

SPRING 2009 – PROFESSOR SCOTT

FREN 868 – STUDIES IN 17TH-CENTURY FRENCH LITERATURE

Molière: Mirth and Modernity



While who is the most influential poet, novelist, playwright in French literature may be a disputed, and somewhat subjective, question, the title of the greatest comic dramatist is not open to question: Molière has profoundly marked the genre and stands alongside Aristophanes and Shakespeare in terms of importance in world literature. Yet, given this revered status, critics have, and continue to, disagree profoundly on fundamental questions concerning the author, and offer sometimes strikingly different interpretations of his major works. The only notion on which there is universal agreement is that Molière is humorous. Why he is funny, for what purpose, and where exactly his hilarity lies, are all contentious subjects.

We will look at twelve plays during the semester, together with other forms of social commentary during the seventeenth century including selections from memorialists such as Choisy and Saint-Simon as well as moralists including La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld. We will particularly examine mirth in Molière in the light of critical theories on laughter which will include Bergson, Bertrand, and Minois. In addition to DVD stagings of some of the plays, we will also analyze some cinematic interpretations of Molière including *Le Roi danse* and *Molière*.

Texts: *Les Précieuses ridicules*; *Le Médecin malgré lui*; *L'École des femmes*; *Le Tartuffe*; *George Dandin*; *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*; *Le Malade imaginaire*; *Les Femmes savantes*; *Dom Juan*; *Le Misanthrope*; *Amphitryon*; *L'Avare*.