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David Bradby and Andrew Calder, Eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Molière*. Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xix + 242 pp. Tables, figures, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$75.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN: 0521837596; \$29.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN: 0521546656.

Review by Stephen C. Bold, Boston College.

The new *Cambridge Companion to Molière* is an important addition to the series' list of literary volumes. David Bradby and Andrew Calder, the editors of this particular collection of essays, have indeed carefully assembled a "broad and detailed introduction to Molière," as the cover blurb promises. Unlike Cambridge philosophical series, the "companions to literature" seem at times to present their subject in a bit of an arbitrary way, through essays defined by themes and texts rather than critical problems. The reader might have a similar expectation when perusing the table of contents, where individual plays are featured more prominently than generic or critical topics. This impression is a bit deceiving, however, as the eight essays (out of sixteen) that single out specific plays--*L'Ecole des femmes*, *Tartuffe*, *Le Misanthrope*, *Dom Juan*, *L'Avare*, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, *Les Femmes savantes*, *Le Malade imaginaire*--use these works primarily as examples and as means for raising larger questions: the role of gender, irony, or music; the treatment of classical models; the pedagogical function, etc. In a number of cases the essays are written by critics who have already contributed important monographs to Molière studies, so that these shorter pieces serve as a kind of compendium of important critical directions in the field. Equally important is the sense that these essays often work in pairs, complementing or contrasting at least one other piece in the collection--an effect that brings the whole together as a kind of well-conceived and lively written colloquium.

The most distinctive of the directions in the collection, and to my mind the most evocative of its facets, is found in the closing group of four articles that reflect on the history--especially the recent history--of staging and performance of Molière. Two of these essays examine the staged interpretations of *Tartuffe* and *Dom Juan*, arguably the most ambiguous and problematic of the comedies.

David Whitton has approached *Dom Juan* as "the directors' play," explaining in this way the rediscovery of this long-neglected, aesthetically "inferior" play: "It is not by accident that the modern ascent of *Dom Juan* coincides with the emergence of directors as the dominant creative agency in theatre, since the recovery of meaning from this formerly neglected text has been an essentially directorial initiative" (p. 213). Whitton chronicles the essential role played by Louis Jouvet's towering 1947 production. He shows how Jouvet resolved the dilemma of representing the play's basic disconnectedness, both in the lead character's anomie in and the play's own jerky episodic structure. Jouvet himself played the title role as a tortured Catholic so as to give depth and understanding to Don Juan's evasiveness. Similarly, the seams evident in the play's fractured narrative are air-brushed away by a staging that "elides successive scenes *with* the continuity of an edited film" (p. 206). In contrast, Vilar and Chéreau will work with the play as it goes provocatively against the grain, defying the audience's too easy complicity with this charming agent provocateur. These more ideological approaches are linked by Whitton to the eastern European modernist explorations of Meyerhold and Brecht. Whitton concludes, after enumerating the diverse Dom Juans created in the twentieth century: "All of these, like the productions evoked above, also illustrate how a staging is simultaneously a liberating and a diminishing operation: it extends the play's life by actualizing it, but narrows its focus by concretizing a particular version of it" (p. 213). The demonstration is so clear that one is tempted to add: QED.

Jim Carmody, author of *Re-reading Molière* (1993), the most important English-language study of Molière on the modern stage, unfortunately covers quite a bit of the same ground in his discussion of “Landmark Twentieth-Century Productions of Molière,” though he does add a partially complementary “transatlantic perspective” to the discussion. An important part of Carmody’s argument is that “Molière” is a name whose meaning is constantly redefined: “It is the critics, scholars and artists who record and disseminate their reactions to and reflections of the ‘Molière’ that emerges from each noteworthy production of one of the plays, who perform the invaluable cultural work of identifying potential landmarks and explaining how these emerging landmarks might be understood as redrawing the ‘Molière’ map” (p. 196). For the most part Carmody refuses to be pinned down to too many specifics, saying that his own title’s contract is “virtually impossible to fulfill” (p. 193). For those specifics, one should see his earlier book, no doubt the critic’s personal escape clause, written into the fine print of the contract. As for the American perspective, he notes mostly ambivalence and difficulty: “Molière” provided rich artistic inspiration to once-fledgling, now leading theatre companies like the Guthrie and the ACT, but the visibility of Molière does not seem to have grown commensurately with those new theatres—in part, according to Carmody, because of the problem of translation (long the monopoly of Richard Wilbur where Molière is concerned).

Carmody’s essay follows Noël Peacock’s survey of British productions of *Tartuffe*, which also concludes with a statement on the Wilbur dilemma: the British audience, always less enamored of these translations celebrated in the U.S., has recently been treated (for better or worse) to freer translations and generally more free-wheeling interpretations of what is perhaps Molière’s greatest play. Peacock describes extremely well the linguistic and political inflections given *Tartuffe* through its channel passage; these include a 1985 “Scotticized” version in Edinburgh, Ranjit Bolt’s frankly slangy translation performed in London in 1991 and in a revised version at the National Theatre in 2002, and Jatinder Verma’s resetting of the play in the court of seventeenth-century Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb. From the start, as Peacock shows, British adaptations have elucidated the meanings of the original play—maybe even of the “unfinished” *Ur-Tartuffe* of 1664. Peacock is thoroughly convinced of the surprising fertility of these reworkings: “With the dissolution of the binary opposition between original and translation, the theoretical shift from source-oriented to target-oriented replacing the quasi-fetishistic concern for the text, a new dialectical relationship is, we have seen, being established between Molière’s *Tartuffe* and modern British audiences. The prestige and polemical force of the French version is being restored, paradoxically, through works which seek to remove the play from its original context...” (p. 186). This is a surprising assertion from someone who is as fine and a seasoned reader of seventeenth-century French texts as Noël Peacock.

The collection’s closing statement, David Bradby’s “‘Reculer pour mieux sauter’: modern experimental theatre’s debt to Molière,” essentially brings the pieces by Peacock, Carmody, and Whitton together by underlining once again the decisive role played by modern directors. Bradby’s essay features the description of another set of “landmark” productions (those of Planchon, Vitez, Mnouchkine, Savary, and Fo) and shows how important Molière was for these directors in helping them define their own artistic vision: “Molière continues to provide a stimulus to new work in the theatre, and his plays have played a pivotal role in the major experimental movements of the period since the early twentieth century” (p. 226).

In addition to these four discussions of *mise en scène*, the volume contains an extremely authoritative description of “The Material Conditions of Molière’s Stage” by Jan Clarke, a leading historian of French classical theatre. The opening section of this essay, the longest of the collection, details the construction and disposition of Parisian theatres of the time, including some useful period and modern illustrations of the performance spaces. The richness and quality of this discussion—which also includes discussions of staging, lighting, troupe organization, ticket sales and more—is too substantial to be conveyed here. This essential essay could and should be read as the documentary supplement to René Bray’s *Molière, homme de théâtre* (1954).

Chapters six through twelve (leaving out chapter eight) feature more typical textual criticism of individual plays used as examples for larger issues.

Julia Prest's discussion of "Medicine and Entertainment in *Le Malade imaginaire*" is a useful summary of one of the best-known themes in Molière's theatre. Whereas the articles on staging may tend to go beyond what might be called the introductory level, Prest's treatment of medical satire (not only in the *Malade* but throughout Molière's career) would provide an appropriate initiation for most college students. I am also fully convinced of the importance of the contrast made with entertainment in her piece: theatre is indeed an elixir in the *Malade* and as such sheds important light on Molière's theatrical profession. Prest does not engage very much with the voluminous existing scholarship on the subject, but this does not seem to be her purpose in this helpful overview.

In "L'Ecole des femmes: matrimony and the laws of chance," Roxanne Lalande focuses on this first "grande comédie" primarily as a reflection on Molière's "conflicted attitude[s]" on freedom and control in a number of contexts, including theatrical art, human nature, and gender. Although gender-based readings (of Molière in general and of this play in particular) commonly demonstrate a similar ambivalence—both on the part of the critic (see especially Barbara Johnson, "Teaching Ignorance") and the playwright—Lalande adds a fresh perspective by coupling the "woman question" with the theme of fate, recognized by many critics (e.g., Judd Hubert) as a fundamental constituent in the pseudo-tragic structure of the play. Her dialectical model places reason on the side of Arnolphe and places Agnès, deprived of reason and an informed free will, on the side of chance, concluding: "Although much has been written about Molière's advocacy of the natural order, the final reconciliation is ultimately founded on the subservience of feminine chance to masculine reason" (p. 175). This (im)balance seems a fairly accurate description of the state of affairs in Molière, though the demonstration—and the usefulness of this essay as an introduction to gender issues in Molière's theatre—might have profited from references to other plays (e.g., *Les Précieuses ridicules*, *Les Femmes savantes*, *La Princesse d'Elide*) or to existing scholarship on these issues. These omissions do not detract greatly from the interest of this essay.

Two engaging pieces examine Molière's debt to comic models. Robert McBride's "*L'Avare* or Harpagon's Masterclass in Comedy" seeks to demonstrate how Molière's comic originality survives close adherence to a classical model, Plautus's *Aulularia*. The close, very linear reading of the play, in many ways reminiscent of W. G. Moore's "new criticism" of Molière (not light praise!) is intelligent but, as with Lalande's piece, does not open up the critical vistas one might hope for in this kind of collection. Stephen Knapper's "The Master and the Mirror: Scaramouche and Molière" is a companion piece to McBride's and it arrives at a very similar conclusion: that Molière's inventive imitation allows him to equal and even surpass his model, in this case the Italian comic actor Tiberio Fiorilli (a.k.a. Scaramouche) with whom he shared the Palais-Royal theatre. What is nice about Knapper's essay is precisely the broad, extremely well-informed approach, which is most appropriate as the issue here is not textual imitation but rather stagecraft. As such, this piece, with its discussion of historical documents, iconography and period and modern staging, will be informative for most specialists even as it provides a clear introduction to the study of the role of farce (especially Italian farce) in Molière.

"Molière and the teaching of Frenchness: *Les Femmes savantes* as a case study" by Ralph Albanese, Jr. begins with a lengthy and useful reminder of Albanese's own tour de force study of *Molière à l'école républicaine* (1992) where he explains the dramatist's enshrinement as the model of bourgeois rectitude, setting in place a critical "truth" that is even now difficult to question. But the focus on *Les Femmes savantes* does little to enrich this viewpoint, especially as it seems to suggest an identity between Molière's intent and the republican interpretation. Is this what Albanese is suggesting for this play and for other (or all) of Molière's comedies? This is not clear from his essay.

Two essays examine "the comic" in Molière: Larry Norman's "Molière as Satirist" and co-editor Andrew Calder's "Laughter and Irony in *Le Misanthrope*." Norman's essay, a condensed form of his book *The*

Public Mirror (1999), focuses on the aesthetics of satire: satire as representation and satire as dramatic action. Satire must be real, based on actual models, and universal, so as not to slander or to be consigned to the dustbin of literary arcana. The thematization of satire within the plays, with a focus on the *grandes comédies* from *L'École des femmes* to *Le Misanthrope*, anchors the satiric spirit within Molière's aesthetic. Although satire does not represent the full range of the playwright's comic art, Norman's mastery of this problem is unequaled. This essay represents a good synopsis of current thought.

Calder, author of *Molière: The Theory and Practice of Comedy* (1993), covers some of the same ground as Norman in his reading of *Le Misanthrope*. His focus, however, is on the play's structure and aesthetic strains and, at least initially, on the self-reflective dimension of the text, given "the many allusions to writing and theatre in the text" (p. 97); ironically (though this does not seem to be one of the ironies on Calder's mind), the downfall of the comi-tragic heroes is their insufficient self-reflection (p. 100). Most of the essay examines the tragic and comic perspectives on the two primary couples, framed by a reference to Montaigne's comi-tragic couple Democritus and Heraclitus (*Essais* I, 50). Was Molière Alceste? Philinte? Célimène? Calder's prudent, non-committal conclusion, which nonetheless leans toward the comic model of Célimènesque *ridicule*, is a bit disappointing in its blandness: "It is enough that *Le Misanthrope* is a delightful, provoking and elegant entertainment and that in Alceste, whom he played himself, Molière gave the comic theatre one of its richest and most demanding roles" (p. 106).

Two essays are devoted to the group of plays known as *comédies-ballets*, though Charles Mazouer, in his piece simply entitled "Comédies-ballets," reminds us that the term is reserved by Molière for one play only—the one examined by John S. Powell in "*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*: Molière and Music." Mazouer, author of an essential 1993 study of the genre, describes succinctly the origin of the *comédie-ballet* at court, its variable and complex form, and its meanings, concluding: "the ornaments of *comédie-ballet*, with the fantasy which is proper to them, complete the work of laughter and lead to a sense of complete well-being. He would concur with the view that stage happiness has its limits; but his affirmation of joy carries with it a conviction, or at least a longing; that the world could be a better place and that humankind could be happy" (p. 119). Though conjectural, this conclusion is at odds with the moralizing assumptions now dominant in much Molière criticism and corrects, to my mind, the view that the "folly" of late works (*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and *Le Malade imaginaire*) is at base a cynical rejection of the world as it is.

John Powell's discussion of *Le Bourgeois*, written from the position of strong musicological authority, enriches our knowledge of the historical and artistic circumstances of the play's creation and provides insights into the personal and interpersonal dynamics of Lully's work: e.g., his composition methods and his rivalry with contemporary stage composer Pierre Perrin. The essay concludes with some sensible discussion of the thematic function of music and dance within the play, though I am not sure that he adds very much to what others, including Robert McBride in his 1992 book or Mazouer in his essay, have said. But for the student approaching this play for the first time, Powell's piece will be most helpful. And for the reader still unconvinced of the essential role of music in this *comédie-ballet*, Powell's argument is convincing, learned, and articulate.

The two remaining articles, the opening biographical sketch by Marie-Claude Canova-Green and Richard Parish's "How (and Why) Not to Take Molière Too Seriously" have the broadest scope and present sharply contrasting approaches to the meaning of Molière. Canova-Green has the thankless task of encapsulating a complex and shadowy career in a brief portrait of the artist, for which she posits (in her title) a "career strategy." Although the strategy seems for this critic to have many facets, intentions are found in a rather unexplained way: by turns his strategy is one of "recycl[ing] the ingredients of his first comedies" or "reflecting the 'galant' aesthetics developing in the salons" (p. 7); then "having a subtle revenge on those who accused him of flouting the classical tradition" (p. 9); and, most fundamentally, employing "mirror-like fidelity [which] was essential if theatre was to fulfill its pedagogic role" (p. 8)—an intention that is taken as a given, but may not be so at all. This, at least, is one suggestion that I find

in Parish's *mise en garde*. The primary focus of his caution, developed through a commentary of three (or four) pronouncements made by Molière himself, seems to be that Molière is not quite as innocent or benevolent as is commonly assumed. Parish's suggestion that "the only correction may lie in learning to take on board, lucidly, the implications of universal folly" (p. 81) echoes closely Defaux's conclusion at the end of *Molière ou les métamorphoses du comique* (1980); though unlike Defaux, Parish seems to be suggesting that this attitude is not just the result of a late-career disappointment but is something of an over-arching vision.

It is an important quality of this collection of essays that such debates emerge implicitly between the chapters. While (inevitably) few of the articles come close to offering definitive statements on any given subject (Clarke, Knapper, and Mazouer perhaps come the closest), they provide good introductions for the uninitiated or new food for thought for scholars--and sometimes both. As such, this volume, amply representing the work of new generations of scholars, takes its place solidly next to important earlier English-language collections by Jacques Guicharnaud (1964) and James F. Gaines and Michael Koppisch (1995).

LIST OF ESSAYS

Marie-Claude Canova-Green, "The Career Strategy of an Actor Turned Playwright: 'de l'audace, encore de l'audace, toujours de l'audace'"

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David Whitton, "*Dom Juan*: The Directors' Play"

David Bradby, "'Reculer pour mieux sauter': Modern Experimental Theatre's Debt to Molière"

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