

# Reflections on “Molière”

Welcome to my page of thoughts on the film “Molière” (2007, written and directed by Laurent Tirard and starring Romain Duris in the title role). This is not intended as a full review of the film, but rather a look at some of the themes the film and Molière’s work in general touches upon.



Initially well received by critics and public alike, the film went on to be criticised, at least in the UK and the USA, for being a little shallow – criticism I find somewhat ironic and largely unjustified as Molière accuses himself of just such a fault quite early in the film, and the film then deals with this issue more than adequately, in my opinion.

It does seem a little unfair to criticise a film for not being something reviewers think it should be. “Shakespeare in love” was much appreciated for its clever combination of historical fact, transposition of character and imagined biographical detail. Critics and public were happy to celebrate the witty creation of an intriguing and light-hearted sortie into historical fiction. “Molière” uses the same conceit and actually takes shallowness as one of its themes, yet it is accused of lack of depth despite delivering an involving and entertaining package!



Personally, I found “Molière” intriguing, involving, and of considerable historical interest. It brings the celebrated author and the content and context of his plays to life. Human and amusing, the film reveals the themes of the time, most of which remain relevant to society today, such as an examination of social strata and class superiority, the value of sincerity and genuine love as opposed to adopting manners or airs and graces in order to please others or to try to advance socially, religious zealotry and how principle can be manipulated to achieve one’s own ends, and the vagaries of parental interference in children’s lives, to name but a few of the themes touched upon.

It would be short-sighted to consider that the seventeenth century setting of Molière's work means that it is not relevant to today. Molière's reading of human nature and society is so acute that he sees beyond the immediate context of his play and touches on universal themes and problems.

The bourgeois or middle classes aspiring to the heady heights of the aristocracy who in turn are doing their best to avoid the depths of having to work in order to acquire money can surely be simply replaced with different players aspiring to different positions. The fundamental truth remains that there are those who (may be forced to) fawn to those considered superior, or those who treat their "inferiors" with contempt. Religious zealots can be seen as any group claiming moral or spiritual superiority, yet who manage to improve their own physical lot along the way.



Molière clearly invites us to consider our true worth, value and place in society, to value what is genuine and not to take people or position for granted.

There are, of course, many different ways of assessing the value of literary work. According to the film, Molière wished to be regarded as a great writer – someone with things to say about life – but he himself does not recognise the value of comedy (which he regards as light and frivolous) in the drive toward fulfilling his aim. He appears to believe serious points can only truly be made through serious drama and tragedy, dramatic forms for which he has little or no talent.

Molière is presented as a man dogged by a sense of his own lack of worth or value. Success is not enough – he wishes to leave behind something meaningful and serious. Yet he is given hope and inspiration by one he loves and respects and who is about to die. He is given a new perspective and insight into the possibility that through his comedy he can indeed deliver a meaningful and worthwhile “message”, and a commentary on society and life.



Pointing out society's and various individuals' foibles in a witty and entertaining manner is perhaps more engaging and thus can be more effective than a “serious” play on the same theme. Man's nature is examined indirectly through a comedy of manners and social etiquette.

The plays Molière admired undoubtedly contained many truths and insights into human nature (often taken to extreme), but Molière's plays remain accessible to readers/viewers. There is a familiarity and comfort in his settings and situations and

readers/viewers are more likely to identify and associate with these events and characters, ultimately perhaps lending them greater value and impact than other more “serious” works.



This film really brought Molière’s world alive for me. The historical context and pervading humanity allow the viewer to enjoy and appreciate Molière’s work with a fresh eye. Emotionally engaging as well as entertaining, I thoroughly enjoyed all the performances, though especially Fabrice Luchini and Romain Duris who managed to be amusing and touching, much like the film as a whole, as befits a work inspired by the works of Molière.