

THE ELEMENT OF SELF-INTEREST IN MOLIÈRE'S CHARACTERISATION

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by

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the creation of his comic types.

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I - THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-INTEREST	9
CHAPTER II - THE DRAMATIC EXPLOITATION OF SELF-INTEREST	34
CHAPTER III - THE COMIC EXPLOITATION OF SELF-INTEREST	60
CONCLUSION	90
BIBLIOGRAPHY	94

INTRODUCTION

Self-interest is defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as being "actuated or absorbed in what one conceives to be for one's interests". We propose in this study to discuss the element of self-interest in Molière's characterisation in psychological, dramatic and comic terms. Self-interest is viewed, not merely as a form of caricature, but as an important aspect of Molière's theatre. The theme of the moi désaxé in Molière is discussed by A. J. Krailsheimer¹; our work on this topic is greatly inspired by his contribution. Krailsheimer, being primarily concerned with the evolution of the moi désaxé from Descartes to La Bruyère, is perhaps prevented from assessing this theme in Molière in great detail.

We tend to differ with Krailsheimer, at least on one point. He neglects the theme of self-interest in Molière's farces on the grounds that "it is those plays which provoke thought which remain the most successful."² W. G. Moore³,

¹A. J. Krailsheimer, Studies in self-interest from Descartes to La Bruyère (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 152-172.

²Ibid., p. 152.

³"Which is held up to greater ridicule, the rogue or the dupe? The question suggests interesting conclusions about the structure of comedy. The satire on Argan is surely as keen

on the other hand, argues that self-interest is to be found both in the characters of Molière's more literary comedies and those of his farces. We would perhaps adhere to W. G. Moore's view, as self-interest seems to be particularly evident in Scapin, who demands our attention almost continuously throughout the farce, Les Fourberies de Scapin. He would seem to be the keystone of the play's edifice, as Simon has observed: "Chacun le croit son valet, mais trompant tout le monde, il sert le seul théâtre."⁴

In considering the psychological aspect of self-interest, we must bear in mind Molière's principle, "lorsque vous peignez les hommes, il faut peindre d'après nature."⁵ (La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, vi, p. 208). The point is further elucidated by Jean-Louis Barrault: "Toute l'histoire du théâtre nous apprend que cet art prend sa source dans l'imitation; comprenons, non la pâle copie de la nature, mais la re-création de la vie par des moyens artificiels."⁶ In our

as that on *Purgon*. The pedants who write bad verses are treated no more harshly than the girls gullible enough to praise them, *Alceste* is no more eccentric than *Célimène* or *Arsinoé*, Don Juan than *Sganarelle*."

W. G. Moore, Molière, A New Criticism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 85-86.

⁴A. Simon, "Les Rites élémentaires de la comédie moliéresque", p. 27.

⁵All quotations are taken from the du Seuil edition of Molière's writings.

⁶Jean-Louis Barrault, Nouvelles Réflexions sur le

study, we are concerned with prevalent as opposed to occasional self-interest.

As W. G. Moore⁷ has pointed out, it would seem that self-interest is prevalent both in the rogue and in the fool to an unnatural degree, largely because they represent extremes of conduct. This unnatural or abnormal self-interest is the criterion we will use in assessing Molière's characters to determine those with which the study will be concerned. The following figures would seem to qualify for analysis: the valet fourbe, the impostor, the pedant, the jaloux, the miser, the hypochondriac, the marquis ridicule, the coquette, the prude and the précieuse. It should be mentioned that Tartuffe and Dom Juan are regarded as impostors because of their hypocrisy; the prude is largely the female counterpart of the hypocrite. To divide these figures rigidly into rogues and fools would perhaps be an over-simplification. Sganarelle may be termed a fool and Scapin a rogue, but in more complex characters such as Tartuffe and Argan, tyranny and gullibility would seem to be fused, as W. G. Moore has noted.⁸ Psychological motivation in Molière's characters generally tends to be

Théâtre (Paris: Flammarion, 1959), p. 12.

⁷W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 72.

⁸Ibid., p. 72.

conscious in the rogue and unconscious in the fool; this largely determines the nature of the self-interest. The rogue has a greater degree of awareness, which enables him to have more control over his inner motives. It is precisely this awareness which seems to be lacking in the fool. Furthermore, Molière's characters are perhaps motivated either by an idea or a physical object, the former being by far the more common, at least in Krailsheimer's opinion.⁹

Despite the variety of psychological response, a general pattern of behaviour may be postulated.¹⁰ In each case there is a figure, normal in all respects save one, who follows his own inclinations at the expense of the feelings of others. The actual drama stems from the conflict between this figure and others, normally in the form of some irrevocable action such as marriage, and which will have the effect of extending the figure's authority. The dénouement is usually contrived by undermining the egoist on some issue, a lawsuit for instance, and thus limiting his threat to normality. Nevertheless, the dénouement in no way diminishes the character's egoism, at least if one subscribes to Bailly's view:

⁹A. J. Krailsheimer, Studies in self-Interest from Descartes to La Bruyère, p. 169.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 153.

Mais, -- et c'est un trait important du génie de Molière, -- s'il récompense la jeunesse ou la vertu, et si, par là même, il châtie le vice, -- jamais il ne nous le montre corrigé. Il n'y a pas de conversions dans son théâtre, et c'est peut-être par là qu'il est le plus vrai.¹¹

Secondly, we deal with the dramatic exploitation of self-interest, with regard to language and plot-structure. Verbal banter in Molière, as Garapon suggests, is seldom gratuitous. Indeed, it would appear that certain techniques, namely latinisms, use of jargon, repetition and symmetry, stycomythia, approbation serve to reveal the element of self-interest. With regard to plot-structure, it has been noted that Molière's dramatic production falls into three periods, each characterised by the structure of the plays.¹² Up till 1662 and L'Ecole des Femmes, binary structure is prevalent; it largely rests on the conflict between good sense and the egoism of a character bent on imposing his own views, although this good sense may triumph through cunning. Ternary structure is to be found between 1663 and 1669; it is characterised by the presentation of two extremes and a juste milieu representing good sense. In the plays produced between 1669 and 1673, Molière once again returns to binary

¹¹A. Bailly, L'Ecole classique française, p. 53.

¹²Charles P. Mauron, Des métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel (Paris: Corti, 1963), pp. 275-277.

structure. Mauron argues ¹³ that binary structure owes much to farce; whereas ternary structure is more closely affiliated to literary comedy and the romanesque. We hope to show that both combine to translate self-interest into dramatic terms. Ternary structure perhaps favours the more complex character's machinations and binary structure the more simple form of egoism.

Thirdly, as a trait of character one would hardly consider self-interest amusing. In Molière's opinion, however, comic treatment can serve to render defects ridiculous:

Car enfin, je trouve qu'il est bien plus aisé de se guinder sur de grands sentiments, de braver en vers la fortune, . . . que d'entrer comme il faut dans le ridicule des hommes, et de rendre agréablement sur le théâtre les défauts de tout le monde.
(La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, vi, p. 208).

Molière's comic principle largely rests on "entrer comme il faut dans le ridicule des hommes" (loc. cit.). For this ridicule to provoke amusement, one must: "se laisser prendre aux choses, et de n'avoir ni prévention aveugle, ni complaisance affectée, ni délicatesse ridicule". (La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, v, p. 205)

Defects such as self-interest are exposed and ridiculed in Molière, with the aid of certain techniques, some of which

¹³ Charles P. Mauron, Des métaphores obsédantes. . . , p. 276.

are selected for discussion. Automatism, irony and convention help to achieve a comic effect; while the moral element inherent in the theme of self-interest leads to a discussion of the possibility of catharsis. The point is to ascertain whether the moral element is implicit rather than systematic; W. G. Moore maintains that it is implicit:

The initial error lies in confusing moral aims and moral implications. . . But it is impossible to discover that Molière had any conscious moral aim.¹⁴

Then the varying comic responses elicited by the portrayal of self-interest are viewed, more especially with regard to wit and humour. Wit as opposed to humour is often tendentious, in the Freudian sense,¹⁵ and intellectual; it generally rouses outright laughter. Humour, however, tends to be less trenchant and appeals to our sense of sympathy to a limited extent, thus only an ironic smile is raised.

In our discussion of the psychological, dramatic and comic exploitation of self-interest, it would seem that the backcloth against which Molière's characters are viewed is normality. In this sense, we perhaps reveal the extent

¹⁴W. G. Moore, Molière, A New Criticism, p. 103.

¹⁵S. Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 96.

to which his comedies display what Gouhier has termed "la double fidélité à la vérité comique et à la réalité humaine."¹⁶ The nature of this normality is widely disputed, largely because the satirical element in Molière engenders a certain confusion between moral aims and comic expediency. Indeed, in examining Molière's comedy we endeavour to examine the justification for Jouvett's assertion:

Tout ce qui est intention ou volonté altère l'acte du théâtre, il ne peut y avoir d'autre préméditation que de conquête ou d'amour. . . Le fouet de la satire est un instrument symbolique pour l'écrivain.¹⁷

¹⁶ Henri Gouhier, Le Théâtre et l'Existence (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1952), p. 147.

¹⁷ Louis Jouvett, Témoignages sur le Théâtre (Paris: Flammarion, 1952), p. 69.

CHAPTER I

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-INTEREST

This deals largely with conscious and unconscious motivation in the behaviour of Molière's characters, which should enable us to gain some psychological insight into their self-interest. Artaud has, however, raised an objection to the psychological approach:

It must be said that the domain of the theatre is not psychological but plastic and physical. And it is not a question of whether the physical language of theatre is capable of achieving the same psychological resolutions as the language of words, whether it is able to express feelings and passions as well as words, but whether they are not attitudes in the realm of thought and intelligence that words are incapable of grasping and that gestures and everything partaking of a spatial language attain with more precision than they.¹

On the other hand, the plastic element is subordinated by Alfred de Vigny, who has described a play as "une pensée qui se métamorphose en machine."² Furthermore, the psychological approach is used by Mauron in Des Métaphores obsédantes au Mythe personnel. We could perhaps regard drama as a fusion of the psychological and the plastic, or as Juvet has aptly said, "de l'imagination et de la parole."³ The justification

¹Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and its Double (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 71.

²Cited by Louis Juvet, Témoignages. . ., p. 21.

³Louis Juvet, Réflexions du comédien (Paris: Librairie théâtrale, 1952), p. 160.

for this would seem to be found in Lanson's statement:

Dans Molière le sentiment intérieur, qui se pousse au dehors met tout l'homme en branle, et le discours s'accompagne d'une grimace, d'une posture, qui l'interprètent et le complètent.⁴

Self-interest appears to be prevalent in the majority of Molière's characters,⁵ but there are certain notable exceptions, who are not unduly unnatural and do not exhibit what Freud terms "deviations from normal thinking."⁶ On this basis, we would exclude the naïve valet such as Jodelet as Gros-René.⁷ The raisonneur, such as Philinte of Le Misanthrope, represents the juste milieu and thus would scarcely incarnate any form of excess detrimental to others. The bourgeois is generally not portrayed as exhibiting an unnatural degree of egoism⁸; characters like Béralde of Le Malade imaginaire display good sense and prudence. We should perhaps distinguish between bourgeois as a social status and as a dramatic attribute. Sganarelle is described as a "bourgeois" in Le cocu imaginaire, L'Ecole des Maris and L'Amour médecin, this being merely his

⁴Gustave Lanson, "Molière et la farce", p. 141.

⁵V. Introduction, p. 3.

⁶S. Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, p. 60.

⁷The naïve valet is the second zanno in the Italian commedia dell'arte. Jodelet was first portrayed by Scarron.

⁸L. L. Bernard, "Molière and the Historian of French Society", p. 541.

social rank. Sganarelle's social status varies, though the dramatic portrayal remains constant, at least in Lanson's view:

Par essence, il [Sganarelle] est seulement peuple, ignorant, égoïste, buveur, poltron, simple, sauf quand la peur ou l'intérêt lui aiguïsent l'esprit. . . . Il est mûr ou vieux, paysan ou bourgeois, mari, tuteur ou père. . . .⁹

We would also exclude from our study the servante, Toinette of Le Malade imaginaire for instance, who is generally endowed with a sense of duty and with good sense in Molière. The boastful soldier only appears once, namely in the figure of Sylvestre in Les Fourberies de Scapin; and one appearance is scarcely representative.

In Molière's plays, there is a wide range of psychological response, whether conscious or unconscious, behind the prevalent self-interest. Generally speaking, Krailsheimer¹⁰ suggests that his characters are either motivated by an idea or by a concrete object like money. Undue attachment to a particular idea can result in abnormal self-interest, by love of one's own welfare and in some cases, by disregard for the feelings of others. A person acting in this way may

⁹Gustave Lanson, "Molière et la farce", p. 148.

¹⁰A. J. Krailsheimer, Studies in Self-interest. . . , p. 169.

be termed a monomaniac, according to Nelson,¹¹ if his conduct becomes so abnormal that it leads to isolation from the rest of society and its norms. This is a person lacking what Ramon Fernandez has termed "la vision double".¹²

Fixation about social elevation characterises the existence of the précieuses of Les Précieuses ridicules. The seventeenth century précieux movement is largely associated with the aristocratic Marquise de Rambouillet and her chambre bleue and with the literary Mlle. de Scudéry. Its original purpose was to infuse much-needed purity into language and refinement into manners. In this respect, Cousin's definition of the précieuse may be applicable:

On appelait précieuses, toutes les femmes qui avaient un peu de culture et d'agrément.¹³

Gradually, the original aims were lost to view and affectation set in. Cathos and Madelon are more preoccupied with the external manifestations of préciosité than with the way of life it represents.

¹¹Robert J. Nelson, "The Unreconstructed Heroes of Molière", p. 14.

¹²Ramon Fernandez, La Vie de Molière (Paris: Gallimard, 1939), p. 136.

¹³V. Cousin, La Société française du dix-septième siècle d'après le grand Cyrus, chapt. XII, cited by P. Bénichou, Morales du grand Siècle, p. 183.

The two girls are affecting préciosité as a means of escaping from the bourgeois prospect of love and marriage.¹⁴ It would seem, however, that they are unconsciously motivated by the desire to dominate. They endeavour to attract and subjugate men by virtue of their intellect. Hence Madelon refers to the mirror as "le conseiller des grâces" (vi. p. 104) and intersperses her conversation with notions drawn from Mlle. de Scudéry's novels. Her sense of superiority is quite apparent when she addresses her father thus:

Mon Dieu, que vous êtes vulgaire! Pour moi, un de mes étonnements, c'est que vous ayez pu faire une fille si spirituelle que moi. (v. p. 103)

On Mascarille's arrival, however, her tone changes and she is obliged to admit that both she and Cathos are unknown provincials: "Hélas! nous ne sommes pas encore connues. . . ." (ix. p. 105)

The femmes savantes also seem anxious to escape from the dreariness of everyday life. Chrysale complains that household chores are neglected for more intellectual pursuits:

Raisonner est l'emploi de toute ma maison,
Et le raisonnement en bannit la raison.
L'un me brûle mon rôl, en lisant quelque histoire;
L'autre rêve à des vers, quand je demande à boire.
(Les Femmes savantes, II, vi, 11597-600)

¹⁴"Cathos and Madelon, by identifying life with the vicissitudes of fiction, have tried to protect themselves from the dull hazards of day to day existence." J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 21.

Hubert¹⁵ interprets this show of learning as a compensation for their inability as women to dominate elsewhere, such as in politics. They do not confine their efforts to becoming socially acceptable, as it would seem that has already been achieved. They consciously assert their superiority over men by denying the physical aspect of existence; or so one would gather from Armande, who envisages marriage as a form of servitude to men.

Loin d'être aux lois d'un homme en esclave asservie,
 Marriez-vous, ma soeur, à la philosophie,
 Qui nous monte au-dessus de tout le genre humain,
 Et donne à la raison l'empire souverain,
 Soumettant à ses lois la partie animale,
 Dont l'appétit grossier aux bêtes nous ravale.
 (I. i.11 43-48)

Furthermore, Philaminte is anxious to vindicate female intellectual superiority.

Mais nous voulons montrer à de certains esprits,
 Dont l'orgueilleux savoir nous traite avec mépris,
 Que de science aussi les femmes sont meublées;
 Conduites en cela par des ordres meilleurs.
 (III. ii.11. 91-94)

Hence her intention of founding an academy that will dominate the literary life of the country: "Un dessein plein de gloire, et qui sera vanté / chez tous les beaux esprits de la postérité."
 (III, iii. 11.911-912) Behind the façade of learning, per-

¹⁵* In short, these predatory females do not really care about ideas or even about the purity of the French language; they merely use philosophy as a means of asserting something much more basic. Deprived for obvious reasons of military or political dominance, they find in these learned academies some form of compensation." J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 243.

haps lurks envy of Henriette, and a desire to love and to be loved, at least in the case of Armande. The latter claims to have little attachment to men, and yet accuses Henriette of stealing Clitandre from her:

Mais c'est un dessein qui serait malhonnête
Que de vouloir d'une autre enlever la conquête;
Et ce n'est pas un fait dans le monde ignoré
Que Clitandre ait pour moi hautement soupiré.
(I. i. 11.91-94)

It would, therefore, seem that having adopted the précieux scorn for carnal instincts, amour-propre forbids her to reveal her inner misgivings. Her self-interest is undermined by Clitandre's frank avowal of love for Henriette, but not destroyed, as Bailly maintains:

Dupés, bafoués, châtiés par la vie, les ridicules de Molière s'indignent et consentent parfois à changer de résolutions, mais ils ne sauraient changer leurs coeurs.¹⁶

Thus Philaminte still clings to philosophy and Madelon observes: "C'est une pièce sanglante qu'ils nous ont faite!" (XVII, p. 111)

Undue attachment to the idea of spiritual direction is largely the cause of Orgon's undoing, at least in Krailsheimer's view.¹⁷ He is primarily interested in guaranteeing

¹⁶A. Bailly, L'Ecole classique française, p. 53.

¹⁷A. J. Krailsheimer, Studies in Self-interest. . ., p. 159.

his spiritual welfare at all costs. Tartuffe, a rogue endowed with "double vision", holds out the promise of salvation in return for entire submission to his guidance in all matters -- a proposition which Orgon foolishly accepts. Orgon is quite willing to sacrifice his family's well-being, contrary to Christian ethics. He abandons his wife, drives out his son, orders his daughter to marry Tartuffe, and makes the impostor his sole heir. This abnormal behaviour in a husband and a father may well be termed monomania. Indeed, Krailsheimer describes Orgon as a "spiritual hypochondriac, afraid of losing the source of his quack remedies."¹⁸ He is almost paranoid in his defence of Tartuffe:

Je sais bien quel motif à l'attaquer t'oblige,
 Vous le haïssez tous; et je vois aujourd'hui
 Femme, enfants et valets, déchaînés contre lui.
 On met impudemment toute chose en usage
 Pour ôter de chez moi ce dévot personnage:
 Mais plus on fait d'efforts afin de l'en bannir,
 Plus j'en veux employer à l'y mieux retenir;
 Et je vais me hâter de lui donner ma fille,
 Pour confondre l'orgueil de toute ma famille.
 (III. v. 11.1118-1126)

It is perhaps significant that Orgon foresakes the impostor because the latter, in the effort to win Elmire, wounds his pride by referring to him as "un homme. . . à mener par le nez". (IV. v. 1. 1524) Then he goes to the other extreme and vows unqualified hatred for the pious, without bothering to distinguish between piety and hypocrisy. In

¹⁸A. J. Krailsheimer, Studies in Self-interest. . .,
 p. 159.

the light of this volteface, Orgon's religious convictions would not appear to be deeply-rooted. La Rochefoucauld's analysis would seem to be pertinent:

Les vertus se perdent dans l'intérêt comme les fleuves se perdent dans la mer.¹⁹

He maintains that, lacking alike the fortitude to follow true virtue and the conviction to follow vice, men take the line of least resistance by indulging in hypocritical acts of feigned virtue:

Nul ne mérite d'être loué de sa bonté s'il n'a pas la force d'être méchant. Toute autre bonté n'est, le plus souvent, qu'une paresse ou une impuissance de la volonté.²⁰

Since Orgon lacks the volition to be consistently virtuous or wicked, he differs from more conscious hypocrites like Tartuffe, whose hypocrisy may perhaps be described as "un hommage que le vice rend à la vertu".²¹

Orgon's attachment to Tartuffe possibly reveals a desire to dominate, motivated by self-interest, since he is not averse to relinquishing his wife, children and wealth. Indeed, he seems bent on humiliating his family to show his

¹⁹La Rochefoucauld, Maximes (Paris: Garnier, 1961), no. 171.

²⁰Ibid., no. 237.

²¹Ibid., no. 218.

authority, at least to Tartuffe:

Faire enrager tout le monde est ma plus grande joie;
Et je veux qu'à toute heure avec elle [Elmire] on
vous voie.
Ce n'est pas tout encor: pour les mieux braver tous,
Je ne veux point avoir d'autre hériter que vous,
Et je vais de ce pas, en fort bonne manière,
Vous faire de mon bien donation entière.
Un bon et franc ami, que pour gendre je prends,
M'est bien plus cher que fils, que femme, et que
parents. (III. vii.11. 1173-1180)

The basic difference between the egoism of Tartuffe and that of Orgon lies largely in the degree of awareness. In this respect, Nelson²² maintains that Tartuffe displays false devotion, whereas Orgon exhibits blind devotion. It is almost inevitable in the context that Orgon, with his limited awareness, should fall victim to the impostor's wiles, the deus ex machina presenting perhaps the only possible solution. Once the situation alters and Tartuffe is convicted, Orgon, "suivant le naturel des âmes foibles"²³, tries to indicate his self-esteem by insulting the impostor, but is dissuaded.

Conscious self-interest would seem to be evident in Dom Juan's preoccupation with the notion of self-reliance.²⁴

²²Robert J. Nelson, *The Unreconstructed Heroes of Molière*, p. 17.

²³Lettre sur . . . l'Imposteur in Oeuvres de Molière, éd. Despois et Mesnard, IV, p. 553.

²⁴W. G. Moore, Molière, A New Criticism, p. 96.

This attitude may be interpreted as magnanimity in the seventeenth century sense: "La magnanimité méprise tout pour avoir tout."²⁵ Dom Juan strives to free himself from all bonds both of a supernatural and a human order. Nelson maintains that he makes a ~~conscious~~ effort to mystify others by adopting a series of poses; it is in this respect that he is a hypocrite:

With Dom Juan, 'hypocrisy' is not a matter of ethics but of esthetics: he is a hypocrite only in the etymological sense of the word: an actor.²⁶

This is perhaps one of Molière's most controversial plays, condemned alike for atheism by the parti dévot and for artistic disunity.²⁷ The play is difficult to assess, largely because of the divergence of opinion amongst critics about the value of the play as an artistic creation. Doolittle, however, champions the aesthetic unity of Dom Juan:

The stubborn belief in a unifying principle beneath the manifold appearances of human nature is. . .one of the deep-rooted preoccupations of the thought and art of Molière's century. . .in Dom Juan Molière has created his finest single artistic expression of this theme.²⁸

²⁵ La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, no. 248.

²⁶ Robert J. Nelson, "The Unreconstructed Heroes of Molière", p. 19.

²⁷ J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 113.

²⁸ James Doolittle, "Humanity of Molière's Dom Juan", p. 533.

Michaut expresses a similar view, although he has certain reservations about the play's non-conformity with French classical standards.²⁹

Dom Juan's supposed self-reliance is largely manifested on two planes: as grand-seigneur and as méchant homme. This distinction would appear to be reminiscent of the Pascalian dicotomy between grandeur d'établissement, which every aristocrat possesses, and grandeur naturelle, which is natural and therefore, independent of rank and circumstance.³⁰ Dom Juan uses the advantage of noble birth and wealth to charm women of various social ranks, to gratify his amour-propre. This view is perhaps justified by Pascal's observation:

Nous avons une source d'amour-propre qui nous représente à nous-même comme pouvant remplir plusieurs places au dehors; c'est ce qui est cause que nous sommes bien aises d'être aimés. Comme on le souhaite avec ardeur, on le remarque bien vite.³¹

Dom Juan himself confesses that love affairs are but a means of asserting his superiority:

²⁹G. Michaut, Les Luittes de Molière (Paris: Hachette, 1925), pp. 152-153.

³⁰v. B. Pascal, Trois discours sur la Condition des grands in Pensées et opuscules, pp. 231-238.

³¹B. Pascal, Discours sur les Passions de l'Amour, in Pensées . . . , p. 128.

Enfin, il n'est rien de si doux que de triompher de la résistance d'une belle personne; et j'ai, sur ce sujet, l'ambition des conquérants, qui volent perpétuellement de victoire en victoire, et ne peuvent se résoudre à borner leurs souhaits. il n'est rien qui puisse arrêter l'impétuosité de mes désirs; je me sens un coeur à aimer toute la terre. (I. ii. p. 287)

The mutual affection of a young couple arouses his envy, as he frankly admits:

La tendresse visible de leurs mutuelles ardeurs
me donna de l'émotion; j'en fus frappé au coeur,
et mon amour commença par la jalousie.

As mutual affection would seem to presuppose interdependence, if only perhaps to a limited extent, the sight of a happy couple possibly thwarts his notion of self-reliance.

Secondly, Dom Juan plays the rôle of the méchant homme. This wickedness lies, in Nelson's opinion, in his "overriding drive to self-definition in action",³² which can only be accomplished by a rejection of established conventions.³³ Dom Juan, traditionally a liar in Hubert's view,³⁴ uses conventions for his own ends, and it is in this sense that he possibly rejects them. Hence he justifies his desertion of Elvire by claiming remorse at having abducted her from a convent:

³²Robert J. Nelson, "The Unreconstructed Heroes of Molière", p. 26.

³³James Doolittle, "Humanity of Molière's Dom Juan", p. 532.

³⁴J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 120.

Il m'est venu des scrupules, madame, et j'ai ouvert les yeux de l'âme sur ce que je faisais. J'ai fait réflexion, que pour vous épouser, je vous ai dérobée à la clôture d'un couvent. . . et que le ciel est fort jaloux de ces sortes de choses. (I. iii. p. 290)

He assumes the full guise of hypocrisy in the last Act, by feigning to disavow past follies. He is perhaps motivated by what La Rochefoucauld terms prudence:

Les vices entrent dans la composition des vertus, comme les poisons entrent dans la composition des remèdes. La prudence les assemble et les tempère, et elle s'en sert utilement contre les maux de la vie.³⁵

This notion is corroborated by Dom Juan's explanation of the motive for his conduct:

C'est un dessein que j'ai formé par pure politique, un stratagème utile, une grimace nécessaire où je veux me contraindre pour ménager un père dont j'ai besoin, et me mettre à couvert, du côté des hommes, de cent fâcheuses aventures qui pourraient m'arriver. (V. ii. p. 307)

Thus he is obliged to admit the expediency of human interdependence at least, if not its intrinsic merit. He also tolerates the company of Sganarelle, his valet, whose views he despises, if only out of sheer necessity.³⁶

Dom Juan is also wicked in that he is an esprit fort,

³⁵ La Rochefaucauld, Maximes, no. 182.

³⁶ "Moreover, he [Dom Juan] needs servants to dress him for the part of seducer." J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 129.

who applies cold logic to matters of faith.³⁷ This is probably the sort of sceptic to whom Pascal's Pensées are addressed. In Dom Juan's search for self-sufficiency, he comes into conflict with the supernatural. His attempt to rationalise the supernatural in human terms fails, and he is obliged to admit that the statue baffles his intellect (V. ii. p. 307). Nevertheless, he refuses to abandon his hypocrisy both in the presence of the spectre, representing divine grace in Michaut's view,³⁸ and before the statue. Nelson contends³⁹ that it is through suicide and damnation that Dom Juan proclaims his self-reliance, and that since these are his own conscious options, his dire end does not necessarily imply the failure of his ideal. This would seem to be contrary to W. G. Moore's opinion of Dom Juan as " a man who despises humanity, who sets himself apart and above the rest and is thus bound, being human, to fail."⁴⁰ This

³⁷ Bénichou draws similarities between Dom Juan's situation and the predicament of the feudal aristocracy under Louis XIV. The roi soleil curtailed their power by the transforming them into a noblesse de cour. Their desire to dominate is reflected in the esprit fort notion's prevalence amongst aristocrats. P. Bénichou, Morales du grand Siècle, p. 171.

³⁸ G. Michaut, Les Luittes de Molière, p. 182.

³⁹ Robert J. Nelson, "The Unreconstructed Heroes of Molière", p. 27.

⁴⁰ W. G. Moore, "Dom Juan Reconsidered", p. 514.

is, in our view, belied by the fact that Dom's Juan humanity is possibly also a deliberate choice, for he gives alms to the Poor Man "pour l'amour de l'humanité" (III. ii. p. 299). Furthermore, Hubert regards the dénouement as an "apocalyptic materialization"⁴¹; Nelson and Doolittle⁴² add that brute force as opposed to spiritual power is used to crush his self-reliance. We would perhaps subscribe to a more limited assessment, by observing that the deus ex machina would seem to represent an appeal to a superior power, at least in dramatic terms, and that Dom Juan's self-reliance is perhaps crushed against or rather despite his will, as with Tartuffe's hypocrisy. Krailsheimer argues the point quite cogently:

Pathological libertinage is the cause of Dom Juan's downfall. If his punishment is to be eternal it is because he has wagered in the full knowledge of the odds and stakes (to use Pascal's formula) and quite deliberately chosen damnation as the price for that freedom from constraint which his ego demands.⁴³

The distinction between two forms of conscious self-interest, Dom Juan's self-reliance and the valet fourbe's

⁴¹J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 127.

⁴²Robert J. Nelson, "The Unreconstructed Heroes of Molière", p. 28 and James Doolittle, "Humanity of Molière's Dom Juan", p. 532.

⁴³A. J. Krailsheimer, Studies in Self-interest. . ., p. 164.

cunning, is perhaps best illustrated by La Rochefaucauld's maxim:

Celui qui croit pouvoir trouver en soi-même de
quoi se passer de tout le monde se trompe fort;
mais celui qui croit qu'on ne peut se passer
de lui se trompe encore davantage.⁴⁴

The crafty valet's egoism is perhaps motivated by love of virtuosity. The ending reveals that his intrigues are largely the product of amour-propre, for it is not the direct outcome of his efforts. Hubert makes the point, with regard to Scapin:

It so happens that all the energy he expends
and all his wondrous intrigues must go for
naught, for the end would have been the same
whether or not he intervened.⁴⁵

In this respect, the crafty valet exaggerates his own importance, a tendency in human nature which La Rochefoucauld notes:

Le vrai moyen d'être trompé c'est de se croire
plus fin que les autres.⁴⁶

We do not claim, however, that Molière has depicted this

⁴⁴La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, no. 201.

⁴⁵J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 232.

⁴⁶La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, no. 127.

figure in great psychological depth. Indeed Lanson, among other critics, has argued that the crafty valet's character is basically simple, in the farce tradition. He describes this sort of figure as:

Une nature puissamment unifiée par la domination d'une passion ou d'un vice qui détruit ou opprime toutes les autres affections et puissances de l'âme, et devient le principe de toutes les pensées et de tous les actes du personnage.⁴⁷

This character is studied, despite his rudimentary psychology, because he exhibits considerable self-interest, though this is not discussed by Krailsheimer⁴⁸. The element of self-interest emerges from Scapin's declaration:

A vous dire la vérité, il y a peu de choses qui me soient impossibles, quand je m'en veux mêler. J'ai sans doute reçu du ciel un génie assez beau pour toutes les fabriques de ces gentillesse d'esprit, . . . à qui le vulgaire ignorant donne le nom de fourberies. (I. ii. pp. 568-569)

Mascarille, the self-styled fourbum imperator, appears in three Molière plays: L'Etourdi, Le Dépit amoureux and Les Précieuses ridicules. We are concerned more with the portrayal of Mascarille as a crafty valet; Le Dépit amoureux

⁴⁷G. Lanson, "Molière et la farce", p. 145.

⁴⁸v. A. J. Krailsheimer, *Studies in Self-interest*. . . , pp. 152-172.

is, therefore, excluded⁴⁹. Mascarille's tricks are a means of publicly proving his worth and of acquiring gloire, in the seventeenth century sense. This perhaps explains his annoyance at Lélie's one attempt at intrigue in L'Etourdie, which causes him to pour out his woes in pseudo-heroic⁵⁰ fashion. His egoism leads him to claim that his fate is in the balance, and that he must choose between exhibiting bonté or courroux (III. i. 11. 901 and 903). Indeed, since he regards intrigues as "nobles travaux" (loc. cit. l 916), it is hardly surprising that he should be averse to losing face:

On dira que je cède à la difficulté;
Que je me trouve à bout de ma subtilité:
Et que deviendra lors cette publique estime
Qui te vante partout pour un fourbe sublime?
(loc. cit. 11. 909-912)

Despite the fact that Lélie's clumsiness incessantly foils his plans, he is gratified to be the harbinger of the good news that resolves his master's love affair. His attachment to his master is probably not due to pure altruism on his part,

⁴⁹Bray notes that with Mascarille there is continuity of name but discontinuity of type. R. Bray, Molière, homme de théâtre, p. 155.

⁵⁰Schérer has interpreted this monologue in terms of a parody of Cornelian tragedy, as interpretation to which we are largely indebted. v. J. Schérer, "Molière et le monologue tragique", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LIV (Sept. 1939), 768-774.

if he places such value on intrigue as a means of gaining public esteem. Indeed, La Rochefoucauld observes that such conduct is but another facet of amour-propre:

Il semble que l'amour-propre soit la dupe de la bonté et qu'il s'oublie lui-même lorsque nous travaillons pour l'avantage des autres. Cependant, c'est prendre le chemin le plus assuré pour arriver à ses fins; c'est prêter à usure, sous prétexte de donner: c'est enfin s'acquérir tout le monde par un moyen subtil et délicat.⁵¹

So far we have dealt with self-interest motivated by a fixation, by undue attachment to an idea. With Harpagon, the miser, we are presented with the sort of monomaniac whose existence centres on a concrete object: money. On the subject of monomania Krailsheimer makes this claim:

Molière's characters, as monomaniacs, are single-minded, pathologically so, from the start and thus 'maîtres de soi', but the comic conflict derives precisely from their inability to extend their mastery to others, whether to individuals or to society as a whole.⁵²

Although we would tend to agree that Harpagon's avarice is pathological, he can scarcely perhaps be termed maître de soi, since it is precisely his monomania, in the sense of single-mindedness, which causes him to lack conscious self-awareness.

⁵¹La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, no. 236.

⁵²A. J. Krailsheimer, Studies in Self-interest. . ., p. 172.

Indeed, the involuntary nature of his egoism is noted by

Nelson:

We should remember that Alceste willingly banishes himself to his desert; the Harpagons and the Arnolphes are banished unwillingly. Or more precisely unwittingly. In fact, they have been living psychologically in a desert from the very beginning of the play: the desert of their particular obsessions.⁵³

Harpagon is then, according to W. G. Moore,⁵⁴ a one-track man, who has transferred to money all the affection that one normally gives to people, as La Flèche remarks:

En un mot, il aime l'argent plus que réputation,
qu'honneur, et que vertu. (L'Avare, II. iv. p. 441)

Thus on dismissing La Flèche, Harpagon's first thought is to ensure that the servant has no knowledge of his hidden treasure. He, therefore, searches the servant from head to foot, but betrays himself through sheer anxiety:

Harpagon: 'Ne serais-tu point homme à faire courir
le bruit que j'ai chez moi de l'argent
caché?'

La Flèche: 'Vous avez de l'argent caché?'

Harpagon: 'Non, coquin, je ne dis pas cela!.'
(I. iii. p. 433)

Harpagon does not even trust his own children with money and often condemns their supposedly lavish expenditure. Cléante, his son, is particularly criticized for wasting money on dress,

⁵³Robert J. Nelson, "The Unreconstructed Heroes of Molière", p. 29.

⁵⁴W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 109.

instead of investing profitably:

Il est bien nécessaire d'employer de l'argent à des perruques, lorsque l'on peut porter des cheveux de son cru, qui ne coûtent rien. Je vais gager qu'en perruques et rubans il y a du moins vingt pistoles; et vingt pistoles rapportent par année dix-huit livres six sous huit deniers, à ne les placer qu'au denier douze. (I. iv. p. 435)

Indeed, he unwittingly lends money to his own son at very high interest, and is not in the least ashamed when Cléante finds out that he is the money-lender. In fact, he lays the blame squarely on Cléante for needing to borrow money. His mercenary nature is further revealed by the marriages he arranges for his two children, which should be of financial benefit to him. Cléante is to marry a rich widow, while Elise is to wed the ageing but wealthy Anselme, without a dowry.

Harpagon is not only a mercenary father but a mercenary suitor. He expects Mariane's mother to bleed herself while, if necessary, to provide a dowry for her daughter:

Car encore, n'épouse-t-on point une fille sans qu'elle apporte quelque chose. (II. v. p. 442)

Marriage is not only a business transaction, but possibly also a means of extending his authority and thus gratify the desire to dominate. Hence he is incensed with Cléante for competing with him over Mariane:

N'est-ce pas une chose épouvantable, qu'un fils qui veut entrer en concurrence avec son père? et ne doit-il pas, par respect, s'abstenir de toucher à mes inclinations. (IV. iv. p. 454)

As Valère astutely observes, direct confrontation only serves to stiffen the miser's resistance, possibly by rousing his desire to dominate:

Heurter de front ses sentiments est le moyen de tout gêner, et il y a de certains esprits qu'il ne faut prendre qu'en biaisant; des tempéraments ennemis de toute résistance; des naturels rétifs, que la vérité fait cabrer, qui toujours se raidissent contre le droit chemin de la raison. (I. v. p. 438).

Although Harpagon seeks to gratify his vanity and to extend his authority through marriage, only money gives him a real sense of security.⁵⁵ Hence when his casket is stolen his whole character disintegrates, and a sort of mania or at least hysteria ensues:

Au voleur! au voleur! à l'assassin! au meutrier!
Justice, juste ciel! je suis perdu, je suis assassiné;
on m'a coupé la gorge: on m'a dérobé mon argent.
Qui peut-ce être? Qu'est-il devenu? Où est-il?
Où se cache-t-il? Que ferai-je pour le trouver?
Où courir? Où ne pas courir? N'est-il point là?
N'est-il point ici? Qu'est-ce? Arrête. (A lui-même,
se prenant le bras.) Rends-moi mon argent, coquin. . .
Ah! c'est moi! Mon esprit est troublé. . . (IV.
vii. p. 455)

Furthermore, it would seem to be evident that Harpagon's authority depends on his wealth, at least as far as it is a support, for he says:

⁵⁵Frosine argues that Mariane's lack of dowry is compensated by the latter's supposed frugality, to which Harpagon replies: "Ce compte-là n'est rien de réel." (II. v. p. 443) This we interpret to mean that the dowry or rather actual money is his criterion of reality.

Puisque tu m'es enlevé, j'ai perdu mon support
 . . . tout est fini pour moi, et je n'ai plus que faire
 au monde. (loc. cit. p. 455)

Harpagon's pathological case is perhaps due to his single-mindedness and to a misplaced or rather miscalculated sense of domination. His horde of servants should probably be construed as gratification of his amour-propre, rather than incipient liberality, for he forces them to suffice with the minimum. Money is the centre of his existence, hence he is willing to allow his children to marry whomsoever they wish, providing his casket is returned. Although he ultimately makes this concession, one may safely say that he will persist in equating wealth with health.

Thus we would conclude that the trait that all these characters have in common is self-interest, which manifests itself in various guises, though largely through undue attachment to an idea or to a concrete object, Harpagon probably being the sole example of the latter phenomenon. The psychological motivation of self-interest is shown to be predominantly conscious with those, such as Dom Juan and the crafty valet, who are endowed with a certain perspective of their activities. On the other hand, the précieuse or femme savante, Orgon and Harpagon largely exhibit unconscious motivation, for their egoism is characterised by a far lesser degree of self-awareness. We would, however, remark that the more complex figures such as Dom Juan, the femme savante,

Orgon and Harpagon often combine both forms of motivation, although one tends to be more predominant. A general assessment of the psychology of self-interest may be made, with the aid of La Rochefoucauld's analysis:

L'amour-propre est l'amour de soi-même et de toutes choses pour soi; il rend les hommes idolâtres d'eux-mêmes et les rendroit les tyrans des autres si la fortune leur en donnait les moyens:
il ne se repose jamais hors de soi et ne s'arrête dans les sujets étrangers que comme les abeilles sur les fleurs, pour en tirer ce qui lui est propre . . . Là, il est à couvert des yeux les plus pénétrants, il y fait mille insensibles tours et retours. Là, il est souvent invisible à lui-même. . . mais cette obscurité épaisse qui le cache à lui-même n'empêche pas qu'il ne voie parfaitement ce qui est hors de lui. . . l'on pourroit conclure assez vraisemblablement que c'est par lui-même que ses désirs sont allumés, plutôt que par la beauté et par le mérite de ses objets.⁵⁶

⁵⁶La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, Premier Supplément, no. 1.

CHAPTER II

THE DRAMATIC EXPLOITATION OF SELF-INTEREST

We now propose to discuss plot-structure and certain verbal techniques used by Molière to fix and isolate the element of self-interest. This study, however, makes no claim to being comprehensive; it is concerned with examining a few specific ways in which self-interest is exploited in dramatic terms.

In his study on the fantaisie verbale¹ Garapon maintains that:

Molière dépasse le jeu avec les mots en l'intégrant au mouvement dramatique de son dialogue et en le subordonnant à la peinture psychologique.²

It would thus seem that Molière's use of language is not merely gratuitous; it may, therefore, possibly stress certain traits such as self-interest. Firstly, the pedant's latinisms serve perhaps to indicate his self-importance and an inordinate desire to be admired for his apparent knowledge. This conduct can, therefore, be interpreted in Pascalian terms:

Curiosité n'est que vanité. Le plus souvent on ne veut savoir que pour en parler.³

¹We would express our debt to R. Garapon, La Fantaisie verbale et le comique dans le théâtre français, pp. 221-276 for his masterly analysis of Molière's use of language to achieve psychological verity and comic effect.

²R. Garapon, La Fantaisie verbale. . . , p. 221.

³B. Pascal, Pensées. . . , section II, no. 152.

This interpretation is corroborated by the docteur's criticism of the barbouillé's lack of proper formality:

Il faut que tu sois bien mal appris, bien lourdaud, et bien mal morigéné, mon ami, puisque tu m'abordes sans ôter ton chapeau, sans observer rationem loci, temporis et personae. Quoi? débiter d'abord par un discours mal digéré, au lieu de dire: Salve, vel salvius sis, Doctor Doctorum eruditissime! (La Jalousie du Barbouillé p. 33)

The docteur's speech reveals his egoism and vanity. This being a farce, however, the gratuitous element of fantaisie verbale is predominant at least according to Simon:

Les mots que prononce le comédien remplissent donc la triple fonction de bruits matériels; de signes intellectuels et de sons harmonieux. La farce s'appuie de préférence sur la première fonction, réduisant les deux autres à son service, comme pour prolonger son écho.⁴

Métaphraste also uses Latin merely to mystify others and to gratify his amour-propre. Hence even the most banal, comments are made in Latin:

. . .Filio non potest praeferri
Nisi filius. (Le Dépit amoureux, II, vi.11. 678-9)

⁴A. Simon, "Les Rites élémentaires de la Comédie moliéresque", pp. 18-19.

⁵The conduct of Molière's pedants with their latinisms would seem to be reminiscent of Rabelais' écolier limousin with his thoroughly latinised French.

Furthermore, the authority of Vergil is invoked at the slightest pretext, the pretext here being Albert's supposed inaccuracy:

Dans un lieu reculé du bois, voulez-vous dire,
Un endroit écarté, latine, secessus;
Virgile l'a dit: Est in secessu. . . locus.
(Le Dépit amoureux, II, vi. ll. 708-710)

Métaphraste evidently delights in hearing his own voice, for his remarks are often irrelevant to the conversation. As he himself gives us to understand, speech is the vehicle for proving superior intellect; silence is torture to this pedant:

. . . O l'étrange torture!
Hé! laissez-moi parler un peu, je vous conjure.
Un sot qui ne dit mot ne se distingue pas
d'un savant qui se tait.
(II, vi. ll. 755-758)

Secondly, the use of jargon in general, apart from latinisms, is to be found in Molière, though usually absent in literary comedy.⁶ In his numerous disguises Mascarille, for instance, indulges in a variety of jargons, including germanised French as in the following example:

Moi sous ein chant t'honneur, moi non point
Maquerille,
chai point fentre chamais le fame ni le fille.
(L'Etourdi, V. v. ll. 1811-1812)

Scapin's similar predilection for intrigue and disguise is manifested by his imitation of the Gascon accent in the sack scene:

⁶R. Garapon, La Fantaisie verbale. . . , p. 225.

Quoi! je n'aurai pas l'abantage de tuer cé
Géronte, et quelqu'un, par charité, né m'
enseignera pas où il est! (Les Fourberies de
Scapin, III. ii. p. 585)

In both cases cited, the disguise fails and the valet's
fourberie is exposed, and as previously discussed,⁷ fourberie
is a manifestation of conscious self-interest.

Doctors consciously employ jargon as a means of
promoting their own interests and the prestige of their pro-
fession. This sentiment is voiced by M. Filerin in unequivocal
terms:

Mais le plus grand faible des hommes, c'est l'amour
qu'ils ont pour la vie; et nous en profitons, nous
autres, par notre pompeux galimatias et savons
prendre nos avantages de cette vénération que la
peur de mourir leur donne pour notre métier. . .
N'allons point. . .détruire sottement les heureuses
prévention d'une erreur qui donne du pain à tant
de personnes. (L'Amour médecin, III. i. p. 318)

This notion is also evident when Thomas Diafoirus introduces
formality into the simple procedure of taking Argan's pulse,
and pronounces that the hypochondriac's pulse is "duriuscule,
pour ne pas dire dur." (Le Malade imaginaire, II. vi. p. 646)
By exploiting Argan's hypochondria, the doctors and the
apothecary further their own financial interests at least.
Moreover, Thomas Diafoirus' pompous speech in praise of Angélique

⁷v. Chapter I on the psychology of self-interest.

would seem to be aimed at displaying his intellectual worth, as he is fresh from college:

Ne plus ne moins que la statue de Memnon rendait
un son harmonieux lorsqu'elle venait à être
éclairée des rayons du soleil, tout de même me
sens-je animé d'un doux transport à l'apparition
du soleil de vos beautés. (II. v. p. 642)

Legalistic jargon is used, for instance, by the notary in L'Ecole des Femmes to vaunt his knowledge of technical details about wills:

. . . Il peut l'avantager
Lorsqu'il l'aime beaucoup et qu'il veut l'obliger;
Et cela par douaire, ou préfix qu'on appelle,
Qui demeure perdu par le trépas d'icelle;
Ou sans retour, qui va de ladite à ses hoirs;
Ou coutumier, selon les différents vouloirs;
Ou par donation dans le contrat formelle
Qu'on fait ou pure et simple, ou qu'on fait mutuelle.
(IV. ii. ll. 1062-1069)

His self-importance is wounded by Arnolphe's impatience with his technicalities and he says:

Vous, qui me prétendez faire passer pour sot,
En me haussant l'épaule et faisant la grimace.
(loc. cit. ll. 1079-1080)

It would, therefore, seem that the egoist, whether pedant or valet, consciously plays on appearances through use of jargon for the purpose of achieving recognition. A pithy comment on this mode of conduct is made by La Rochefoucauld:

Dans toutes les professions, chacun affecte une mine et un extérieur pour paroître ce qu'il veut qu'on le croie. Ainsi, on peut dire le monde n'est composé que de mines.⁸

⁸ La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, no. 256.

Thirdly the use of repetition and dramatic symmetry⁹ stresses perhaps the dogmatism which often characterises self-interest. Repetition of a single word is quite common in Molière, the following being an example:

Oronte: L'estime où je vous tiens ne doit point
vous surprendre,
Et de tout l'univers vous la pouvez prétendre.
Alceste: Monsieur. . .
Oronte: L'état n'a rien qui ne soit au-dessous
Du mérite éclatant que l'on découvre
en vous.
Alceste: Monsieur. . .
Oronte: Oui, de ma part, je vous tiens préférable
A tout ce que j'y vois de plus considérable.
(Le Misanthrope, I. ii. ll. 265-271)

Oronte's deliberate flattery of Alceste is aimed at cajoling the latter into praising his sonnet, which he recites soon afterwards. Alceste's reaction may possibly not be altruistic, at least if we bear in mind La Rochefoucauld's observation:

Le refus des louanges est un désir d'être
loué deux fois.¹⁰

The more common phenomenon, however, is repetition of phrases, according to Garapon.¹¹ The following example

⁹By symmetry is meant the repetition within one play of analagous scenes, representing a similar situation.

¹⁰La Rochfoucauld, Maximes, no. 149.

¹¹R. Garapon, La Fantaisie verbale. . ., p. 236.

is taken from Le Tartuffe and reveals Orgon's blind devotion to the impostor:¹²

Dorine: Madame eut avant-hier la fièvre jusqu'au
soir,
Avec un mal de tête étrange à concevoir.
Orgon: Et Tartuffe?
Dorine: Tartuffe! il se porte à merveille,
Gros et gras, le tient frais, et la bouche
vermeille.
Orgon: Le pauvre homme!
Dorine: Le soir elle eut un grand dégoût,
Et ne put, au souper, toucher à rien
du tout,
Tant sa douleur de tête était encor cruelle!
Orgon: Et Tartuffe?
Dorine: Il soupa tout seul, devant elle;
Et fort dévotement il mangea deux perdrix,
Avec une moitié de gigot en hachis.
(I. iv. ll. 231-241)

Another particularly good example of repetition of phrases is to be found in L'Avare, where sans dot is repeated seven times, and has the effect of emphasizing Harpagon's form of self-interest, motivated by avarice and vanity.¹³

Symmetry or scenic repetition is used to great effect in Le Tartuffe, where there are two interviews between Tartuffe and Elmire.¹⁴ On both occasions Tartuffe's sensual love for

¹²We beg to quote only part of this case of repetition, owing to its length.

¹³"Obviously, Harpagon intends to live up to his position in the world without for one moment departing from the most stringent stinginess. The contradiction lies in the discrepancy between the public image of himself which he so ludicrously strives to impose on others, and the reality of his sordid avarice and usury." J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 211.

¹⁴III. iii and IV. v.

Elmire causes him to betray his hypocrisy. Once his sensuality comes into play his craftiness recedes, otherwise he should have had more foresight than to walk into the same trap twice. It is, however, difficult to determine whether Tartuffe is really in love or whether he is merely pretending. Jouvett is of the opinion that Tartuffe is in love and that this proves he is no monster. Hence he interprets the two scenes as follows:

Je sais bien que c'est pour démasquer l'imposteur, mais qui ne se laisserait prendre à ce jeu lorsqu'il est amoureux? Et que Tartuffe, bafoué dans son amour et . . . dans son amour-propre, se venge d'Orgon avec les armes qu'il a, c'est humain, plus que monstrueux.¹⁵

Rigal, on the other hand, maintains that Tartuffe's egoistic conduct is immoral rather than irreligious but, nevertheless, monstrous:

Rien dans la pièce ne prouve péremptoirement que ce scélérat n'est pas un croyant . . . Tartuffe n'est qu'un faux dévot qu'en ce qu'il se débarrasse lui-même de la morale qu'il impose très sévèrement aux autres. . . Il est libertin au sens moral du mot, sans être libertin au sens religieux. . . Tartuffe est un croyant corrompu. . . ; sa dévotion, qui est monstrueuse, mais sincère. . . , est sa sauvegarde vis-à-vis de Dieu comme vis-à-vis des hommes.¹⁶

On examining the text, we would tend to subscribe more

¹⁵L. Jouvett, Témoignages. . . , p. 77.

¹⁶E. Rigal, Molière, I, pp. 241 and 247.

to Jouvet's view, for the impostor contrives his own ruin with comments like "Mon sein n'enferme pas un coeur qui soit de pierre" (III. iii. l. 930), and "Pour être dévot, je n'en suis pas moins homme" (loc. cit. l. 966). In the first of the two symmetrical scenes his hands stray on to Elmore's knees, which indicates the gradual erosion of his self-control in Elmore's presence. The impostor exposes his hypocrisy even further in the second interview by demanding "des réalités", by scoffing at religion and conventional morality, and by asserting validity of the casuistic maxim: "Et ce n'est pas pécher que pécher en silence." (IV. v. l. 1506)

Fourthly, stycomythia or closely paralleled replies tends to illustrate the pedantic self-importance of Trissotin and Vadius, both vying for intellectual supremacy. Their unctuous flattery of one another perhaps betrays a desire to display their respective talents to the femmes savantes:

Trissotin: Vos vers ont des beautés que n'ont point
tous les autres,

Vadius: Les Grâces et Vénus règnent dans tous les
vôtres.

Trissotin: Vous avez le tour libre, et le beau choix
des mots.

Vadius: On voit partout chez vous l'ethos et le
pathos.

(Les Femmes savantes, III. iii. ll. 969-972)

The swiftness with which unctuous flattery gives way to invective perhaps reveals their basic egoism:

Vadius: Fort impertinemment vous me jetez les
vôtres.

Trissotin: Allez, petit grimaud, barbouilleur de
papier.

Vadius: Allez, rimeur de balle, opprobre du métier.
 Trissotin: Allez, fripier d'écrits, impudent plagiaire.
 Vadius: Allez, cuistre. . . .
 (III. iii. ll. 1014-1018)

In Garapon's view stycomythia is a form of repetition:

Mais le goût de Molière pour les différentes
 variétés de répétition ne s'arrêtent pas là
 . . . sous sa forme la plus simple, le ballet
 des paroles se présente comme une stycomythie.¹⁷

This would seem to justify our study of stycomythia in terms
 of the theme of self-interest.

Fifthly, approbation serves ironically to underline
 a refusal to compromise, due to a figure's obstinate attach-
 ment to his own ideas.¹⁸ Ariste and Sganarelle's psychological
 differences are largely reflected in their treatment of their
 respective wards. Ariste's ward, Léonor, is allowed to
 indulge her every whim, while Sganarelle rigorously trains
 Isabelle for domestic life. The two brothers hold mutually
 exclusive views and we would agree with Hubert that:

To a seventeenth century audience, neither
 Ariste's extreme permissiveness, nor Sganarelle's
 workhouse techniques would have seemed realistic
 or even theoretically tenable positions.¹⁹

Since Sganarelle brooks no overt opposition, Ariste retreats

¹⁷R. Garapon, La Fantaisie verbale. . . , p. 236.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 246.

¹⁹J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect,
 pp. 48-49.

at one point behind a barrier of categorical approbation, so as to safeguard his own principles:

Sganarelle: Vos désirs lui seront complaisants,
Jusques à lui laisser et mouches et rubans?
Ariste: Sans doute.
Sganarelle: A lui souffrir, en cervelle troublée,
De courir tous les bals et les lieux
s'assemblée?
Ariste: Oui, vraiment.
Sganarelle: Et chez vous iront les damoiseaux?
Ariste: Et quoi donc?
Sganarelle: Qui joueront et donneront cadeaux?
Ariste: D'accord.
Sganarelle: Et votre femme entendra les fleurettes?
Ariste: Fort bien.
Sganarelle: Et vous verrez ces visites muguettes
D'un oeil à témoigner de n'en être point
saoul?
Ariste: Cela s'entend.
Sganarelle: Allez, vous êtes un vieux fou.
(L'Ecole des Maris, I. ii. ll. 221-230)

Another example of approbation is to be found, for instance when Cléante approves his father's praise of Mariane, with whom he is in love, little knowing that Harpagon intends to marry the girl himself through sheer vanity:

Harpagon: Ne croyez-vous, qu'une fille comme cela
mériterait assez qu'on songeât à elle?
Cléante: Oui, mon père.
Harpagon: Que ce serait un parti souhaitable?
Cléante: Très souhaitable.
Harpagon: Qu'elle a toute la mine de faire un
bon ménage?
Cléante: Sans doute.
Harpagon: Qu'un mari aurait saitsfaction avec elle?
Cléante: Assurément. (L'Avare, I. iv. p. 436)

In all the techniques discussed, it would seem that Molière's jeu verbal is scarecely gratuitous and indeed, that it serves to place the element of self-interest in a dramatic per-

spective. This view is argued in more general terms by Garapon, who interprets the jeu verbal in the following way:

Doublément subordonné au mouvement dramatique et à la peinture psychologique, ne s'épanouissant plus avec la liberté et la profusion gratuite de jadis, il rentre peu à peu dans l'ombre et cesse de provoquer, dans l'esprit du spectateur, une impression distincte de celle que procure l'observation des ridicules présentés: il a perdu son autonomie.²⁰

In view of the fact that Molière was a harrassed playwright-actor-manager often obliged to perform at short notice,²¹ it might seem impertinent to give a fairly rigorous interpretation to his dramatic structure. This would seem to have considerable bearing on whether Molière's work can be isolated from his life. Certain critics such as Ramon Fernandez and Pierre Brisson have stressed the "subjectivism" of Molière. Their attitude is largely illustrated by the English title of Fernandez's major contribution -- Molière, the Man seen through his Plays. There are those like Michaut whose assessment of Molière's plays is considerably dependent on biographical events. More recent criticism has tended to take a different approach expressed in W. G. Moore's comment:

²⁰ R. Garapon, La Fantaisie verbal. . ., pp. 275-6.

²¹ "Les rois n'aiment rien tant qu'une prompte obéissance, et ne se plaisent point du tout à trouver des obstacles. Les choses ne sont bonnes que dans le temps qu'il les souhaitent. . . Ils veulent des plaisirs qui ne se fassent point attendre". (L'Impromptu de Versailles, i. p. 214)

Of all dramatists the comic writer must be most anonymous and impenetrable behind his creation.²²

This view is also held by Bray:

Elle [la comédie] est une creation autonome qui se justifie par sa seule existence, par la force avec laquelle elle s'impose au spectateur.²³

This approach seems to have justified the study of Molière's dramatic techniques for its intrinsic qualities. Mauron somewhat modifies this position with his notion of mythe personnel, which represents a fusion of Molière's plays and Molière, the dramatist:

Dans la persistance des schémas archétypiques, dans l'accumulation des influences, elle nous permet d'entrevoir la durée vivante d'un personnage qui ne saurait être que Molière lui-même, non pas nécessairement l'homme, mais le créateur qui nous intéresse bien davantage.²⁴

Molière's dramatic structure, both binary and ternary can be examined to ascertain whether it serves to illustrate the self-interest of the rogue and the fool. W. G. Moore assesses Molière's dramatic technique in these terms:

These are the factors which condition the structure of the comedies: as a basis the antinomy of fools and rogues; as setting the conditions of bourgeois life, . . . as incident, a sequence of scenes loosely linked into a kaleidoscope or film of human

²²W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 86.

²³R. Bray, Molière, homme de théâtre, p. 37.

²⁴Charles P. Mauron, Des Métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel, p. 277.

attitudes.²⁵

We would, however, present the following schema of plot-structure, largely suggested by Mauron,²⁶ giving a brief indication of each period of Molière's production and its characteristic type of plot-structure:

<u>PERIOD</u>	<u>STRUCTURE</u>
→ 1662 and <u>L'Ecole des Femmes</u>	Binary
1663 - 1669	Ternary
1669 - 1673	Binary

Binary structure is often regarded as being due to the influence of farce on Molière's dramatic technique, especially as a result of his frequenting Pont-Neuf in his youth and of associating with the Italians. Ternary structure is generally found in literary comedy, and in Molière this would probably be a relic of the romanesque trend, often associated with Spanish comedy. We propose to analyse the plot-structure of L'Ecole des Femmes and Le Misanthrope to expose the dramatic portrayal of self-interest.

The plot of L'Ecole des Femmes is based on Arnolphe's scheme to force Agnès to conform to his pre-ordained notion of the perfect wife, so that he can marry without fearing the

²⁵W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 83.

²⁶Charles P. Mauron, Des Métaphores obsédantes. . ., pp. 275-277.

prospect of being cuckolded, his chief maxim being: "Epouser une sottise est pour n'être point sot" (I. i. l. 82). He laughs at the miseries of cuckolded husbands and imputes their fate to stupidity, on their part. He is deaf to Chrysale's warning: ". . . Mais qui rit d'autrui / Doit craindre qu'en revanche on rie aussi de lui." (I. i. ll. 45-6). Arnolphe has brought up Agnès with the utmost strictness and has deliberately kept her in ignorance. He initially regards her as existing merely for his gratification: "Je suis maître, je parle; allez, obéissez." (II. vi. l. 642). He discourages on her duties as his prospective wife and subjects her to the most humiliating sermon on marriage. Indeed, Hubert terms Arnolphe Agnès' "self-styled spiritual director".²⁷ Arnolphe is, in this respect, primarily concerned with preserving his honour or, more properly speaking, his amour-propre:

Songez qu'en vous faisant moitié de ma personne,
C'est mon honneur, Agnès, que je vous abandonne;
Que cet honneur est tendre, et se blesse de peu,
Que sur un tel sujet il ne faut point de jeu.
(III. ii. ll. 723-726)

Arnolphe, a jaloux, makes a serious miscalculation, however, by presuming that ignorance necessarily precludes

²⁷ J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 80.

natural intelligence and cunning, both of which Agnès seems to possess. Indeed, Hubert among others argues that it is Agnès' very innocence which is the cause of Arnolphe's intense suffering.²⁸ We are given the first instance of his vulnerability when Horace confesses to him that he has taken a fancy to Agnès. At this news, Arnolphe conveys his distress to the audience by sighing: "Ah, je crève!" (I. iv. l. 327) In jealousy, he places even greater restrictions on his ward in the hope of subverting the incipient love affair. But he soon learns that Horace has managed to bribe Alain and Georgette, his servants, and thus to secure an interview with his ward. In the course of the interview, the young man steals Agnès' ribbon and this further intensifies Arnolphe's distress. She is perfectly sincere about the whole matter and naïvely admits that in Horace's presence "La douceur me chatouille, et là --- dedans remue / Certain je ne sais quoi dont je suis tout émue." (II. v. ll. 563-564)

The situation is aggravated by the fact that Horace, a friend's son, insists on confiding in Arnolphe, expecting him to laugh at the antics of Agnès' guardian, M. de la Souche, who is none other than Arnolphe himself. The young man reads out Agnès' letter, which reveals her gradual awakening to life and love. Thus despite threats of "chaudières bouillantes"

²⁸J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 77.

(III. ii. 1. 727), Arnolphe is unable to prevent her from falling in love with the young man of her choice. He is, therefore, left to reflect on his scheme, which has failed partly because of its inhumanity²⁹ and partly because he has apparently fallen in love with Agnès.³⁰ This latter possibility is suggested by Pascal, who comments in general terms: "A force de parler d'amour, l'on devient amoureux."³¹ Indeed, Arnolphe foolishly overlooks this possibility when concocting his plans, by underestimating the rôle of natural instincts:

Mais il est bien fâcheux de perdre ce qu'on aime.
Ciel! puisque pour un choix j'ai tant philosophé,
Faut-il de ses appas m'être si fort coiffé!
(III. v. 11. 993-995)

He finds it hard to reprimand Agnès for disobeying his orders by writing to Horace, because his anger is dissipated by her youthful beauty: "J'étais aigri, fâché, désespéré contre elle; / Et cependant jamais je ne la vis si belle." (IV. i. 11. 1020-1021). His distress is largely due to the tardy realisation that, as a result of his humiliating treatment,

²⁹"Arnolphe. . .has acted almost criminally in preventing his charge from developing into an intelligent human being." J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 83.

³⁰Ibid., p. 82.

³¹B. Pascal, Discours sur les passions de l'amour in Pensées et opuscules, p. 128.

his ward has no affection for him. In desperation, he changes tactics and seeks to win her favour through kindness: "Tout comme tu voudras, tu pourras te conduire." (V. iv. l. 1596) Nevertheless, his entreaties are to no avail and everything conspires against him. Once her true parents are discovered, her mother being Chrysale's³² sister, Arnolphe's authority over her is undermined.

The improbable dénouement would seem to justify Lanson's observation:

Elle [l'intrigue] n'est plus qu'un prétexte à tuer les fils des marionettes humaines. . . .³³

W. G. Moore also adds that Molière's dénouement owes more to fantasy than to logic and that it helps to maintain permanence of character:

Fantasy is indeed highly appropriate to end a spectacle in which the distinction between the probable and the improbable are designedly vague, and in which any realistic happy ending would mean an alteration or violation of character.³⁴

Arnolphe fails to foist his views on Agnès, but he does not

³²As has been suggested, this play makes a turning point in the evolution of Molière's dramatic technique. Ternary structure is foreshadowed by the rôle of Chrysale, a raisonneur. Binary structure appears to predominate, however, since Chrysale is a minor figure.

³³G. Lanson, "Molière et la farce", p. 144.

³⁴W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 83.

readily admit defeat. Throughout the play his foolishness is pitted against Agnès naïve cunning. Her seeming artlessness, indeed, presents an antithesis to her guardian's blind tyranny. We would, therefore, tend to agree with Hubert's assessment of his conduct:

His sin -- or his aberration -- consists mainly in his foolhardy attempt to transform himself into an absolute on whom a normally free human being must become totally dependent. It is an unheard of manifestation of self-love that simply invites disaster.³⁵

In considering Le Misanthrope, we should perhaps remember that the desire for solitude was generally regarded as an aberration in seventeenth century society; even Port-Royal's solitaires banded together in their search for seclusion. The general view is largely expressed by La Rochefoucauld's maxim:

C'est une grande folie de vouloir être sage
tout seul.³⁶

In his analysis of Le Misanthrope, Michaut³⁷ envisages three groups of major characters, hence the plot-structure of the play is regarded as ternary. The plot-structure is illustrated in the following schema:

	WOMEN	MEN
<u>One extreme</u>	Arsinoé	Alceste
<u>Other extreme</u>	Célimène	Oronte
<u>Le Juste milieu</u>	Eliante	Philinte

³⁵J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 82.

³⁶La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, no. 231.

³⁷G. Michaut, Les Luittes de Molière, pp. 231-232.

Michaut is, however, more preoccupied with giving Molière's dramatic structure a philosophical orientation. Hence he explains dramatic evolution in these terms:

Le changement est-il seulement un changement de procédé ? Peut-être aussi y aurait-il là un progrès dans la pensée de Molière. Avancé en âge et en expérience, il se sera rendu compte que c'est une vue un peu simplifiée de l'humanité, d'y reconnaître seulement des sages et des fous, des bons et des mauvais; Et le contemplateur aura tâché de reproduire plus fidèlement la nature humaine.³⁸

Bray is, however, opposed to this interpretation and judges Molière's plays largely from the angle of dramatic technique as a distinct entity:

Il n'y a aucune évolution dans la carrière du comédien, sinon celle d'une technique qui prend de l'assurance.³⁹

We would tend to accept Michaut's grouping of characters, though not its philosophical connotation, as we are, at this point, less concerned with the philosophical as with the aesthetic aspect of plot-structure. W. G. Moore argues the point quite cogently:

So there may be after all no need to imagine Molière taking such care to keep a mouthpiece for himself. These characters have a better reason for their presence, an aesthetic reason. They ensure symmetry and roundness of comic

³⁸G. Michaut, Les Lutttes. . ., p. 232.

³⁹R. Bray, Molière, homme de théâtre, p. 251.

presentation. Sense shows up nonsense,
sobriety sets off bad temper.⁴⁰

We, therefore, envisage dramatic expediency as the guiding factor and self-interest as a master concept⁴¹ in our study of ternary plot-structure.

In Le Misanthrope we distinguish ten major episodes or "sketches", to use Bray's⁴² term:

- A. Exposition (I. i.) of all four elements of the plot discerned by Rudler⁴³ namely: social hypocrisy, salon society practices, the love theme and the lawsuit.
- B. The sonnet scene (I.ii) which reveals the cause of Oronte's lawsuit with Alceste (II.vi.).
- C. Alceste's first interview with Célimène in which he tries to convert her to his way of thinking (II.i.).
- D. Célimène's médiance is fully exposed, as she holds forth in her salon. (II.iv)
- E. The dialogue between the marquis ridicules, ending in their decision to compete for Célimène's favours (III.i.).
- F. The conflict between Célimène and Arsinoé, the coquette and the prude (III.iv.).

⁴⁰W. G. Moore, Molière, A New Criticism, p. 74.

⁴¹"This new principle of structure might be said to depend on suffusion rather than on deduction. The loosely linked scenes all stand in direct relation to the master concept; they build up a vision not of a person nor of a plot but of a choice of attitudes." Ibid., pp. 78-9.

⁴²R. Bray, Molière, homme de théâtre, p. 253.

⁴³Cited by W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 79.

- G. Arsinoë offers to reveal Célimène's infidelity to Alceste, by showing him a letter written by her to a male admirer (III.v.). This proof is found to be adequate and Alceste, in a fit of pique, offers to marry Eliante who refuses (IV. ii.).
- H. Alceste loses the lawsuit against an unknown litigant (IV. iv and V. i.).
- I. Célimène refuses to choose between Alceste and Oronte (V.ii.).
- J. Dénouement. Célimène's slanderous letters to the marquis ridicules mocking her other admirers are revealed, largely because of the rivalry sworn between the two marquis. Célimène refuses to accompany Alceste into solitude; he, therefore, departs alone. Eliante accepts Philinte's offer of marriage. (V.iv.).

Despite the apparently loose structure, it would seem that Alceste is "the keystone of the dramatic edifice."⁴⁴ The plot may thus be largely visualised as revealing the facets and consequences of his misanthropy. In the opening scene, Alceste's virtue is seen to rest on a false premise -- misanthropy: "Je veux qu'on me distingue; et, pour le trancher net, / L'ami du genre humain n'est point du tout mon fait." (I. i. ll. 63-64). He is evidently obsessed by the idea of solitude: "Et parfois il me prend des mouvements soudains / De fuir dans un désert à l'approche des humains." (I.i.ll. 143-144). Philinte's good sense further serves to illuminate Alceste's misanthropy, through sheer contrast: "La parfaite raison fuit toute extrémité, / Et veut que l'on soit sage avec sobriété." To the raisonneur, social hypocrisy is to be

⁴⁴W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 79.

noted but tolerated: "Je prends tout doucement les hommes comme ils sont, / J'accoutume mon âme à souffrir ce qu'ils font." (loc. cit. ll. 163-164). Philinte also queries Alceste's choice of Célimène and is met with: "Mais la raison n'est pas ce qui règle l'amour." (loc. cit. l. 248). If his affection for Célimène is not motivated by reason, it is probably the product of amour-propre:

Quelque prétexte que nous donnions à nos affections, ce n'est souvent que l'intérêt et la vanité qui les causent.⁴⁵

In this respect, Alceste may perhaps be regarded as a more complex form of jaloux, though equally self-centred as other egoists portrayed by Molière.

It may well be objected that Alceste's misanthropy may not provide the link, since he is absent for most of the third Act. The validity of our view should emerge on examining two scenes when Alceste is absent. In the dialogue between the marquis ridicules, Acaste's egoism is quite blatant: "Parbleu! je ne vois pas, lorsque je m'examine, / Où prendre aucun sujet d'avoir l'âme chagrine" (III. i. ll. 781-782). Acaste, for instance, not only has self-interest in common with Alceste but also a desire to be distinguished: "Les gens de mon air, . . . ne sont pas faits/ Pour aimer à crédit, et faire tous les

⁴⁵La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, no. 232.

frais." (loc. cit. ll. 815-816). The difference lies in the divergence over the manifestation of self-interest in society; the marquis tend towards excessive frivolity while Alceste tends towards excessive gravity. With regard to the plot, the dénouement is largely the outcome of the friendly rivalry between the marquis, as Célimène's treachery is exposed by her letters to Acaste and Clitandre. The revelation of Célimène's total insincerity and contempt for others, including himself, prompts Alceste's retreat into solitude.

The second instance selected for discussion is the scene between Célimène and Arsinoé, which clearly represents a conflict of attitudes. Célimène's appeal for frankness, which appears to be feigned in the circumstances, shows her exploiting Alceste's attitude for her own ends:

Ces avis mutuels seraient mis en usage.
On détruirait par là, traitant de bonne foi,
Ce grand aveuglement où chacun est pour soi.
(IV. iv. ll. 966-968)

Their malicious criticism of one another, under the guise of offering friendly counsel, reveals the depth of the antagonism, largely caused by Arsinoé's fondness for Alceste. She is revenged on her rival by showing Alceste a letter written by the coquette to another admirer. It would, therefore, seem that a link is established with a consequence of Alceste's misanthropy, his jealousy.⁴⁶ We would, furthermore, reaffirm

⁴⁶"The male characters, almost without exception, are

the view that Alceste's misanthropy is a form of self-interest,⁴⁷ largely manifested by his inordinate sense of superiority, and that this arouses a variety of responses, from contempt to praise, from those around him. The ultimate assertion of his attitude is possibly seen in:

His imagined exclusion from the world, . . .
and he wishes to take Célimène with him, not
only because he loves her according to his
fashion, but in order to become entirely
self-sufficient in his private universe.⁴⁸

We would, therefore, conclude that the element of self-interest is given dramatic value through Molière's use of language and plot-structure. We have endeavoured to show that the dramatic exploitation of this element rests on the antagonism between the rogue and the fool, which is thrown into greater relief in ternary structure by the presence of a raisonneur. We do not, however, maintain a rigid distinction between rogue and fool, as certain figures may indeed combine cunning and stupidity, although one of the

are domesticated oppressors leading a life of luxurious futility, while seeking means to gratify their egos: Acaste by his addiction to fashion; Oronte, by writing innocuous verse; Alceste, the noblest of the lot, through sterile misanthropy". J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 143.

⁴⁷R. Jasinski, Molière et le Misanthrope (Paris: Armand Colin, 1951), p. 136.

⁴⁸J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 151.

two aspects tends to predominate within a given character. This antagonism is interpreted in dramatic terms and is seen to be intensified by the "sketch" technique -- loosely linked scenes in relation to a master concept. Furthermore, a general pattern may be discussed: the plot often consists of a series of incidents illustrating the egoism of a character intent on imposing his views on others. In such situations the deceiver is generally deceived, as with Arnolphe, for instance, this being the theme of the trompeur trompé.⁴⁹ The dénouement brings self-interest into focus by showing the egoist's refusal to change radically, and his desire to continue living in a world of his own imagination, to borrow a Pascalian interpretation.⁵⁰

⁴⁹W. G. Moore refers to "the schemer hoist" with his own petard". A New Criticism, p. 72.

⁵⁰Pascal describes imagination as "cette superbe puissance, ennemie de la raison, qui se plaît à la contrôler et à la dominer, pour montrer combien elle peut en toutes choses, a établi dans l'homme une seconde nature." Pensées. . ., no. 82.

CHAPTER III

THE COMIC EXPLOITATION OF SELF-INTEREST

As a trait of character, one would hardly consider self-interest amusing. In his plays, Molière exploits the comic potential of this trait with the aid of certain techniques, some of which will now be discussed. We would, however, point out that we are in no way formulating a general theory of laughter, but are more concerned with examining Molière's vis comica in the light of first-hand¹ comments and of selected theories of laughter. Nevertheless, the difficulty of formulating systematic ideas on this area of human activity can scarcely be minimised. Indeed, Bergson specifies one of the many factors that contribute to this difficulty:

Une des raisons qui ont dû susciter bien des théories erronées ou insuffisantes du rire, c'est que beaucoup de choses sont comiques en droit sans l'être en fait, la continuité de l'usage ayant assoupié en elles la vertu comique.²

The problem is further complicated by the fact that in the

¹We propose to make use of the following: -- Molière's La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes and L'Impromptu de Versailles, and the anonymous Lettre sur la Comédie de l'Imposteur.

²H. Bergson, Le Rire in his Oeuvres, p. 405.

seventeenth century the word comédie had two senses. Firstly, it was the general word for a play of any kind; secondly, it meant comedy in the modern sense, the counterpart of tragedy.

We are concerned with the comic exploitation of self-interest; in other words, we are examining to what extent self-interest renders a character ridiculous and thus elicits amusement from the spectator. Swabey, for instance, sees the relationship between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza as a contrast largely between two extreme attitudes to life, which may perhaps be interpreted as two forms of egoism:

The don and his squire, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, madman and bumpkin, come to symbolise two fundamental attitudes towards life, the world as it ought to be and as it is. The don is mad basically because he refuses to admit the distinction and unbridgeable gulf between the objects of selfless aspiration and those of everyday life; whereas the clown is a clown, despite his shrewd practical wisdom, because of his blindness to the presence of a higher invisible world.³

Molière also uses this sort of contrast as, for example, between Dom Juan and Sganarelle. Hence W. G. Moore remarks that Dom Juan:

. . . is built around the relationship of master and man.
 . . . The hauteur of the master is paralleled by the grovelling of the man, the free thought of the one by the bondage to cliché and magic of the other.⁴

³Marie Collins Swabey, Comic Laughter, p. 67.

⁴W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, pp. 95-96.

The element of self-interest emerges largely through this contrast in that Dom Juan "is foolish where he thinks he is superior".⁵

It would also seem that Molière's comedy largely depends for its success on inducing a sense of self-righteousness, if not of superiority, in the audience. Bergson visualises the psychogenesis of laughter in these terms:

Nous verrions que le mouvement de détente ou d'expansion n'est qu'un prélude au rire, que le rieur rentre tout de suite en soi, s'affirme plus ou moins orgueilleusement lui-même, et tendrait à considérer la personne d'autrui comme une marionnette dont il tient les ficelles. Dans cette présomption nous démêlerions d'ailleurs bien vite un peu d'égoïsme.⁶

In our enquiry, we seek to ascertain the measure of egoism endemic in laughter by examining reactions elicited from the audience by Molière's use of automatism, irony, convention, satire, wit and humour.

Bergson's thesis of comedy would seem to rest on three basic tenets, which he enunciates thus:

En résumé, . . . un caractère peut être bon ou mauvais, peu importe: s'il est insociable; il pourra devenir comique. . . Insociabilité du personnage, insensibilité du spectateur, voilà en somme, les deux conditions essentielles. Il y en a une troisième. . . C'est l'automatisme.⁷

⁵ Ibid., p. 97.

⁶ H. Bergson, Le Rire in his Oeuvres, p. 482.

⁷ Ibid., p. 456.

At this juncture, the two factors with which we are more concerned in the comic portrayal of self-interest in Molière are insociabilité and automatism. It would, moreover, appear that in Bergson's interpretation the two factors are interdependent:

La cause du raideur par excellence, c'est qu'on néglige de regarder autour de soi et surtout en soi.⁸

We, therefore, propose to elucidate and verify the validity of the Bergsonian⁹ principle of comedy as "du mécanique plaqué sur le vivant,"¹⁰ by examining the conduct of Sganarelle as depicted in L'Ecole des Maris.

In this particular play, Sganarelle's¹¹ rigidity would seem to be evident both from his appearance and his conduct. With regard to appearance, he stands out because he persists in wearing outmoded clothes of Henry IV's era, as he claims that current styles are both ridiculous and uncomfortable:

⁸Ibid., p. 457.

⁹Bergsonian automatism seems highly reminiscent, of the seventeenth century notion of "man-machine", which came into such prominence as a result of Cartesian influence and ensuing mechanistic tendencies in philosophy. The tendency is perhaps illustrated by the Pascalian formula: "Nous sommes automate autant qu'esprit". B. Pascal, Pensées, no. 252.

¹⁰H. Bergson, Le Rire in Oeuvres, p. 410.

¹¹Sganarelle appears in six plays between 1660 and 1666 namely: Le cocu imaginaire, L'Ecole des Maris, Le Mariage forcé, Dom Juan, L'Amour médecin and Le Médecin malgré lui.

De ces manches qu'à table on voit tâter les sauces?
 Et de ces cotillons appelés hauts-de-chausses?
 Et de ces souliers mignons, de rubans revêtus,
 Qui vous font ressembler à des pigeons pattus?
 Et de ces grands canons où, comme en des entraves,
 On met tous les matins ses deux jambes esclaves,
 Et par qui nous voyons ces messieurs les galants
 Marcher écarquillés ainsi que des volants?
 Je vous plairais, sans doute, équipé de la sorte?
 Et je vous vois porter les sottises qu'on porte.
 (I. i. ll. 31-40)

This is, however, but an external manifestation of his
fantaisie. Hubert argues:

As he [Sganarelle] consistently prefers his fantaisie
 to the opinions of the rest of humanity, he very
 nearly affirms his own infallibility or at the
 very last the superiority of his pedagogical and
 moral principles.¹²

It is his fantaisie or artificial way of life which isolates
 him and renders him ridiculous, or so it would seem from Ariste's
 comment:

Cette farouche humeur, dont la sévérité
 Fuit toutes les douceurs de la société,
 A tous vos procédés inspire un air bizarre,
 Et jusques à l'habit, rend tout chez vous barbare.
 (I. i. ll. 13-16)

Sganarelle's raideur is largely the consequence of his obstinate
 refusal to see anyone else's point of view. He becomes so
 convinced of the validity of his way of life that he regards
 it as being above criticism. Indeed, he considers that in
 educating his ward, Isabelle with the utmost strictness he has

¹²J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect,
 p. 55.

found a unique antidote to cuckoldry. Hubert argues that this preconceived notion is totally erroneous:

In a sense, he is predisposed in her favor, for he tends to see her [Isabelle] as a product of his educational system and therefore endowed with solid, old-fashioned virtues. Herein lies a paradox, for Sganarelle's fantaisie, far from consisting of unorthodox ideas of his own invention, coincides with the sternest pedagogical clichés of the old guard.¹³

Furthermore, Sganarelle cannot tolerate criticism of any sort, especially from Ariste whom he mocks with considerable callousness, about his advanced age (I. i. ll. 55-56). He is equally suspicious of Isabelle's flighty sister, Léonor with whom Isabelle is permitted to have only minimal contact, for fear of contamination. He has evolved an ideal education for his ward which largely depends on insociabilité, on seclusion:

. . .Mais j'entends que la mienne
Vive à ma fantaisie, et non pas à la sienne;
Que d'une serge honnête elle ait son vêtement,
Et ne porte le noir qu'aux bons jours seulement;
Qu'enfermé au logis, en personne bien sage,
Elle s'applique toute aux choses du ménage,
A recoudre mon linge aux heures de loisir,
Ou bien à tricoter quelque bas par plaisir;
Qu'aux discours des muquets elle ferme l'oreille,
Et ne sorte jamais sans avoir qui la veille.
(I. ii. ll. 115-124)

Through sheer fantaisie, he reserves the right to impose his own views on others, particularly his ward. Indeed his

¹³J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 56.

primary concern in marrying Isabelle is to become self-sufficient in his own universe.¹⁴

Isabelle's plan to deceive her guardian largely owes its success to his rigidity and self-assurance. Hence Hubert contends:

She bases each of her tricks on her guardian's prejudices and assumptions, and especially on his long standing habit of trusting only his own judgement.¹⁵

As she feigns scorn for Valère, Sganrelle regards him as an innocuous rival, convinced in his inordinate self-confidence of the apparent success of his mode of upbringing. Hence he interprets Valère's reactions in the light of his own self-exultation:

Que sa confusion paraît sur son visage!
Il ne s'attendait pas, sans doute, à ce message.
Appelons Isabelle, elle montre le fruit
Que l'éducation dans une âme produit.
(II. ii. 11. 443-446)

He is content to shuttle¹⁶ back and forth between Isabelle and Valère, repeating their messages with almost mechanical precision, in a manner reminiscent of the diable à ressort¹⁷

¹⁴"He had wanted all along to make Isanelle part of his own little universe, separated from the rest of humanity." J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 57.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁷H. Bergson, Le Rire in Oeuvres, p. 419.

evoked by Bergson. On ultimately discovering his ward's cunning, however, he swears eternal hatred for the female sex, thus maintaining his inflexibility and isolation.

W. G. Moore has argued that Tartuffe is difficult to explain in terms of Bergsonian automatism:

Raideur goes only part way to explain this comedy, in which the power of the will is neutralised by the strength of appetite.¹⁸

He remarks¹⁹ that neither Bergson nor Thibaudet regarded Tartuffe as a comic character, and is of the opinion that the impostor's hypocrisy is "more biological than moral, displaying the strength and the limitation of a passion".²⁰ Furthermore, in his view, the hypochondriac would seem to be only partly a case of raideur in view of the latter's occasional spontaneity:

Argan has certainly given up thinking for himself and is a slave to the most idiotic statement of a doctor. . . he is pushed into position where he gets excited and forgets the slavery.²¹

Hence disregard for nature rather than isolation from society

¹⁸W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 110.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 110.

²⁰Ibid., p. 111.

²¹Ibid., p. 111.

appears to be W. G. Moore's criterion for the ludicrous in Molière's portrayal of self-interest. The notion that a character is rendered comic as a result of reification or automatism is, however, held by Poulet,²² who puts forward the view that the comic figure is the object of our senses, our judgement and our regard or look. This view would seem to coordinate the intellectual, moral and natural aspects of raideur. It would, therefore, seem that the principle of automatism may only be applied consistently to Molière if Poulet's modification is taken into consideration, as it is perhaps sufficiently broad to explain the conduct of even the more complex figures, in general terms.

Typification is also used to intensify comic effect largely through repetition. Repetition is, however, an aspect of automatism, at least according to Bergson:

Là où il y a répétition, similitude complète, nous soupçonnons du mécanique fonctionnant derrière le vivant.²³

Typification would, therefore, appear to be a form of automatism:

Imiter quelqu'un, c'est dégager la part d'automatisme qu'il a laissée s'introduire dans sa personne. C'est donc, par définition même, le rendre comique.²⁴

²²W. G. Poulet, Etudes sur le temps humain (Edinburgh: University Press, 1949), pp. 116-124.

²³H. Bergson, Le Rire in Oeuvres, p. 403.

²⁴Ibid., p. 402.

This is perhaps the significance of Pascal's enigmatic comment:

Deux visages semblables, dont aucun ne fait rire en particulier, font rire ensemble.²⁵

Bergson enunciates the notion of typification in these terms:

Le personnage comique est un type. Inversement, la ressemblance à un type a quelque chose de comique. Nous pouvons avoir fréquenté longtemps une personne sans rien découvrir en elle de risible: si l'on profite d'un rapprochement accidentel pour lui appliquer le nom connu d'un héros de drame et de roman, pour un instant au moins elle côtoiera à nos yeux le ridicule Il est comique de se laisser distraire de soi-même. Il est comique de venir s'insérer. . . dans un cadre préparé.²⁶

The cadre préparé with regard to Molière's plays would seem to be theatrical convention, at least according to Gouhier's view:

Le théâtre vit de conventions. Sur la scène, tout est illusion, le temps, l'espace, la lumière, et les gens eux-mêmes reçoivent un nouvel être de leur déguisement: ici, c'est l'habit qui fait le moine.²⁷

Molière's use of conventional types has been frowned on by certain critics and this disapproval of the more extreme element of burlesque in Molière is queried by Bray:

Le monde comique, non seulement n'est pas identique au monde de la vie, mais ne se mesure pas au même mètre. En ce sens, il ne peut y avoir de comique outré. L'outrance est de l'essence du trait comique.²⁸

²⁵B. Pascal, Pensées. . . , no. 133.

²⁶H. Bergson, Le Rire in Oeuvres, p. 458.

²⁷H. Gouhier, Le Théâtre et l'Existence, p. 104.

²⁸R. Bray, Molière, homme de théâtre, p. 369.

Rigal, furthermore, draws up a list of conventional types, largely relics of French and Italian farce, which are to be found in Molière's plays.²⁹ In the early plays, that is, before the playwright's return to Paris and the production of Les Précieuses ridicules, the types portrayed are the amorous old man, such as Anselme of L'Etourdi: the naïve and crafty valet corresponding respectively to Mascarille of Le Dépit amoureux and his counterpart in L'Etourdi: the pedant, like the docteur of La Jalousie du Barbouillé. Rigal then discerns a metamorphosis as a result of Molière "soufflant sur les vieux fantoches, de leur donner la vie".³⁰ The old man is then transformed into figures like Harpagon, the valet into Maître Jacques of L'Avare, the female counterpart of this rôle being Martine of Les Femmes savantes, the pedant into types like the doctors of L'Amour médecin. The parasite is portrayed by Dorante of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme; Tartuffe adopts the greater part of the hypocrisy formerly associated with the femme d'intrigue; and the boastful soldier only appears once in the person of Sylvestre of Les Fourberies de Scapin.

Molière also creates a few types of his own, such as

²⁹E. Rigal, De Jodelle à Molière, pp. 29-30.

³⁰Ibid., p. 29.

the marquis ridicule, by drawing on contemporary inspiration.³¹

The marquis ridicule may be said to possess an unnatural degree of self-interest; his lack of conscious awareness, moreover, renders him both foolish and ridiculous.³² Acaste's

- total absence of self-criticism is noted by Rudler:

De voir un être aussi totalement entiché de lui-même que l'est Acaste vous met dans une joie qui touche à la béatitude. Il désarme; point de résistance chez le spectateur, ni de moralité, ni de classe; une satisfaction parfaite, une satisfaction d'artiste, qu'un homme remplisse aussi absolument sa définition.³³

Hubert argues that "blindness to one's shortcomings often takes the form of complacency".³⁴ He adds that Acaste "in damning himself with faint praise, prides himself only on externals."³⁵ Acaste's self-portrait would indeed seem to justify this interpretation. (Le Misanthrope, III. i. ll. 781-804). He is glad to be wealthy, of good aristocratic stock, and to have proved his worth by dabbling successfully

³¹"Le marquis aujourd'hui est le plaisant de la comédie; et comme, dans toutes les comédies anciennes, on voit toujours un valet bouffon qui fait rire les auditeurs, de même, dans toutes nos pièces de maintenant, il faut toujours un marquis ridicule qui divertisse la Compagnie." (L'Impromptu de Versailles, i. p. 216)

³²v. Chapter I for features of the fool's psychology.

³³cited by W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, pp. 113-4.

³⁴J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 137.

³⁵Ibid., p. 137.

in state affairs. He enthuses over the excellence of his wit, his social graces and his fashion consciousness. In fact, his behaviour is largely characterised by blind and noisy adherence to the latest literary fad:

Pour de l'esprit, j'en ai, sans doute; et du bon goût,
A juger sans étude et raisonner de tout;
A faire aux nouveautés, dont je suis idolâtre,
Figure de savant sur les bancs du théâtre;
Y décider en chef, et faire du fracas
A tous les beaux endroits qui méritent des has!
(III. i. ll. 791-796)

He also prides himself on his fine teeth and his popularity with the fair sex. Thus it emerges that Acaste, in his superficial way, has no doubts about his superiority and is oblivious of his defects.

Clitandre, a fellow marquis, is equally a function of his vanity and the slave of fashion, or so we gather from Alceste's scathing description of him:

Est-ce par l'ongle long qu'il porte au petit doigt
Qu'il s'est acquis chez vous l'estime où l'on le voit?
Vous êtes-vous rendue, avec tout le beau monde,
Au mérite éclatant de sa perruque blonde?
Sont-ce ses grands canons qui vous le font aimer?
L'amas de ses rubans a-t-il su vous charmer?
Est-ce par les appas de sa vaste rhingrave,
Qu'il a gagné votre âme en faisant votre esclave?
Ou sa façon de rire, et son ton de fausset,
Ont-ils de vous charmer su trouver le secret?
(II. i. ll. 479-488)

The stress on externals evident in the portrayal of the marquis ridicules, for instance, is held by Gouhier to be a fundamental attribute of the type:

Dans le type, l'extérieur tient à l'être même que définit l'essence et n'apparaît plus comme accidentel.³⁶

He is in concordance with Bergson's view that the type is a product of abstraction, although there is considerable divergence over the nature of this abstraction. He distinguishes "l'abstraction par simplification et intensification" from "l'abstraction par comparaison et généralisation".³⁷ His own approach is delineated in these terms:

L'intensification qui extrait le type de la personnalité historique est beaucoup moins l'effet d'une intelligence purifiée par l'indifférence que des sentiments libérés par la disparition de la sympathie.³⁸

Despite the divergence of opinion of this sort, typification would appear to be commonly regarded as a major comic principle.

W. G. Moore has asserted that "many comic effects can be obtained by the juxtaposition of the real and the assumed."³⁹ This would seem to raise the prospect of comic absurdity. In this sense, Molière's theatre perhaps poses the question: "Faut-il accepter ou refuser la mascarade?" Bergson, however, argues

³⁶ H. Gouhier, Le Théâtre et l'Existence, p. 143.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 158.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 160.

³⁹ W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 40.

that absurdity is not a basic comic principle:

L'absurdité n'est pas ici la source du comique.
Elle n'est qu'un moyen très simple et très efficace
de nous le révéler.⁴⁰

He also regards the techniques of degradation and exaggeration in the same light.⁴¹ In his opinion, the most common form of juxtaposition is between the real and the ideal;⁴² and this can evoke a measure of absurdity through sheer contrast. This juxtaposition, though not in itself comic can, nevertheless, convey irony and humour. At this juncture, we will limit our discussion to the notion of irony, which is defined by the concise Oxford dictionary as "expression of one's meaning by language of opposite or different tendency, especially simulated adoption of another's point of view for purpose of ridicule".

W. G. Moore contends that "discretion imposed by social status is a simple form of mask"⁴³; in this sense, the mask is the symbol of the assumed, in contrast with the real.

⁴⁰G-A. Astre "Un comique de l'absurde", p. 32.

⁴¹Degradation is, however, rehabilitated by Freud, who sees it as a basis of the tendentious element in comedy. This is implicit at least in the following state: "Tendentious jokes are so highly suitable for attacks on the great, the dignified and the mighty, who are protected by inner inhibitions and external circumstances from direct disparagement." S. Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, p. 105.

⁴²H. Bergson, Le Rire in Oeuvres, p. 447.

⁴³W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 41.

Considerable irony results, for instance, from the incongruity between what a servant really thinks of his master and what he is obliged to say in the latter's presence. Hence Sganarelle, being a servant, is obliged to suppress or at least moderate his own interests for the sake of his wages. The dichotomy between his real and assumed opinion is illustrated by the following example from Dom Juan:

Mon maître est un fourbe; il n'a dessein que
de vous abuser, et en a bien abusé d'autres;
c'est l'épouser du genre humain, et
(Apercevant dom Juan.) Cela est faux; et qui-
conque vous dira cela, vous lui devez dire
qu'il en a menti. Mon maître n'est point
l'épouseur du genre humain, il n'est point
fourbe, il n'a pas dessein de vous tromper,
et n'en a point abusé d'autres. Ah, tenez
le voilà; demandez-le plutôt à lui-même.
(Dom Juan, II. iv. p. 296)

Incongruity is also evident when Arnolphe is forced to laugh at his treatment of Agnès, against his own inclinations. Horace reveals his affection for Agnès to Arnolphe, his father's friend, without knowing that the latter is in fact the girl's jealous guardian, M. de la Souche. Hence the irony of the situation in which Arnolphe is obliged to feign amusement at his own antics:

Horace: Riez-en donc un peu.

Arnolphe rit d'un air forcé.

Cet homme, gendarmé d'abord contre mon feu,
Qui chez lui se retranche, et de grès fait parade,
Comme si j'y voulais entrer par escalade;
Qui, pour me repousser, dans son bizarre effroi
Anime du dedans tous ses gens contre moi,
Et qu'abuse à ses yeux, par sa machine même,
Celle qui'il veut tenir dans l'ignorance extrême!

.
 Je ne puis songer sans de bon cœur en rire;
 Et vous n'en riez pas assez à mon avis.
 Arnolphe, avec un ris forcé.
 Pardonnez-moi, j'en ris tout autant que je puis.
 (L'Ecole des Femmes, III. iv. ll. 926-933, 937-939)

Another perspective is given to the juxtaposition of the real and the assumed by Gouhier's⁴⁴ contention that there is considerable oscillation between the individual and the typical in Molière's more complex characters, such as Alceste and Tartuffe. This would also seem to be true of Argan, who occasionally forgets his hypochondria, which is possibly just a means of attracting attention and thus gratifying his amour-propre. It would appear that Argan forgets his hypochondria whenever he gets excited. When Toinette annoys him by questioning his parental authority, he chases her vigorously around the room without the aid of a stick (I. v. p. 633). On a different occasion (I. vi. p. 634) he also has sufficient strength to throw his pillows at Toinette. A further note of irony is introduced when Cléante observes that Argan is looking well, to which Toinette feigns disagreement:

Comment! qu'il se porte mieux! Cela est faux.
 Monsieur se porte toujours mal. (II. i. p. 640)

The hypochondriac is well enough at least to attempt to cane his younger daughter, Louison for telling lies (II. viii. p. 647). His brother, Béralde also notes that the hypochondriac's

⁴⁴H. Gouhier, Le Théâtre et l'Existence, p. 150.

health appears to be improving as Argan, when overcome with emotion, rises in his chair (II. ix. p. 648) Despite the masquerade Argan, nevertheless, persists in enjoying at least one pleasure of healthy life, that is, wine, though fort trempé, with his meals (II. x. p. 656).

In short, the falseness of his hypochondria is revealed in his own brief remark: "Je joue ici un plaisant personnage". (II. vi. p. 645) Thus it would seem that Argan's hypochondria is rendered ridiculous largely as a result of the oscillation between the individual and the typical, which is an aspect of comic irony. The element of incongruity latent in irony is also noted by the author of the Lettre sur la Comédie de l'Imposteur, who is of the view that "le ridicule. . . [est] quelque chose de relatif, puisque c'est une espèce de disconvenance."⁴⁵ We would, therefore, maintain that perhaps the common factor linking the comic portrayal of self-interest through use of automatism and irony is disconvenance, whether between man and machine, between the real and the assumed or between the individual and the typical.

So far, we have been examining Molière's comic technique with regard to the theme of self-interest; now we propose to assess the possible moral element inherent in this

⁴⁵ Lettre sur la Comédie de l'Imposteur, éd. Despois et Mesnard, Oeuvres de Molière, IV, p. 561.

theme. The moral element is largely associated with satire, which is itself defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary as "use of ridicule, irony, sarcasm, etc. in speech or writing for the ostensible purpose of exposing or discouraging vice or folly". In our enquiry, we endeavour to ascertain the extent to which satire has a moral as opposed to an aesthetic value, so as to determine the probable nature of catharsis in Molière.

We would, however, remark that the problem is a difficult one, for in the seventeenth century the moral value of the theatre was widely debated, often resulting in controversy. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Tartuffe, a pungent satire on religious hypocrites, should have been banned for four years to placate the parti dévot and the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement. It should perhaps also be noted that Bossuet dogmatically condemned Père Caffaro's apologia of the moral value of drama. Port-Royal was also vociferous in its denunciation of theatre and actors. Indeed, in his Traité de la Comédie Nicole, a Jansenist, regards drama as intrinsically immoral:

Ainsi la comédie par sa nature même est une école et un exercice de vice, puisqu'elle oblige nécessairement à exciter en soi-même des passions vicieuses.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ P. Nicole, Traité de la Comédie, p. 42.

The case in favour of the moral value of drama as a result of catharsis is set forth by Milton in the preface of Samson Agonistes, though with regard to tragedy:

Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held, the gravest, modest, and most profitable of all other poems: therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated.⁴⁷

The comic counterpart of this notion of catharsis is enunciated by Bergson:

Il y a des états d'âme, . . . dont on s'émeut dès qu'on les connaît, des joies et des tristesses avec lesquelles on sympathise, des passions et des vices qui provoquent l'étonnement douloureux, ou la terreur, ou la pitié chez ceux qui les contemplent, enfin des sentiments, qui se prolongent d'âme en âme par des résonances sentimentales . . . Tout cela est sérieux, parfois même tragique. Où la personne d'autrui cesse de nous émouvoir, là seulement peut commencer la comédie.⁴⁸

The moral value of Tartuffe, for instance, as a satire would seem to emerge from three major arguments at least. The play has first been regarded, as W. G. Moore⁴⁹ points out, as an attack on the self-interest of religious people. This view

⁴⁷J. Milton, Samson Agonistes (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 13.

⁴⁸H. Bergson, Le Rire in Oeuvres, pp. 450-451.

⁴⁹W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 89.

is corroborated by Molière's⁵⁰ final preface of Tartuffe:

Les hypocrites n'ont point entendu raillerie; ils se sont effarouchés d'abord, et ont trouvé étrange que j'eusse la hardiesse de jouer leurs grimaces, et de vouloir décrier un métier dont tant d'honnêtes gens se mêlent. C'est un crime qu'ils ne sauraient me pardonner. . . Suivant leur louable coutume, ils ont couvert leurs intérêts de la cause de Dieu; et le Tartuffe, dans leur bouche, est une pièce qui offense la piété. (1669 Preface of Tartuffe, éd. du Seuil, p. 256)

The second point, also discussed by W. G. Moore,⁵¹ is that once portrayed on stage the figure of the hypocrite was open to any interpretation, whatever the author's intentions. The third point is that the raisonneur, in the form of Cléante, may be endowed with a moral purpose, since he condemns the excesses of both Orgon and Tartuffe. The third point has, however, been discussed elsewhere in our study, where we concluded that the raisonneur's purpose is dramatic as opposed to moral.⁵²

To return to the first point, Michaut has reviewed

⁵⁰We have not discussed the possibility that Molière was attacking religion, and not merely religious people. This issue is examined by G. Michaut in considerable depth and the following view is cited: "Je voudrais savoir comment ce comique Molière pouvait, dans ses comédies, témoigner de ses sentiments religieux. Et je voudrais bien qu'on me citât les auteurs de comédies. . . qui l'ont fait." Les Luites. . . , p. 108n.

⁵¹W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 91.

⁵²v. Chapter II of this study.

the whole issue in masterly fashion,⁵³ and contends that it is impossible to assert exactly which religious group in general or which person in particular Molière may have been satirising. Furthermore, he argues⁵⁴ that the most likely original model for Tartuffe is a certain Sieur de Sainte-Croix, cited by Tallemant des Réaux. The difficulty of assessing Molière's intention is complicated by the fact that certain attitudes are common to both the pious and the hypocrite, as the author himself notes:

On me reproche d'avoir mis des termes de piété dans la bouche de mon imposteur. Hé! pouvais-je m'en empêcher, pour bien représenter le caractère d'un hypocrite? (1669 Preface of Tartuffe, éd. du Seuil, p. 256)

Furthermore, Molière defends himself by observing that he is satirising a general trait, not a specific individual:

Toutes les peintures ridicules qu'on expose sur les théâtres doivent être regardées sans chagrin de tout le monde. Ce sont miroirs publics, où il ne faut jamais témoigner qu'on se voie; et c'est se taxer hautement d'un défaut, que se scandaliser qu'on le reprenne. (La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, vi. p. 207)

The second point mentioned is hard to disprove. Molière's intentions would seem to be safeguarded to a certain extent by

⁵³G. Michaut, Les Luites. . ., pp. 86-104.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 66.

the Lettre sur la Comédie de l'Imposteur⁵⁵, which indicates that satire corrects the rough ridicule of the external manifestation of a general defect:

Quoique la nature nous ait fait naître de connoître la raison pour la suivre, pourtant, jugeant bien que si elle n'y attachoit quelque marque sensible qui nous rendit cette connoissance facile, notre foiblesse et notre paresse nous priveroient de l'effet d'un si rare avantage. . . Le ridicule est donc la forme extérieure et sensible, que la providence de la nature a attachée à tout ce qui est déraisonnable, pour nous en faire apercevoir, et nous obliger à le fuir.⁵⁶

The possibility that this form of ridicule will act as a moral corrective and hence result in moral catharsis is made highly remote by the fact that Orgon, the dupe, is probably more ridiculed than Tartuffe, the scoundrel. The greater measure of ridicule directed at Orgon is noted by Nelson:

Though Molière has divided the limelight between the impostor and his victim, the play can still be inserted into the typical formula of Molière dramaturgy: the monomaniac (Orgon) is the butt of the satire and the entire action is organised around the effort to break down his fanatical devotion to Tartuffe.⁵⁷

⁵⁵On the question of the authorship of the Lettre, v. René Robert, "Des Commentaires de première main sur les chefs-d'oeuvres les plus discutés de Molière", Revue des Sciences humaines (1956), 19-49.

⁵⁶Lettre à la Comédie de l'Imposteur in Oeuvres de Molière, éd. Despois et Mesnard, IV, pp. 559-560.

⁵⁷R. J. Nelson, "The Unreconstructed Heroes of Molière", p. 15.

Furthermore, at the dénouement Tartuffe does not willingly abandon his egoism which takes the form of hypocrisy; he is forced to bow to a superior force -- the king. This would scarcely seem to be a highly moral conclusion; it is more in keeping with comic expediency, which necessitates a certain détente.

Molière's moral intentions, if he had any, are further obscured by his insistence on plaire, on the entertaining aspect of comedy:

Je voudrais bien savoir si la grande règle de toutes les règles n'est pas de plaire. (La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes. vi. p. 209)

Owing to the fact that it is almost impossible to determine the original model for Tartuffe, or Molière's real intentions, we would subscribe to W. G. Moore's view that the moral element of Molière's satire is more implicit than explicit:

Whatever he Molière may have meant, the figure of his hypocrite, once it had become public property by being put. . . on the stage, was no longer restricted by any intentions or safeguards. It was there for all to see, and to interpret as they liked. Herein lies its satirical force.⁵⁸

Having discussed the question of moral reactions, we now propose to examine the varying responses elicited from the spectator by the use of wit and humour. The Concise Oxford dictionary defines wit as the "power of giving sudden intellectual pleasure by unexpected combining or contrasting of previously unconnected ideas or experiences." On the

⁵⁸W. G. Moore, Molière, a New Criticism, p. 91.

other hand, humour according to Swabey "signifies a quality that pertains to actions, happenings, situations, or upon occasion to the verbal expression of ideas, which appeals markedly to sympathetic emotion for the appreciation of incongruity." Both aspects of the comic would, however, seem to have one common factor at least, as Freud has noted:

The joke -- work makes use of deviations from normal thinking -- of displacement and absurdity -- as technical methods for producing a joking form of expression.⁵⁹

Wit appeals less to our emotions than to our intellect.

Hence Bergson argues:

Le comique exige donc enfin, pour produire tout son effet, quelque chose comme une anesthésie momentanée du coeur. Il s'adresse à l'intelligence pure.⁶⁰

Freud⁶¹ is of the opinion that the technique of wit rests on condensation, displacement, allusion, indirect expression, double entendre and the replacement of object association by word association. Indeed, he is greatly preoccupied with the linguistic aspect. Furthermore, he⁶² links wit to

⁵⁹S. Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, p.

⁶⁰H. Bergson, Le Rire in Oeuvres, p. 389.

⁶¹S. Freud, Jokes and their Relation in the Unconscious, pp. 41-42.

⁶²Ibid., p. 88.

dreams, since they both spring from the amoral, alogical unconscious; and both help to liberate repressed emotions. He also distinguishes between the innocent and the tendentious witticism, which evoke different reactions. The innocent joke only elicits a smile and not laughter:

The pleasurable effect of innocent jokes is as a rule a moderate one, a dear sense of satisfaction, a slight smile, is as a rule all it can achieve in its hearers.⁶³

He accounts⁶⁴ for this greater sense of pleasure by contending that the tendentious draws on additional reserves namely⁶⁵: hostility, obscenity, cynicism and scepticism. He also argues that "economy in expenditure on inhibition or suppression"⁶⁶ appears to be the secret of the pleasurable effect of tendentious jokes and that "this yield of pleasure corresponds to the psychical expenditure that is saved."⁶⁷

The pleasure of wit according to Freud "is derived from play with words or from the liberation of nonsense, and that the meaning of the joke is merely intended to protect that

⁶³ S. Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, p. 96.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 97 and p. 115.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

pleasure from being done away with by criticism."⁶⁸ This is the childlike aspect of laughter, which is also noted by Bergson,⁶⁹ amongst others. Swabey, on the contrary, maintains that "wit involves an intellectual victory and the rejection of illogicality."⁷⁰

The element of self-interest comes into play, once jokes are regarded, as by Freud, as motivated by the desire for self-gratification:

The process in the joke's first person produces pleasure by lifting inhibition and dismissing local expenditure; but it seems not to come to rest until, through the intermediary of the interpolated third person, it achieves general relief through discharge.⁷¹

This appears to be the motive behind Célemène's conduct in the portrait scene, in which she displays her trenchant wit. Her wit would seem to be tendentious, in the Freudian sense, and to illustrate Jasinski's comique satirique⁷²; and this emerges from her acid remarks about Cléon's banquets:

⁶⁹H. Bergson, Le Rire in Oeuvres, pp. 418-419.

⁷⁰Marie Collins Swabey, Comic Laughter, p. 73.

⁷¹S. Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, p. 158.

⁷²v. R. Jasinski, Molière et le Misanthrope.

Que de son cuisinier il s'est fait un mérite,
Et que c'est à sa table à qui l'on rend visite.

.
. . . Mais je voudrais bien qu'il ne s'y servit pas:
C'est un fort méchant plat que sa sottise personne,
Et qui gâte, à mon goût, tous les repas qu'il donne.
(Le Misanthrope, II. iv. ll. 625-626, 628-630)

As opposed to wit, humour is said by Freud to arise from "an economy in the expenditure of affect".⁷³ It contains an element of emotional identification with the object of ridicule and is, in Swabey's opinion, "metaphysically deeper than wit."⁷⁴ Bergson observes, however, that sympathy can be discouraged:

Il y . . . a un art aussi de décourager notre sympathie au moment précis où elle pourrait s'offrir, de telle manière que la situation, même sérieuse, ne soit pas prise au sérieux.⁷⁵

Hence a figure who appeals to our sympathy can, nevertheless, cause amusement if he acts in a way that alienates this sympathy. Alceste, for instance, is rendered ridiculous because of incongruity; his high principles rest on a false premise -- misanthropy. This is expressed by Bergson as follows:

⁷³S. Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, p. 118.

⁷⁴Marie Collins Swabey, Comic Laughter, p. 101.

⁷⁵H. Bergson, Le Rire in Oeuvres, p. 454.

On dira que ce n'est pas l'honnêteté d'Alceste qui est comique, mais la forme particulière que l'honnêteté prend chez lui et, en somme, un certain travers qui nous la gêne.⁷⁶

The point is further illustrated by Philinte's remark:

Et je vous dirai tout franc que cette maladie,
Partout où vous allez, donne la comédie,
Et qu'un si grand courroux contre les moeurs du
temps,
Vous tourne en ridicule auprès de bien des gens.
(Le Misanthrope, I. i. ll. 105-108)

The technique of humour by which Alceste becomes amusing in our eyes rests largely on the fact that he is an atrabilaire amoureux; love and misanthropy engender conflict, especially when he chooses to love the very kind of person whom his misanthropic instincts should logically lead him to shun. It is indeed amusing that he falls victim to the very irrationality he condemns in others. This humorous treatment, however, because it consists of latent rather than blatant ridicule, produces no more than a "rire dans l'âme",⁷⁷ to cite Donneau de Visé's well-known phrase.

With regard to the comic exploitation of the element of self-interest, we would conclude that possibly a most basic condition for laughter is a sense of superiority touching on infallibility on the part of the spectator. This view

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 452.

⁷⁷Cited by P. H. Nurse, "Essai de Définition du Comique moliéresque", p. 19.

is expressed in the Lettre sur la Comédie de l'Imposteur:

Car quand nous voyons une action ridicule, la connoissance que nous avons du ridicule de cette action nous élève au-dessus de celui qui la fait, parce que, d'une part, personne n'agissant irraisonnablement à son su, nous jugeons que l'homme qui l'a faite ignore qu'elle soit déraisonnable et la croit raisonnable, donc qu'il est dans l'erreur et dans l'ignorance, que naturellement nous estimons des maux; d'ailleurs, par cela même que nous en sommes exempts: donc nous sommes en cela plus éclairés, plus parfaits, enfin plus que lui.⁷⁸

Humour, however, raises a smile rather than outright laughter partly because greater affectivity comes into play and thus lessens our detachment, and partly because the resulting détente is limited. This détente, however, owes more to a sensation of pleasure than to moral catharsis, although moral response is not rigidly excluded. Furthermore, Molière's comic portrayal of self-interest rests largely on incongruity, which is only made possible by the egoist's attempt to falsify his own nature by refusing to seek self-knowledge and to admit his limitations. It is in this sense that we accept the view that "toute contrariété qui procède d'un même principe est essentiellement ridicule."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Lettre sur la Comédie de l'Imposteur in Oeuvres de Molière, IV, éd. Despois et Mesnard, pp. 564-565.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 564.

CONCLUSION

The element of self-interest is manifested through the psychology of Molière's characters, who can generally be regarded as being rogues or fools. These categories are not rigid, however, for some of the more complex figures like Tartuffe, Dom Juan, Alceste and Argan are endowed with both attributes; it is just that one tends to predominate over the other in a given character. Self-interest in Molière is considered unnatural once it deviates from normality, and leads certain figures to claim a considerable measure of infallibility. It is this departure from real nature which is of crucial importance:

On n'est jamais si ridicule par les qualités que l'on a que par celles que l'on affecte d'avoir.¹

Self-interest in Molière can be motivated unconsciously, especially with regard to the fool who has little or no appreciation of his own activities. It may also be conscious, as with rogues like Tartuffe and Scapin who deliberately attempt to mystify others. It appears to be a general principle that self-interest is seldom voluntarily surrendered at the dénouement, although it may be involuntarily suppressed by external factors. On the other hand, the dénouement largely ensures that the egoist fails to extend his

¹La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, no. 134.

authority over others, as a result of being undermined on some important issue like marriage.

Self-interest is seen to be exploited dramatically through language and plot-structure. The frequency of the use of various forms of repetition in Molière would seem to be indicative of the persistence of egoism. Plot-structure rests on loosely-linked scenes in relation to a master concept, such as self-sufficiency with Dom Juan, which may be regarded as illuminating some aspect of self-interest. Binary structure rests on the portrayal of self-interest through the antinomy of rogues and fools:

Un homme d'esprit serait souvent bien embarrassé
sans la compagnie des sots.²

With ternary structure a juste milieu is introduced, embodied by the raisonneur, to intensify the antinomy. The dénouement shows the fool falling victim to the rogue, who is in turn betrayed by his own excessive self-confidence.

Comic exploitation of self-interest is assessed in terms of two basic factors: the egoism of the character portrayed and the sense of superiority of the spectator. With regard to the portrayal of egoism, amusement can result from the use of automatism, convention and irony, although possibly from any single one of these techniques. Incongruity in general would seem to be the most frequent source of ridicule. Since self-interest may be regarded as a vice, or at least an

²La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, no. 140.

aberration, the possibility of moral catharsis resulting from satire was discussed. Owing to the difficulty of distinguishing between Molière's moral and aesthetic intentions, it was held that the moral element was probably more implicit than explicit.

On considering the dichotomy between wit and humour and the variety of comic responses elicited, one common factor seemed to emerge: the spectator's sense of superiority which is brought into play more by the tendentious element of wit. Gouhier upholds the element of superiority or orgueil, even where momentary sympathy exists. The point is systematically argued with reference to Pierre, a hypothetical object of amusement:

Pierre est mon semblable, cela veut dire qu'il est un moi comme j'en suis un moi-même. Je l'aime non comme s'il était moi mais parce qu'il est un moi et que tout être ayant la dignité d'un moi appelle l'amour. La sympathie ne lui prête nullement mon moi: au contraire, elle affirme le sien; si elle s'achève en amitié, je l'aime parce que c'est lui, peut-être parce que c'est moi. De là le paradoxe de la personne qui est mon semblable sans cesser d'être autre: nos dissemblances sont même la condition de cette profonde similitude; pour être semblable à moi, Pierre doit être, comme moi, une personne originale et unique, donc distincte des autres . . . et de moi.³

This study has endeavoured to examine the psychological, dramatic and comic exploitation of the element of self-interest in Molière. Whatever conclusions our enquiry has enabled us to formulate, we would, nevertheless, agree with La Rochefoucauld's comment:

³H. Gouhier, Le Théâtre et l'Existence, p. 135.

Quelque découverte que l'on ait faite dans le pays de l'amour-propre, il y reste encore bien des terres inconnues.⁴

⁴La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, no. 3.

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