

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review Volume 4, Number 4

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The Mercurian is named for Mercury who, if he had known it, was/is the patron god of theatrical translators, those intrepid souls possessed of eloquence, feats of skill, messengers not between the gods but between cultures, traders in images, nimble and dexterous linguistic thieves. Like the metal mercury, theatrical translators are capable of absorbing other metals, forming amalgams. As in ancient chemistry, the mercurian is one of the five elementary “principles” of which all material substances are compounded, otherwise known as “spirit”. The theatrical translator is sprightly, lively, potentially volatile, sometimes inconstant, witty, an ideal guide or conductor on the road.

The Mercurian publishes translations of plays and performance pieces from any language into English. *The Mercurian* also welcomes theoretical pieces about theatrical translation, rants, manifestos, and position papers pertaining to translation for the theatre, as well as production histories of theatrical translations. Submissions should be sent to: Adam Versényi at anversen@email.unc.edu or by snail mail:

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EDITOR'S NOTE

We begin this issue with the last of the roundtable discussions from the Theatrical Translation as Creative Process: A Conference Festival, convened here at the University of North Carolina in April 2012. This conversation is with Jean Graham-Jones about her translation of contemporary Argentine playwright Ricardo Monti's play *Apocalypse Tomorrow*, which was published in *The Mercurian*, Vol. 2, No. 1. This lively conversation, which concluded the Conference Festival, covers everything from orgasms and cocaine to questions of tone, style, and legibility in theatrical translation.

The roundtable discussion is followed by a new translation by Samuel Buggeln, whose translation of Marivaux's one-act, *School for Mothers*, was published in *The Mercurian*, Vol. 4, No. 1. Here Buggeln turns to Molière, with a new translation of *Le Misanthrope* titled *Hater*. Having recently dramaturged Molière's *Imaginary Invalid* in a new translation commissioned by PlayMakers Repertory Company from David Ball, directed by Dominique Serrand, which created a contemporary re-visioning of that play in the spirit of Molière, I was attracted to Buggeln's approach to *Le Misanthrope*. As he explains in his introduction to *Hater*, this translation was undertaken from a directorial point of view. Having loved *The Misanthrope* when he first read it in translation, Buggeln found himself suspicious that his standard rhymed translation was reflecting the original. When he went to the French he was "delighted and surprised" by the modernity of Molière's verse, which led him to a free-verse translation of his own. In his description of the translation process Buggeln raises questions of about rhyme, tone, style, and the familiar vs. the foreign in theatrical translation, finally opting for a collision of the two rather than choosing one over the other.

Hater is followed by Joanne Pottlitzer's translation of the well-known Cuban playwright José Triana's *Common Words*. The translation is preceded by two introductions, one from Triana himself describing how he based his play *Palabras comunes* on Miguel de Carrión's novella *Las honradas (Respectable Women)*, influenced by both the contemporary Cuban playwright Abelardo Estorino's adaptation of Carrión's *Impure Women* and by the 19th century Spanish playwright Ramón de Valle Inclán's play *Divine Words*. Pottlitzer herself then describes the genesis of her translation, following a production of *Common Words* at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1986 that was rejected by Triana after he discovered that the RSC had radically adapted and restructured his text. Her description of the translation process raises further important issues regarding adaptation vs. translation for the theatre. Pottlitzer's translation of Triana's complex, multi-layered play aims for a 19th century diction and style that accurately captures the tone of Triana's work.

The issue concludes with Szilvia Naray-Davey's article "TRUE TO 'THE LIFE' IN THE TEXT—Naturalistic drama through the actors' naturalistic tools" about her translation process with the contemporary Hungarian playwright János Hay's *Vasárnapi*

Ebéd (2010), a commission from the National Theatre in Budapest that asked ten playwrights to each write a play responding to one of the Ten Commandments. Hay's commandment was "Honor thy father and thy mother" and the resulting play is *Sunday Lunch*. Naray-Davey describes her desire for her British audience "to love, accept, and value the play's foreignness." As such, her guiding principle for her translation became "performability" using a Stanislavkian acting approach to naturalistic texts as the foundation for her translation of Hay's work. We hope to publish her translation of *Sunday Lunch* in a future issue of *The Mercurian*.

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can now be found on the website of the Department of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina, <http://drama.unc.edu/related-links/the-mercurian/> where we will maintain a permanent web presence. As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Vol. 5, No. 1 of *The Mercurian* will be a special issue on German-language theatrical translation Guest Edited by Gillian Drake. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 5, No. 2 will be April 1, 2014.

--Adam Versényi

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TRANSLATION CONFERENCE: ROUNDTABLE & CONVERSATION WITH JEAN GRAHAM-JONES

The Theatrical Translation as Creative Process Conference was staged during the second week of April, 2012, on the campuses of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University. It was a collaborative offering of The Mercurian, the UNC-CH Department of Dramatic Art, The Process Series (also of UNC-CH), and the Performance and Embodied Research Colloquium at Duke University. Open rehearsals and staged readings of translated works were followed by lively round-table discussions. Rather than present formal lectures, conference participants drew on their collective experience in “Open Space” dialogues.

The conversation that follows presents participants’ reactions to Jean Graham-Jones’ translation of Ricardo Monti’s play, *Apocalypse Tomorrow*

ADAM VERSENYI. Jean, do you want to talk a little bit about your relationship with Monti? What the process has been?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I first met Monti in 1992 when I was in Argentina doing research for my dissertation. I lived there for a year, and I interviewed, I don’t know, seventy people involved in theater of the dictatorship era. He was someone whose first play was produced in 1970, and he also wrote a play that was produced in 1977 that was the great drama hit of the season, and reading both that play and the great comedy hit of the season, I thought, “Oh my God. How the hell did they *do* these plays under dictatorship, get around censorship, and be received, and with such success?” So he was on my wavelength for that reason, and I read everything he wrote and really connected to his plays. There’s one of his plays that I adore, which is called *A South-American Passion Play*. I had read all the criticism, like a good little scholar-girl, yet I disagreed with most of the local critics on how they’d interpreted the play. So I’m having this interview with Monti, and I’m sitting in his home, and we’re drinking tea, chat chat chat, and inside, I’m going, “Can I ask him? Should I ask him? I’m going to totally screw up this relationship by asking him...,” and I finally get up my courage at the very end of the afternoon, and I say, “I want to share with you my own response to this play.” And I say it. And he just stops, and he looks me, and he says, “I don’t get it. How can somebody who’s coming from the United States understand my play better than the people of my own city?” Hugely validating for me. At that part, I started thinking about it. He invited me to the theater, and I saw several things of his, and we met several times. And I thought, “I *do* have a connection to this guy. I think I kinda get him. I think everybody else should hear about him and know him and see his work.” Monti’s well-known in Europe, but in not the US. So I asked him if I could possibly take a stab at translating one of the plays. And that led to a working relationship of my going back every year to Buenos Aires with one more rough translation of another play, and over a ten-year period, I ended up translating nine of his plays. I’ve known Monti for over twenty years, now. When I directed his 1977 play, *Visit*, the hit I mentioned, I directed it in English

translation at Florida State, and I brought him up. He saw the first two performances and was part of the talkbacks. So he has seen how I work, too. Really, it's quite lovely.

NEIL BLACKADDER. I just wanted to say how much I appreciated an actor who was taking her time with the text.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Oh, I was really moved. I was so thankful.

NEIL BLACKADDER. There were moments when she wasn't speaking, that were still in the world. That was good.

JOSEPH MEGEL. It's hard, because you're doing a one-person show in a reading, and I think her original desire was to be able to be out of the book.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. But she'd end up in paraphrase land.

NEIL BLACKADDER. Exactly.

JOSEPH MEGEL. But she didn't paraphrase. There were maybe four words.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. That's it. She really embraced the text. Which I appreciated. And it's not easy language to wrap oneself around. If I had rewritten it to make it easier to speak – that's not what the original is. Monti's a very lyrical writer. He even writes in verse sometimes. He'll place a neoclassical ode in the middle of a play. I've struggled with those translations, and I want to honor the lyricism. To me, it's what gets under my skin and resonates with me.

JOSEPH MEGEL. It's a difficult thing to pace. A lot of my notes were "take your time with this," and "slow it down." It's a matter of sitting in it, but also trying to find the dynamic where things are lifting.

Yael PRIZANT. That also gives it class. Her class is much more obvious from her language, and the relationship between her and her sister from that language, how that language changes when she's Bianca versus when she's Rosie. If you lose that piece of it, that's a big chunk gone.

NEIL BLACKADDER. Oh! "Blanca and Rosie."

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. "*Bianca.*"

NEIL BLACKADDER. Oh, "*Bianca.*" Because I translated another play by Rebekka Kricheldorf, and it's called *Rosa und Blanca*. Based on the Grimms' Fairy Tale.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. We've got a *show!*

NEIL BLACKADDER. The Rosie and Blanc-ie Show! But is that in there? Is the Grimms fairy tale in Monti's mind, or is that just a coincidence?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I have not asked him that question.

KLAUS VAN DEN BERG. Ask him about Faulkner.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Well, he *has* read Faulkner.

ADAM VERSENYI. Also, "white and red" in the Argentine context is a totally different matter than in the German context. There's a whole history. The formation of Argentina as a nation was essentially a civil war between the Unitarian Party and the –

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. The Liberal Centralist, let's-be-like-the-United-States-and-Europe party, very focused in the capital of Buenos Aires. And then a federal, regional rights movement, where you had a lot of local bosses and party leaders. Then in the mid-19th century, a dictator by the name of Rosas, who made everybody wear red –

ADAM VERSENYI. You had to paint your house red.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Everything had to be red, or you could be dead. So there's a bit of that authoritarian in Rosie, Rosa. But *rosa* is different, because *rosa* is "pink." It's "Rose," but it's also "pink." And of course, Bianca/Blanca ... virginal, stay-at-home, innocent. I think it's more those connotations – which could be in the Grimm as well, right?

Back to a question that Andy Bragen asked me earlier: Monti went to college for a little bit, but dropped out. He's very much an autodidact. In the 70s, he was influenced by the Germans. Peter Stein, for example, he *loved* Stein's stagings back then. He has a very European background, more than US. That's not atypical for intellectual formation of the Argentine middle classes. A lot of philosophy, a lot of history. He told me that he basically quit reading fiction about twenty-five years ago. He's still writing a historical novel that he's been working on since I met him. It's about six hundred pages now. I've yet to see any of it. He's done adaptations. About four years ago, he did a theatrical adaptation of *A Death in Venice* that's really wonderful. He's done some adaptations of novels like Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* – he did an incredible theatrical adaptation of that.

ADAM VERSENYI. And of *Marathon*. An adaptation of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Yes and no. It's because Jaime [Kogan] told him he wanted to set a play in a dance hall, and then Monti went to town with it. Yet it's very historical and Argentine. Some of his plays are historically set. He has some influences of Brecht, I would say. Brecht and Beckett were very present in the Buenos Aires cultural scene during ~~in~~ his formative years; in his childhood, there was an important production of

Waiting for Godot in Buenos Aires. It seems like everyone I know who was alive then saw it.

KLAUS VAN DEN BERG. How old is he now?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. He was born in 1944. That makes him – 68?

Yael Prizant. I'm glad that you said that about Beckett, because I definitely got bits of *Happy Days*. Maybe because a reading –

JOSEPH MEGEL. Didn't you see the sand? I put sand –

ADAM VERSENYI. That teacup was full of sand.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. In the Argentine production, the actress sat on a little black cube. Just sat there in her little pink suit and her gray wig, and did all sorts of wonderful things with her legs and arms. Bonnie really moved from there when she came in and left. Joseph has a copy of the DVD of that Argentine version. Which I'm not sure I totally liked.

Monti is a rather shy person, and he stays home a lot. He doesn't go out. I've had one meal in a restaurant with him. It's always, "Come over to my house. We'll have some tea." He's a real homebody.. When we brought him to Tallahassee, he was there for two days, and said, "I want to go home." He didn't do any tourist stuff.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Well, once you've seen Tallahassee...

NEIL BLACKADDER. Get home as soon as you can!

KLAUS VAN DEN BERG. Does he get involved in the staging of his plays, their productions?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. He worked for a long time with one director, Jaime Kogan. They were very close, and then the director died. That kind of sent him into a spin as to who to work with, and he wasn't produced for a while, until he started working with the woman who directed the Buenos Aires production of this monologue, Monica Vinao. Earlier in 1989, he and his longtime partner Kogan fought, and Monti took over directing *A South American Passion-Play*. It was a huge disaster. He directed a couple times before that, but now, nothing. He goes to rehearsals and is an incredibly generous person in terms of text. He'd say to me during the translation process, "Go with the simplest word. Do whatever you want." He'd sit in on rehearsals and be extremely generous and open with his work. He spent time with my actors and was really wonderful.

NEIL BLACKADDER. One word thing that I was very interested in was the thing that the kid on the street says to her. Is it "rotten old bitch"?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I'm glad you picked up on that. "Vieja podrida." We talked with Joseph and Bonnie about this. It occurred to me that the kid would never have said that to her – in 2001, no kid is going to run up to you in the street and say that. It'd be "vieja de mierda." It'd be worse. My interpretation is that it's her rewriting. She's rewriting and retelling.

NEIL BLACKADDER. She can't bring herself to say what he really said.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Right. I wanted it to sound antiquated. Not euphemistic, but ... and then she calls herself, at the end, a rotten old bitch. "Rotten" works very well for me in terms of no longer being able to lose her virginity, not having another virginity to give, you know, locked up in your home. I'm glad it hit home.

ADAM VERSENYI. Something that really resonated for me is the way time works in this piece. Perhaps it's because I just taught parts of *Death of the Last Black Man...* the other day and was trying to get my students to understand the way that time works in that piece, that it's not linear but it's a spiral and past, present, and future are there together, which is very much the same thing that happens here, but in a totally different way – I haven't quite wrapped my mind around what the distinction is between the two of them yet. But that was fascinating. I think it has something to do with her being an unreliable narrator of events.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I think of her in terms of Freudian dream revision. I feel that that's what she's doing. It's kind of in that in-between state. I'm not a Freudian by any stretch, but that's kind of how I process –

ADAM VERSENYI. Different levels of consciousness that are occurring.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. For me, she's headed toward a state of grace of some sort.

JOSEPH MEGEL. I think Bonnie came to that, too.

Yael PRIZANT. I like the thought that the piece starts with a day-marker, because to me, that took out a little of the question of sanity vs. senility or dementia. Because that's the first question they ask you, isn't it, when you hit your head? What day is it, or what year? And so there's some sense of her being able to mark that pretty clearly. "No, Rosie, you're wrong, it wasn't 1999, it was 2000." She seems to have the dateline down, right from the get-go. Which left me *not* doubting her mental state. She becomes more unreliable as it goes on. But the fact that she starts out fairly clear let me in to see her as somebody who's holding onto it at the beginning, and it slowly crumbles for her. That's what it did for me.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. For me, it's not that she has dementia, just that she's living in an in-between space. She sometimes connects and sometimes doesn't.

ADAM VERSENYI. Well, she's also *high*.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. And she's high! Yeah.

YAEL PRIZANT. And the choice of that drug for an older person is fascinating.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Isn't it wild? I said to Monti, "Why the coke?" And he said, "I don't know..." He liked the asthma plus the cocaine.

JOSEPH MEGEL. I never knew coke was for asthma!

ANDY BRAGEN. We really got to hear the play. Bonnie articulated it in a great way. But I also had this thought watching it, that the dramatic tension of the piece lies in this character starting out with the orgasm, and taking the coke, pushing against her being alone, à la *Happy Days* and a number of other plays. I think that the choice here was for her to sink into a kind of sensory experience of so much of it right now, instead of pushing toward the more playful side of the play.

JOSEPH MEGEL. There was a moment where she was seeing everything, it was really clear and very vivid, and I asked her to veil it a little bit. Make it a little more fuzzy. And she did that brilliantly.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. You used the image of a scrim.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Actors are really clear on what scrim is. It really changed the quality. The other was too precise, almost unreal. It just didn't work as well for me.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. For me, when she gets in the street and she sees the boy, it's almost over-focused. It's such a level of focus that everything else around her becomes fuzzy.

YAEL PRIZANT. But that made cocaine a very good choice. It also made me believe that that would drive her outside.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. It also made her more interesting. Honestly! It's like, *what? she snorts coke! What an interesting old lady!*

YAEL PRIZANT. But you could have chosen the sorts of drugs that would have made her want to stay inside and sort of retreat, but that was one that made her want to go out.

NEIL BLACKADDER. If you'd asked us to write down what we expect we're going to hear in a monologue about a seventy-five year old lady, how many of us would have put down "cocaine" and "orgasms"? Apart from Joseph! *[laughter]* That's ruffling our expectation right from the get-go, so we're more interested in her.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I have a question, and it has to do with production. As you could tell, I made a very clear choice not to overly contextualize it, in the sense of, "This

is Buenos Aires, December 20th, 2001.” It’s a political move on my part, or a strategic move rather, in that so much Latin American theater is immediately categorized as political theater, and it’s immediately localized as “it happens to them and nobody else.” I’ve dealt with a lot of that, and there are certain plays that I’ve done where I’ve made the local a very clear setting. This one, I purposely didn’t add it – it’s not in the original text, and I didn’t add it. I was wondering, in terms of reception but also potential production, how much localizing would you want to see or wanted to have seen? There was a little confusion in terms of what year she’s in, but I’m okay with that in her present moment.

ANDY BRAGEN. There’s a very long tradition of monologues you can’t quite place. I put it in the tradition of Beckett or David Adjmi’s *Elective Affinities* that was done by Zoë Caldwell this past autumn, some of the Wallace Shawn stuff – *The Fever* – where you can’t quite place exactly where they are and it doesn’t really matter.

NEIL BLACKADDER. But the specificity about 1945 – I was trying to work it out. Bonnie said she was imagining it was now, but if it was now, then she had the orgasm when she was five? That’s a very different story!

ANDY BRAGEN. We’ll put that together though, right, from her age?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Well, in the reading, the stage directions say that she’s seventy-five. But in performance, you might not know how old she was. It’s seventy-five for 2003. For the moment he wrote it in, for the specific context.

JOSEPH MEGEL. So now she’s 83.

KLAUS VAN DEN BERG. For some of the other plays we saw, it was important to me to know where they are. But this one is not that way. I’m imagining, I can really well imagine, an old woman like that, be it here or in Argentina or now or forty years ago. I can well imagine that, and I don’t think it’s important.

JOSEPH MEGEL. And people go out into cities with melees all the time. It could’ve been the LA riots.

NEIL BLACKADDER. Except for the knife sharpener. The knife sharpener was the thing – what is that telling me about where we are? Cause that’s not a world I recognize.

Yael PRIZANT. But it didn’t differentiate it as Argentina versus Bolivia. The knife sharpener is something I see in the street in Cuba. It may only be Latin America in a certain sense, but it doesn’t take you out of it being one country or the other. We don’t have those in the US. We have the trucks, but not on the street.

JOSEPH MEGEL. In boroughs in Manhattan! In boroughs in Manhattan there are knife sharpeners who went around – it might have been in ethnic neighborhoods, but I have this distinct memory of being in a neighborhood in New York City –

ANDY BRAGEN. It's archaic.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Yeah.

KLAUS VAN DEN BERG. I had no trouble imagining it. My mom's dad never learned to drive. To have a knife-sharpener or somebody come around with ice...

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Plus the whistle is going to sound – what does it say, I wrote the words but I can't remember them – a far-away, almost unreal sound of a knife-sharpener's whistle? You have the broken violin string or something. A Chekhovian moment.

YAEL PRIZANT. I think it's a moment of, is the music in her head or is it real?

For Cuban plays, there's a thing in Cuba where time sort of stands still in some ways. There are old cars ... it feels like the 50s or something.

JOSEPH MEGEL. I feel sometime that these images that seem foreign exist in a literary allusion. When I hear "knife sharpener," I don't need to go to any country in particular. It becomes the world of this play, and certainly there are plenty of American playwrights who throw allusions at us that may feel foreign to our cultural experience, but become their own thing and have their own value. There does become this balance question for me: so we have this relationship that is so specifically class-oriented that we may not recognize between the two boys, but makes sense to me in a North American context. I guess what I'm saying is that these constructs have their own meaning and their own buoyancy as literary allusion.

YAEL PRIZANT. I would say that we, as translators, should be asking whether it is legible, and not *how* it's legible. Because it doesn't matter which way you read it as long as you can.

ADAM VERSENYI. And is it part of the world of this particular play? How important is it to make it legible within that world?

YAEL PRIZANT. It does not sound strange when she talks about it within her context – at all.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. The language is not easily spoken language. I thought Bonnie really worked it. There are some phrases that had to be quite long, some I could break up, some that just had to go on and on. She stayed with it and did it and I was so happy to get to hear that. It was a real gift. But she threw me. The first thing she asked me when we went out to lunch was, "I'm all about the Method, so, what's your backstory?" I thought, "Oh, crap." But I was ready for that question, and I just said, "If you asked the playwright that, I know him, and his answer would be, 'I have no idea.'"

And she was kind enough to take that and work it in her own way, and she found what she needed to find, I think.

ADAM VERSENYI. That's another really interesting aspect about the way we set all of this up, which is, for the final piece, you have an actor who is experienced, who has the chops, who's going to take it and run with it, versus the other types of casting we had to do for the other three pieces.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Thank you! And she was older. I really liked that she was an older actress rather than someone in their twenties trying to age up.

ADAM VERSENYI. But I'm just thinking how that then affects audience reception particularly with a translation, rather than with something that's been written in American English initially. I mean, I don't know! I guess it's a question that I've got rolling around in my brain.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Is that part of the legibility issue for you?

ADAM VERSENYI. Well, a reading of anything is going to depend upon the quality of actors that you've got doing the reading, but is there another layer that enters in? If the acting isn't clearly serving the text for a translation, does that make it even more difficult to make the cultural shift?

JOSEPH MEGEL. Well, it speaks to the first duty of a reading, which is legibility. I mean, that is the first duty of a reading. To create clarity, as much as you can, about what's happening, what the language is doing. With some plays, it's harder to create that legibility than with others. But when I think about directing a reading, that's my first duty as a director. To find a way to help the actor make it as clear as possible what's going on in the text. It really does help to have actors with chops no matter what the age is, but age appropriate is also very helpful, because the visual of that – twenty year olds playing seventy year olds – the disconnect of that is always going to distance you from the reality of that play.

ADAM VERSENYI. This is a question to throw at you, Joseph. Was your approach to working on this just as if it was any new play?

JOSEPH MEGEL. Yes. I did not think of it differently.

ADAM VERSENYI. As a translation.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Right. No, I didn't think of it differently. And I had Jean there, and Jean will tell you that I'm not shy about asking the playwright or the translator questions about text.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. That's been a real revelation for me, I have to admit. It's helped me so much to think of a new translation as a new play. I think it's going to help

me with working with directors and producers and other people considering doing a translation, to think of it in those terms. Because in my own experience there have been some problematic match-ups, and I think it's because I haven't thought of a translation's first production as a new play. It's obvious! But it's helpful.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Talking with you *is* like talking to a playwright, because there are questions I ask playwrights all the time, where they're not even clear what a line is doing when there's a problem, versus when you *know*, "Oh, that's this, and everybody misses it."

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Or when you maybe don't know why but you know it has to be there.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Exactly right. Or, the distinction between the language being difficult to say on purpose, versus an oddly constructed line that should be retranslated. But you *know* the difference.

YAEL PRIZANT. I had the good fortune on the translation of *Chamaco* to get a group of actors sitting around the table to, what I'll say is, *hear* the play. Because we sat around a conference table, so it certainly wasn't a presentation and I wasn't watching their faces. I was hearing the play. A few of the roles were not perfectly cast – they were age appropriate, but not perfectly cast – but for me as a translator, there was something about the audio of the play that became really important. And I think we have to think about then, when we're discussing something – concert reading vs. staged reading vs. the other layer, which may be for a person like the translator to hear the work. For us it was private. There was no public there. The actors had the text beforehand but certainly were not expected to have worked on it.

HECTOR GARZA. Did they have the Spanish?

YAEL PRIZANT. No. It was the English version only. We didn't read the Spanish.

HECTOR GARZA. I've seen instances where the Spanish version is in the room, and that becomes really problematic –

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. When you have a Cuban actor saying, "Well, that's not how we say it..."

YAEL PRIZANT. Yeah. Right. No, there was not Spanish. I recorded it, so I can use the recording later. But it certainly made me go, "Ooh, that section's clunky. Whoops, this part."

JOSEPH MEGEL. Again. Translation, original play. Same thing.

YAEL PRIZANT. But the privateneness of that reading, before it becomes a concert reading, was especially important.

ANDY BRAGEN. There's also the question of tone and style, I think, and I think any first production is about discovering where the translation is in line with the text, where it is against the text or where it is in conversation with it. And I think it's a fact – I've talked with people who have directed at Repertorio Español—there is a certain kind of Latin American acting style that is very different from the US. I'm not putting any judgment here. It's not simply about realism. There are actors who are doing all kinds of stuff. I think it's very interesting when you see a Mexican play in translation, for example, it's going to feel very different. A Japanese play in the States, or a German one. I think in *The Ugly One* [at Soho Rep] for example, they were trying to find their "American" style to deal with the script. It becomes something very new. I'm sure the Argentinian production would be amazing; but I also imagine that the most successful American production, in an amazing way, would feel completely different.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Oh, yes. But it's interesting – I think Neil and I are kind of in the same stage with our translations in that I've done readings of this but it's not been actually produced. Whereas you, Andy, have had a full production. Was the reading for you here more like a second production reading?

JOSEPH MEGEL. Do you feel like it was a throwback to a stage you're already beyond?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. For me, I'm still making some adjustments such that if anybody wanted to do this, I'd probably do some minor tweaks.

ANDY BRAGEN. I listen for things. After you've worked on something for a few weeks, and you have some very experienced actors, a lot of times, they make things work. It's never bad to hear it again, because there are things that pop out for me. But it's different having seen it produced. I have a sense of what I think works in space and all that, and adjustments are made in terms of what it means in that sense. You can't get that rhythm, you can't get that much rhythm, and you can't always figure out tone, in a reading. You're going to get a certain sort of gesture in its direction. I have a number of plays that are unproduced, sadly, and a number of translations that are unproduced. There are immense things I've gotten out of workshops of these plays. Your translations are both done, and they're really wonderful. It's not about you having more work to do, at least I don't think so, but I think it's more about, you get in a rehearsal room, you're going to have a deeper understanding of what the play is, which isn't even necessarily about language. It's about a fuller feeling.

Yael PRIZANT. I was thinking, during the reading this afternoon, about how the actor's face becomes text. I haven't thought about that quite so much before.

ANDY BRAGEN. That moment when she describes the sister, making herself up like the sister ... I kept thinking of the tattered nature of these Argentinians who had money and who don't anymore. This sister. To a part of her, going out felt like a kind of prostitution.

NEIL BLACKADDER. Especially the description of the lift.

ANDY BRAGEN. Yeah, the lift. And this is the breadwinner –

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Having forgotten that they have money out there, and she needed money.

ANDY BRAGEN. Yeah, it was fascinating to feel that.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Yeah, you know, and girls that go out are sluts. “That’s why I got your man...”

Yael PRIZANT. But when she says “the little hat,” too, that also made her this strange throwback to the women who would never leave the house without a hat on. Right? There was that sort of distance all of a sudden that I loved.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. There are people who have lived in their modest apartments in Buenos Aires for generations, you know. The apartments are paid for, so you don’t have that expense. I can imagine her, and I can also imagine it being a place that’s maybe also starting to miss some furniture... I was really pleased that there were some students there this afternoon. Who was the one sitting in the front, who talked about Japan?

Yael PRIZANT. Is he a student?

ADAM VERSENYI. I think he’s a graduate student

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Thanks for the wonderful comments.

ADAM VERSENYI. I know we’re all tired, and this has been a long few days. But anything else? Final thoughts?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. This goes for your selection of collaborators and texts: I really appreciated how un-Usonian they were.

ANDY BRAGEN. Un-what?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Un-Usonian. I copy Frank Lloyd Wright and Noam Chomsky, who referred to people from the United States as “Usonian.”

ANDY BRAGEN. Un-American? Oh, come on! I take some offense to that! I mean, Neil’s not American ... but we all live here.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I’m American, but not just from the United States.

JOSEPH MEGEL. But at least you speak our language. *[laughter]*

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. The point of this is that I really liked that there was, for lack of a better word, a foreignness to each one. It's something you don't always see in translation. All four plays have that, and retain it in translation.

NEIL BLACKADDER. Do you mean, as opposed to – if I translated a family drama from the German, it could just as easily be set in the United States of America?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Or some of the suggestions in terms of what you have done – it could be anywhere. It could be in the United States.

ADAM VERSENYI. So translating *Ballad*, but turning it into Marin County.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Or *Huddersfield*. I would take a different direction from Caridad's. I actually don't want it to be Pennsylvania slackers. I want the location. And even if Caridad doesn't wish to acknowledge it, I think it's there in her translation.

ANDY BRAGEN. I think that the idea of a play that captures the place it's coming from and the place it's going to, and exists in that kind of third place, that would be absolutely right.

NEIL BLACKADDER. So, I don't know what the thinking is about future iterations of this conference, and I don't want to press either Adam or Joseph to say anything about that particularly, but I was just thinking – it's been great, and I've really enjoyed this whole thing – but thinking about translations as if they were new plays, I was wondering what it would be like to do a staged reading of a draft translation? It would put the translator in a pretty vulnerable and weird position, but it would give a chance to talk about the choices that are being made based on what we all heard together in a group reading.

HECTOR GARZA. I was thinking the same thing and I would volunteer for that. That's one of the things that I think is next. We've been talking about where we are in the process. All four of these are published already and have some success. It'd be interesting to see something –

JOSEPH MEGEL. And it's much more accurate to what the process is anyway.

ADAM VERSENYI. And I could conceive doing something that's in its first or second draft, doing a reading of it on the first night of a four-day event, and on the last night, having worked the script, doing another reading. It would require more planning.

JOSEPH MEGEL. And the writer will never attend a conference again ...

[laughter]

Yael Prizant. But can we add a layer to that? I'd love to do partnered collaborations, where we have a partner who is a translator, maybe purposely not from the same language, who might read the work before and give us some feedback so there's already a conversation before it comes out to that next level.

Jean Graham-Jones. So, two translators working together.

Yael Prizant. Together, where they're each working on a piece and they read each other's and give each other feedback. I guess you could always make it partners coming from the same base language for the translation, but to me, there's something about the translation being all there is when you don't speak the base language.

Jean Graham-Jones. Andy's experience.

Andy Bragen. Yeah, I think there's a certain amount of freedom in that. I think that's great when you read someone else. Because then you're really focused on how it's going to feel in the English.

Adam Versenyi. The other thing to do – the experience that I'm remembering – is like when I was in grad school, we were required to take a course on translation and adaptation, and the dramaturges and the playwrights were all put into that class together. So Edit Villarreal and I both translated a couple of scenes from Lorca's *Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*) and then we brought them in, presented them simultaneously the same day. They could not have been more different. There was also something very weird going on in terms of male and female selections of language there.

Yael Prizant. Virginia Scott has an exercise where she gives you a literal trot of a piece of Molière. And I don't speak French. So she gave us the French, but she gave us her literal trot and asked us to make something of it. And they were all completely different. It was exciting to see that as a group in the room, but it was also exciting to understand people's processes, because we had to speak to the choices we were making.

Adam Versenyi. That's exactly what I was just thinking.

Jean Graham-Jones. But those instances of well-known plays and playwrights where there's a lot of baggage coming to the table. It'd be really interesting to do that with a play by someone you don't know.

Andy Bragen. There was a translation conference in Montreal where they invited eight translators from various countries: a Lithuanian, an Argentinian, two German translators, etc. etc.

Jean Graham-Jones. Sounds like a joke! They all walk into a bar and then what happens?

ANDY BRAGEN. And it was. Both Germans were named Frank, from Berlin, bald with glasses. There's a joke there. But we did a little workshop with excerpts from this play, *Yukon Style*, which I really love. A Quebecois play. We had the French, and everybody took fifteen minutes, maybe a little longer, to translate two little passages into the language they translate into, and then we read those out loud. Granted, we didn't all understand the languages. The two Franks, apparently, had very different translations – they sounded very different – and then the Lithuanian ... You really got this amazing sense of everyone working on this same piece – quickly, of course, not with a lot of thought – but how people wrestled with things. It was fascinating to hear, and actually pretty quick.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I would like to have us pursue Joseph's master idea of the Network. Even as simple as an email list, we all have each other's contact information ... but also maybe collectively coming up with all the theaters in the United States we think might be interested in new translation. People were throwing out names in the course of these several days, and I actually think there's quite a group.

ANDY BRAGEN. Who knows how reliable it is, but in the back of the Dramatists Sourcebook, there is a list of companies that claim to be interested in translation.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. But I'm more interested in the ones that we know and really believe are interested or have been doing it.

ADAM VERSENYI. Well, we have about five minutes, so any final thoughts anybody would like to throw out?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Alejandra has been so quiet...

ALEJANDRA RODRIGUEZ. Oh, but I'm the type of person who likes to learn. Listen and learn. The only thing that I can say now is that this conference has been an epiphany to me. Has opened a new world to me. So I'm super happy, and thank you very much, for allowing me to be part of it. And congratulations to all of you, because your work is awesome.

NEIL BLACKADDER. I don't know what the ethics of this are, but if somebody tells you they had an epiphany, is it rude to ask them to talk to you about the epiphany?

[laughter]

I'm interested. Can you say a bit more?

ALEJANDRA RODRIGUEZ. This is why I don't talk very much! Well, in the sense that I never thought about translating and I have a lot of problems because the works that I work on, they are not translations. So nobody knows it, and it is very difficult to tell people about them. And I was thinking, maybe I could do *this*, someday. Because at the same time, as you know, I write theater, I love to write, and being here with you, I have

seen that being a translator is also being an artist, being a writer. It appeared so fascinating to me.

SCOTT WILLIAMS. It's been interesting for me, too, because I come at it differently from most of ya'll, I think. You come at it from theater, and I come at it from the much larger angle of translation studies. Lots of reading in translation theory, what different people have been doing over the last thirty-four years particularly, struggling with myself to situate theater translation within that much larger context. It's partly confirmed things that I have thought about, and it gives me lots of food for thought. I can't say that I had an epiphany – it might come in two weeks or three weeks – but I have a lot of food for thought.

JOSEPH MEGEL. The conference was incredibly important to me because I'm sort of expanding. I came from such a specific new play/playwright model. I got a good sense that, yes, it changes, people do it different ways, but they all take some form that is sort of understandable. To really think about this process as a new play process, and to see that my impulse and instinct are probably the same, and that you're probably working on the same issues and the same problems, ultimately, with the idea that the connection to the original material is important – but that's sort of like an adaptation issue. What happens when you adapt from another source? What is fidelity versus the theatrical world to be created anew? This process feels very familiar to me. It was sort of revelatory that I can go into thinking about process for translations in this way and feel fairly secure.

ADAM VERSENYI. That was obviously part of my thinking in putting all of this together, which is that the translator is frequently not seen as a creative artist. I firmly believe that they are artists. I'd just like to thank you all for the privilege of spending the last number of days with you, to talk about things that I care passionately about. That's been wonderful.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. The sustained conversation has been a luxury. [*All clap, and stretch, and leave.*]

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PLAYAS GOTTA PLAY: AN INTRODUCTION TO *HATER*

BY SAMUEL BUGGELN

1

As you've probably inferred from the title, *Hater* doesn't sound like most translations of classical French theatre. The verse is unrhymed and the language is very, very contemporary. I'll discuss here the ideas behind this approach and in some ways how it has worked, but I can't pretend I formulated the rationale in advance. I work in theatre regularly as a director and occasionally as an adaptor, and at the time of beginning the project many years ago, had not translated a thing. So the sound of *Hater* didn't emerge from theory—or even from knowledge!—but by trial and error, from my intuitive feeling for the play.

I first read *Le Misanthrope* in a standard rhymed translation, and I immediately loved the brilliance and force of the argumentation, the hilarious comebacks, the exuberance of the characters and their colliding needs. There seemed something proto-Chekhovian about these peoples' passionate refusal to be in love with the right person. But I was suspicious as to whether the translation was doing all it could to transmit the qualities of the original. I remember feeling like I was reading the play somehow muffled, across a veil. And when I read the play in French, I was delighted and surprised. Delighted by the breezy clarity of Molière's verse, quite unlike the structure and formality of its English counterpart, and surprised by the vocabulary. I suppose I'd expected a French Shakespeare who would send me to the dictionary at every other word. Instead I found the amazingly clear and modern-sounding diction of Molière. I loved it. I reviewed a lot of other English translations: no dice. The path was clear. Like any self-respecting twentysomething who had no idea what he was doing, I set out to write a translation of my own.

At first I didn't know what my version would sound like: somewhere I have pages of rhyming couplets, iambic pentameter, and period-sounding language. As I worked, though, what "clicked" revealed itself, and soon I'd found a method: I sat at my desk energetically mouthing each original line and then re-enacting the beat in English. (Like

a crazy person. Am I the only reader of *The Mercurian* to have found himself doing this?) It was a way to step back from the words and phrases of the original—laden, anyway, with *fausses amis*—to attempt instead to discern the dramatic impulses animating the text, and then to find the way that impulse might be most entertainingly verbalized by the same person in the same circumstances today. Of course this was an act of imagination: these people and circumstances couldn't exist today. But, I reasoned, isn't all translation of period work an act of imagination?

I found my way to free verse by a process of elimination. My attempts at rhyming couplets and blank verse hindered my ability to land the jokes and argumentative points as powerfully as I heard them, and in return neither form was creating an effect I delighted in. (I've never much loved the way long-form rhyme plays in English; and when I don't know the source material in advance, in the moment of hearing most performance to be honest I find blank verse tough to distinguish from prose.) On the other hand when I wrote in straight-up prose, I found myself agreeing with Richard Wilbur—widely considered Molière's preeminent English translator—who argues that in a prose version some “‘musical’ elements would be lost, in particular the frequently intricate arrangements of balancing half-lines, lines, couplets, quatrains, and sestets. There is no question that words, when dancing within such patterns, are not their prosaic selves, but have a wholly different mood and meaning.”¹

In terms of diction, I found that every time I backed off from a contemporary choice in favor of something that sounded more “period,” I succeeded, again, only in fuzzing the argument and the humor. My main concern was that the characters of *Le Misanthrope* are drawn from among the most fabulous, fashionable, and irreverent people in Molière's Paris, and I wanted them to sound that way rather than stodgy and fuddy-duddyish. And conveniently the major characters here, unlike in many plays of this period, are similar in status (no wily chambermaids or rebellious children)—so with no need to establish social

¹ Richard Wilbur, *The Misanthrope and Tartuffe, by Molière* (Orlando: Houghton Mifflin; 1965), 9

strata via levels of formal language, the last argument disappeared against simply making the characters sound like I imagined their modern-day equivalents.²

Evidently I wasn't fussed that this sort of language would feel anachronistic. Instead, I think I was drawn to that feeling. In order to say why, let me take a step back. A translator's central dilemma often seems to hover around a version of this question: to what extent do I translate the ease of reading of the original, even if that requires ironing out what is unfamiliar and thereby sacrificing flavor; and to what extent do I transmit the qualities of the work that are foreign to us, perhaps making the translated work a tougher read than it is in the source? Many translators, myself included, may sympathize more with the latter imperative—after all, the foreignness is the point—while perhaps a publisher will lean to the former. In the case of theatre translation, when the work is destined to be performed as well as read, the pressure naturally increases to make the language as natural to speak and easy to understand as possible. (After all, audiences won't be able to review a bit they didn't get the first time.)

Nonetheless, as a director in a recent case much like this one, I found myself insisting on the foreign. It was a LORT production of Yasmina Reza's *God of Carnage* (recent, set in the present, easy to speak in the original). For the West End run of the play, Christopher Hampton's excellent translation was into British English, and the setting remained Paris: the characters addressed each other as Madame and Monsieur, and the *clafouti* remained an old family recipe from the *midi*. For Broadway, the language was sensibly shifted to a more American English, but the story was, distressingly, reset in New York. Leaving aside whether this transition was well executed, I found it disheartening that some decision-makers thought an audience of privileged middle-aged New Yorkers would be unable to invest in a story about privileged middle-aged Parisians. For my regional

² By contrast, my translation of Marivaux' *The School for Mothers* appeared in Volume 4, Number 1 of *The Mercurian*. The play is full of levels of status (parent/child, servant/master) and is about a child's desire to escape the strictures of duty, so a more formal diction (by my standards, at any rate!) seemed right.

production, therefore, we created an American equivalent to the West End version: a hybrid text in which the spoken English was American, but the setting remained Paris.³

I think I preferred this approach because as a director, one gets in the habit of seeking the most exciting way to detonate, if you will, a text onto an audience. So, perhaps like many directors, I think of foreignness and familiarity less as poles on a spectrum than as things one might *collide*. (One thinks of how seldom Shakespeare’s plays seem to be set in Elizabethan costume these days.) For me, then, one of the reasons to produce *God of Carnage* in the US is to communicate that the set of venal lefties depicted in the play transcends country and culture—a “bonus” layer of meaning that’s not available to the original audience (perhaps some compensation for the inevitable losses of translation.) And we get this effect only when we’re reminded of the familiarity of these couples *alongside* their foreignness (in this case, familiar character versus foreign country). In *Carnage*, then, to shift the setting to New York not only effaces much of the flavor of the original, but also misses the opportunity for this “collision” layer of meaning.

Since of course *Le Misanthrope* is set in a world that’s thrillingly different from our own,⁴ in the case of *Hater* I think it was this taste for collision that led me to a contemporary diction. Let’s look at an example, comparing the original to a standard recent prose translation and to *Hater*:

<p>Molière Parbleu, c'est là-dessus, parler en homme sage, Et je vous en estime, encore, davantage: Souffrons, donc, que le temps forme des noeuds si doux. Mais, cependant, je m'offre entièrement à vous;</p>	<p>John Wood⁵ By Jove! Spoken like a man of sense! I admire you all the more for it. Let us then leave it to time to establish this happy relationship between us. Meanwhile I am entirely at your service. If there is anything I can do for you at</p>	<p>Buggeln Wow. You are <i>so wise</i>. I'm very impressed. Okay. We'll get to be friends slowly. Over time. But in the meantime truly you know Alex I'm your guy. If there are any</p>
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³ Since all of the words were Hampton’s, we hoped that this hybrid script would be ethically (if not, ahem, strictly contractually) sound.

⁴ The action takes place at the home of a very rich, very young widow, where all day, whether she’s around or not, a gaggle of powerful somewhat older men stop by and/or hang out, openly competing and maneuvering for their hostess’s hand in marriage. Different!

⁵ John Wood, trans., rev. Coward, David, *The Misanthrope and Other Plays, by Molière* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 102

S'il faut faire à la cour, pour
vous, quelque ouverture,
On sait, qu'auprès du Roi, je
fais quelque figure,
Il m'écoute, et dans tout, il en
use, ma foi,
Le plus honnêtement du
monde, avecque moi.
Enfin, je suis à vous, de
toutes les manières;

Court, I am known to cut
some figure with His Majesty.
I have his ear and he treats
me, by God, with the greatest
possible consideration. Once
again then—count on me
entirely.

doors you need
opened at the Louvre, I kind
of know the King—
I mean he listens to me, and
he's always very very
nice, so you know whatever
you need it's fine.

Now, OK. I'm certain that the diction of *Hater* will be startling to many, and to some simply definitively be Not What Molière Sounds Like in English. The point of the excerpt, though, is that in the NYC production of *Hater*, Oronte's line about being friendly with the king got a laugh. And that moment isn't particularly funny in the original play—it's an example of the bonus "collision" level, in which we are pleasantly startled that in the world of this play, whose characters are so recognizable, Louis XIV lives across town in the Louvre, and the guy onstage is in some way friendly with him.

Now, the line "I am known to cut some figure with His Majesty, I have his ear and he treats me, by God, with the greatest possible consideration," is a thoughtful and responsible translation. As would be the case in any conventional rendering, though, when we hear it we probably don't laugh, because nothing in it startles us with the differences between then and now. The apparent period of the language matches so well with the period of the play that in some way, to my ear, they efface one another. As standard as it may be to translate old plays into such appropriate-sounding language, I think when we do we run the risk that the audience receives both the form and content somehow condescendingly, enveloped in a nostalgic haze. So the contemporary sound of *Hater* operates, I hope, in a way analogous to a Shakespeare production costumed in business suits. The contemporary element lends immediacy to a foreign world, and the ongoing jangle of anachronism is stimulating rather than bothersome.

2

So my idea was, roughly, to land an unfamiliar world as unexpectedly clearly on our ear as the original would have on the original audience. Having found my way to that approach, specific questions often answered themselves.

I adjusted the characters' names, like the title, to be more familiar. "Hater" was acquired after the text was effectively finished, when the play was first produced, at the Ohio Theatre in NYC as part of their annual Ice Factory Festival. (I directed.) It seemed a lucky stroke that "hater" should have been so much in vogue as a term for the person who disapproves of everything.⁶ (After 2000 songs, iTunes runs out of space to list the cuts with "hater" in the title.) If such a popular term hadn't been in the air, though, I might have stuck with *The Misanthrope*. I still regret the extent to which a different title invites the interpretation that *Hater* is an "adaptation" rather than a "translation." It seems to me that the distinction is slippery in general, but so long as it's in use I maintain that no matter how unexpected the vernacular, any version of a play that transmits the referents of the original is a translation.

In line with the overall informal diction, I use first names for address rather than the original's honorifics. (In the few moments that servants speak, they address their superiors as "Sir" or "Madam.") And where Molière's characters explode, "Par la sangbleu!" "Têtebleu!" or "La peste!" I, ahem, didn't settle on "zounds" or "egad" as their most effective equivalents.

Having stepped back from the "nearest word" approach, I could make other choices to aid clarity. The play's many references to offstage legal action can be confusing at the best of times, so I translated "le cour" as "the palace" or "the Louvre," rather than "Court." This avoids confusion around the courts of law the play references and implies, and in a nice way reinforces the concreteness of what it would mean to be "at court" at this time. Similarly, though "arrêter" is most directly translated as "to arrest," to be "arrested" in Molière's moment seems to have been something more like what we'd call being "indicted," so that is the verb I used.

Given those parameters, line by line *Hater* hews very closely to the syntactic referents of the original play.⁷ (Closer, for example, than rhyming translations can.) And

⁶ The word is not, of course, a precise equivalent. Misanthropes hate human nature (or humankind), and haters hate, well, everything. But the proximity was too good to resist.

⁷ Thus my insistence that *Hater* is a translation rather than an adaptation. Reviewing the well-received production at the Ohio Theatre, two critics for prominent publications were

surprisingly, *Hater*'s reproduction of the broader rhythms of *Le Misanthrope* seems to produce a text with more classical qualities than one might have guessed. The cast of the Ice Factory production, almost all of whom had performed traditionally classical work on major stages, reported that *Hater*'s speeches required effectively the same process of preparation—and level of stamina—to spit out as did more conventionally period-seeming ones. In an earlier reading of the play, with the downtown NYC company Clubbed Thumb,⁸ an equally gifted cast found many of the speeches challenging to perform given the limited rehearsal afforded by a reading.

And as I write this, I've just had the revealing experience of seeing a production of *Hater* at Humboldt State University, directed by Michael Fields. Michael is the co-Artistic Director of Dell'arte, one of the country's foremost training programs for ensemble-based physical theatre, and among other things a master of Commedia. Now, I think of *Le Misanthrope* as probably the furthest of Molière's plays from his street-performer roots in Commedia (which are so visible in, say, *Sganarelle* or *Scapin*), and it was amazing and very unexpected to see a *Hater* that was powerfully based in this raucous tradition of street clowning. Rather than feeling in any way imposed on the text, the production seemed to reveal the depth to which Commedia traditions undergird even Molière's most heady late plays. And the audience's responses—during the show and in a talkback—surprised me by confirming that *Hater*'s characters can be sent up in the most broadly comic ways without reducing or obscuring their humanity or the stakes of the play's intellectual arguments.

More aspects of the Commedia tradition were explored in Fields' *Hater* than I could enumerate, but let me describe one: the cast took robust and hilarious advantage of the text's invitations to interact with the audience. The targets of Phil's and Celine's personality critiques and Ron's reference to an "empty-headed noble" were landed (to

seemingly startled by the vernacular into assuming the text was an "adaptation" and tempered their positive notices with disappointment that the text limited itself to "only" what Molière's original play achieves.

⁸ At the time the piece was entitled "The Misanthropist," reflecting a baseless fixation I had that "misanthrope" would not be a word in English if not for an early convention to import the play's original title into English unchanged—the opposite of *Hater*'s approach.

their delight) on specific patrons, Alex’s descriptions of the faults of humanity were ascribed to swathes of the audience, and Celine and Zinnia’s Act III battle was an open competition for the affection of the crowd, complete with urgings that they applaud particularly well-made points. With so thoroughly demolished a fourth wall, I leave it to you to imagine the self-assurance with which the young cast could respond to a ringing cellphone or late-arriving audience member.

Needless to say, it is fascinating as a director to see one’s writing helmed by someone else so different from oneself, and so good. Perhaps the nicest aspect was that as successful as the Humboldt production was, I didn’t think it worked better than the NYC production—just as well, though, and very differently. The magic of plays that have stood the test of centuries is that they contain many mansions. I was reassured to see that the text of *Hater* was not merely a manifestation of my own directorial vision for *Le Misanthrope*, but a sturdy vehicle for the visions of others.

At the same time, without having conferred on the matter Michael and I shared a surprising number of directorial impulses. We both used a version of a runway stage, allowing some of the audience members to look across the theatre at each other much like the *haut monde* in the boxes of 17th-century theatres. A runway, of course, also evokes the fashion-obsessed world of the play, and both productions began with a “fashion show” strut. Both shows, too, punctuated the act breaks with movement or dance interludes, as may well have been the case in 1666, to contemporary music (current radio-hit dance tracks in Humboldt, original dubstep cuts in NYC.) Most important, while the design of both productions incorporated contemporary features, both somehow felt foundationally “period.” In fact, while I think *Hater* would work well in full seventeenth-century regalia (I’m frankly hopeful to see that production), in the interest of collision management I wouldn’t particularly encourage a modern-dress *Hater*. In a *Hater* that looked as well as sounded like the modern day, I fear the text’s references to the palace, the king, carriages, and so on might not be enough to jell into an intelligible world.

Finally, as closely as I hew to the original text, I must own up to a few liberties. I play occasionally with “empty” lines of verse to suggest rhythmic possibilities; I occasionally extrapolate an argumentative point that is suggested in the original but not strictly represented there; and I add an occasional vocal tic or flourish that seems productively to “pop” a character. And I make one small narrative change. In the final moment of the play, I render Philinte’s couplet “Allons, Madame, allons employer toute chose, /Pour rompre le dessein que son coeur se propose.”⁹ as “Come on, we’ll go talk him out of it./He’ll never really do it—”; and I add the stage direction “[exit Phil; *manet* Liane].” I admit these choices were made by the director in me rather than the translator (if, at this point, one can still imagine such a distinction). A common strain of scholarship proposes that Alceste’s plan to flee Paris for *œun d’aert*” (then, a deserted place) will probably add up to no more than a brief time in his country house to lick his wounds. As a director, though, my bias is towards the option that creates the highest stakes, and since 1666 was a moment when one could board a boat from France to any number of wild New World colonies I’m attracted to the idea that Alceste is truly leaving behind the society he knows. So with Phil’s slightly limp *œHe’ll never really do it—*” I mean to suggest that Phil knows that Alex *will* do it, and that the friends may never see one another again. As for the stage direction retaining Liane on stage as Phil exits: in my perhaps romantic reading, Liane—whose role, it must be said, leaves room for interpretation—remains in love with Alex; her offer to marry Phil is a melancholy acceptance that Alex will never love her back; and the very qualities for which she loves Alex are the ones that force him to leave for good. The actress who played Liane in the NYC production was the marvelous Merritt Wever (since then an Emmy nominee for her work in *œNurse Jackie*) and at the end of the play, after Phil left her in futile pursuit of Alex, she burst, alone, into sobs.¹⁰

3

Like many translators, I believe that plays—and classic plays especially—are served by a multiplicity of other-language interpretations, rather than the one magisterial translation

⁹ Literally “Come Madame, let’s go do everything we can/to break the plan his heart proposes.”

¹⁰ The equally successful Humboldt ending was, of course, broadly comic.

œfor the ages” that some Molière translators have sought to produce. Having just outlined my own approach and some of its results, this is a perfect moment for you to skip forward and read the play. For those that are interested, though, I’d like to develop here some thoughts I formed around Molière translation and production practice since finishing the script. I probably always knew that *Hater* constituted an unusual approach to *Le Misanthrope*, and the positive responses to it have of course been gratifying. But I was somewhat na‘vely surprised to learn that for many theatres *Hater*’s approach in the abstract—whatever the text’s merits and deficits—puts the script fully outside the realm of consideration for the œclassical comedy” slot. The two deal-breaking factors are, of course, anachronism and rhyme.

Given how comfortable audiences have become with anachronistic stagings of period plays, I’ve been surprised at the extent to which it seems that for most translators, to avoid œanachronism” is a foundational part of the job.¹¹ One often encounters the rationale that non-period-sounding language would be œjarring” or œtake the audience out of the play.” As discussed, it seems to me that to jar the audience—indeed, to briefly take them out of the play—is often productive and exciting, and I would be delighted to see translators to use this effect on the page as freely as directors do on the stage.

More than that, though, I fear that as translators we may underestimate the expressive constraints we accept when we avoid language that feels anachronistic. For example, the idea seems surprisingly universal that Molière should be rendered in contemporary English. To speak only about *Le Misanthrope*: Richard Wilbur describes his project as “seek[ing] to avoid a ‘period’ diction.”¹² Donald Frame writes, “Since in French [Molière] does not generally strike the modern reader as at all archaic, he should not in English... I have sought an English that is familiar and acceptable today.”¹³ Maya Slater says, “I have avoided old-fashioned language. In the original, the speeches are clear and lively; an over-literary version would give too stilted an impression. I have aimed for a

¹¹ Unless we are to call it an “adaptation,” which opens the door to an infinity of changes in referents and, for that matter, narrative.

¹² Wilbur, *The Misanthrope and Tartuffe*, vi

¹³ Donald Murdoch Frame, trans., *The Misanthrope and Other Plays, by Molière* (New York: New American Library, 1968), xiv

modern idiom...”¹⁴ And Constance Congdon writes, “The language I chose for this version is... American English, typical of the latter half of the twentieth century.”¹⁵

But each of these excellent translators, and they are typical in this, retreats in the face of anachronism. Frame’s sentence quoted above ends, “... an English that is familiar and acceptable today but not obviously anachronistic.” Slater ends, “I have aimed for a modern idiom, though not excessively so, avoiding current slang and anachronisms.” And the ellipsis I placed in my quotation of Congdon replaces the adjective “slang-free.”¹⁶

A goal thus bifurcated: to render a complicated play in language that is “modern,” fresh, immediate, witty, lands the jokes—all the qualities of the original—while denying the possibility of using a locution that an audience member might consider jarringly unlike something someone would say in 1666, is on its face a difficult project. Tony Harrison describes his 1971 commission from the National Theatre: “a version for seventeenth-century costume, accurate, speakable, no anachronisms, no jarring slang, but in modernish colloquial English,”¹⁷ as “an almost impossibly paradoxical request,” and refuses to play ball, setting his version in 1966.¹⁸

Let’s look at the language produced by a true expert in one recent effort to square this circle. Since the need to rhyme has its own effect on English diction, let’s take verse out

¹⁴ Maya Slater, trans., *The Misanthrope, Tartuffe, and Other Plays, by Molière* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xxiv

¹⁵ Constance Congdon, trans., *The Misanthrope, by Molière* (New York: Broadway Play Publishing, 2004), 2

¹⁶ I don’t think Congdon (or Slater) avoid slang because of its informality, since much of Molière’s writing was slangy and informal in its day—the problem is that today’s slang sounds like *today*.

¹⁷ Tony Harrison, trans., *The Misanthrope, by Molière* (London: Rex Collings Ltd, 1973), xv

¹⁸ There are a surprisingly large number of people who, like Harrison, want to use uncompromisingly contemporary language to render *Le Misanthrope*, but then feel obliged to reset the play in the present. So Harrison’s version is set in DeGaulle’s Paris; Bartlett’s 1990 version is set in Hollywood; Martin Crimp’s 1996 version is set in the London of that day; Lochhead’s hilarious 2002 *Miseryguts* is set in present-day Glasgow; Ranjit Bolt’s 2008 *The Grouch* is again set in contemporary London. I can well understand wanting to see the story set, for example, in 1966 Paris—but, inveterate collider of periods that I am, I might prefer to do so using Ozell’s 1714 translation.

of the equation. Here is a representative excerpt from two translations of Molière’s prose *Don Juan*: the first is Henri Van Laun, writing in 1875, and the second is Wilbur, writing in 1998.

Do not be surprised, Don Juan, to
see me at this hour, and in this dress.
An urgent motive obliges me to
make you this visit; what I have to say
will admit of no delay.¹⁹

Don’t be surprised, Don Juan, to
see me at this hour and in this costume.
The most urgent motives compel me to
make this visit, and what I have to say
will permit of no delay.²⁰

Wilbur’s language is all but indistinguishable from that produced 123 years earlier. When scrupulously avoiding a feeling of anachronism, it would seem to become virtually impossible to “avoid a period diction,” a goal that almost every translator notes as being equally important. The problem may be that this approach aims definitely *away* from something—language that sounds too new or too old—but seems unsure as to what it is aiming *at*. Wilbur almost confirms as much, in his *Misanthrope* introduction: “at best the diction mediates between then and now, suggesting no one period.”²¹ But I fear this nowhere may not be anywhere. The territory in which many translations aim to live—not detectably of our day but neither sounding “period”—is one that may contain very little land.

Finally, it seems to me that to own up to the newness of one’s writing may simply be the most honest approach. If we want our Molière to feel like 1666 untainted by the present moment, fascinating and genuinely old translations are extant, googlable, and in the public domain.²² It seems to me that when a purely “period” or “authentic”-feeling

¹⁹ Henri van Laun, trans., *The Dramatic Works of Molière, rendered into English, Volume Third*, (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1876), 153-54.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=LeAwaQAAMAAJ>.

²⁰ Richard Wilbur, trans., *Don Juan, by Molière* (San Diego: Harcourt, 2001), 119.

²¹ Wilbur, *Misanthrope and Tartuffe*, 10.

²² I’m a particular fan of the version that appeared in 1739, along with six other of Molière’s plays, in volumes four and five of *The Comic Theatre: Being a free translation of all the best French Comedies by Samuel Foote, Esq., and others*. “Nothing is so nauseous to me as the grimace and cant of those great promifers; those smiling, cringing, hugging puppies...”

http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Comic_theatre.html?id=VDY0AAAAMAAJ

production of Molière is desired, one could do worse than to look to those who wrote within a few decades of the playwright himself. When an artistic director, as in Harrison's case, commissions a new translation but would like it to be "non-jarring," I wonder if she sneakily wishes to ease the challenges of genuinely old language for her audience, while keeping the process invisible. But to attempt to persuade an audience that it is experiencing the past unmediated by the present yet also breezily easy to understand is a Disneyfication of the world of the play. As theatre makers, we know we have no way to transport the audience to 1666 Paris, but merely to an imagined place that mixes the then and there with the here and now. And this hybrid space is not a failed but a thrilling one. I would urge that as translators, we feel free—when appropriate—to take our audience into our confidence and exploit, rather than conceal, the advantage of our currentness; that we make a tool of anachronistic-sounding diction and the collisions it creates; and that we do so unapologetically under the banner of "translation."

4

Finally, to rhyme. This question is more localized to translators of Molière, but for the past 60 years it has been powerfully localized there. For almost three centuries Molière is exclusively translated into prose or occasionally blank verse.²³ Jump with me to 1955: Richard Wilbur is a celebrated poet advocating, *contra* the New York School, the Beats, and other American poets of his moment, that English-language verse ought to return to rhyme. And with *The Misanthrope* he does the impossible, translating Molière's rhyming couplets for the first time into the same form in English. Like the four-minute mile, though, once the impossible thing is done, it is done often. Three more prose or blank-verse contributions appear in the 1950s,²⁴ but since then, rhyming couplets have seemed almost mandatory for Molière's verse plays. Wilbur's *The Misanthrope* has become

²³ Complete or selected works are contributed in prose by John Ozell (1714), John Watts (1732), Baker & Miller (1739), Samuel Foote (1762), R. Taylor (1771), Henri Van Laun (1875), Charles Heron Wall (1876), Thomas Constable (1898), Charles Matthew (ca. 1890), Katharine Prescott Wormeley (1894), A.R. Waller (1902), and in blank verse by Curtis Hidden Page (1908).

²⁴ As correctives? They are Morris Bishop, 1957, Bernard Grebanier, 1959, and John Wood, 1959.

canonical, and since 1970 at least ten more rhyming translations of that play alone line up next to it, compared to one without rhyme.²⁵

Now, whether one enjoys the way extended rhyming couplets play on stage in English is a matter of taste. What I find puzzling, though, is that one often hears rhyming-couplet translations of Molière described as being more “classical” than others. Indeed, Wilbur writes in his introduction that his rhyming couplets “recall our own tragic tradition.”²⁶ In fact, though, when one surveys the history of English drama it seems that to write an entire play in rhyming couplets may be thought of as a challenge to our tragic tradition. The emergence of what we consider to be the English language itself coincides with the abandonment of rhymed-through playwriting, in the shift from Middle English in which the rhymed mystery and morality plays are written, to the Elizabethan English in which Shakespeare and his contemporaries write largely unrhymed verse. The first time rhymed-through verse appears on the English comic stage is via Wilbur’s pen, in 1955.²⁷

The newness of this form in English is of course no argument against the approach; no more is *Hater* a traditional approach. I mention the point merely in the hope that the acting teachers who rightly desire to train their students in the performance of classical

²⁵ Rhyming versions are contributed by Tony Harrison (1973), Neil Bartlett (1988), Martin Crimp (1996), Ranjit Bolt (twice! 1998 and 2008), Maya Slater (2001), Liz Lochhead (2002), Constance Congdon (2003), Stephen Mulrine (2005), and David Ives (2010). Slater and Bartlett even eschew iambic pentameter to write in the rhymed 16-syllable alexandrines of the original. In 2009 Prudence Steiner contributes the sole unrhymed version in 30 years.

²⁶ Wilbur, *Misanthrope and Tartuffe*, 8

²⁷ The Restoration provides a brief experiment in long-form rhyming couplets on the tragic stage, in the “heroic tragedy,” a genre championed by the master of English rhyming couplets, John Dryden. Several dozen plays are written in the form over the course of its fifteen-year life, and the most that can be said of them is that they are neither revived nor fondly remembered. The form dies when Dryden publicly abandons it in the introduction to *Aureng-Zebe* (1675), in which he “damns his laborious Trifle of a Play,”

Not that it's worse than what before he writ,
But he has now another taste of Wit
And to confess a truth, (though out of time)
Grows weary of his long-lov'd Mistris, Rhyme.

From then on Dryden continues to write plays but without rhyme, and he continues to write rhyming couplets—to celebrated lengths—but not even when adapting Molière’s *Amphitryon* does he employ them for the stage.

verse understand that rhyming couplets in these cases are not more traditional than the cadences of Allen Ginsberg and Frank O'Hara. To my mind, the most classical English-language Molière is found in the 18th century translations, which are in prose.

As a general matter, I can't help but wonder if very often the best way to translate a verse form into a highly different destination language will be simply to reproduce it there.²⁸ Historically, the English verse most equivalent to Molière's Alexandrines would be the blank verse of the Elizabethans.²⁹ And in terms of the *effects* of verse in each language, rhyming couplets in English behave quite unlike they do in French. The linguistic reasons for this are profound, numerous, and not for delving into here.³⁰ Suffice it to make two points: first, rhymes are much harder to find in English than French, and so extended rhyme in English implies some compromise to lexical fidelity in the translation, and some more unusual syntax than occurs in the original. And second, once we've made these compromises, English rhyming couplets could hardly sound less like they do in French. The effect in French is formal, regular, and constantly present, yet graceful and unobtrusive, supporting the play's thought structures without dominating them; in English it would seem that this effect is simply not available. Our language is structured such that long-form rhyming couplets must walk the line between sounding, when audible, as songlike as Dr. Seuss or, when good writing and performance work to counter this effect, sounding virtually imperceptible but for the linguistic distortions they necessitate. (The actor Brian Bedford, one of Wilbur's greatest champions and interpreters, notes that "often the audience is not aware of the rhyme," though he insists "it does do something.")³¹

²⁸ The principal arguments made by translators in favor of English rhymed couplets for Molière are made by Wilbur, Frame, and Harrison in their *Misanthrope* introductions. To my mind, these arguments tend either to be very subjective or simply to dissolve upon scrutiny.

²⁹ In 1908 Curtis Hidden Page makes this argument memorably, introducing his *Complete Works*, (<http://books.google.com/books?id=nWpBAAAAYAAJ>, xxxiii), as does Christopher Hampton, much later, in the introduction to his 1983 blank-verse *Tartuffe* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber), 8.

³⁰ Hampton's *Tartuffe* introduction gets into the technicalities of this.

³¹ Jaime Weinman, "The last of the rhyming poets," MacLeans.ca, May 30, 2011. <http://www2.macleans.ca/2011/05/30/the-last-of-the-rhyming-poets/>.

Don't get me wrong: when we eliminate rhyme in the translation altogether, something is lost. And if, as I suspect, to recreate the rhyme in English is not the best compensation, how might one try, imperfectly, to make up the difference? It seems that Molière makes sacrifices too. He often adds a word or phrase, purely, it would seem, to make up the syllables he needs; so in unrhymed English, at least the points and jokes can land more directly.³² And the arrangement of Molière's speeches often seems governed by the logic of the rhyme rather than that of the ideas, so I often found myself able to build a more propulsive argument by swapping the order of some clauses or even sentences. Further, Molière's language is beautifully clear, but if one sets aside the rhymes it's not particularly exciting: he's famous, in fact, for using almost no imagery nor lyrical turns of phrase.³³ So one might hazard to make up for some of what is lost—to the extent of one's gifts—with wit and imagery. For example:

Original ACASTE Parbleu, s'il faut parler des gens extravagants, Je viens d'en essayer un des plus fatigants; Damon, le raisonneur, qui m'a, ne vous déplaie, Une heure, au grand soleil, tenu hors de ma chaise. CELIMENE C'est un parleur étrange, et qui trouve, toujours, L'art de ne vous rien dire, avec de grands discours. Dans les propos qu'il tient, on ne voit jamais goutte,	John Wood ³⁴ ACASTE Egad, talking of odd fellows I have just had a dose of one of the most tiresome of them all—I mean that garrulous bore, Damon! He kept me out of my sedan chair for an hour, if you please, and in the blazing sun too! CELIMENE How he <i>does</i> talk! He contrives to say nothing at the most inordinate length and I can never make any sense of what he is talking <i>about</i> . It is like listening to so much noise.	Wilbur ³⁵ ACASTE Speaking of dunces, I've just now conversed With old Damon, who's one of the very worst; I stood a lifetime in the broiling sun Before his dreary monologue was done. CELIMENE Oh, he's a wondrous talker, and has the power To tell you nothing hour after hour: If, by mistake, he ever came to the point,	Buggeln CASHIN And speaking of weirdoes I'm absolutely wrecked. Damon, Mister Chatty, this is true, kept me out of my sedan chair for a solid hour yapping in the blazing sun! CELINE Oh he is the Olympic Mouth Champion—that guy can actually talk without saying anything. It's true, I've searched, there's no
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³² I'm not the first to notice this: John Wood, in his original introduction, says a prose translation provides the "small consolation that it is possible to eliminate some of the minor but recurring tautologies, the odd words which are put in to rhyme or to eke out the line."

John Wood, trans., *The Misanthrope, and Other Plays, by Molière* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959), 20

³³ Notwithstanding that almost half of his plays are written in rhyme, Molière is not really considered by the French to even be a poet; in English, on the other hand, Shakespeare (who rarely rhymed in his plays) is thought of as one of our greatest.

³⁴ Wood, trans., rev. Coward, *Misanthrope*, 110

³⁵ Wilbur, *Misanthrope and Tartuffe*, 61

Et ce n'est que du bruit, que
tout ce qu'on écoute.

The shock would put his
jawbone out of joint.

content, it's a string of purely
abstract noises.

I chose this segment because it's a bit tricky: it doesn't advance the story so it has to be entertaining on its own. And I think by many measures it's among Wilbur's most successful passages: the rhymes are regular, the rhythm is clear, and the effect is delightful.³⁶ I'd point out, though, that in Wilbur's rendering more of the delight comes from the effect of the rhymes than from the way in which the scene *itself* is entertaining; the reverse is true in French. And while these couplets read beautifully in this sort of short burst (in which form, by and large, they are used in Elizabethan dramatic verse), in performing the entire play the actor will have to de-emphasize the rhymes to virtual inaudibility in order that they not come to dominate the proceedings. Finally, though the sense remains broadly the same, the need to rhyme has prompted some imaginative reinterpretation on Wilbur's part: Damon becomes old, and a dunce rather than an oddball; we lose the fabulous image of being kept out of one's personal litter; to come slowly to the point subs for speaking emptily; and a jawbone is invented of whole cloth.

It may be nervy of me to quibble with the some of the pressures Wilbur applies to Molière's precise syntactic referents, since *Hater* bends some lines in similar ways. (I am able to do less of it though, and in pursuit of other game than to rhyme.) I hope it's clear that I don't make these points to criticize Wilbur, who is more responsible than anybody for re-introducing Molière to English-language stages, but simply to consider the tradeoffs implied by a rhyming approach. As for the compensations I have to offer? "Weirdoes," "wrecked," "yapping," "Mister Chatty," the Olympic Mouth Champion": they're certainly not conventional, but I've had the honor and pleasure of seeing them heartily entertain a number of audiences. I hope in context they divert you as well.

*

³⁶ A few lines later, his form is less regular: "His talk is full of eyebrows and grimaces;/How tired one gets of his momentous faces;"

*

Samuel Buggeln is a director, casting director and translator based in NYC and Ithaca, NY. In NYC he is an Artistic Associate of the New Ohio Theatre, and he often creates work with his collaborators as Bug Company. Work at the New (or old) Ohio includes the world première of the Bulgarian play *The Eyes of Others*; the O-B première of *Rum & Vodka* by Conor McPherson; the Drama Desk-nominated *Cressida Among the Greeks*; and, for the Obie Award-winning Ice Factory Festival, *Hater* (his unconventional translation of *Le Misanthrope*) and his adaptations of Queneau's *Le Vol D'Icare* and Duras' *Les Yeux Bleus Cheveux Noirs* (developed at as an Artist-in-Residence with New York Theatre Workshop at Dartmouth College). He has directed and/or developed new work at numerous other downtown NYC theatres including NYTW, the Atlantic, Clubbed Thumb, and the Lark. Regional credits include shows at Capital Rep (Albany, NY), Mason Street Warehouse (Saugatuck, MI), StageWorks (Hudson, NY), and extensive work at Portland Stage (ME). He is an alumnus of the Lincoln Center Directors' Lab and a frequent guest director at NYU/Tisch and other universities. He just finished a six-month stay in Buenos Aires, where he explored (and [blogged](#)) that city's extraordinary theatre scene. He is currently finishing work co-translating new Argentine plays by Rafael Spregelburd and Santiago Loza. His translation of Marivaux' *The School for Mothers* appeared in *The Mercurian* Vol. 4 No. 1. <http://www.buggeln.net>.

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, often known by his stage name, **Molière**, was born into a prosperous Paris family in 1622. He studied to be a lawyer at the Collège de Clermont but at the age of 21 left town to become an itinerant actor. He worked the road for about thirteen years before in 1658 returning to Paris for a command performance for Louis XIV. The audition secured Molière the use of a small theatre space near the Louvre, and over the next decade or so his work generated outrage, scandal, censorship and hilarity in ever greater measure. By 1667, Molière's health was poor, and he took a break from the stage. His sense of irony was undimmed, however, and in 1673, while playing the titular hypochondriac in *Le Malade Imaginaire*, he was seized by an all-too-real coughing fit and hemorrhage. A pro to the end, he finished the performance but collapsed and died a few hours later.

hater

a new translation
of Molière's *Misanthrope*
by Samuel Buggeln

draft 4.2
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