

6 Theatres as economic concerns: Molière, the Hôtel Guénégaud and the Comédie-Française

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The seventeenth-century theatrical enterprise was a business like any other. Rooted in its locality, it not only provided a living for company members and their employees, but also contributed to the livelihoods of myriad other associates, from the most skilled to the most humble. The majority remain anonymous, while others have left only fleeting traces in contemporary documents (Clarke, 2020: 30). This chapter focuses on three companies that succeeded one another: Molière's troupe (1658-73), the Guénégaud company (1673-80) and the Comédie-Française (from 1680 onwards), and examines such issues as the importance of a theatre's location within the capital, the financial structures in place, and typical items of income and expenditure, as well as some of the challenges that these companies faced.

Location, location, location

A theatre's location in seventeenth-century Paris was of vital importance to its success or failure. As the century progressed and the city expanded, areas came into or went out of fashion, so that sites where theatres had succeeded in the past fell from favour, while others became much 'sought-after'. For example, when the first two permanent companies settled in the capital in the early 1630s, one took up residence in the Hôtel de Bourgogne near Les Halles, while the other eventually settled in a tennis court in the Marais.¹ And yet, in 1673, the unpopularity of this last site contributed to the closure of the Marais Theatre; and, in 1680, the Comédie-Italienne fought tooth and nail to avoid having to transfer to the Hôtel de Bourgogne because of its location. Rather, its members would have preferred to remain in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where Molière's *Illustre Théâtre* company had failed almost 40 years earlier, thereby demonstrating that an area previously insufficiently developed to support a theatre was now highly popular.

The Hôtel de Bourgogne was situated to the rear of the Rue Montorgueil. Today a fashionable shopping street, it was then close to what had, for generations, been the commercial heart of Paris, and was also within striking distance of the Louvre – the primary residence of the royal court until 1682. In the 1630s the Marais was, for its part, an up-and-coming district: 'a residential area for aristocrats [...] harbouring a society of rich and elegant people, and surrounded by shopkeepers selling luxury goods' (Lawrenson, 1970: 34).² However, a decade later, when the young Molière and the other members of the *Illustre Théâtre* attempted to establish what they hoped would be a third Parisian theatre, they opted for neither of these areas, instead choosing to adapt a tennis court on the Rue de Seine in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. But this was not yet the fashionable entertainment district it would later become, and when they did not fare as well as they had hoped, Molière and his associates opted to move closer to the Marais, which suggests that they attributed their lack of success at least in part to their location. But their debts were considerable, and they failed here, too, and were forced to quit Paris (for a detailed examination of Molière's theatre, see Poirson in this volume).³

When Molière returned from the provinces in 1658, Louis XIV decreed that his troupe should share a theatre in the Petit-Bourbon palace adjacent to the Louvre with the Italian company already installed there. To begin with, the Italians performed on the more

¹ The majority of seventeenth-century theatres were either converted tennis courts or were built (or adapted) in the tennis court style (Clarke, 1998: 60-63).

² French quotations have been modernized in the interests of facilitating comprehension across a variety of sources; all translations are my own.

³ Information on Molière's theatres is taken from Clarke (1995: 247-72).

popular *jours ordinaires* (Tuesday, Friday, Sunday), leaving Molière's troupe the remaining *jours extraordinaires*; but later, the companies swapped. Then, in 1661, when the Petit-Bourbon was demolished, both companies moved to the Palais-Royal in the 'Richelieu quarter', which was becoming a kind of '*Marais manqué*' ['second-rate Marais'] occupied by rich nobles rather than great lords, and never quite achieving the 'elegance, cultural vitality, and artistic audacity' of the Marais itself (Ranum, 1973: 119). However, by the early 1670s the Marais was in decline, which had a negative impact on the local theatre, that its supporters attempted to deny. For example, the playwright and theatrical commentator Donneau de Visé wrote of the premiere of Pierre Corneille's *Pulchérie* that, 'all the obstacles that prevent plays from succeeding in so remote a neighbourhood were not sufficiently powerful to harm this work' (Donneau de Visé, 1673: 225); while Corneille himself noted in his preface that, despite having been relegated '*dans un lieu où on ne voulait plus se souvenir qu'il y ait un théâtre [...], [sa pièce] n'a pas laissé de peupler ce désert*' ['to a place where people wanted to forget there was a theatre [...], [his play] did not fail to populate this desert'] (Corneille, 1980-87: III.1171-72). The point is further hammered home in the strangely self-conscious prologue to Montfleury's *Ambigu comique*, performed at the Marais in 1673, where an antipathetic character attacks the members of the troupe and his brother-in-law for having hired them:

*Les voit-on jamais que dans l'affiche?
Les acteurs inconnus de ce lieu déserté,
Sont d'un plan qui n'est jamais bon que transplanté.
Jamais, sortant chez eux d'une pièce nouvelle,
Y trouve-t-on jamais ce cortège nombreux
De pages, de laquais, de carrosses pompeux,
Dont l'utile embarras, et le grand étalage,
Font juger par dehors des beautés d'un ouvrage.*

[Does anyone ever see them other than on the poster? The unknown actors from that deserted place will only ever do well if they are transplanted. Do you ever find, leaving their theatre after a new play, that long procession of pages, lackeys and sumptuous carriages, the useful inconvenience and great display of which allows the beauties of a work to be judged from the outside? Did any author of reputation ever give them a single line? My brother-in-law must be out of his mind.]

Even the author and playwright Chappuzeau, in his apologia of *Le Théâtre français* (1674) is forced, when writing of the Marais, to admit that its location has been a problem:

Celle-ci n'avait qu'un désavantage, qui était celui du poste qu'elle avait choisi, à une extrémité de Paris, et dans un endroit de rue fort incommode. Mais son mérite particulier, la faveur des auteurs qui l'appuyaient, et ses grandes pièces de machines surmontaient assurément le dégoût que l'éloignement du lieu pouvait donner au bourgeois, surtout en hiver, et avant le bel ordre qu'on a apporté pour tenir les rues bien éclairées jusqu'à minuit, et nettes partout de boue et de filous.

[This troupe had only one disadvantage, which was that of the location it had chosen on the outskirts of Paris, and in a highly inconvenient street. But its particular merit, the favour of the authors who supported it, and its great machine plays easily overcame the distaste its distant location could cause the bourgeois, particularly in winter, and before the successful order given to keep the streets

well-lit until midnight, and everywhere clear of both mud and pickpockets.]
(Chappuzeau, 2009: 184-85)

The last quarter of the seventeenth century saw the rise of French opera under the aegis of first the poet and librettist Pierre Perrin and then the composer Jean-Baptiste Lully. The Faubourg Saint-Germain was by this time also rising, and the first home of the Paris Opera was a tennis court converted for Perrin by the marquis de Sourdéac, situated between the Rue de Seine and the Rue Mazarine, which later became known as the Hôtel Guénégaud. When Lully took over from Perrin, he installed his new company in another converted tennis court a fifteen-minute walk away on the Rue de Vaugirard (Clarke, 2012: 212-24). Molière's death in 1673 initiated a great upheaval: Lully petitioned for and was awarded the use of the Palais-Royal, actors from Molière's troupe leased the Guénégaud, and the Marais was closed down, and its actors transferred to the Guénégaud to form a new French troupe. This went into operation only meters away from where the Illustre Théâtre had failed thirty years earlier, and was shortly joined by the Italian troupe, with the two companies performing on alternate days as before (Clarke, 1998: 1-56).

What were the characteristics of the Faubourg Saint-Germain that made it so suitable as a site for theatres in the last quarter of the century (and beyond)? Work in developing the area since the 1640s had not always proceeded smoothly. As late as 1668, residents had refused to pay taxes for street cleaning and lighting, claiming that the streets were unpaved and badly cleaned, some houses unfinished and others unoccupied (Delamare, 1722-38: IV.233). However, the Guénégaud troupe and later the Comédie-Française (which would occupy the same premises from 1680) regularly paid these taxes, and by 1675, according to Orest Ranum, the faubourg was inhabited by 'a satisfactory mix' of noble and bourgeois householders (1973: 117) – a distinct advantage for theatre companies when the typical audience of the time was made up of these same noble and bourgeois elements, with members of the lower social classes being almost entirely absent (Lough, 1957: 80-81). Another feature of the faubourg was the presence of several academies for the nobility, where members could practise their riding and fencing skills. In fact, the district seems to have been associated with leisure pursuits, for it had more tennis courts (where men could also play cards and billiards) than any other area of Paris, as well as the best inns for travellers (Wilhelm, 1977: 31). The link between theatre and tourism had been underlined in 1668 by Michel de Pure, who advised companies to present varied programmes so that visitors to the capital could see several productions during their stay (1668: 175). Moreover, one of the two annual Paris fairs was held in the faubourg each spring, attracting huge numbers of visitors into the neighbourhood. Finally, a large number of foreigners lived and worked there (Wilhelm, 1977: 31). While this population would probably not have been of great significance to the three main troupes under consideration in this chapter, its presence was of vital importance to the Italians, as we will see.

From 1673 onwards, there were just four companies operating permanently in Paris: the Hôtel de Bourgogne company, the Royal Academy of Music (Opera) at the Palais-Royal, and the French and Italian troupes alternating at the Guénégaud. Then, in 1680, another major upheaval occurred when the actors from the Hôtel de Bourgogne were ordered to transfer to the Guénégaud to form the Comédie-Française. This new company was almost twice as big as any that had previously existed and consequently could perform every day; indeed it had to, in order to support so many dependent families. The Italians were, therefore, ordered to transfer to the now vacant Hôtel de Bourgogne. They did not go quietly, claiming they drew the bulk of their audience from among the foreigners resident in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and they even requested permission to construct a theatre there, which was refused (Clarke, 2022: 280). The Italians had enjoyed a privileged status in France and benefited from a high

degree of royal favour. Their portion of the rent on the Guénégaud (1200 *livres*) had always been paid by Lully because he had forced them to move by taking over the Palais-Royal. The understanding was that the Italians would always be lodged free of charge. So, when they transferred to the Hôtel de Bourgogne where the rent was 2400 *livres*, Lully (and later his heirs) continued to pay half the rent, and the French actors were ordered to supply the remainder, because the Italians had moved theatre to suit them. The French were horrified, and succeeded in bargaining the sum down to 800 *livres* by claiming the Italians received income from their theatre's refreshment booth. Nevertheless, the payment rankled, and all the more so when the Italians began to give scenes in French, claiming they had to adapt their material to their new audience, which the French saw as an infringement on their monopoly.

The Comédie-Française continued to occupy the Guénégaud until Easter 1689. Two years earlier, the actors had been summarily ordered to find new premises because of their theatre's proximity to the newly founded religious institution, the Collège des Quatre-Nations. For, as the dramatist Jean Racine had commented humorously at the time, it was necessary to avoid noise from the theatre being heard during religious services and vice versa (1950-66: II.485). The search was long and hard as their various proposals were rejected (generally on account of the hostility of local clergy), and they were forced to appeal against inappropriate suggestions made by those courtiers in charge of the move. Their letters and petitions reveal the factors taken into consideration when siting a theatre, including access, the avoidance of congestion and the provision of parking facilities. For example, the actors wrote as follows regarding a site on the Quai des Augustins:

Entrance to the theatre will be via the quay, which is very spacious and can hold several carriages without inconvenience or congestion. The adjacent streets are wide and not at all busy. The actors have not found any other more suitable location, which would cause less inconvenience to the public. The poultry and bread markets are held on the quay twice a week, but they are in the morning and finish at two or three in the afternoon at the latest, whereas the play only begins after five, and there are stone boundaries enclosing the market. The place occupied by the hire carriages at the end of the Pont Neuf is a good distance away, and besides [...] their carriages are hired before the play begins. (Bourdel, 1955: 151-52)

Nor was it only vehicular access that had to be thought of, as the actors noted when rejecting the Hôtel d'Auch: 'there would be on either side a passage of more than twenty *toises* [38.9 meters] before arriving at the building, which would be very inconvenient for the public, [and] unbearable for people of quality, who would be obliged to walk on the ground at the entrances to the passages' (ibid.: 161).

This site was located close by the Hôtel de Bourgogne and presented a multiplicity of problems, including competition with the Italians, as they informed the marquis de Seignelay: 'Consider also, My Lord, that having only two troupes of actors in Paris [the Comédie-Française and the Comédie-Italienne], it would expose them to total ruin to place them so close to each other' (ibid.: 162). In other words, a neighbourhood could only support one theatre. There were, in addition, practical considerations:

The exit onto the Rue Montmartre cannot be used for three reasons. First, it is too narrow, being only 15 *pieds* [4.9 meters] wide. Second, the gutter there occupies the whole of the middle of the road and, as it is very high, carriages coming to the theatre would not be able to get past it easily without being in danger of turning over. Third, this exit is almost opposite the church of La Jussienne, which is one of the things Your Highness has told us above all to avoid.

On the other side, the Rue Montorgueil, which would be the only avenue leading to the said Hôtel d'Auch, is one of the busiest in all Paris. It is the only road to Les Halles and there is not an hour in the day when it is not full of a great number of carts, fish wagons and all sorts of vehicles [...]. (ibid.: 161-62)

And the congestion problem would have been exacerbated by their proximity to the Italians:

this place is very close to the Hôtel de Bourgogne, thus there would be at the same time a double encumbrance, which would entirely block the Rue Tiquetonne, which is the only communicating road between the Marais and Saint Honoré districts, and which already serves for the overspill of the carriages from the Comédie-Italienne. (ibid.: 162)

The carriage question had, in fact, come up previously. The actors had said in favour of the Hôtel de Sens that the site was big enough for them to build their theatre and turn the remainder into two courtyards capable of holding 80 carriages, 'so that the street and the neighbourhood will not be encumbered' (ibid.: 157). And the King himself had apparently approved their proposal regarding the Hôtel de Lussan: 'as much on account of the width of the street as on account of the Place des Victoires, which could be used to line up the carriages' (ibid.: 159). Finally, in March 1688, the actors were allowed to purchase a tennis court and adjacent properties in the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain (better known today as the Rue de l'Ancienne-Comédie), close to their then location in the Rue de Seine. However, in a break with previous practice, the existing buildings were demolished and a new theatre constructed in their place, where the Comédie-Française would remain until 1770.

The Share System

A theatre company at this time consisted of a fixed number of shareholding actors (*sociétaires*) who, once expenses had been paid, divided the takings at the end of each performance according to the value of their share (full, half or, very occasionally, a quarter or three quarters). These expenses were of two kinds: ordinary and extraordinary. The ordinary expenses (*frais ordinaires*) consisted of the sums required for running the theatre on a daily basis, such as for lighting, publicity (posters), and the wages of employees paid at a daily rate (*gagistes*). The extraordinary expenses (*frais extraordinaires*) included outlay for the preparation of new productions, for sets and properties, or for hiring additional singers and dancers. These could be extremely high, particularly when the work in question involved a considerable degree of stage spectacle.

For a time, the Guénégaud *sociétaires* also included two stage machinists, the marquis de Sourdéac and his associate Champeron, who had first constructed the theatre as an opera house for Perrin. This was part of the deal by which the actors took over the lease, but was also a sign of the new company's commitment to stage spectacle. However, Sourdéac and Champeron proved to be troublesome and, when Lully had restrictions on the use of stage music imposed on companies other than his own, thereby hindering the production of spectacular works since music was needed to cover the noise of the scene changes, the company dismissed them. It was comparatively rare for *sociétaires* to be removed in this way, although others sometimes left of their own volition. Another such dismissal involved the actress Marie Dumont (Mlle Auzillon) who, in 1673, had deployed her influential patrons in a campaign to join the new Guénégaud company, even though two of its members later described her as '*inutile*' ['useless'] (Monval, 1886: 77), and who was forcibly retired six years later (Clarke, 2001: 354).

The *sociétaires* were not alone in being remunerated by means of shares. Authors of new plays were either paid with a lump sum (usually 2000 *livres*) or else they received one or

two shares during their play's first run, depending on its length. The costumier Baraillon was given a share in those productions where he provided costumes for a large number of *assistants* (supernumerary performers), and the composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier was also awarded a share in new plays for which he had provided the score.

Sociétaires may have had a share in the takings but they were also responsible for a share of the company's debts and major outgoings. For example, when the Comédie-Française was ordered to move to new premises, the company constituted a fund to cover the cost of buying land and constructing the building. It set aside a fixed amount from each day's takings (66 *livres*) together with the totality of the amount it received annually from the King (12 000 *livres*). Even so, it still had to borrow two thirds of the sum required, for which the actors agreed that both they and their heirs would be liable. The fund raised belonged to the actors in proportion to their shares. Any actor joining the company subsequently was required to contribute a sum equivalent to their share in the fund and, when actors left the troupe through death or retirement, their share in the fund was repaid either to them or to their heirs. This practice continued throughout the eighteenth century and vestiges of the arrangement remain even today. Indeed, so significant was this fund that theatre historian Claude Alasseur describes the relevant document as the fundamental administrative text of the Comédie-Française, second only to the original founding decree of Louis XIV (1967: 37-38).

Expenditure

One of the most significant expenses for a theatre company was rent. Whereas the King had awarded Molière free use of the Palais-Royal, both the Guénégaud company and the Comédie-Française while it was resident there, had to pay rent at a rate of 2400 *livres* per annum. An indication that such rents were linked to property values is provided by the fact that the annual rent on the Marais theatre was reduced from 2400 *livres* to 1600 *livres* in 1671, as the area fell from fashion (Deierkauf-Holsboer, 1954-58: II.178). Similarly, while the rent on the Hôtel de Bourgogne was initially also 2400 *livres* (Deierkauf-Holsboer, 1968-70: II.180, 194, 195), the Comédie-Française actors would later declare it to have been 2000 *livres* (Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française, 1695), suggesting that it, too, may have been reduced, and thereby situating the theatre in the mid-ground as regards desirability.

All the companies under consideration here kept detailed account books, and although not all those of Molière's troupe have come down to us, we do have the digest drawn up by the actor La Grange. These, together with the record of Comédie-Française company meetings (sadly incomplete), provide an invaluable source of information regarding the companies' finances. Their main concern was, understandably, to balance the books, as is clear from the layout of the books themselves, with the top half of each page showing income from that day's ticket sales and other sources, and the bottom half, the expenditure. The company would meet at the end of each day's performance to receive the record of ticket sales and the revenue from the box office, and pay the daily expenses and those necessitated by the play(s) of the day. Agreed amounts would be set aside for rent and other large expenses and given into the safekeeping of one of the actors. The remainder would be divided among the *sociétaires* in proportion to their shares, and anything left over would form a petty cash fund. At an annual meeting held at the end of each season immediately before the Easter break, those individuals who had received sums from the troupe would submit their accounts. According to Chappuzeau, the company officers charged with overseeing all this were the Treasurer, the Secretary (who completed the account book) and the Controller (2009: 223-34). But these functions rotated and, at the Comédie-Française, there were only two such officers, known as the *quinzainiers*, later *semainiers* (because they were in post for first two weeks, then one).

Each theatre company employed a whole team of *gagistes*. These included the concierge, who lived on the premises and looked after the theatre building, and the copyist, who kept the company's library and produced the prompt copy of new plays as well as the *rôles* (lines) of individual members of the cast. Originally, the copyist also acted as prompter, but later the Comédie-Française engaged a specialist (often female) employee for that purpose. The members of the band (referred to collectively as *violons* even though not all were violinists) were also *gagistes*, and occasionally companies would have a dancer or singer on the payroll. For example, the Illustre Théâtre hired the dancer Daniel Mallet in 1644 (Jurgens and Maxfield-Miller, 1963: 242-42); and a certain Mlle Fréville was employed by the Comédie-Française between 1684 and 1686 to sing, dance and play the guitar (Clarke, 2021: 171). But more usually, supernumerary singers and dancers were taken on as required and would, therefore, have featured in the *frais extraordinaires*, along with any supplementary stagehands. Finally, *assistants* – additional actors for small parts and walk-on roles – were similarly paid per performance.

Included among the *gagistes* were the box-office and front-of-house staff, a surprising number of whom were women – including many former actresses –, which may have been a way of supporting them in old age (Clarke, 2021: 163-72). The job of porter was, though, difficult and often dangerous, since they had to ensure that only people with tickets entered the auditorium, and they were usually (although not exclusively) male, as were the guards and the officer in charge of them. Companies had on their payroll two *décorateurs* (and later a *sous-décorateur*) responsible for the sets and lighting, assisted by one or more labourers. *Peintres* (scenic artists) were, though, hired as required, and some props and other elements were also provided by specialists. Finally, the daily expenses included payments to the candlemaker, the billsticker (plus the cost of the posters), and for oil lamps, cleaning, and charity to a number of religious orders.

Regular payments not included among the daily expenses that appear elsewhere in the account books were for heating and to the *cabaretiers* (caterers), who provided refreshments for the actors and their employees, most usually during set building or rehearsals (often of dancers). There were also frequent payments for transport, including horses and carriages for those sent on business trips, and carts and carriages to convey the actors and their equipment when summoned to perform at the royal court. Costumes are mentioned only rarely, since these were generally provided by the actors themselves. According to Chappuzeau, this represented a considerable expenditure, and he values the stage wardrobe of some actors at more than 10 000 *livres* (roughly equivalent to £90 000 in today's money). Moreover:

since they are obliged to appear at court and see people of quality at any time, they have to follow fashion and undertake new expense for their ordinary dress, which prevents them from placing large sums of money at interest. Which is why we have seen few actors become rich. (Chappuzeau, 2009: 171)

When companies performed at court, the royal purse would contribute to the expense of new costumes, but La Grange complains in 1673 that he had received only 2000 *livres* 'for costumes for the plays created for the King's pleasure', that had cost him twice as much (1947: I.146). However, when a role required a particular costume that could not easily be reused (such as M. Jourdain's dressing gown in Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*), or when costumes and footwear were required for supernumerary actors or dancers, these would either be purchased or hired from the company's costumier.

Pensions formed another considerable item of expenditure – even more than the rent. Anyone retiring from a troupe (as opposed to leaving to join another) was paid a pension in proportion to their share, with the holder of a full share receiving 1000 *livres* per annum (Clarke, 2021: 169-71). This was paid for as long as the holder lived, which could be for a

considerable time (Marie-Anne-Catherine Quinault holds the record, having received her pension from 1722 to 1792), and continued regardless of whether the recipient took on other employment (for example backstage work). They were carried over from one troupe to another as companies merged, thereby becoming an ever-increasing burden. By the mid-1680s, the Comédie-Française had fourteen such pensioners and was forced to make complicated arrangements to ensure these commitments were met, primarily by having the incoming actor pay the pension of the person whose share they had taken over. It is not surprising, therefore, that the company sometimes tried to avoid paying, as when it attempted (unsuccessfully) to terminate Sourdéac's pension of 500 *livres* on the grounds that the Guénégaud company, which had made the agreement, no longer existed (Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française, 1682-89). And it later denied a pension to Angélique Du Croisy (Mlle Poisson), who had to appeal to the Dauphin to receive her due. This occurred in 1699, at which time the Comédie-Française noted that it had seventeen pensioners receiving a total of 17 000 *livres* per annum.

Not all pensioners were actors, and the troupe would occasionally award pensions to other long-serving employees. For example, in 1703, when informed that their former box-office manager, Mme Provost, did not have enough to live on, the Comédie-Française actors decided to award her an annual pension of 150 *livres*. In 1707 Mme Crosnier, the widow of a *décorateur* and herself a long-serving employee, received 300 *livres* per annum. And in 1711 the concierge Dufors (who now combined these duties with those of *décorateur* and stage machinist), was awarded 500 *livres* per annum for his lifetime, to be followed by 300 *livres* to his wife should he pre-decease her. More surprising, though, is the case of the musician Mlle Fréville, hired as a *gagiste* in 1684 at a rate of 1000 *livres* per annum and dismissed two years later, who was compensated by a *gratification* (tip) of 300 *livres* per annum, which was only cut when the troupe tightened its belt as it searched for new premises (Clarke, 2021: 117).

Other instances of generosity to associates and their family members might more properly be described as charity, as when La Grange was authorized to give 30 *livres* to Mme Dubreuil, the widow of an usher and former *décorateur*. But for charitable donations, too, it was sometimes necessary to offer regular payments rather than a lump sum. For example, in 1696, the company paid for the mother of a deceased company member to enter a charitable institution for 'the rest of her days, noting that it had previously done the same for a former female usher' (Clarke, 2021: 172). What is more, both the Guénégaud and Comédie-Française companies regularly gave money to actors and former actors, both male and female, who were down on their luck, even though many had never performed with the troupes in question.

Income

Inevitably, the greater part of this expenditure had to be covered by ticket sales. An evening's entertainment would often consist of two plays: usually a five-act play with a shorter afterpiece or two mid-length plays. It was not always the play performed first that was the main attraction, and older main plays could be given with new afterpieces (known as *petites pièces*). Ticket prices varied according to whether the main play being performed was old or new, but initially this only applied to some areas of the house. Performances with tickets at their regular price were said to be *au simple*, while those with prices raised were *au double*, and the length of time a play could be maintained *au double* was one indication of its success. The cost of hiring a box was the multiple of the number of seats it contained (usually four, six, eight, or twelve) regardless of the actual number of people seated in it. For the first seasons of the Guénégaud's activity, prices were as follows:

Area	Simple	Double
Stage	5 livres 10 sols	5 livres 10 sols
First-row boxes	5 livres 10 sols	5 livres 10 sols
<i>Amphithéâtre</i> ⁴	3 livres	5 livres 10 sols
Second-row boxes	1 livre 10 sols	3 livres
Third-row boxes	1 livre	2 livres
<i>Parterre</i> ⁵	15 sols	1 livre 10 sols

We see that tickets for the most expensive areas remained the same for both old and new plays, while prices in the cheaper areas were doubled for new ones. Then, during the course of the 1676-77 season, prices in the more expensive areas were reduced to three *livres au simple* and all areas were increased for performances *au double*, a practice that continued at the Comédie-Française. The use of the *double* was clearly intended to capitalize on the earning potential of new works and privilege wealthier members of the public by pricing out less favoured sections of the audience, thereby allowing those who could afford it to see new plays as part of a privileged elite. But it required careful calculation on the part of the actors, who had to decide when it was better to switch from fewer people paying more to more people paying less until finally, in 1718, the Comédie-Française fixed a policy of reducing prices when takings fell below a certain level at a given number of performances.

Companies granted free entry to a select group of individuals including visiting dignitaries, privileged associates, and actors with other troupes. *Sociétaires* were allowed two free tickets to distribute as they wished, and their servants and family members could also see the show when space permitted. However, each free entry represented a loss of potential income, and the Comédie-Française increasingly took measures to limit these, particularly where the more popular areas of the house were concerned, or when larger audiences than normal were expected. For example, in 1682, the ushers were ordered to admit the children and maidservants of the actors to the rear boxes only when they would otherwise have been empty, and no workmen other than those belonging to the troupe were allowed to enter. In 1683, for the revival of Pierre Corneille's *Toison d'or*, the free entry list was restricted to a select few who were to be placed in the rear side boxes, thereby allowing paying customers to be seated close to the stage, where they would be most visible (Clarke, 2008: 76-77). And in 1688, 1697 and 1726, the company agreed a full set of regulations governing free entry (Bonnassies, 1874: 106-26).

Another source of income was the awarding of concessions. Chief amongst these was the 'lemonade' or refreshment booth, whose proprietor, Mlle Michel, paid the Guénégaud company 600 *livres* per annum to be allowed to provide a range of drinks and snacks at performances by the French and Italian troupes (Clarke, 1998: 116). She was still in the same post at the Comédie-Française in 1697, when a door to her café had to be bricked up to prevent people using it as a shortcut from the *parterre* to the boxes (Bonnassies, 1874: 125). Then, in 1685, the troupe envisaged another concession, when it banned the publisher Ribou from selling books in the auditorium, 'because we plan to set up a shop we will rent to a bookseller for the distribution of the said plays[,] whoever will offer the most' (Clarke, 2018: 175). That such concessions were considered a source of income is demonstrated by the fact that the French actors used revenue from the lemonade booth as a way of reducing their contribution to the Italians' rent.

A far bigger contribution to the income of two of these companies came from the King. Molière's troupe first received a royal pension of 6000 *livres* per annum in 1665 when

⁴ A raked seating area to the rear of the auditorium, facing the stage.

⁵ A standing area occupying the whole of the lower level, surrounded by the stage and the three rows of boxes.

it became the King's Troupe, having previously belonged to the King's brother. In 1671, this was raised to 7000 *livres*, perhaps on account of the arrival of new actors. Molière's troupe also received sums in connection with some of its trips to entertain the court, such as 3000 *livres* for Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1668, 12 000 *livres* for Chambord in 1669 and the same sum for Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1670. These were divided among the *sociétaires* according to the value of their share. From July 1668 onwards, the King also began to reimburse the actors for expenses incurred at court by means of a *per diem* of six *livres* (La Grange, 1947: I.112). These two systems (the payment of a large sum in respect of one or more trips and a daily allowance) seem to have coexisted until 1670, after which the actors received only the *per diem*, their share in the annual pension and any additional *gratifications*.

Molière's troupe was also remunerated for giving *visites* (private performances) in the homes of the aristocracy. These were generally given on the *jours extraordinaires*, when the troupe did not perform in town, and so had the advantage of allowing it to supplement its regular revenue, with no associated loss. At certain key moments in Molière's career, such as during the move from the Petit-Bourbon to the Palais-Royal, or immediately after the lifting of the ban on his play *Le Tartuffe* when everyone was clamouring to see it, these *visites* were an important (and sometimes sole) source of income for the company. In general they made only a small contribution to its coffers, but it was another source of revenue from which the troupe was cut off when it was obliged to be at court.

Trips to court in fact presented a huge problem for Molière's troupe since they could extend over days and weeks. This entailed closing its Paris theatre, thereby cutting it off from its main source of income and potentially offending its Paris audience (Clarke, 2018a: 31-63). And although the sums received from the King appear large, they did not fully compensate the troupe for such losses. Molière attempted to mitigate this by having the troupe perform in town as soon as it arrived back, and he organized its other *visites* so as to disturb as little as possible the rhythm of town performances. He also wrote new plays to be created in Paris, rather than relying on the revival of works written for the court. The situation changed, though, in the last year of Molière's life, once Lully had taken over the Opera – a sign that he, rather than Molière, was now the court's preferred entertainer. However, contrary to what is sometimes written, Molière's troupe did still go to court, but did not remain there for extended periods and did not, therefore, miss a single town performance. According to Roger Duchêne, this resulted in a favourable financial position, with the troupe's income now being almost entirely derived from its Parisian public (1998: 636).

The Guénégaud company, on the other hand, did not receive a pension from the King and performed only twice at court; but, on the plus side, it never had to cancel a Paris performance. It did, though, occasionally give *visites*, including one to the home of the Spanish ambassador (Clarke, 1998: 200-07). The situation of the Comédie-Française was very different – not only did it receive a royal pension of 12 000 *livres*, but the company was large enough to perform at court and in town on the same day. Thus, it was able to combine short *visite*-style trips to nearby royal palaces with longer stays when the court was based elsewhere, while simultaneously continuing to satisfy its Parisian public, although there was a degree of grumbling on either side. This is in contrast to the Italians who, when taunted by the French actors with regard to the infrequency of their trips to court, responded that there was little advantage for them in going since it prevented them from performing in Paris. And although the size of the Comédie-Française was an advantage in some respects, it meant that the troupe had more dependent mouths to feed, as it pointed out frequently in its various petitions.

By the end of the 1689-90 season, the Comédie-Française was safely installed in its new theatre in the heart of the Paris entertainment district. This did not mean that its financial

problems were over – far from it. To echo theatre historian André Blanc, when reading the minutes of its company meetings one is immediately struck by the many and varied forms of financial difficulty endured by the company and its members, ranging from the devaluation of the currency via the introduction of new taxes, to the seizing of money and assets of individual actors. Indeed, the commitment necessitated by the construction of its new premises was such that in 1725, only sixteen actors had succeeded in paying off their debt to the company (Blanc, 2007: 124-25).⁶

And yet, although many of the financial structures that had been in place since the time of Molière (and before) were adapted in the light of new constraints, they are for the most part still recognizable; and the institution, by dint of much effort, has survived to carry this great tradition inherited from Molière forward into the future (for an account of the Comédie-Française today, see the interview with its director Éric Ruf, in this volume).

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