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Thesis

THE ITALIAN INFLUENCE IN THREE  
OF  
MOLIERE'S PLAYS

by

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## The Italian Influence in three Plays of Moliere

### I Introduction

This thesis is written to show the extent of Moliere's indebtedness to Italian comedy in three of his early plays, Le Medecin volant, L'Etourdi, and Dépit amoureux. As a background for this study a short survey will be made, first, of the Italian comedy before Molière, and second, of the Italian influence in French comedy itself before Molière. Finally, with this background, the Italian influence in the three above mentioned plays will be studied in detail.

### II Italian Comedy before Molière

Italian comedy before Molière was characterized by stock characters and acts, improvisation, and highly popular and vulgar comedy. There were two rather different types of comedy, the commedia dell'arte and the commedia regolare, differing principally in the use or non-use of improvisation. The first mentioned always existed while the second appeared only in the fifteenth century.

#### a. commedia dell'arte

The commedia dell'arte was characterized especially by improvisation and also by stock characters and acts.

Unlike our modern plays, the full text of the play of the commedia dell'arte was not written out; hence improvisation, the most distinctive feature of this type of comedy, was resorted to. Only a scenario, that is, an indication of the subject and an outline of the plot appeared in written form. As a rule this

outline was a bare summary of the action and it was posted so that the actors had a chance to consult it before the play was put on. Consequently the various roles were studied individually by the respective actors, but they did not memorize any parts and the dialogue was abandoned to the improvisation of each actor.

The improvisation was assisted by the fact that many stock acts were employed. Not only did each actor have a store of general stock acts but certain ones as well. He had, for example, his own particular manner of exit and entrance as peculiar to him as his costume. His posture and gesture were uniform and every bit as important as his speech. These actors did not carry on in a haphazard fashion, they "étudient beaucoup et se munissent la mémoire d'une grande provision de choses: sentences, concetti, déclarations d'amour, reproches, désespoirs et délires, afin de les avoirs tout prêts à l'occasion, et leurs études sont en rapport avec les moeurs et les habitudes des personnages qu'ils représentent." It is important to note that: "Les acteurs de la comédie de l'art n'avaient pas seulement, pour vaincre les difficultés de l'improvisation, l'avantage d'une longue préparation, d'une préparation de toute leur vie. Ils possédaient d'autres ressources. Ils étaient, pour la plupart, des mimes très-exercés. Les jeux de physionomie, les postures, les gestes tenaient une grande place dans leur talent. Il était déjà question, au temps du roi Théodoric, de ces histrions 'qui donnaient autant de soufflets et de coups de bâton qu'ils

débitaient de paroles, et qui faisaient plus rire par les grotesques mouvements de leur corps que par les saillies plus ou moins heureuses de leur esprit.'.....Souvent les sauts, les pirouettes, les culbutes leur tenaient lieu de réplique. Les bastonnades n'étaient pas ménagées. La plupart des acteurs fameux de la commedia dell'arte furent des gymnastes de premier order; ils durent leur réputation autant à leurs tours de force ou d'adresse qu'à la vivacité de leur réparties."

To return again to stock characters, the leading rôles in the plays were generally that of a valet, a pedant, a captain, a merchant, and a pair or two of lovers. These stock characters developed from the fairs and masquerades which furnished entertainment during the carnivals. Each province or town represented at the carnivals furnished a comic character or actor. Venice, for instance, was responsible for the merchant, Messer Pantalon, who was vain and gallant but always duped. He was "un vieux marchand dans son naturel" clothed in plain black clothes and wearing a beard. He most often played the part of the unrelenting father of the unhappy lover, though sometimes he is the unhappy, duped husband. He is characteristically portrayed in L'Arracheur de dents. In this play Pantalon and his son Oratio were rivals for the hand of Isabelle. In order to prevent Pantalon from winning the young lady in question there was a plot underway to convince Pantalon that he had halitosis. Pantalon with marriage in view makes plans to have teeth extracted which he believes are the cause of his trouble.

In behalf of his master, Oratio, Arlequin poses as the "cavadente". With huge pliers he extracts with one pull four good teeth of Pantalons. Pantalon in convulsion of pain grabs the beard of the extractor. The beard proves to be false and comes off in his hands. Arlequin flees and Pantalon pursues him.

Bologna was the source of le pédant ridicule. His garb was the black gown worn by the doctors of Bologna. He also wore a mask which covered his forehead and nose. Each word of this character is "une délicieuse ânerie." His speech is liberally sprinkled with Latin words and phrases. "Les modèles n'étaient pas rares dans un temps où l'engouement pour les lettres grecques et latines dégénérait aisément en folie." In a large number of the plays the Pedant is at hand to offer advice. The advice most often is over looked or else is absurd and without value.

The Captain was another important type. He originated from the Spanish braggarts who, for a time, overran Italy. As would be expected, he dressed as a Spaniard, his most characteristic feature being his formidable moustache. His part seemed to be that of furnishing the necessary data or clues which bring about the discovery of lost identities.

The Zanni, which developed into the valet as represented by Arlequin, Scapin and Sganarella, play a most important part in the plays. They were dressed in white pantaloons decorated with green trimming, white coats with green braid and hat to match. They wore moustaches and carried wooden swords.

This actor played the part of being "pétulant, grimacier, malin, gourmand et poltron. Avec tout cela, il ne laisse pas d'être fidèle et actif. Il est souvent le meneur du jeu, c'est lui qui conduit toutes choses, déconcerte les plans des vieillards, sauve et unit les amants malheureux."

These stock characters may be better understood if we compare them with the modern actor or screen star, Charlie Chaplin. It has been said<sup>1</sup> that he has carried out the fundamentals of these actors so far as the pantomimic limits of the film permit. Charlie Chaplin always appears on the screen as a witty fool, that is, in the identical general stock role, as for instance, Arlequin, who has just been described. His clothes were always the same, such as his hat, his glasses, large shoes and small black moustache. His gestures were also repetitions as exemplified by his gait, his entrances and exits. Hence, when the name Charlie Chaplin is mentioned, whoever has once seen him has a mental picture of this actor and his rôle just as did the Italians upon hearing the name of Pantalon or Arlequin.

It is interesting to consider the commedia dell'arte, because it combines practically in one, author and actor, as: "le dernier mot de l'art dramatique", for: "La distinction de l'auteur et du déclamateur est un procédé imparfait, qui n'a d'autre raison d'exister que l'insuffisance de la nature humaine. L'idéal est celui que chercha à réaliser la commedia dell'arte

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1. T. W. Stevens, The Theatre from Athens to Broadway, p. 99

en réunissant dans la même personne le poète et celui qui se charge de faire vivre ses fictions."

b. commedia regolare

In spite of the vogue and importance of the commedia dell'arte, the commedia regolare is also important in a study of three of Molière's early plays.

In view of the fact that the commedia regolare grew out of the commedia dell'arte it is not surprising to find many points of similarity. Indeed, the various troops did not confine themselves to one type of comedy. If a play of the commedia dell'arte proved successful and if the author desired to have it printed it was transformed into a written comedy. Yet again, if a written play was especially successful it might be made use of in an improvised play. La Emilia of Luigi Grote, for example, furnished more than one rough draft for actors of the commedia dell'arte.

It is not strange, therefore, to find in the commedia regolare stock characters not unlike those of the commedia dell'arte. "Les types principaux du jeu comique tendaient également à l'uniformité." As in the other type of comedy, the Captain and the Pedant are important personages in the written comedy. "Le pédant semble encore plus ancien et plus indispensable." The best example of this character is found in Giordano Bruno's play translated into French as Boniface et le Pédant.<sup>1</sup> He is pictured as stupid and ridiculous. Take for instance the scene where he is arrested by some vauriens déguisés en sbires. One of his tormentors named Marca speaks:

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1. Giordano Bruno, Il Candelaio

Oui mais il donne des explications assez vraisemblables. Another called Barre answers: Il n'importe, cela ne doit pas nous empêcher de le conduire en prison. The pedant speaks up: Verum, mais je tomberai dans la dérision de mes élèves et de tout le monde, à cause des aventures qui se sont abattues sur mon dos. One of his tormentors answers: Entendez-vous ce qu'il jargonne? Then they tell him that if he does not hand over the money he must go to prison. He answers: Minime, je n'en ai plus aucun de reste, tous m'ont été enlevés, ita, mehercle, per Jovem, per altitonantem, vos sidera testor.

His tormentor will not take this for an answer and threatens him with a lashing of fifty blows.

The Pedant: Quobus propositis malis, minus est tolerandum, sicut duobus propositis bonis, melius est eligendum, dicit Peripateticorum princeps.

He finally choses the beating to giving up money. He is ordered to count the blows. He begins:  
The Pedant: Toff! un. Toff! oh! trois. Toff! oh! ah! quatre. Toff! oime! oime! Toff! ah! oime! Toff! oh! pour l'amour de Dieu, sept." Here his tormentors interrupt with:  
"Recommençons par le commencement. Après quatre, ce n'est point, sept; vous deviez dire cinq.

They plan to start over again from the beginning but it is too much for the Doctor-- he gives in and parts with his earthly goods.

So likewise is the Captain like his ancestor the

Captain of the commedia dell'arte, a Spaniard who speaks bravely and boldly but whose actions belie his words.

The old men of the commedia regolare Pandolfo, Polidoro or Crisoforo, take on the likeness of Pantaloon of the commedia dell'arte. The clever valets also have a familiar air. ("Les valets balourds et poltrons en arrivent de bonne heure à se ressembler sur les deux scènes comiques, ainsi le Zucca de l'Interesse, comédie régulière de Nicolo Secchi, Zucca qui est devenu le Mascarille du Dépit amoureux, était un véritable Arlequin poltron et balourd dont Molière n'a pas complètement effacé les traits, tandis que le Mascarille de L'Etourdi n'était autre que le rusé Scappino, le Scapin modèle emprunté à Beltraine, l'un des plus fameux artistes et écrivains de la commedia dell'arte.") These valets conceive of the most absurd and comical plots and methods to either deceive the easily duped father or guardian of their master, or else upset his mind by outlandish pranks, to such a degree that they bring him around to their way of thinking. The valet is an extremely important individual in bringing about a happy ending to the play. In this rôle the valet orders about his master, in fact the master is in most cases reduced to literally getting down on his knees to his servant.

The characters of the Parasite and Hypocrite alone seem to have been peculiar to the commedia regolare. These characters need no explanation for their nature is fully described in the very name Parasite and Hypocrite.

"Il n'est pas besoin de dire que les amoureux sont

semblables de part d'autre; ils sont à peu près les mêmes toujours et partout."

Vulgarity is an all prevailing feature of this type of comedy. The Gelosi troop, however, was considered to be freer of this vice than its associates. Betraîne himself: "Parlant des comédiens antérieurs aux Gelosi 'ils n'hésitaient pas,' dit-il, 'à pousser la vraisemblance jusqu'à faire comparaitre sur la scène un homme nu, s'échappant d'un incendie nocturne, ou une femme dépouillée par des brigands, attachée à un arbre par quelques lambeaux d'étoffe, et à produire d'autres spectacles du même genre ou plus indignes encore d'être mis sous les regards de galants hommes." Nevertheless, from the point of view of the modern critic in the Italian commedia regolare les situations son risquées, choquantes à un point qu'on a peine à se figurer." A French actor states: Je puis dire avec vérité que la plus chaste comédie italienne est cent fois plus dépravée de paroles et d'actions qu'aucun des nôtres." But it must be that "Il pubblico voleva ridere, et gli autoir non sapevano font migliore d'ilarita che le sconcezze aperte o maleziosamente velato." Moreover, as Rossi points out, this vulgarity was little more than an exaggerated expression of the life of the time and that "la satira specialmente d'alcune classi sociali, talvota vien fuori; ma la scaltrezza finisce sempre col triara fare, la bricconeria rimane impunita, ne la voce della coscienza si leva mai a condannare sì grande sfacilo morale.

As in the commedia dell'arte, "ces pièces sont toutes

fondées sur des intrigues amoureuses d'amour-- il est le seul mobile qui fasse agir ce monde aux costumes pailletés et bariolés, et c'est l'amour sans hésitation et sans combats, l'amour dans toute sa franchise, en pleine lumière."

Save for the all important feature of improvisation, the two types of comedy strongly resemble one another in fact - les traits de ressemblance entre la comédie régulière et la comédie de l'art se multiplierent."

### III Introduction of Italian Comedy into France

In order to understand how the Italian comedy came to influence the French theatre and Molière in particular, it is necessary to review the history of the Italian theatre in France, first before Molière and secondly in Molière's time.

#### a. Italian comedy in France before Molière.

The first record of an Italian troop in France is in 1576 when Henri III invited the Italian troop I Gelosi, led by Flaminio Scala, to Bolis to entertain the States General. Their arrival was delayed by the Huguenots but when they did reach Bolis they were given a room of the Etats at Bolis in which to act. When Henri returned to Paris the troop accompanied him and they were installed in the Hotel de Bourbon. Catharine de Medicis, the mother of Henri III, also had for her own entertainment an Italian troop.

In this period, as well as afterwards, the Italian actors were especially welcome in France on account of the elegant actresses, for the French had no women on the stage

until the seventeenth century, men dressed as women taking the feminine roles. Then again the French enjoyed the beauty of costume, the perfection of decoration and machines of the Italian troops. Another innovation offered by the Italian actors was the music employed in intermissions.

Regardless of popularity the confreres of the Passion prevented the Italian performances and the Italian troops left Paris.

However, the comici confidenti were in Paris for a few months in 1584 but they played chiefly at the Duke of Joyeuse (a play entitled Angelica, the work of one of the actors, Fabrito di Fornario.).

The Gelosi troop was again in France in 1588 for the second States General of Blois. They withdrew, however, because of an arrêt of Parlement and other signs of unrest.

Henri IV also enjoyed entertainment offered by the famous Italian troop I Gelosi. His wife, Marie de Medicis, invited a new troop, I Comici Fedeli, to Paris in 1615. It remained until 1618 playing at court and at the Hotel de Bourgogne. It returned to Paris in 1621 and did not leave until 1623.

A troop led by the actor Beltraine came to Paris in 1625 and received a warm welcome.

After the death of Richelieu and Louis XIII, under the rule of Mazarin, Italian troops flowed into Paris. The best known was a troop led by Guiseppe Bianchi, director and actor, which was established at the Petit-Bourbon, remaining

until 1647.

From 1648 until 1653 compatriots of Mazarin were not welcome in France but in 1654 until 1659 a troop, Scaramouche, Trivelin, Aurelia and Horace among its chief actors, was established at the Petit-Bourbon.

The French capital was not the only point of invasion for the Italian troops. At Lyons from an early date there was a numerous and opulent Italian colony and Italian comedians were present even before 1548. Inasmuch as the Italian troops were wanderers by nature it is believed that they travelled widely throughout the provinces. There is no definite information as to the names and dates of the many troops which travelled around in the French provinces, but there is every reason to believe that from the middle of the sixteenth century not only the more famous troops such as I Gelosi visited the larger towns of Southern France, but that there were numerous small and obscure Italian troops in the Provinces. But to return to Molière.

b. Molière's contact with the Italian Theatre.

At the time Tiberio Fiorelli was playing most successfully the part of Scaramouche, Molière made his first public appearance for "À l'époque où les Italiens offraient au public ces attrayants spectacles, une jeune troupe d'enfants de famille, la plupart Parisiens de naissance, s'étant associés pour jouer la comédie sous le titre de l'illustre Théâtre, donnèrent d'abord au Jeu de paume des métayers puis au Jeu de paume de la Croix-Noire, sur le quai des Ormes, des représentations beaucoup fastueuse." But this small troop led by

Molière was unsuccessful and withdrew disgraced leaving the field to the Italians at the Petit-Bourbon and the French at the Hotel de Bourgogne. "On pense bien, toutefois, qu'à ce moment où il entrait dans la carrière du théâtre, Molière avait prêté une vive attention aux Italiens, ses trop heureux concurrents." Moreover, "Si nous en croyons Le Boulanger de Chalussay, l'auteur d'Elomire hypocondre, Molière aurait positivement reçu de Scaramouche des leçons de pantomime, et lui aurait du ses progrès dans l'art du comédien.

After the failure of l'illustre Theatre, Molière left Paris and wandered about the Provinces with his troop. It is certain that during his wanderings he came into frequent contact with Italian troops.

In 1658 after an absence of nearly twelve years Molière brought his troop back to Paris having obtained the patronage of Monsieur, the king's brother. He obtained permission to share the theatre of the Petit-Bourbon with the Italians. Il paya aux Italiens quinze cents livres pour sa contribution aux dépenses faites par eux dans la salle. Molière had to take the days for his representations that the Italians did not use, Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. These were not considered the most favorable days. Les deux troupes qui occupaient la même scène ne différaient notablement que par le langage. So also when Molière was forced to move from the Petit-Bourbon, il en est de même au théâtre du Palais-Royal, à partir du mois de janvier 1662. Jusqu'à la mort de Molière et au delà, Français et Italiens

se firent concurrence, s'imitèrent, s'emprunterent réciproquement ce qu'ils avaient de meilleur, rivalisèrent dans les fêtes de cour, où ils étaient fréquemment réunis et mis en présence.

By the above material it is easy to see that Molière came into constant contact with Italian actors and acting.

#### IV French Comedy before Molière.

It is now necessary to view the state of French comedy before Molière, in order to be able to draw a conclusion as to the extent of the Italian influence on Molière and if this influence was direct or through work of contemporaries. Since the Italian influence alone is of interest for this paper a survey of French comedy will be brief, for "Le théâtre française contemporain (to I Gelosi) était bien éloigné d'égaliser sous ce rapport les Italiens." In fact, "la comédie malgré les traductions ou les imitations littéraires des Larivey et des Turnebe, avait peu de place tant au théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne qu'au théâtre de l'Hôtel d'Argent qui s'ouvrit vers 1600 rue de la Poterie au Marais. Les acteurs étaient toujours obligés d'en revenir à la vieille Farce, à la Farce garnis de mots de gueule' aux jeux des pois pilés, qui contiendraient d'avoir la faveur populaire."

Two more factors which will be of considerable interest in dealing with the three plays of Molière as well as in this short survey of French comedy before Molière, are first in regard to French Farce: La forme était rudimentaire,

il est vrai, mais la pensée, l'observation, la gaieté auraient parfois trouvé mieux leur compte dans ces grossières parades que dans les intrigues des Italiens. Sans doute les Arlequin, les Pedrolino, les Pantalon étaient des copées ressemblantes, quoique outrées, de la nature humaine. Ces types avaient leur vérité railleuse cachée sous leur exubérante fantaisie. Mais combien, dans la Farce française, la satire était plus directe et plus pénétrante!" Second factor is that: "Le rire, moins épanoui, moins insouciant chez nous, révélait, en revanche, bien plus de sagacité et de malice. Tandis que la tradition burlesque régnait presque souverainement sur la scène italienne, et que les types, inventés un fois pour toutes, y reproduisaient chaque ridicule dans son expression générale, nos bouffons ne perdaient pas l'habitude de regarder autour d'eux, de peindre sur le vif un caractère particulier, de saisir l'actualité au passage, d'exercer enfin l'esprit observateur et satirique propre à la nation."

b. Seventeenth century French comedy before Molière.

In this period we find the names of Rotrou, Cyrano de Bergerac, Scarron and Corneille among the best known authors of comedies.

As do most of his comedies, La Soeur of Rotrou shows a decided Italian influence. In fact it resembles strongly L'interesse of Nicolo Secchi. In both plays there is a complication brought about by an exchange of babies which takes place unknown to the parents, and that matter is not disclosed

for many years. The true identity is discovered just in time to save the plays from becoming tragedies. This type of plot was extremely common in Italian plays, particularly of the commedia regolare, and Nicolo Secchi's L'interesse is merely the best known of this type. This is not the only point of resemblance that La Soeur has with Italian comedy, but perhaps the most important characteristic which recalls its Italian origin is the presence of stock characters such as Ergaste, the helpful, intriguing valet. Then there is Anselme, the parent who stands in the way of the young people. He is not unlike Pantalon or Pandolfo of the Italian comedy. He himself states:

"Et dupe que je suis, interdit et confus

Perdant encor le sens, ne perdrais guère plus."

The introduction of the Turks in this play is a common feature in the Italian plays, and the improvised language that Ergaste resorts to in his 'conversation' with Horace has its counterpart in innumerable Italian comedies such as L'Inavvertito.

The mention of Italian towns, such as Venice, also causes a stronger feeling of relationship with Italian comedies.

Another representative of French comedy of this period is Cyrano de Bergerac. In this play Le Pedant Joué, the characters which form the more original part of this play bear a strong resemblance to the stock characters of the Italian comedy. Take for instance, the chief character of the play, Granger, the pedant. He combines the pedantry of the

Doctor of the Italian comedy with the vanity and gallantry of the dupe Pantalon. This is true in spite of the French veneer for Granger is "a seventeenth century figure, a pedant and a Frenchman: in his use and misuse of the French language, his allusions to French things, his contempt for all that is foreign. His pedantry is colored by his time and nationality. He is précieux to the core.

Paquier is another composite character, one minute reminding us of the Italian valet, of Scapin, and yet he is a pedant by profession, but at the same time he reveals a store of good sense, as for instance when he attempts to console Granger with the words: "Trust in God! He will help you. He helps the Germans who do not belong to this country."

Though a Norman, "quasi venu du nord", the character of Chateaufort is the boastful, cowardly Captain of the Italian comedy.

Mathieu Gareau, the peasant, might easily be an Italian peasant or a French peasant save for the fact that he uses French dialect which removes question of nationality.

Scarron's Jodelet ou Le Maître Valet illustrates concretely the Italian stock character of the intriguing valet. He is disguised as Don Juan, his master, while his master plays the part of the valet. Jodelet is able to address his master thus:

"Mais, faquin! vous voudriez peut-être me donner des conseils; suis-je pas votre maître? Eh! qui sait mieux que vous le bien que je lui veux?" Moreover, Jodelet is

able to take advantage of his temporary position and revenge himself by beating up Don Juan in the presence of those whom Don Juan would have believe that he is the valet.

In Act I, Scene v, there is an example of the action and stage play such as is found in the Italian commedia dell'arte as well as in commedia regolare. For instance: "Don Juan met l'épée à la main, cherche dom Louis, rencontre l'épée nue de Jodelet, qui tombe à terre d'effroi, couché sur le dos; et pare de bas en haut les bottes que pousse son maître."

This play of Scarron's gives evidence of Italian influence in its characters, in its plot as well as in the action.

If Corneille's drawing room comedy as exemplified in Mélite and Le menteur is included, the above brief survey discloses what Molière found in the field of French comedy. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Molière's early plays reveal a strong Italian influence.

## V The Three Plays.

### a. Introduction

The next step consists in the study of the three plays of Molière under discussion. They will be taken up in chronological order.

#### Le Médecin volant

With the brief survey of Italian comedy before Molière in mind a study of the Italian influence in Molière's early plays is made easier. Le Médecin volant, one of Molière's

earliest farces shows clearly an Italian influence as expressed in characters, action and outline of play itself.

In order that the following statements may be clearly understood a brief outline of the play is necessary.

Valère is in love with Lucile but her father stands in the way of their marriage. In order not to have to marry the man of her father's choice Lucile pretends to be ill. At Valère's request Sganarelle, his valet, plays the part of a doctor in order to get Lucile out of her father's clutches. He has also to try to make Gorgibus, Lucile's father, believe that he, the valet, is a brother of the doctor that he represents. While he does not succeed in this latter task, the play ends happily.

With this outline alone it is easy to see that Sganarelle bears all the ear marks of the stock character of Italian comedy, the clever valet. He resembles the Italian actors of whom "Les jeux de physionomie, les postures, les gestes tenaient une grande place dans leur talent."<sup>1</sup>

Sganarelle's part is carried out by acts more than by words. Then again in characteristic Italian fashion Sganarelle though only a valet, holds a position of importance in his master's eyes as well as in his own. For instance:

Valère: Ah mon pauvre Sganarelle, que j'ai de joie de te voir! J'ai besoin de toi dans une affaire de conséquence; mais comme je ne sais pas ce que tu sais faire.

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1. L. Moland, Molière et la comédie italienne, p. 26

Sganarelle: Ce que je sais faire, Monsieur? Employez-moi seulement en vos affaires de conséquence en quelque chose d'importance."<sup>1</sup>

Gorgibus the father of Lucile is not unlike the Pantelons of the Italian stage. He is easily deceived as to Sganarelle's role as doctor and as is characteristic of the parent of the Italian theatre, one minute threatens the valet: Tu seras pendu, fourbe, coquin",<sup>2</sup> in the very next scene he concludes with the words: Je vous pardonne, et suis heureusement trompé par Sganarelle, ayant un si brave gendre."<sup>3</sup>

The lovers, Lucile and Valère recall the Italian stage inasmuch as while the play is built around their love affairs their part in the action of the play is minor, the valet displaying more wit and intelligence than the master.

It is interesting to note that the name Gorgibus, Sganarelle, Lucile and Valère occur time and again in characters of Molière's plays. This again recalls the Italian stock character who played always the same role.

This farce shows a strong influence of the commedia dell'arte in the superabundance of action. In Le Médecin volant there has to be a certain amount of stage direction in order to appreciate the play. The reader is left with the feeling that in order to do itself justice this play should be acted rather than read. This would seem to strengthen the state-

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1. Scene II  
2. Scene XIV  
3. Scene XVI

ment that "Le mouvement" of the Italian theatre was one of the most important contributions.<sup>1</sup> For instance, beginning with scene eleven where Gorgibus meets Sganarelle dressed as a valet and believes he recognizes him as the doctor who offered to cure his daughter this stage direction is particularly necessary. Were we not informed that Sganarelle changes quickly in to doctor's robe and then back again into his regular clothes, scenes thirteen and fourteen would be incomprehensible. In scene fifteen we have Sganarelle going back and forth by way of the window in order to continue the deception. It does not take any very great exercising of the imagination to conceive that Sganarelle went through all sorts of contortions and gestures to add to the comic situation.

In addition to the action which is undeniably Italian there is the subject matter itself. As we have pointed out in the introduction, the subjects of the Italian comedies concern some phase of love. In this farce of Molière's we find a father who has chosen the young man that he wants his daughter to marry. She, however, is in love with a different young man. In characteristic Italian fashion the young lovers manage to get married and in the last scene the father, pocketing his rage, is transformed into a kind and generous parent who bestows his blessing upon the young couple and forgives the valet. While this conclusion is unrealistic and forced, it is

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1. L. Moland, Molière et la comédie italienne, p. 26

more or less in keeping with a farce of this type. Unfortunately, however, Molière seems to have permanently adopted this type of denouement for it is found even in his more mature comedies.

"Le Médecin Volant" shows therefore a strong Italian influence in characters, in subject matter, in stage play, in denouement, and even in the names of the characters. For all this similarity we can not agree with those who insist that Molière has practically translated an Italian play entitled "Il Medico Volante". At this particular time the Italians at Paris did not print their plays. "Les pieces italiennes ne sauroient s'imprimer. La raison est que les comediens italiens n'apprennent rien par coeur, et qu'il leur suffit pour jouer une comédie d'en avoir vu le sujet un moment avant que d'aller sur le theatre. Aussi la plus grande beauté de leur pieces est inseparable de l'action."<sup>1</sup>

#### L'Étourdi

"L'Étourdi", Molière's first five-act comedy, is the second step in the study of the Italian influence upon this great French Genius. The plot of this play is of Italian origin. In fact there are three Italian plays from which it might have been taken, "La Emilia" by Luigi Grotto, "Angelica" by Fabritio de Fornaris, and "L'Inavvertito" by Nicolo Barbieri.

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1: Les Grands Ecrivains, - Oeuvres de Molière, Vol. 1, p. 75, note 1

"L'Étourdi" is the story of a young man who is in love with a slave. He has not the means to purchase her and so turns to his valet for assistance. The valet is full of plans but, as each plan is about to develop, along comes the young man who stupidly upsets or spoils each plan in turn. There are various other complications such as strong willed fathers and rivals, but in the last act all is righted and every one is happy. This same brief summary could be applied to "L'Invertito" as well as to "L'Étourdi", but it is not so completely a summary of the "Angelica" or "La Emilia".

Similarities to "L'Invertito":

The first similarity between the "Invertito" and "L'Étourdi" is found in the cast of characters which is almost identical in the two plays. We have, for instance:

Lélie- son of Pandolf	Fulvio- son of Pantalone
Célie- slave of Trufaldin	Celia- slave of Mezzetino
Mascarille- valet of Lélie	Scappino- valet of Fulvio
Leandre- son of family	Cintio- son of family
Hippolyte- daughter of Anselme	Lavinia- daughter of Beltrame
Pandolfe- father of Lélie	Pantalone- father of Fulvio
Andrès- foreigner	Capitano Bellorofonte, foreigner
Anselme- father of Hippolyte	Beltrame- father of Lavinia

Moreover, in following along in the two plays scene by scene, one finds many which are identical. For example, the first three scenes in Act I are practically identical. In scene one of the Italian edition Fulvio states his case to Cintio and offers him Lavinia and Cintio drops the hint that he also loves Celia and is no longer interested in Lavinia. In Molière's version Lélie gives us this information in a short

monologue. In scene two and again in scene three corresponding characters are present in both the plays. The conversation, however, is not identical in the two versions though of the same gist. There is more elaborate dialogue between Celia and Fulvio than between Lélie and Célie. Now and then one will find phrases which seem to be translations, as for instance: In scene three of the Italian play Scappino in speaking to Fulvio says, "Retirativi, e lasciate parlar a me."<sup>1</sup> Mascarille under similar circumstances tells Lélie: "Allez-rétirez vous, je saurai lui parler."<sup>2</sup>

As the play progresses there is more divergence. Molière's version is not so long drawn out and has more variety of incidents such as the dropping of the pocket-book by Anselme, and the pretension that Lélie's father is dead. These incidents, however, can hardly be supposed to be original with Molière. The first incident might possibly be of Italian origin, while the second is as old as the written language.

We find stock tricks of the Italian variety such as letters, rings, slaves turning out to be long lost daughters, the extra lover turning out to be a brother and so forth, illustrated in "L'Étourdi". Mascarille writes Trufaldin a letter supposedly from Spain from Célie's parents, asking that Célie be held till he arrives. Célie and André turn out to be the son and daughter of Trufaldin and André discovers that his love for Célie was merely brotherly love.

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1. "L'Invertito", Act I, Scene 3  
2. "L'Étourdi", Act I, Scene 3



tricks causes him to quickly forgive his master. Scappino's pride is of similar nature. He says, "In somma ho fatto l'impossibile e l'incredibile per amutarlo."<sup>1</sup> The only reward that these valets receive aside from the gratitude of their masters, is their own satisfaction in a deed well done.

As characteristic in Italian comedy, the young masters have great confidence in their valets' abilities to solve their problems for them. In "L'Inavvertito" Fulvio says to Scappino: "Io sequestre le mie invenzione nella mia mente, e segillo col silenzio le mie parole, e lascio l'opera tutta sopra le tue spalle." L'Élie in speaking to Mascarille uses the following words:

"Toute fois j'aurois tort de me désespérer;  
Puisque j'ai ton secours, je puis me rassurer;  
Je sais que ton esprit en intrigues fertile,  
N'a jamais rien trouvé qui lui fût difficile  
QU'on te peut appeler le roi des serviteurs."<sup>2</sup>

The characters of L'Élie and Fulvio do not seem to have as much in common as the valets. The picture that we have of L'Élie is that of a blunderer, recalling to mind the Italian character, Pantelon. He spoils plan after plan of Mascarille's. First, he spoils Mascarille's plan to get in touch with Célie by pretending to seek assistance from her knowledge of magic. Then he spoils the scheme of the pocket book for Anselme tells L'Élie that he wants to make sure that the money is all good. L'Élie not for a minute suspecting a trick hands the money back.

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1. Les Grands Ecrivains, Oeuvres de Molière, Vol. I "L'Inavvertito", Act I, scene 2
  2. Les Grands Ecrivains, Oeuvres de Molière, Vol. I "L'Étourdi", Act I, scene 2

He spoils Mascarille's plan to get in with Leandre by pretending that L  lie is a cruel master. The list of blunders goes on until it begins to grow tedious. Fulvio, however, is no better than L  lie for he makes as many blunders. Both of the young men attempt to aid their valets by trying to carry out plans of their own. This attempt also causes some carefully laid plans of their valets to fail.

For all this these two young men are not photographic duplicates. There is something pathetic about Fulvio which one does not find in L  lie even when L  lie is most depressed as for example when he threatens:

"Je m'en vais me tuer"<sup>1</sup>

after Mascarille, in disgust, has refused to help him. We feel with Mascarille that:

"Ce n'  trot que grimace."<sup>1</sup>

There seems to me to be a note of sincerity in the following words of Fulvio's: "O Fortuna, frena quella ira hormai che senza ritegno fai scorrere sopra di me. O mitiga il rigore de'suoi maligni infulssi. . . . . Io sono in disgrazia del padre, di poca stima al suocero, in derisione col capitano, in conto di pazzo a mezzetito, in punto di perder Celia, ed in somma sono la favola della citta; e quello che'  peggio, io sono in odio a Scappino, qual mi fugge, ed he ragionel Cessa, cessa scapigliata Dea, di tormentarmi, te ne priego."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Les Grands Ecrivains, Oeuvres de Moli  re, Vol. 1, \*L'  tourdi\*, Act II, scene 6

2. Les Grands Ecrivains, Oeuvres de Moli  re, Vol. I, "L'Inavvertito", Act V, scene 1

This contrast in the characters of Fulvio and L  lie is again brought out in the last scene of Act V of both plays. When L  lie learns that all complications have been dissolved he turns to Mascarille rather than to C  lie and joyfully shouts:

"Il faut que je t'embrasse, et mille et mille  
fois,  
Dans cette joie....."

Fulvio, on the other hand, when his father asks: "E Vero che tu sia innamorato di questa giovine?" he answers, "Signore, no." When pressed further he turns to Scappino and seeks his help. He is not entirely at ease even when Scappino tells him to say 'yes'. He asks Scappino: "Garde bene che non mi facci fare qualche balordaria?" This scene in the Italian play is very amusing and Moli  re has been criticised for not making use of it in his comedy. In the first place, it would not be in keeping with L  lie's character as Moli  re has drawn him. In the second place, such an ending would mean that L  lie had been reformed. One feels that Fulvio has been reformed. It seems doubtful that he will ever interfere with any plans that Scappino may make, in fact it looks as if he may have lost all self-confidence. Moli  re for all his apparently moralistic bend never brings about conversions in his plays. Bailly believes this is because "Un pessimisme inbranlable forme l'assise de ses comedies."<sup>1</sup> I, personally, can not agree with this opinion for if it were so, Moli  re would never have worked so hard for the public appearance of Tartuffe. He must have

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1. Bailly, L'Ecole Classique Francais

felt that "Le Tartuffe" was needed, that it might do some good. This surely would not be the feeling of a pessimist. I feel sure that the cause for the lack of conversions is due to Molière's innate habit of presenting people, human beings and not grotesque caricatures. I know that Molière has said that "Tous les personnages qu'il represente sont des personnages en l'air, et des fantomes proprement, qu'il habille a sa fantaisie."<sup>1</sup> This was written in reply to those who accused him of depicting particular individuals.

With the exception of the similarity in names there is just about as much difference between Célie and Celia as there was between Lélie and Fulvia. They follow along similar lines so far as the development of plot is concerned. Both are slaves and are loved by young men who have not the means to free them. Both girls are about to be forced to marry a young man who turns out to be a relative. In the case of Célie, André is discovered to be her brother, while in the Italian play Celia's wooer discovers that his wife, Celia's sister, is alive. Celia and Célie differ in character. We are led to believe that Célie is practical and sensible while Celia is emotional and self-centered. For instance when Lélie tells Célie in seventeenth century drawing room style how her eyes have affected him she replies:

"Mon coeur, qu'avec raison votre discours étonné,  
N'entend pas que mes yeux fassent mal a personne;  
Et si dans quelque chose ils vous ont outragé  
Je puis vous assurer que c'est sans mon congé."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Molière, L'Improntu d'Versailles  
2. "L'Étourdi", Act I, scene 3

Celia's reply to Fulvio is of somewhat different nature, for she says, "Le mia bellezze e grazie v'hanno imprigionato? O Signore, o voi scherzate meco, o che v'infingete le cause che mi vi fanno parer bella."<sup>1</sup> The difference in their characters is again brought out when Capitano Bellofonte is about to take Celia away with him, the journey has to be made by boat. She weeping says, "Signor mi trema il cuore d'andar per mare".<sup>2</sup> Andres is going to take Celia on a similar journey. She does not become hysterical but in a dignified manner requests that

"Si j'avois sur vous quelque peu de puissance,  
Notre voyage, au moins pour trois ou quatre jours,  
Attendroit que ce mal eut pris un autre cours."<sup>3</sup>

The greatest difference in characters is found in Andres and his counterpart, so far as plots are concerned, Capitano Bellofonte. The Capitan is a bold blustering conceited individual. He seems to have been taken directly from the "Commedia dell'arte". He rather clashes with the rest of the characters inasmuch as his humor does not blend with the rest of the play. It seems unnecessary, the play would be better without it. Andres is a quiet gentleman who seems to have been added as an afterthought in order to help bring the play to a close.

While one can sum up "L'Étourdi" in almost identical words as were used in reference to "Le Médecin Volant", for the plot is of Italian origin, the action Italian, some of the

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1. "L'Inavvertito", Act I, scene 5
  2. "L'Inavvertito", Act IV, scene 9
  3. "L'Étourdi", Act IV, scene 2

characters very similar in act as well as in words, Molière's personal touch is much more in evidence in this play as has been pointed out in the above discourse.

Le Dépit Amoureux

The third play on the list is "Le Dépit amoureux". This play opens showing us Éraste, Lucile's lover, fearing that Lucile may prefer Valère. This fear increases regardless of her assurance to the contrary because Valère does not act like a man who has been turned down. Marinette, Lucile's maid, brings Éraste a note. Marinette assures them that they are foolish to be jealous. (I neglected to say that Éraste's valet, Gros-René, has an affair with Marinette. This affair progresses only when the master's affair is progressing.) The note Marinette has brought tells Éraste that he has only to ask her father for her and she will be his. Éraste is wild with joy until he sees Valère who claims that his affair with Lucile is also progressing. Éraste shows him the note but Valère just laughs. His valet discloses the fact that Valère and Lucile have been secretly married. No sooner does Éraste receive this information than Marinette arrives with word that Lucile will see him that evening. Éraste rages. Marinette is unable to understand the sudden change.

It seems that Ascagne, who poses as Lucile's brother, is a girl. She is disguised as a boy because she took the place of a baby who died. Had the baby lived, being a boy it would have inherited considerable wealth. The mother feared

that the loss of money caused by the death of the child would drive her husband to distraction. Upon the death of the baby the money would have gone to Valère, but the mother gets hold of this girl and brings it up as a boy. Valère falls in love with Lucile but she will have none of him. Ascagne, however, does love him and pretending she is Lucile she meets him at night and they are married. Lucile, when accused of being unfaithful to Eraste is indignant and even goes so far as to slap Mascarille's face for insulting her with such stories. Ascagne is about to be forced into a duel to defend Lucile's honor when all is cleared up and the play ends happily.

We are told that Molière has borrowed the "Imbroglia" from Nicolo Secchi's play entitled "L'Interesse". This play tells us the story of Pandolfo, who, during the confinement of his wife, has bet two mille ecus with a friend that the child will be a boy. It turns out to be a girl. In order not to be the loser, Pandolfo brings it up as a boy. The remorse and fear of Pandolfo that his trick will be discovered and the "boy's" falling in love bring about complications.

Molière, as we can see from the summary of "Le Dépit Amoureux", has followed this story rather closely, but as usual has removed most of the indecencies and generally given the play a human touch.

The other part of the play and from which the title "Dépit Amoureux" is derived is considered to be "la partie de la piece ou Molière, se degageant de l'imitation de Secchi, substitue a la comedie traditionnelle d'intrigue la peinture vraie

et hardie des passions."<sup>1</sup> Molière has gone beyond the elementary step where action reigned supreme.

Now to be more specific. As in the other plays, the Italian stock characters are present. In this play, a minor character, the pedant, *Metaphraste*, is the most characteristic of the Italian stock characters. He is the personification of the impractical. His language, far from clear and concise, is interspersed with Latin quotations. While he may display a generous degree of learning, his intelligence is not great. This is well illustrated when Albert the father of Lucile makes a statement containing the following phrase:

"Dans un recoin du bois"

and *Metaphraste* corrects him:

"Dans un lieu reculé du bois, voulez-vous dire,  
Un endroit écarté, latine, *secessus*;  
Virgile l'a dit: *Est in secessu locus*."<sup>2</sup>

The valets *Gros-René* and *Mascarille* do not play as important parts as in the plays just mentioned. Though *Gros-René* in particular shows the egotism and pride which was characteristic of the Italian stock character of valet. For instance in speaking to his master, *Éraste*, he states:

"Que c'est injustement blesser ma prud'homie  
Et se connoître mal en physionomie.  
Les gens de mon minois ne sont point accusés  
D'être, grace à Dieu, ni fourbes, ni ruses,  
Cet honneur qu'on nous fait, je ne le démens  
guères,  
Et suis homme fort rond de toutes les manières."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Les Grands Ecrivains, Oeuvres de Molière, Vol. 1, p. 384  
2. Le Dépit Amoureux, Act II, scene 5  
3. Le Dépit Amoureux, Act I, scene 1

Both valets are treated by the masters as if they were their equals, but they are not entrusted with the entire care of solving their masters' love affairs. In fact, in this case Mascarille complicates Eraste's by relating to him a bit of gossip in connection with Lucile which turns out, as most gossip, to be without foundation. Again, unlike the majority of Italian comedies and the two plays of Moliere so far touched upon, the valets are not the chief source of the humor.

Albert and Polydore, the fathers of the lovers, are furnishing a major portion of humor. Albert again differs from the stock character of Italian comedy, Pantelon. He gives the feeling of rationality and sincerity, elements lacking in the Italian comedy. When he states, "mon fils me rend chagrin; vous savez que je l'aime, et que soigneusement je l'ai toujours nourri."<sup>1</sup>

Polydore is more like the stock character of the fathers in the Italian stage. He is more easily deceived and in the scene where they each believe that the other has discovered the trick that they have played on one another, Albert realizes their mistake before they separate but not so Polydore.

There is plenty of action and physical comedy of the type found in Italian comedies, in this play, in particular the disguise. Ascagne's disguise as a boy is absurd and flavors of the commedia dell'arte. The complications brought about by this disguise create an implicated plot of Italian style. The

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1. Act II, scene 6

duel which was about to take place, the passing of notes and nocturnal meetings are all to be found again and again in Italian plays. The slap which Mascarille received from Lucile seems not unlike acts put on by the lazzi of the commedia dell'arte.

Moliere's personal touch is seen in this play more often than the first two. It displays itself in a certain sincerity and rationalism which appears amidst the absurdity and humor. The sincerity of Albert has already been mentioned. Lucile his daughter seems to inherit some of this quality. In the scene where Mascarille accuses her of meeting her lover at night her reaction is human. She at least does not bow down to the valet. The arguments she uses, like her father's, are rational and human. For instance:

"Quand on aime les gens, on les traite autrement;  
On fait de leur personne un meilleur jugement."<sup>1</sup>

Ascagne also appears as something more than a mere humorous character. In fact, one feels as she expresses it,

"J'ai l'esprit délicat plus qu'on ne peut penser,  
Et le moindre scrupule a de quoi m'offenser."<sup>2</sup>

While the Italian influence is present also in the characters, action and plot of this play, it also seems to show a development of Moliere's originality.

Thus is concluded a study of his three early plays.

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1. Act IV, scene 3  
2. Act II, scene 2

### Conclusion

While there is one main conclusion which can be drawn after a study of three of Molière's early plays which is that the Italian influence is very evident, there are minor conclusions of interest to students of Molière. These minor conclusions are to the effect that the characters in the plays under discussion are drawn practically entirely from the stock characters of the Italian troops, that Molière discovered the value of action from the Italians. Another interesting though minor conclusion is that the abrupt and unsatisfactory ending of his plays, for which Molière is so often criticised, is present in these early plays and their counterpart is to be found in the Italian theatre. Yet another fact of minor significance is found in Le Medecin Volant. In this play so closely modeled from the Italians is to be found Molière's attitude towards doctors, for which he became so well known before the end of his career.

To return in detail to one of the most important factors in this Italian influence as seen in Molière's plays, the characters which for the most part closely resemble the corresponding stock characters in the Italian theatre. These stock characters of the Italian theatre represented types and so do the characters in the plays of Molière just studied. There was the valet, a type, alike in the three plays despite the change in names. The parents and the lovers represented types. Having met them in one play they were easily recognized in the

others, save perhaps Albert and Lucile in Le Dépit Amoureux.

As mentioned above, another important factor which Molière undeniably derived from his contact with the Italian stage was rapidity of action. The short survey of French comedy before Molière makes it obvious that Molière's work is far less forced than that of his fellowcountrymen. It seems that Molière was quick to see the qualities of the Italian actors. A comparison of Le Médecin Volant with a play written by one of his immediate predecessors will show that the essential difference between them is the greater rapidity of action. It must have been evident to an intelligent actor of Molière's type that the acting of the Italian troops was excellent. It must have been exceptionally good for the Italian plays were produced in France before audiences who were entirely ignorant of Italian. It was necessary to hold their interest by the acting alone. There could be no lull or dragging periods. It seems only natural that Molière, with his keen understanding of human nature, would turn to the Italians rather than the French for material and inspiration. To make this statement more concrete take for instance the famous "gallery scene" which Molière is supposed to have stolen from his contemporary, Cyrano de Bergerac. Molière's gallery scene is far superior to Cyrano de Bergerac's. In the first place Bergerac's is over done, Molière's gains through its brevity. Molière has made his material more plausible for the scene takes place, in his work, at Naples, a town exposed to pirates, but Cyrano places a Turkish gallery in the Seine.

Not only is there concrete evidence of the Italian influence in Molière's plays, but the very fact that Molière came into such close contact with the Italian theatre would alone point to evidence of an influence of this theatre upon his works. As has already been noted, Molière not only came into contact with Italian plays and Italian actors during his wanderings in the provinces, but he even shared a theatre with an Italian troop. Then again Molière found the works of his predecessors and contemporaries permeated with Italian influence. These facts, coupled with obvious signs of Italian influence in the plays themselves, leave no doubt not only as to the influence of the Italian theatre upon Molière, but also of his debt to this same theatre in the developing of his genius.

Summary

The previous pages have been written in an attempt to point out the extent of the Italian influence on Molière as disclosed by three of his early plays. In order to do this a brief survey of the Italian comedy before Molière has been outlined. Then the relationship of this foreign comedy has been traced in France in order to point out the contact which Molière must have had with this type of comedy. This has been done in an effort to show that the influence of this Italian comedy was felt directly by the author in question rather than through the work of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries.

A quick glance has been taken of the French Comedy immediately preceding Molière with particular emphasis on the Italian traits displayed in same to show that the influence of Italy was felt in a different way when Molière came into contact with Italian actors.

Finally, three of Molière's early plays have been studied in detail, the Italian influence receiving the greatest attention but signs of Molière's originality and development not being overlooked.

The conclusion has been reached that Molière was quick to see the qualities of the Italian actors. He realized that the acting of the Italian troops was excellent. Accordingly he learned from them the necessity of spontaneous and natural acting which combined with his natural abilities made Molière the great playwright and actor that he became.

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