

After Molière (1673-1689)

Introduction

As we approach the four hundredth anniversary of his birth, Molière is undoubtedly the most celebrated of all French playwrights, consistently translated, adapted and performed around the globe.¹ He is equally beloved at home – the French equivalent of Shakespeare as national icon. The Comédie-Française is known proudly as the ‘Maison de Molière’, and every year the whole troupe gathers onstage to honour his birthday. Similarly, the French national theatre awards are known as the ‘Molières’, just as Britain has its ‘Oliviers’ and the US its ‘Tonys’. And yet, in his lifetime, Molière was a figure of contestation, loved by some but reviled by many. One of his plays was temporarily banned (*Tartuffe*), while another may have been discreetly withdrawn (*Dom Juan ou Le Festin de pierre*).² He also had to endure outrageous personal slurs, including the accusation of having married at best his mistress’s daughter, at worst his own.³ And while many of his plays enjoyed success in his own time, these are not necessarily the ones that have come down to us as ‘classics’, and some of his most popular plays (*Psyché* for example) are rarely performed and largely forgotten.⁴ But Molière was not only a playwright, he was an all-round man of the theatre, an actor and company manager as well as a dramatist, who shouldered the responsibility of ensuring the livelihoods of all those employed by his troupe and associated with it – a point that Grimarest’s anecdote of his insistence on performing on the night of his death for the sake of the ‘fifty poor workers’ who depended on him was surely intended to demonstrate.⁵ So, how did this transformation from theatre practitioner to national treasure come about? The aim of the present article is to examine the very first stages of Molière’s establishment as the cornerstone of the French national canon, focusing on those early years where the focus was, above all, on coping with the seemingly irreparable loss that had been incurred.

Molière’s death in February 1673 was a blow from which many thought his troupe would not recover, and four actors left shortly afterwards for the rival Hôtel de Bourgogne company: La Thorillière; his son-in-law, Michel Baron; Jeanne-Olivier Bourguignon; and her husband, Beauval. Another blow came when Molière’s theatre in the Palais-Royal was allocated to Jean-Baptiste Lully for the production of his operas. However, by 23 May, the remainder of the company had found new premises: a former opera house known as the Hôtel Guénégaud, initially been constructed to house the first Académie de musique, when under the direction of Pierre Perrin. They were joined there a month later by actors from the third Parisian theatre, the Marais, which was then closed down.⁶ This left just two troupes of French actors, one at the Guénégaud and the other at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, plus a troupe of Italian actors

who shared the Guénégaud with the French, just as they had shared the Palais-Royal with Molière's troupe, and the Académie royale de musique in Molière's old theatre as renovated by Lully.

This arrangement continued for seven years, until August 1680, when the Hôtel de Bourgogne was itself closed down and its actors transferred to the Guénégaud to form the Comédie-Française. The Guénégaud thus became the first home of the French national theatre just as it had been the first home of the Paris Opera. The Comédie-Française would remain at the Guénégaud until 1689, when it transferred to new premises in the rue des Fossés Saint-Germain (now the rue de l'Ancienne-Comédie. It had, in fact, been ordered to move two years earlier due to the Guénégaud's proximity to the newly completed religious institution, the Collège des Quatre Nations, but had struggled to find a site, primarily due to the hostility of the clergy in all those areas to which it turned.⁷ This relocation forms the end point of the present survey.

As this chronology makes clear, the only connection between Molière and the Comédie-Française was provided by the Guénégaud company, and it is solely thanks to the Guénégaud that there is any justification at all in the use of the term 'la Maison de Molière' to describe the French national theatre. Indeed, the members of the Guénégaud troupe became perhaps unconsciously the 'keepers of the flame', as they strove to make best use of their Molière inheritance. This comprised not just his plays but also a range of administrative practices and a structure that is still today recognisably that of Molière. However, their preservation did not stem from a conscious desire to perpetuate Molière's practices. Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès has demonstrated how the organisation of seventeenth-century theatre companies was derived from the medieval *societas*.⁸ Molière's troupe, along with all the other companies of his age, had adopted this pattern, and the Comédie-Française would follow suit, with the ancient traditions evolving only gradually in the face of changing circumstances.

Above all, the popular appellation reflects the fact that the Comédie-Française repertoire has consistently included a large proportion of Molière's works. But again, this is unlikely (in the first instance at least) to have been the product of a spirit of preservation. Indeed, it is striking that, at its inception, the Comédie-Française was viewed more as a *conservatoire*, dedicated to the improvement of acting, than as a national theatre devoted to the maintenance of a canon. Thus, the founding decree states that the Hôtel de Bourgogne and Guénégaud companies have been brought together by the King, 'affin de rendre les Représentations des Comédies plus parfaites par le moyen des acteurs et actrices auxquels Elle a donné place dans lad. Troupe'.⁹ However, as the Guénégaud and Comédie-Française

companies struggled first to keep afloat and then to surpass their rivals, the strategies they employed to capitalise on their Molière inheritance undoubtedly contributed to the survival, at least in the short term, of the majority of his works.

This inheritance included not only Molière's own plays but also works by other authors his troupe had performed in the past. The Marais actors had similarly contributed to the Guénégaud repertoire, but the share derived from Molière's troupe was indubitably pre-eminent. This was the 'capital' the Guénégaud actors had available to them to exploit and on which they had to build, primarily by combatting the *usure* (erosion) that was bound to occur as audiences grew weary of works they had seen too often. The troupe's success in coming back so quickly from catastrophe – it was the Hôtel de Bourgogne that was closed down in 1680 rather than the Guénégaud – was due to the success of its production policy, which combined the introduction of popular and controversial new plays with the skilful management of its repertoire of old ones. Similar tactics were continued at the Comédie-Française, which brought together actors from three component companies: Molière's troupe, the Marais (via the Guénégaud) and the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Indeed, as we will see, both the Guénégaud and the Comédie-Française managed the seemingly impossible task of 'growing' the number of Molière plays in their repertoires in the fifteen years after his death.

We are fortunate in having a full set of the account books of both the Guénégaud and the Comédie-Française, where ticket sales and the resulting revenue are entered by seating area. The information for the Comédie-Française is now available online thanks to the Comédie-Française Registers Project,¹⁰ but the Guénégaud account books still only exist in manuscript form. I have, though, published much of the information they contain,¹¹ and analysis together with that of the Comédie-Française will enable me to determine both the programming tactics employed and the popularity of individual Molière plays across the whole period. But first, I will examine briefly how the newly founded Guénégaud company coped with the sudden disappearance of Molière the actor and administrator.

Administrator

It is widely assumed that the actor La Grange replaced Molière as company leader. Indeed, André Blanc maintains he had done so even before the dramatist's death,¹² presumably because, in 1664, La Grange replaced him as Company Orator – the person who made the public announcement that followed each performance. Wilma Deierkauf-Holsboer goes further, seeing La Thorillière's departure for the Hôtel de Bourgogne as the result of a power struggle.¹³ And some credence is given to this theory by La Grange's statement in 1680 that it

was La Thorillière's death that had made possible the creation of the Comédie-Française (LG, Vol. 1, p. 237). We should also note Chappuzeau's assertion in *Le Théâtre français* (1674) that La Grange had not only succeeded Molière as Orator but also in 'le soin et le zèle qu'il avoit pour les interests communs, et pour toutes les affaires de la Troupe'.¹⁴ Molière's wife, Armande Béjart, is usually written out of these narratives as having been unequal to the task – a bias of which Blanc, at least, is not guilty.¹⁵ Whereas La Grange is recorded as having said that those actors who stayed true to the company remained 'avec la veuve dudit sieur Molière', thereby implicitly crediting her with holding the troupe together.¹⁶ And it was Armande Béjart who loaned the company the money necessary to purchase the transfer of the lease on the Guénégaud together with its fixtures and fittings.¹⁷

This raises the question of whether it was, in fact, the practice for seventeenth-century theatre companies to have a designated leader. This had certainly been the case earlier in the century, and Molière was undoubtedly the head of the troupe that is generally known by his name, although his partner (in all senses of the word), Madeleine Béjart, may also have played a significant (probably financial) role.¹⁸ An illustration of Molière's pre-eminence is provided by La Grange who, at the time of the company's unexpected expulsion from the Petit-Bourbon theatre in 1660, wrote that its members resisted proposals from rival companies because:

... [ils] aimoient le sieur de Moliere leur Chef qui joignoient a un merite et une capacité extraordinaire une honnesteté et une maniere engageantes qui les obligea tous a protester qu'ils voulaient courir sa fortune ne le quitteroient jamais quelque proposition qu'on leur fist et quelque avantage qu'ils puissent trouver ailleurs. (LG, Vol. 1, p. 27)¹⁹

Molière was exceptional also as the chief provider of plays for his company, which increased his pre-eminence in a way we might not suspect. For the figure of the director is absent from seventeenth-century theatre, and plays were staged by means of collective rehearsals to which the author and the actors would all contribute. Indeed, Chappuzeau takes pains to emphasise the importance of the author's contribution (*TF*, p. 107). This description of the production process would, at first sight, seem to be contradicted by Molière's famous rehearsal play, *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, where the character 'Molière' directs a group of actors waiting to entertain the King. However, we should bear in mind that the character 'Molière' is not only the leader of the troupe (as discussed above) but also the author of the play his company is preparing to perform, and it is in these twin capacities that we see him advising his comrades.

Thanks to the fifteen years he spent touring the provinces following the failure of the Illustre Théâtre in 1643, Molière (and the troupe he would ultimately lead) no doubt inherited from the earlier tradition of touring companies led by a single individual – Valleran Le Comte for example. However, times had changed and Chappuzeau in *Le Théâtre français*, while careful to emphasise the actors' love of the monarchy, asserts that 'ils ne la peuvent souffrir entre eux, ils ne veulent point de Maître particulier, et l'ombre seule leur en feroit peur' (*TF*, p. 156).²⁰ Later, he describes their system of self-government as Republican, in that 'ils n'admettent point de supérieur, le nom seul les blesse, ils veulent tous être égaux, et se nomment Camarades' (*TF*, p. 163).²¹ In the manuscript version of his work, written in the year of Molière's death, Chappuzeau does in fact associate the Orator with leadership:

... comme il represente l'Etat en prenant la parole pour tout le Corps, il est de l'honneur de la Troupe qu'il en soit nommé le Chef, puisque je luy ay donné la face d'une Republique, et qu'encore qu'il n'ayt pas plus de pouvoir ni d'avantages qu'un autre, chacune toutefois a de la deference pour ses avis. (*TF*, p. 214)²²

However, in the version published the following year, this passage has been revised to downplay the Orator's administrative function, probably at the request of the actors:

... comme cet Orateur ne doit le plus souvent l'honneur de sa fonction qu'au pur hasard, sans que precisement le merite y contribue, et que d'ailleurs il n'a pas dans la Troupe plus de pouvoir ny d'avantage qu'un autre, **ainsi que les Comediens de Paris me l'ont assuré**, je ne le nommeray simplement que l'Orateur, et je diray en peu de mots quelles sont ses fonctions. (*TF*, p. 215)²³

The period following Molière's death saw, therefore, a change in theatre company administration, as one model gave way to another, possibly even because of his passing. This would be intensified at the Comédie-Française, as befits a state subsidised (and controlled) company, where the day to day running of the troupe was in the hands of two rotating internal officers operating first fortnightly and then weekly, under the supervision of the First Gentlemen of the King's Bedchamber and, later, the King's daughter-in-law, the Dauphine.

Actor

Before turning to discuss Molière's replacement as actor and author, I must say a word about the rhythm of Paris performances. In the seventeenth century, the theatrical season ran from Easter to Easter with a short break (roughly three weeks) in-between, during which actors were traditionally free to change troupes. Between the 1630s and the late 1670s, companies usually performed only three or four times a week. Following his return from the provinces in 1658,

Molière had shared his theatres (first the Petit-Bourbon and then the Palais-Royal) with a troupe of Italian actors, and the Italians also transferred to the Guénégaud. At the Palais-Royal and the Guénégaud, the French appeared on the more popular Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays, while the Italians were obliged to take the other days. But when the Italians were away from the capital, whether touring or entertaining the court, the French increased their revenue by performing seven days a week.

When the Hôtel de Bourgogne actors were transferred to the Guénégaud to found the Comédie-Française, the Italians were ordered to move to their former theatre, which was standing empty. The new Comédie-Française company was, therefore, free to perform every day. Indeed, it was in some respects obliged to do so, since it was almost twice as big as any previous company (27 members at its foundation),²⁴ with twice as many actors and their dependents to support. This caused a huge increase in the number of performances given, from an average of 114 per season for Molière's troupe, to 145 at the Guénégaud, and 324 at the Comédie-Française.²⁵ The number of town performances could, in theory, be compromised by calls to entertain the court outside Paris; there had, for example, been some months when Molière's troupe did not appear in town at all.²⁶ This was not, though, a problem for its successor, since the Guénégaud company (to its great regret) was not so much in demand there, while the increased size of the Comédie-Française meant it was (in theory) able to entertain its town and court publics simultaneously, as is noted rather smugly in the preface to the 1682 edition of Molière's *Oeuvres complètes*.²⁷ But difficulties could still arise, as is indicated by a note the actor Hauteroche (in town) sent to his comrade La Grange (at court) in September 1681, threatening to close the theatre because the Paris contingent included no comic actors and the public would not be satisfied with only serious plays.²⁸

Hauteroche specifically asked La Grange to send back Raymond Poisson, known for his interpretation of the recurrent character Crispin, and Jean-Baptiste Raisin, usually referred to as Raisin *cadet* (the younger), both of whom had entered the Comédie-Française from the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1680. Raisin *cadet* would later be known as 'le petit Molière' ('the little Molière'), due to his specialisation in the parts the comic dramatist had written for himself. Indeed, one of the first problems Molière's troupe had faced was how to replace him in these roles. The troupe had, in fact, returned to the stage just a week after his death, giving *Le Misanthrope* with Baron as Alceste and *Le Malade imaginaire* with La Thorillière as Argan. These were both actors who quit the troupe soon afterwards, perhaps suggesting that they did not share their fellows' devotion to their deceased leader. At the Easter recess and following the departure of the four actors previously described, the remaining members found a more

long-term solution when they hired Rosimond from the Marais to take on Molière's roles, even before their transfer to the Guénégaud.

The casting situation was, though, more complicated at the Comédie-Française, since a number of plays (including some by Molière) had been in the repertoires of both the Hôtel Guénégaud and the Hôtel de Bourgogne companies (see below), which meant that more than one actor was available to play each role. So, while Pierre Corneille, Racine and Quinault were available to determine the casting of their works, the First Gentleman of the King's Bedchamber was brought in, at the actors' request, to settle the distribution of parts in Molière's plays. He advised that Molière's roles should be shared between Rosimond, Raisin *cadet* and Brécourt, with Rosimond being first choice at court, and Brécourt first choice for *L'Étourdi*, *Le Médecin malgré lui* and the marquis de Mascarille in *Les Précieuses ridicules* in town.²⁹ This solution was not, though, successful in the long term, since Brécourt was only briefly a member of the Comédie-Française troupe.³⁰ Further information is provided by a document from 1685, which indicates how certain of Molière's roles were cast at that time,³¹ while a complete reallocation was made necessary by Rosimond's death a year later. This material has been synthesised in the following table, where the plays are listed in production order. The 1685 list does not, though, include the distributions for those short comic plays that were habitually performed in second position on a double bill. These are merely listed and include, from Molière, *Le Cocu imaginaire*, *Le Mariage forcé*, *L'Amour médecin*, *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, *Le Médecin malgré lui*, and *Les Précieuses ridicules*.

Table 1: The Casting of roles formerly played by Molière from 1685 onwards

Play	Role	1685	1686	After Rosimond's death ³²
<i>L'Étourdi</i>	Mascarille	Raisin <i>cadet</i>	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, Poisson second ³³
<i>Le Dépit amoureux</i>	Mascarille	Rosimond	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, De Villiers second
	Métaphraste	Rosimond	Rosimond	La Grange first, La Thorillière second ³⁴
<i>Le Cocu imaginaire</i>	Sganarelle		Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, Poisson second

<i>L'École des maris</i>	Sganarelle	Rosimond	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, La Grange second ³⁵
<i>Les Fâcheux</i>	Caritidès	Rosimond	Rosimond	Du Perrier
<i>L'École des femmes</i>	Arnolphe	Rosimond	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, Du Perrier second
<i>La Critique de l'École des femmes</i>	Le Marquis	Hubert		
<i>Le Mariage forcé</i>	Sganarelle		Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, Du Perrier second
<i>Tartuffe</i>	Orgon	Rosimond	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, La Grange second ³⁶
<i>Le Festin de pierre</i>	Sganarelle	[Rosimond] ³⁷	Rosimond	La Thorillière first, Poisson second
<i>L'Amour médecin</i>	Sganarelle		Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, Desmares second
<i>Le Misanthrope</i>	Alceste	La Grange	[La Grange]	[La Grange]
<i>Le Médecin malgré lui</i>	Sganarelle		Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, Poisson second
<i>Le Sicilien</i>	Dom Pèdre	Rosimond	Rosimond	Du Perrier
<i>Amphitryon</i>	Sosie	Rosimond	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, La Thorillière second ³⁸
<i>George Dandin</i>	George Dandin	Rosimond	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, Du Perrier second
<i>L'Avare</i>	Harpagon	Brécourt or Rosimond	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, Du Perrier second
<i>Monsieur de Pourceaugnac</i>	Pourceaugnac	Brécourt	Rosimond	La Tuillerie first, Poisson second
<i>Le Bourgeois gentilhomme</i>	Jourdain	Rosimond	Rosimond	La Grange first, Poisson second
<i>Les Fourberies de Scapin</i>	Scapin	Rosimond	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, De Villiers second
<i>La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas</i>	M. Bobinet		Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, Beauval second

<i>Les Femmes savantes</i>	Chrysale	Rosimond	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, La Grange second ³⁹
<i>Le Malade imaginaire</i>	Argan	Rosimond	Rosimond	Raisin <i>cadet</i> first, La Grange second

A striking omission from the above is *Les Précieuses ridicules* where, at the time of his death, Rosimond was playing the Vicomte de Jodelet, rather than Molière's role of the marquis de Mascarille, and was replaced by La Thorillière as first choice and Poisson as second choice. This can, though, perhaps be explained by the fact that, as previously noted, Brécourt had been first choice to play the part in town. However, this in turn raises the question of who would have replaced Brécourt as the Marquis. When *Les Précieuses ridicules* was performed at Versailles with Campistron's *Andronic* on 17 February 1685, the following actors are recorded as having been present: Baron, Champmeslé, Guérin, Raisin the elder, La Grange, Du Croisy, Beauval, and Rosimond.⁴⁰ Baron, Champmeslé and Raisin the elder were primarily serious actors; La Grange and Du Croisy would still have been playing the roles in *Les Précieuses* that bear their names; which only leaves Guérin and Beauval as possible contenders. Of these two, the former seems most likely, since Beauval was essentially a minor actor. In a similar vein, by 1685, La Grange had taken over as Alceste in *Le Misanthrope* (Rosimond played a guard), which may suggest how the role was perceived, since he generally played the 'lover'. Similarly, although perhaps less significantly, Hubert had taken on the Marquis in *La Critique de l'École des femmes*. Finally, the fact that an actors first appearance in a role was something of an event is indicated by a note in the account book for 1687-88, which states that *Le Malade imaginaire* had been given for the first time 'depuis la mort de M. de Rosimond' ('since the death of M. de Rosimond').⁴¹

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Both of the above documents are described as *répertoires* – a term whose primary meaning was 'list' but which had just begun to take on its more modern connotation. For example, Chappuzeau defines *répertoire* as a list of old plays to be given during the summer months, since premieres were more likely to be given in winter (*TF*, p. 169). Not all of Molière's plays formed part of the regular repertoire. Not included were the farces *La Jalousie du barbouillé* and *Le Médecin volant*, whose authenticity is still contested;⁴² the *pièce de circonstance*, *L'Impromptu de Versailles*; and the court productions *La Princesse d'Élide*, *Mélicerte*,

Pastorale comique, *Les Amants magnifiques*, and *Psyché*. *Les Amants magnifiques* and *Psyché* would, though, benefit from full-scale revivals during this period, and *La Princesse d'Élide* would similarly be revived in 1692-93.

We will now turn to consider the repertoire more generally. An evening's entertainment could consist of one long play; one long play followed by a shorter one, often known as a *petite pièce*; or two plays of equal, usually longer, length. When a double bill was given, it generally consisted of a tragedy or longer comedy plus a shorter comedy or farce. And although each troupe had its specialism (tragedy for the Hôtel de Bourgogne, comedy and comedy-ballet for Molière's troupe), all troupes performed in all genres. The number of plays performed each season varied considerably. Molière's troupe had given between 12 and 27 (21 on average) and, in its first seasons, the Guénégaud followed suit (19 on average). But, in 1676-77, the troupe began to increase the size of its repertoire, which rose to peak at 49 plays in 1679-80. And at the Comédie-Française, the size of the repertoire rose still further to an average of 98 plays per season, with a peak of 105 in 1686-87. But the playlist now consisted of the combined Guénégaud and Hôtel de Bourgogne repertoires, which must have been welcome given the new requirement to perform every day.

The Guénégaud troupe increased the size of its repertoire in response to a number of factors. Before 1676-77, it had specialised in spectacular works, enjoying great success with *Circé* and *L'Inconnu* by Thomas Corneille and Jean Donneau de Visé. These were, though, dependent on music – as an attraction but also to cover the noise of the stage machinery. And Lully, who wanted to prevent the production of works so similar to his own, had restrictions placed on his rivals' use of stage music, which forced the Guénégaud to seek other means of attracting the public.⁴³ Its response was first to increase the number of plays it produced each season by drawing on the past repertoires of Molière's troupe and the Marais company. It also embarked on a 'war of the tragedies' with the Hôtel de Bourgogne, creating new works on the same subjects as those of Racine, and poaching the Hôtel de Bourgogne's leading actress, Mlle Champmeslé, who brought its tragic repertoire with her.

As previously noted, each troupe's offering included both new and old plays. Molière's troupe gave an average of four new plays per season. This fell to three at the Guénégaud but rose to ten at the Comédie-Française. New plays were given a series of more or less continuous performances. It was not, though, always the first play that was the main attraction, and a new second play would be preceded by a series of older main plays. The length of this first run is often used as a gauge of a play's success: 10 to 15 performances, modest but definite; 15 to 22 or 23, considerable; 24 to 30, striking; 30 to 40 or more, outstanding.⁴⁴ During their first run,

plays were considered the property of the company that had produced them, and it was usually only once this was over that they were published and fell into the public domain. For example, in 1674, the King banned provincial actors from performing Molière's *Malade imaginaire* as being in contravention of 'the time-honoured custom' that allowed companies to profit from their investment in a new work.⁴⁵ The decision regarding when to end this first run was, therefore, a crucial one and, over time, formulae were adopted to make the reasons more transparent, with plays being dropped once their takings had fallen below a certain level.⁴⁶

After their first run, plays were either dropped or added to the repertoire of works to be given in rotation, where they remained for varying lengths of time (only very few plays have featured in the repertoire consistently). Some plays could not, though, be performed in rotation, particularly if they required elaborate decors or special effects, and these could only be brought back by means of a full-scale revival. Some of these did, though, subsequently enter the repertoire – presumably in a reduced form. Given the comparatively short runs of most new plays, the majority of plays given each season were old. The management of this repertoire was, therefore, crucial to the success or failure of a theatrical enterprise. However, many old plays were given only three times or fewer in any one season, which provokes two questions: why did companies want to retain so many plays in the repertoire when they were performed so infrequently, and what value was there in giving so few performances of so many plays? These are, in fact, probably connected: wishing to retain these plays in the repertoire, as they evidently did, it was necessary to give them an occasional outing to refresh the actors' memories.

When Molière first arrived back from the provinces in 1658, his troupe's repertoire had consisted of twenty-seven plays and included a number of works (half of them tragedies) dating back to the days of the Illustre Théâtre. Increasingly, though, Molière's troupe had come to specialise in his own plays and works by other authors had been dropped. It was imperative, then, for the company to find one or more replacement dramatists and to exploit its stock of old plays to its best advantage. The tactics it employed are described in full (with supporting statistics) in my article 'Molière at the Hôtel Guénégaud and the Comédie-Française' and will be summarised here. One strategy was to withdraw plays briefly to increase anticipation before reintroducing them. At the same time, the company revived a number of early works that had not been seen for some time – no doubt to substitute for those that were dropped. At least one of these required some work: *Le Festin de pierre* had aroused controversy at the time of its creation in 1664-65 and had never been revived. Unwilling to waste an opportunity, Armande Béjart commissioned Thomas Corneille to produce an expurgated version in verse. In this way,

the two troupes ‘grew’ their Molière offering from fourteen plays in 1673-74 to twenty-five between 1681-82 and 1684-85, although the number tailed off subsequently. Molière as a main attraction also initially held up well in terms of the number of performances given. However, as the size of the repertoire and the number of performances given per season rose, the proportion of main plays by Molière, which had been 45% at the Guénégaud, fell to 23% at the Comédie-Française.

But Molière’s plays were not only given as main attractions. The increase in the size of the Guénégaud repertoire from 1676-77 onwards seems to have been motivated by a desire to enhance the variety of its programmes and was effected initially by reviving plays (in all genres) from the repertoires of its component troupes. This trend continued at the Comédie-Française, whose repertoire also included the Hôtel de Bourgogne’s stock plays. Older comedies and more serious works (outside of their first runs) were traditionally given accompanied, and a similar desire for variety would appear to lie behind an increase in the proportion of double bills. Initially, the vast majority of these featured plays by Molière (78% on average at the Guénégaud), but this dropped to 37% at the Comédie-Française as the company found other purveyors of *petites pièces*. The importance of the double bill as a draw is underlined by the actor Hauteroche in his letter to La Grange, where he notes that to perform a serious play without an afterpiece is ‘quite to chase away the public’.⁴⁷ In fact, few of Molière’s plays were only ever performed alone and these were all works with a pronounced spectacular and/or musical content. Rather, one of the chief advantages offered by the Molière repertoire (which was itself uniquely varied in terms of length and tone), was precisely the capacity to create an astonishing number of different programmes. Thus, Molière’s plays were combined both together and with other plays between 1673 and 1679 to give a total of 376 different programmes.

The Comédie-Française also expanded its Molière offering by more unconventional means. The repertoire of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, often viewed as a bastion of tragedy, also included a number of plays by Molière, including *La Princesse d’Élide*, which the Guénégaud company itself did not perform.⁴⁸ It also created two new plays that paid homage to the master: Brécourt’s *Ombre de Molière*, which features the playwright himself plus several of his characters, and Champmeslé’s *Fragments de Molière*, which reproduces scenes from Molière’s *Festin de pierre* (which had not yet been published) plus a passage from *Scapin*.⁴⁹ At the Comédie-Française, these became two additional, Molière inspired, *petites pièces*, enabling the creation of twenty-nine new Molière-based combinations. So, although his own plays may have

been becoming stale, audiences clearly still had an appetite for Molière and appreciated the novelty of seeing familiar characters in different settings.

Substitutes

We have already noted the need to find new comic playwrights to replace Molière. The most successful external substitutes as regards main plays were, at the Guénégaud, Montauban, Montfleury, Thomas Corneille and Donneau de Visé, and the last three plus Robbe, Boursault, La Fontaine, and Campistron at the Comédie-Française.⁵⁰ However, a significant number of the more popular new main comedies were provided by members or former members of the two troupes (Poisson, Champmeslé, Baron, Dancourt, Hauteroche, Rosimond). Clearly, the actors agreed with Chappuzeau that the presence of such ‘actor-authors’ was a great advantage, since it obviated the need to deal with difficult playwrights (*TF*, p. 98). Where comic second plays were concerned, the Guénégaud company was still heavily dependent on works by Molière. Indeed, only two new second plays were given during the seven seasons it was in operation. However, the creation of the Comédie-Française saw an immediate increase in the number of second plays by other authors thanks to the incorporation of the Hôtel de Bourgogne repertoire. Also striking is the number of new second plays that were created (as many as eight in 1685-86), which demonstrates the company’s willingness to invest in this area of its activity and reinforces what we have said about the popularity of the genre and of the double bill in general. As with the new main plays, many were by actor-authors and, in addition to those named above, we also find Rosimond, La Tuillerie, Brécourt, Desmares, and Raisin. One of these new second plays is significant as the only comic play by a woman to be given in this period. *Titapapouf ou le voleur* was the work of Mlle Longchamps, who worked for the Comédie-Française as prompter and librarian. It was not, though, a success, and was withdrawn after just three performances.

Conclusion

The Guénégaud company and the Comédie-Française performed supremely well in preserving their Molière inheritance, but such strategies could only work for so long. In 1746, the First Gentleman of the King’s Bedchamber noted that ‘for some years now performances of Molière’s comedies are quite deserted by the public’ as a result of ‘the unfortunate practice adopted by the actors of performing them too frequently and thereby fatiguing the spectators’. Consequently, with a view to ‘reviving the taste of the public for these works which form the staple repertory of the Comédie-Française’, he instructed that there should be ‘no further

performances of any of Molière's five-act plays until we have ordered otherwise'.⁵¹ Similarly, in 1772, the company itself decided that, since Molière's works had long benefitted from the 'honneur dangereux' ('dangerous honour') of being 'beaucoup lus et souvent représentés' ('much read and frequently performed'), it would give them only once a fortnight, on a day specially designed to honour his genius, to serve as a model for aspiring comic dramatists.⁵² Neither of these diktats seems to have been rigidly applied. Instead, as Mark Darlow has demonstrated, the company returned to the strategy it had employed for generations: taking plays out of circulation for a given period to revive public interest and then reintroducing them. It is futile to imagine what Molière's posterity might have been had the Guénégaud company not come into being in 1673, leading as it did to the subsequent creation of the Comédie-Française. I would, though, contend that if Molière the playwright has survived to enjoy his continuing and resounding success worldwide, it is in part at least thanks to the determined (and to a certain extent coincidental) efforts of these two companies.

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¹ This essay is a complement to a short article, Jan Clarke, 'Molière at the Hôtel Guénégaud and the Comédie-Française: the early years', in *Molière in Context*, ed. by Jan Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). I would like to thank Cambridge University Press for permitting me to reproduce material, and the editors of the present volume for allowing me to expand upon it.

² This view is contested by Georges Forestier, who believes the spectacular nature of *Le Festin de pierre* prevented it being performed in repertoire (Georges Forestier, *Molière* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018), p. 299).

³ *ibid.*, pp. 42-47.

⁴ The Comédie-Française attempted to remedy this neglect with its revival of *Psyché* in 2013.

⁵ Jan Clarke, "Cinquante pauvres ouvriers": employés et fournisseurs chez Molière et à l'Hôtel Guénégaud de 1660 à 1689', *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 285, 29-52.

⁶ For a full account, see Jan Clarke, *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673-1680). Volume One: Founding, Design and Production* (Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1998).

⁷ Nicole Bourdel, 'L'Établissement et la construction de l'hôtel des comédiens français', *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 7 (1955), p. 145-172.

⁸ Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès, 'The Survival of Medieval and Renaissance Professional Practices', in *Molière in Context*, ed. by Jan Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

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- ⁹ '[T]o make the performance of plays more perfect by means of the actors and actresses to whom [His Majesty] has given places in the said troupe'. La Grange, *Registre*, ed. by B. E. Young and G. P. Young, 2 vols (Paris: Droz, 1947), Vol. 1, p. 242, henceforth referred to as LG. All translations are my own.
- ¹⁰ <https://www.cfregisters.org/#/> (accessed 7 June 2021).
- ¹¹ Jan Clarke, *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673-1680). Volume Two: the Accounts Season by Season* (Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 2001).
- ¹² André Blanc, *Histoire de la Comédie-Française de Molière à Talma* (Paris: Perrin, 2007), p. 42.
- ¹³ S. Wilma Deierkauf-Holsboer, *Le Théâtre du Marais*, 2 vols (Paris: Nizet, 1954-58), II, 185.
- ¹⁴ '[T]he care and the zeal he had for the common interests and for all the affairs of the troupe' (Samuel Chappuzeau, *Le Théâtre français*, ed. by Christopher J. Gossip (Lyon: Michel Mayer, 1674) (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2009), p. 222), henceforth referred to as *TF*.
- ¹⁵ For example, Jean Valmy-Baisse, *Naissance et vie de la Comédie-Française* (Paris: Fleury, 1945), pp. 92-94.
- ¹⁶ '[W]ith the said sieur Molière's widow' (Georges Monval, 'L'Affaire Auzillon', *Le Moliériste*, 8 (1886), 53-59, 73-85, p. 75).
- ¹⁷ Clarke, *Guénégaud I*, pp. 43-45.
- ¹⁸ Jan Clarke, 'Women in Theatre Administration in France in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centures', *Women and Theatre Occasional Papers*, 2 (1994), 88-106, p. 90.
- ¹⁹ '[T]hey] loved the sieur de Molière their leader who combined extraordinary merit and ability with civility and an engaging manner that caused them all to declare that they wanted to throw in their lot with him and that they would never leave him whatever advantage they might find elsewhere'.
- ²⁰ '[T]hey cannot bear it for themselves, they do not want a particular master, and the very shadow of one would make them afraid'.
- ²¹ '[T]hey will accept no superior, the very name wounds them, they wish all to be equal and call each other comrade'.
- ²² '[A]s he represents the State by speaking on behalf of the whole body, it is to the honour of the troupe that he be called its leader, [but] I have described it as a Republic and he has no more power or advantage than anyone else, but even so everyone shows deference for his opinions'.
- ²³ '[A]s this Orator most often only owes the honour of his function to pure chance, without merit specifically contributing to it, and as besides he has no more advantage within the troupe than anyone else, **or so the Paris actors have assured me**, I will simply call him the Orator and will say in a few words what are his functions ((my emphasis). Christopher Gossip, in his edition of Chappuzeau, expresses the view that all troupes would have had a leader (p. 214) – I can only disagree.
- ²⁴ William D. Howarth, *French Theatre in the Neo-Classical Era, 1550-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 288-89.
- ²⁵ Although the Guénégaud was the first home of the Comédie-Française, the terms 'Guénégaud' and 'Comédie-Française' are used here to distinguish the phases before and after 1680. Also, although the Comédie-Française was founded part way through the 1680-81 season, the whole of this season is included in the Comédie-Française period to facilitate comparison.

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- ²⁶ Jan Clarke, 'The Consequences for Molière's troupe of its trips to court, 1667-73', in Mary Jo Muratore, ed., *Molière Re-Envisioned: Twenty-First Century Retakes; Renouveau et Renouvellement Molièresque: reprises contemporaines* (Paris: Hermann, 2018), 31-63.
- ²⁷ Molière, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Georges Forestier and Claude Bourqui, 2 vols, Paris, Gallimard, 2010, I, 1105.
- ²⁸ Pierre Mèlèse, *Le Théâtre et le public à Paris sous Louis XIV (1659-1715)*, Paris, Droz, 1934, p. 70.
- ²⁹ Jules Bonnassies, *La Comédie-Française: histoire administrative (1658-1757)* (Paris: Didier, 1874), pp. 60-61.
- ³⁰ Georges Mongrédien and Jean Robert, *Les Comédiens français du XVII^e siècle: dictionnaire biographique* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1981), p. 48.
- ³¹ Henry Carrington Lancaster, *Actors' Roles at the Comédie-Française according to the Répertoire des comédies qui se peuvent jouer en 1685* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1953).
- ³² Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française, R52_0_1686, Feuilles d'assemblée, 1686 (2 December 1686).
- ³³ These terms indicate those actors who were first, second or sometimes third choice to play the role in question.
- ³⁴ This was the son of La Thorillière who had left the Palais-Royal for the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1673.
- ³⁵ A note adds that Le Comte would now play the brother (Ariste) and Raisin the elder the lover (Valère).
- ³⁶ A note adds that La Grange would be first choice to play the lover (Damis) and De Villiers second choice.
- ³⁷ Sganarelle has been omitted from the list of characters for *Le Festin de pierre*. But since Brécourt is given as having played Gusman, it seems likely that Sganarelle would also have been played by Rosimond.
- ³⁸ A note adds that De Villiers would understudy Mercure so as to be able to play the role as second choice.
- ³⁹ A note specifies that Dancourt will understudy La Grange so as to play the role as second choice.
- ⁴⁰ Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française, R16, Registre 1684-1685.
- ⁴¹ Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française, R19, Registre 1687-1688, p. 179.
- ⁴² Molière, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Georges Forestier and Claude Bourqui, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), II, 1710-15.
- ⁴³ Jan Clarke, 'Music at the Guénégaud Theatre, 1673-1680', *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 12 (1990), 89-110.
- ⁴⁴ John Lough, *Paris Theatre Audiences in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 52.
- ⁴⁵ William D. Howarth, *French Theatre in the Neo-Classical Era, 1550-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 122.
- ⁴⁶ Jules Bonnassies, *Les Auteurs dramatiques et la Comédie-Française à Paris aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Willem et Daffis, 1874), pp. 15-28.
- ⁴⁷ Howarth, *French Theatre in the Neo-Classical Era*, p. 316.
- ⁴⁸ Sylvie Chevalley, 'Les Derniers Jours de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne', *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 17 (1965), 404-407.
- ⁴⁹ Jan Clarke, 'Du Molière sans Molière', in Martial Poirson, ed., *Ombres de Molière: naissance d'un mythe littéraire à travers ses avatars du XVII^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012), pp. 55-73.
- ⁵⁰ 'Successful' here means that they had written a play performed ten or more times in a given season.
- ⁵¹ Howarth, *French Theatre in the Neo-Classical Era*, p. 606.

⁵² Mark Darlow, 'La place des oeuvres de Molière dans le répertoire du XVIIIe siècle', *Littératures classiques*, 95 (2018), 151-65, p. 158.