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Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale Tradition

Ruth B. Bottigheimer

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In the classic rags-to-riches fairy tale a penniless heroine (or hero), with some magic help, marries a royal prince (or princess) and rises to wealth. Received opinion has long been that stories like these originated among peasants, who passed them along by word of mouth from one place to another over the course of centuries. In a bold departure from conventional fairy tale scholarship, Ruth B. Bottigheimer asserts that city life and a single individual played a central role in the creation and transmission of many of these familiar tales. According to her, a provincial boy, Zoan Francesco Straparola, went to Venice to seek his fortune and found it by inventing the modern fairy tale, including the long beloved Puss in Boots, and by selling its many versions to the hopeful inhabitants of that colorful and commercially bustling city.

With innovative literary sleuthing, Bottigheimer has reconstructed the actual composition of Straparola's collection of tales. Grounding her work in social history of the Renaissance Venice, Bottigheimer has created a possible biography for Straparola, a man about whom hardly anything is known. This is the first book-length study of Straparola in any language.

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