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CARTESIAN SUBJECTIVITY ON THE NEOCLASSICAL
STAGE; OR, MOLIÈRE ACTS CORNEILLE FOR LOUIS XIV

Je suis maistre de moy comme de l'Univers:
Je le suis [...]

—Corneille, *Cinna*

In 1658, having been invited to perform at court for the first time in his career, Molière paired his farce *Le Docteur amoureux* with *Nicomède*, a 1651 play by France's reigning dramatist, Pierre Corneille. The choice of *Nicomède* is surprising for political reasons, since the play is shot through with suspicion of royal authority: Corneille's hero is a great military leader unjustly imprisoned by the weak king he selflessly serves.¹ The choice becomes less surprising when one considers a different set of reasons. Corneille's play is a generic oddity that marries its tragic tropes to elements of historical drama and a surprisingly comic ending. Molière's provincial troupe may have felt more at ease in such a play than in a proper neoclassical tragedy, since they lacked training in rhetorically complex stage declamation and in the codified gestures and postures preferred to convey tragic stage emotion at the time.² In particular, they lacked the facility of the king's (and Corneille's) favorites, the esteemed Hôtel de Bourgogne actors, who were in the audience as guests of the monarch.³ No doubt anxious in their presence and in the presence of the king, Molière might have sought to mitigate

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the unfavorable comparison he anticipated between the talents of his troupe and those of the reigning Paris tragedians.

Whatever its rationale, however, Molière's choice has delectable implications in the hindsight of intellectual history. In this hindsight, *Nicomède* can be seen more clearly not as an atypical tragedy but rather as inaugurating a new tragic paradigm, as Corneille himself had boasted in his critical writings. In fact, the play's generic innovations and especially its unorthodox hero resonate clearly with new Cartesian paradigms of subjectivity engendered in mid-seventeenth-century France, with what various scholars have considered the birth of the modern subject.⁴ Dalia Judovitz, for example, has shown how closely Descartes's contribution to modern philosophy—his pursuit of truth as certainty—is imbricated with his idea of the empirical subject, the individual "I" that governs the *Meditationes de prima philosophia*.⁵ As Descartes describes in the second Meditation, the existence of the "I" originates in its own essential capacity for thought. Defined as it is by rational (and, for Descartes, mathematical) precepts, the Cartesian subject differs from its antecedents—particularly in its starkly different relationship to the world and especially to the world of letters that had grounded Renaissance humanism. This Cartesian subject develops in philosophical discourse concurrently with Corneille's and Molière's theatrical careers, and I argue that it can be seen to govern both Corneille's inward-looking hero Nicomède and Molière himself as a writer, actor, director, and (especially) theorist of acting.

Indeed, I contend that the paradigm shift undergone by the concept of "self" in light of Cartesian thought can be traced both in Corneille's play and in the different acting styles of Molière and the Hôtel de Bourgogne troupe. Corneille's fidelity to the Bourguignons and their highly stylized acting, I will demonstrate, is incompatible with the Cartesianism of his later plays, and especially his *Nicomède*, who emblemizes a new model of subjectivity. Molière's performance style, meanwhile, pointed to his own timely understanding of what it means for the Cartesian subject to act. Molière gave us further insight into this understanding in his 1663 *L'Impromptu de Versailles*: in a metatheatrical gesture toward his court debut five years earlier, the play dramatizes the anxieties of a troupe, led by one "Molière," about to perform before Louis XIV. In 1894, Gustave Lanson wrote that Cartesian philosophy and *grand siècle* French literature developed in parallel, as "effects of the same causes" or "independent expressions of the same spirit."⁶ In what follows, I underscore some parallels between the two, by examining the theoretical insights into acting and subjectivity that are revealed by the *L'Impromptu* and Corneille's text. I then turn to Molière's own performance in *Nicomède*, which I read as an emblem of the triumph of theatrical Cartesianism.

I. MOLIÈRE ACTS MOLIÈRE

We know very little about the productions or day-to-day practices of seventeenth-century theatre artists in general and Molière in particular, having only some graphic scenic reproductions and limited eyewitness accounts on which to rely. This limitation is of course true of most periods and of most performers in the theatre's long history, and the evidentiary artifacts from Molière's 1658 performance in

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Nicomède are particularly scanty. Looking more broadly at the theatre-historical records of seventeenth-century France, however, the collective evidence is fuller than some have claimed.⁷ Accounts agree that Molière's troupe developed an increasingly naturalistic style—a *jeu naturel*—during the playwright's career, which flourished after the 1658 court performance. Two descriptions from the period, for example, note that “their acting is hidden in nature so well that one cannot distinguish truth from mere appearance”⁸ and that “the characters were so well drawn that the performances seemed less like plays than reality itself.”⁹ There is no way of knowing precisely what kind of acting might be described as a *jeu naturel* by such a witness, especially one accustomed to the stylized Hôtel de Bourgogne actors, with their emphatic playing or *jeu emphatique*. Nonetheless, we can contextualize such accounts with other textual artifacts. One, central to the discussion here, is the *Impromptu*. This play, as Patrick Dandrey has argued in his book *Molière ou l'esthétique du ridicule*, plays a key role in the Molière canon, revealing much of the playwright's thought on the practice and philosophical implications of dramatic expression.¹⁰ An extended contemplation of its theoretical insights and theatrical power, therefore, can help us to speculate about Molière acting Corneille in 1658.

As its title indicates, the 1663 *Impromptu de Versailles* debuted at court. It was written at Louis XIV's express command that Molière respond to *Le Portrait du peintre*, a play premiered shortly before at the Hôtel de Bourgogne and credited to Esmé Boursault—although believed by Molière, probably accurately, to be the collective work of various *antimoliéristes* including Corneille. Thus, the *Impromptu* continued the yearlong war of words between Molière and the Bourguignons, the so-called *querelle* [quarrel] of *L'École des femmes*:¹¹ the play rebutted the ad hominem attacks on Molière made in *Le Portrait du peintre* while also allowing him to take shots of his own, with uncharitable parodies of the Bourguignon acting style. The *Impromptu*'s defensive and offensive maneuvers are, however, much slyer than those of the earlier plays in the *querelle*, framed as these maneuvers are by the play's sophisticated ontological structure. The plot concerns a troupe of actors (Molière's) meeting and “rehearsing” with their author-director (one “Molière”) in the theatre [*salle de la comédie*] of Versailles, before a performance commanded by the king. The character of “Molière,” having been unable to rehearse his play properly—but also espousing the virtue of naturalistic performance—coaches his troupe in the art of improvisation. As the pressure of the impending curtain builds, various digressions and obstacles, none more serious than the actors' resistance, set back the rehearsal. Then, in a resolution as bold as that in his *L'Avare*, Molière receives a report that the king, out of his “unique goodness,”¹² has agreed to postpone the play. Molière calls this deferral the “greatest favor in the world.”¹³

Albert Bermel, who translated the play into English in 1962,¹⁴ declared it “the first utterly realistic drama (ahead of Hebbel by some 200 years).”¹⁵ This assessment is accurate. Molière anchors the play's realism in several ways. First, its structure is looser than that of other plays about actors [*comédies des comédiens*] of the period,¹⁶ its governing self-reflexivity presented more casually and less self-consciously. Second, this self-reflexivity—the play is a diversion commanded with insufficient time by the king, unfolding at the theatre in

Versailles—is neater, because the conditions of production within the play perfectly mirror those of the play: La Grange’s register notes that the troupe had to leave for the palace “by order of the King” on 11 October 1663, a week or so before the performance and very soon after the opening of *Le Portrait du peintre*.¹⁷ Third, the *Impromptu*’s dialogue is (and would have been to seventeenth-century ears) startlingly conversational, as if improvised. This improvisational quality would become a distinguishing generic feature of the “impromptu”—defined as a short circumstantial work giving the illusion of having been composed spontaneously.¹⁸ (In *Les Précieuses ridicules*, Molière had already noted the generic distinctiveness of the impromptu, when Mascarille—played in the troupe’s performances by the playwright—catalogs his literary output, which includes sonnets, epigrams, and madrigals. “I am fiendishly good at impromptus,” he boasts.)¹⁹

Bermel’s rendering of the play’s title as *The Rehearsal at Versailles* therefore misses a key nuance: much of the play concerns not a rehearsal per se, since the dramatic script to be rehearsed seems not to be properly finished; rather, the impromptu is generated precisely through the actors’ interaction with their troupe leader as they ostensibly prepare. Moreover, the translation of *impromptu* as “rehearsal” violates the neat self-reflexivity of the initial performance in 1663. Just as the characters (“Molière,” “Béjart,” “Du Parc,” and so on) seem to partake in an impromptu within the world of the play, so too do Louis XIV and the court audience have an impromptu (and not a “rehearsal”) performed for them by the actors (Molière, Béjart, Du Parc, and so on). Although the actors do not acknowledge their audience and feign that they are still “preshow,” this lack of acknowledgment—this breach in what Bermel calls the play’s utter realism—facilitates the impromptu’s conceit: the illusion of spontaneity. Onstage and offstage, at the debut performance at least, are meant to seem ontologically coextensive.²⁰

This illusion that *L’Impromptu* is indeed an impromptu is guaranteed by Molière’s Pirandellian trick, since the lines putatively from the play within a play are thrown into relief by the “spontaneous” discussion that surrounds them. For example, in a scene in which he and La Grange rehearse playing two marquises, Molière’s lines as director are underscored as “real” (that is, unscripted) by the contrast to his lines as marquis:

- MOLIÈRE: Be sure to remember to come on as I told you, there, with that manner they call the *bel air*, combing your wig and muttering a little tune between your teeth. La, la, la, la, la, la. The rest of you, spread yourselves out, there has to be room for two marquises, and they’re not the sort to present themselves in a cramped space, come on, speak.
- LA GRANGE: Good day, Marquis.
- MOLIÈRE: Good God, that’s not at all the tone of a marquis, you have to raise it up a notch, and most of those gentlemen affect a particular manner of speaking to distinguish themselves from the masses. Good day, Marquis, start again.
- LA GRANGE: Good day, Marquis.
- MOLIÈRE: Ah, Marquis, at your service.²¹

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The direction that Molière here offers La Grange points to the third reason why we should understand *L'Impromptu de Versailles* as realism *avant la lettre*. In the play, the natural diction of “Molière” functions self-consciously to advance a theory of naturalistic performance: La Grange ought to deliver his line as a real marquis would, and the other actors onstage ought accordingly to plan their blocking as if two real marquises had entered the room.

Underscoring the need for verisimilitude in performance, this direction is consistent with his other advice to the actors throughout the play, which allows “Molière” the character to provide the poetics of Molière the playwright—one well described by Léopold Lacour in 1928 as “a revolutionary doctrine of art.”²² This doctrine is best summarized by one bit of direction that “Molière” provides the troupe: “Try to take on all the character [*caractère*] of your roles and to make yourself appear as if you are who you are playing.”²³ The sentence repays close attention; contemporary ears miss how unusual the phrasing and formulation would have sounded in historical context. In the play, Molière uses several different meanings of the word *caractère*, some of them denotatively novel: for example, as “keynote,” or as “assembly of traits that comprise an individual’s personality.”²⁴ *Caractère* is used to tell the actors the “type” they will play: for example, “a prude” in Mlle Béjart’s case. Additionally, and more significantly, the word is used to delimit an interiority for the role: “Enter into this character,” Molière tells Mlle De Brie.²⁵ As in English, a word that had originally referred to a mark on a page had begun to acquire a third dimension—a denotative deepening that is hard to separate from the protopsychological discourse emerging at the time. Molière also uses the word to denote the distinctive features—the figuration—by which the audience will recognize the sort of person being represented. (It is in this sense that Viola means “character” when she tells the Captain, at the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, that “I will believe thou hast a minde that suites / With this thy faire and outward charracter.”)²⁶ Molière’s various uses of the word—it appears eight times—mark his historically unorthodox acting advice: outwardly draw and therefore express that you *are* who you represent. The actor is asked to fuse with the character through performance, embodying the ontological coextensivity (between real and represented) on which the *Impromptu* conceptually relies.

In response to this advice, Mlle Molière quips to her husband that he ought to have devised a play for one actor: that is, himself.²⁷ Her sarcastic retort—as when Mlle Béjart confesses that she can’t play a part that she hasn’t entirely rehearsed,²⁸ or when La Grange complains that the troupe cannot act in a style they don’t know²⁹—adumbrates how radical Molière’s conception of acting is. Even his own actors, Molière suggests, remain insufficiently revolutionary in their method. Theatre historians have made similar claims for Molière, confirming his self-aggrandizing vision of himself, in the *Impromptu*, as theatrically revolutionary.³⁰ It is more precise to say that Molière came to lead, and was the most important player in, a phenomenon in acting style that was not exclusive to him.³¹ After all, it was some time earlier that Hamlet’s advice to the Players had similarly steered them away from emphatic declamation and

stylized gestures. My contention is that Molière does more than push for greater theatrical verisimilitude, and the *Impromptu* helps us better to understand his pioneering. The *Critique de l'École des femmes*, which he had written a few months before, also contains aspects of a theatrical poetics: “represent according to nature,” Dorante famously advises.³² But the *Impromptu* goes further—well beyond Hamlet, certainly—in providing a theoretical means and motivation for the performer to do so in performance. The individual actor is licensed to make himself or herself into a character, both in a literal sense (since Du Parc plays “Du Parc,” for instance) and in a philosophical sense (since the self of the actor, his or her own *caractère*, is to anchor that of the role). “How do you expect us to do that,” Mlle Béjart asks, “if we don’t know our parts?”³³ Molière’s sincere response—“you will know them, I tell you”³⁴—asserts that a scripted text is unnecessary if the actor has completely inhabited the character.

This assertion gives the actor a curious primacy in dramatic expression. Moreover, from the point of view of performance, it casts aside the stylistic prescriptions typical in seventeenth-century acting. In this way, the *Impromptu* distils and potently fortifies Dorante’s stance in the *Critique*, which endorses the modern subject’s *bon sens* while denigrating rules and received conventions.³⁵ Foregrounding the individual as a thinking agent in both plays, Molière thus recapitulates the opening gambit of each of Descartes’s 1637 *Discours de la méthode* (in which he proposes that the reasoning ability or *bon sens* of the individual should guide philosophical investigation)³⁶ and his 1641 *Meditationes* (in which he resolves to sweep away all of his preconceived knowledge and begin anew, from the ground up).³⁷

In his indispensable *The Player’s Passion*, Joseph Roach traced how Cartesian physiology entered acting theory in the eighteenth century.³⁸ As the *Impromptu* demonstrates, Descartes’s theory of self began to exercise its impact even earlier. For the Cartesian actor, not rules or conventions but the “I,” the mind, shall be the actor’s guide. Thus, Molière commands Du Croisy to fill himself with his role, Mlle Béjart to keep the character in front of her eyes, Mlle De Brie to enter into her character, and the entire company to imprint their characters strongly into their minds.³⁹ Molière considers a role to be a two-dimensional textual construct, awaiting animation by the actor’s agency or *esprit*. This animation is effected by an interpenetration of the actor’s mind and the character’s interiority—an interpenetration signified by Molière’s spatially contradictory directions, which demand that the actors both fill themselves with, and enter into, their *caractères*.⁴⁰ According to this model, the actor’s mental conceptualization of the *caractère* leads the bodily business of acting a role; that is, the performer is the empirical (and grammatical) subject, charged with a process in which mental representation precedes physical representation. Molière ends his instructions by using the word *caractère* in yet another novel way. Cleverly violating the denotative distinction between *caractère* and *rôle*, he “tells them all their characters.”⁴¹ Doing so, he at once directs the actors and casts the play.

The *Impromptu*’s emphasis on the performer’s mental agency does have implications for casting: stressing mind over body, it foregrounds the actor’s own character and deemphasizes physiognomy.⁴² (It is useful to recall that Molière’s

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critics repeatedly, and to modern eyes unfairly, deemed him to be ill suited for tragedy because of his physique. He was said to lack the necessary “physical gifts” [“dons extérieurs”].⁴³ He reinforces this implication with a pointed in-joke, giving Mlle Du Parc an unsympathetic role. When she protests that she is herself nothing like the affected character she is assigned, he demurs: “that is true.”⁴⁴ The demurral, however, is coy. The original audience would have remembered that Mlle Du Parc had piqued Molière’s ire by leaving him for another company for one season.⁴⁵ (She would deal a crueller blow just a few years later, leaving him again for the Hôtel de Bourgogne.)⁴⁶ More generally, Molière’s evolving understanding of casting was reflected in the evolution of his company, which initially resembled a commedia dell’arte troupe but came to rely less on physical types.⁴⁷ Moreover, his facility with casting was recognized quickly by the critics; as early as 1696, for example, Charles Perrault had written that Molière “understood the ways of the actors so well, in giving them their true character, and in addition he had the gift of assigning the roles so well and then directing so perfectly that they seemed less like actors in a play than the real people [*vraies personnes*] they were portraying.”⁴⁸ It is noteworthy that Perrault cites not only the believability of the portrayals, but also the verisimilitude of the characters, who seem like “real people.” Molière’s commitments to more naturalistic acting and to verisimilitude are indeed closely interrelated, as his gradual abandonment of monologues attests.⁴⁹ So too attests his stubborn defence of prose during his dramatic career: significantly, in the *Impromptu* he notes that prose is easier to improvise, as it is more natural.⁵⁰

The ontological trick of the *Impromptu*, and of naturalistic acting more broadly, allows a spectator to forget the difference between an actor and a character, or between a character and a real person. I contend that this trick is made possible by the philosophically transitional moment in which Molière lived. This transition is manifested in Molière’s understanding of *caractère* and in his assertion of the actor’s agency. It is also reflected in the shifting denotations of the word *acteur*. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the word means, simply, *personnage* or “role,” and the two appear interchangeably at the top of dramatic personae in printed plays.⁵¹ By the end of the century, however, *acteur* had come to signify *comédien* or “actor,”⁵² the sense in which Molière uses the word—three times in the text and once in the stage directions—in the *Impromptu*.⁵³ I have already noted how the playwright foregrounds the actor’s agency; it is in this sense that the denotative displacement of *comédien* (from the Greek *kōmōidia*, “comedy”) by *acteur* (from the Latin *agere*, “to do”) is most resonant. Martine Clermont has beautifully detailed how such a shift in meaning emerges with appropriate simultaneity alongside new theoretical reflections on the art of acting.⁵⁴ The particular line of theoretical reflection that Molière sketches in the *Impromptu*—about the experiential reality of the actor and its relationship to his or her portrayal of a three-dimensional character—is made possible by new modes of thinking about the self more generally. The modern subject emerges.

The opening printed matter of *L’Impromptu de Versailles* lists the following under “Noms des Acteurs”: “MOLIERE, BREYCOURT, DE LA GRANGE, DU CROISY, LA TORILLIERE, BEJART, Mademoiselle DU PARC,

Mademoiselle BEJAR [*sic*], Mademoiselle DE BRIE, Mademoiselle MOLIERE, Mademoiselle DU CROISY, Mademoiselle HERVE.”⁵⁵ Ten of these names are *acteurs* in the sense of “roles”: “Molière” is a character name, and the performer portraying the character in a contemporary revival plays Molière. However, “Béjart” and “La Torillière” [i.e., La Thorillière] are *acteurs* only in the modern sense: their characters are not Béjart and La Thorillière but, respectively, a “man of quality” and a marquis. Thus the “Nom des Acteurs” list cleverly exploits its own denotative ambiguity. This sly joke of course appears only in the (posthumously) printed drama, but it provides a textual analogue for the *Impromptu*’s first moment in theatrical performance. Sitting down to Molière’s retort to *Le Portrait du peintre*, Louis XIV would have seen Molière call eight members of his troupe into the *salle de la comédie* to discuss their impending, unfinished, improperly rehearsed performance. Explicitly naming each of the eight one at a time, Molière (and “Molière”) would have clarified for the audience that the troupe members were playing themselves. He would have established the play’s realistic conceit—a conceit violated and thus underscored in the second scene when La Thorillière entered as a “real” marquis, as opposed to the “pretend” marquises that “La Grange” and “Molière” briefly play. The desired theatrical effect—Bermel’s “utter realism”—would have been underscored too by the sheer number of bodies on stage⁵⁶ and by Molière’s squabbling with his new wife during the scene. (This squabbling, in turn, alludes to *L’École des femmes* and the origins of the feud. Thus, the ontological ambiguity between actor and character serves also to make *L’Impromptu* more pointed as a parry in the *querelle*, an effect ironically highlighted in a rehearsal scene when Brécourt’s “man of quality” claims that Molière does not write *pièces à clef*.) Meanwhile, the semiotics of the play’s staging captures its ontological multivalence: the onstage bodies, including M. and Mlle Molière, are dressed not as themselves but “fully costumed”⁵⁷ for the impending play. This play, of which we see a few interrupted scenes in rehearsal, is that ostensibly anticipated by Louis XIV. It never arrives. Molière, although dressed as a marquis, acts as Molière.

II. CORNEILLE

I have argued that the *Impromptu* reveals Molière’s Cartesian sensibility, his attunement to a new understanding of the modern subject. Such an understanding also reveals itself in Corneille’s *Nicomède* (1651), in which the triumph of the unusual prince over his father and stepmother neatly emblemizes the emergence of a new paradigm of subjectivity and princehood. To claim that the hero of Corneille’s *Nicomède* is a Cartesian figure is almost axiomatic. Several critics have demonstrated that the titular prince is a paragon of generosity (a *généreux*), drawn with clear if not self-conscious parallels to the doctrine of *générosité* developed in Descartes’s *Les Passions de l’âme* (1649), which was published two years before Corneille’s play.⁵⁸ *Générosité*, Descartes claims, consists of two interrelated elements:

partly in [a subject’s] understanding that there is nothing which truly belongs to him but this free control of his volitions, and no reason why he ought to be

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praised or blamed except that he uses it [i.e., them] well or badly; and partly in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it [i.e., them] well, that is, never to lack the volition to undertake and execute all the things he judges to be best—which is to follow virtue perfectly.⁵⁹

The fundamental part is the Cartesian *bon sens*, which ought to guide the empirical subject (and which Molière's Dorante had endorsed in *Critique de l'École des femmes*): his or her recognition of an unconditional self-worth grounded in a capacity for thought. This part is harnessed to a second, which is the virtuous magnanimity that governs the subject's actions—and, importantly, his or her interactions with others, who are recognized as similarly rational.

In the sway of Corneille's Cartesianism, it is unsurprising to find that his hero deviates from the classical ideal. In his second "Discourse on Tragedy" (1660), Corneille describes how he had loosened Aristotle's constraints on the exemplary hero, which he faults for excluding characters outstanding in virtue.⁶⁰ Nicomède, by contrast, is a paragon. Faced with a stepmother (Arsinoé) whose mission is to ruin him, a younger stepbrother (Attale) who seeks to usurp his throne and steal his fiancée, and a vacillating father (Prusias) who imprisons him, Nicomède responds with magnanimity. In stark contrast to his family, he also abjures strategic machinations in favor of rational action. For example, considering Attale's claim on the kingdom, Nicomède proposes that an empirical test be used to determine succession: "I wish to put aside, with the title of first-born, the rank of lordship I was to have over you; and we will see which lessons make a better man, those of Hannibal or those of Rome."⁶¹ Refusing his rights, Nicomède shows his typical disregard for the customs and conventions of court and government. Significantly, he associates these conventions with Rome, where Attale was raised and in whose sway both his stepmother and father are held. The association is resonant. In the dénouement, Bithynia asserts itself as independent from Rome, as Nicomède and the transformed Attale come to power. Concomitantly, Corneille ends his flirtation with classical genre conventions, freighted as they are with humanistic baggage: a tragic conclusion is diverted, and the classical sources are ignored, as Nicomède bestows forgiveness on all of his family. Thus, in both plot and structure, for both its hero and its author, the play marries its interest in the Cartesian subject to a rejection of classical Rome—and, we might say, to a rejection of Renaissance humanism. Nicomède concludes his speech foregoing the rights of primogeniture by telling Attale, "Adieu, reflect well on this, I leave you to think about it."⁶² The Cartesian echoes are clear.

As Descartes wrote, the *généreux* are "entirely masters of their passions."⁶³ As Nicolas Boileau noted in his *L'Art poétique*, however, stirring the tragic spectator with "froids raisonnements" is dramaturgically challenging.⁶⁴ Corneille's inward-looking hero, characterized by his refusal to scheme, is indeed daringly untheatrical—as the fifth act ends, reconciliation replaces grief, and five mentions of *générosité* replace cries for vengeance. For its dramatic power, the play relies instead on the novelty of its hero and of the rational subjectivity that

this hero embodies and sees in others. Corneille throws both into relief with the hypertheatrical Arsinoé; indeed, the two characters embody the emotion–reason binary that structures *Les Passions de l'âme*. Paying traitorous soldiers to slander Nicomède, she schemes to remove him from his father's favor. This plot involves both the emotional volatility and the capacity for dissemblance with which Corneille signifies her ruthless villainy:

I thought it best that he [Nicomède] be lured from his fortress to this region. Métrobate brought it about by panic. Pretending to betray to him my tyrannical orders, and saying that he had been suborned to murder Nicomède, he has (thanks to the gods) brought him here for me. He comes to complain to the King, and to demand justice from him, and this complaint hurls him to the precipice: without taking any care to justify myself, I will know how to strengthen my position. As soon as I saw him I acted terrified; I changed color; I cried out. He thought to surprise me, and he thought that in vain, since his very return is my handiwork.⁶⁵

Nicomède, she wagers, is fooled by her performance since it is in keeping with her emotional nature. Plotting to trick him, however, Arsinoé fails—not because she is outmaneuvered by a superior strategist, but precisely because she is mired in old emotional and tragic paradigms. Thus, she misreads Nicomède's every move, presuming that he is “driven by his thirst for revenge.”⁶⁶

The play's dramatic arc involves not a change in the steadfast hero but a transformation of those around him: the playwright situates Attale and especially Prusias between stepson and stepmother—between “generosity” and “hatred,” as Corneille succinctly puts it.⁶⁷ Nicomède's fiancée, the Armenian princess Laodice, notes in the play's opening moments that the king sees only through Arsinoé's eyes,⁶⁸ and Nicomède's task is to teach his father to ignore the intense emotional and rhetorical pressures of both the queen and the Roman ambassador Flaminius. Prusias must be taught, in other words, to reason: to be true to his own (royal) self. In a revealing exchange, the king—weighed down by advice from various quarters, and bemoaning his competing obligations as husband and father—demands existential counsel of Nicomède. “What should I be?” he asks. Cutting his father off, Nicomède ends the alexandrine, fittingly rhyming “moi” with a single blunt syllable: “Roi.”⁶⁹ He ties the demands of statehood explicitly to the king as subject.

In the “Discourse on Tragedy,” Corneille would similarly foreground not *générosité* per se but rather its effect on Prusias, whose exposure leads to moral improvement and not (as in the historical sources) attempted filicide.⁷⁰ After all, as Nicomède himself puts it, “admiration of ideal men is no great virtue if one doesn't imitate them.”⁷¹ As Descartes theorizes in *Les Passions de l'âme*, *générosité* serves to temper the passions that disorder the soul, especially anger.⁷² Thus, the ending of Corneille's play works to demonstrate onstage the very effect that the playwright claims for it offstage, a new effect going by an old name: catharsis. Corneille's understanding of the term also reveals his Cartesianism,

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which again drives the play's deviation from classical form. This deviation is well described by the playwright himself, both in the prefatory "Au lecteur" accompanying *Nicomède's* 1651 publication and the expanded "Examen' à *Nicomède*" published in his 1660 *Théâtre*. In the first text, Corneille identifies the crux of the play's novelty as its arousal in the spectator not of the typical emotions of pity and fear but rather of *admiration* or "wonder."⁷³ In the second, Corneille explicitly evaluates his tragic model against Aristotle's: "In the wonder that we have for [Nicomède's] virtue, I find a way to purge the passions of which Aristotle did not speak, and which is perhaps more reliable than that which he prescribes for tragedy by means of pity and fear."⁷⁴ The nagging deficiencies of those emotions for the tragic playwright, he claims, are evident in dramatic practice.⁷⁵

Since these deficiencies can be explained by the modern physiology of his day, understanding this physiology is vital to understanding Cornelian theory. As Descartes had described them, both pity and fear are constituted by the awareness of a muscular reaction occurring in the body because of the movement of animal spirits. These unavoidable movements cause bodily perturbations and constrain the rational workings of the subject. *Nicomède* demonstrates such disturbances at various times in its poetry, which moves moral agents out of their subject positions and makes them the objects of driving passions. It is Arsinoé's hatred, for example, that purchases her assassins.⁷⁶ It is Laodice's furious rage which, seizing her soul, defeats her respect and generosity.⁷⁷ Even *Nicomède*, acknowledging that he had disobeyed the king in returning unbidden to Bithynia, understands his disobedience in these terms: "my love for you committed this offence," he claims.⁷⁸ By Cartesian emotional logic, for a playwright to move spectators to pity and fear would be to move them to disorder. Therefore, Cornelian catharsis substitutes these emotions for wonder, "the first of all passions" as Descartes had described it:

When the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to be new, or very different from what we knew in the past or what we supposed it was going to be, this makes us wonder and be astonished at it. And since this can happen before we know in the least whether this object is suitable to us or not, it seems to me that Wonder is the first of all the passions. It has no opposite, because if the object presented has nothing in it that surprises us, we are not in the least moved by it and regard it without passion.⁷⁹

Wonder, claims Descartes, is not constituted by a muscular response. Instead, the animal spirits form an indelible impression on the brain "to fortify and preserve" the impression of the object, "rare and consequently worthy of being considered."⁸⁰ As evidenced by its unique failure to produce changes in the heart or the blood, wonder relates physiologically only with the brain; its only object is knowledge of the wondrous stimulus.⁸¹ In this difference resides its utility for the spectator and, by extension, the tragic playwright. Its effect is calming, as the protesting crowds in the fifth act of *Nicomède* (shown in the play's

1660 frontispiece; Fig. 1) discover.⁸² Outraged by the prince's unjust imprisonment, the bodies of Prusias' subjects are disordered. Significantly, their disorder is mirrored in the posture of their king, who has yet to exercise his reason. Corneille describes the crowd as "ému," a word that beautifully captures the relationship between emotion and disorder, denoting as it does both "moved" and "riotous." But upon the prince's release, "all is tranquil. The first sight of [him] suddenly calmed the people."⁸³

Moving outward from one set of subjects (his characters) to another (his audience), Corneille claims to effect a similar response in his spectators, whose passions are purged: the love that wonder inspires in us, he claims, gives us hatred for the contrary vice and the passionate upheaval it causes.⁸⁴ In this way Corneille fully realizes cathartic tragedy and establishes a new paradigm for the form, as Boileau would corroborate in a letter to Perrault.⁸⁵ Moving the audience members from emotion toward reason, the Cartesian hero brings them closer to self-knowledge, closer to the self. *Générosité* begets further *bon sens*. In this way, the tragic spectator is like Arsinoé, who after four-and-a-half acts of emotional upheaval is stricken with calm—the agitation in her heart subdued—in the wondrous glow of her stepson's unlikely forgiveness. As she says:

Sir, must you push your victory so far, and having in your hands my life and my honor, does the ambition of such a powerful conqueror wish also to triumph in my heart? Against so much virtue I cannot defend it; it is itself impatient to surrender. Join this conquest to three conquered scepters and I will think that in you I have gained a second son.⁸⁶

At least one critic reads Arsinoé's final act conversion as just another dissemblance.⁸⁷ However, the cynicism of such a reading reveals it as a product of the twentieth century. Although our faith in Descartes's rationalist project has wavered, Corneille's did not.

III. MOLIÈRE ACTS CORNEILLE

In light of *Nicomède*'s manifest Cartesianism, the play was an intriguing choice for Molière's court debut. The troupe's 1658 appearance at Versailles had ended with Molière's fawning apology, in what Pierre Brisson notes was itself (like the *Impromptu*) a carefully staged false improvisation;⁸⁸ La Grange records that Molière had bemoaned the "imperfections" ["*deffauts*"] of his troupe compared to the Hôtel de Bourgoigne actors:

The play having been finished, Molière came into the theatre and, after having thanked His Majesty very humbly for the kindness he had shown in excusing his imperfections and those of his entire troupe, who trembled to appear before such an august audience, he told him that their pleasure to have had the honor of diverting the greatest King of the world had made [the troupe] forget that His Majesty had at his service such excellent originals, of which they were but very weak copies[.]⁸⁹

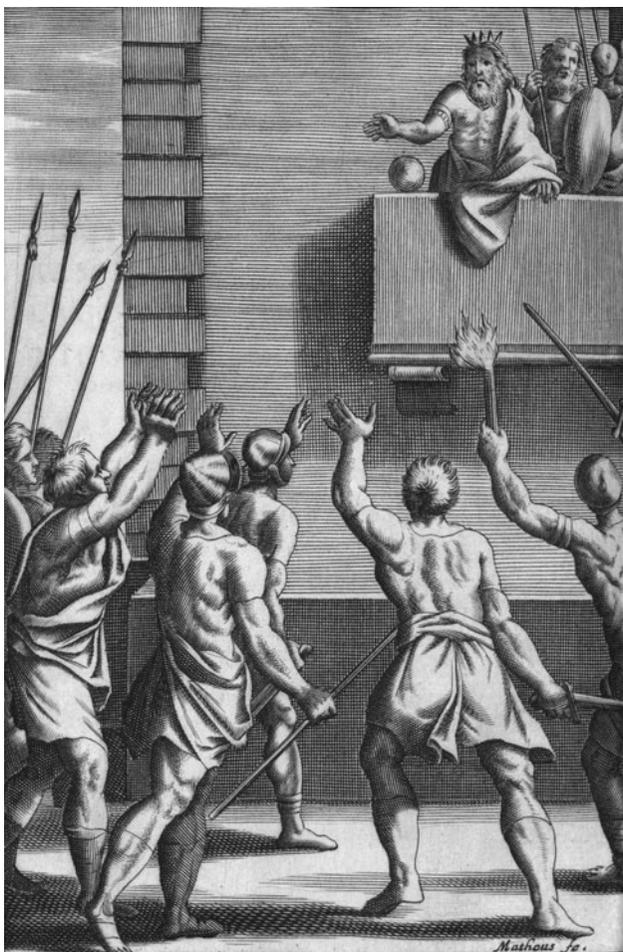


Figure 1.

In the 1660 frontispiece to *Nicomède*, the disordered bodies of Prusias' subjects mirror the posture of their king.

After *Nicomède*, Molière had thanked the king for “suffering their provincial style.”⁹⁰ In *l'Impromptu*, he would instead coyly celebrate his unfamiliarity with Hôtel de Bourgogne conventions, noting that he had seen them perform only “three or four times since we have been in Paris”⁹¹ and had not “caught” (in the sense that one catches a cold) “their manner of delivery.”⁹² Molière’s more natural performance style, I am suggesting, aligns itself with the attractive novelty of Corneille’s hero. This alignment reveals the inherent incompatibility of *Nicomède* and the Bourguignon style that Corneille favored.

In its dramatization of the troupe's anxieties prior to a court performance, the *Impromptu*—which provides particularly fertile evidence of Molière's Cartesian sensibilities—slyly evokes *Nicomède*. While explaining one of his ideas for the command performance, Molière tells Mlle De Brie that in it she would portray a member of a successful provincial troupe newly arrived in Paris. (Of the actors in the *L'Impromptu*, she was one of the five who had performed at court five years earlier.)⁹³ Proposing to cast himself as an established tragic poet—unkindly, he has Corneille in mind—Molière describes how one of the troupe members would step forth and recite the following verse, as “naturally as he could”:⁹⁴ “Shall I tell you, Araspe? He has served me too well / In adding to my power.”⁹⁵ The lines are from *Nicomède*: Prusias in conversation with his captain of the guards. Molière's joke is unsubtle. The provincial actor's natural delivery of the lines shocks the unimpressed poet, who interrupts to give some Bourguignon direction, which unsurprisingly prescribes a stylized pose and affected declamation. Molière acts Corneille, imitating Montfleury: “You have to speak things with emphasis. Listen to me. ‘Shall I tell you, Araspe? . . . etc.’ *Imitating Montfleury, excellent actor of the Hôtel de Bourgogne*. Do you see this posture? Note that well. There, stress the last rhyme as you should. That's what gets approbation and raises a brouhaha.”⁹⁶ The provincial actor's equally pointed retort, meanwhile, demonstrates his *moliéresque* sensibility: “It seems to me that a king consulting privately with the captain of his guards speaks a bit more humanly, and hardly uses this demoniacal tone.”⁹⁷

Note how carefully Molière folds even this parody into the *Impromptu*'s realistic frame: he is merely describing to Mlle De Brie an idea for a comedy, and this description compels him explicitly to impersonate Montfleury and implicitly to critique Corneille's preferred acting style. He delivers his attacks under cover of an offstage *impromptu*—a contrast, he highlights, to his *querelle* rivals' ad-hominem clumsiness. Moreover, whereas the *Impromptu*'s printed 1682 stage directions explicitly indicate the actor targeted in the parody, in performance in 1663 Molière would have relied on his celebrated skill at mimicry to ensure that his audience understood the joke.⁹⁸ (This refusal to name his targets aloud is ironically underscored when he explicitly dismisses Mlle De Brie's suggestion that he write about Boursault. “What a fine subject to divert the court Mr. Boursault would be!” he tells her: “I would like to know how he could be made entertaining.”)⁹⁹ The subsequent parodies in the *Impromptu*, of all of the major Bourguigne actors except Floridor, also make use of Corneille: Molière quotes variously from *Horace*, *Le Cid*, *Sertorius*, and *Oedipe*. Pointedly, though, the fact that the *Impromptu*'s suite of parodies begins with *Nicomède* reminds us—and would have reminded Louis XIV—that Molière's success in Paris also began with *Nicomède*. Playing both sides in the exchange between the provincial actor and the Cornelian author would have allowed Molière not only to demonstrate his versatility as an actor but also to set up the crucial stylistic difference that undergirded his feud with the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Just as the *Impromptu*'s “spontaneous” dialogue throws into relief its “scripted” dialogue, so too does the sincerity of Molière, espousing a *jeu naturel*, throw into relief the pretensions of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Thus, the play connects its two suites of inset theatricality

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(i.e., its Bourguignon caricatures and its play-within-the-play marquises) by metonymically linking Bourguignon acting with one of his favorite targets for ridicule: affectation. The shared quality is, of course, falseness. This metonymy revisits that of *Les Précieuses ridicules*, in which Mascarille notes that he intends to send his play to the Hôtel de Bourgogne, because they know how to “make the poetry whirr, and stop at a beautiful spot.”¹⁰⁰ (“The others”—those who “recite like people talk”—are ignoramuses, he claims.)¹⁰¹

Mascarille’s approval of the Bourguignons satirizes more generally the popular taste of the time: theatregoers in general, for whom the Hôtel de Bourgogne represented the pinnacle of tragic acting, did not want to hear tragic alexandrines spoken with simplicity and naturalism.¹⁰² It is useful to remember that, however celebrated he was as a comedian and especially as a *farceur* during his lifetime, Molière was mocked for his tragic acting, in which he dropped the comic mask both literally and figuratively. (Mlle Béjart pointedly notes in the *Impromptu* that “imitating an actor in a comic role isn’t depicting the man himself, it’s depicting the roles he plays according to his manner [. . .]. But imitating an actor in serious roles is depicting him by faults that are entirely his own, since those sorts of roles do not require either the gestures or the ridiculous tones of voice by which he is recognized.”)¹⁰³ For reasons that the theoretical insights of the *Impromptu* make clear, however, stylized movement and exaggerated diction are incompatible with the notion of character advanced in *Nicomède*. Corneille’s play opposes the emotionally driven and rhetorically promoted machinations of Arsinoé and the Roman Flaminius versus the plainspoken rationalism of the hero.¹⁰⁴ I contend that we can see this opposition as analogous to that which Molière drew in the *Impromptu* between Bourguignon affectation and his own troupe’s transparency.

Because the surviving accounts are so few, we can merely speculate about the troupe’s performance of *Nicomède* for Louis XIV, before Molière had successfully established himself in Paris. The first page of La Grange’s *Registre* records only that “the troupe started at the Louvre, before His Majesty, the 24th of October 1658, with *Nicomède*.”¹⁰⁵ Did they give the court an aesthetic taste of what was to come? Or did they try to adapt to Bourguignon standards? Perrault later noted only that “the troupe didn’t succeed this first time.”¹⁰⁶ La Grange later noted (more ambiguously) that the “new actors did not displease, and the charm and the acting of the women were very satisfying.”¹⁰⁷ One can imagine that the villainous Arsinoé, presumably in the hands of Molière’s leading actress, Madeleine Béjart, stole the show. Of Molière’s performance La Grange recorded nothing. Nor did any member of the court audience. It is not even clear which role the director took for himself: following the logic of his progressive views of casting, it may have been Prusias, whose comic undertones would have suited Molière’s character; or it may have been the leading role, which best suits a natural style of delivery.¹⁰⁸

Whether he acted as the transparently virtuous hero or the father in whom virtuous change is effected, it will be clear how the play’s Cartesian sensibilities would have appealed to Molière, whose career we can read—as we can read *Nicomède*—as emblemizing the eventual triumph of a threatening new paradigm over an old one. If Molière did in fact choose to act Corneille in a new style, it is

tempting to read this choice as psychological wish fulfillment: the upstart takes on, and then converts, the father figure. He did not, of course; Corneille's Bourguignon loyalties were unflinching during his career. However, the older playwright's Cartesianism reveals him to have been on the wrong side of the artistic feud begun by the *querelle of l'École des femmes*. In the hindsight of intellectual history, we see more clearly two different Pierre Corneilles. On one hand, there is the playwright mocked in the *Impromptu*, who took part in the Hôtel de Bourgogne's attacks on Molière. On the other hand, there is the playwright whose later plays—I am thinking also of *Rodogune*, *Théodore*, and *Héraclius*—reveal philosophical insights that fit ill with the Bourguignon style. It is no accident that, whatever their personal animosities, Molière stuck with Corneille as he persevered in his new style of tragic acting: between 1658 and Molière's death in 1673, 166 performances of Corneille by Molière's troupe are recorded.¹⁰⁹

In a recent book, Dominique Labbé promotes the tenuous hypothesis that Corneille wrote Molière's best plays, whose lexicon he finds cornelian.¹¹⁰ I would counter that Corneille's interest in the self reveals him at his most *moliéresque*. Saint-Évremond noted in 1684 that Corneille had pushed beyond the tragic playwrights who preceded him. They saw drama as a series of actions, he claimed, whereas Corneille “went into their [i.e., the characters'] souls to find the principle behind their actions; he descended into their hearts to see the passions forming there, and to discover what was most hidden in their actions.”¹¹¹ Note the echoes of *Les Passions de l'âme*: what Saint-Évremond discovers in Corneille's tragedies is his dramatic consonance with Cartesian psychology. In 1635, when Corneille had Auguste declare “Je suis maistre de moy comme de l'Univers: / Je le suis, je veux l'estre,”¹¹² he prefigured Descartes's 1637 debut on the philosophical scene. Exploiting the pun “suis”—the first-person-singular form, in the present tense, of both *to be* and *to follow*, *être* and *suivre*—Corneille anticipates the Cartesian method by foregrounding the self that *is* alongside the self that *leads*: “I” is the self (“I am master of myself as of the universe. I am, I wish to be”) as “I” *follows* the self (“I am master of myself as of the universe. I follow it, I wish to be”). The Cartesian model of subjectivity, however, concerns not only thoughts, but the actions thoughts engender; not only the mind that governs, but the body that is governed. In thus affirming the primacy of the self in *Cinna*, Corneille limned a question on the page that would be fully, bodily, articulated by his rival on the stage.

Molière did so in various plays and performances during his career: as Harpagon, as Alceste, as Tartuffe. The psychological complexity of these characters is best served by an acting style that theatre history would vindicate over two hundred years later, one in which the mental interiorities of the actor and character come to penetrate one another. Indeed, it is no accident that Jansenist antitheatrical discourse in France rose along with Molière's success; such interpenetration was precisely their concern. Reminding Mlle Du Parc that her role in the *Impromptu* would require her to act out of character, Molière joked that “sometimes violence to ourselves is necessary.”¹¹³ The antitheatricalists took such violence much more seriously. They worried, first, that an actor made himself vulnerable to his character (in the sense of role) and, second, that the actor passed on this character (in the sense of moral quality) to unwitting

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spectators. For example, Bishop Bossuet noted that, “[b]y imitating something, we take on its spirit [. . .]: we become slaves alongside a slave, and full of vice alongside a vicious man; and, above all, to represent passions it is necessary to form inside of us those whose expression we wish to show outwardly. The spectator is carried along in this spirit.”¹¹⁴ In light of the theory of acting that Molière proposed and promoted, it is unsurprising that Jansenist antitheatrical prejudice, so unlike its Puritan counterpart in England, would reach its apogee against him: the *Tartuffe* affair would arrive less than a year after *L’Impromptu de Versailles*. Soon, Molière would be characterized as “one of most dangerous enemies that this world has raised up against the church of Jesus Christ.”¹¹⁵

However, from the Cartesian point of view, Molière can appear to us as virtuous, and the *Impromptu* as demonstrating the power of *générosité*. The political suspicions of *Nicomède* might be understood differently, as celebrating the imminent arrival of a great new king, Louis XIV, who unlike his predecessors would quell political discord precisely with a bold assertion of self: his complete centralization of power in his own hands, captured in the apocryphal maxim *l’État, c’est Moi* (“I am the State”). In this sense, the solipsistic implication of the *Impromptu*—it is expressly written for an audience of one—is particularly resonant. In a landmark article, Marc Fumaroli argued that the *Impromptu* celebrated Molière’s government of his troupe as a microcosmic instance of Louis XIV’s government of the country.¹¹⁶ I would add that the *générosité* shown by Molière in not personally attacking his critics as they had attacked him can be said to reflect, and even to emanate from, the *générosité* of the king who commanded the play. Louis XIV figures as a *deus ex machina* in the *Impromptu*, when word arrives in the final scene that he has postponed the performance until the troupe is better prepared. It is an act of grace so unostentatious as to be offstage. It was Louis XIV, too, who disbanded the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1680, by folding it and the rest of Molière’s troupe (including his widow) into the newly formed Comédie-Française; through it, Molière came to be recognized as the natural father of the French theatre. “La Maison de Molière,” as it is called, would of course outlast not only the king but the monarchy. The troupe’s most recent performance of *Nicomède* was in 1989.

ENDNOTES

1. The play’s hero bears an uncomfortable resemblance to Louis II of Bourbon, the Prince of Condé, who had been imprisoned by Cardinal Mazarin and the Queen Regent in January 1650 and released in February 1651, around the time of the play’s premiere. This resemblance has been described, most notably, by Paul Bénichou in his 1948 *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 86–92, and by Georges Couton in his *Corneille et la Fronde* (Paris: Clermont Ferrand, 1951), 67–77.

2. As Pierre Gaxotte speculates: “Molière a-t-il pensé qu’il serait plus à l’aise dans ce drame politique que dans une tragédie véritable?” *Molière* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977), 92.

3. Molière’s actor La Grange [Charles Varlet] recorded in the Preface to *Les Oeuvres* that “[l]es Fameux Comediens qui faisoient alors si bien valoir l’Hostel de Bourgogne, étoient presens à

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cette representation.” Molière, *Les Oeuvres de Monsieur de Molière*, 8 vols. (Paris: D. Thierry, C. Barbin, et P. Trabouillet, 1682), 1: sig. aiiii^r.

4. See, most forcefully, Hiram Caton, *The Origin of Subjectivity: An Essay on Descartes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

5. Dalia Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: The Origins of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

6. “effets des mêmes causes, expressions indépendantes du même esprit”; Gustave Lanson, “Le Héros cornélien et le ‘généreux’ selon Descartes,” *Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France* 1 (1894): 397–411, at 397.

7. See, for example, Jim Carmody, *Rereading Molière: Mise en Scène from Antoine to Vitez* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 7.

8. The anonymous report, dating from after Molière’s death, describes the playwright’s widow, Armande [Béjart] Molière, and La Grange in *Le Malade imaginaire*. It is recorded in François Parfaict, *Histoire du théâtre françois*, 15 vols. (Paris: P. G. Le Mercier et Saillant, 1747), 11: 324: “leur jeu se cache si bien dans la nature, que l’on ne pense pas à distinguer la vérité de la seule apparence.”

9. “Caracteres si bien marquez, que les Representations sembloient moins estre des Comedies que la verité mesme.” Charles Perrault, *Les Hommes illustres qui ont paru en France pendant ce siecle* (Paris: A. Dezallier, 1696), 79.

10. See Patrick Dandrey, *Molière ou l’esthétique du ridicule* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1992), 87. The *Impromptu*’s importance to seventeenth-century theatre studies has been inadequately recognized outside French-language scholarship, although the play is no longer as “determinedly neglected” as Francis Lawrence found it to be in his “Artist, Audience and Structure in *l’Impromptu de Versailles*,” *Oeuvres et Critiques* 6.1 (1981): 125–32, at 125. See, more recently, Cecile Lindsay, “Molière in the Post-Structuralist Age: *L’Impromptu de Versailles*,” *Theatre Journal* 34.3 (1982): 373–83; Abby Zanger, “Acting as Counteracting in Molière’s *The Impromptu of Versailles*,” *Theatre Journal* 38.2 (1986): 180–95; and Vincent Desroches, “Représentation et métatexte dans *L’Impromptu de Versailles* et la querelle de *L’École des femmes*,” *Romance Notes* 38.3 (1998): 321–31.

11. The *querelle* begins with Molière’s play *L’École des femmes*, which premiered on 26 December 1662. The play, its uneasy resonances with Molière’s marriage to Armande, and (no doubt) its success elicited various attacks on Molière, who was accused scurrilously of having married his lover’s daughter. Molière answered the attacks in *La Critique de l’École des femmes*, which premiered on 1 June 1663. *Le Portrait du peintre*, subtitled to the point as *La Contre-critique de l’École des femmes*, premiered at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in October 1663. Although the *Impromptu* was Molière’s final word in the feud, it did not yet end: the Bourguignons would respond with *La Réponse à l’Impromptu de Versailles ou La Vengeance de Marquis* and *L’Impromptu de l’Hôtel de Condé*. The Bourguignon plays are united in Georges Mongrédien, ed., *La Querelle de l’École des femmes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Didier, 1971).

12. “bonté toute particuliere”; Molière, *L’Impromptu de Versailles*, in *Les Oeuvres de Monsieur de Molière*, 7:126. (It is this edition that is cited hereafter as Molière, *L’Impromptu*.)

13. “la plus grande grace du monde”; *ibid.*

14. Molière, *The Rehearsal at Versailles*, in *One-Act Comedies of Molière*, trans. Albert Bermel (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1962), 95–118.

15. Albert Bermel, *Molière’s Theatrical Bounty: A New View of the Plays* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 107.

16. For example, see Gougenot, *La Comédie des comédiens* (Paris: P. David, 1633); Georges de Scudéry, *La Comédie des comédiens* (Paris: A. Courbé, 1635); Philippe Quinault, *La Comédie sans comédie* (Paris: G. de Luynes, 1657); or Dorimond, *La Comédie de la comédie et les Amours de Trapolin* (Paris: G. Quinet, 1661).

17. The scholarship gives at least five dates for the premiere. The first publication, in the 1682 *Oeuvres*, records 14 October (see 7:89), although this date has been doubted for various reasons. La Grange’s handwritten register notes only that “Le jeudy 11me Octobre La Troupe Est partie par ordre du Roy pour Versailles” and that among the plays the troupe performed was “*l’Impromptu dit*,

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a Cause de La nouveauté et du Lieu, *de Versailles*.” Bert Edward Young and Grace Philpott Young, eds., *Le Registre de la Grange, 1659–1685, reproduit en fac-similé* (Paris: E. Droz, 1947), 61.

18. Alain Rey et al., eds., *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, 2 vols. (Paris: Le Robert, 1993), 1:1006. Although such attributions are notoriously unreliable, it is telling that the dictionary attributes both the noun (denoting the genre) and the adjective (meaning “improvised”) to Molière himself.

19. “je suis diablement fort sur les Impromptus”; Molière, *Les Précieuses ridicules* (Paris: G. de Luyne, 1660), 64.

20. Thus, Georges Forestier notes that in Molière’s play “la double énonciation inhérente à tout discours théâtral se trouve réduite à une énonciation unique” (“the double enunciation [that is, actor and character] in all theatrical discourse is reduced to a single enunciation”). Forestier, *Le Théâtre dans le théâtre* (Geneva: Droz, 1981), 154.

21. Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 106–7:

MOLIÈRE:	Souvenez-vous bien, vous de venir, comme je vous ay dit, là avec cet air qu’on nomme le bel air, peignant vostre Perruque, & grondant une petite chanson entre vos dents. La, la, la, la, la. Rangez-vous donc vous autres, car il faut du terrain à deux Marquis, & ils ne sont pas gens à tenir leur personne dans un petit espace, allons parlez.
LA GRANGE:	Bon jour Marquis.
MOLIÈRE:	Mon Dieu, ce n’est point là le ton d’un Marquis, il faut le prendre un peu plus haut, & la plupart de ces Messieurs affectent une maniere de parler particuliere pour se distinguer du commun. Bon jour Marquis, recommencez-donc.
LA GRANGE:	Bon jour Marquis.
MOLIÈRE:	Ah! Marquis, ton serviteur.

Although modern editions—see, for example, the Gallimard edition: Molière, *L’Impromptu de Versailles*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Georges Couton, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), at 1: 685—use quotation marks to set off scripted from putatively unscripted lines, the original published text does not. The 1682 text’s failure to distinguish between the two ontological levels operating in the play is theoretically provocative, though likely unintentional.

22. “une doctrine d’art alors révolutionnaire”; Léopold Lacour, *Molière acteur* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1928), 87.

23. “tâchez-donc de bien prendre tous le caractere de vos rôles, & de vous figurer que vous estes ce que vous representez”; Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 101.

24. The Robert *Dictionnaire historique*, 347–8, describes how the meaning of *caractère* as sign or printed mark underwent a “grande expansion” in the seventeenth century, when the word came to designate “abstraitement le caractère distinctif d’une chose (1662, d’un sentiment)” and “l’ensemble de traits dominants de la physiognomie morale d’un homme (av. 1662, Pascal).” Compare *O.E.D.*, whose earliest usages in English are in the sense of “distinctive mark impressed, engraved, or otherwise formed; a brand, stamp.” The first listed instance of the word in the sense of “sum of the moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual [. . .] viewed as a homogeneous whole” is 1647. In English, the usage of “character” in the sense of “role assumed by a stage actor” dates from 1664, according to the *O.E.D.*

25. “entrez bien dans ce caractere”; Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 102.

26. William Shakespeare, *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London: I. Iaggard & Ed. Blount, 1623), 256.

27. “vous deviez faire une Comedie où vous auriez joué tout seul”; Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 96.

28. “je ne sçaurois aller jouer mon rôle si je ne le repete tout entier”; *ibid.*, 123.

29. To Molière’s demand that they “employons ce temps [the rehearsal] [. . .] & voir la maniere dont il faut jouer les choses,” La Grange responds, “Le moyen de jouer ce qu’on ne sçait pas?” *Ibid.*, 93.

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30. See Robert J. Nelson, “*L’Impromptu de Versailles* Reconsidered,” *French Studies* 11 (1957): 305–14, at 306.

31. A year before Molière’s return to Paris, for example, Vincent de Paul had reported that some actors had changed their delivery and were now speaking familiarly to the spectators: “Croiriez-vous, Monsieur, que les comédiens [. . .] ont changé leur manière de parler et ne récitent plus leurs vers avec un ton élevé, comme ils faisaient autrefois? Mais il le font avec une voix médiocre et comme parlant familièrement à ceux qui les écoutent.” Vincent de Paul, *Correspondance, entretiens, documents*, ed. Pierre Coste, 14 vols. (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1920–5), 6: 378–9. For his discovery of this letter, I am indebted to Jacques Truchet, *La Tragédie classique en France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1975).

32. “il faut peindre d’après Nature”; Molière, *La Critique de l’Escole des femmes* (Paris: G. Quinet, 1663), 83.

33. “Comment pretendez-vous que nous fassions, si nous ne sçavons pas nos rôles?” Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 95.

34. “Vous les sçavez, vous dy-je”; *ibid.*

35. Dorante lauds “le bon sens naturel”; Molière, *La Critique*, 86. He is concerned not with the actor but the spectator, whose judgment is deemed a superior guide than the classical rules or *règles*. See *ibid.*, 50, 97.

36. René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* (Leiden: I. Maire, 1637), 11:

sitost que l’aage me permit de sortir de la sujétion de mes Precepteurs, je quittay entièrement l’estude des lettres. Et me resolvant de ne chercher plus d’autre science, que celle qui se pourroit trouver en moyesme, oubien dans le grand livre du monde, j’employay le reste de ma jeunesse [. . .] à faire telle reflexion sur les choses qui se presentoient que j’en pusse tirer quelque profit.

Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 5–6, translates the passage thus:

as soon as age permitted me to emerge from the supervision of my teachers, I completely abandoned the study of letters. And resolving to search for no knowledge other than what could be found within myself, or else in the great book of the world, I spent the rest of my youth [. . .] engaging in such reflection upon the things that presented themselves that I was able to derive some profit from them.

37. Renati Des-Cartes [i.e., René Descartes], *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (Paris: M. Soli, 1641), 7–8:

Animadverti iam ante aliquot annos quàm multa ineunte ætate falsa pro veris admiserim, & quàm dubia sint quæcunque istis postea superextruxi, ac proinde funditùs omnia semel in vita esse evertenda, atque à primis fundamentis denuò inchoandum, si quid aliquando firmum, & mansurum cupiam in scientiis stabilire[.]

Cress’s translation at Descartes, *Meditations*, 59, reads:

Several years have now passed since I first realized how numerous were the false opinions that in my youth I had taken to be true, and thus how doubtful were all those that I had subsequently built upon them. And thus I realized that once in my life I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences.

38. Joseph R. Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 62–8.

39. To Du Croisy: “vous devez vous remplir de ce personnage”; Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 101. To Mlle Béjart: “ayez toûjours ce caractere devant les yeux”; *ibid.*, 102. To Mlle De Brie: “entrez bien

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dans ce caractère”; *ibid.* He ends his directions by noting: “je vous dis tous vos caractères, afin que vous vous les imprimiez fortement dans l’esprit”; *ibid.*, 103.

40. In his *The Theatres of Molière* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 142–3, Gerry McCarthy argues that *caractère* cannot be understood in psychological terms, but an attentive reading of the *Impromptu* suggests otherwise. Dandrey, 109, provides a starkly different view: he reads *caractère* as an

abstraction en voie d’incarnation, phase transitoire entre les personnes et les personnages, fantôme par lequel le comédien doit se laisser envahir, fasciner et hanter [. . .], pour à son tour en féconder un rôle pour l’instant tout verbal et à peine visuel. . . .

[abstraction in the process of incarnation; a transitory phase between people and characters; a phantom which the actor must let invade, fascinate and haunt him . . . in order to fertilize a role, which for the moment is entirely verbal and hardly visual. . . .]

Although his image is rather phantasmic, it usefully suggests the *caractère*’s function in the actor’s process, that is, the mental representation that will precede and guide the physical representation ultimately performed.

41. “je vous dis tous vos caractères”; Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 103. In French, *caractère* does not typically mean “role” or “part”; Molière’s unusual usage (see n. 24) is noted by the Robert *Dictionnaire historique*, 348.

42. See Nelson, 305–6.

43. See René Bray, *Molière: Homme de théâtre* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1954), 149.

44. “Cela est vrai”; Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 101.

45. She and her husband had joined the Théâtre de Marais. See *Le Registre de La Grange*, 3.

46. Henry Lyonnet, *Dictionnaire des comédiens français (ceux d’hier)*, 2 vols. (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), 1:616.

47. On the troupe’s changing composition and its relationship to Molière’s increasingly naturalistic writing, see Roger Herzog, “Le Jeu ‘naturel’ de Molière et de sa troupe,” *Dix-septième siècle* 132 (1981): 279–83, at 281–2.

48. “Il a [. . .] entendu admirablement les habits des Acteurs en leur donnant leur véritable caractère, & il a eu encore le don de distribuer si bien les Personnages & de les instruire ensuite si parfaitement, qu’ils sembloient moins des Acteurs de Comédie que les vraies Personnes qu’ils representoient.” Perrault, 80.

49. Robert Garapon notes that Molière had abandoned monologues almost entirely by 1663. “Les monologues, acteurs et le public en France,” in *Dramaturgie et société: Rapports entre l’oeuvre théâtrale, son interprétation et son public aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, ed. Jean Jacquot, 2 vols. (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1968), 1:254.

50. See Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 95.

51. For example, within a single volume of a single edition, we have both: in Volume 8 of the 1682 *Oeuvres*, *Le Malade imaginaire* lists its “Acteurs” at 134 and *Les Aman[t]s magnifiques* lists its “Personnages” at 6. The same phenomenon is seen in other volumes.

52. See Martine Clermont, “L’Acteur et son jeu au XVII^e siècle: Ses rapports avec le personnage qu’il représente,” *Revue d’histoire du théâtre* 33.4 (1981): 379–88, at 380–1.

53. See also four such usages of *acteur* by Éraсте in Molière, *Les Fâcheux* (Paris: G. de Luyne, 1662), 8, 8, 9, 9; one by Sbrigani in Molière, *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (Paris: J. Ribou, 1670), 8; one by Covielle in Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (Paris: P. Le Monnier, 1671), 111; and one by the countess in *La Comtesse d’Escarbagnas*, in *Les Oeuvres de Monsieur de Molière*, 8: 114.

54. Clermont, 380.

55. Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 90.

56. Jacques Truchet makes this point in “*L’Impromptu de Versailles*: ‘Comédie des comédiens,’” in *Langue, littérature du XVII^e et du XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Roger Lathuillère (Paris: Sedes,

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1990): 153–61, at 154. By contrast, *L'École des femmes* had used eight of the troupe; *Critique de l'École des femmes*, six.

57. “tous habillez”; Molière, *L'Impromptu*, 93.

58. So dominant is this understanding of Corneille that a survey text such as V. L. Saulnier's can claim that “Corneille a fait vivre le *généreux* de Descartes.” Saulnier, *La Littérature française du siècle classique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970), 53. Readings of Cornelian *générosité* are provided by Lanson, “Le Héros cornélien”; Pierre-Henri Simon, *Le Domaine héroïque des lettres françaises* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1963), 141–4; and André Stegmann, *L'héroïsme cornélien: Genèse et signification* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968), 467–71. The relationship between Cornelian and Cartesian thought more generally is traced by Lanson, “L'Influence de la philosophie cartésienne sur la littérature française,” *Revue de métaphysique* 1896: 517–50; Jean-Marie Beyssade, “Descartes et Corneille ou les démesures de l'égo,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 47.1 (1991): 63–82; and Ernst Cassirer, *Descartes, Corneille, Christine de Suède*, trans. Madeleine Francès and Paul Schrecker (Paris: J. Vrin, 1981).

59. Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 104. The original (Descartes, *Les Passions de l'ame* [Paris: Henry Le Gras: 1649], 210) reads:

partie en ce qu'il connoist qu'il n'y a rien qui veritablement luy appartienne, que cette libre disposition de ses volonte, ny pourquoy il doit estre loüé ou blasmé, sinon pource qu'il en use bien ou mal; & partie en ce qu'il sent en soy mesme une ferme & constante resolution d'en bien user, c'est à dire de ne manquer jamais de volenté, pour entreprendre & executer toutes les choses qu'il jugera estre les meilleures. Ce qui est suivre parfaitement la vertu.

A minor correction to Voss's translation: his pronoun (“it”) refers to the antecedent “free control”; Descartes's (“en”) stresses the antecedent “volitions.”

60. Corneille, “Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter, selon le vray-semblable ou le necessaire,” in *Le Theatre de P. Corneille, reveu & corrigé par l'Auteur*, 3 vols. (Paris: A. Courbé and G. de Luynes, 1660), 2:xiv. Corneille presumably has in mind Aristotle's stipulation in Chapter 13 of the *Poetics* that the tragic hero should not be outstanding.

61. “Je veux bien mettre à part, avec le nom d'ainé, / Le rang de vostre maistre où je suis destiné, / Et nous verrons ainsi qui fait mieux un brave homme, / Des leçons d'Annibal, ou celles de Rome.” Corneille, *Nicomède* (Rouen: L. Maurry, 1651), 19.

62. “Adieu, pensez-y bien, je vous laisse y rêver.” *Ibid.*

63. “entierement maistres de leurs Passions”; Descartes, *Les Passions de l'ame*, 214.

64. See Nicolas Boileau [Despréaux], *L'Art poétique*, in *Oeuvres diverses du Sieur D**** (Paris: Denis Thierry, 1674), 119.

65. Corneille, *Nicomède*, 23–4:

j'ay creu pour le mieux
Qu'il [Nicomède] failloit de son fort l'attirer en ces lieux.
Metrobate l'a fait par des terreurs Paniques,
Feignant de luy trahir mes ordres tyranniques,
Et pour l'assassiner se disant suborné,
Il me l'a, grace aux Dieux, doucement amené.
Il vient s'en plaindre au Roy; luy demander justice,
Et sa plainte le jette au bord du précipice:
Sans prendre aucun soucy de m'en justifier,
Je sçauray m'en servir à me fortifier.
Tantost en le voyant j'ay fait de l'effrayée,
J'ay changé de couleur, je me suis écriée,
Il a creu me surprendre, & l'a creu bien en vain,
Puisque son retour mesme est l'oeuvre de ma main.

66. “Ce fils donc [...] a pressé la soif de sa vengeance.” *Ibid.*, 22.

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67. In private discussion with Laodice, Nicomède worries that “[m]a generosité cède enfin à sa [i.e., Arsinoé’s] haine.” Ibid., 62. He worries unnecessarily.

68. Laodice notes that Prusias “[n]e voit pas que par ses yeux,” an effect of Arsinoé’s pretentiously parading before him, as Nicomède alleges: “avec tant de pompe à vos yeux elle étale.” Ibid., 2, 80.

69. See *ibid.*, 86:

NICOMÈDE: Seigneur, voulez-vous bien vous en fier à moy?
 Ne soyez l’un ny l’autre. [i.e., neither father nor husband]
 PRUSIAS: Et que dois-je estre?
 NICOMÈDE: Roy.

70. The playwright refers to the “la generosité de ce fils” [“generosity of the son”] and calls Nicomède a “fils genereux” [“generous son”]. Corneille, “Discours,” xxviii, xxii.

71. “l’admiration de tant d’hommes parfaits [...] / N’est pas grande vertu si l’on ne les imite”; Corneille, *Nicomède*, 42.

72. See Descartes, Article 203, “Que la Générosité sert de remede contre ses [i.e., anger’s] excès,” in *Les Passions de l’ame*, 272. See also Article 148, “Que l’exercice de la vertu est un souverain remede contre les Passions,” in *ibid.*, 203.

73. Corneille, “Au lecteur,” in *Nicomède*, sig. aiii^v.

74. “Dans l’admiration qu’on a pour sa vertu je trouve une maniere de purger les passions, dont n’a point parlé Aristote, & qui est peut-estre plus seure que celle qu’il prescrit à la Tragedie par le moyen de la pitié & de la crainte.” Corneille, “Examen,” in *Le Theatre de P. Corneille*, 3:lxvii.

75. See Corneille, “Discours,” xii, where he says of Aristotelian catharsis that “je doute si elle s’y fait jamais, & dans celles-là mesme qui ont les conditions que demande Aristote.”

76. “d’assassins acheptez par sa haine”; Corneille, *Nicomède*, 6.

77. “Fuyez donc les fureurs qui saisissent mon ame. / Apres le coup fatal de cette indignité / Je n’ay plus ny respect, ny generosité.” Ibid., 115.

78. “L’amour que j’ay pour vous a commis cette offence.” Ibid., 32.

79. Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, 52. The original (Descartes, *Les Passions de l’ame*, 82–3) reads:

Lorsque la premiere rencontre de quelque object nous surprend, & que nous le jugeons estre nouveau, ou fort different de ce que nous connoissons auparavant, ou bien de ce que nous supposions qu’il devoit estre, cela fait que nous l’admirons & en sommes estonnez. Et pour ce que cela peut arriver avant que nous connoissions aucunement si cet objet nous est convenable, ou s’il ne l’est pas, il me semble que l’Admiration est la premiere de toutes les passions. Et elle n’a point de contraire, à cause que si l’objet qui se presente n’a rien en soy qui nous surprenne, nous n’en sommes aucunement émeus, & nous le considerons sans passion.

80. The spirits work to “fortifier & conserver” the impression of the object as “rare, & par consequent digne d’estre fort considéré.” Descartes, *Les Passions de l’ame*, 95.

81. See *ibid.*, 96.

82. The frontispiece is reproduced in Corneille, *Le Theatre de P. Corneille*, 3:362.

83. “Tout est calme, Seigneur, un moment de ma veuë/ A soudain appaisé la populace émeüë.” Corneille, *Nicomède*, 120.

84. “L’amour qu’elle nous donne pour cette vertu que nous admirons, nous imprime de la haine pour le vice contraire.” Corneille, “Examen,” lxxvii.

85. Nicolas Boileau [Despréaux], “A Monsieur Perrault de l’Academie Française,” in *Oeuvres diverses du S^r Boileau Despreaux*, 2 vols. (Paris: D. Thierry, 1701), 2:126:

Corneille [...] fait inventer un nouveau genre de Tragedie inconnu à Aristote [...]. [I]l n’a point songé, comme les Poëtes de l’ancienne Tragedie, à émouvoir la Pitié & la Terreur; mais à exciter dans l’ame des Spectateurs, par la sublimité des pensées, & par

la beauté des sentimens, une certaine admiration, dont plusieurs Personnes, & les jeunes gens sur tout, s'accoutument souvent beaucoup mieux que des véritables passions Tragiques.

[Corneille gave rise to a new genre of tragedies unknown to Aristotle [. . .]. He never dreamed like poets of ancient tragedy to rouse pity and fear but rather to excite in the soul of the audience, through sublime thoughts and beautiful sentiments, a certain wonder, which many people, and the young above all, adapt to much better than the real tragic passions (of pity and fear).]

86. Corneille, *Nicomède*, 122:

Seigneur, faut-il si loin pousser votre victoire,
Et qu'ayant en vos mains & mes jours, & ma gloire,
La haute ambition d'un si puissant vainqueur
Veüille encor triompher jusques dedans mon coeur?
Contre tant de vertu je ne le puis défendre,
Il est impatient luy-mesme de se rendre:
Joignez cette conquête à trois Sceptres conquis,
Et je croiray gagner en vous un second fils.

87. Bruce Griffiths, "'La Fourbe' and 'la générosité': Fair and Foul Play in *Nicomède*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 1 (1965): 339–51, at 348.

88. Pierre Brisson, *Molière: Sa vie dans ses oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 45.

89. La Grange's Preface to Molière, *Les Oeuvres de Monsieur de Molière*, 1: sig. aiiiii^r:

La piece étant achevée, Monsieur de Moliere vint sur le Theatre, & après avoir remercié Sa Majesté en des termes tres-modestes, de la bonté qu'elle avoit eüe d'excuser ses deffauts & ceux de toute sa Troupe, qui n'avoit paru qu'en tremblant devant une Assemblée si Auguste; il luy dit que l'envie qu'ils avoient eüe d'avoir l'honneur de divertir le plus grand Roy du monde, leur avoit fait oublier que Sa Majesté avoit à son service d'excellens Originaux, dont ils n'estoient que de tres-foibles copies[.]

90. "souffrir leurs manieres de campagne"; *ibid.*

91. "trois ou quatre fois depuis que nous sommes à Paris"; Molière, *L'Impromptu*, 97.

92. "je n'ay attrappé de leur maniere de reciter"; *ibid.*

93. The others were Louis Béjart, Mlle [i.e., Madeleine] Béjart, Mlle Hervé [i.e., Geneviève Béjart], and, of course, Molière. See *Le Registre de La Grange*, 2.

94. "Le plus naturellement qui luy auroit esté possible." Molière, *L'Impromptu*, 98.

95. "Te le diray-je Araspe, il m'a trop bien servy, / Augmentant mon pouvoir." *Ibid.* See also (and identically except for punctuation) Corneille, *Nicomède*, 29.

96. "il faut dire les choses avec emphase. Ecoutez-moy. Te le diray-je, Araspe. . . &c. *Imitant Monfleyru excellent Acteur de l'Hostel de Bourgogne. Voyez-vous cette posture? remarquez bien cela. là [sic] appuyer comme il faut le dernier Vers. Voilà ce qui attire l'approbation, & fait faire le brouhaha.*" Molière, *L'Impromptu*, 98–9.

97. "il me semble qu'un Roy qui s'entretient tout seul avec son Capitaine des Gardes, parle un peu plus humainement, & ne prend gueres ce ton de demoniaque"; *ibid.*, 99.

98. On this point, see Bermel, 107.

99. "Le beau sujet à divertir la Cour, que Monsieur Boursault. Je voudrois bien sçavoir de quelle façon on pourroit l'ajuster pour le rendre plaisant. . . ." Molière, *L'Impromptu*, 122.

100. "faire ronfler les vers, & s'arrester au bel endroit"; Molière, *Les Précieuses ridicules*, 78.

101. "Les autres sont des ignorans, qui recitent comme l'on parle." *Ibid.*

102. Forestier, 220, notes that, however difficult it is to imagine in hindsight, the *jeu emphatique* was privileged in tragedy; André Villiers, "Le Comédien Molière et l'expression du tragique," *Revue d'histoire du théâtre* 26.1 (1974): 27–52, at 49, notes that the Hôtel de Bourgogne

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was in effect the most esteemed acting school for the tragic performer. See also Georges Mongrédien, *La Vie privée de Molière* (Paris: Hachette, 1950), 185.

103. “contrefaire un Comedien dans un rôle Comique, ce n’est pas le peindre luy-mesme, c’est peindre d’après luy les Personnages qu’il represente [. . .]. Mais contrefaire un Comedien dans des rôles sérieux, c’est le peindre par des défauts qui sont entierement de luy, puisque ces sortes de Personnages ne veulent, ny les gestes, ny les tons de voix ridicules, dans lesquels on le reconnoist.” Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 97.

104. See Griffiths, 342.

105. “La Troupe [. . .] Commança au Louvre devant S. M^{te}. Le 24^{me} octobre 1658 par Nicomede.” *Registre de La Grange*, 1. Even this record is retrospective: La Grange joined Molière’s troupe six months after the court performance.

106. “la Troupe ne réussit pas cette premiere fois.” Perrault, 79.

107. “Ces nouveaux Acteurs ne déplurent point, & on fut sur tout fort satisfait de l’agrément & du jeu des Femmes.” La Grange’s Preface to Molière, *Les Oeuvres de Monsieur de Molière*, 1: sig. aiiii^r.

108. The first assumption is that of Lacour, 56; the second, that of Ramon Fernandez, *La Vie de Molière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1929), 66.

109. On Molière’s fidelity to his new acting principles, see, for example, Mongrédien, *La vie privée*, 185, or Lacour, 91. My tally of Molière’s performances of Corneille is based on the tables provided in W. D. Howarth, *Molière: A Playwright and His Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 313–15.

110. Dominique Labbé, *Corneille dans l’ombre de Molière* (Paris: Impressions nouvelles, 2003).

111. “[Corneille] est allé au fond de leur ame chercher le principe de leurs actions, il est descendu dans leur cœur pour y voir former les passions; & y découvrir ce qu’il y a de plus caché dans leurs mouvemens.” Charles de Saint-Évremond, “Sur les tragedies,” in *Oeuvres meslées*, 11 vols. (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1684), 11 : 1–20, at 10–11.

112. Corneille, *Cinna, ou la clémence d’Auguste* (Rouen: T. Quinet, 1643), 106.

113. “il faut par fois se faire violence”; Molière, *L’Impromptu*, 113.

114. “en imitant quelque chose, on en prenoit l’esprit [. . .]: on devoit esclave avec un esclave; vicieux avec un homme vicieux; & sur tout, en representant les passions, il falloit former au-dedans celles dont on vouloit porter au dehors l’expression & le caractere. Le spectateur entroit aussi dans le mesme esprit.” Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, *Maximes et reflexions sur la comédie* (Paris: J. Anisson, 1694), 59–60.

115. “un des plus dangereux ennemis que le Siecle ou le Monde ait suscité à l’Eglise de Jesus-Christ”; Adrien Baillet, *Jugemens des sçavans sur les principaux ouvrages des auteurs*, 9 vols. (Paris: A. Deszallier, 1686), 5 : 110.

116. Marc Fumaroli, “Microcosme comique et macrocosme solaire: Molière, Louis XIV, et *L’Impromptu de Versailles*,” *Revue des sciences humaines* 37.145 (1972): 95–114.