

MOLIERE'S THEATRE EXAMINED THROUGH A STUDY IN DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

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THROUGH A STUDY IN DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

BY

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The purpose of this paper will be to analyze Molière's theatre in terms of the dramatic traditions that the author knew. The dramatic structure of select plays from the beginning, the middle, and the latter part of Molière's career will be examined. The analysis will reveal that the creation of the plays was partially inspired by the traditions that Molière, the actor knew, namely, French and Italian farce, and that the development from simple farces to a new kind of comic entertainment was the result of a complex inter-relation between various approaches and techniques of dramaturgy.

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about Molière and his plays. The extensive Molière bibliography reflects the immense fascination of his work. Some studies seek the man and his personal life through the plays¹; others search out evidence to label Molière as bourgeois or libertine²; still others examine his plays for their realism and their satire of seventeenth century France.³ Yet, in spite of the vast number of studies on Molière, the plays refuse to succumb to the blows and tortures meted out by scholars. The plays are as vital and dynamic today as they were when originally produced and renowned theatre companies continue to perform Molière's plays with success.

Since Molière's plays have remained in theatre repertoires and have remained accessible for three hundred years, it would seem reasonable to search for their success in their viability on stage. A new wave of Molière criticism, combining scholarly research with theatrical experience, maintains that we must return to the dramatist, Molière, and read the plays as plays, remembering that Molière was primarily a man of

¹P. Brisson, Molière, sa vie dans ses oeuvres, (Paris, 1942).

²J. Cairncross, Molière bourgeois et libertin, (Paris, 1964).

³V. Vedel, "Molière", Deux Classiques français vus par un critique étranger, trans. E. Cornet, (Paris, 1935).

the theatre, best known to his contemporaries as a comic actor as well as dramatist and director. Messrs. Bray and Moore⁴ are the leaders of this new wave of criticism supported by the experience of men of the theatre like Louis Jouvet, Jean Vilar and Jacques Copeau.

We have chosen to study Molière's work as comic theatre, to examine the artistic development in the plays from simple farce to spectacular fantasies. The study proposes to examine the dramatic traditions in which Molière began his career, viz., French farce and commedia dell'arte, and to show that Molière seized and expanded the jeu de théâtre from these traditions. We will attempt to show that there is more than a linear development in Molière's work as a whole but developments in various directions. A detailed study of each play is not in question. Instead, we shall trace through Molière's career analyzing in greater detail those plays which best reflect the dynamics of Molière's theatre. The ultimate aim of the study is to show how Molière expanded existing theatrical traditions to amuse and entertain his audiences. We shall begin by examining the dramatic value and perspectives of French farce, commedia dell'arte and literary comedies of the seventeenth-century, then note Molière's relationship to the farce tradition and the reputation of these genres in seventeenth-century France.

The following chapters will deal with Molière's work directly. In the second chapter we shall examine certain techniques and qualities

⁴R. Bray, Molière homme de théâtre, (Paris, 1954), and W. G. Moore, Molière A New Criticism (Oxford, 1949).

of Molière's early career as a dramatist, noting dominant influences and changes from the dramatic traditions he knew. In the third chapter we shall examine L'Ecole des femmes. The play marks the end of Molière's early career and establishes him as a successful dramatist in Paris. We shall examine why the play is successful and note its dynamic quality.

L'Ecole des femmes begins the expansion of the comic perspective into a range of the serious where the potential for drama exists.

Tartuffe, Don Juan and Le Misanthrope are Molière's masterpieces of elegant comedy and reveal how topics like hypocrisy or idealism can be examined by the comic dramatist. We shall examine Le Misanthrope in chapter four. It is Molière's crowning achievement in elegant comedy, revealing that the comic perspective can exercise its influence on topics not necessarily considered funny or comic. The play is both comic and dramatic and stands at an extreme point in Molière's career.

The final chapter will be prefaced with a brief study of a body of Molière's plays basically designed for court entertainment. The inclusion of music and dance into the plays reveals Molière's attempt at various theatrical adventures. Le Malade imaginaire will then be analyzed to note the preference by Molière for farce, for the values of the commedia dell'arte and the influence of music in the achievement of a successful comedy very different in perspective from Le Misanthrope.

Each play analyzed shows how Molière expanded existing traditions, how these expansions or changes have dramatic and comic value, and how the influence of the actor cannot be overlooked. Sainte-Beuve's observation outlines the basic development of Molière's career:

De la farce franche et un peu grosse du début, on se sera élevé, en passant par le naïf, le sérieux, le profondément observé, jusqu'à la fantaisie du rire dans toute sa pompe et au gai sabbat le plus délirant.⁵

35. ⁵C. A. Sainte-Beuve, Portraits Littéraires, (Paris, 1835-1836), II,

CHAPTER I

MOLIÈRE AND THE COMIC TRADITIONS OF HIS ERA

Gustave Lanson's essay on Molière re-established without hesitation or embarrassment the value of farce as a major influence in Molière's plays.¹ This influence must be emphasized for there is often a tendency not to see certain elements of Molière's plays in the perspective of his entire dramatic production and to praise only more delicate and elevated aspects of his plays. Gustave Lanson reacted against this trend which separated what was considered lowly farcical elements and fine literary comedy and reaffirmed the comic and dramatic potential of the farce. If we regard Molière as a master of comedy it seems reasonable to try to understand why and how Molière persistently incorporated elements of the farce tradition into his plays.

Initially, we shall examine the features of both French and Italian farce, noting their potential for theatrical entertainment and reaffirming their popularity in Molière's era. Literary comedies were becoming popular during the first part of the seventeenth-century and certain features of the genre, as well as its growing success in Paris, influenced Molière as dramatist and director. Thus a brief study of the

¹G. Lanson, "Molière et la farce", Revue de Paris, (May, 1901), pp. 129-153.

trend in literary comedies will complete the background to the theatrical traditions with which Molière was familiar.

The Farce Tradition

One of the essential characteristics of the farce tradition is the dramatization of the movement and activity of persons in everyday life. In the Ancien Théâtre François² collection of farces, the titles alone confirm the basic orientation of farce. We find such titles as: Le Conseil du nouveau marié, L'Obstination des femmes, Farce des femmes qui font refondre leurs marys, Le Cuvier, Farce d'un Amoureux. As one can see, the marital scene is frequent in these farces. Basic themes included the struggle for dominance by husband and wife, mismarriages and infidelity. The farce, L'Obstination des femmes is a domestic quarrel over dominance. The whole sketch consists of the husband's wanting to put a crow in the cage he has built opposed by the wife's insisting that she wants a rooster in the cage. The short sketch ends with the husband complying with his wife's wishes rather than being continually harangued by her.

²Viollet Le Duc, Ancien Théâtre François, (Paris, 1854), I-II.

Ruse or trickery also provides the theme for a great number of farces.

In Maistre Pierre Pathelin³, for example, Pathelin, a cunning lawyer tricks a draper into giving him the material for some new clothes on credit. Pathelin never plans to pay the draper and thinks up many antics, including fits of delirium, to escape payment. However, at the end of the farce, Pathelin is tricked out of his wages by a simple shepherd.

Intrigue is always rudimentary or even lacking in most farces. In L'Obstination des femmes the whole dramatic scene is centered on the quarrel of the husband and wife. The farce, Deux hommes et leurs deux femmes is a series of scenes in which two types of wives are contrasted. The subtitle clearly indicates the difference: "l'une a malle teste et l'autre est tendre du cul". Generally, the dramatic agent of trickery, as in Maistre Pierre Pathelin, or the reversal of situation, as in Le Cuvier, form the action or plot. Otherwise, emphasis is on juxtaposing scenes of contrast and balancing of opposites. It is basically through contrast and opposition that the comic tension is created in the farces. "Le contraste est l'essence du rire, et nos farceurs paraissent l'avoir fort bien senti", observed M. Lintilhac.⁴

Characters in the farces are presented as types easily recognized by the audience and almost a necessity in the short farces.

³P. L. Jacob, Recueil de Farces, (Paris, 1876), p. 19-116.

⁴M. Lintilhac, quoted by B. Bowen, Les Caractéristiques Essentielles de la Farce Française et Leur Survivance Dans les Années 1550-1620, (Urbana, Illinois, 1964), p. 17.

Natural to the farce stage are: the married couple, the relatives and in-laws, the servants, valets, maids, the lovers and the professionals -- doctors, lawyers, and soldiers. What is important about these types is the way in which they reinforce the dramatic value of the farce:

Dans tous ces cas, les caractéristiques des personnages sont étudiées uniquement en ce qui concerne leur rapport avec d'autres personnages.⁵

The shrewd wife is matched with a foolish husband; the licentious old man is matched with a pretty young wife and a jealous husband; the gluttonous valet is matched with a rich master from whom he steals his food and drink. The use of types and the simple intrigues both reinforce the idea that it is the constant contrast of opposites which gave the farce its basic structure.

Satire is not lacking in the farces but is primarily of a gentle nature, lending itself to type characterizations and the basic dramatic agent of trickery. Merchants are always trying to trick their customers (the opposite happens in Maistre Pierre Pathelin); bragging captains or soldiers turn out to be drunkards and cowards. Curés and friars are frequently satirized. They are rarely considered as representatives of ecclesiastic authority and are primarily satirized for their libidinous tendencies. Medicine and doctors are not taken seriously by the

⁵Bowen, p. 48.

farceurs and doctors are primarily made fun of for either their dogmatism or their charlatanism. Northrop Frye points out that impostors and hypocrites have been part of the comic mood from the tradition of the Ancients and that characters like the miles gloriosus or the irreverential monk had the chief function of amusing the audience.⁶ This tradition has been maintained in farce.

Basic to the activation of the scene in farce is movement and gesture. Blows and kickings, chairs knocked over, obscene gestures, were all part of the comic effect:

Le seul jeu de scène habituel qui soit franchement
et brutalement physique, les coups de bâtons
ou de poing ont fait la joie du public d'
Aristophane jusqu'au Punch and Judy anglais...
Ils sont normalement donnés par le mari à la
femme, par la femme au mari, réciproquement, et
forment le dénouement logique d'une dispute...⁷

Coupled with these stage effects are verbal techniques to create laughter. Repetitions are frequent. The ending of Maistre Pierre Pathelin realizes the use of repetition for comic effects in a degree unusual to many of the simple farces. Pathelin has instructed the shepherd he is defending to reply "Bée" to any question the judge asks. The shepherd obeys and the frustrated judge must finally dismiss him. Then, Pathelin asks the shepherd for his fees. The shepherd still continues his

⁶Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, (New York, 1968), pp. 163-186.

⁷Bowen, p. 37.

replies of "Bée" and finally the enraged Pathelin must also dismiss him without receiving any money. The repetition of "Bée" becomes more comic as Pathelin's anger rises and as he becomes aware of being tricked at his own game. The use of repetition effects the reversal of situation and we laugh at the clever lawyer tricked at his own game by a simple shepherd.

Other comic effects are obtained verbally by the use of enumerations, jargon, obscene puns and jokes. The friars and professional men all speak Latin or macaronic Latin to impress or trick others. The licentious Frère Guillebert opens his farce exclaiming to the audience:

Foullando in calibistris,
Intravit per boucham ventris
Bidauldus, purgando renes.
Noble assistance, retenez
Ces mots pleins de devotion;

The macaronic Latin, the professional jargon, and the eloquence of types like the friar helped to put on a good show. The title, Farce nouvelle et fort joyeuse du pect, indicates a Rabelaisian or Chaucerian taste for scatology. This farce and others like it are simply a series of verbal volleys built up by puns and allusions to sex and the phallic region.

Due to the brevity of the farces, the exposition often took the form of a short monologue or a conversation which quickly revealed the theme. For example, L'Obstination des femmes opens with a monologue in which the husband laments, "Gens mariez ont assez peine". Often the initial speech was directed to the audience to tell them what would be

played before them. The above excerpt from the farce Frère Guillebert is an example of this style of addressing the audience.

Many farces ended on ready-made formulae. The actors would turn to the audience and present "une chanson pour dire adieu" or a brief remark like, "vueillez prendre en gré nos esbas". This kind of ending tends to supply a merry note to the end of the performance and tends to compel the spectator to regard the performance as a play by actors.

This brief examination of the basic elements of the farce tradition reveals that it dramatizes contacts and conflicts of everyday life. Plot and character analysis are rudimentary and often lacking. There is no attempt at edification or verisimilitude. We laugh at the fool and admire the trickery; the eternal marital quarrels are part of life. There is an acceptance of the way things are within the whole perspective of the farce and from that angle, the perpetual oscillations and contradictions in everyday life are presented not by realism on stage but by type characters and stock comic situations. By exploding everyday situations the farce does not reflect a realistic observation of medieval life but rather a theatrical tradition growing out of medieval life which creates comic tension by contrasting opposites and by accenting the 'play' aspect of the actors on stage. The lack of verisimilitude which includes the repeated use of physical violence without consequence creates an illusory world where characters can bounce back after being cudgelled, where a kick or a fall causes no physical pain but verbal reaction. Although unsophisticated, there is a style in farce which can be

characterized by what Robert Garapon has called "une gratuité fantaisiste".⁸ Whether the farce followed a tragedy or was presented as part of the celebration on a feast day, its primary aim was to amuse.

Farce in XVII Century France

In his essay on Molière and the farce, Gustave Lanson traces the theatrical activities in Paris as the young Molière might have known them. Although French farce was still highly popular in the provinces it had to admit to the Italian influence in Paris and the growing popularity of literary comedies. Around 1630, the troupe of players at the Hôtel de Bourgogne followed the Italian tradition. Each actor had his mask and his fixed type. For example, we have record of the valet, Turlupin, played in the mask, who wore a costume similar to Brighella's⁹ and who was a rascal and a smooth talker.

The simple Tabarin farces which were popular during the first decades of the century had an Italian flavour. The actors set up their medicine stand in la place Dauphine and drew customers to hear lively monologues or dialogues and simple farces.¹⁰ The Tabarin farces are

⁸R. Garapon, La Fantaisie Verbale et Comique dans le Théâtre Français, (Paris, 1957), p. 100.

⁹Brighella is an intriguing valet with piercing eyes, olive coloured mask and stealthy sword. His assistance is invaluable in executing various tricks and schemes.

¹⁰A. Adam, Histoire de la Littérature Française au XVII^e Siècle, (Paris, 1962), I, 180.

played by fixed types and include very few characters: Tabarin, the simplistic valet; Lucas and Piphagne, the old men; Captain Rodomont, the boaster; Isabelle and Francisquine, the clever and tricky girls. The farces are very short and the plot simple. In the first of only four extant farces, Tabarin faithfully tries to save his master some money by buying two pigs from Francisquine. Francisquine has stuffed into a sack two men on whom she wanted to avenge herself and sells them to Tabarin in lieu of the pigs. The trick is discovered, the bastonnade follows. The dialogue often follows a simple plan. Tabarin asks a question and Rodomont or Piphagne replies in a mixture of French, Italian and Spanish. Piphagne opens the first farce with the following jargon:

L'Amor é una divinitaé chi ravissé toute
lé affection dellé personné. Depis que le
vichessa s'inflamao el cor di questo foco, la
barba blanché perdi tutta la sua prudentia:
omnia vincit amor... Questo incendio mi a
transportao dé sorté que mi som resolvo de
querir copulation et far la simbolisanbula,
la trambula trimble.¹¹

Some of the dialogue is clever, much of it is full of the grossièreté of French farce.

The sack tricks and the beatings are similar to the lazzi of the commedia dell'arte and the scenes are often left to be entirely improvised

¹¹E. Fournier, Le Théâtre Français au XVI^e et au XVII^e Siècle, (Paris, 1872), pp. 502-503.

by the actors. The following sketch is given at the end of one of the farces:

Lucas est battu et recogneu. Tabarin est bien estonné, Isabelle encore plus. Le Capitaine arrive, qui termine le differend, et puis on tire le rideau: la farce est jouée.¹²

The Tabarin farces were popular in the early 1620's and had their influence on the actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne who followed the Italian tradition.

Towards the middle of the seventeenth century the farces in Paris tended to be replaced by the literary comedies. Yet an important consideration must be kept in mind: both at the court and in the provinces the farce was still a favoured form of entertainment. Robert Garapon's article, La Permanence de la farce dans les divertissements de cour au XVII^e siècle,¹³ reveals that in the ballets and the mascarades at the court of Louis XIII and during the minority of Louis XIV the influence of the farce never ceased. The earthy flavour, the indecencies prevailed; the masks of the Italian farces joined types from the French farces. Together with mascarades and disguises, jargon and comic gestures (essential to the farce tradition) were the basic techniques for amusement. Many of the divertissements were so impregnated with the tone and techniques

¹²Fournier, p. 515.

¹³R. Garapon, "La Permanence de la farce dans les divertissements de cour au XVII^e siècle", Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises, (June, 1957), pp. 117-127.

of the farce that they could easily be referred to as farces rather than ballets or mascarades. Thus, before Molière was established in Paris, the farce prevailed at court.

Commedia Dell'Arte

During the late 1500's and early 1600's the French farce tradition began to feel the evergrowing influence of the Italian farce tradition, better known as the commedia dell'arte. Most elements of the commedia dell'arte tradition point to a theatre whose aim was to create an elaborate visual spectacle and whose success depended on skilled actors.

The lengthier name, commedia dell'arte all'improvviso suggests one of the dominant features of this tradition: it was a theatre of improvisation. The actors had no written parts but merely the sketch or scenario of the plot. Yet, the improvisations were not strictly spontaneous outpourings of the actor's imagination but often memorized speeches taken from novels or literary comedies. In fact, the actor had to have an ample provision of tirades, speeches, quotations, songs, poems, and witty turns of speech which he could make to conform naturally to the role he was playing. More important, he had to be keenly aware of the timing of his speeches. The actors were ultimately responsible for creating a harmonious interplay of dialogue in the improvised scene.

The scenarios of the commedia dell'arte are not limited to the themes of everyday life as is the French farce. The Italian tradition draws on many sources, including tragedies and pastorals, to create fantastic spectacles. In his study of the history of theatrical art Karl Mantzius makes this observation about the scenarios of the commedia dell'arte:

These scenes with elevated subjects were the queerest farrago of absurd events attributed to historical persons, of sorcery, sentimental pathos, harlequinades and mechanical tricks. The usual characters of the commedia dell'arte were mixed up in the drollest way with mythological and historical characters, and the scenes were laid in the most extraordinary countries... Shipwrecks, naval battles, fires, metamorphosed animals, all kinds of fire-spitting magic, alternating with touching love-scenes and comic lazzi.¹⁴

This inventory of spectacular events reflects the importance of the visual impact of the scene. Yet, the stage machines were supplemented by the gestures and movements of the actors on stage. The actors were often acrobats, dancers and stunt-men. The stunts performed were similar to the comic stunts of the farce. These stunts, called lazzi, include bastonnades, disguises and slap-stick effects and they enforced the visual impact of the scene. Sometimes the lazzi were strictly for comic effect. For example, Arlequin waits on Don Juan seated at the table.

¹⁴ Quoted by I. A. Schwartz, The Commedia Dell'Arte, (Paris, 1933), p. 30.

Before placing the plates before his master he wipes them with the seat of his pants. Often the lazzi visually reinforced the emotion expressed by the character. When the statue which has come to dine with Don Juan looks at Arlequin, Arlequin expresses his fear by doing a somersault with a glass of wine in his hand. The importance of gesture and movement by the actor cannot be underestimated. Gesture is basically the medium of expression in this theatre tradition.

One of the most distinguishing features of the commedia dell'arte is that it is played in the mask. The mask underlines the importance of bodily movement and gesture by the actor:

...l'acteur qui pose un masque sur son visage, fonde son jeu non plus sur la mobilité de sa physiognomie, mais sur les mouvements de son corps; et ce faisant, il agit très judicieusement au point de vue théâtral....¹⁵

Furthermore, the mask fixes the conception of the character. As in the French farce, the characters are types and there is little concern for the psychological complexities of the character. Fundamental types include: Pantalone, the old man or father type, often a rich miser; the Dottore, a learned man who can discuss philosophy or whatever in macaronic Latin. Arlecchino and Brighella are members of a family of types called the Zanni: valets, peasants, sharpers, idiots, gluttons, simpletons and wastrels. They often played the role of confidant to a main character but their principal function was to amuse.¹⁶

¹⁵M. Mic, quoted by G. Attinger, L'Esprit de la commedia dell'arte dans le théâtre français, (Paris, 1950), pp. 37-38.

¹⁶Schwartz, p. 19.

The essence of the commedia dell'arte is the spectacle. Like the farce it went beyond the realism of daily life. However, it surpassed the French farce in its stylization and artistry. The décor, the versatility of the actor in mime and speech was of a higher calibre than the often simple French farces. The success of the commedia dell'arte was due not only to the stage machines that fascinated the audiences of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but in large measure to the versatility of the actor:

It is the actor who, with his art of gesture and movement, compels the spectator to be whisked into a fairyland where the blue bird flies, where the beasts talk, and where the loafing, roguish, or infernal Harlequin is transformed into a simpleton who performs wonderful tricks.¹⁷

Lazzi, mask, and the concern for spectacular entertainment all combine to shift the emphasis in commedia dell'arte away from any step-by-step build-up of dramatic action to a concern for the dynamics of the scenic unit. The audience would often witness a series of sketches in which comic situations were exploited by the lazzi and acrobatics of the actors. In the script of a play called La Chasse, there is a scene of drunkards. Much was made of a scene like this. More emphasis was put on the comic effects derived from the situation and less concern for the movement from situation to situation. In his study of this script, Mr.

¹⁷V. Meyerhold, "Farce", Tulane Drama Review, IV, (1959-1960), p. 146.

Attinger notes this tendency:

Dans la scène d'ivrognerie..., on indique que les acteurs doivent tomber l'un après l'autre.... Grattiano en outre doit s'écrouler "après une quantité de lazzi d'ivresse (dopo molti atti imbrioscherzi)"; ce molti n'est pas là sans raison: il y a beaucoup d'hommes ivres dans ces pièces. Il était bon de préciser qu'ici les lazzi devaient constituer une véritable scène.¹⁸

The tendency to introduce stage machines for spectacular effects, coupled with the most fantastic combinations of characters and situations, reflects to what extent the series of sketches and concern for the scenic unit were part of the commedia dell'arte tradition.

A certain element of the romantic is not lacking in this tradition but rather reinforces its mood of imaginative gaiety. Although much was made of comic scenes and situations, love scenes were not excluded. The lovers were generally the handsome or beautiful people on stage, dressed with elegance and less prone to indulge in gesticulation and lazzi than the valets or old men. Lovers' sighs and lamentations were never confused with the foolery of buffoons and rogues.

In general, the commedia dell'arte was a form of theatrical entertainment which aimed at an imaginative and fantastic visual spectacle, completely removed from a concern for verisimilitude or edification. Romantic speeches, fantastic stage machines, lazzi and stunts were all combined in an artistic endeavour to captivate and amuse

¹⁸Attinger, p. 47.

the audiences of Europe, heads of state as well as the common people.

The Trend in Literary Comedies

The literary comedy or la grande comédie is generally defined as a five-act comedy, written in verse, whose aim was to amuse. The indecencies of farce, the physical violence and the stock character types give way to an attempt at realism. Spirited dialogue and delineation of character were to be the main centres of amusement.

Pierre Corneille's comedies are regarded as initiating the genre in seventeenth-century France. His plays, like la Galerie du palais (1633) and La Place royale (1634), stress the contemporary Parisian scene. In La Galerie du palais Corneille seemed intent on giving glimpses of the daily life in Paris. He shows us the merchants of shops like a bookstore and a haberdashery. This trend to realism in setting and observation of habits and customs defined many comedies as 'comedies of manner', and the trend continued to gain influence through the rest of the century. Chappuzeau's Académie des femmes (1661) is a study of preciosity with little attention to intrigue and concentration on the social types and social conditions creating them.

During the 1630's and 1640's there was also an increasing tendency for comedies of intrigue. Les Galanteries du Duc d'Ossone (circa 1632) is a lighthearted comedy full of disguises and surprises.

Although the play was later denounced as immoral because of the infidelity in the love theme, the play is more concerned with creating surprises and complications. Its mood is gay and there is never any attempt at edification. Corneille's Illusion comique (1636) is more than a comedy of intrigue combining the element of surprise with the illusion of a play within a play. At the end of the play the actors reveal themselves as playing out a tragedy within the comedy. The effect is a complete surprise and the comedy ends on a gay note.

This taste for surprise and intrigue persisted during the middle years of the century and the primary influence came from Spanish dramatists. D'Ouville's play, Les Fausses vérités, is an adaptation from a Spanish source and based on an ingenious and complicated intrigue.¹⁹ Corneille's Le Menteur (1642-43), considered one of the best comedies before Molière, is derived from a Spanish source and is primarily a comedy of intrigue in spite of tendencies to label it a comedy of character. Many of Scarron's plays maintain the vogue for Spanish comedy. For example, his Jodelet ou Le Maître valet is derived from a play by Rojas and his Jodelet duelliste, from a play by Tirso de Molina.²⁰

In the translations or adaptations from Spanish comedies settings are often changed from Madrid to Paris and customs and events might be

¹⁹H. C. Lancaster, French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, (Baltimore, 1929), pt. 2, II, 431.

²⁰Lancaster, pt. 2, II, 453.

either changed or introduced to suit Parisian customs and manners.

Thomas Corneille maintained the Spanish scene in his first three plays and only in his fourth play, Amour à la mode, did he transfer the scene to Paris in the Tuileries Gardens.

Versification and la conversation des honnêtes gens replaced the common language or indecencies of farce. Lovers and social types tended to replace the fixed types of farce. For example, in Les Galanteries du Duc d'Osseonne the main protagonist is a man of station who is a gay, carefree lover. In most of Pierre Corneille's comedies the leading characters are young men and women in love. If they are not titled, they are of the upper middle class.

While many of the literary comedies tended to move away from farce, Scarron's and Cyrano de Bergerac's maintained the flavour of farce. Many of Scarron's comedies are burlesque comedies in which elements of satire and buffoonery are introduced and situations inflated to create laughter. Many of the plays were written with the farceur, Jodelet, in mind. Jodelet, one of the great virtuosos of farce, continued to succeed even when farce was losing its popularity during the middle years of the century. Scarron's realization of the importance of Jodelet to the success of many of his plays is evidenced by the change in name of Les trois Dorotheés to Le Jodelet duelliste.²¹

²¹Lancaster, pt. 2, II, 459.

The basic themes of most of these literary comedies were romantic love themes in which some obstacle had to be overcome before the happiness of the lovers could be assured. In Corneille's La Veuve one element of the love theme is that the lover of the widow feels he is below her in wealth and station and fears to express his love for her. In other plays, the love theme could be complicated by the theme of false appearances, or the theme of the peasant child who is really a prince. The theme of the rebuked female lover who disguises herself as a man provided another variation of the love theme.

In most of the literary comedies the dramatists attempted an elevated style, usually in alexandrine verse. To succeed, the dialogue had to be gay, witty and amusing. Concern for realism in manners and character was coupled with a concern for bienséance. Killings and violence were removed from the stage or even from the script, often replaced by bastonnades or minor farcical elements. There was never any great or growing concern during the middle of the century for the classical unities of time, place and action. "In regard to the proprieties, it was still thought that the comic author need not be so careful as the author of tragedy or tragi-comedy..."²² Tragedy was always considered the genre par excellence during the seventeenth century and the comic dramatist had not, before Molière, proven himself as worthy as the tragedian.

²²Lancaster, pt. 2, II, 429.

However, by the 1650's literary comedy had shown that it was attempting to become a respectable genre, to measure up to tragedy and to conform to the civilizing trend of the honnêtes gens and salon society:

...la farce, au milieu du siècle tendait à disparaître. La comédie littéraire l'absorbait et l'étouffait. Il est probable qu'elle fut à la longue victime de la présence des honnêtes gens et des dames. Madame de Rambouillet, nous dit Tallemant qui l'en blâme, ne pouvait entendre un gros mot;...

Molière and the Comic Traditions

Although the farce tradition bowed to the increasing influence of literary comedies in Paris during the middle years of the century, it had lost no favour in the provinces. Molière toured the provinces for thirteen years (1646-1659). It is not unreasonable to maintain that during his peregrinations in the provinces Molière established himself as a farceur, for it was a troupe of actors in the farce tradition that returned and settled in Paris in 1659:

Chaque acteur de la troupe a son masque, nom et caractère fixe pour la farce: pour les vieillards, le Docteur et Gorgibus; pour valets, d'abord Gros-René ou le Barbouillé, c'est-à-dire

²³Lanson, p. 138.

le "fariné": ...outre Gros-René, Mascarille
 et Sganarelle, deux masques que se compose
 et qu'essaie successivement le chef [Molière]
 de la troupe.²⁴

La Jalousie de Barbouillé and Le Médecin volant, two farces, if not written by Molière, were part of his repertory during the provincial tours. La Grange's register notes about twelve farces which were played by the troupe but we have no definite evidence that any or all of them were written by Molière. La Jalousie de Barbouillé, a short farce of thirteen scenes, is built on a double plan: first, the mismarriage of le Barbouillé and Angélique, and then, the constant reappearance of the Doctor, whose ramblings and pedantic jargon have really no connection with the mismarriage theme. The mismarriage theme is built on the plan of the reversal of situation: le Barbouillé knows his wife is making a cuckold of him but when he tries to show he is right, his wife tricks him and makes him appear to be in the wrong. One can see that the Doctor theme was added primarily for comic effect, yet the two themes complement one another if we see that both Angélique and the Doctor add to the frustration of le Barbouillé and keep him in a constant state of enragement. The shortness of the play demands the fixed types: le Barbouillé with his floured face was the foolish husband; Angélique, the clever wife. The conjugal theme and the general satire on the Doctor were part of the commedia dell'arte and the farce traditions as were the jeux de scène --- blows, quarrels, name callings, professional jargon.

²⁴Lanson, p. 138.

The plot is simply a sketch to build up the reversal of situation. Le Barbouillé's monologue in the first scene serves as the exposition and the problem of the play is immediately stated. The dénouement is actually a false dénouement for nothing is solved as far as le Barbouillé is concerned. He will go on trying to prove he is right and make a fool of himself just as the Doctor will go on and on in his macaronic Latin. There is never a serious moment in the farce and at the end of the sixth scene there is mass movement and confusion on stage which the actors improvise and which suggest the commedia dell'arte's trend to build on the visual quality of a scene by the use of lazzi and movement. The end of the scene contains the outline of the action which the actors must improvise:

Le Barbouillé, Angélique, Gorgibus, Cathau, Villebrequin parlent tous à la fois, voulant dire la cause de la querelle, et le Docteur aussi, disant que la paix est une belle chose, et font un bruit confus de leur voix; et pendant tout le bruit, le Barbouillé attache le Docteur par le pied, et le fait tomber; le Docteur se doit laisser tomber sur le dos; le Barbouillé l'entraîne par la corde qu'il lui a attachée au pied, et, en l'entraînant, le Docteur doit toujours parler, et compter par ses doigts toutes ses raisons, comme s'il n'était point à terre, alors qu'il ne paroît plus.²⁵

In our analysis of the commedia dell'arte tradition we tended to emphasize the importance of the actor's movements and gestures on stage.

²⁵ Oeuvres complètes de Molière, ed. R. Jouanny (Paris, 1962), I, 15.

Molière was primarily known as an actor to his contemporaries and it was usually with the Italian virtuoso of mime, Scaramouche,²⁶ that Molière was compared. We know that Molière's troupe shared the Petit-Bourbon theatre with the Italian actors and that he highly respected their style of acting. From acting farces in the provinces and from his contact with the Italian actors Molière developed his genius for mime. Even the critic, and at times enemy of Molière, Donneau de Visé, admitted Molière's excellence on the stage:

Il était tout comédien, depuis les pieds jusqu'à la tête. Il semblait qu'il eût plusieurs voix. Tout parloit en lui, et d'un pas, d'un sourire, d'un clin d'oeil et d'un remuement de tête, il faisoit plus concevoir de choses que le plus grand parleur n'en auroit pu dire en une heure.²⁷

Thus, the fact that Molière was a successful actor in the manner of farce is as important a factor in the dramatic structure of his plays as the traditions of dramaturgy that the French and Italian farces encompass.

²⁶Adam, III, 241-243.

²⁷Donneau de Visé, quoted by Adam, III, 243.

CHAPTER II

TECHNIQUES AND PRINCIPLES IN THE EARLY YEARS OF PLAYWRITING

Molière's early plays reflect the influence of both French and Italian farce as well as literary comedies. We do not know to what extent Molière wrote dramatic material during his provincial tours but we do know from his two five-act comedies written in the provinces, L'Etourdi and Le Dépit amoureux, and the short farces usually attributed to him, La Jalousie du Barbouillé and Le Médecin volant, that Molière was gaining experience in developing certain techniques of composition. We shall examine the dominant features of composition in his plays up to and including L'Ecole des maris. We shall see how elements like plot, character, theme and setting were influenced by the comic traditions Molière knew and how Molière changed or developed certain elements from French and Italian farce. The analysis will not proceed from play to play but will seek to highlight changes and habits of composition which are particularly outstanding in these early plays seen as a whole.

Plot Structure

During his career in the provinces Molière wrote at least two five-act comedies. Both plays, L'Etourdi and Le Dépit amoureux, are

adaptations from Italian sources displaying the Italian vogue for complications and surprises. Both plays have different plot structures and a study of them, in relation to the plot structure of subsequent plays, reflects in which direction Molière's concern for plot was developing.

Le Dépit amoureux was written after L'Etourdi but is Molière's only attempt at a highly complicated and romantic plot. The plot is so complex that Molière had difficulty combining its exigencies with the comic situations. Consequently, the play falls into two tempos: the lengthy récits to explain the plot, and the lively comic situations. For example, in the first four scenes of the second act, the complications of Ascagne's childhood and present situation are revealed. Following these talk scenes are the farcical scenes between Albert and Métaphraste. The roles of Albert and Polydore, the two old men, are expanded and it is primarily their antics and Mascarille's cowardice which dominate the central portions of the play. The fourth act is devoted to the lovers' quarrel in which Molière kept the comic twist by the symmetrical play of the servants and masters. Unfortunately, the fifth act falls hopelessly into obscure and lengthy récits contrasting sharply with the amusing activities of the third and fourth acts.

Molière never followed the plot structure of Le Dépit amoureux again but indicated a preference for the simple plots of the farce tradition and the build-up of dramatic action by the repetition of an accident or mishap. The plot structure of L'Etourdi set a precedent in which Molière realized the value of the mishap or contretemps situation

for structuring the plot. The subtitle of the play, Les Contretemps, is really a guide to the structure of the play. L  lie, a young scatter-brain, is in love with a beautiful slave girl, C  lie. He seeks the aid of his roguish valet, Mascarille, to get the girl away from her master before his rival does. Mascarille thinks up a series of schemes but each time he is on the point of success L  lie unwittingly does something to foil his attempts.

There are ten mishaps or contretemps episodes in the play. The technique of repeating the basic episode in various ways has lead many to label the play a com  die    tiroirs in which the author could expand or reduce the number of episodes according to the number of acts he wished to produce. Nevertheless, the mechanical repetition builds a comic tension in the play and the way in which the episodes are arranged displays a conscious concern for the building of the tempo and mood of the play. The first act has a brief and lively introduction and then proceeds, without hesitation, into three mishap situations. The attempt to gain C  lie's confidence, the attempt to take Anselme's purse and the attempt to take C  lie away from Trufaldin are all thwarted by L  lie. Each plan is quickly contrived, neatly executed and just as quickly foiled. An element of suspense is introduced in the third situation by the conversation between Mascarille and Hippolyte. This conversation cuts the rapid tempo which has been building up and increases the suspense. The audience is deliberately made to wait for the knowledge that Mascarille's third attempt has not succeeded.

The second act is a skilful repetition of the main themes of the first act but amplified and ornamented. The second attempt to take Anselme's purse is made more elaborate by the contrived story of Pandolphe's death and the second attempt to get Célie is complicated by the invention of the ring and the false confidence by Mascarille to Léandre, the rival. By varying the rhythm of the second act from that of the first act but maintaining essentially the same structure Molière avoided the monotony of the repeated sequences and sustained their comic effect. Act III does not vary from the basic structural pattern of the repeated accident. Molière shows that he was constantly concerned about how he could make this basic structure amusing and how it contributed to the aesthetics of the play. The third act is full of energy and visual material. The culmination of the act in the double masquerade, adorned with music and gaily coloured costumes, expands the basic mishap episode with festivity and spectacular entertainment. The fourth act slows the tempo of the play to make the resurgence of energy and movement in Act V more striking. Mascarille's disguise as a Swiss porter is gay and amusing and the short conversation between the two girls is a moment of waiting which is soon dispelled by Mascarille's return to the scene with an energetic and lively report of good news.

The technique of repeating a basic situation or episode can be seen as more than an attempt by a novice dramatist to structure a five-act play. Although the technique is simple, the orchestration of the episodes and the rhythmic effects created by the way in which the episodes

were put together display a concern for the mood and tempo of a play whose basic aim is sheer amusement and gay laughter. Furthermore, the simple structure allowed Molière to concentrate on the effects of scenic situations like the double masquerade or the Swiss porter scene and the creation of the central character, Mascarille.

Molière returned to the mishap situation in the plot structure of other early plays. In Dom Garcie de Navarre Molière aimed at a study of jealousy in a noble character. The play is a heroic comedy whose aim and style is very different from that of L'Etourdi but whose plot is structured in essentially the same way. Instead of ten contretemps there are only four. Each situation is created to trigger a jealous reaction by Dom Garcie. Initially, Done Elvire receives a letter from her close friend, Done Ignès. Dom Garcie believes the letter to be from a rival and his jealousy is not relieved until he discovers the truth. Then, a torn letter is found by Dom Garcie. His jealousy leads him to suspect a rival again but Done Elvire shows him that the letter was addressed to him. The third occasion of jealousy is motivated by a meeting Done Elvire has with a man who is actually her brother. When Dom Garcie sees Done Ignès, disguised as a man, being consoled by Done Elvire, his jealousy is revived, without real cause, a fourth time.

Each repeated episode is contrived by the dramatist to put the main protagonist in a situation that allows the dramatist to portray the depths of Dom Garcie's jealousy. The mechanical repetition of episodes reveals Dom Garcie as an automaton of jealousy, and Molière fails to create

a character who evokes sympathy, fear or laughter. Once Dom Garcie is made jealous his characterization becomes too abstract, too uninteresting, and the repetition of episodes falls into an impasse instead of building on their effect. The repeated episodes that trigger Dom Garcie's jealousy are well distributed and well executed, and in this respect the play is well constructed. It was perhaps the ambiguity of the genre,¹ and the fact that Dom Garcie was a noble character which made the play unappealing. However, Molière does reveal that he is attempting to fuse characterization and plot structure.

The failure of Dom Garcie de Navarre does not lie in how the play was constructed and Molière continued to use the contretemps situation in other plays, realizing its comic potential when combined with a comic character. Les Fâcheux is built on a sequence of repeated accidents. Eraste is constantly attempting to see Orphise, the girl he loves. Each attempt at an encounter with her is foiled by the appearance of some social acquaintance. The parade of the fâcheux social types is the main interest of the play and the mishap situation gave Molière a convenient way of introducing the characters while maintaining a comic tension in the play. Eraste is impatient and not really interested in listening to what his acquaintances have to tell him. Each encounter increases his

¹Molière's play is based on an Italian source. The Italian play does not follow the rules of the comédie héroïque and the concern for bienséance as did Molière. "L'Italian manquait aux bienséances et gesticulait beaucoup, mais son histoire avait du mouvement. La princesse se faisait enlever, aimait son ravisseur et le lui clamait... le prince s'agitait comme un forcené aux actions imprévues; le traître qui attisait sa jalousie était un touche-à-tout comique et maladroit -- et Arlequin tenait ce rôle."

(Oeuvres complètes de Molière, ed. R. Jouanny, Paris, 1962, I, 253.)

impatience and maintains a comic tension in the scene. Les Fâcheux was quickly written and Molière seized on the mishap situation to construct his play. In the preface to the play Molière suggests that the haste in which he wrote persuaded him to choose a structural plan already familiar to him:

...et, pour lier promptement toutes les choses ensemble, je me servis du premier noeud que je pus trouver.²

There seems to be no attempt at unity of action in these plays. The mishap situation is primarily based on chance or coincidence. Yet, the technique has merits. The technique was simple enough to master and gave Molière an opportunity to concentrate on other demands in the plays like the scenic situations in L'Etourdi, or the portraits of the irritating social types in Les Fâcheux. The technique has comic potential. The mechanical repetition of the central conflict increases the comic tension, for an expectation which does not succeed can create laughter. "To cover a good deal of ground only to come back unwittingly to the starting-point, is to make a great effort for a result that is nil."³ This is basically the reverse of the snow-ball effect which Bergson describes as a comic situation.

²All the quotations from Molière's plays that appear in the text have been taken from Oeuvres complètes de Molière, ed. Robert Jouanny, Classiques Garnier, 2 vols., (Paris, 1962).

³H. Bergson, Laughter, trans. in Comedy, (New York, 1956), p. 115.

Besides the mishap situation Molière drew on the dramatic agent of trickery to construct the plot of his plays. It is trickery that lays the foundation for Les Précieuses ridicules. Mascarille, a valet disguised as a marquis, tricks two pretentious girls from the provinces into believing his disguise. The duping of the girls provides the valet's master with the revenge he sought after being snubbed by the girls. The ground plan of trickery is basically a conflict situation. Conflict is necessary for good theatre and in Les Précieuses ridicules the tension is maintained by the conflict between the rogue, Mascarille, and the fools, Cathos and Magdelon. "This anatomy of trickery, this struggle between deceiver and deceived, is rudimentary as a principle of psychology but unailing as a dramatic agent."⁴

As a farceur and as a man of the theatre Molière was sensitive to the potential of the dramatic agent of trickery as both a structural and comic device. In L'Ecole des maris Sganarelle, a grotesque guardian, is made the victim of trickery by his cunning pupil, Isabelle. Yet, as in Le Cocu imaginaire, the character development becomes more closely tied to the plot structure. The whole of the first act builds up a series of contrasting attitudes between Sganarelle and the other characters on the subject of fashion, women's rights and women's education. Sganarelle's rude, uncompromising individuality and his fear of cuckoldry are revealed

⁴W. G. Moore, Molière A New Criticism, (Oxford, 1949), p. 72.

in these arguments and it is a direct result of his "farouche humeur" that Isabelle must contrive her trick to escape him. The trickery begins in the second act and the second and third acts gather momentum, with the comic tension rising, as Sganarelle's bliss in thinking he has triumphed over his brother meets with the increasing cleverness of Isabelle and Valère. It is primarily the agent of trickery and Sganarelle's character on which Molière concentrates. The success of this three-act play undoubtedly prompted Molière to see how successfully he could build on the agent of trickery, the mishap situation and the character development in a five-act play. In the following chapter we shall see how masterfully he combined all these elements in L'Ecole des femmes.

Themes, Setting, Character

As well as providing Molière with elements of plot structure, the farce tradition contributed to the dramatic structuring of Molière's plays in theme, setting and character; however, other influences are also noticeable.

The themes of French farce were basically concerned with the activities of characters in everyday life. Marital problems, jealousy, infidelity and the struggle for dominance recurred constantly. The theme of trickery was often combined with the marital problems, the clever wife never hesitating to dupe her foolish husband. Even themes that Molière took from literary comedies were given a farcical

bent. Molière's themes are basically derived from the farce tradition. In L'Étourdi the romantic theme of the lovers gives way to the roguish valet's trickery. In Les Précieuses ridicules the theme of trickery is expanded to create the plot structure of the play. Variations on le mari trompé and the theme of jealousy appear in Dom Garcie de Navarre, Le Cocu imaginaire, Les Fâcheux, and L'Ecole des maris. All the plays, except Dom Garcie de Navarre, were successful plays. The recurrence of the theme of jealousy, treated in a farcical way, was a successful theme for Molière the dramatist and Molière the actor, for Molière played the main role in almost all of the plays. Thus, the recurring theme of jealousy and fear of cuckoldry, themes of farce, do not necessarily reflect any part at all of Molière's personal life, but rather his ability to play the role of le jaloux successfully. In his comments on Le Cocu imaginaire, Neufvillennaine records Sganarelle's reaction when he sees his wife admiring Lélie's picture:

Son visage et ses gestes exprimaient si bien
la jalousie qu'il ne serait pas nécessaire
qu'il parlât pour paraître le plus jaloux
des hommes.⁵

Besides this basic orientation to the farce in main themes there are certain leitmotifs of contemporary relevance which indicate that once Molière returned to Paris he realized the success of many literary comedies which often displayed customs and manners on stage.

897. ⁵Oeuvres complètes de Molière, ed. R. Jouanny, (Paris, 1962), I,

In Les Précieuses ridicules, Le Cocu imaginaire and L'Ecole des maris there is a recurring theme of some social relevance, namely, that what is provincial is backward and what is Parisian is civilized. The theme of preciosity was of contemporary relevance and was expanded to include such questions as women's education and women's liberty. The constant awareness of the Parisian scene, which included a certain amount of satire, reflects Molière's concern for his public, for he seemed to be directing his plays more and more to the Parisian audiences and the court of Louis XIV. In Les Précieuses ridicules Molière not only mocks the country girls but brings in certain contemporary themes as well -- the habit by dramatists of reading their plays in salons, references to Le Grand Cyrus and the Carte de Tendre, the style of acting at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Les Fâcheux is a very contemporary play full of social types found in Paris. The tendency to pick out social habits and customs and make fun of them is harmless satire which Molière and his contemporaries did without fear of giving offence .

Traditionally, most farces and many literary comedies were set in the street in front of someone's house. However, the trend toward realism and study of manners made much of the Parisian scene. In Le Cocu imaginaire the setting is laid in Paris and both Gorgibus and Sganarelle are bourgeois de Paris . The Gorgibus of Le Cocu imaginaire rails against the precious writings and liberal education of women as did his namesake in Les Précieuses ridicules. In L'Ecole des maris the scene is again Paris with the themes having contemporary relevance. Paris is always suggested as the

only accepted and civilized place to live, and Sganarelle is laughed at not only for his fear of cuckoldry but his idea of honour associated with the provincial life. One can interpret this tendency to give the plays a contemporary setting and to introduce subjects of contemporary relevance as Molière's sensitivity to his public. Molière was a professional man of the theatre and to overlook his audience and its tastes would be to overlook the possibility of success. Initially, the settings of his plays maintain the tradition of the farce as do the themes and characters -- everyday people in everyday situations. The literary comedies and the Parisian scene have modified the influence of the farce in theme and setting to some extent.

Almost all of the secondary characters in these early plays are stock types: the old men and the pedant in Le Dépit amoureux, the lovers in L'Etourdi, the nagging wife in Le Cocu imaginaire, the roguish valet in L'Etourdi and Les Précieuses ridicules. In L'Ecole des maris Isabelle assumes a dominant role in the second and third acts but all the other secondary characters are hardly developed. Ariste, the raisonneur, was obviously introduced to highlight Sganarelle's character. His role is similar to that of Gorgibus in Les Précieuses ridicules: both characters help to clarify the dramatic conflict. Gorgibus, himself somewhat eccentric in his attitude to preciosity, throws relief on the girls' attitudes. Similarly, Ariste's banal formulae and strict adherence to convention throw Sganarelle's rigid attitudes into relief. They are as much fixed types as the main characters.

The main characters in these early plays are types and Molière owes this basic orientation to the French and Italian farce traditions. In L'Etourdi Mascarille plays in 35 of 47 scenes. Everything in the play revolves around him:

Mascarille mène le jeu; il n'y a que lui qui compte; il n'y a que lui en scène. L'intérêt des péripéties se mesure à l'éclat de sa verve.⁶

Mascarille is a descendant of the roguish valet in Italian farce, a brother of the Zanni. The name, Mascarille, means 'little mask' and the character is a fixed type. In L'Etourdi, Mascarille is the king of rogues and he is constantly demonstrating his cunning: "Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator (v. 794)". The Italian Mascarille returns with verve and roguery in Les Précieuses ridicules. The mask fixed this valet-fourbe type. Gustave Lanson clearly indicates the fixity of the type in his description of Mascarille: "Ce n'est qu'un fourbe, il ne peut qu'imiter les autres états".⁷

Sganarelle is the French counterpart of Mascarille. Instead of the little black mask, Sganarelle was identified by his floured-face, long moustache and heavily crayoned eyebrows. In abandoning Mascarille after Les Précieuses ridicules Molière took the Sganarelle type and

⁶P. Brisson, p. 32.

⁷Lanson, p. 147.

transformed it. In Le Médecin Volant, Sganarelle is the valet-fourbe ; in Le Cocu imaginaire he is the fearful husband; in L'Ecole des maris he becomes a combination of the earthy bourgeois, Gorgibus, and the cocu figure. In his development from the Mascarille to the Sganarelle figure Molière removed the mask but kept the fixity of its structure in the various types. The mask fixed and defined the character and it is precisely this idea of 'fixity' that Molière works with in the rest of his plays. Instead of the mask of the farce, the structure of the mask is transferred to a psychological fixity in character.

Sganarelle of Le Cocu imaginaire is, as the title of the play indicates, a person who lives in his own little world: he is an "imaginaire". A braggard and a coward, he is an egoist with a dread of being cuckolded. He is, as Antoine Adam states, "un solitaire, et qui ne sortira jamais de soi".⁸ The initial and final scenes, important for the impact on the audience, plainly give the impression of a man, victim of his own ego and imagination. When Sganarelle enters on stage Célie is fainting and the following results:

Sganarelle: Qu'est-ce donc? Me voilà.

La Suivante: Ma maîtresse se neurt.

Sganarelle: Quoi? ce n'est que cela?
Je croyois tout perdu, de crier de la sorte.
Mais approchons pourtant. Madame, êtes-vous morte?
Hays! elle ne dit mot.

(Scène III)

⁸ Adam, III, 268.

In the end, when Sganarelle discovers that he has not been cuckolded, his conclusion reaffirms the rigidity of his attitudes:

A-t-on mieux cru jamais être cocu que moi?
 Vous voyez qu'en ce fait la plus forte apparence
 Peut jeter dans l'esprit une fausse créance.
 De cet exemple-ci ressouvenez-vous bien;
 Et, quand vous verriez tout, ne croyez jamais rien.

(Scène dernière)

In L'Ecole des maris there is more emphasis on the 'fixity' of Sganarelle's character. Again, his first words give us the impression of an obdurate uncompromising personality, clinging only to his own ideas:

Mon frère, s'il vous plaît, ne discourons point tant,
 Et que chacun de nous vive comme il l'entend.
 Bien que sur moi des ans vous ayez l'avantage
 Et soyez assez vieux pour devoir être sage,
 Je vous dirai pourtant que mes intentions
 Sont de ne prendre point de vos corrections,
 Que j'ai pour tout conseil ma fantaisie à suivre,
 Et me trouve fort bien de ma façon de vivre.

(I, i, 1-8)

Like the Sganarelle of Le Cocu imaginaire, this Sganarelle is also living in his own little world of delusion. He tries to create a world for himself and Isabelle according to his rigid views. In following his own imagination, Sganarelle distorts ideas and bends them to conform to his plans. For him honour is synonymous with forced marital fidelity. In his scale of values he condemns what is Parisian and new, for it contributes to infidelity, and praises what is provincial and old. Prompted by his

obsessive fear of cuckoldry Sganarelle refuses Isabelle the freedom her sister enjoys and insists that the cloistered provincial life is more honourable:

Isabelle pourroit perdre dans ces hantises
 Les semences d'honneur qu'avec nous elle a prises;
 Et pour l'en empêcher dans peu nous prétendons
 Lui faire aller revoir nos choux et nos dindons.

(I, iv, 259-262)

Sganarelle finds difficulty in defending his attitude against Ariste and ultimately resorts to calling Ariste an old fool instead of reasonably considering a change in attitude. There is repeated emphasis in the first act to show that Sganarelle is alone in his views and refuses to change them. Lisette, Léonor, Valère and Ergaste all comment on his "farouche humeur" and the audience is well prepared to see the consequences of this rigid attitude in the following two acts.

Character and plot are important to the dramatic structure of a play. Molière's experience in both French and Italian farce gave him the foundation for character and plot. The development of the mask from Mascarille to Sganarelle is essential to the understanding of how Molière conceived of his main characters in the dramatic structure of his plays.

Gesture

In the commedia dell'arte the mask fixed the character and underlined the importance of gesture and bodily movement on stage. Mask and gesture were bound to each other in the commedia dell'arte and the actor's

gestures, combined with all kinds of lazzi, were major depositors of comic effects. Molière's theatre is never void of gesture and movement on stage. The gaiety and rhythm of many of his early plays is directly related to an appreciation of gesture and lazzi. In Les Précieuses ridicules it is the actor's ability in mime which determines the success of Mascarille's grandiose entrance or the way he combs his wig, or tries to dance an aristocratic dance. It is through his gestures that the actor demonstrates both how ridiculous Mascarille is and how pleased he is with his own performance. Molière himself reaffirms the importance of the animation on the stage by the actors. In his preface to Les Précieuses ridicules he states:

Mais, comme une grande partie des grâces qu'on y a trouvées dépendent de l'action et du ton de voix, il m'importait qu'on ne les dépouillât pas de ces ornements;...

Wearing the mask the actor has to make his bodily movements and his tone of voice demonstrate the action on stage. Each time Mascarille's attempts are foiled by Lélie in L'Etourdi it is not simply what Mascarille says that conveys his irritation; it is his gesticulation and tone of voice which make the scene amusing. In scenes like the attempt to steal Anselme's purse or the imitation of the Swiss porter the actor is at liberty, because of the mask, "to fool to the top of his bent without fear of giving offence."⁹

⁹Moore, p. 34.

As we have stated Molière developed the mask to a psychological fixity in character. This development is accompanied by an increased importance in gesture and movement to display visually the psychological fixity in character while at the same time keeping the emphasis on the comic. In L'Ecole des maris Sganarelle reflects in every aspect of his personage his intransigent individuality: his fierce face, his outmoded dress, deliberately exaggerated to reflect his rejection of convention, his abrupt and rude manner of speech. We can imagine with what ease and grace this loup-garou tries to kiss Isabelle's hand and how he tries to embrace Valère!. In this scene (II, x) Molière pushes to the extreme the blindness and the bliss of Sganarelle; the scene is played in a highly visual and amusing way through the gestures of the actors. In almost all of Act II Sganarelle runs back and forth delivering messages for the lovers. He is like a puppet and even though he is the object of Isabelle's trickery it is the rigidity of his own mind that causes him to fall for the trick. His automatic movements become the outward manifestation of his state of mind.

This attention to the physical on stage -- the facial expression, the costume, the gesture -- creates the visual impact to which the audience responds. Furthermore, this emphasis keeps the examination of character from deeper probes which could reveal emotions and feelings the audience would identify with. The emphasis on the physical keeps the audience emotionally detached from the character and keeps the comic touch. "Any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in

a person when it is the moral side that is concerned."¹⁰ This repeated concern for the audience, and for the movement on stage must be emphasized, for these are essential aspects of the theatre which tend to be overlooked in a strictly literary study of the play and which are essentially derived from Molière's familiarity with the stage as actor and director.

We noted earlier that in the commedia dell'arte there was a certain taste for spectacular entertainment. Huge stage machines, elaborate costumes, acrobatics and physical stunts gave the spectators something more to see, something of an unusual or grandiose display. Evidences of this taste for spectacular entertainment appear in some of Molière's early plays. In L'Etourdi the double masquerade and the Swiss porter scene ornament the trick Mascarille is attempting and give the audience something more to look at and something more to respond to. In Les Précieuses ridicules, Mascarille's extravagant costume and his stupendous entrance on stage smack of the spectacular. The parodies of the tragic monologue in plays like L'Etourdi or Le Cocu imaginaire can be seen as an expansion of the comic scene to give the spectators something more to be amused by. This element of spectacular tends to disappear as Molière begins writing literary comedies, but is prevalent in his work for the court of Louis XIV and reappears in his later plays.

¹⁰Bergson, p. 93.

Monologues

Molière's fondness for the monologue in these early plays is striking. From L'Etourdi to L'Ecole des femmes a total of 81 monologues contrast sharply with the 24 monologues of the plays in the central years of Molière's career, viz., La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes to Le Sicilien. Two tendencies dominate in this frequent use of the monologue. Molière exploited it as a structural, and a comic technique. There are several short (8-10 verses), or very short (2-3 verses) monologues which serve either to unite scenes or to punctuate the action between scenes. For example, in L'Etourdi, several short monologues slow the action or inform the audience. After Mascarille's first ruse a short monologue follows¹¹ in which Mascarille lets the audience know that another scheme is in the making. This pattern of ruse -- monologue -- ruse is repeated frequently in the play¹² and it becomes clear that Molière found it a convenient vehicle for punctuating the series of schemes.

In Le Dépit amoureux the monologue is important for the plot or action of the play. In Act III, five monologues build up the action and comment on it. Mascarille's and Albert's monologues lay the basis for the quiproquo between Albert and Polidore in the fourth scene of that act. Polidore's short monologue follows the quiproquo scene. He comments on Albert's confusion and distress and at the end of the monologue introduces

¹¹I, iv, 201-203.

¹²Examples include: I, vi, 290-293; II, viii, 785-794.

Valère for the following scene. Similarly, Valère's short monologue at the end of scene vi serves as a transition to the following scene. Mascarille's monologue at the end of the act is a rhymed couplet which neatly closes the act with Mascarille lamenting about his state of affairs. In both of these early five-act comedies Molière repeatedly uses the monologue to aid in the structuring of the play.

Molière also capitalized on the monologue as a vehicle of entertainment. The famous monologue by Mascarille in L'Etourdi can be called an hors d'oeuvre, for it has nothing to do with the action of the play. On the other hand, if one sees the play as an exercise in amusement this monologue becomes one of the highlights of the play. The monologue follows the Cornelian form but empties it of its basic purpose. The Cornelian hero has a serious reason for hesitating between two modes of action and his decision is important for the action of the play. Mascarille has no reason to hesitate; he has been a rogue in the first half of the play and will continue to be so in the second half. Mascarille's monologue is emptied of any passion which makes the Cornelian monologue tragic.¹³

Mascarille begins by addressing two abstract qualities as if they were persons on either side of him:

Taisez-vous, ma bonté, cessez votre entretien:
Vous êtes une sotté, et je n'en ferai rien.

¹³J. Scherer, "Molière Et Le Monologue Tragique, D'Après Un Passage De L'Etourdi", PMLA, (1954), p. 769.

Oui, vous avez raison, mon courroux, je l'avoue;

(III, i, 901-903)

As Mascarille continues, his tone and diction become burlesque:

"L'honneur, ô Mascarille, est une belle chose ". He echoes lines from Le Cid and his hesitation is eloquently presented in confused images capturing the jargon of the tragic style:¹⁴

Mais quoi? que feras-tu, que de l'eau toute claire,
Traversé sans repos par ce démon contraire?
Tu vois à chaque instant il te fait déchanter,
Et que c'est battre l'eau de prétendre arrêter
Ce torrent effréné, qui de tes artifices
Renverse en un moment les plus beaux édifices.

(III, i, 919-924)

The content of the monologue is reduced to a series of gestures and movements which are comic because they are without meaning. The tragic monologue is a form, a type in which a certain ritual takes place. Molière has deliberately prevented the association of the seriousness of the content with its form.¹⁵ The travesty of the tragic monologue gave Mascarille-Molière another occasion to entertain. The actor is alone on stage for a considerable length of time and it is on his ability that the success of the scene depends, not to mention the renown for the actor himself.

¹⁴Scherer, p. 771.

¹⁵Bergson, p. 89-90.

In Le Cocu imaginaire monologues are frequent (9 in 24 scenes). They primarily support the theme of false appearances and are comic because of the false situation. Scene v is a monologue by Sganarelle's wife. She has seen Sganarelle attending Célie who has fainted and assumes her to be Sganarelle's mistress. Her anger at being betrayed is revealed in the monologue along with Sganarelle's inadequacies in their marriage -- a typical theme of the farce. Her mistaken impression initiates the theme of false appearances as it sustains the tone and mood of the farce. At the end of her monologue she picks up Lélie's picture and begins commenting on it, making the transition to the following scene where the compounding of the false appearances continues. The monologue is in a key position for revealing the theme and tone of the play as well as being a structural agent. As in L'Etourdi and Le Dépit amoureux there is an expansion of the comic scene to include the burlesque of the tragic monologue. In a lengthy monologue (67 verses) Sganarelle tries to decide whether to fight Lélie and save his honour, or follow his "humeur débonnaire" and do nothing. It is not a question of conflicting ideals which makes Sganarelle hesitate. It is simply the fact that he is a coward and wants to save his honour and his life at the same time. The fact that he is not really a cocu further heightens the absurdity of his dilemma. The mélange of comic and tragic diction, the questions and exclamations, the hesitation and gesticulation, build to an inflated climax which is deflated in a highly amusing way by Sganarelle's absurd reasoning and comic gestures. Putting his hand on his stomach he triumphantly concludes:

Je me sens là pourtant remuer une bile
 Qui veut me conseiller quelque action virile;
 Oui, le courroux me prend; c'est trop être poltron:
 Je veux résolûment me venger du larron.
 Déjà pour commencer, dans l'ardeur qui m'enflamme,
 Je vais dire partout qu'il couche avec ma femme.

(xvii, 469-474)

In this scene, the monologue becomes more than a tour de force. While still keeping in mind that Molière the actor could see the comic potential in these visually oriented monologues, one can see that Molière the dramatist is grafting the monologue to his character portrayals. Sganarelle is the first of a long line of imaginaires. This monologue effectively demonstrates Sganarelle trapped in his own imagination.

In L'Ecole des maris the situation and character revelation are simultaneously developed and the monologues reflect this tendency. The ten monologues are shared by Isabelle and Sganarelle. Three times the virtuous young maiden excuses her conduct and justifies her trickery against the "injuste rigueur" of Sganarelle. Sganarelle's monologues demonstrate his rigid way of thinking and at the same time, his "fantaisie". The more he becomes duped by Isabelle the more he praises his own philosophy. Full of pride and happy that his honour is saved he babbles:

Ah! que je suis heureux! et que j'ai de plaisir
 De trouver une femme au gré de mon désir!
 Oui, voilà comme il faut que les femmes soient faites,
 Et non comme j'en sais, de ces franches coquettes,
 Qui s'en laissent conter, et font dans tout Paris
 Montrer au bout du doigt leurs honnêtes maris.

(II, vii, 677-682)

To recapitulate, the monologue is a technique that Molière used in the dramatic structuring of his early plays. In plays like L'Etourdi and Le Dépit amoureux the two different uses are apparent but through Le Cocu imaginaire and L'Ecole des maris the dramatic and the comic potential becomes more fused. The propensity for lengthy monologues displays a taste for comic sketches or spectacular entertainment, a tendency which can be seen as deriving from the commedia dell'arte and the penchant of the actor to 'play' on stage.

Expositions and Dénouements

Any man of the theatre realizes the importance of the exposition and the dénouement of a play. Conventionally, the exposition opens with a monologue or a spirited debate which quickly reveals the theme, plot and characters of the play. Lélie's short monologue in L'Etourdi reveals the traditional theme of the lovers and an obstacle. In the second scene Mascarille has already devised his first plan and in the third scene the action begins. From the initial scenes we are quickly informed and we are quickly caught up in Lélie's enthusiasm and Mascarille's verve. The verve and energy of the first two scenes set the tempo and the mood of the play. L'Ecole des maris opens at a moment of dispute in the middle of a conversation between Ariste and Sganarelle. Sganarelle's first words not only reveal his obstinacy but draw the audience into the conflict. Most of the first act is argumentation to reveal Sganarelle's nature and

it is not until the second act we learn of Isabelle's plans to escape. The debate of Act I conditions the rest of the play and there is a snow-ball effect of movement and tension from the debates of the first act to the frenzied activities of the last act.

Les Fâcheux has a basically traditional exposition. Eraste and his valet are having a conversation in which we learn of Eraste's rendezvous with Orphise and his irritation against les fâcheux. From Eraste's lengthy récit which opens the play we understand his state of irritation which continues to be aggravated during the play. As in L'Ecole des maris the tempo is set for a snow-ball effect -- Eraste's aggravation gathering momentum after each interruption. The récit is a lengthy description of an annoying social acquaintance. His extravagances are narrated rather than demonstrated and it would be up to the actor to interpret this lively portrait written with such unrelenting vivacity. As René Bray rightly states: "cette narration est quasi une action".¹⁶

What strikes us about these expositions is not that they are traditional but that they are lively and vital. The audience is immediately affected and drawn into the play. Consequently, it becomes less a question of introducing theme or plot and more a question of the tone and tempo to which the audience responds.

Many have criticized Molière's dénouements for their lack of logic and their improbability. Yet it is precisely the illogical and the

¹⁶R. Bray, p. 219.

fantastic which so eminent an actor as Louis Jouvet has praised for displaying "la plus fine convention théâtrale".¹⁷ When Lisette turns to the audience at the end of L'Ecole des maris to recite the 'moral', or when the long lost parents identify themselves, as in L'Etourdi, the merry note or the illogicality of the scene reinforces the traditional happy ending of the comedy and compels the spectator to realize that the illusion or the play is over. Molière continued to use illogical dénouements throughout his career and it is reasonable to assume that he never abandoned them because they crowned the performance with a fanciful ending. To simply read the plays and criticize the ending is to forget the mood of theatre -- the lights (or candles in the seventeenth century), the setting, the costumes, the stage, and the mood of the spectators who have come to be amused by the performance.

Most of Molière's plays, up to and including L'Ecole des maris, show to what extent Molière favoured the techniques of the farce traditions as both actor and dramatist. L'Etourdi, Le Dépit amoureux and Dom Garcie de Navarre were Molière's initial attempts at literary comedies and we have noted how they derive techniques of dramatic structure from farce as well. The plays indicate, on the one hand, Molière's versatility in farce and on the other, Molière's attempt at literary comedy. Les Fâcheux, written for court entertainment, was accompanied by a ballet.

¹⁷L. Jouvet, "Molière", Conferencia, XXXI (1937), p. 294.

and Molière notes in his preface to the play that this combination had future potential. More than one road lay open for Molière to follow in the comic theatre. He eventually followed several of them but with his next play, L'Ecole des femmes, indicated that the farceur was attempting to score success with a five-act comedy in verse.

CHAPTER III

L'ECOLE DES FEMMES

On joua l'Ecole des Femmes,
Qui fit rire Leurs Majestés
Jusqu'à s'en tenir les côtés:
Pièce aucunement instructive,
Et tout à fait récréative;
Pièce dont Molière est auteur,
Et même principal acteur;
Pièce qu'en plusieurs lieux on fronde,
Mais où pourtant va tant de monde,
Que jamais sujet important
Pour le voir n'en attira tant.¹

This extract from a tribute to the play recognizes how favourably Molière's first five-act Parisian comedy was received by Louis XIV and his court. The gazeteer, Loret, points out two features of this play which cannot be disputed: it was a highly amusing comedy and a great success for Molière as author and actor. In the preface to his play Molière himself lets the success of the play speak for itself, answering his critics by implying that because the play had been a successful vehicle of entertainment he had achieved his aim in writing and performing it:

Bien des gens ont frondé d'abord cette comédie;
mais les rieurs ont été pour elle, et tout le
mal qu'on en a pu dire n'a pu faire qu'elle n'ait
eu un succès dont je me contente.

¹Oeuvres complètes de Molière, ed. E. Depois and P. Mesnard, (Paris, 1893-1927), III, 118.

In the study of this play we shall examine to what extent certain elements of farce condition the structure of the play and contribute to its aesthetic effect. We shall examine the comic and dramatic value of the themes, noting how the theme of jealousy follows a pattern dominant in the early plays. We shall then examine how the play is put together, analyzing the dramatic value of the exposition and dénouement, the fusion of the plot and character portrayal and the function of the monologue within this framework. The analysis of these aspects of the play will concentrate on their dramatic value, ultimately to show how the rhythm, mood, and comic perspective of the play are maintained.

The Perspective of Farce

L'Ecole des femmes is a play about a jealous old guardian who wants to keep his ward for himself and marry her. However, his clever young ward successfully outwits him and marries the young man she loves. Although every aspect of the play is much richer than this schematization, the play derives its story essentially from the farce themes of le cocu and le mari trompé. The mood and intention of the farce tradition is also maintained. The play is gay, the effects often gross. We admire the cunning of the ward and laugh at the fool, the old guardian.

This farcical pattern is amplified by the characterization and plot structure, and its aesthetic persists primarily through the emphasis on the animation of the scenes and the emphasis on gesture by the actor.

We know that farce and commedia dell'arte relied heavily on gesture and movement for the animation of the scene. In L'Ecole des femmes gesture is essential to the characterization of Arnolphe. By gesture the actor must capture the mechanical in Arnolphe, for his mechanical movements on stage, his grimaces of jealousy, his ridiculous sighs of love, will demonstrate his mental rigidity. One cannot take Arnolphe's pleas of love for Agnès seriously. Molière himself underlined the farcical in Arnolphe when he played the role. Who can take Arnolphe seriously when he delivers his protestations of love with, "ces roulements d'yeux extravagants, ces soupirs ridicules et ces larmes niaises qui font rire tout le monde?"² One cannot see Arnolphe's passionate feelings of love in a tragic light when he constantly punctuates them with the familiar, "je crève". Arnolphe becomes ridiculous in his tyranny and authority. Molière introduces a parody of Corneille's Sertorius in verse 642 to keep the scene comic. In Corneille's tragedy the line ends one of the important scenes in the play. It is a serious moment; Pompey is sending Perpenna to death. The allusion to Corneille's play would probably not have been missed and the parody makes us see Arnolphe's tyranny in a comic light. There is no doubt that Molière meant his main protagonist to be comic. He makes us aware that all the other characters on stage laugh at Arnolphe. Chrysalde leaves his friend commenting, "Ma foi, je le tiens fou de toutes les manières (v. 195)". Horace tells Arnolphe that Monsieur de la Souche is considered a "ridicule" by others. Even the names Arnolphe,

² La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, Scene vi.

patron saint of cuckolds, and de la Souche foreshadow the fool. These elements smack of the farce tradition and we are prepared to see again the old fool tricked and laughed at.

Much of the gaiety and movement in L'Ecole des femmes derives from Molière's appreciation and taste for farce. A reader of the play must be constantly aware of how gesture and movement on stage are essential to the understanding of the text. As astute a literary scholar as Antoine Adam concedes to this very important aspect of the play:

Il est naturel que les paroles d'Arnolphe, lorsqu'elles sont lues, rendent un son presque tragique, tandis que ses gestes et sa minique nous ramènent à la pure comédie.³

As in the commedia dell'arte the scenes of farce in this play contain a scenic quality similar to sketches. Yet these scenes, like everything in L'Ecole des femmes, are tied to the rest of the play. The scenes of farce are part of the dramatic structure of the play contributing to the mood and tempo as well as the characterization of Arnolphe. The peasants, Alain and Georgette, are the rustic types of farce and their jargon and attitudes create the provincial background in which Arnolphe wants to keep Agnès. The peasants antics are lively and farcical, and Alain and Georgette initiate the agitation that will grow in Arnolphe as the play progresses. The initial scene of farce (I, ii) starts this agitation and is played in a manner aimed at creating laughter. Arnolphe attempts to

³Adam, III, 283.

get into his house but is locked out. He must argue with his servants and ultimately threaten them before the door is opened. The scene contrasts effectively with the previous scene in which Arnolphe was quite sure he had everything under control. Of course, Molière's own experience in farce led to an expansion of the comic potential of the scene. The bastonnade and the hat game between Alain and Arnolphe are gay and amusing as well as revealing that Arnolphe's control and authority are undermined by the peasant's antics. The scene initiates the gap between Arnolphe's obsessive desire to control rigidly his world and its refusal to be ordered. The breach becomes wider as Arnolphe tries to narrow it and the disobedience and ignorance of the peasants reveal this in a gay and comical way.

The farcical scene with the notary (IV, ii) is noted by Donneau de Visé as one of the funniest scenes in the play and one which inspired much of Paris to come and see the play. It is a scene in which Arnolphe and the notary sustain a quiproquo. Arnolphe thinks he is alone; he speaks of his need to be careful with Agnès and his fear of letting news of Agnès's affair with Horace spread through the city. The notary thinks Arnolphe is speaking to him about the marriage contract and replies accordingly. A completely ridiculous conversation results as each man continues his own line of thought. The situation is comic, it is what Bergson defines as the "reciprocal interference of series" in which "we [the audience] see the real meaning of the situation, because care has been taken to show us every aspect of it, but each of the actors knows

only one of these aspects"⁴. Besides the scene's comic value, which contributes to the mood of the play, its dramatic value lies in showing us how consistently Arnolphe follows only his own line of thought.

We have suggested in the initial chapter that the farce took the spectator into a gay world of the unreal where realistic observation and edification give way to amusement and laughter. This perspective pervades L'Ecole des femmes. The liveliness of the play, the deliberate avoidance of the serious, derive from the farce. That Molière was able to introduce elements of farce into a literary comedy without making them seem like deliberate 'filler' material to create laughter is of the foremost value, for the pleasing quality of the play owes much of its success to the techniques and perspective of the farce tradition.

Themes

L'Ecole des femmes continues the predominant theme of L'Ecole des maris, Le Cocu imaginaire, and Dom Garcie de Navarre, namely, the theme of jealousy. In each play the protagonist is obsessively possessive of the woman he loves and haunted by the fear of cuckoldry. Yet Dom Garcie is jealous without cause and Sganarelle and Arnolphe are never really cuckolded. The basic theme in farce of le jaloux and le cocu is expanded to le cocu imaginaire. Dramatically this theme of imagining to be cuckolded opens the door for many more equivocal comic

⁴Bergson, p. 123.

situations and expanded use of dramatic irony. The theme of le cocu imaginaire lends itself more than the traditional farce theme to the study of a basically comic character; for the imaginaire embodies a certain absentmindedness, a certain unawareness of his nature and the reality around him. This unawareness, part of the mechanical or automatic in his character, makes him comic.⁵

Molière did not hesitate to use the archetypal theme of the young lovers faced with an obstacle to overcome. This romantic theme was a favorite of literary comedies but Molière did not use it as his principal theme; rather, he fused it with the theme of le cocu shifting his emphasis to the portrayal of the main character. Yet the theme of the beautiful young lovers and the romantic dénouement have dramatic value. The young lovers have a charm which contrasts with the rigidity and obsessiveness of Arnolphe and the romantic theme complements the farce theme by sustaining the gay, fairy tale like mood of the play.

Built around these two basic themes are contemporary themes: the education and status of women, bourgeois vanity, Parisian manners. These themes would have enhanced the contemporaneity of the play for Molière's audiences and would have reflected the basic trend in literary comedies of the period. For modern audiences, the status of women and bourgeois vanity are themes which have not lost accessibility.

⁵Bergson, p. 155.

Since our purpose is to study the dramatic structure of the play and analyse how elements, like theme, contribute to the success of the play as a vehicle of entertainment, it seems irrelevant to interpret the recurrence of the predominant theme of jealousy and fear of cuckoldry by ascribing them to Molière's personal life. We can see that Molière fused two archetypal themes of the comic traditions he knew. Both themes sustain a mood of gay unreality. The concentration on the portrait of the jealous man is an expansion of the type from farce and the principle of the mask, elements to be analyzed in the character study of Arnolphe. It must be remembered that the preceding comedies which incorporated the predominant theme of jealousy were successful comedies for Molière and his troupe (except Dom Garcie de Navarre). It is not unreasonable to assert that Molière would have tried to capitalize on successful themes when he made his début in Paris as a writer of five-act comedies.

Exposition and Dénouement

"L'exposition et le dénouement sont dans une comédie les moments privilégiés où l'art de l'acteur trouve particulièrement à s'employer."⁶

When the curtain rises on the first scene of the play the spectators expect to be given information about the play. Yet, the introduction must not be static but have a certain movement and interest which will draw the

⁶Bray, p. 212.

spectator into the play. In the manner of the literary comedy, the exposition of L'Ecole des femmes is a spirited debate between Arnolphe and Chrysalde. The debate gives us information about Agnès, about Arnolphe's mockery of cuckolds and the change of his name to Monsieur de la Souche. The lengthy debate on cuckoldry may seem somewhat heavy-handed to the reader but we must constantly remember that these comedies were meant to be played, to be watched. The potential for action is there if we imagine the attitudes of Arnolphe and Chrysalde, the exchange of looks and gestures, the tone of voice. For example, by the punctuation of the text we can see that Arnolphe is constantly interrupting Chrysalde and asserting his own ideas. The effectiveness with which the actors capture this rhythm will determine the tempo of the scene. Chrysalde finally gives up trying to assert his views: "Je ne vous dis plus mot (v. 123)". The whole scene is structured on the reversal of a comic situation which Bergson calls the jack-in-the-box.⁷ Chrysalde does not take his friend seriously and keeps rejecting his arguments until he just gives up arguing with "un fou". By diametrically opposing the two characters' attitudes in this scene Molière creates a comic situation which the actors must seize on and expand to create an amusing and informative introduction. The lightness of the mood, the bizarre attitude of Arnolphe and the warnings by Chrysalde, "Je vous le dis encor, vous risquez diablement (v. 66)", draw the spectator into the play.

⁷Bergson, pp. 105-106.

In the previous chapter we have interpreted Molière's *dénouements* as kind of coup de théâtre in spite of opposing opinions. In L'Ecole des femmes the *dénouement* is contrived and artificial. The motif of the secret marriage of Agnès's parents, her father's return from America, the fact that Horace had been already intended for her, are simply illogical and romantic, contrived to make the comedy end well. Antoine Adam dismisses the *dénouement* of the play by insisting that Molière was slavishly following literary convention.⁸ Rather than dismiss the *dénouement* in this way, we would choose to interpret it as serving two dramatic purposes.

In the *dénouement* we see that all of Arnolphe's efforts have come to nil. He has expended much energy, both physical and mental, to come back to where he started. This situation is laughable. It is, as Bergson calls it, the reverse of the snow-ball effect. In this situation, "Laughter is the result of an expectation which of a sudden ends in nothing".⁹ Just as Arnolphe is about to whisk Agnès away he is stopped. The *dénouement* undoes Arnolphe's scheme while keeping a comic twist.

This type of illogical *dénouement* which Louis Jouvet has called the "purest" of theatrical conventions reinforces the illusion of the play on stage. Arnolphe is not changed at the end of the play; he learns no lesson. The audience is not withdrawn from the gaiety of the comic world on stage to learn about the realities of Arnolphe's situation and profit

⁸ Adam, III, 281.

⁹ Kant, quoted in Bergson, p. 116.

by his example. This dénouement maintains the gaiety and artificiality of the world of the theatre into which the audience has entered. It is not in the last scene but after the last scene that the audience returns to the logical, real world. Thus, instead of dismissing the improbable and illogical dénouement as convention or even satire, it seems more reasonable to attempt to explain its effect as a theatrical convention and its value within the dramatic structure of the play.

Fusion of Plot Structure and Character Study

In L'Ecole des femmes the plot is built on the repetition of a coincidental meeting between Arnolphe and Horace. Each meeting triggers a reaction in Arnolphe which reveals the contrast within Arnolphe of the mechanical and the living, and the contrast between Arnolphe and Agnès. The repeated episodes structure the play and the concept of the natural and the artificial, the mechanical and the living motivates it:

L'Ecole des femmes, que l'on considère parfois comme le chef-d'oeuvre de Molière, présente à l'état nu la lutte de l'automatique et du vivant, c'est-à-dire les puissances élémentaires du comique...plus Arnolphe plaque du mécanique sur la vie, plus la vie, par ses seules forces, fait tomber ce mécanisme, le rend inutile et incertain.¹⁰

¹⁰A. Thibaudet, "Le Rire de Molière", Revue de Paris, (1922), pp. 318-319.

How Molière arranged his plot and developed his character study reveals a mastery of techniques he had worked with in his earlier plays and in which he saw comic value. In L'Etourdi Mascarille repeatedly tries to capture Célie for his blundering master. In Les Fâcheux Eraste keeps trying to see Orphise in spite of the constant interruptions by his bothersome social acquaintances. This use of the contretemps or repeated mishap situation gives us the impression of a mechanical arrangement and "any arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement".¹¹

To make all the meetings between Horace and Arnolphe seem coincidental, and thus, closer to the illusion of life, Molière set the scene in a street near the house where Agnès is being kept. The setting is a theatrical convention and would be accepted as such by the audience of Molière's day. Furthermore, since both men, Horace and Arnolphe, constantly centre their attention on Agnès, it is likely that they would run into each other in the vicinity of her house.

L'Ecole des femmes is structured on four episodes which follow the same pattern throughout. Initially, Arnolphe meets the son of an old friend (I, iv). This young fellow, Horace, reveals to Arnolphe that he is in love with a beautiful young girl who is closely watched by her guardian, Monsieur de la Souche. Horace is not aware that Arnolphe has

¹¹Bergson, p. 105.

assumed this name and that he is actually speaking with the girl's guardian. When Arnolphe hears that Horace is in love with the girl that he himself has carefully raised and planned to marry, he hides his outrage until Horace has left and then, plans to take measures to prevent Horace from meeting Agnès again.

Shortly after Arnolphe is satisfied that he has the situation under control he meets Horace again (III, iv). Horace, still unaware that Arnolphe is his rival, tells him of the misfortune in his love affair. Arnolphe hears quite contentedly that from her balcony Agnès told Horace to go away and then threw a stone at him. Arnolphe is pleased until he hears that Agnès was ingenious enough to tie a note to the stone, telling Horace that she would be his. Arnolphe must again hide his anger until Horace leaves. Then, Arnolphe begins to plan to tighten the security around Agnès to ensure that she will never belong to Horace and that he, Arnolphe, will not be cuckolded.

Just after Arnolphe feels that he has everything under control he meets Horace a third time (IV, vi). This time Horace tells him he has gained access to Agnès's bedroom and arranged to take her away with him that night. Arnolphe is dumfounded; when Horace leaves, Arnolphe resolves to prevent Horace's attempt. Having prepared his servants to ambush Horace, Arnolphe feels certain that this precaution will succeed in saving Agnès and his honour. During the ambush, however, the servants think they have mistakenly killed Horace. Arnolphe is distressed, not knowing how he will explain this to the boy's father.

Just as Arnolphe leaves the house he surprisingly meets Horace a fourth time (V, ii). Horace tells him of the ambush. During the confusion Agnès left the house quickly. After the terrified servants fled, Agnès found Horace feigning death and they both quickly departed. Horace now begs his friend, Arnolphe, to take care of Agnès for the sake of propriety and until he can make arrangements with his father. Naturally, Arnolphe is eager to take back his ward. In the meantime, Horace's father has returned and informed Horace that a marriage has been arranged for him. Horace implores his friend Arnolphe to dissuade his father from the planned marriage and Arnolphe seizes on the occasion as a means of preventing Horace from getting Agnès. He tells Horace's father that a son should always obey his father's wishes. Arnolphe feels confident that Agnès is now his, but just as he is on the point of taking her away, he and Horace both find out that Agnès is the girl whom Horace's father had arranged for him to marry. Arnolphe leaves the stage speechless. Each precaution had been useless.

In L'Etourdi, Les Fâcheux and Dom Garcie de Navarre there is little attempt to unite the series of repeated accident situations. Yet, in L'Ecole des femmes there is an admirably graded sequence of repetitions closely knit to the mood of the main character. Each encounter that Arnolphe has with Horace reveals more clearly Arnolphe's rigid attitude and the comic in his character. Like the Sganarelles of L'Ecole des maris and Le Cocu imaginaire Arnolphe is an imaginaire. He wants only to follow his own ideas and plans: "Je veux suivre ma mode (I, i, 124)". He has laughed at hundreds of men who have been cuckolded by their clever

wives yet he has found a flawless plan for avoiding the 'horns': marry a simpleton, a girl isolated from the world and society, a girl innocent solely because she is ignorant. Arnolphe is quite proud that his plan has been successful. He has strictly supervised the girl's education, has surrounded her with ignorant servants and has removed her from any contact with 'corrupt' Parisian women. His pride, his egoism, and his pendency make him exclaim:

Dieu merci, le succès a suivi mon attente:
Et grande, je l'ai vue à tel point innocente,
Que j'ai béni le Ciel d'avoir trouvé mon fait,
Pour me faire une femme au gré de mon souhait.

(I, i, 139-142)

Before Arnolphe's first meeting with Horace there is a short scene with Agnès which allows us to see how Arnolphe feels about his ward. The scene (I, iii) demonstrates that with Agnès Arnolphe is an awkward, timid lover. The scene recalls, to some extent, the impression of awkwardness and egoism that Sganarelle presented in his introduction in Le Cocu imaginaire. Arnolphe's first words, "La besogne à la main!" reveal his joy in seeing Agnès obediently following his mode of instruction. Then, when Agnès tells him that her only anxiety is the bedbugs, Arnolphe replies with boyish glee: "Ah! vous aurez dans peu quelqu'un pour les chasser". His awkwardness and his desire to please her quickly give way to his own desire to achieve his plans and it is this rigid attitude, this obsessive fear of cuckoldry which dominates his being.

Each meeting with Horace reveals more intensely that in his master plan Arnolphe overlooked his own humanity and the human potential which he had been thwarting in Agnès. After his first meeting with Horace Arnolphe is angered that his rules have not been observed and that Horace has been allowed to see Agnès. It is the pride he took in devising his plan and the fear of what might have happened between Agnès and Horace that make him lament: "Oh! que j'ai souffert durant cet entretien! / Jamais trouble d'esprit ne fut égal au mien (I, iv, 357-358)". This obsessive fear of cuckoldry shown as a psychological fixity in character is comic. It is, as Bergson defined the comic, something mechanical encrusted on the living. We become more aware during the repeated episodes of the timid, awkward love of Arnolphe trying to break through his obsessive fear.

In the early scenes of the play Arnolphe speaks of the ignorance and simplicity of Agnès in the most heartless and callous way. He tells Chrysalde of creating a woman to his own liking, and later, he speaks of moulding Agnès like a piece of wax into the shape that pleases him.¹² It is this attitude that prompts him to threaten Agnès with hell and damnation if she does not obey him. With threats and sermons on marriage Arnolphe feels confident he is moulding Agnès into a perfect wife for himself. But, as Agnès's spirit and intelligence respond to Horace's love so also does Arnolphe respond to Agnès's awakening with his own immature love. When Arnolphe hears that Agnès was ingenious enough to tie a note to the stone

¹²III, iii, 808-810.

she threw Horace, Arnolphe is shocked and suffers in both heart and mind.

Ironically, he sounds like the wronged lover:

Elle trahit mes soins, mes bontés, ma tendresse:
Et cependant je l'aime, après ce lâche tour,
Jusqu'à ne me pouvoir passer de cet amour.

(III, v, 997-999)

After the attempted escape by Agnès and Horace, Horace unwittingly returns Agnès to her guardian. The image of the comic villain who hides his face with his cloak soon gives way to a pathetic and foolish lover. The overbearing master who told his ward, "Je suis maître, je parle: allez, obéissez (II, v, 642)", is reduced by a love he never counted on to beg of Agnès to love him in spite of all her trickery:

Je te pardonne tout et te rends ma tendresse.
Considère par là l'amour que j'ai pour toi,
Et me croyant si bon, en revanche aime-moi.

(V, iv, 1581-1583)

The living in Arnolphe has momentarily broken through the mechanical. This is the high point of the drama. The natural man in Arnolphe which his mask of pendency and tyranny has tried to suppress struggles to emerge. His identity or his mask is slipping and it is this gap between the face and the mask which makes him comic. It is really not a character study which makes Arnolphe so gripping and yet so comic but rather the development of the mask principle to show the 'mechanical en-crusted on the living'. Arnolphe is clever, but he is not clever enough. Part of the aesthetic pleasure of the play derives from the fact that, in spite of all his planning and his knowledge of Horace's plans,

Arnolphe fails. He fails because of the suppression of the human in his calculations, the suppression of the human in himself and Agnès.

The repetition of episodes closely tied to the contrast of the mechanical and the living structure and motivate the play. Each meeting triggers a more complex reaction in Arnolphe as well as heightening the contrast between Arnolphe and Agnès. Initially, Agnès seems as dull as the existence Arnolphe has planned for her, but, as the play progresses, she begins to display a capturing innocence and frankness which contrast sharply with the pendency and rigidity of her master. When she tells Arnolphe of her meeting with Horace her innocence is shown by her taking the love metaphor literally; her charm emerges as she speaks:

"Moi, j'ai blessé quelqu'un! fis-je toute étonnée.
 -Oui dit-elle, blessé, mais blessé tout de bon;
 Et c'est l'homme qu' hier vous vîtes au balcon.
 -Hélas! qui pourroit, dis-je, en avoir été cause?
 Sur lui, sans y penser, fis-je choir quelque chose?
 -Non, dit-elle, vos yeux ont fait ce coup fatal,
 Et c'est de leurs regards qu'est venu tout son mal.
 -Hé! mon Dieu! ma surprise est, fis-je, sans seconde:
 Mes yeux ont ils du mal, pour en donner au monde?

(II, v, 512-520)

Throughout the play her joy and spontaneity in relating her experiences with Horace contrast with Arnolphe's rage and fear. After Act III, scene iii, Agnès is absent from the stage until Act V, scene iii, but her innocence and naturalness invade the play. Her letter is a masterpiece of naturalness and spontaneity with an innocence that fears to offend:

Je veux vous écrire, et je suis bien en peine
par où je m'y prendrai. J'ai des pensées que je
désirerois que vous sussiez; mais je ne sais comment
faire pour vous les dire, et je me défie de mes
paroles. Comme je commence à connoître qu'on m'a
toujours tenue dans l'ignorance, j'ai peur de mettre
quelque chose qui ne soit pas bien, et d'en dire
plus que je ne devois...

(III, iv)

With this letter Molière has clearly directed all our sympathies to Agnès and isolated Arnolphe. By the end of the play the frankness and honesty of Agnès's remarks completely disarm Arnolphe. The love which Horace has inspired in Agnès has broken through the mechanical trappings Arnolphe has imposed on her. All of Arnolphe's sighs and pleadings become useless. Agnès bluntly tells Arnolphe that all his pendants and rigidity do not move her:

Tenez, tous vos discours ne me touchent point l'âme:
Horace avec deux mots en feroit plus que vous.

(V, iv, 1605-1606)

The fusion of the contretemps situation with the character revelation contributes to the organic unity of the play. In this fusion we can see the comic value of the plot structure and the comic and dramatic value of the development of the mask principle in Arnolphe. The struggle between the mechanical and the living which emerges is, as Messrs. Bergson and Thibaudet would maintain, essentially comic. Molière's two main characters, Arnolphe and Agnès, are the central agents in this concept and Molière has maintained the organic unity of the play by having the secondary characters function in relation to the main study.

The servants and Chrysalde stand out as the major secondary characters of the play and have their function in the structure of the play. We know that Arnolphe is constantly trying to order reality and fashion it to his way of thinking. Horace and Agnès are the main threat to his scheme, but the servants and Chrysalde also antagonize Arnolphe. The servants antagonize Arnolphe with their disobedience and Chrysalde, with his constant teasing, annoys Arnolphe. Chrysalde mocks Arnolphe's plan, punctuating Arnolphe's remarks with short comments like, "Une femme stupide est donc votre marotte? (I, i, 103)". Chrysalde warns Arnolphe that if he does not want to be cuckolded he should not marry, but Arnolphe listens to nothing but his own "fantaisie". Chrysalde's second appearance in the play is at a point when Arnolphe is in a state of turbulence over Agnès's planned escape. Chrysalde teases Arnolphe just when Arnolphe is least receptive to remarks like:

Encore un coup, compère, apprenez qu'en effet
 Le cocuage n'est que ce que l'on le fait,
 Qu'on peut le souhaiter pour de certaines causes,
 Et qu'il a ses plaisirs comme les autres choses.

(IV, viii, 1302-1305)

Chrysalde's raillery, like the servants' disobedience, is part of the master plan: it triggers a reaction in Arnolphe to show how the fear of cuckoldry and the desire to follow his plan obsess Arnolphe and make him an automaton.

Monologues, Function of the Plot Structure

In the previous chapter we noted the frequent use of monologues in the early plays of Molière. L'Ecole des femmes follows this pattern with sixteen monologues, fourteen of them by Arnolphe. The frequent use of monologues in this play is directly related to the structure of the play. The repeated meetings with Horace trigger reactions in Arnolphe which the monologue serves to present and, thus, the monologue becomes a major agent for knitting the episodes to the study of Arnolphe. After his initial interview with Agnès and before his first meeting with Horace, Arnolphe reveals in a monologue his pride and satisfaction with Agnès by denouncing the preciousness of salon women (I, iii, 244-248). This joy and self-satisfaction is quickly dispelled by the surprising revelation about Horace and Agnès. The monologue following the meeting with Horace gives Arnolphe's obsessive fear of cuckoldry an opportunity to express itself and contrasts sharply with his mood in the previous monologue. In other monologues Arnolphe will reveal his confusion, his anger and his love for Agnès. After having read Agnès's letter, Arnolphe's rage gives way to feelings of love but his pedantry and obsessive fear quickly dismiss his sentimentalism. By concentrating his attention on Arnolphe, Molière uses the monologue to show us constantly Arnolphe's reactions.

With the monologue attention is fixed on the reaction to events rather than the events themselves. For example, in the monologue following the reading of Agnès's letter, Arnolphe decides he will visit Agnès to see how she will act after having committed such an act of treason. Instead of opening the next scene with Arnolphe and Agnès Molière chose to concentrate on Arnolphe's reactions to the interview. Through the monologue we enjoy Arnolphe's turbulence as he describes Agnès's calm comportment:

De quel oeil la traîtresse a soutenu ma vue!
 De tout ce qu'elle a fait elle n'est point émue;
 : : : : :
 Plus 'en la regardant je la voyais tranquille,
 Plus je sentoïis en moi s'échauffer une bile;

(IV, i, 1012-1017)

Arnolphe's feelings of love are quickly suppressed by his jealousy and his fear of cuckoldry. Through the monologue we trace his feelings from turbulence and anger, to pathetic sighs of love, to a vengeful determination to thwart Agnès's and Horace's plans:

Non, parbleu! non, parbleu! Petit sot, mon ami,
 Vous aurez beau tourner: ou j'y perdrai mes peines,
 Ou je rendrai, ma foi, vos espérances vaines,
 Et de moi tout à fait vous ne vous rirez point.

(IV, i, 1035-1038)

Style

All of the action of the play centers on the constant meetings of Horace and Arnolphe. H. C. Lancaster is right in pointing out that Molière brought out the comic effects more by relating the events rather than displaying them to the audience.¹³ Instead of seeing Horace visit Agnès we hear him tell Arnolphe about the visits. Our attention is fixed on Arnolphe. The effect of the surprise and the knowledge that he has been tricked combine with Arnolphe's asides and his attempts to control his emotions to create several very funny scenes. Instead of seeing the old woman come to Agnès on Horace's behalf we hear Agnès's charming account of the incident. The scene brings out Agnès's innocence as well as Arnolphe's rage. The episode is part of a larger scene and suggests the struggle of the mechanical and rigid against the spontaneous and the living.

In La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, Dorante, who is usually accepted as Molière's spokesman for the play, makes this accurate assessment of the récit style of the play:

...les récits eux-mêmes y sont des actions suivant la constitution du sujet; d'autant qu'ils sont tous faits innocemment, ces récits, à la personne intéressée, qui par là entre, à tous coups, dans une confusion à réjouir les spectateurs, et prend, à chaque nouvelle, toutes les mesures qu'il peut pour se parer du malheur qu'il craint.

(Scene vi)

¹³Lancaster, pt. III, I, 247-248.

Like the action and vitality of Ergaste's récit in the exposition of Les Fâcheux many of the monologues and narrations of L'Ecole des femmes are vital. In his third meeting with Arnolphe, Horace tells of what went on in Agnès's room when her guardian came in. Horace hid in the closet and heard her master pounding the table with his fist, moving around the room, sighing pitifully, kicking a little pup and even breaking one of Agnès's ornamental vases. Horace's narration of the events are vivid and the scene is kept comic by the fact that he is speaking to the very person he is describing. Arnolphe's reception of his own image, his shock on hearing that Horace was able to see Agnès, and the news of their rendezvous are highly amusing. The scene vividly describes the action for the spectators, it retains the comic tone because of the situation and, like the other narrations by Horace, it shows Arnolphe an image of himself which he never accepts because of his obsessive desire to follow only his plan.

The narrative and monologue are both part of the dramatic structure. Both focus on Arnolphe, the central character; both reveal the comic in the situation; and, both have an energetic and vital quality in their diction which contributes to the gaiety and tempo of the play as well as its comic appeal. Furthermore, the style reflects that the play is an actor's play. Molière created the main role for himself and played it successfully. Horace's lengthy récits make the same demand on the actor for energy and movement throughout the play. The style of the play reflects a fusion of literary and farcical elements as well; the gesture of farce combines with the power of intonations and vocal acrobatics. Following Donneau

de Visé's observation that Molière was a man of many voices, René Bray imagines how carefully Molière expressed himself on stage:

Il [Molière] exprimait autant par l'attitude que par le mot. C'est en jouant de son corps qu'il rendait intelligibles les sentiments, qu'il soulignait les expressions verbales, qu'il faisait entrer le spectateur dans la délicatesse d'un caractère. Au reste, il ne négligeait pas la diction... Il soignait les accents des phrases, réglait son débit, variait les intonations.¹⁴

The style of the play reflects the sensitivity of Molière, actor and director, to the physical demands of the stage. It also complements the structure of the 'accident répété' and the characterization of Arnolphe.

Conclusion

The perspective of the farce tradition, the presentation of a gay world of the unreal, and a desire to entertain penetrate L'Ecole des femmes. The values of the farce tradition cannot be undermined for they determine, to a large extent, the success of this play. Dom Garcie de Navarre has the same theme, the theme of jealousy, and the same plot structure, four repeated accidents, yet it is a failure. The brisk tempo, the lazzi, the gaiety, are all features lacking in Dom Garcie de Navarre, and the farceur, Molière, realized the rôle of Arnolphe more successfully than the rôle of Dom Garcie because of his return to values and techniques of the farce.

¹⁴Bray, p. 150.

The taste for spectacular entertainment in the commedia dell'arte seems to be supplanted by what we would call a spectacle du type . Everything in L'Ecole des femmes revolves around Arnolphe and his attempt to 'encrust something mechanical on the living'. This struggle in himself between the mechanical and the living emerges as the play progresses and, through the monologue, the plot and character are neatly fused. This struggle of the mechanical against the living is also revealed in Arnolphe's relationship with Agnès, with the servants and with Chrysalde. The high point of the play is the moment where the natural man in Arnolphe emerges from beneath his unconscious mask of pedantry and authority and offers Agnès anything in return for her love: "Tout comme tu voudras, tu pourras te conduire (V, iv, 1596)". Molière played the role of Arnolphe and the actor in him seized on the potential of the mask. "Jouer de la comédie dans la comédie, jouer un personnage qui à son tour en joue un autre, voilà, certes, de quoi satisfaire en Molière le démon du théâtre"¹⁵. Deluded characters like Arnolphe transport the audience into a world which is the essence of theatricality, for these characters assume an identity or a role, which covers their natural being. Molière uses the mask for its comic and dramatic potential, finally steering Arnolphe into a position where the natural in him struggles to emerge. In L'Ecole des femmes the concept of the mask, of 'something mechanical encrusted on the living' underlies the whole play.

¹⁵Vedel, quoted in Moore, p. 38.

Other elements of the dramatic structure reflect a concern for the dynamic quality of the play. We emphasized that the exposition had certain comic effects and initiated the gay mood of the play. Similarly, our analyses of the dénouement reflected the importance of the mood and atmosphere created. The parody of Corneille's play and the comic anguish of Arnolphe hint at the mock tragedy. The habit of parodying excerpts from literary comedies or tragedies was not unfamiliar to the commedia dell'arte. The narrations and monologues are not only vehicles for revealing information; the monologues progressively reveal the struggle in Arnolphe; the narrations by Horace are dramatic and comic, for they focus the audience's attention on Horace's information and Arnolphe's reactions.

L'Ecole des femmes reflects Molière's suffusion of farcical and literary elements in a five-act play, a mastery of techniques, especially plot structure and character presentation developed from earlier plays, a keen handling of tempo and mood, and an awareness of the actor's need to perform.

CHAPTER IV

LE MISANTHROPE

La comédie est en cinq actes lorsqu'elle est ambitieuse: elle emprunte chaque fois qu'elle peut le coupe du "grand genre", la tragédie.¹

The quarrel that followed L'Ecole des femmes included the question of the relative values of comedy and tragedy; and, Molière replied in his polemic play to the question by maintaining that it is no easy task to make respectable people laugh.² After the debate of his first five-act comedy in Paris, Molière encountered further problems with the next five-act plays he wrote. Both Tartuffe and Dom Juan faced interdiction on the grounds of immorality and both plays were accused of not being comic. Le Misanthrope is an elegant comedy whose restrained humour and sustained dramatic tension recall eighteenth century drama. The play is noticeably different in mood and effect from the gay farces and other comedies in Molière's career. Historical evidence indicates that it was begun in 1664,³ that is, not long after the quarrel about L'Ecole des femmes, and completed and performed in 1666, that is, after the five-act version of

¹ J. Scherer, La Dramaturgie Classique en France, (Paris, 1950), p. 197.

² La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, Sc. vi.

³ Adam, III, 343.

Tartuffe and Dom Juan. Le Misanthrope can be seen in the light of these other five-act plays for it seems to be Molière's most ambitious attempt at breaking the prestige barriers between comedy and tragedy. The techniques of construction have evolved and developed through Molière's career and the method of construction in Le Misanthrope is not unlike that of Tartuffe and Dom Juan.

In L'Ecole des femmes Molière fused a clearly defined plot structure with a dominant theme. We see the contrast of the mechanical against the spontaneous, the natural man in Arnolphe against the rigid and automatic, and each repeated situation helps to build that contrast. In Molière's subsequent five-act comedies there seems to be a striking attempt to build impressions of the main theme or themes. Through the juxtaposed scenes and the mask principle we have certain tableaux presented which suggest impressions and ideas about the main themes of the play. In Dom Juan we are carefully presented a series of dynamic scenes in which Dom Juan flouts accepted standards and beliefs and is warned that Heaven will take its revenge. The stress is on the scenic situation and the interplay of characters. The dramatic tension rises as Dom Juan proclaims his self-sufficiency and flouts normal beliefs and conventions like marriage, paternal honour and God. In Dom Juan, as in other plays of this period, the themes of tragedy and comedy coincide.⁴ The comic and lamentable in Dom Juan's self-sufficient attitude

⁴W. G. Moore, "Dom Juan Reconsidered", MLR, LII (1957), p. 53.

are revealed in his reliance on Sganarelle and by the fact that, in the end, Dom Juan's idea of self-sufficiency must bow to the very human fact of death. The juxtaposition and counterpoise of the normal and human against the inhuman are developed throughout Tartuffe, Dom Juan and Le Misanthrope. The technique of presentation is tableaux and impressions of the main themes rather than the step-by-step method of building dramatic action.

Although farcical effects are not absent from Tartuffe and Dom Juan, there is a more serious tone to these plays. Tartuffe and Dom Juan are not funny in the sense of exciting laughter and mirth; they are deeply comic because of the gap between their assumed attitudes and their situations. In examining the hypocrite, the libertine and the misanthrope Molière reveals the far-reaching potential for self-deception and absurdity in human conduct. The principal dramatic agent used for this creation is the mask; yet, the plays themselves are not character studies. The way in which Molière constructed the plays demonstrates that the central themes are revealed from a variety of angles. In examining the dramatic structure of Le Misanthrope we shall study how the more serious tone of the play is created, how the variety of tableaux are dramatic and how the characters are created to complement the impact of the play.

Elegant Comedy

Le Misanthrope differs from Molière's other plays in its sustained realism and restrained humour. There is nothing like the farcical antics of Alain and Arnolphe in L'Ecole des femmes or the marital quarrels and

name-calling in Le Médecin Malgré Lui. There are amusing and laughable scenes in the play, but the liberty and gaiety of farce is replaced by a more dignified tone. In the highly amusing sonnet scene Alceste and Oronte begin an argument because of their opposing views to the sonnet. The volley of verbal ripostes is like the farcical quarrel in which the name-calling will increase and be concluded with a bastonnade. However, in Le Misanthrope the name-calling is restricted to a skimming of the veneer of politeness and the quarrel is stopped by Philinte who intervenes and restores order. Towards the end of the play the dramatist refuses to exploit the comic potential and element of surprise. In the second scene of the fifth act Alceste is waiting for Célimène in the dark corner of the salon; he goes unnoticed by Oronte and Célimène who enter. Oronte asks Célimène to reveal whom she really loves. The scene is set for a coup de théâtre similar to the feigned death by Argan in Le Malade imaginaire and the scene of discovery in Tartuffe where Orgon is hidden under the table. Yet in Le Misanthrope the coup de théâtre is not realized. Alceste walks out of the darkened corner and Célimène tries to avoid a definite answer. This restraint by the dramatist in exploiting the comic in the situations must be attributed to the style of elegant comedy. The only scene in the play which can be criticized as somewhat out of place is the farcical interview between Alceste and his servant, Du Bois (IV, iv). Yet, the scene can be appreciated in the dramatic structure of the play, for its timing in the act is of dramatic importance. Alceste and Célimène have just been interrupted in a very serious scene

in which Alceste's jealousy, passion and lucidity have evoked sympathy and pity for him. The entrance of Du Bois and his antics quickly remove Alceste from the center of our attention. The audience is carefully manipulated by the scene of farce into a gayer mood. The interplay between Alceste and Du Bois takes us away from the pathetic and suffering lover to the easily angered and brusque master, the atrabilaire, who tells his servant:

Ah! je te casserai la tête assurément,
Si tu ne veux, maraud, t'expliquer autrement.

(IV, iv, 1448-1449)

The mood of the previous scene is completely broken. In returning Alceste to the world of affairs and, namely, his law-suit, the scene is integrated into the thematic structure of the play and serves as a preparation for the opening scene of Act V. Thus, although the scene with Du Bois is the most farcical in the play, it has a dramatic function in relieving the tension of the previous scene, in returning to the atrabilious in Alceste, and in linking the themes of the play.

. The more dignified tone and realism of the play are also achieved by the omission of the traditional romantic motif. There is no archetypal pattern of the young lovers with an opposing father or guardian to overcome as in L'Ecole des femmes or Tartuffe. The love theme in the play is more complicated and is presented in the complex of questions emerging from the theme of the individual in his society. There are no parallels in

the character presentations to Agnès and Mariane or Horace and Valère; the romantic dénouement where the young lovers triumph and plan to marry is lacking in this play. What replaces the romantic and farcical motifs are a more realistic setting, closer observation of the social group and more complexity and realism in the portrayal of the characters.

The dramatist has chosen a well-defined setting. We enter the closed universe of high society in Paris. The individuals are not princes and kings, but are of high enough social station to be familiar in court circles and seek favours from the royal court. The individuals presented have no pressing family obligations, no financial worries and no commitments outside of their social sphere. In the salon of the rich and charming Célimène we see that the basic concern of high society in Paris is the creation of various social relationships and the achievement of success in the social world. The presentation of the salon and the social sphere it encompasses focus attention on the central theme of the play, the individual in a well-defined social sphere. This setting differs from that of the other comedies of Molière. We are not in the family cadre of Tartuffe or Les Femmes savantes where the family hierarchy and bourgeois obligations affect the structure of the play. We are not in the everyday world of the bourgeois Arnolphe and his unsophisticated servants. Le Misanthrope presents a well-defined and closed universe where social relationships are of prime importance. The realism and clarity in the setting of the play is created through a certain amount of social observation. We see how the salon society entertains, we hear about the

custom of the embrassade and the habit of soliciting the judge in favour of one's law-suit. The detailed observation of customs and manners in the play is part of the realism of the elegant comedy. There is some satire in this observation yet the drama of the play lies less in the observation of customs and manners and more in the interplay of various attitudes to these customs and habits.

With the romantic and farcical motifs giving way to a more realistic setting, the tone of the elegant comedy becomes more realistic and the presentation of the various characters conforms to this tone. We see a variety of social types within the setting: the marquis, the coquette, the prude; however, their presentation often goes beyond the type characterization. We shall study the dramatic function of the various characters in a later section, yet we must note here that the elegant comedy presents characters in a more realistic way than farcical or romantic comedies. The marquis are foppish but are not presented in the same way as the buffoon, Mascarille, in Les Précieuses ridicules. Even Alceste, with his atrabilious nature and excessive anger, must not betray the general mood of the play. The interpretations of his role have varied considerably from the violent antics by Molé to the dignified and restrained performance by Baron who was supposed to have succeeded Molière in the role and to have followed Molière's style:

Je vais vous rapporter la manière dont Baron jouait le rôle d'Alceste... Il mettait non-seulement beaucoup de noblesse et de dignité,

mais il y joignait encore une politesse délicate et un fonds d'humanité qui faisait aimer le Misanthrope... Il se permettait quelques brusqueries et de l'humeur, mais toujours ennoblies par ses tons et par son jeu. Rien d'impoli, rien de grossier ne lui échappait... Baron jugeait avec raison qu'il était nécessaire que l'acteur prit le ton du grand monde. Par ce motif sensé, il adoucissait ce rôle, au lieu de le pousser trop loin et de l'outrer.⁵

Posture and gesture should reveal the comic in Alceste, the lover, and Alceste, the misanthrope. If Don Garcie de Navarre languished one of the reasons was the lack of gesture and movement on stage. Although the interpretation of Alceste by the actor, Molé, who was noted to have crashed a chair to the floor in the initial scene of the play, can be seen as misrepresentative of the role, it must be emphasized that even in elegant comedy the actor must feel in his interpretation of the role to what extent his gestures are comic without becoming vulgar or buffoonish.

"Le ton du grand monde" is further achieved in the spirited dialogues and debates in the play. The salon game is successful only if the conversation is witty and scandalous. The third act of the play is a series of tête-à-têtes in which we see how varied la conversation des honnêtes gens can be between two foppish marquis, two women who despise each other, and two jealous and righteous persons consumed only with their own desires. The récits, like those of L'Ecole de femmes, are energetic and vivid, and presented to study the listener's reaction to

⁵Despois, V, pp. 400-401.

the speaker's attitude. For example, we never see Alceste in the court defending his law-suit but when he tells Philinte that he has lost the litigation (V, i), the long narration informs us about the theme of the law-suit and reveals Alceste's rage and righteous indignation. When Alceste has finished the narration, Philinte is hardly moved; he sees the situation differently and tells Alceste so. In a play which reveals aspects of the individual in his society it is through la conversation that the interest of the play must develop. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are no monologues in the play. The juxtaposed tableaux and the interplay of the various characters with Alceste reveal sufficiently the situations and attitudes that are presented.

The exposition and dénouement, so important for the impact of the play on the audience, reveal to what extent the play maintains its more realistic and sober atmosphere and to what extent gaiety and euphoria are absent from the play. The initial scene is an admirable exposition revealing the themes, the main characters, the setting and mood of the play. Alceste argues with Philinte about the convention of the embrassades and their hypocritical nature. This brings up the topic of hypocrisy and sincerity in society and its relationship to friendship. As Alceste continues to express his disgust for his society he brings up the theme of the law-suit and the practice of soliciting the judge in favour of one's case. Alceste's constant demands for honesty and plain speech prompt Philinte to ask why Alceste has chosen Célimène, a coquette, whose "esprit médisant" seems quite contrary to Alceste's principles. This

question initiates the love theme and we learn that "la sincère Eliante" and "la prude Arsinoë" are both interested in Alceste and that Philinte has a penchant for Eliante.

The lively debate between Alceste and Philinte is similar to those in the opening scenes of the Ecole plays. That Philinte compares their attitudes to the two brothers in L'Ecole des maris clarifies the opposition in their attitudes. Alceste, like Sganarelle and Arnolphe, praises the past and the provincial life and condemns the present and the social world of Paris. Philinte, on the other hand, accepts the world he lives in despite its faults. Alceste's principle of plain speech seems noble but we also see that in Alceste's temperament there is a tendency to exaggerate and to be egocentric. Thus, the noble principle often tends to become inflated; it reveals the motive of self-interest and a certain lack of distinction and discrimination. Alceste attempts to reproach Philinte with a sweeping and hyperbolic speech but betrays his concern for le moi :

Morbleu! vous n'êtes pas pour être de mes gens;
Je refuse d'un coeur la vaste complaisance
Qui ne fait de mérite aucune différence;
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, 60-64)

Alceste's black-biled nature and his tendency to exaggerate combine with his opposition to Philinte's attitude to make the scene informative and interesting. From the rise of the curtain the spectator is constantly caught

up in the tension between Alceste and Philinte and the tensions in Alceste himself. Alceste's desire to be left alone, his outbursts of anger, his impatience with Philinte, and his constant interruptions of Philinte keep the pace of the debate active. Alceste's repeated exclamations of "Morbieu" and his hyperbolic speech, create a series of crescendos. The scene, like the rest of the play, never smacks of the gaiety and liveliness of farce but rather initiates a subdued comic mood provoking a smile instead of a full laugh.

The dénouement of the play is unlike any other dénouement in Molière's entire theatrical career. The romantic lovers do not triumph and the general gaiety and mirth inspired by the proposed wedding of the romantic couple is lacking. An increasingly somber mood penetrates the fifth act, with the darkening day contributing to the mood evoked by the series of defeats in the last act. Alceste has lost his law-suit and has passed judgment on the world he lives in: for him, it is evil and he feels he must leave it. Célimène is defeated by Arsinoé's ruse, but Arsinoé fails to win Alceste and leaves. The marquis' vanities have been momentarily bruised and they leave Célimène and her salon. When Célimène and Alceste are left face to face their incompatibility forces them apart. Célimène leaves Alceste, withdrawing silently from the stage. Then, Alceste proceeds to leave, telling Philinte that he must find a retreat from his society. Philinte and Eliante, the only couple left on stage, pursue Alceste hoping to change his mind. The salon has been eventually emptied

and the last impression of the salon before the curtain falls is one of solitude and emptiness. The emptiness of the salon and the suggestion of the desert create a strong impression of nothingness which strikes the spectator who ponders that nothing has really been resolved or ended as the final curtain falls. The salon has been the sphere in which all of the characters revolve. The salon remains and we feel that the marquis will soon find new salons, Célimène new admirers, Arsinoé another scandal. Even Alceste will return to the salon world, for it is in that society that he finds the justification for his attitudes. We have seen the harmony of the social group and we now see the discord. The salon can be the desert or the land of plenty, but it is always the focal point of the individuals in high society. The tone of dignity and the verisimilitude of the dénouement are maintained by the absence of any contrived scheme by the dramatist to make a happy ending. The empty salon, when juxtaposed with the gay and crowded salon, reflects the successes and defeats that all the individuals meet in the very closed and small universe of salon life.

Thematic Structure

When one comes to outline the plot of Le Misanthrope one soon realizes that there is really very little to say. There are no complicated imbroglios, no disguises, no quiproquos. What we see is a tableau of Parisian high society in which Alceste is constantly attempting to discuss marriage plans with Célimène but is always interrupted. These interruptions give us a glimpse of the salon society and the plot is resolved by an

attempt by Célimène's rival to win Alceste. Ultimately Alceste refuses the rival and Célimène refuses Alceste. Scholars who say that for Molière plot was secondary⁶ indicate that the plot hardly reveals what really happens in the play. L'Ecole des femmes foreshadows a kind of play which is less concerned with presenting events per se and more with presenting the reaction to events and the interplay of various characters. In Le Misanthrope we find our attention fixed on Alceste's reaction to the reading of the sonnet and the outcome of his law-suit. We find our attention fixed on Philinte's attitude in comparison to Alceste's and how the various characters interact. Alceste's forced exits and the interruption of his meetings with Célimène by her fâcheux social acquaintances suggest a structure similar to that of Les Fâcheux and L'Ecole des femmes, but the series of contretemps in the play become fused to the thematic structure and the character presentations. As we noted earlier, the scene with Du Bois forces Alceste to leave Célimène but it also reveals the atrabilious nature of Alceste and links the love theme to the theme of the law-suit.

In Le Misanthrope a canvas is rolled back in which we see various aspects of the basic theme. The theme of the individual in high society involves a complex of questions which can be categorized in four areas: social hypocrisy, the practices of the salon, the law-suit and the love theme. The concept underlying these themes is that vanity and self-interest are present in varying degrees in one's relationship with others

⁶Bray, p. 204.

and one's reaction to social situations, for the individuals in the play are presented as seeking their self-satisfaction, whether consciously or unconsciously, in their intercourse with others. The play must not be seen as centering only on Alceste and the love theme as H. C. Lancaster would interpret the structure of the play:

The plot is largely concerned with the love of three women for Alceste and the reasons for his decision not to marry any of them, but Molière, wishing to present him as more than a lover, added the law-suit and the quarrel with Oronte. He also developed, at greater length than he would have done if he had been thinking merely of the main plot, the conversation between Acaste and Clitandre, and the altercation between Célimène and Arsinoé, but he managed to devote to the plot enough attention to sustain interest and bring to an end the love-affair of Alceste and Célimène.⁷

Lancaster suggests that the play is basically constructed on the love theme and that the rest of the play was "added" material. However, if we see the play constructed on various juxtaposed tableaux, the organic unity and impact of the play are more clearly understood. For example, the sonnet scene, Acaste's self-portrait and Arsinoé's visit to Célimène all have the quality of independent tableaux, but through their juxtaposition are revealed different aspects of the theme of sincerity.

In the initial scene of the play Alceste was deeply concerned about friendship and sincerity. Oronte enters in the following scene with great protestations of friendship for Alceste. Oronte wants to be

⁷Lancaster, pt. 3, II, 657.

distinguished by Alceste and his profession of friendship is as pierced with egocentricity as Alceste's principle of sincerity. He tells Alceste:

Et je brûle qu'un noeud d'amitié nous unisse:
Je crois qu'un ami chaud, et de ma qualité,
N'est pas assurément pour être rejeté.

(I, ii, 258-260)

Oronte wants Alceste's friendship and approval of his sonnet as a reinforcement for his self-esteem. He assures Alceste that the gesture of approval will not go unrewarded, for if Alceste can boost Oronte's ego, Oronte will use his persuasion in the court for Alceste. As the scene progresses Alceste demonstrates that, in spite of his black-billed humour, he can be polite and courteous, that he has considerable difficulty in defending his principle of plain speech, and that his rigid attitude of condemning what is modern is unjust, for he passes judgment on Oronte's sonnet even before the end of the recital. As the scene closes we see that neither Alceste nor Oronte will change their opinions and both feel they are right. Friendship and sincerity were motivated by the individual's self-interest.

When Acaste delivers his magnificent self-portrait to Clitandre (III, i) another aspect of sincerity is revealed. All that Acaste says about himself is probably true, but his automatic approval of all he sees in himself, his extremely high regard for himself, his gross vanity make him comic. He cannot see the irony of his situation when he boasts of success with the fairer sex and only after much raillery does he admit

that his success with Célimène is limited. Molière's satire of the marquis is meant to create laughter but in a play about plain speech, Acaste's self-portrait also reveals how fatuous sincerity can be.

The scene between Célimène and Arsinoé is located in the centre of the play and reveals again the theme of social hypocrisy, sincerity and the self. Arsinoé, la prude, comes to Célimène as a friend warning Célimène that her conduct is lacking in honneur and bienséance. The meeting of the two women is more complex than the confrontation of two rivals for one man for we see that Arsinoé's prudery and jealous warnings to Célimène cover her envy and jealousy of Célimène's age and success in the social world. Each woman is prompted by hatred and spite to reveal, under the veneer of politeness, what she plainly thinks. For example, Arsinoé spitefully tells Célimène what she thinks of Célimène's ability to attract suitors:

Qu'on n'acquiert point les coeurs sans de grandes avances
Qu'aucun pour nos beaux yeux n'est notre soupirant,
Et qu'il faut acheter tous les soins qu'on nous rend.

(III, v, 1014-1016)

Here Arsinoé is expressing her sincere hatred and envy of Célimène but her sincerity in speaking from le fond du coeur is odious and bitter.

These three scenes at first seem like independent tableaux, but when juxtaposed we see how personal vanity enters into the question of sincerity, and that sincerity can have many faces. With Alceste it is self-centered, with Acaste it is fatuous, with Arsinoé it is odious.

pathetic

The love theme in Le Misanthrope continues the theme of jealousy so dominant in Molière's earlier plays. Like Sganarelle and Arnolphe, Alceste wants to possess completely the woman he loves, is haunted by the fear of her betrayal and ultimately loses her. Yet the love theme in Le Misanthrope is not the dominant theme in the play for it becomes interwoven with the question of the individual in high society and is examined through various attitudes. In the juxtaposed tableaux we see that love is a social event for the marquis and Célimène, a forbidden and tempting pleasure for Arsinoé, a mutual agreement for Philinte and Eliante, and an uncontrollable passion for Alceste.

The love theme is seen in the light of the individuals' self-interest as is the law-suit and the theme of sincerity. Célimène attracts lovers who can influence the outcome of her law-suit; Arsinoé's love for Alceste is not exclusive of her envy of Célimène's success in the social world; Alceste's law-suit and his social acquaintances keep interfering with his desire to possess Célimène and live only for her. The structure of the play presents the basic themes from many angles. Molière has masterfully fit all these attitudes and ideas into a single spectrum of social behaviour and the impact of the presentation of these various attitudes explains the dynamic and vital quality of the play.⁸

Social observation, restrained humour and thematic tableaux do not necessarily make good drama and sustain the audience's interest in

⁸W. G. Moore, "Reflections on Le Misanthrope", Australian Journal of French Studies, IV (1967), p. 202.

the play. The juxtaposed thematic tableaux are not abstract, moral or philosophical studies of solipsism and the corruption of high society. The element of tension created in the various scenes and in the interplay of the characters' attitudes is what gives the play its dramatic force. The famous salon scene (II, iv) shows the practices of salon society but this in itself is not dramatic. As Célimène's friends enter and gather round her, the tension which will build in the scene is initiated by the short quarrel between Alceste and Célimène. Alceste threatens to destroy the social event about to take place and the spectator's attention is caught in both the relationship of Alceste and Célimène and the presence of the others. As the scene progresses we see the world in which Célimène lives and the frivolity of it. The scene cannot be reduced to a study of manners or a satire of the salon, for the scene has a dramatic movement which stems from neither of these aspects.

Célimène is the centre of attention as the game of the portraits begins. She delights in the approval and encouragement that the marquis give her and even when Alceste interrupts, she refuses to let him spoil their fun. She enjoys the social success her scandalous portraits give her and her attitude, so incompatible with Alceste's, is suggested by the way in which the scene is set: Célimène in the centre of her salon surrounded by the foppish marquis and Alceste on the periphery of the group. Célimène and the two marquis form a solid central group. Alceste forms the opposition to the group. His silence and their gaiety set up a tension in the scene which keeps the spectator's attention fixed on both groups. Eliante and Philinte form a third group in the salon. They are part of

Célimène's group in as much as they enjoy the game and see no real harm in it. They do not encourage Célimène as the two marquis do and their comments form a counterpoise to the other groups. "La sincère Eliante" sustains the impression of her epithet by opposing the slanderous spirit of Célimène with her silence. Philinte plays a somewhat negative role similar to Eliante's. Although he introduces Damis' name for a portrait, he commits a social error in that he praises Damis when Célimène unhesitatingly incorporates Damis into the abusive portraits like the others. Philinte not only committed an error in terms of the game but also revealed, as he did in his remarks to Oronte about the sonnet, to what extent his remarks were a social convention, devoid of any honest or considered assessment of the situation.

The portraits themselves are part of the dramatic structure of the scene. They indicate that Célimène's society is one of appearances where superficiality reigns and where Alceste's principles have no meaning:

Tout dans cette scène se situe au niveau des apparences. Les absents sont décrits et jugés en surface par les présents dont le moi ne se laisse pas approcher. Tout se passe comme s'il était acquis de tout éternité que le groupe représente la perfection: il ne se met pas lui-même une seconde en question, ni en profondeur ni en surface... Quant aux absents dont on parle, ils ne sont rien de plus que leur comportement, -- pas question des vertus et du mérite chers à Alceste.⁹

⁹J. Guicharnaud, Molière une aventure théâtrale, (Paris, 1963), p. 407.

All the characters in the portraits are ridiculed because they do not conform to the role their society demands. Cléante, by his extravagant comportment, Damon, by his fatiguing conversation, Belise, by her apathy, do not essentially know how to react sociably with others, that is, they do not know how to disguise their own vanities or interests in their relationships with others.

Alceste's interruption and denunciation of the marquis and the game is both comic and dramatic. He interrupts just when the group is at the height of its pleasure, and even though what he says about it is true, he misunderstands its game and by asserting that the others are wrong, that is, that he is right, he becomes the butt of their ridicule just as those who are described in the other portraits. Once Alceste has destroyed the harmony of the group, the others attempt to restore the previous gaiety. Célimène continues to taunt Alceste and Eliante intercedes in an attempt to calm everyone. However, Eliante's charming speech which suggests that love can overlook faults and change the image of the loved one is completely opposed to Alceste's attitude. Where Eliante claims that love can make the plump and fattish woman appear as majestic or magnificent in her bearing (v, 720), Alceste would always see a fat woman as fat. Célimène ultimately stops the whole conversation and suggests a short promenade. The scene ends on a comic note as Alceste, who has just insisted that he shall stay, is forced to leave. Thus, the salon scene derives its dynamic quality from the series of tensions set into motion by the various groups.

Each encounter Alceste has with Célimène is dramatic simply because Célimène eludes Alceste and refuses to be possessed by him. The fact that there are several encounters between the two builds the tension resulting from the incompatibility of their attitudes and the attraction the two have for each other. Alceste's forced exits, although they contain an element of comic in their mechanical repetition, are dramatic for they heighten Alceste's frustration with Célimène and keep returning him to the law-suit and world of affairs. In this way, the contretemps situations not only link the love theme and the theme of the law-suit, but also make the themes two poles of dramatic tension in the play.

Other scenes derive their dynamic quality from the antagonism set up by the formulae of politeness. The quarrel between Alceste and Oronte at the end of the sonnet scene comes close to skimming the veneer off politeness; Célimène and Arsinoé are ladies because of the social formulae they follow and not because of their true feelings for each other. This element of tension replaces, to a large extent, the jeu comique of farce. Tension, like farcical movements and comic sketches, is an unprintable quality which the actors must feel and portray for a successful presentation of the play. In the dramatic structure of the play the inner tensions of the individuals motivate and determine their response to others as much as the social conventions. The themes and situations on which the play is constructed only become living and dramatic when we see what motivates the characters to act and what creates the antagonisms between the various characters in the situations presented.

Characters

When one comes to analyze the dramatic structure of a play like Le Misanthrope, it becomes clear that no one aspect of the structure is independent of the other features. In a discussion of the dramatic function of the characters both the tone of elegant comedy and the thematic structure of the play are involved and much has already been said about the characters in the previous pages. It was suggested that because of the well-defined setting and the style of the play the characters are presented in a more realistic or more dignified way than in farce, and that the thematic tableaux become dynamic because of the tension created by the various attitudes. In examining the grouping of the characters more closely we see that the tensions and antagonisms are created by three different groups of characters in the salon setting and that the series of rivals because of the love theme make the basic grouping more complex:

SOCIAL ATTITUDES IN THE SALON	I Success Seekers	Célimène The Marquis
	II Spectators	Philinte Eliante
	III Denouncers	Alceste Arsinoé
RIVALRIES	I Célimène Eliante Arsinoé	Alceste
	II Alceste The Marquis	Célimène
	III Philinte Alceste	Eliante

The complex of character groupings in the play is conditioned by the structure of the play. Unlike L'Ecole des femmes or Tartuffe which have a basically binary division of characters, Le Misanthrope has a ternary grouping to present more fully the variety of questions that the theme of the individual in his society involves. Molière learned from the farce tradition the opposition of the rogue and the fool and the matching of opposites to make a scene dramatic. In L'Ecole des femmes the opposition between Arnolphe and the others is central to the basic theme which opposes the mechanical and rigid with the natural and spontaneous. However, in Le Misanthrope, the basic theme of the individual in his society involves more than a clear cut opposition of two attitudes. Molière maintains the matching of opposites but shows that the prude opposes the coquette as much as the mild-mannered women opposes them both. In an elegant comedy these varying attitudes are more realistic than the simple opposing attitudes of farce, yet their opposition still retains the dramatic function of animating the scene. The love theme in L'Ecole des femmes was presented in the manner of farce: the clever young ward tricks her foolish old guardian. In Le Misanthrope the love theme is linked to the various other themes and the realism of the presentation derives from the fact that the opposition between rogue and fool is brought to a point where the individual personalities, not a scheme or trick, prevent any triumph in love. Arsinoé's scheme failed because she did not understand Alceste and could not cope with her own failure in the salon society. Célimène and Alceste part because of their incompatibility. Philinte's relationship

with Eliante, their calmness and control, throw Alceste's relationship with Célimène more boldly into relief, and also suggest that, in their attitude of living life safely, they miss the experience of any real passion and tenderness. Michaut suggested that Molière introduced the third group in Le Misanthrope to declare his own views and to present them as acceptable.¹⁰ Thus, Michaut would see Eliante and Philinte as the characters who express Molière's view, a view which the audience would have agreed with. This suggestion by Michaut is sheer conjecture, for we know nothing at all about Molière's personal views. What we can see in the ternary grouping is the influence of the thematic structure, the influence of the farce tradition in the opposition of attitudes, the influence of the elegant comedy in the elaboration and sophistication of the rogue-fool pattern, and the tendency to realism in the character portrayals. Yet as much as the character groupings clarify the opposition of attitudes, the inner tensions of the individual characters and their personalities contribute to the dramatic value of the presentation as well.

Alceste is the central character of the play for it is around him that the various themes seem to gravitate. Yet, the play presents no full character study of Alceste. We see Alceste in a variety of situations which bring to life the issues of the play. Molière has made his main character dramatic and comic by the contradictions in his personality and his reaction with others. Alceste is a man who believes that in all situations one should follow the principle of plain speech:

¹⁰G. Michaut, Les Luites de Molière, (Paris, 1925), pp. 227-228.

Je veux que l'on soit homme, et qu'en toute rencontre
 Le fond de notre coeur dans nos discours se montre,
 Que ce soit lui qui parle, et que nos sentiments
 Ne se masquent jamais sous de vains compliments.

(I, i, 69-72)

The principle per se seems admirable yet we see it become comic when uttered by a man who poorly defends what he preaches and who is somewhat egocentric and extravagant. Like Sganarelle or Arnolphe, Alceste will unhesitatingly praise the past and condemn the present. Like them, he also speaks constantly in the first person singular. Comments like those in the first scene of the play -- "Je veux me fâcher", "Je veux qu'on soit sincère", "Je veux qu'on me distingue" reflect his egocentricity.

As a lover Alceste is presented as trapped in a contradiction. The subtitle of the play is L'Atrabilaire amoureux. Alceste is passionately in love but his morose nature makes him brusque and easily angered. When he feels Célimène has betrayed him, his appeal for revenge to Eliante and his rudeness to Philinte are overpowered only by his deep hurt. Yet, at the moment of his greatest suffering he speaks the truth about his relationship with Célimène:

Je sais que sur les vœux on n'a point de puissance,
 Que l'amour veut partout naître sans dépendance,
 Que jamais par la force on n'entra dans un coeur,
 Et que toute âme est libre à nommer son vainqueur.

(IV, iii, 1297-1300)

However, his suffering and pathetic sighs soon lose their sympathetic appeal as we see the obsessive desire to possess Célimène return. One

of the most dramatic moments in the play is when Alceste, a man who believes in plain speech and honesty, tells Célimène he will accept the illusion of her innocence:

Efforcez-vous ici de paroître fidèle,
Et je m'efforcerai, moi, de vous croire telle.

(IV, iii, 1389-1390)

If the actor utters these lines with great restraint we are at the point of pity for Alceste. If, however, he utters them with a pitiful grimace and somewhat exaggerated sighs we smile at his pathetic attempts to possess Célimène and the contradiction in his attitude. From the ridiculous cuckold of the farce, to the imaginary cuckolds like Sganarelle and Arnolphe, Molière has penetrated another imaginaire in Alceste. Like the long line of cocus imaginaires -- Sganarelle, Don Garcie, Arnolphe -- Alceste is haunted by the fear of Célimène's infidelity and like them he is comic for he cannot see the reality of his situation. Alceste cannot see the contradiction in letting Célimène choose her own lover and his desire to mould her into the woman he wants.

In attempting to reject his social world and cling only to Célimène, Alceste sets up a tension between himself and the others in the play. He refuses to act in his law-suit and allows Oronte to inflate the sonnet affair out of all proportion. In his condemnation of the world and its vices Alceste sees himself as good and right. What he cannot see is that he is part of that picture as much as all the other "loups" of his world. What is in question in the play is not so much whether Alceste is right and the others wrong but how each individual faces the society he

lives in. Alceste is presented as a man easily angered when the world he lives in does not obey him and as a man blind to the fact that personal needs and desires motivate the application of his principles. In short, the mask principle, the juxtaposition of the real and the assumed is what makes Alceste deeply comic and his reaction with others dramatic.

Arsinoé is like Alceste in her condemnation of Célimène's frivolity and the salon society, yet we see that her mask of prudery covers her envy of the social world she condemns. Arsinoé is unaware of her hypocritical attitude and it is dramatic to watch Célimène tear the mask of prudery from Arsinoé's face. The major dramatic tension in the scene with Célimène and Arsinoé lies in the antagonism between the two women and in the tension in Arsinoé herself. The fascination of her tirades lies basically in the contrast of her zealous righteousness and her frustration. When Arsinoé proposes her plan against Célimène, (III, v) Alceste overlooks Arsinoé's perfidious treatment of Célimène and the duality in Arsinoé's words to solve his own problems. The scene not only ends on a threatening note for Célimène but on a dramatic presentation of the love theme and the theme of sincerity. Alceste and Arsinoé join forces and leave the scene together but both are consumed by their own passions and hopes. Arsinoé is like Tartuffe in the sinister mood she brings to the play. The temptation that the flesh offers her is similar to Tartuffe's sensual appetite:

Elle fait des tableaux couvrir les nudités;
Mais elle a de l'amour pour les réalités.

(III, iv, 943-944)

Her presence in the play not only reveals an aspect of the question of sincerity and another attitude to love but is directly responsible for bringing the play to an end. It is her scheme that initiates the series of defeats in the last act.

The marquis presented are basically fops and comic social types to amuse the audience. In L'Impromptu de Versailles Molière stated that the marquis type is comic material:

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.

(Scene ii)

As noted earlier, the marquis must be comic and amusing, but not buffoons who betray the mood of the elegant comedy. The various marquis in the play are silly and frivolous yet they also help to reveal the situation which is being presented. Oronte with his sonnet, Acaste with his self-portrait, Clitandre with his influence in high places, all present aspects of the social theme, the question of sincerity and the love theme, thereby contributing to the fullness of the presentation.

Célimène is the central female figure in the play. She is charming and witty yet scandalous and frivolous. In a play involved with masks, social conventions, sincerity and hypocrisy we see that Célimène is the only person who is exactly what she appears to be:

L'unique but de sa vie est le jeu. Elle est sans fatuité et sans illusion. A son piège seul se prend celui qui veut bien s'aveugler et joue à colin-maillard.¹¹

She knows why she encourages the marquis, she knows Arsinoé's prudery is a mask, and she knows she is in the prime of her social success and refuses to accept Alceste's invitation to isolation and solitude at the end of the play. She plays on the men's vanities; yet, all those who attempt to possess her, or change her, or get beneath her mask of gaiety and frivolity, fail simply because Célimène does not wear a mask. In her provocation of others she reveals one of the central issues of the play; "ce grand aveuglement où chacun est pour soi (v, 998)". She never accepted the marquis' vanities, Arsinoé's prudery or Alceste's tyranny but revealed these things in the other characters. At the end of the play it is in the self-interest of all the rest of the characters (except Eliante and Philinte) to reject her. She reveals to Alceste, when the others have left, that the treachery and anger of the others have not bothered her but that she feels sorry for the injustice she has done to him (vv, 1740-1747). She is drawn to Alceste, has displayed a certain amount of tenderness for him in the play, but her final words indicate that she finds the solitude Alceste proposes frightening. Like Dom Juan, Célimène refuses to be controlled or changed by others. When she leaves the stage speechless, the scene is silent. The actress who portrays Célimène can

¹¹ A. Simon, Molière par lui-même, (Paris: 1957), p. 125.

make that walk in various ways. If she leaves in misery and defeat, the scene can tend to melodrama and tears; if she leaves with restrained dignity, we feel that the young coquette will return to her salon: her defeat is not final. As a sophisticated rogue who plays on the vanity and illusions of others Célimène is the key agent for revealing what motives and desires lie behind one's relationship with others. Her rejection at the end of the play also reveals to what extent the others will keep their attitudes and illusions and stay in the salon society. The fact that their attitudes do not worry her indicate that she sees in their rejection of her no barrier in continuing her social life.

Philinte is the raisonneur in the play in as much as his attitude "is that of the average spectator for whom the show is devised."¹² Yet within the dramatic structure, Philinte's attitude is part of the spectrum of social behaviour presented in the play. In the initial scene of the play the debate between Alceste and Philinte derives much of its dynamic movement from their diametrically opposed views. Philinte's polite remarks to Oronte in the sonnet scene not only infuriate Alceste but reveal, in their opposition to Alceste's attitude, two very different ways of accepting the social situation: it can be treated as polite conversation or it can be inflated to something serious and of consequence. Philinte constantly reflects Alceste's attitude by opposing his attitude to Alceste's. When Alceste has lost his law-suit and decided to leave

¹²W. G. Moore, Molière A New Criticism, (Oxford, 1949), p. 74.

salon society Philinte tries to convince Alceste that things are not as bad as they seem, but the more Philinte tries to talk to Alceste, the more Alceste refuses to listen. Like Chrysalde, Ariste and Cléante, Philinte was created to show more clearly Alceste's attitude. Philinte's philosophy that "la parfaite raison fuit toute extrémité (v, 151)" is not the key meaning of the play, but becomes rather a flat piece of moralizing to his atrabilious and passionate friend.

As a couple, Philinte and Eliante are rather colourless and apathetic spectators of the world around them. They are not as frivolous as Célimène and the marquis, and not as openly defiant of the social conventions as Alceste is. They both admire Alceste, however, and we feel that Philinte's attempt to encourage Alceste to return at the end of the play is sincere. Philinte's and Eliante's love relationship is influenced by their basic attitude to life. They find in each other a 'safe' companion. The scene of their agreement to marry (IV, i) is a quiet conversation devoid of passion or tenderness. This scene is a sort of détente dramatically juxtaposed with a scene of passion and tumult which follows.

"La sincère Eliante" and the reasonable Philinte suggest a way of meeting with the various situations they confront: calmly and, to a certain extent, apathetically. They do not embroil themselves in heated arguments and do not get involved with vicious scandalmongers. They are dramatic creations which contrast with the other characters and complete the spectrum of social behaviour presented. Their attitude, however, seems no more noble or admirable than Alceste's or Célimène's

but simply more practical.

Conclusion

In Molière's career, Le Misanthrope stands out as a comedy at an extreme point in the range of the comic. The structure of the elegant comedy restrained the jeu comique in the play, a feature so familiar in Molière's other plays. Sustained dramatic tension replaced this jeu comique, and even in the dénouement the dramatist refused to relieve the dramatic tension. Other features of the dramatic structure, however, are more familiar. We see again the central role as written by Molière for himself and the theme of jealousy revived in the main role. Yet, the cocu imaginaire and le trompeur are not simple farce types, for Alceste and Célimène reach an impasse in their relationship and it is their incompatibility which drives them apart. The principle of the mask is again one of the dynamic agents in the play as Molière reveals the gap between the assumed attitudes of the characters and the reality of their situations. The mask reveals the comic and the grotesque in Alceste, Arsinoé, Acaste and even Philinte. The absence of a plot and the building of the intrigue is not unusual to Molière's theatre. L'Ecole des femmes and Tartuffe initiated a dramatic structure which is based less on events and more on the reaction to events. In Le Misanthrope we see a variety of juxtaposed tableaux in which situations are set up to study the reaction of certain attitudes to these situations.

The refusal by the dramatist to relieve the dramatic tension and end the play on a gay note has sometimes led to a confused reaction to the play:

Plus que Tartuffe, plus que l'Avare, cette comédie tend vers le drame, offre un visage ambigu, impose au spectateur cette gêne de ne pas savoir exactement s'il doit rire ou s'émouvoir, et la crainte de commettre un contresens.¹³

Because Molière has created a play which evokes laughter and pity, the play obscures the conventional relegation of what is serious to tragedy and what is charming and gay to comedy. We suggested that in the chronology of Molière's plays Le Misanthrope was decidedly Molière's attempt to show that he could make comedy as worthy a genre as tragedy, for no other play in his career is as serious or as realistic. Yet the methods of composition reveal that the play was created with those dramatic devices that the actor and director knew and which his imagination and genius developed or changed. The creation of Le Misanthrope is significant in the development of Molière's career yet the fact that it brought comedy to an impasse cannot be overlooked. In the plays that follow Le Misanthrope Molière abandoned the elegant comedy and turned his attention to creating joy, laughter and mirth, for the illusion of the theatre, the farce and the spectacle return. Le Misanthrope was a brilliant experiment.

¹³Adam, III, 343.

CHAPTER V

LE MALADE IMAGINAIRE

Molière's last play, Le Malade imaginaire, is a three-act comedy¹ which includes elements of farce-ballet, a pastoral motif and varieties of music and dance. After having examined the elegant comedy and sustained drama of Le Misanthrope, features like farce-ballet and music might take us somewhat by surprise, but we must remember that the scope of Molière's dramatic production includes a whole body of plays, primarily commissioned for court entertainment, which we have barely mentioned: the pastorale-comique, the comédie-galante, the comédie-ballet. If we note, in passing, features like ballet fused with farce or the pastoral love motif, we shall be able to see more clearly the dramatic value of these elements in Le Malade imaginaire.

In plays like La Princesse d'Elide, Mélicerte, Les Amants magnifiques, the theme of love dominates in an idyllic setting. The gracious verses of Mélicerte's dialogue with her heart (II, ii) are as pleasing to the ear as is the exotic ending of La Pastorale comique to the eye. Whether it be Egyptian dancers accompanied by guitars and castanets or Moron's farcical pursuit of the shepherdess, Philis, the aim of the performance was to please and to dazzle the court. In Psyché, the co-authors, Molière, Corneille and Quinault, seemed concerned

¹The three-act comedy was a frequent structural form in the commedia dell'arte and figures in approximately one third of Molière's productions.

with the co-ordination of music, dance and huge stage machines. Elaborate costumes, sumptuous décors, professional singers and dancers, numerous stage machines, all contributed to the spectacular entertainment. Molière had been involved in producing court entertainment before Le Misanthrope in plays like Les Fâcheux, La Princesse d'Elide and Le Mariage Forcé. Yet, after Le Misanthrope there is an increasing predilection for farce and the inclusion of music and dance into the plays, and often an expansion of the farce, with music and dance, into spectacular displays. The prevalent taste for farce, ballet, and elaborate stage machines led commissioned dramatists, like Molière, back to the resources of French farce and commedia dell'arte.²

In the commedia dell'arte tradition mixtures of ballet, opera, mythology and stage machines were familiar to the stage. Furthermore, Molière's own acting ability consisted of agile body movements on stage which were easily adapted to dance. Mascarille's dancing and attempts at singing in Les Précieuses ridicules are meant to be funny but only a lithe and intelligent actor can present them as such. Many other comic roles played by Molière combine mime with music: Lysandre's dance and song in Les Fâcheux; Moron's singing attempts in La Princesse d'Elide; Sganarelle's song in praise of drink in Le Médecin malgré lui. From both French and Italian farce traditions Molière appreciated and mastered the stylization in acting, the value of the type, and lazzi. René Bray makes this close observation of stylization to suggest that song and dance enter into Molière's work somewhat naturally:

²R. Garapon, "La Permanence de la farce dans les divertissements de cour au XVIII^e siècle", CAIPE, 9 (1957), 124.

Le pas de danse n'est pas moins conventionnel: tout geste en scène est artifice, toute posture; mais un geste qu'ordonne la musique est encore plus affranchi des exigences de la réalité représentée. Le chant de même ajoute à l'artifice du vers. L'union du chant et de la danse avec le comique de farce n'introduit donc aucune disparate.³

The conventional farce of Le Mariage forcé was ornamented with ballet and song when presented to the court in 1664. The lazzi of Sganarelle, Pancrace and Marphurius are complemented by Egyptian dancing girls who move around Sganarelle and tell him he will be cuckolded. Like the scene of the tailors in Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, the dance becomes part of the action revealing the situation in a highly visual way. In other plays lazzi and comic effects are expanded into song and dance. In Monsieur de Pourceaugnac the singing doctors, syringe in hand, pursue their victim in a dance. The charlatan's song in L'Amour médecin is a delightful variation of the comic effect of enumeration in song. The entr'actes and finales of plays like Monsieur de Pourceaugnac and Le Bourgeois gentilhomme create a spectacle on stage ornamenting the end of the play with the harmony of the motion of the players on stage. The pleasure principle asserts itself unmistakably in the final song of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac:

Ne songeons qu'à nous réjouir:
La grande affaire est le plaisir.

³Bray, p. 259.

The costumes, the mass movement, the gay and harmonious music leave a strong euphoric impression on the audience as the curtain falls. To this extent the ballet and music which formed the cadre of George Dandin sustain the gaiety of the farce and our enjoyment of le mari confondu.

By introducing music and dance into his comedies Molière not only heightened the spectacular quality of many plays but created a special atmosphere for them. Plays like Tartuffe and Le Misanthrope have a mood and tempo which make us feel we are, at times, watching real life on stage. But the royal spectacles and the comédies-ballets take us into a gay world of fantasy where the puppets on stage amuse us by their antics. Le Médecin malgré lui, one of Molière's gayest farces, captures the tempo of a lively dance in the mood and rhythm of the play. Sganarelle's song, his exuberant gestures to the nurse and his pirouettes around her and Lucas are as choreographic as Sosie's movements around his lamp in the first scene of Amphitrion. This element in Molière's work must not be overlooked in assessing the dramatic value of the plays.

In coming now to a direct examination of Le Malade imaginaire we shall see how Molière's last play is dramatically constructed and how the comedy has reached a new point in the development of Molière's career.

Thematic Structure

The plot of Le Malade imaginaire is disjointed, episodic and rather pointless.⁴ A hypochondriac is persuaded by his wife to leave her

⁴Moore, p. 75.

all his money and concludes an agreement to marry his daughter to a doctor. By feigning death the hypochondriac discovers that his wife's affection for him is hypocritical and his daughter's is sincere. His disguised servant persuades him that she is a better doctor than his other doctors and the patient is finally talked into taking part in a burlesque ceremony whereby he is admitted to the medical profession and whereby his daughter is freed to marry the man she loves.

In the evolution of the dramatic structure of Molière's plays we have noted that plot becomes less important. The previous studies of L'Ecole des femmes and Le Misanthrope attempted to clarify how Molière moved away from the step-by-step method of building up dramatic action. In L'Ecole des femmes the repeated contretemps structure the play and trigger Arnolphe's jealousy. The plot structure is closely fused to the study of Arnolphe, showing us, in a graded sequence, Arnolphe's love for Agnès breaking through his pedantry and jealousy. In Le Misanthrope there is no clearly defined plot but rather a thematic structure to the play. Molière uses the contretemps situation in forcing Alceste to leave Célimène and to frustrate his desire to speak plainly with her. In Le Misanthrope the thematic structure predominates and the contretemps are conditioned by it. The more Alceste tries to make Célimène his only world the more frustrated he becomes by interferences like his law-suit and Oronte's charges against him because of the sonnet.

Le Malade imaginaire is not structured on a well-defined and closely knit plot. Instead, Molière builds his play on a thematic structure. In this play he returns to the dramatic value of the theme of trickery, the struggle between rogue and fool, for the ground plan of his

play. The theme of the doctors and hypochondria, the theme of the daughter-to-marry, the theme of the hypocritical step-mother are all united by the basic theme of the struggle between deceiver and deceived. The theme of jealousy, dominant in so many of the earlier plays has disappeared and the comic hero's obsessions and fantasies enter a new realm. Argan is the last of a line of foolish old men obsessed with themselves. Harpagon, M. Jourdain and Argan represent a new kind of imaginaire: old fogies obsessed with money, status or health. Argan's obsession about his health is a dominant theme of the play but it also is conditioned by the struggle between deceiver and deceived. The play is not designed in a haphazard combination of the various themes. As in Le Misanthrope the themes are interwoven and the play is structured on a juxtaposition of scenes in which facets of the themes are illuminated. A schematic analysis of the play will show how the themes are introduced in the first act, how they are interwoven in the second act, and how they are resolved in the final act:

Themes: A -- The hypochondriac
 B -- The daughter-to-marry
 C -- The hypocritical step-mother

	Act I	Act II	Act III
Scenes:	1-3: A	1-4: B	1-6: A
	4-5: B	5: A+B	7-10: A
	6-7: C (A+B)	6: A+B+C	11: B+C
	8: B+C	7-9: A	12: C
		dénouement	13: B
			14: A+B

The play is constructed by the orchestration of these various themes and the internal unity of the play derives from its thematic structure. Various scenes have the quality of independent tableaux yet when these scenes are juxtaposed, we can see how they present aspects of the main theme. For example, the scene where Béline and her notary scheme to take Argan's money seems rather independent from the scene where Toinette disguises herself as a doctor and plays on Argan's hypochondria; yet, both scenes allow us to see more than one aspect of the central theme of trickery. In the scene with Béline and M. Bonnefoy (I, vii) we see schemers craftily tricking Argan. Argan cannot see Béline's glances to the notary and the money she slips him. We clearly see Argan's gullibility in his blindness to Béline's contradictory remarks but realize that more than Argan's gullibility is involved in the trick. Now, if we consider the scene in which Toinette disguises herself as a doctor, the question of trickery takes on a different light. In this scene Toinette's disguise is poor and Argan is tricked more by his own gullibility than the cleverness of the scheme, for we watch him convince himself, despite Toinette's poor disguise, that it is not Toinette standing before him.

The monologue which opens the play has the quality of an independent tableau. One has the impression that Molière, the author, wrote this scene with Molière, the actor, in mind. An opening monologue gives the actor reciting it a privileged position to perform alone on stage and feel the response of the audience across the footlights. There is, in the latter part of Molière's career, a return to the lengthy monologue. The opening monologues of Amphitryon and Le Malade imaginaire, the monologues

of Georges Dandin and the famous monologue of L'Avare recall the preference for lengthy monologues in the early part of Molière's career. This return can be attributed to the actor's needs and also to the dramatist's desire to include those techniques into his plays which have sustained visual appeal as well as comic and dramatic value. In this respect, the lengthy monologues return to the principles of the commedia dell'arte.

In Le Malade imaginaire the opening monologue must be seen in the light of the actor's sensitivity to the stage, the visual appeal of the scene, and the thematic structure of the play. In this scene, the curtain rises on Argan seated at a table and figuring his medical accounts with a tally. His dialogue with himself, his replies to the bills and his imaginary conversation with Messrs. Purgon and Fleurant are comic, for the spectator sees a certain absentmindedness⁵ in Argan's talking to himself. The enormous list of medications, Argan's methodic calculations and his absurd reasoning contribute to the comic value of the scene. What caps all this is Argan's satisfaction about the state of his health and his bourgeois concern for money. The scene is active and has visual appeal. Argan can be dressed in a red dressing gown, and a night bonnet, with an oversized handkerchief around his neck.⁶ His play with the tally markers, his pauses, his calculations and his reflections are

⁵Bergson, p. 155.

⁶Oeuvres complètes de Molière, ed. R. Jouanny, (Paris, 1962), II, p. 750.

lively and are completed with a flurry of activity as he begins to ring his bell and to shout with great energy. The theme of hypochondria is revealed in a dramatic and comic way. The spectators see it as a hobby for Argan: "Ah! Monsieur Fleurant, tout doux, s'il vous plaît; si vous en usez comme cela, on ne voudra plus être malade (I, i)".

The flurry of activity at the end of the scene reveals visually Argan's basic psychology: he demands constant attention and when he becomes angry or excited he reveals that he is healthy and strong. He is comic because he unwittingly betrays himself through his gestures. The theme of hypochondria is, thus, introduced in a scene which has dramatic and comic appeal, revealing certain things about Argan which we shall see other facets of later in the play. For example, his need to be surrounded by others and have attention lavished on him can explain to some extent why he becomes the easy dupe of Béline.

Various scenes have their own internal unity yet become part of the organic unity of the play when one considers the thematic structure, as the schematization and examples have illustrated. The scenes are further integrated by Argan's role, for he is the dramatic agent around whom the basic struggle to deceive centers.

The Central Role

Argan's role, not the portrayal of his character, is central to the composition of the play. The various themes are interwoven with the basic theme of the rogue against the fool through the role of Argan and the predominance of his role conditions the setting of the play. The

scene is laid in Argan's study and his huge chair is centre stage. It is from this chair that Argan commands his household, around this chair that he chases Toinette when he is angry, into this chair that he sinks when he thinks of his illness, and to this chair that the doctors come to consult, and Béralde to visit and entertain him.

The theme of Argan's hypochondria is exploited in the play for its dramatic and comic effects. High points in Molière's comedies are precisely those moments when the mask slips or when a character is driven into a situation where he says or does things to reveal the gap between his illusion and the reality of his situation. In Le Malade imaginaire many of the keenly comic episodes are precisely those which steer Argan into just such a position. Argan is like the imaginaires of earlier plays: he is haunted by an obsession and never really sees the gap between his illusion and reality. Argan is a man who is well until he thinks he is ill, a man who tries to fashion his world to suit the idea of his being ill, and who will promptly accept any evidence, no matter how contrary, to support his illusion of being ill. Molière exploits this facet of Argan's hypochondria for its comic effects making the whole topic of death, medicine and purgations highly comic.⁷

Argan's rigid adherence to medical jargon and authority is emphasized throughout the play by his constant calculations in which he sees a direct relationship between the state of his health and the number

⁷Hypochondria, like hypocrisy and avarice, is not in itself comic or amusing. It is the comic perspective which reveals the gap between the mask and the face, and shows that the mechanical encrusted on the living is what makes the hypochondria of Argan or the avarice of Harpagon comic.

of medications he has had. If he has had eight doses of medicine and twelve enemas this month and twelve doses of medicine and twenty enemas last month, he concludes that he must have felt better last month. His obsession with numbers and their relation to the state of his health make him ponder the most ridiculous thoughts:

Monsieur Purgon m'a dit de me promener le matin
dans ma chambre, douze allées, et douze venues;
mais j'ai oublié à lui demander si c'est en
long, ou en large.

(II, ii)

Calculations like these reveal how much of an imaginaire Argan is.

He is, to paraphrase Louis Juvet, "un déraisonnable qui raisonne dans la déraison."⁸

Argan's forced exits because of some enema or some colic affair (I, iii; III, i) recall similar exits by Harpagon to the garden to check his cherished money box. It never dawns on Argan that only a strong constitution could maintain the constant purges and medications the doctors give him and when Béralde suggests this idea, Argan refuses to consider it. Argan's constant concern for his health, his fear of taking his bonnet off, his demand that Toinette speak softly to invalids, all reflect to what extent Argan wants to wear the mask of malady. Yet Argan's hypochondria is an unconscious mask which the natural man in Argan is constantly trying to tear off his face. As soon as someone does not

⁸L. Juvet, "Molière", Conferencia, XXXII (1938), p. 673.

accept Argan's hypochondria his anger makes him reveal his health and his strength. Toinette is the principal agent for arousing his anger and shattering his illusion: "Tenez, Monsieur, vous ne songez pas que vous ne sauriez marcher sans bâton (III, i)". When Argan does not think about his illness, when he becomes emotional, he reveals himself as a healthy man. Toinette opposes his decision about Angélique's marriage and tells him the idea is ridiculous. She angers him to such a point that he rises from his chair and blurts out, "Je ne suis point bon, et je suis méchant quand je veux (I, v)".⁹ This statement is the climax of a heated discussion and is deeply comic because Argan is made to say something which, on reflection, he would not say. That he has forgotten his illness in his anger is sustained visually in the rest of the scene as he races around the chair after Toinette, his cane in his hand. Argan cannot see the contradiction between his attitude and his action. A sick man who walks with a cane does not run! This dichotomy between Argan's being and thinking is also exploited for its dramatic effects. When Cléante comes to see Angélique he presents his compliments to Argan (II, ii). Toinette interjects with some beautiful dramatic irony which Argan cannot appreciate:

Toinette: Il marche, dort, mange, et boit tout comme les autres; mais cela n'empêche pas qu'il ne soit fort malade.

Argan: Cela est vrai.

⁹When Molière's concern was for dramatic tension and comic effects, he worried little about reusing his own material. Much of the dialogue in this argument is copied, almost word for word, from Les Fourberies de Scapin, I, vi.

Hypochondria is made comic and dramatic throughout the whole play by the mask principle.

The theme of hypochondria is knit to the theme of the daughter-to-marry and the theme of the hypocritical step-mother. Like other Molièresque heroes Argan wants to have his own way and sustain his illusion. M. Jourdain wanted his daughter to marry a man of quality, Philaminte wanted her daughter to marry a poet, and Harpagon wanted his daughter to marry sans dot. Similarly, Argan wants his daughter to marry a doctor to sustain his illusion of hypochondria. As in the earlier plays this plan to marry the daughter sets up a conflict situation and an intrigue to resolve it. The theme of the hypocritical step-mother also sets up a conflict situation which must be resolved. The pattern forms the basic conflict in Tartuffe and reappears along with the daughter-to-marry in Les Femmes Savantes. Each theme is linked to the rogue-fool pattern by Argan for it is around him that all the schemes gather and on his gullibility that they work. Basically, trickery sets up tension between the deceiver and the deceived and it is this tension which helps to make the themes of the step-mother, the daughter-to-marry and the theme of hypochondria dramatic. We watch Argan become easy prey to Béline, M. Purgon and the Diafoirus. He is completely taken in by Toinette's poor disguise and the drama of the scene lies in watching Argan convince himself that Toinette is not Toinette. Yet Argan is not a complete dupe, and the play is not simply a string of episodes revealing the gullibility of a hypochondriac. In the interplay of themes we see aspects of Argan in which he is aware of

his situation and responsive to his family. When Argan first begins to discuss plans of marriage with Angélique, the scene is relaxed and Argan is in a good humour:

O çà, ma fille, je vais vous dire une nouvelle...
on vous demande en mariage. Qu'est-ce que cela?
vous riez. Cela est plaisant, oui, ce mot de
mariage; il n'y a rien de plus drôle pour les
jeunes filles: ah! nature, nature!...

(I, v)

With his other daughter, Louison, Argan reveals himself to be an authoritarian, but sympathetic father. It is under the influence of Béline and the doctors that Argan changes. Like the other bourgeois imaginaires Argan is aware of money. He can complain about the cost of his bills and can bring financial considerations into the arrangement of Angélique's marriage. When things threaten to interfere with Argan's well-being, that is, his sickness, he is clear-sighted. He has no trouble seeing through Cléante's trick.

This focusing on various aspects of the imaginaire hero shifts the spectator's response to Argan during the play. The spectator is drawn into the various tricks because of their dramatic value, yet, the comic value of the various dupings changes. At times we are sympathetic; at times we just laugh. This shift in focusing reflects how far Molière has advanced the basic rogue-fool pattern of the farce tradition into a much richer comic presentation. If Molière had not broadened the role of Argan to include a certain sympathie for him, the series of tricks

would become monotonous. However, Béline's attempts to deceive him are more serious than Toinette's disguise, and the doctors' attempts to play havoc with his body more serious than Louison's scheme to feign death. The response of the audience to the various tricks is conditioned by the presentation of the characters. If Argan were a complete fool and not shown as wanting human attention and affection, the series of episodes would become short farces in which we admire the schemer and laugh at the fool. However, Argan is more than the simple fool of farce. He would not be comic if we did not see elements of the man and the mask. The series of episodes do not lose their dramatic quality because of the way in which Molière has presented the interplay his main character and his secondary characters.

Secondary Characters

Since the basic theme of the play is the struggle between deceiver and deceived Molière lined up his secondary characters as schemers and opponents, with Argan in the middle. The division, because of the various themes, is not absolutely clear cut, for we do see the opponents to the professional schemers also scheming. Yet, the division between the parasites, like the doctors and Béline, and the unprofessional schemers is clear:

Professional Schemers	Dupe	Opponents
The Diafoirus	Argan, dupe	Béralde
M. Fleurant	of medicine	Toinette
M. Purgon		Angélique
		Cléante
Béline	Argan, dupe of	(Louison)
M. Bonnefoy	hypocritical wife	

Unprofessional Schemers	Dupe	Opponents
Toinette	Argan	The Doctors
Cléante	Argan	Béline
Louison	Argan	
Argan	Béline	
Toinette	Béline	

The schematization reveals a more complex pattern to the theme of trickery than that seen in simple farces, and a corresponding complexity in the roles of the secondary characters results, as we shall shortly see. In L'Ecole des femmes the theme of jealousy dominated and we saw Arnolphe pitted against the others. When Molière expanded into various themes and structured his plays on thematic tableaux the secondary characters assumed a rather important position for the fullness of the presentation. We noted, for example, in Le Misanthrope how Alceste, Acaste and Arsinoé revealed different aspects of the theme of sincerity and different attitudes to love. We noted, too, that the interplay of various characters with different or opposing attitudes not only adds to the "symmetry and roundness of the comic presentation"¹⁰ but has a

¹⁰Moore, p. 74.

certain dramatic quality which cannot be overlooked when assessing their roles.

Béline and her notary, M. Bonnefoy, scheme to take all of Argan's money. Béline contrives to become Argan's sole heir by indulging his hypochondria and by attempting to exile his two daughters to a convent. Her role creates a dramatic tension with Argan's, Toinette's, and Angélique's roles as well as bringing an element of cynicism to the play. Her selfish motives pit her against the family unit which she wants to destroy and, in this respect, she is similar to Tartuffe. In her exploitation of Argan she reveals that Argan's hypochondria is linked with his urge to have constant attention lavished on him. Thus, her role reveals that two themes in the play, the theme of hypochondria and the theme of the step-mother are really not completely independent. In the fullness of the dramatic presentation her role has emotive and dramatic value. Her hypocrisy makes Angélique's sincere love for Argan more touching, her exploitation of Argan evokes a certain sympathy for him, her slyness contrasts sharply with Toinette's frankness and spontaneity, and, through her role, the theme of trickery is given an added dramatic value, for "audiences have always been incited to laugh at 'le trompeur trompé,' at the schemer hoist with his own petard".¹¹ We can see in Béline's role how Molière has advanced from the farce tradition, for the clever wife in this play is far from admirable; yet, we can also see how Molière has maintained the dramatic value of the farce in presenting the trompeur trompé.

¹¹Moore, p. 72.

Angélique and Cléante are the handsome young couple in the play. Angélique is beautiful and charming in her role as a young girl in love and she and her handsome lover bring a touch of romantic comedy to the play. Angélique's eagerness to confide her feelings of love for Cléante to Toinette (I,v) are overcome only by her desire to hear Toinette say that Cléante's actions reveal that he loves her as much as she loves him. In the following scene, Angélique's girlish delight in thinking Argan is speaking of Cléante is captured in her giggle when Argan says that someone has asked for her hand in marriage. In the scene with the Diafoirus, Angélique and Cléante create a romantic mood in their pastoral song which contrasts sharply with the pendency and awkwardness of Thomas. In the dénouement the romantic mood created by the success of the young lovers merges with the fantastic ceremony as everyone joins into the carnival of music and dance.

As the young girl in love, Angélique is charming and innocent. This charm and innocence contrasts with the hypocrisy and cunning of Béline. When Angélique is tested by Argan's feigned death her reaction is exactly the opposite of Béline's. Angélique's exclamations of grief seem exaggerated: "Après la perte de mon père, je ne veux être plus du monde (III, xiv)", but the audience accepts the sincerity behind the words because it contrasts with the hypocrisy of Béline's remarks¹² and

¹²See Act I, Sc. iv, for remarks by Béline almost identical to Angélique's. For example, "S'il vient faute de vous, mon fils, je ne veux plus rester au monde".

Béline's reaction to Argan's death. The audience is less interested in the literal meaning of Angélique's words and more caught up in the emotive value of the dramatic contrast with Béline. Furthermore, because of the tension created by the trick of the feigned death, the audience eagerly waits for Argan to assert himself as living and respond to Angélique's surprise.

Angélique's role contributes to the dramatic value of the central scenes of the play (II, v, vi). Her cool response to Thomas contrasts with her eagerness to reply to Cléante and her confrontation with Béline threatens Béline's scheme. She speaks out against her father's arrangement of her marriage with Thomas. Argan is put in an awkward position, begging the two doctors' indulgence and ultimately trying to restore order by giving Angélique an ultimatum: Thomas or the convent. The ultimatum reasserts Argan's authority and silences Angélique.

Angélique's role is similar to Agnès's in bringing a mood of romantic comedy to the play, but Agnès's role assumes a more dominant position in the play because of the theme of jealousy which pervades the structure of the play. In L'Ecole des femmes Agnès is the 'object' Arnolphe tries desperately to possess and the play is constructed to show how her blossoming love for Horace and her intelligence defeat the pedantry and scheming of Arnolphe. The opposition between Arnolphe and Agnès grows as the play develops, clearly showing the living and spontaneous defeat the mechanical and the automatic. Horace also assumes

a more dominant position in L'Ecole des femmes than Cléante in Le Malade imaginaire because of the structure of the play. The four meetings between Horace and Arnolphe structure the play and trigger Arnolphe's reactions. Cléante's role is primarily a function of the thematic structure of the play. As the handsome young lover he contrasts with the idiot, Thomas, and in the central scene of the play, Cléante's romantic song highlights how ridiculous a lover Thomas is with his lengthy thesis and scholastic arguments. Cléante's failure to take Argan in by the pastoral song further reflects that Argan is not a complete dupe. When his hypochondria, which will be nourished by the entry of Thomas into the family, is threatened Argan can quickly take command of the situation. As an unprofessional schemer, Cléante counterpoises the professional schemers like Béline, adding to the complex pattern of schemers and deceivers in the play.

Although Louison appears in only one scene of the play that scene is located in the central portion of the play and is part of the struggle between deceiver and deceived. The scene has been interpreted in more than one way. Some critics would see Argan as being tricked by Louison's feigned death; others would say that Argan understood her game and was not deceived. What Molière seems to be working with in how he constructed the scene is the dramatic effect of the struggle and the disclosure of certain attitudes in human behaviour.

Initially, Argan, the authoritarian adult, faces Louison, the child, and demands of her information about Cléante and Angélique.

Louison responds indirectly, avoiding the topic which Argan himself has brought up indirectly. When Argan becomes more direct she still tries to be evasive until the symbol of adult authority, the birch rod, makes her confess that she had promised to keep Angélique's secret. Caught between two conflicting promises and the threat of punishment the child's only way out of the situation is to feign death. Argan shows that he is sensitive enough to the child's dilemma by not strapping her after she has revealed she is not dead. By mutually accepting the trick both profit. Louison avoids the birch rod and Argan establishes a means of communicating with her. In the second half of the scene Argan still interrogates Louison but his method is different. "Son petit doigt" is no longer a symbol of parental authority but a game which the child accepts. She tells the truth as far as she knows it and cannot compromise herself on what she does not know. She candidly tells Argan who is eager to put words in her mouth:

Non, mon papa, ne le croyez pas, il ment, je
vous assure.

(II, viii)

In a play about cunning and scheming this charming scene shows a facet of cunning by the child to avoid pain and a facet of Argan's cunning in being able to manipulate the child by game or illusion to tell the truth. Furthermore, the child's refusal to distort the image of what she saw is a refreshing contrast to Argan's preconceived image of what went on in the room. This insistence by Argan on questioning the judgment of the child

is central to the theme of trickery which plays on the fallibility of human judgment and its power to distort what it sees. The scene is charming and refreshing, revealing an aspect of the central theme of the play. Louison's relationship with her father in this scene shows Argan as sincerely fond of his daughter, even if somewhat authoritarian. Since Molière took care to situate this charming scene in the central part of the play it is not unreasonable to assume that he must have wanted to indicate the human aspect of Argan. We have suggested earlier that this human aspect conditions our response to the kind of schemes surrounding Argan and enriches the fool type of the farce tradition.

Argan's blindspot, his illusion of being ill, is fostered by the medical profession -- the Diafoirus, M. Purgon and M. Fleurant. All four are caricatures, and while Molière indulges in some harmless satire with them, his main aim was to show their effect on Argan, exploiting the comic effect of watching a grown man become the puppet of fools.

Monsieur Fleurant appears in only one scene (III, iv). He makes a brief entrance on stage, waving a syringe in his hand. He enters just after Béralde has inveighed against the practices of medicine and is insulted by Béralde's suggestion of postponing another purgative treatment. Argan is courteous enough to comply with Béralde's request but is warned by M. Fleurant that this insult will not go unavenged.

The revenge is quick in coming, and in the following scene M. Purgon makes his only entrance on stage. He terrifies Argan with all sorts of maladies because of the insult. Unlike his young daughter,

Louison, Argan is susceptible to the power of suggestion and feels the doctor's revenge taking effect on his body.

Both scenes move quickly, are basically visually orientated and suggest the mystifying power medical jargon has on Argan's mind. We see puppets playing out the scene, for the rigid doctors are as mechanical as Argan: "...there is not a real, a serious or even a dramatic scene that fancy cannot render comic by simply calling forth this image [the dancing-jack]¹³."

The Diafoirus are two ridiculous doctors, the image of professional callousness, whose only concern is 'form' and whose constant attention to Argan's body ensure them a steady income. In the grand scene of the Diafoirus we see Thomas as a fool. The stage directions introduce him as "un grand bête" and this is precisely how he acts. What is fascinating about M. Diafoirus's long tirade praising the achievements of his son (II, v) is the dramatic contrast set up between the illusion of genius in the son, inspired by paternal pride, and the down-to-earth reality of Thomas's idiocy right there on the stage! We wonder to what extent M. Diafoirus is duped by his own illusion. There is thus, a suggestion of the trompeur trompé in M. Diafoirus, adding yet another dimension to the simple farce theme of the rogue and the fool.

Béralde and Toinette are the only other characters of the play. Both refuse to be taken in by the schemers and Argan's hypochondria, and both attempt to help Angélique and Cléante. However, the dramatic quality of their roles differs.

¹³Bergson, p. 112.

Toinette is really the second principal character of the play. Like Dorine she has common sense and loyalty, as well as an energy and gaiety which invade the whole play. She can steer Argan into positions to reveal his energy and his strength and she is the principal agent for dramatic irony by her frank remarks. Her energy and sympathy for the family make her the basic opponent to the professional schemers of the play. She is clever enough to play up to Béline, to devise the trick to get rid of the other doctors, and to reveal Béline's hypocrisy.

In her disguise as a doctor she parodies the doctors in the play and plays on Argan's hypochondria. She knows his desire to be distinguished as an invalid and plays on his fancy. She addresses him as an "illustre malade" and tells him how widely known his reputation as an invalid is. Her diagnosis and remedy for Argan is a parody of the Diafoirus consultation and Argan is completely taken in despite the fact that Toinette's disguise is poor. He sees Toinette standing before him disguised as a doctor and comments to Béralde: "Eh! ne diriez-vous pas que c'est effectivement Toinette?". Yet his obsession will not let him believe what he sees. With her disguise Toinette reveals even more so than the doctors to what degree Argan can be convinced to make black seem white.

Béralde does not resort to Toinette's tactics in trying to convince Argan he is wrong but simply takes a completely opposite stand on medicine and attempts to impose it on Argan. Béralde professes that the body can cure itself of any ills and that one should let nature take its course. For him doctors know nothing about curing people and are only quacks with gifted tongues.

The dialogue between Béralde and Argan is somewhat lengthy but because of their diametrically opposed attitudes the scene does not lose its dramatic value. There is also something comic in Béralde's invective, for as he recapitulates the faults of Argan's doctors, Argan really fails to see how it all applies to him. To ensure that the dramatic scene does not lag Molière brilliantly turns the conversation to himself and the plays in which he has satirized doctors. One must agree that there is something uncanny in the dramatic illusion of Argan, played by Molière, raging at that author Molière and his disrespect for doctors! Béralde's views and his attempts to enlighten Argan certainly do not make Béralde the raisonneur or Molière's mouthpiece. His views are as extreme as Argan's and their discussion is a dramatic situation in which two puppets of equal force try to overcome each other. Neither succeeds and the discussion ends at the same point at which it began.

From the moment Béralde enters on stage his presence suggests an aura of calmness and awareness lacking in Argan's household. He can convince Argan to watch the entertainment he has brought, can dismiss M. Purgon without hesitation, and can ultimately convince Argan to join the medical profession. His role is similar to Ariste's in Les Femmes savantes. He is part of the family, yet somewhat removed from it, and is a key agent for restoring family harmony at the end of the play.

The interplay of the secondary characters with each other and with Argan maintains the symmetrical orchestration of themes, as well as sustaining certain comic and dramatic effects. To this extent, Le Malade

imaginaire reflects the conclusion by Jacques Scherer on the importance of secondary characters in Molière's plays: "Il [Molière] n'emploie presque pas de personnages inutiles...".¹⁴

Farce

One of the basic dynamic principles in both French farce and commedia dell'arte supplies the basic structure of the play, the struggle between rogue and fool. Conditioned by this structure the characters are lined up as schemers, fools and their opponents. Yet the roles of the rogue and the fool have been expanded, developed and fused in various ways. We have noted that Argan is not simply a fool and that Béline becomes the trompeur trompé. The doctors are schemers but fools themselves and there is a strong suggestion that M. Diafoirus is the dupe of his illusion about his son. The changes and transformations in the rogue-fool pattern make the theme more complex and more sophisticated than the simple farces but the dramatic value of this elementary theme has not changed. "This anatomy of trickery, this struggle between deceiver and deceived, is rudimentary as a principle of psychology but unfailing as a dramatic agent."¹⁵

The mood and atmosphere of the play is also conditioned by the farce. The lazzi of farce abound in the play, giving it a highly visual

¹⁴Scherer, p. 38.

¹⁵Moore, p. 72.

impact and sustaining a mood of gaiety and fantasy. The abundant use of lazzi, attention to exaggerated costumes and movements make the comic effects of the play gross and reveal the basic psychology of the main characters. Argan runs after Toinette, cane in hand, and throws pillows at her in anger. The effects are farcical and visually sustain the dichotomy in Argan's thinking he is ill and his being healthy. The doctors and the apothecary are caricaturizations whose professional callousness is stressed in their costumes, gestures and names. The black flowing robes and pointed hats of the doctors complement their professional jargon. Their caricaturizations are completed with their names. The apothecary in charge of enemas is sweetly called M. Fleurant and the effect of him walking on stage with a syringe in his hand completes our impression of him. Molière continues his satirization of the medical profession's obsession with purgations by naming the doctors, Purgon and Diafoirus. The effect is not obscene but in the mood of the farce tradition which was often irreverential to doctors and friars.

We noted previously that many scenes in the commedia dell'arte were expanded primarily for comic effects in which lazzi dominate. The jeu comique of these expanded scenes was meant to be sheer fun and demanded, for its success, versatile and lithe actors. Le Malade imaginaire is not lacking in the expansion of scenes into comic sketches. For example, when the Diafoirus first arrive in Argan's study, a farcical interlude takes place as the doctors attempt to take their seats. Diafoirus and Argan engage in

a battle of civilities before they are seated. Thomas goes to sit on a stool where Toinette is seated and jumps in dismay when she cries out. Finally, Toinette brings him a child's chair and farcical effects are obtained from Thomas's difficulty in getting seated in a chair too small for him. In the scene of Toinette's disguise, the same expansion to the farcical is demonstrated and her exaggerated movements are almost a return to pantomime. She pulls at Argan's arm and then rudely lets it drop. She briskly pulls his head back to examine his eyes and when she has him stick out his tongue, she closes his mouth so that he bites his tongue. This scene not only recalls the sketches of the commedia dell'arte but also reveals the distinct understanding by the dramatist of the comic actor's need for expression on stage. This need to play on stage, so close to pantomime, expresses what Vsevolod Meyerhold sees in the value of pantomime: "the self-sufficiency of the acting craft."¹⁶ The director and actors of the play must appreciate these farcical effects if the play is to sustain its vitality. Although much of what we have attributed to farce is not found in the text of the play itself, it must be constantly remembered that these plays were written to be performed, not read. In the preface to L'Amour médecin, Molière's statement is of importance to the understanding of that play and all of his other play, including Le Malade imaginaire:

¹⁶ Meyerhold, p. 142.

Il n'est pas nécessaire de vous avertir qu'il y a beaucoup de choses qui dépendent de l'action [le jeu des acteurs]: on sait bien que les comédies ne sont faites que pour être jouées, et je ne conseille de lire celle-ci qu'aux personnes qui ont des yeux pour découvrir dans la lecture tout le jeu du théâtre;...

The words speak for themselves when conveying the importance of the visual impact of the play, and it is basically from the commedia dell'arte that Molière learned this feature of the stage.

The Element of Spectacle

In the preface of Les Fâcheux Molière noted that the combination of music and dance with the play had future possibilities and in the preface of L'Amour médecin he insisted that music and dance contribute to the overall effect:

...les airs et les symphonies de l'incomparable M. Lulli, mêlés à la beauté des voix et à l'adresse des danseurs, leur [le jeu des acteurs] donnent, sans doute, des grâces dont ils ont toutes les peines du monde à se passer.

The element of music and dance enters into Le Malade imaginaire and is an element, as the introduction to the chapter indicated, with which Molière had been familiar and an element which added an aura of spectacle to the performance. In Le Malade imaginaire music and dance give the play a special atmosphere, influencing the whole conception of the play.¹⁷

¹⁷M. Pellison, Les Comédies-Ballets Le Molière, (Paris, 1914), p. 79.

The prologue and intermèdes complete the play with a variety of entertainment which becomes more closely linked with the action as the play progresses. The prologue introducing the play has a pastoral motif. In it a shepherdess, surrounded by fauns and AEgipans, laments her woes in love and cannot find consolation in the amusement the fauns offer her. The first intermède is a lively farce-ballet in which Polichinelle, an old usurer, has come to entertain and serenade his lover (Toinette). He is a buffoon lover and is interrupted by the musicians and dancers who give him a bastonnade and take his money. The second intermède is introduced by Béralde and is meant to entertain Argan. It is an exotic dance and song by Egyptian dancers dressed as Moors. The third intermède is a burlesque ceremony in song and dance whereby Argan joins the medical profession. The rest of the cast, Béralde, Toinette, Cléante and Angélique join in the merriment of the ceremony and the play ends in a grand spectacle where the players entertain the audience as well as themselves. The prologue and each intermède have the distinct aim of amusing and entertaining the audience as well as a person within the action on stage: the fauns to entertain the shepherdess, Polichinelle to entertain his lover, the Egyptian dancers to entertain Argan, the burlesque ceremony to entertain everyone.

A leitmotif of pleasure runs through the play proper, is sustained by the intermèdes and is ultimately fused with them in the end of the play. What this motif of pleasure does is make the whole topic of

medicine, death, and purgations amusing. There is a sustained impression that Argan finds his hypochondria relaxing and entertaining, a sort of hobby. When calculating his monthly expenses he complains about the bill and reveals his attitude to his sickness: "Ah! Monsieur Fleurant, tout doux, s'il vous plaît; si vous en usez comme cela, on ne voudra plus être malade (I, i)". After his interview with Louison he laments that his children do not give him the leisure of meditating on his illness (II, ix). Even the messy business of the medical amphitheatre is turned to a note of pleasure. Thomas invites Angélique to see a dissection "pour vous divertir". Entertainment is the order of the play. Argan asks Cléante to entertain the company and Béralde's dancers come to entertain Argan.

In his final play Molière continues to prefer the illogical and fantastic dénouement in which a certain gaiety and euphoria are emphasized. With the introduction of music and dance, the dénouement increases in dimension, becoming spectacular with the ritual of the ceremony, the costumes, and the dancers and singers. The satire in the Mamamouchi ceremony of Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme and the satire in the doctorate ceremony of Le Malade imaginaire form an intense visual and highly entertaining ending. The intermèdes sustain the mood of entertainment in the play and contribute to the aura of fantasy. The burlesque ceremony at the end of the play becomes a gay carnival which everyone, including the cast enjoys. Without music and dance the effect would be lost:

Elle [la musique] enveloppe le cerveau d'une atmosphère d'ivresse, où les êtres vivants peu à peu se déforment, sortent du monde réel, prennent des proportions fantastiques. Ainsi dans le Malade imaginaire et le Bourgeois gentilhomme, où la comédie, si franchement réaliste d'abord, se grise de sa santé et finit dans le rire colossal de Pantagruel. Loin d'y sentir une déchéance de la grande comédie, j'y vois son fort épanouissement, une épopée de la belle humeur et de la bouffonnerie.¹⁸

The music and dance are an integral part of the play, sustaining the desire to entertain, making the whole topic of medicine amusing, and whisking the spectators into a gay fairyland.

Conclusion

Le Malade imaginaire is Molière's last play and for us, the ultimate study of dramatic structure. From farce Molière took the elementary yet dynamic principle of the struggle between deceiver and deceived to form the ground plan of his play. The various themes are interwoven with this theme and the play is built on a thematic structure. The variety of frescoes resulting from the orchestration of the scenes are dynamic and appear, "not on any register of a progression in time, from cause to effect: they appear as successive illuminations of facets, of aspects".¹⁹ The opening monologue shows us a facet of Argan's hypochondria as well as a facet of the man's need for others. The scene

¹⁸Pellison, p. 221.

¹⁹Moore, p. 79.

with Louison suggests an aspect of the struggle between deceiver and deceived and reveals an aspect of the relationship between Argan and his daughter. The presentation of the secondary characters, as well as of Argan, is influenced by the thematic structure. We see those aspects of Béline, Louison, M. Diafoirus which reveal suggestions of the themes. The basic pattern of the rogue and the fool is amplified and made more complex. The doctors are rogues and fools; Béline is tricked at her own game; Argan is not taken in all the time. Much of the dramatic quality in the play derives from this struggle to deceive. Molière returns to farce yet has greatly amplified its simple structure.

The play has a strong visual impact. The preponderance of lazzi, the farcical effects in the costumes, the caricaturization of the doctors, sustain the gay and lively effect of many scenes. The element of music and dance, progressively linked with the play, creates an atmosphere of fantasy where elements of realism eventually give way to the influence of farcical effects and music and dance. The satire in the ceremony at the end of the play is influenced by the music and dance. The pique of the satire is not bitter and the inclusion of music and dance throughout the play and in the end of the play reaffirms that the aim of the play was to present a gay comedy in which buffoonery and fantasy reign.

Even though the play does not meet the sophistication and elegance of Le Misanthrope it clearly reflects how the techniques and perspective from the French and Italian farces predominate at the end of Molière's career, and how the actor-director-dramatist constantly gave the acting

potential of a role, the movement of the scene, and the concern to make people laugh prime importance. In defining what kind of play Le Malade imaginaire is, one can see that it includes so many different features -- ballet, romance, farce, satire, psychological observation -- that the term most inclusive of all the aspects of the play would be complete spectacle, or complete comic entertainment.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

We have traced Molière's career from simple farces like La Jalousie de Barbouillé through the elegant comedy of Le Misanthrope to the spectacular events of Le Malade imaginaire. The evolution has been brought about by a mastery of theatrical techniques, a ceaseless concern for response across the footlights, and a complex combination of dramatic devices, enriched by Molière's genius and imagination.

The study has revealed the preference by Molière for themes from farce which include trickery, mismarriages, jealousy, and charlatanism. The theme of trickery often replaces plot in the structuring of the plays. L'Etourdi is a series of ten little farces, each farce being structured on the theme of trickery and the contretemps. In both Les Précieuses ridicules and Le Malade imaginaire, the theme of trickery structures the play. However, in his last play Molière has orchestrated the theme of trickery with other themes and has achieved a complex pattern of relationships between rogue and fool. This preference for themes from farce is complemented by the perspective of farce in which Molière dramatizes situations and characters from everyday life. Foolish doctors, libidinous dévots, roguish valets, and miserly fathers and masters, all derive from the spectrum of farcical types which inhabit Molière's theatre. Molière satirizes doctors in several plays, but we can see that the caricaturizations are in the mood and tone of the farce which was often irreverential to quack doctors and their macaronic Latin. The characters

in Molière's theatre are types, but the type has been enriched and developed. In the study of the plays we have mentioned the repeated use of the rogue and the fool type, and we have traced the evolution from the roguish valet in L'Etourdi to the jealous and foolish types like Sganarelle and Arnolphe. Yet, Arnolphe is also a rogue who is ultimately defeated at his own game. In *Alceste*, we have a complex fool and a jealous type, similar to Arnolphe. However, Molière has brought his comic hero to the point of tragedy, for the mood of the play is more dignified in tone than the other comedies and *Alceste*'s insight and integrity, which clash with his obsessive fears and his atrabilious nature, make him a hero who evokes both sympathy and admiration, a smile and a tear. The rogues have also been enriched and developed. Isabelle must repeatedly excuse her trickery in L'Ecole des maris. Tartuffe is a rogue, but like Béline, is tricked at his own game and becomes the trompeur trompé. Célimène plays on the vanity and illusions of others, forcing them often to give up their pose, as she does with Arsinoé. Yet, in Le Misanthrope, the farcical pattern of the clever woman who tricks her husband or lover is brought to a new level. Célimène lures *Alceste* but ultimately rejects him. Like Arnolphe, *Alceste* attempts to take Célimène for himself and fails. Unlike Agnès who triumphs over her master and marries Horace, Célimène fails to triumph in love. The rogue-fool pattern in Célimène and *Alceste* is developed to an incompatibility in attitudes where no one triumphs.

Molière constantly reworked and developed the rogue and the fool type in his plays, and the development must be also attributed to Molière's understanding of the mask from the commedia dell'arte tradition. After Mascarille, the types become more than fixed masks. Molière created his main characters to reveal both the man and the mask. Arnolphe's pedantry is a mask, his jealousy and fear of cuckoldry are a psychological fixity in character which Molière derived from the mask structure. Yet, Molière also lets us see that Arnolphe's awkward and timid love for Agnès is a very human need. Argan's hypochondria is a mask, but his need for attention and love is human. In Arnolphe, Alceste and Argan, the type is the root of the character creation, but because of the glimpses into the human aspects of the man, the puppets on stage assume a more realistic dimension.

Molière, the farceur, preferred simple plot structures. L'Etourdi, Dom Garcie de Navarre, Les Fâcheux, L'Ecole des femmes and Le Misanthrope all reveal that in the five-act plays, in general, Molière preferred the structure of the contretemps. This device is used in structuring the play as well as in contributing to the mood of the play. In Les Fâcheux, for example, the contretemps is simply an expedient for linking the series of portraits in a comic way. In L'Ecole des femmes the four repeated accidents not only structure the play but are also admirably fused with the main theme and the presentation of the main character. Each encounter gradually reveals the opposition of the mechanical and the living in Arnolphe. In Le Misanthrope, the repeated exits by Alceste are

a structural device to set up a pole of tension between the love theme and the law-suit theme.

In structuring his early plays Molière adapted foreign sources to farcical plots based on trickery, or simple plots founded on the repetition of an accidental situation. Yet, after L'Ecole des femmes the plays are built on a thematic structure. Abstract themes like hypocrisy, vanity, sincerity, avarice, and hypochondria come to life through the setting up of incompatible attitudes. We see a series of oppositions in Le Misanthrope by the individual characters and the groups of characters which reveal various aspects of the themes of love, hypocrisy and social conventions. In Le Malade imaginaire various attitudes are revealed by different members of the family to present the themes of the play in a dramatic way. The secondary characters tend to increase in number after L'Ecole des femmes and this is a direct result of the thematic structure which dominates after L'Ecole des femmes. The secondary characters are dramatic agents that help to present the themes and either oppose or make fun of the central character. For example, in Le Misanthrope, Acaste's presence reflects an aspect of the theme of sincerity by showing how fatuous it can be. In L'Ecole des femmes Chrysalde is a dramatic agent who reveals Arnolphe's rigid attitude and who mocks him just when Arnolphe is not in the mood to hear about the joys of cuckoldry.

The use of lazzi, gesture, sketches, fantastic stage machines, ballet and music, and fantastic and contrived dénouements reveal a mastery of techniques from various dramatic genres, including: farce, commedia dell'arte, court entertainment and displays and romantic comedies. All these devices help to create Molière's comic theatre. Lazzi and gesture are devices which help to create the fairy tale atmosphere and sustain the illusion of puppets playing on stage. Yet, gesture often becomes more significant in Molière's theatre than in farce, for gesture reveals the basic psychology of the character. Whether it be Alceste's impatient cries of "Morbieu" or Argan's chase after Toinette, the gesture reveals an aspect of the man of which he himself is unaware. Alceste cannot see that he tends to exaggerate; Argan cannot see that he is a healthy man. Thus, although Molière, a master comic actor, would naturally incorporate lazzi and gesture into his plays, he does so not only to create comic sketches but to enrich the comic in his main characters and reveal their basic psychology.

The repeated use of fantastic and contrived dénouements is not a structural feature to be criticized, but rather to be understood as a convention of comic theatre in which Molière created an aura of fantasy. Both his expositions and dénouements are conventional theatrical devices in which Molière always showed a concern for the tempo and atmosphere created. The energetic and lively expositions draw the spectator into the play and the fantastic dénouements leave an euphoric and gay mood with the spectator as the final curtain falls.

After Les Fâcheux Molière continued to experiment with music and dance. In the comédie-ballet music and dance often combine with lazzi to play out the action of a scene in a highly visual way. In Le Malade imaginaire the prologue and the various musical interludes were eventually linked to the play and created an aura of entertainment around and within the play. The grand finale of Le Malade imaginaire is achieved by a delicate combination of the romantic dénouement, the satire of the doctors, and the music and dance. The dénouement is a spectacular event giving the spectator a feast of visual delights and crowning the performance with unrestrained gaiety.

Literary comedies, comedies of manners, tragedies, and pastorals also contribute to the dramatic structure of Molière's plays. The attempts at realism, the introduction of contemporary themes and customs, the creation of contemporary social types appear in Molière's plays once he settled in Paris and reflect his awareness of the growing success of literary comedies. L'Ecole des femmes is set in Paris; the attempt to make the meetings between Arnolphe and Horace realistic is made; Arnolphe is a bourgeois de Paris ; and, themes like women's education and the coquetry of Parisian women are introduced. In Le Misanthrope the setting and character types like the marquis, are taken from the upper crust of Parisian society. As in most literary comedies, the gross indecencies of farce are generally lacking in Molière's plays; yet, the mood of farce persists in the famous "le" of L'Ecole des femmes and the references to

purges and colic affairs in Le Malade imaginaire.

In his productions for the court, Molière wrote pastoral pieces like Mélicerte and La Princesse d'Elide, catering to the court's taste for pastoral love themes. Yet, the comedian in him parodied the pastoral motif with Moron and his pursuit of the shepherdess in La Princesse d'Elide. In the commedia dell'arte it was not unusual to take themes from various genres and adapt and parody them on the comic stage. In some of Molière's plays we see the parody of the shepherd or the lover. The parody of the tragic monologue in L'Etourdi and Le Cocu imaginaire, the parody of Corneille's Sertorius in L'Ecole des femmes and the parody of the messenger from war in Amphitryon reflect a mastery of the monologue from tragedy. The attempt at an elevated tone and style in Dom Garcie de Navarre and Le Misanthrope reveal the comic dramatist's attempt at a more serious form of comic entertainment which would equal the prestige of the tragedian.

Another feature which recurs in the dramatic structure of Molière's plays is the existence of one central role. Throughout the analysis we have insisted that Molière's plays are an actor's plays. He wrote the main role for himself and repeatedly played those roles, especially le cocu imaginaire role, which brought him success. From L'Etourdi to Le Malade imaginaire this habit of composition never ceased. In this respect, the lengthy monologues and the preference for gesture and lazzi reveal the complex combinations that the actor, director and dramatist brought to the plays.

When a final assessment of the dramatic structure of Molière's plays is made, one can see the recurrence and influence of various dramatic genres, and various themes, techniques and devices. Molière was an artist of the theatre and the combination and development of various techniques and devices reflect that he was always attempting to create plays to succeed on stage. What we can know of Molière, the man, from the construction of his plays is little. The dramatic structure reveals that the actor understood the need to perform, the director understood the movement and mood of the plays, and the dramatist understood the creation of comic characters and dramatic situation. The various techniques and devices Molière used, his experiments with music and dance, and his versatility on stage, indicate that his first aim was to create a comic world in the theatre to amuse and to entertain.

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