

ЖАН-БАТИСТ МОЛЬЕР

THE BORES

Жан-Батист Мольер

The Bores

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The Bores: A Comedy in Three Acts:

Содержание

INTRODUCTORY NOTICE	4
PREFACE	14
PROLOGUE	17
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	18

Molière

The Bores: A Comedy in Three Acts

INTRODUCTORY NOTICE

The Bores is a character-comedy; but the peculiarities taken as the text of the play, instead of being confined to one or two of the leading personages, are exhibited in different forms by a succession of characters, introduced one after the other in rapid course, and disappearing after the brief performance of their rôles. We do not find an evolution of natural situations, proceeding from the harmonious conduct of two or three individuals, but rather a disjointed series of tableaux – little more than a collection of monologues strung together on a weak thread of explanatory comments, enunciated by an unwilling listener.

The method is less artistic, if not less natural; less productive of situations, if capable of greater variety of illustrations. The circumstances under which Molière undertook to compose the play explain his resort to the weaker manner of analysis. The Superintendent-General of finance, [Footnote: In Sir James Stephen's *Lectures on the History of France*, vol. ii. page 22, I find: "Still further to centralize the fiscal economy of France,

Philippe le Bel created a new ministry. At the head of it he placed an officer of high rank, entitled the Superintendent-General of Finance, and, in subordination to him, he appointed other officers designated as Treasurers."] Nicolas Fouquet desiring to entertain the King, Queen, and court at his mansion of Vaux-le-Vicomte, asked for a comedy at the hands of the Palais-Royal company, who had discovered the secret of pleasing the Grand Monarque. Molière had but a fortnight's notice; and he was expected, moreover, to accommodate his muse to various prescribed styles of entertainment.

Fouquet wanted a cue for a dance by Beauchamp, for a picture by Lebrun, for stage devices by Torelli. Molière was equal to the emergency. Never, perhaps, was a literary work written to order so worthy of being preserved for future generations. Not only were the intermediate ballets made sufficiently elastic to give scope for the ingenuity of the poet's auxiliaries, but the written scenes themselves were admirably contrived to display all the varied talent of his troupe.

The success of the piece on its first representation, which took place on the 17th of August, 1661, was unequivocal; and the King summoned the author before him in order personally to express his satisfaction. It is related that, the Marquis de Soyecourt passing by at the time, the King said to Molière, "There is an original character which you have not yet copied." The suggestion was enough. The result was that, at the next representation, Dorante the hunter, a new bore, took his place

in the comedy.

Louis XIV. thought he had discovered in Molière a convenient mouthpiece for his dislikes. The selfish king was no lover of the nobility, and was short-sighted enough not to perceive that the author's attacks on the nobles paved the way for doubts on the divine right of kings themselves. Hence he protected Molière, and entrusted to him the care of writing plays for his entertainments; the public did not, however, see *The Bores* until the 4th of November of the same year; and then it met with great success.

The bore is ubiquitous, on the stage as in everyday life. Horace painted him in his famous passage commencing *Ibam forte via Sacrà*, and the French satirist, Regnier, has depicted him in his eighth satire.

Molière had no doubt seen the Italian farce, "*Le Case svaligliate ovvero gli Interrompimenti di Pantalone*," which appears to have directly provided him with the thread of his comedy. This is the gist of it. A girl, courted by Pantaloon, gives him a rendezvous in order to escape from his importunities; whilst a cunning knave sends across his path a medley of persons to delay his approach, and cause him to break his appointment. This delay, however, is about the only point of resemblance between the Italian play and the French comedy.

There are some passages in Scarron's *Epîtres chagrines* addressed to the Marshal d'Albret and M. d'Elbène, from which our author must have derived a certain amount of inspiration; for

in these epistles the writer reviews the whole tribe of bores, in coarse but vigorous language.

Molière dedicated *The Bores* to Louis XIV. in the following words:

SIRE,

I am adding one scene to the Comedy, and a man who dedicates a book is a species of Bore insupportable enough. Your Majesty is better acquainted with this than any person in the kingdom: and this is not the first time that you have been exposed to the fury of Epistles Dedicatory. But though I follow the example of others, and put myself in the rank of those I have ridiculed; I dare, however, assure Your Majesty, that what I have done in this case is not so much to present You a book, as to have the opportunity of returning You thanks for the success of this Comedy. I owe, Sire, that success, which exceeded my expectations, not only to the glorious approbation with which Your Majesty honoured this piece at first, and which attracted so powerfully that of all the world; but also to the order, which You gave me, to add a *Bore*, of which Yourself had the goodness to give me the idea, and which was proved by everyone to be the finest part of the work. [Footnote: See Prefatory Memoir, page xxviii. ?] I must confess, Sire, I never did any thing with such ease and readiness, as that part, where I had Your Majesty's commands to work.

The pleasure I had in obeying them, was to me more than *Apollo* and all the *Muses*; and by this I conceive what I should

be able to execute in a complete Comedy, were I inspired by the same commands. Those who are born in an elevated rank, may propose to themselves the honour of serving Your Majesty in great Employments; but, for my part, all the glory I can aspire to, is to amuse You. [Footnote: In spite of all that has been said about Molière's passionate fondness for his profession, I imagine he must now and then have felt some slight, or suffered from some want of consideration. Hence perhaps the above sentence. Compare with this Shakespeare's hundred and eleventh sonnet:

"Oh! for my sake, do you with Fortune chide
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means which public manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand;
And almost thence my nature is subdu'd
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand."]

The ambition of my wishes is confined to this; and I think that, to contribute any thing to the diversion of her King, is, in some respects, not to be useless to France. Should I not succeed in this, it shall never be through want of zeal, or study; but only through a hapless destiny, which often accompanies the best intentions, and which, to a certainty, would be a most sensible affliction to SIRE, *Your MAJESTY'S most humble, most obedient, and most faithful Servant,*
MOLIÈRE.

In the eighth volume of the "Select Comedies of M. de Molière, London, 1732," the play of *The Bores* is dedicated, under the name of *The Impertinents*, to the Right Honourable the Lord Carteret, [Footnote: John, Lord Carteret, born 22nd April, 1690, twice Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, was Secretary of State and head of the Ministry from February, 1742, until November 23, 1744, became Earl Granville that same year, on the death of his mother; was president of the Council in 1751, and died in 1763.] in the following words:

MY LORD,

It is by Custom grown into a sort of Privilege for Writers, of whatsoever Class, to attack Persons of Rank and Merit by these kind of Addresses. We conceive a certain Charm in Great and Favourite Names, which soothes our Reader, and prepossesses him in our Favour: We deem ourselves of Consequence, according to the Distinction of our Patron; and come in for our Share in the Reputation he bears in the World. Hence it is, MY LORD, that Persons of the greatest Worth are most expos'd to these Insults.

For however usual and convenient this may be to a Writer, it must be confess'd, MY LORD, it may be some degree of Persecution to a *Patron*; Dedicators, as *Molière* observes, being a Species of *Impertinents*, troublesome enough. Yet the Translator of this Piece hopes he may be rank'd among the more tolerable ones, in presuming to inscribe to Your LORDSHIP the *Facheux of Molière* done into *English*; assuring himself that

Your LORDSHIP will not think any thing this Author has writ unworthy of your Patronage; nor discourage even a weaker Attempt to make him more generally read and understood.

Your LORDSHIP is well known, as an absolute Master, and generous Patron of Polite Letters; of those Works especially which discover a Moral, as well as Genius; and by a delicate Raillery laugh men out of their Follies and Vices: could the Translator, therefore, of this Piece come anything near the Original, it were assured of your Acceptance. He will not dare to arrogate any thing to himself on this Head, before so good a Judge as Your LORDSHIP: He hopes, however, it will appear that, where he seems too superstitious a Follower of his Author, 'twas not because he could not have taken more Latitude, and have given more Spirit; but to answer what he thinks the most essential part of a Translator, to lead the less knowing to the Letter; and after better Acquaintance, Genius will bring them to the Spirit.

The Translator knows your LORDSHIP, and Himself too well to attempt Your Character, even though he should think this a proper occasion: The Scholar – the Genius – the Statesman – the Patriot – the Man of Honour and Humanity. – Were a Piece finish'd from these Out-lines, the whole World would agree in giving it Your LORDSHIP.

But that requires a Hand – the Person, who presents This, thinks it sufficient to be indulg'd the Honour of subscribing himself *My LORD, Your Lordship's most devoted, most obedient,*

humble servant,

THE TRANSLATOR

Thomas Shadwell, whom Dryden flagellates in his *Mac-Flecknoe*, and in the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, and whom Pope mentions in his *Dunciad*, wrote *The Sullen Lovers, or the Impertinents*, which was first performed in 1668 at the Duke of York's Theatre, by their Majesties' Servants.

This play is a working up of *The Bores* and *The Misanthrope*, with two scenes from *The Forced Marriage*, and a reminiscence from *The Love-Tiff*. It is dedicated to the "Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince William, Duke, Marquis, and Earl of Newcastle," because all Men, who pretend either to Sword or Pen, ought "to shelter themselves under Your Grace's Protection." Another reason Shadwell gives for this dedication is in order "to rescue this (play) from the bloody Hands of the Criticks, who will not dare to use it roughly, when they see Your Grace's Name in the beginning." He also states, that "the first Hint I received was from the Report of a Play of Molière's of three Acts, called *Les Fâcheux*, upon which I wrote a great part of this before I read that." He borrowed, after reading it, the first scene in the second act, and Molière's story of Piquet, which he translated into Backgammon, and says, "that he who makes a common practice of stealing other men's wit, would if he could with the same safety, steal anything else." Shadwell mentions,

however, nothing of borrowing from *The Misanthrope* and *The Forced Marriage*. The preface was, besides political difference, the chief cause of the quarrel between Shadwell and Dryden; for in it the former defends Ben Jonson against the latter, and mentions that – "I have known some of late so insolent to say that Ben Jonson wrote his best playes without wit, imagining that all the wit playes consisted in bringing two persons upon the stage to break jest, and to bob one another, which they call repartie." The original edition of *The Sullen Lovers* is partly in blank verse; but, in the first collected edition of Shadwell's works, published by his son in 1720, it is printed in prose. Stanford, "a morose, melancholy man, tormented beyond measure with the impertinence of people, and resolved to leave the world to be quit of them" is a combination of Alceste in *The Misanthrope*, and Éraste in *The Bores*; Lovel, "an airy young gentleman, friend to Stanford, one that is pleased with, and laughs at, the impertinents; and that which is the other's torment, is his recreation," is Philinte of *The Misanthrope*; Emilia and Carolina appear to be Célimène and Eliante; whilst Lady Vaine is an exaggerated Arsinoé of the same play. Sir Positive At-all, "a foolish knight that pretends to understand everything in the world, and will suffer no man to understand anything in his Company, so foolishly positive, that he will never be convinced of an error, though never so gross," is a very good character, and an epitome of all the Bores into one.

The prologue of *The Sullen Lovers* begins thus: —

"How popular are Poets now-a-days!
Who can more Men at their first summons raise,
Than many a wealthy home-bred Gentleman,
By all his Interest in his Country can.
They raise their Friends; but in one Day arise
'Gainst one poor Poet all these Enemies."

PREFACE

Never was any Dramatic performance so hurried as this; and it is a thing, I believe, quite new, to have a comedy planned, finished, got up, and played in a fortnight. I do not say this to boast of an *impromptu*, or to pretend to any reputation on that account: but only to prevent certain people, who might object that I have not introduced here all the species of Bores who are to be found. I know that the number of them is great, both at the Court and in the City, and that, without episodes, I might have composed a comedy of five acts and still have had matter to spare. But in the little time allowed me, it was impossible to execute any great design, or to study much the choice of my characters, or the disposition of my subject. I therefore confined myself to touching only upon a small number of Bores; and I took those which first presented themselves to my mind, and which I thought the best fitted for amusing the august personages before whom this play was to appear; and, to unite all these things together speedily, I made use of the first plot I could find. It is not, at present, my intention to examine whether the whole might not have been better, and whether all those who were diverted with it laughed according to rule. The time may come when I may print my remarks upon the pieces I have written: and I do not despair letting the world see that, like a grand author, I can quote Aristotle and Horace. In expectation of this examination,

which perhaps may never take place, I leave the decision of this affair to the multitude, and I look upon it as equally difficult to oppose a work which the public approves, as it is to defend one which it condemns.

There is no one who does not know for what time of rejoicing the piece was composed; and that *fete* made so much noise, that it is not necessary to speak of it [Footnote: *The Bores*, according to the Preface, planned, finished, got up, and played in a fortnight, was acted amidst other festivities, first at Vaux, the seat of Monsieur Fouquet, Superintendent of Finances, the 17th of August, 1661, in the presence of the King and the whole Court, with the exception of the Queen. Three weeks later Fouquet was arrested, and finally condemned to be shut up in prison, where he died in 1672. It was not till November, 1661, that *The Bores* was played in Paris.] but it will not be amiss to say a word or two of the ornaments which have been mixed with the Comedy.

The design was also to give a ballet; and as there was only a small number of first-rate dancers, it was necessary to separate the *entrées* [Footnote: See Prefatory Memoir, page xxx., note 12] of this ballet, and to interpolate them with the Acts of the Play, so that these intervals might give time to the same dancers to appear in different dresses; also to avoid breaking the thread of the piece by these interludes, it was deemed advisable to weave the ballet in the best manner one could into the subject, and make but one thing of it and the play. But as the time was exceedingly short,

and the whole was not entirely regulated by the same person, there may be found, perhaps, some parts of the ballet which do not enter so naturally into the play as others do. Be that as it may, this is a medley new upon our stage; although one might find some authorities in antiquity: but as every one thought it agreeable, it may serve as a specimen for other things which may be concerted more at leisure.

Immediately upon the curtain rising, one of the actors, whom you may suppose to be myself, appeared on the stage in an ordinary dress, and addressing himself to the King, with the look of a man surprised, made excuses in great disorder, for being there alone, and wanting both time and actors to give his Majesty the diversion he seemed to expect; at the same time in the midst of twenty natural cascades, a large shell was disclosed, which every one saw: and the agreeable Naiad who appeared in it, advanced to the front of the stage, and with an heroic air pronounced the following verses which Mr. Pellison had made, and which served as a Prologue.

PROLOGUE

(_The Theatre represents a garden adorned with Termini and several fountains. A Naiad coming out of the water in a shell.)

Mortals, from Grots profound I visit you,
Gallia's great Monarch in these Scenes to view;
Shall Earth's wide Circuit, or the wider Seas,
Produce some Novel Sight your Prince to please;
Speak He, or wish: to him nought can be hard,
Whom as a living Miracle you all regard.
Fertile in Miracles, his Reign demands
Wonders at universal Nature's Hands,
Sage, young, victorious, valiant, and august,
Mild as severe, and powerful as he's just,
His Passions, and his Foes alike to foil,
And noblest Pleasures join to noblest Toil;
His righteous Projects ne'er to misapply,
Hear and see all, and act incessantly:
He who can this, can all; he needs but dare,
And Heaven in nothing will refuse his Prayer.
Let Lewis but command, these Bounds shall move,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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