A critical analysis of some of the sources of Moliere's genius

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SOME OF THE SOURCES
OF MOLIÈRE'S GENIUS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

While Molière was at once a director, an actor and an author, his fame results essentially from his universal reputation as a writer of comedies of lasting merit. Such an extensive production as his could not be entirely original; the author must have borrowed from many sources. The general aim of this thesis, then, is to show the extent to which he borrowed plots, characters and situations. Its purpose, further, is to analyze several of the most significant sources which he fervently imitated and to cite various other sources of lesser importance.

The specific aim of the writer is to show how Molière's genius was influenced by experiences in childhood, youth, maturity, and even until death by members of his family, friends, contemporaries and writers from antiquity. All of these stages in his life and sources of his genius find ample representation in his comedies.

In order to understand and appreciate any author, it is essential that certain facts be established in the mind of the reader concerning the public, private, social and literary aspects of his life. A portion of these sources will be discussed in Chapter II, that is, those concerning the influences exerted by his family, friends and marriage on the formation of his genius.

Generally speaking, Molière's works fall into three distinct categories from the point of view of sources; they are ancient and modern influences and contemporary themes. In order that the reader may visualize at a glance the extent of his borrowings and become acquainted with some of the contemporary themes which prevailed in society and in the salons, Chapter III includes, in addition to a brief discussion of each source, a
chart illustrating the scope of his imitations.

The writer will consecrate all of Chapter IV to a critical analysis of six of Molière's plays; two of which will be compared with two from the ancient writers, Plautus and Terence; two others will be compared with those of the modern authors, Scarron and Cyrano de Bergerac; the remaining two will be based on contemporary themes. In spite of the fact that some will show almost complete imitation of general pattern, the writer will nevertheless establish concrete proofs which will serve as typical examples of Molière's originality and the superiority of his genius.

The principal works which have been used in this study are the Complete Works of Molière, and the secondary and general works have consisted of various French histories, critical editions and commentaries on the life and works of Molière.

To a certain extent, this thesis will serve as a sequel to the one of John Leon Perkins, who did extensive and intensive research on the subject, La Femme vue par Molière. These two theses combined will give their readers a broader knowledge and a deeper appreciation for Molière and will perhaps create a desire to make further investigations in the study of this celebrated author.
CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF MOLIERE, SHOWING EARLIER AND LATER INFLUENCES
OF HIS FAMILY, FRIENDS AND MARRIAGE ON HIS GENIUS

When Louis XIV asked one day of Boileau, who was the best and most unusual writer of his reign, the great critic replied: "Sir, it is Molière."1 Posterity has ratified this opinion.

To Jean Poquelin, a well-to-do upholsterer and to his wife, the former Marie Cressé, daughter of a great tapisier, was born a son about January 15, 1622, who was later called Molière. He was named Jean-Baptiste Poquelin in order to distinguish him from another brother who was also named Jean.2

The Comédie-Française celebrates the anniversary of its illustrious ancestor on the precise date of January 15th; however, this is only the date of his baptism and it is probable that Molière was born sometime before.3

The child lost his mother early in 1633, when he was only ten years old. The lack of maternal influence and guidance was greatly felt by Molière. His father remarried and, under the harsh treatment and unhappiness of his stepmother, Catherine Fleurette, some of Molière's ambition was temporarily thwarted. This he represented later in portraying the odious character of Béline in La Malade imaginaire.4 All this Molière

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4Ibid.
endured bravely, but occasionally he paints these hardships in characters of his comedy.

In 1637, Jean Poquelin tried to persuade his son to follow in his footsteps as upholsterer in the king's palace.¹

An important influence came to him from the midst of Paris. La rue Saint-Honoré, where he was born, is between "le quartier des Halles" and "le quartier du Pont-Neuf", two quarters or sections which then offered to a child the most varied spectacles.

On the Pont-Neuf, shops of charlatans (who, in order to group the idlers and to advertise their wares) engaged the most renowned actors, who gave comedy in the open air. From the other side, the theater of the Hôtel de Bourgogne was seen, where tradition showed the maternal grandfather, Louis Cressé, leading his grandson to see played in the same day, tragedy and farce and enjoying the characters who, like Turlupin, Gros-Guillaume and Gaultier-Garguille delighted the Parisian people.²

In the infancy and youth of Molière, two noteworthy things will be of great importance in his future work: first, his intellectual education and second, his life as a child and a gamín in Paris.³

He was educated at the very best school accessible in Paris, the Collège de Clermont. Here, he became acquainted with the work of the ancient authors, Plautus and Terence, from whom he profited a great deal later.⁴ It was in that way that the sources which helped to form his

²M. Paul Crouzet, La littérature française illustrée (Paris, 1926), pp. 11-12.
³Ibid., p. 11.
⁴Ibid.
genius began to exert their influence.

By allying himself with Chapelle, Bemier and Cyrano de Bergerac, his intellectual benefits were immense. There seems to be no sufficient reason to doubt that he and some of his friends afterwards received lessons in philosophy from Gassendi, whose influence must have tended to loosen him from the traditional doctrines and to encourage independence of thought. A translation by Molière of the great poem of Lucretius has been lost, but a possible citation from it appears in the second act of the Misanthrope.

Finally, after the study of the humanities, he went to study law at Orleans, where a mental conflict intervened with a double contradictory influence of the Jesuits on the one hand and the Materialistic and Epicurean philosophy which Gassendi had taught, on the other. All this probably contributed to infecting the mind of Molière with germs of "libertinage" which explain the future struggles with Le Tartuffe.

According to tradition, Molière took lessons from the famous Italian buffoon, Scaramouche. One of his enemies later used this tradition in Elomire hypocondre to show the picture of young Poquelin:

Chez le grand Scaramouche, il va soir et matin.
Là, le miroir en main, et cet homme en face,
Il n'est contorsion, posture ni grimace
Que ce grand écolier du plus grand des bouffons
Ne fasse et ne refasse en cent et cent façons.

It was in reality the second education which decided the future career

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2 M. Paul Crouzet, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
3 Ibid., p. 12.
of young Poquelin. Hardly twenty years old, in 1643, he allied himself with an actress, Madeleine Béjart, renounced the profession of his father, took the name of Molière and founded the Illustre-Théâtre.

In Paris, the Illustre-Théâtre was not successful because the two leading theaters, the Hôtel de Bourgogne and the Théâtre du Marais absorbed the public. At the end of two years, in 1645, Molière was imprisoned for debts at the Châtele; yet when he left, he was not discouraged with the theater but ready to reunite his group to go to the provinces. On this provincial tour, 1645 - 1658, so far as one can judge from the scanty sources of information available, he seems to have been fairly successful. It was then that he learned how to act, to observe and to write. Into this period fall his first attempts at play-writing: le Médecin volant, la Jalousie du Barbouillé and a few other farces which are unfortunately lost.

Emboldened by the success which he achieved in the provinces, especially in Lyons, where he and his troupe performed in his first regular five-act comedy in verse, l'Étourdi (1653 or 1655), followed by le Dépit amoureux, first performed at Béziers (1656), Molière reappeared in Paris, where he soon gained the favor and patronage of the young king, Louis XIV.

Then begins the last period of Molière's life, from the writing of les Précieuses ridicules, 1659, which was his first great success, to le Malade imaginaire, 1673. These twenty-four years were filled with the greatest productions of the author. It was during this period, too, that

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1 She became his mistress.
2 Brunetière, op. cit., p. 100.
3 Abry, Audic, Crouzet, op. cit., p. 229.
4 Ibid.
Molière began to be troubled with his health. In addition, he was beset by other misfortunes: his unhappy marriage in 1662 to the coquette, Armande Béjart, the jealousy of some of his contemporaries, and his polemics with those whom he had ridiculed in his comedies (précieux and précieuses, faux devots, petits marquis, médecins). So many labors, chagrins and struggles explain his melancholy signaled by his contemporaries even after his death, which occurred on February 17, 1673, during the fourth presentation of *Le Malade imaginaire*.

Musset defines, with some exaggeration, the effect of family life and disorganization on Molière's genius; all this caused him to lack the type of enthusiasm and happiness which in him was innate and which had at one time been so evident. The following extract from the poem, *Une soirée perdue*:

*Cette mâle gâité, si triste et si profonde,
Que, lorsqu'on vient d'en rire,
On devrait en pleurer.*

In a life enshrouded with apparent misfortunes and continuous disappointments, Molière's genius proved itself, thanks largely to the influence of teachers, friends at school, his grandfather and his environment, notwithstanding unsuccessful marriage and other adverse circumstances.

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1 His enemies said that he married his own illegal daughter.


3 Ibid., p. 672.

4 Ibid.
CHAPTER III

THE CLASSIFICATION OF MOLIERE'S COMEDIES ACCORDING TO THE ANCIENT AND MODERN INFLUENCES AS WELL AS CONTEMPORARY THEMES

To imitate means, in its most technical sense, to copy religiously or to act just like another, but to take that which another had produced, reproduce it, transform it and add a touch which is typically one's own, implies one's ability to create. It is thus that Molière has leaned to the three types of influences, each time stamping his plays with his unmistakable genius.

These sources are classified into three general categories, namely, ancient and modern authors and influences from contemporary themes. There had never been a man better versed in the knowledge of ancient and modern literature. Each one of his plays is the fruit of immense labor, a work of art, and the ingenious combination of borrowings without regard to number. Some of his rivals whom his glory continually annoyed cried aloud, concerning him, the verse of Mascarille:

Au voleur! au voleur! au voleur! au voleur!

In the eighteenth century, the actor Riccoboni charged that Molière owed all his genius to the Italians. Today even, the idea comes to some to regard Molière first as a thief, later as an imitator and, or at best, as an easily influenced author.

The Italian comedy under its two forms, written comedy and improvised comedy, or commedia dell'arte, contributed to the intellectual education

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of Molière; his debt to them is real and its importance cannot be exag-
gerated.

Avant de s'éloigner de Paris, il avait pu voir jouer
Scaramouche, Trivelin et Aurélia, de leurs vrais noms
Tiberio Furrelli, Domenico Locatelli et Brigida Bianchi,
dont la vogue était grande.¹

He requested of them the sketch for his plays. It is evident that the
Inavvertito of Beltrame suggested to him the gift of l'Étourdi. L'Intéressé
of Nicolo Secchi furnished for him nearly all that of le Dépit amoureux.
It is no longer doubtful that he has taken in la Gelosie fortunata del
principe Ridrigo of André Cicognini, the scénario of Don Garcia de Navarre,
and in il Convinito di pietra that of Don Juan. He is more obligated to
the Italians than he is to the Spanish, although he borrowed from Moreto,
the subject of la Princesse d'Elide.²

He owes more to them than the Trivelins and the Scaramouches whom he
makes dance at the intermission of l'Amour Médecin or Polichinelle in the
interludes of le Malade imaginaire. To them he owes the movements which
animate and give life, as well as, add color, to the scenes. Movement to
the Italians was an essential quality and a natural characteristic in
their theater.³

Some scenes from Molière which are analogous to those of commedia
dell'arte from which he borrowed are: in la Princesse d'Elide, the coward-
ly Moron, a buffoon, who is met face to face with a bear, climbs a tree to
shun the danger, yet as soon as the hunters killed the villainous beast,

¹Ibid., p. 15.
²Ibid.
³Ibid.
he hastens to come down "pour lui donner cent coups."\textsuperscript{1}

Another example is that of Sganarelle "à qui Don Juan a permis de s'asseoir à table à son côté et dont les laquais s'entendent pour enlever l'assiette d'abord qu'il y a dessus à manger?\textsuperscript{2}

A third example is Scapin, who pretends not to see Geronte and runs crying: "O ciel! ô disgrace imprévue! ô miserable père!" during which time the father forces himself to rejoin him and toddler along after him.\textsuperscript{3}

One hardly feels any appreciable difference between the Italian clowns and the characters of Molière whose scenic movements and sentiments are so vividly portrayed.

The authors whom Molière has aped most are those who represent the Gallic tradition: Rabelais, Régnier, Charles Sorel, Cyrano de Bergerac, Scarron, as well as some anonymous authors of short stories and farces. In that which concerns Scarron, he is remembered from his 	extit{Jodelet ou le maître valet} in 	extit{les Précieuses ridicules} from his 	extit{Don Jophet d'Arménie} in 	extit{l'Étourdi}, also 	extit{la Précautin inutile} and 	extit{les Hypocrites} in 	extit{l'École des femmes} and 	extit{le Tartuffe}. Certain traits of 	extit{les Fourberies de Scapin} and 	extit{l'Amour Médecin} are found in Cyrano de Bergerac's 	extit{le Pédant joué}. In the struggle between the first novelists of 	extit{la préciosité}, Sorel was more than once spoken of as a precursor of Molière.\textsuperscript{5} Examples of this are found in his 	extit{Berger extravagant} and 	extit{le Fracéon}. Other authors who served as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}La Princesse d'Elide, deuxième intermède, scene 2.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Petit de Julleville, op. cit., p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{3}Les Fourberies de Scapin, Act II, sc. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{4}L. Petit de Julleville, op. cit., p. 18.
\item \textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 19.
\end{itemize}
precursors to the language which Molière used were Régnier and Fabelais.

To the writers of antiquity also, Molière owes a great deal. Ariosto

To the writers of antiquity also, Molière owes a great deal. Aristophanes is considered as a general source of his influence; Horace,

Plautus and Terence are specific sources. At the Petites Ecoles de Port

Royal, Greek was sacrificed for Latin in the colleges of the Jesuites and

at the Collège de Clermont, where he attended; thus, the Roman writers are

better known to him.1 It is noticeable that the translation of les Amants

magnifiques was greatly influenced by the Donam gratum eram of Horace, just

as Terence's influence is evident in L'Ecole des maris and les Fourberies

de Scapin, and Plautus' in l'Étourdi, Amphitryon and l'Avaré. Plautus and

Terence are often paid the tribute by French critics as Molière's masters.2

Lanson goes so far as to contend that the plays of these ancient

authors would probably have disappeared if the works of Molière had not

sustained them. All that which he took from them, Molière chose because,

in it, he recognized the exact expression of an original that he knew in

life. He retouched it in a manner to make it lighter with his truth of

expression. Molière searched always for the truth; he felt that the truth

in plays ought to make men laugh and correct their errors. No truth

without the comic, nor comic without the truth; that is the formula of

Molière—that is the observation of human types.3

Below is a chart classifying the ancient and modern authors together

with the titles of their plays in comparison to those of Molière, as well

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1Petit de Julleville, op. cit., pp. 22-25.


XXIII.

3Gustave Lanson, Histoire illustrée de la littérature française (Paris, 1933), Tome I, p. 584.
as the contemporary themes which influenced his genius:

Ancients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Titles of Plays</th>
<th>Molière</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Plautus</td>
<td>Aulularia</td>
<td>1. L'Avare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Plautus</td>
<td>Latin comedy</td>
<td>2. Amphitryon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Terence</td>
<td>Adelphes</td>
<td>3. L'Ecole des maris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Terence</td>
<td>Phormion</td>
<td>4. Les Fourberies de Scapin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moderns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Titles of Plays</th>
<th>Molière</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nicolo Barbiere</td>
<td>L'Inavvertito</td>
<td>1. L'Etourdi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nicolo Secchi</td>
<td>L'Intéresse</td>
<td>2. Le Dépit amoureux</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Straparole</td>
<td>Nuits facétieuses</td>
<td>5. L'Ecole des femmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Scarron</td>
<td>La Précaution inutile</td>
<td>4. L'Ecole des femmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dorimont</td>
<td>Le Festin de Pierre</td>
<td>5. Don Juan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. (Fable of the 12th or 15th century)</td>
<td>Le Vilian Mire</td>
<td>6. Le Médecin malgré lui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Apuleius</td>
<td>Metamorphoses</td>
<td>7. Psyché</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Benserade</td>
<td>comédie-ballet (1652)</td>
<td>8. Psyché</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Cyrano de Bergerac</td>
<td>Le Pédant ioné</td>
<td>10. Les Fourberies de Scapin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Ariosto</td>
<td>I suppositi</td>
<td>11. L'Avare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Larivey</td>
<td>Les Esprits</td>
<td>12. L'Avare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Boisrobert</td>
<td>La Belle plaideuse</td>
<td>13. L'Avare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Quinault</td>
<td>La Mère cocquette</td>
<td>14. L'Avare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Rotrou</td>
<td>La Soeur</td>
<td>15. Les Fourberies de Scapin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Larivey</td>
<td>Le Fidèle</td>
<td>16. Les Femmes savantes</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Desmaret de Saint-Sorbin</td>
<td>Visionnaires</td>
<td>17. Les Femmes savantes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Le Boulanger de Chalussey</td>
<td>Elomire Hypocondre</td>
<td>19. Le Malade imaginaire</td>
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Contemporary Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Titles of Plays</th>
<th>Types or Purposes for Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Les Précieuses ridicules</td>
<td>1. A comedy portraying the affected manners and language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sganarelle</td>
<td>2. A play founded on a quiproquo or a blunder.</td>
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</tbody>
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### Contemporary Themes

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Types or Purposes for Presentation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Les Fâcheux</td>
<td>5. A comedy-ballet composed by Molière for the superintendent Fouquet and played at the Château de Vaux during the festivals which Fouquet gave for the king and queen-mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. L'Impromptu de Versailles</td>
<td>4. A play in which Molière defended himself against Visé, Boursault and the other comedians of d'Hôtel de Bourgogne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Don García de Navarre</td>
<td>5. A farce representing jealousy presented under a tragic aspect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. La Princesse d'Elide</td>
<td>7. Written for a festival at the court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. L'Amour médecin</td>
<td>8. Comedy-ballet with music by Lulli. This is the first attack of doctors by Molière.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Monsieur de Pourceaugras</td>
<td>11. Comedy-ballet containing the memoirs of Molière's life in the province.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Le Bourgeois gentilhomme</td>
<td>15. A comedy-ballet presented at the court. Molière received his instructions on the Turks from Laurent d'Arvieux, who had just returned from the Orient.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Contemporary Themes

<table>
<thead>
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CHAPTER IV

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF SIX OF MOLIERE'S PLAYS
WITH THOSE OF THE ANCIENTS, MODERNS AND CONTEMPORARY THEMES

An analysis of six plays of Molière and the sources by which his genius was stimulated reveals the extent of his borrowing from other authors. It must be remembered, however, that this classical age in which he lived and wrote was an era which endorsed and had as one of its chief characteristics the imitation, in one's own manner, of the ideas of one's predecessors. In addition, it is always obvious that Molière, while relying on some of the ideas of the ancients, moderns and contemporary customs, gave all of his plays a purely personal and original touch. It is in this latter creation that his genius is so widely recognized.

Let us consider first, in this series, Plautus' Aulularia, a play from antiquity in comparison with Molière's L'Avare, which bears a striking resemblance to it. The theme of both plays is that of avarice. In Aulularia, Euclio, the main character, who is a miser, is at first a poor man who accidentally discovers a pot of gold which his grandfather had hidden in the house before his death. After finding it, Euclio becomes very suspicious that someone might discover his treasure; therefore, he watches it constantly, anxiously and carefully. His suspicion is aroused by the fact that everybody salutes him more civilly than before, and even when Megadorus, a rich gentleman, asks his daughter in marriage, he thinks that he is aiming at his pot of gold. When, however, the suitor for Phaedra's hand shows his willingness to marry her without a dowry, Euclio gives his consent.

While the preparations for the wedding are going on, Euclio goes to market in order to buy a wedding present for his daughter. On his return,
he finds in his house a number of cooks whom Megadorus has sent to prepare for the marriage feast. He scolds, beats and drives all of them out because he suspects that they are after his money. He then conceals his pot in the Temple of Faith. Strobilus, a slave of Lyconides, overhears Euclio's conversation concerning the hiding-place of the gold and he resolves to steal it. The miser, however, discovers the would-be thief just in time to prevent him from carrying out his project. He then takes his pot to an unfrequented grave. The slave overhears him again and he now succeeds in stealing the gold, after watching Euclio from a tree, as the latter was burying his treasure.

Later, Euclio discovers that someone has taken his treasure and then he laments bitterly. Lyconides, a nephew of Megadorus, and also in love with Phaedra, to whom he has done violence, thinking that the miser is lamenting over his daughter, confesses to his crime. This gives rise to a comical misunderstanding, since Euclio is under the impression that Lyconides is confessing the theft of the pot. Lyconides asks for Phaedra's hand and announces at the same time to the miser that Megadorus has given up his claim to her hand in his favor. When Strobilus informs his master that he has stolen Euclio's treasure, Lyconides orders him to give it up at once so that he may restore it to its rightful owner. The slave is willing to do so on condition that Lyconides will set him free.1 (Here ends Plautus' comedy).

Similarly, in l'Avaré, Molière paints Harpagon, a born miser. He refuses to let his son, Cléonte, have money unless the latter borrows from him at a high rate of interest. He has, also, a daughter whom he wishes

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1 Wright and Rogers, Three Plays of Plautus (New York, 1925), pp. 175-254.
to marry off to an old man who will accept her without dowry ("sans dot"). This daughter, however, has promised to marry a young man, Valère, a steward of Harpagon. Harpagon wishes to wed Mariane, his son's fiancée; yet this inspires no acts of generosity. La Flèche, Cléonte's valet, steals Harpagon's casket containing 10,000 écus and consents to return it only if Harpagon renounces his interest in Mariane. Finally, a reconciliation ends the play with the marriages of Mariane and Cléonte and Elise and Valère. Harpagon remains with his beloved money box.1

In general outline, the Aulularia and L'Avaré resemble each other very closely: in each, there are a miser, a daughter and two lovers of the daughter. The part of Strobilus becomes that of La Flèche in Molière's comedy. Again, in both plays there are a number of servants who are made to suffer from harsh treatment and who freely give vent to their feelings. Molière produces some fine comic effects by means of these servants.

Although the principal characters of the Aulularia reappear in L'Avaré, their particular treatment differs greatly in the two comedies. The characters newly created by Molière are Cléonte, Mariane, Frosine, "maître" Simon and the commissaire.

A general contrast exists between the two misers: Euclio had been a poor man until he suddenly found a pot of gold, whereas the other, Harpagon, had always kept up a comparatively big establishment, comprising a large house and garden, a carriage, horses and a number of servants. Euclio continued his same mode of living as before he found the treasure. Harpagon, on the other hand, exhibits avarice in the midst of elegance. Another great difference between the two misers is that Harpagon is in

2Molière, L'Avaré.
love while Euclio is not. To make an old miser fall in love produced a comic effect and, to add to it all, Harpagon is in love with the same girl as his son. This is one reason that it was necessary to create more characters in *I'Avare*, that is, in order to carry out fully all the comic effects.

The situations and aims of the two plays differ also. *Aulularia* is a comedy of situation, describing the fate of a pot of gold, whereas *I'Avare* is a comedy of character. The aim of the *Aulularia* is to show a miser's distrust for humanity generally, based upon specific reasoning over the loss of a pot of gold. In *I'Avare* the aim is to show the evil effects of a miser's stinginess upon his children, his sweetheart, his servants, his horses, everything and everybody with which or whom he came in contact.

A general comparison between the two comedies shows that *I'Avare* is a much more artistic and living production than the *Aulularia*. While generally the outlines of both are the same, the particular age and society in which they were written make them differ widely. Moreover, the superior talent of Molière changed and enriched the comedy of Plautus in so skilful a manner that when one reads the *Aulularia*, it seems only a sketch as compared with *I'Avare*. These factors reveal that the charm and finish in Molière's works make him a greater genius and exemplify a period of higher social refinement. This play was imitated but surpassed by Molière.¹

To illustrate a typical borrowing in which one author excels his model, an explication of two monologues follows—one, the original, the

other, the imitation. This *explication* seeks to show how Molière, while following faithfully the original in general outline, creates a masterpiece of great originality and universal truth.

The Monologue of Euclio

Euclio (desperate)

I'm perish'd, murder'd, done!
Where run, where not to run?
Stop, stop him! Who stop him?
I know not what to do!
There's nothing that I see
I walk blindly; verily
Whither I go, this place,
Nay, even my very face.
I cannot surely find
And settle in my mind.

(Rushes down to audience)

I call you to my aid.

(To one of them)

Yes, you I begg'd and pray'd;
You'll show me, will you not,
The man who stole my Pot?

(To another)

You! I can trust to you;
Your face betrays you true.
Laugh? Ahi! I know you all!
Thieves are there several
Disguised with dye and dress
Sitting in righteousness!

(To others)

Not one of these? I'm done!
Tell me who's got it. None?
0 pitiable plight!
Damn'd, desperately dight!
This day has brought to me
Hunger and poverty;
There waits me but a morrow
Of groaning and foul sorrow.
Of all on earth I'm worst.
Why need I live, who first
The qualities which Molière admires in Plautus' monologue are the truth, the profoundness of certain expressions and the vivacity combined with the comic force of the extract. On the contrary, Molière has painted his Harpagon as being more natural, more vraisemblable and more logically and naturally emotional over the loss of his money than Plautus. The long apostrophe of Euclio to the audience is almost all that is contained in the play of Plautus. Euclio's actions do not seem natural because it is not realistic that such violent passions and emotions would react so dryly. Plautus seems more rhetorical and less natural because he is not able to stimulate and awaken the souls of his audience.

When Euclio becomes frantic over the stolen pot of gold, his sentiments are not expressed successively and normally; that is, although he is represented as being in pain, despair and anger, Plautus does not seem to know in what order these sentiments would naturally appear. All of these natural emotions Molière senses and searches for the exact characteristics and precise causes of each sentiment through which the robbed miser passes. He puts into the monologue of Harpagon what is lacking in that of Euclio—a natural movement.

Both Plautus' and Molière's monologues may be conveniently divided into five phases. The first phase of Harpagon's monologue is the call for aid, the instinctive gesture of one robbed of a treasured possession:

"Au voleur! au voleur! à l'assassin! au meurtrier! Justice, juste ciel! Je suis perdu, je suis assassiné! On m'a coupé la gorge, On m'a dérobé mon argent!"

Molière, L'Avar, Act IV, scene 7.

Ibid.
The prevailing idea here is that death is better than life, without the money. At the very beginning of Euclio's monologue, he declares that he is dead. Even while repeating this fact, there seems not to be enough variation of synonyms to make it insistent. The despair of Harpagon is more profound because it continues to the point of hallucinations. With Plautus, despair comes in a sudden outburst or explosion which does not build itself up to the proper, gradual climax. Plautus is too rapid, but Molière's development is well placed, well balanced and logical. The repetition of "mon pauvre argent" implies the idea of affection, as well as the use of the second person, singular number "toi" gives an astonishing apostrophe of endearment and passion. Because both misers have lost the thing which seems closest to them, they prefer death and burial rather than life.

The fourth phase appears after the despair and hallucination in the form of an awakening and a return to good sense out of a concrete reflection that he suspects someone.

N'y a-t-il personne qui veuille me ressusciter en me rendant mon cher argent ou en m'apprenant qui l'a pris? Eh! que dites-vous? Ce n'est personne. Il faut, qui que ce soit qui ait fait le coup, qu'avec beaucoup de soin on ait épis l'heure; et l'on a choisi justement le temps que je parlais à mon traître de fils. Sortons. Je veux aller quérir la justice et faire donner la question à toute ma maison! à servantes, à valets, à fils, à fille et à moi aussi.

Even amid the absurd passions of wanting to be dead and buried, Harpagon reflects and is for a moment calm. He seeks an indictment and finds one, which is the belief that the thief is someone in the house and everyone therein is subject to be questioned. The last part of this phase seems original with Molière.

The last phase is an apostrophe to the audience.
Que de gens assemblés! Je ne jette mes regards sur personne qui ne me donne des soupçons, et tout me semble mon voleur. Eh! de quoi est-ce qu'on parle là? de celui qui m'a dérobé? Quel bruit fait-on là-haut? Est-ce mon voleur qui y est? De grâce, si l'on sait des nouvelles de mon voleur, je supplie que l'on m'en dise. N'est-il point caché parmi vous? Ils me regardent tous et se mettent à rire. Vous verrez qu'ils ont part, sans doute, au vol que l'on m'a fait. Allons, vite, des commissaires, des archers, des prévôts, des juges, des gênes, des potences et des bourreaux! Je veux faire pendre tout le monde; et, si je ne retrouve mon argent, je me pendrai moi-même après.

In a general manner, Harpagon addresses the audience as Euclio does in Plautus. In the appeal, he suggests "Sortons", meaning let us go out to get the police and other necessary agents to aid in the quest. On the way, as he meets many passersby who are talking, he begins to wonder what they are saying. He concludes with the same idea of the monologue generally, that they know the news of his being robbed. When some begin to laugh, he suspects that they are accessories to the crime. This phase doubtless ends at a window, while addressing the men in the street after the apostrophe is turned from the audience.

Molière is more comical and possesses greater genius than any of his models. Without doubt, the passion of his hero is almost tragic grandeur; yet we laugh aloud because Harpagon seems grotesque.

Additional comic effects lie in the fact that even if Harpagon had not recovered the casket of money, he would not have been ruined or even poor. He would have still been a rich man because ten thousand ecus represented only a small percentage of his fortune. Moreover, the money is not lost. The audience knows where it is and that it will be returned. When the money is returned, instead of Harpagon's following up his characteristic routine of becoming furious and seeking revenge from or demanding the punishment of the "thief", he appears as a pitiful, helpless imbecile.

It would be possible to compare numerous additional passages which
would indicate Molière's undeniable superiority over any of the men whom he imitated.

The second work to be compared with one of Molière's plays is Terence's *Adelphes* which inspired Molière's *l'Ecole des maris*. A summary of each follows: In *Adelphes*, Demea, the brother of Micio, had two sons, Aeschinus and Ctesipho, the former of whom was adopted by his uncle Micio and the latter kept by his father. Demea was grim and harsh, and Ctesipho, captured by the charms of a cithern-player, was sheltered by his brother, Aeschinus, who allowed the rumor of his brother's intrigue to be placed on him. Furthermore, to substantiate this rumor, he carried off another girl from a slave-dealer who owned her. Aeschinus had, himself, already seduced an Athenian lady, Sostrata, of scanty means and pledged himself to marry her. Demea angrily protested against the affair, but, when the truth became known, Aeschinus married the lady and Ctesipho was left in possession of his original lover, the cithern-player whose name was Bacchis.  

In *l'Ecole des maris*, two brothers, Sganarelle and Ariste, have two pupils, Isabelle and Léonor, whom they wish to marry. Sganarelle treats Isabelle with jealousy and severity, forbidding her all her pleasures, while Ariste, much older than Léonor, treats the latter with an indulgent affection; it is on his affection and indulgence that he counts for Léonor to accept him as a husband because she does not appear to love him. On the contrary Isabelle becomes interested in a young man named Valère. In

1. The *Brothers*, a play from antiquity.

spite of the careful watching by Sganarelle, Isabelle makes known her love for Valère, who in turn loves her. Sganarelle is duped by her without the knowledge of the elopement of the two.¹

The idea of the duped tutor prevails in both plays, as is evident. There are other similarities: In each play two brothers fall in love; thus, a love affair seems to be the main theme. Severity is characteristic in both plays; nevertheless, on the one hand it is Demea, the father of Aeschines and Ctesipho, who protests against the affair of his son, and on the other hand, Sganarelle, a brother, in L'Ecole des maris, who is cruel to his fiancée. Striking contrasts are that in the former play, both brothers marry and the father is duped, but in the latter only one brother marries, while the other is duped. Molière transforms almost completely the thought of Terence which stresses throughout to play the severity of a father toward his sons.

The third set of plays to be compared are Scarron's Les Hypocrites² and Molière's Le Tartuffe. This novel by Scarron seems to be the source of one of the characteristic scenes of Molière's play, act III, scene 6.³ Scarron relates a similar story⁴ of an adventurer by the name of Montufor and two women, one young, the other old, who, seeming or pretending to be very religious, engaged in a lucrative trade in Seville. Montufor rented a house which he furnished with the greatest simplicity, and dressed in

¹Molière, L'Ecole des maris.
²Larousse du XXᵉ Siècle, Tome 6, p. 229.
³Tartuffe does not make an appearance until act III.
⁴Jules Taschereau, Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de Molière (Bruxelles, 1828), pp. 45-45.
austere, sombre and drab clothing, all three of them worked upon the religious sympathies of the inhabitants. He went to churches and prisons, made great show of almsgiving and religious observances, all for the sake of personal gains but did it with so much shrewdness and success that he and his companions soon gained the reputation of devout saints.

There happened to be a gentleman of Madrid in Seville at that time who formerly had been the lover of the younger of Montufor's companions. Meeting them in front of the church one day, he became so much irritated at their hypocrisy, that he broke through the admiring and adoring crowd which surrounded them and with a blow of his fist, sent Montufor reeling to the ground. The people, angered at this action, rushed upon him and would have killed him, but Montufor interceded and protected him. He admitted his wrong doings and asked pardon. Yet, he continued to practise his selfish aims and in secret lived magnificently on the alms which he devoted to his comforts and those of his companions. Finally, he was denounced by his valet in court, but having beforehand, suspected the matter, had managed to escape.¹

The comedy, *le Tartuffe*, begins within the interior of a bourgeois home in which Orgon, his family and aged mother live. The friendship between Orgon and Tartuffe begins when they meet in church where Tartuffe, a hypocrite, is posing as a Christian. Orgon invites Tartuffe to his home and gives him lodging there. In the meantime, Orgon's mother, Madame Pernelle, is also overwhelmed by Tartuffe's pretense, while the others of the household despise him and desire that he be turned out. Gradually, as Tartuffe assumes full authority in the house, he is involved in a triple

¹John E. Matzke (ed.), *Molière's Tartuffe*, Intro., pp. XVI-XVIII.
danger, namely, to marry Orgon's daughter, to seduce his wife and to get rid of Orgon himself. The only means by which Orgon's wife was able to convince him that Tartuffe was an imposter was to have Orgon hide under a table in the room where Tartuffe made love to her and to overhear the conversation. As a result, when Orgon learned all this, he tried to get rid of Tartuffe, but by this time Orgon had donated him his entire material household. Orgon's home was spared only when Tartuffe was taken into the policeman's custody, thanks to an old criminal record and the efforts of Cléante, Orgon's brother.¹

Among the many similarities, these are the most evident: both plays have as the principal characters, hypocrites who pretend to be religious; both impostors gain their wealth unscrupulously; and neither is able to enjoy his fortune because the theft is revealed.

Hypocrisy, using the garb and bearing of piety for the furtherance of selfish ends, has been always present in the universe, but the peculiar conditions in France during the seventeenth century and the political influence of the Church had undoubtedly aided its development.² The severe criticism which Molière received after presenting this play only served to make him rate among present day critics as a first ranking producer of great character studies in some of the world's greatest literature.

The fourth set of plays for comparison in this series is Cyrano de Bergerac's Le Pédant Joué and Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin.

Le Pédant Joué is a farce in which a love triangle is the main theme.

¹Molière, Le Tartuffe.

²John E. Matske, op. cit., P. X.
Jean Grangier, the pedant and principal of the college of Beauvais, is in love with Genevote, who is also the fiancée of his son Charlot. In order to have more freedom in his advances toward Genevote, Grangier sends his son and rival, Charlot, to Venice. But the son pretends that he has gone and actually hides himself at the home of a friend and has it announced to his father that he has been taken by the Turks. The father ransoms his son from the Turks and later on in the play, when Genevote and Charlot display their affections before the pedant, Grangier, he gives his consent to their marriage.¹

It was perhaps the whim of fashion which led Cyrano to compose, as his first literary work, a satirical comedy directed against a man who, as far as critics know, had given him no just cause for anger; for Cyrano never studied at Beauvais² and apparently could have no schoolboy grudge against its principal, Jean Grangier, such as that with which he has been credited. Grangier's was a figure, however, which lent itself readily to satire; he was so pedantic and avaricious that he more than once caused revolts among his pupils by his petty meannesses and harsh discipline; later, his relations with his servant, though he had taken all the orders except priesthood, became the scandal of the University. Whatever his reasons, Cyrano was not slow to carry out his intentions. The weapon he chose was a satirical comedy after the manner of the Italians in the commedia dell'arte or free comedy.³

¹Cyrano de Bergerac, Le Pédant joué (Boston, 1899), pp. 5-80.
²Nor did Molière, says Jean de Peiffer (ed.) Cyrano de Bergerac's Le Pédant joué, Introduction.
³Cyrano de Bergerac, op. cit., Introduction, pp. XI-XIII.
A summary of *Les Fourberies de Scapin* follows: Octave, the son of Argante, secretly marries a poor girl named Hyacinte, during his father's absence. Léandre, her brother and son of Géronte, is overwhelmed by Zerbinette, the daughter of Argante. While these love affairs are developing, the two fathers return home. These affairs worry both Octave and Léandre because they are pressed for money. In order to help them in their financial difficulty, they engage Scapin, Léandre's valet. When Argante learns of the marriage of his son, he wishes to have it broken and, as a result, Géronte refuses to let his son marry Zerbinette. In the trickery of securing money by underhand means, Scapin paints a terrible picture to Hyacinte about her brother who would consent to breaking her marriage. Thus, when Hyacinte is angered, Scapin asks her for 500 pistoles. Later, Scapin pretends to Géronte that Léandre is held by a Turk and he will help with his release for 500 escus. Scapin succeeds in these capers by stratagem and at the end, all four lovers marry happily and pardon Scapin for his trickery.¹

The principal borrowings from Cyrano's *le Pédant joué* are: the galley scene, the love scene between Charlot and Genevote which inspired the lovers in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, and the idea of saying that the son was held by a Turk. It was the galley scene which furnished Molière the model of the true peasant, Mathieu Gareau, who by his characteristics and his language digresses for the first time from the conventional type of villagers of the pastorals.² Scene XI, act II of *Les Fourberies*, in which Scapin paints to Géronte the gruesome picture of Léandre's kidnapping

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¹Molière, *Les Fourberies de Scapin*.

²Marcel Braunschvig, *op. cit.*., p. 682.
on a Turkish galley, while walking along the wharf, offers a striking analogy with scenes II and VI of act II in *Le Pécaut joué*. The words of Géronte have become proverbial: "Qu'allait-il faire dans cette galère?" These words are repeated in the scene of Cyrano almost as they are in Molière. The other scene which compares closely is the one in which Zerbinette in Molière and Genevote in Cyrano laugh while telling the old man about the trick by which he has been victimized.

The comedy of Cyrano was probably composed in 1645, according to record. *Les Fourberies de Scapin* was presented in 1671; thus, the former was the first by about twenty-six years. Although some critics doubt which of the two authors merits the priority, tradition recalls that Molière, when reproached for having two scenes which were analogous with two of Cyrano, retorted: "On reprend son bien où on le trouve."¹

In the play, Cyrano de Bergerac, Rostand indicates that Cyrano was aware of Molière's borrowing. The following excerpt illustrates this fact--act V, scene VI:

Ragueneau, à travers ses larmes

Je suis moucheur de .... de chandelles, chez Molière.

Cyrano

Molière!

Ragueneau

Mais je veux le quitter, dès demain;
Oui, je suis indigné! .... Hier, on jouait Scapin
Et j'ai vu qu'il vous a pris une scène!

Le Bret

Entière!

¹L. Moland, *op. cit.*, p. 278.
Ragueneau

Oui, Monsieur, le fameux: "Que diable allait-il faire?"

Le Bret, furieux

Molière te l'a pris!

Cyrano

Chut! chut! Il a bien fait!...

(à Ragueneau)

La scène, n'est-ce pas, produit beaucoup d'effet?

Ragueneau, sanglotant

Ah! Monsieur, on riait! on riait!

Cyrano

Oui, ma vie

Ce fut d'être celui qui souffle—et qu'on oublie!¹

In spite of the fact that the last example here given of Molière's plagiarism is, in its broadest concepts, contrary to general opinion, the other numerous examples concerning the chief sources of Molière prove his originality. These proofs have been established by revealing the ideas which he borrowed and those which he contributed. From Plautus' Aulularia he borrowed the situation but enlivened the plot and characterization by displaying the effects of natural emotions. From Terence's Adelphes he borrowed the situation of the duped tutor but lessened the number of characters involved to produce greater comic effects. Both situation and plot are borrowed from Scarron's Les Hypocrites but Molière uses only one hypocrite, Tartuffe, instead of three; he, also, makes his ending more effective by having Tartuffe imprisoned instead of escaping as Montufor.

¹Edmond Rostand, Cyrano de Bergerac (Paris, 1950), p. 211.
The galley scene, the love situation, the kidnapping by the Turk and the ridicule given to the stingy old man are all taken from Cyrano de Bergerac's *Le Pédecant joué*; yet, Molière changed the plot extensively and enhanced the characterization by creating Scapin.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Although the word genius implies possessing a remarkable aptitude or creative ability for some special pursuit, it must of necessity rely on certain definite sources of influence so that it may properly develop and be directed toward the respective channels in which the individual seems inclined. Too, there must be certain environmental forces conducive to forming and developing these innate abilities and tendencies to their greatest possible extent. When genius is revealed in triplicate form, obviously the sources and influences for its formation must be greater, more varied and more widespread. Such is true of the genius of Molière, who was equally outstanding at the same time as a director, an actor and an author.

With these factors in mind, the writer of this thesis has revealed the many sources of influence on the formation of Molière's genius from the first discoveries in his early childhood, throughout his life and playwriting career.

In addition to the degree of influence exerted on him by his family, friends, schoolmates and marriage, which he has depicted in certain of his plays, the greater and more significant source appears in his use of other authors' ideas, scenes and plots, as exemplified in almost all of his comedies. The current customs, prevalent during his time, proved to be another important source which he used in order to paint human nature as it existed with its faults and weaknesses. One of Molière's chief purposes in writing his numerous satirical comedies was to correct the vices of man as they appeared in seventeenth century society. It was this idea which
created for him his greatest literary appeal.

Since Paris could not sufficiently stimulate and produce the necessary incentives to aid in Molière's brilliant and promising literary career, it was doubtless providential that he found it expedient to organize l'Illustre-Théâtre and make the provincial tour of 1645.\(^1\) The extent of Molière's literary grasp and intellectual growth, while in the provinces, proved invaluable and immeasurable, for it was in that environment that his genius as a writer of comedy first became evident, with the presentation of l'Etourdi. Even after his return to Paris in 1658, he continued to incorporate some of the provincial manners, language and customs in his plays, many times making contrasts between these and the Parisian customs—all of which he attacked.

One notes, therefore, that generally speaking, Molière's plays may fall into three categories, according to the sources of influence, which are ancient authors, modern, and contemporary themes. In connection with a brief discussion of the context of each, Chapter III has included a table which graphically illustrates the placement of each.

Since, in some of the plays, the plots, characterization and even the language have been more religiously imitated than in others, six from Molière's vast collection have been chosen, analyzed and compared with their most obvious sources or models. Although the primary aim of this thesis has been to make a critical analysis of each source from which his genius sprang, one cannot overlook the fact that in its entirety, the significant, prevailing secondary idea was to prove Molière's originality in spite of his borrowings.

\(^1\)Des Granges, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 486.
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