Introduction

*Les Fâcheux* resulted from the collaborative efforts of Molière, the poet Paul Pellisson (who wrote the prologue), Pierre Beauchamps (who composed the ballet music),¹ Hilaire Dolivet (who helped choreograph the dances),² Charles Le Brun (who painted the scenic embellishments), and Giacomo Torelli (who designed the sets and stage machines).³ In addition, Jean-Baptiste Lully contributed a sung *courante* to *Les Fâcheux.*⁴

Molière's *Avertissement* printed in the first edition of the play offers a brief but rich statement of their theoretical position:

> The design was also to give a ballet; and as there was only a small, select number of excellent dancers, it was deemed necessary to separate the *entrées* of this ballet and put them in the entr'actes of the comedy, so that these intervals might give the dancers time to return in different costumes. Furthermore, to avoid breaking the thread of the piece by these manner of interludes, it was deemed advisable to weave

---


² Loret's letter of 20 August 1661 mentions that Beauchamps composed the ballet, and that Dolivet created some of the choreography (*La Muze historique*, III:392): ' . . . Un Balet entendu des mieux, / Qui par intervalles succède, / Sert à la Piéce, d'Interméde, / Lequel Balet fut compozé / Par Beauchamp, Danseur fort prizé, / Et dansé de la belle sorte / Par les Messieurs de son Escorte; / Et, mesme, où le sieur d'Olivet, / Digne d'avoir quelque Brévet, / Et fameux en cette Contrée, / A fait mainte agréable Entrée'.

³ Loret (*La Muze historique*, III:392) described Torelli's machine effects for the Prologue: 'during the aforementioned action, one saw and admired (although they appeared immovable) the statues and the columns move, and twelve fountains spout water ten feet into the air'. A watercolor of a set design, reproduced in Per Bjurström, *Giacomo Torelli and Baroque Stage Design* (Stockholm, 1961), 183, might possibly be the one Torelli designed for *Les Fâcheux.*

⁴ Lully may have had good reasons for not taking a more active role, as Henry Prunières (*L'Opéra italien en France avant Lully* [Paris, 1913], 269) suggests. Fouquet was a powerful and dangerous nobleman who posed the single most important threat to Louis XIV's rule, and the king had been secretly planning his downfall long before the 1661 fête at Vaux-le-Vicomte; and so Colbert might have forewarned Lully not to associate with the doomed Minister of Finance, who was soon to be arrested for corruption and treason. But while Lully supplied only a single *courante* to this entertainment, it is possible that he played a greater role. Molière refers to Lully in Act I, sc. 3, when the dancing nuisance departs to show 'Baptiste le très cher' his *courante* and entreat him to compose the parts (*d'y faire des parties*); this might suggest that Lully served informally as a consultant to the *Les Fâcheux* team of artists.
them into the subject as best as possible, and to make the ballet and the comedy a single thing. But since time was short, and everything was not regulated entirely by a single brain, some parts of the ballet might perhaps be found that do not enter as naturally into the comedy as others do. Be that as it may, this is a combination that is new for our stages, and for which some authorities might be sought in antiquity; and, as everyone has found it agreeable, it may serve as a model for other things which may be thought out at greater leisure.

While Molière may or may not have been a late addition to the team, clearly a number of factors affected the design of the work: i.e., the number of dancers available, and the time required for costume changes. Moreover, the playwright admits that some parts were beyond his personal control (‘. . .et que tout cela ne fut pas réglé entièrement par une même tête’). Notwithstanding the number of artists involved, *Les Fâcheux* achieves an unsurpassed degree of structural and thematic integration--making Molière's testimony that *Les Fâcheux* had been 'conceived, written, learned, and performed in fifteen days' all the more remarkable.

Couvreur views Molière's citation of authority as a tongue-in-cheek jab at Pierre Corneille, who was ever preoccupied with correcting and defending his tragedies. But Molière might easily have familiarized himself with Aubignac's description of Roman comedy, which the theorist/playwright published just four years earlier in *La Pratique du Théâtre*. When comedy was first introduced in Rome, it replaced the Greek chorus with 'entr'actes of people who together sang, danced, and played instruments to mark the intervals between the acts'. Moreover, the themes of the play were imitated in these entr'actes 'by people who represent in their dances and gestures the things that had been

---

5 Claude Abraham, *On the Structure of Molière's Comédies-Ballets*, Biblio 17 (19) (Paris-Seattle-Tübingen, 1984), 18-20. On the other hand, Molière was informed of this project a full month ahead--for Fouquet commissioned a new work from Molière when the Troupe de Monsieur performed at Vaux-le-Vicomte on 13 July 1661; see Daspit de St-Amand, 'Une visite de Molière et de sa troupe chez le Surintendant Fouquet', *Le Moniteur du Bibliophile*, 10 (1 December 1880), 289-306 [290].

6 *Les Fâcheux*, comédie de J.-B.-P. Molière, représentée sur le théâtre du Palais royal (Paris: de Luyne, 1662); *Avertissement*. Loret tells us that the actors had just three days to memorize their parts; see *La Muze historique*, letter of 20 August 1661, III:392.

declamed, as seen in [the plays of] Plutarch and Lucian. It therefore should come as no surprise that Molière's comédie-ballet follows much the same procedure: the ballet entrées remain distinct from the spoken scenes, while developing their content through dance. The end result is a melding of a comédie épisodique that mirrors the structural features of the ballet à entrées, and a ballet whose entrées translate the play's themes into pantomime, gesture, and figurative meaning.

Traditionally, after the subject and disposition of a ballet de cour had been decided in advance by the 'organizer of ballets', the poet's usual task was to provided vers pour les personnages and prefatory récits to introduce the various dance entrées. But unlike other ballets de cour, Les Fâcheux was a completely 'professional' ballet. Since the nobility did not participate, there was no need for vers pour les personnages; moreover, there were neither récits nor other sung lyrics. Molière replaced these conventional verbal elements with comic episodes, which were loosely connected through linear plot and liaison de scène. And, as if to announce a break with ballet tradition, Les Fâcheux began in a novel manner. After the overture, Molière appeared on-stage in street clothes, looking surprised. Addressing the king, he made excuses for the disorder caused by hasty preparations, and for lacking both the time and actors to provide the divertissement his Majesty seemed to expect of him. Then suddenly, Torelli's machines began operating behind him--transforming the garden setting into the supernatural pastoral landscape.

In the midst of twenty natural water cascades, a large mechanical shell opened to reveal 'the lovely Naïade, who appeared from within it, advanced to the front of the stage and, with a heroic air, declaimed the verses that M. Pellisson had written, and which served as a prologue'. She proclaims that the heavens, the earth, and all of nature stands in readiness to bow before Louis XIV's

---

10 This claim should probably be taken with a grain of salt, for Les Fâcheux shows no sign of precipitation. Indeed, Saint-Hubert (La Maniere de composer et faire reussir les ballets [Paris: François Targa, 1641; repr. ed. Marie-Françoise Christout, Geneva, 1993], 5 and 17) says that a 'grand Ballet' requires 15 days to learn, and a 'petit Ballet' eight days--and Les Fâcheux falls into the category of a 'petit Ballet'. Couvreur provides a fascinating discussion of the 'aesthetic of the impromptu' and the 'myth of precipitate creation' in Jean-Baptiste Lully, 232-34.
commands, and calls forth several dryads, fauns, and satyrs--who emerge from the trees and from behind ornamental columns. She commands these mythic beings to transform themselves into the play's characters, and entertain the king with a little divertissement portraying various species of nuisances (fâcheux).

This miraculous prologue announces two central themes of the Vaux-le-Vicomte fête: the artful transformation of nature, and divertissement. A section of Fouquet's elegant gardens at Vaux, created from nature by the landscape gardener André Le Nôtre, had been refashioned for this occasion into a natural stage. Likewise, the mythic beings of the prologue transform themselves into fâcheux to perform for the king's amusement. Molière's comedy and its ballet entrées are then presented a play-within-the-Prologue, and become associated by a common theme--but one that explores the other 17th-century meaning of divertir (i.e., 'to lead astray, to avert, to deter').

Three component parts comprise Les Fâcheux: a supernatural prologue, a comedy with intercalated ballet entrées, and a pastoral epilogue. In contrast to the prologue and epilogue, which draw upon the mythic and naturalistic pastorale, the spoken play is set in Paris; unlike the mythic demi-gods of the prologue, its cast is a collection of urban oddballs--each with his own particular fixation. As a foil to these aristocratic 'visionnaires', the entrées portray archetypal commoners identified by their vocations or avocations: pall-mall players, curious onlookers, boule players, boys with slingshots, cobbblers, a gardener, and Swiss guards. The theme of play and play-acting informs the prologue, comedy, and ballets. Moreover, all of the characters derive from the woodland divinities of the prologue. Coming from a multi-sensory world of music, ballet, and the merveilleux; these fauns, satyrs, and sylvains transform into the play's characters and move into a verbal world of storytelling, technical jargon, game-playing, and artistic creation.

The young lover Eraste becomes the common link between the play and its ballets. In the Ballet du Premier Acte, Eraste stumbles into a game of pall-mall (Les Joueurs de Mail), is warned away, and then himself becomes an object of curiosity (Les Curieux). The Ballet du Second Acte continues this action when some boule players ask Eraste for his opinion regarding a distance (Les Joueurs de Boullé); their dance is interrupted by boys with slingshots (Les Frondeurs), who are chased off by cobbblers and
menders (Savetiers et Revandese), and are in turn driven away by some gardeners (Les Jardiniers). These scenes of balletic dispossession presage the final scene, when some mascaraders arrive to celebrate their wedding but are driven away in dance by the Swiss guards.

Just as the dancers are interrupted in their games, Eraste is repeatedly distracted from the game of love by a cortège of fâcheux. These spoken episodes form a complex network of recurring themes and motives. The first four scenes introduces the main characters and the dramatic predicament, after which the play proceeds in a series of ballet-like entrées dealing with (A) lazzis and farcical encounters with nuisances, then (B) matters of the heart, and finally (C) matters of death (see Table 8.2). Not confined solely to the ballets, music and dance spill over into the spoken play when the dancing nuisance Lysandre attempts to teach Eraste his courante (I,5), when Eraste composes a song (II,3), and when mascaraders arrive with their fiddles and tambourines to celebrate the forthcoming wedding (III,7). After the Swiss guards cleared the stage, the concluding pastoral ballet acted as a retransition to the sylvan setting of Fouquet's gardens.

The thematic progression of interruption, dispossession, and play-acting culminates in the play's dénouement. When Damis (Orphise's guardian) learns of her assignation, he decides to have Eraste assassinated. Eraste's servants, however, overhear Damis talking with his valet, and fall upon them—whereupon Eraste arrives, draws his sword, and chases off the unknown attackers. Unaware that the attackers were Eraste's own men, Damis is so grateful and so moved by this display of generosity that he agrees to allow Eraste to marry his ward: hence what appeared as an act of heroism was in reality a staged charade.

Les Fâcheux also include numerous topical references, beginning with the verses addressed to Louis XIV in the prologue. In I,5 the dancing nuisance Lysandre goes off to show his courante to

---

12 Other sub-themes include: jealousy and misunderstanding (Eraste becomes jealous of Orphise and Alcidor in I,2; Orphise in turn becomes jealous when she sees Eraste talking to the two précieuses about jealousy in II,4); the comic jeu de scène between Eraste and his servant (the dressing scene in I,1; La Montagne's prevarication in II,3; and the valet's over-attentiveness in III,1); and the motive of leave-taking (Eraste sends La Montagne away on errands in I,3 and I,11; Eraste himself leaves in III,1, and forces his valet to remain behind against his will).
'Baptiste le très cher'—referring to Lully, who was known at court as 'Baptiste'. When the duelling nuisance asks Eraste to deliver a challenge in I,10, Eraste soberly reminds him of the king's edict against duelling. Alcippe, the card-playing nuisance, describes in II,2 a hand of piquet, a game that was currently all the rage in France. The appearance of two annoying précieuses in II,4 recalls Molière's recent hit comedy, Les Précieuses ridicules. Upon the king's recommendation, Molière later added the scene (II,7) with the hunting nuisance--modelled after the Marquis de Soyecourt, who was a fan of that sport. In the Ballet du Second Acte, the entrée of the boys with slingshots (petits frondeurs) who are chased away by adults represents a thinly-veiled allusion to the outcome of the Fronde. And finally, the dance of the solo gardener paid tribute to André Le Nôtre, the landscape gardener who designed those at Vaux-le-Vicomte.

In Les Fâcheux, the arts join forces to express shared thematic content in different sensuous form. For example, at the end of Act 2 Eraste frees himself from the hunting nuisance and continues searching for Orphise—when 'some boule players stop him to measure a throw about which they are in dispute; he extricates himself with difficulty, leaving them dancing a dance composed of all the postures usual to that game'. The object of boules is to toss a ball so that it lands closest to a marker, and, in the process, to knock the opponents' balls out of the way. Just as the choreography visually represents the movements and gestures of the players, the music paints an aural picture of another aspect of boules—namely, the course of the balls. The first half of the dance would seem to describe

---

13 According to the Menagiana (1694, II:13; quoted in Georges Mongrédien, Recueil des textes et des documents du XVIIe siècle relatifs à Molière, 2 vols. [Paris, 1965], I:149), after the first performance of Les Fâcheux the king said to Molière, while pointing to the Marquis de Soyecourt, 'There is a great eccentric that you have not yet copied'. In twenty-four hours, Molière wrote the scene of the hunting-bore, and included it for the king when his troupe performed Les Fâcheux at Fontainebleau on 25 August 1661.

14 This might also clarify Eraste's earlier mention of the raining fâcheux, and his mysterious reference to the thunder and rain which has passed over—but which was not violent enough to disperse the bores that beleaguer him (II,1). Further allusions to the Fronde will appear three years later in Les Plaisirs de l'île enchantée (Ballet du Palais d'Alcine)—particularly in the speeches Alcine and her nymphs address to the queen mother, Anne of Austria.

15 This points up one of several discrepancies between indications in the Philidor score and those in Molière's published play. Philidor designates the music of the Prologue for Les Silvains, but Plusieurs Dryades, accompagnées de Faunes et de Satyres are called for in the play. In the Second Intermède, the women who accompany the Savetières (cobbler's) are identified as Ravaudeuses (menders) in Philidor's score, but as Savetières (cobbler's wives) in the play. The final entrée of the Second Intermède in Philidor's score is entitled Les Jardiniers, but Molière's play specifies that this dance is for 'a gardener who dances alone and then retires to make way for the third act'.
in musical terms the windup (m. 1). A ball is tossed (m. 2, illustrated by the arched phrase of the
dessus part), hits the ground and bounces (m. 3, suggested by the rhythms and repeated-notes of the
upper three parts). As the ball-in-play (dessus) rebounds off of the haute-contre, taille, and basse balls, it
sends their melodic lines careening off in different directions (mm. 4-5). Eventually all balls expend
their momentum and come to rest in m. 8 (except the basse). Attuned to the symbolic meanings of
ballet, seventeenth-century spectators might view the interrupted progress of the ball as analogous to
the obstacles Eraste meets up with en route to his rendezvous with Orphise. Hence, music and
choreography express in their own aesthetic terms different facets of the game of boules—which in
turn may be perceived as a metaphor for the contretemps Eraste experiences in the game of love.
[Part I]

First Entrée. Entertainment and a Musical Consort

    Scorn sings of the therapeutic benefits of entertainment

Second Entrée. Astrologers, Misfortunes, Happiness

    Time sings of woman's inscrutability

Third Entrée. Treasure-Seekers, Goblins, Demons

    Reason sings of the wasted effort of love-seekers

Fourth Entrée. Gallants and Coquettes

    Followers of the Coquettes sing of the foolishness of jealousy

Fifth Entrée. Doctoral Ceremony (Doctors and Scaramouche)

    Chorus of Doctors praise the new doctor

[Part II]

Sixth Entrée. Hunters with drums

    Time sings of love's hunt

Seventh Entrée. Alchemists and Mercuries

    Scorn sings of woman's unfaithfulness

Eighth Entrée. Sunburnt Indians with parasols

    Reason sings of the vain effort of lovers to avoid Love's darts

Ninth Entrée. Jean Doucets and Gypsy Women

    Time sings of the foolishness of jealousy

Tenth Entrée. Village Wedding and a Rustic Consort

    Wedding Chorus sings of the folly of poor people marrying

Table 8.1. Structure of *L'Amour malade* (1657)
I,1 Eraste complains of nuisances, and then bores La Montagne with his theater story; La Montagne delays Eraste from meeting Orphise by trying to adjust his master's clothes

I,2 Orphise briefly appears, but is besieged by a nuisance (Alcidor) - Eraste becomes suspicious and jealous

I,3 Eraste sends La Montagne to pursue Orphise and the nuisance

I,4 Eraste has apprehensions about his missed appointment

A I,5 Lysandre: the dancing nuisance

I,6 Eraste must endure high-ranking nuisances by dissimulation

I,7 Eraste anticipates Orphise's arrival

B I,8 Eraste confronts Orphise and they quarrel

C I,9-10 Alcandre: the duelling nuisance

I,11 Eraste sends La Montagne in search of Orphise

Ballet du Premier Acte

II,1 Eraste comments on the passing storm and time running out

A II,2 Alcippe: the card-playing nuisance

II,3 La Montagne beats around the bush; Eraste composes some verses to a tune

B II,4 Orante and Climène: the précieuses nuisances

II,5 Orphise sees Eraste with the two ladies, and they quarrel

II,6 Eraste wants to make his innocence known to Orphise

C II,7 Dorante: the hunting nuisance (graphic narrative of a stag hunt)

Ballet du Second Acte
A  III,1  La Montagne: the over-attentive servant
    III,2  Caritèdes: philosopher nuisance; reads his petition to monitor inscriptions on public buildings
    III,3  Ormin: the nuisance who wants to change the coastline of France into a port
    III,4  Filinte: the nuisance who wants to become Eraste's bodyguard
C  III,5  Damis (Orphise's guardian) is attacked by rogues, and is saved by Eraste
B  III,6  Damis gives Orphise to Eraste, and calls for entertainment
    III,7  mascaraders enter, but are chased away by guards

Ballet du Troisième Acte

Table 8.2. Recurring Thematic Patterns in *Les Fâcheux*