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COMIC ATMOSPHERE IN SELECTED COMEDIES OF MOLIÈRE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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INTRODUCTION

No one would dispute Victor Fournel’s statement
"Toute la comédie antérieure est venue aboutir à Molière," although differences may arise as to the importance of the various pre-Molière comic traditions in shaping his theater. To appreciate the elements that make up a Molière play, it is necessary to understand the background from which it came. Rather than list the possible sources for his plays, our purpose will be to describe the evolution of comedy up to Molière’s time and show how Molière used past comic tradition to forge a theater which differs widely from that of his predecessors.

Boileau attempted to sum up the dichotomy in Molière’s theater with his "il a sans honte allié Térence à Tabarin." These two figures epitomize the dignified, elegant high comedy of the Roman stage, which Boileau admired, and the farcical tradition, which he distained; Le Misanthrope represents the Terentian side of Molière’s work, while Les Fourberies de Scapin incarnates farce. It is not that easy, however, to categorize any Molière play, as we shall see.

Molière grew up in a time when the stage offered two levels of comedy; the plays of Rotrou and Corneille are typical of the high comedy of the day, written in verse, five acts in length, and free of vulgarity; their theaters existed side by side with the comédia dell'arte, both of which were considered to be of very limited artistic potential, if not downright worthless. It was Molière's genius to have combined the best qualities of both these theaters in order to create comedies of even a higher tone than Corneille's.

The comedies of Rotrou and Corneille typify the taste of the first half of the seventeenth century. While courtiers and men of letters were admiring and writing works in the effeminate vein of d'Urfé and Sorel, the same desire for refinement dominated the stage. Hardy's tragi-comedies, typical of the complicated, heroic theater of the early seventeenth century, held sway over serious drama; his theater yielded to Corneille's tragedies when excessive, facile sentimentality was shunned. Comedy was neglected until Molière's time, and this genre is considered a minor part of the works of Rotrou and Corneille. These playwrights adopted the Spanish theater of Calderon and Lope de Vega, similar in their insouciance to rules as the baroque novels of d'Urfé, retaining the taste for chivalric actions and romanesque plots.
During the three decades preceding the establishment of Molière in Paris, there was developed, thus, a type of comedy which was distinctive of the period in which it was produced. It owed little to the Italian comedy, beside which it grew up, and still less to classic models. It did not grow out of farce, but supplanted it, ... It was produced on response to a more refined public taste which no longer took delight in the crude offerings of the farceurs, ... It goes back to ... the novels of a d'Urfé, ... 2

Molière told Boileau that he owed much to Corneille's Le Menteur, which has been chosen as typical of pre-Molière comedies, in addition to being a significant step in the development of comedy:

Je dois beaucoup au Menteur, lors-qu'il parut j'avais bien l'envie d'écrire; mais j'étais incertain de ce que j'écrirais ... le dialogue me fit voir comment causaient les honnêtes gens... sans le Menteur, j'aurais sans doute fait quelques pièces d'intrigue, l'Etourdi, le Désir; mais peut-être n'aurais-je pas fait Le Misanthrope, ...  

How much he owed to the comedies and heroic tragi-comedies of this period cannot be overstated; this comedy was an important step in the history of French comedy between Molière and medieval French farce.

This period showed little interest in the creation of original comedy, and playwrights were content to copy the

Spanish models that were then in vogue. Saint-Evremond describes the taste of his contemporaries for Spanish drama in his *Sur nos comédies excepté celles de Molière*:

Comme toute la galanterie des Espagnols est venue des Maures, il y reste que je ne sais quel goût d’Afrique trop extraordinaire pour s’accommoder à la justesse des règles. Ajoutez qu’une vieille idée de chevalerie errante, commune à toute l’Espagne tourne les esprits des cavaliers aux aventures bizarres. Les filles, de leur côté, goûtent cet air-là... aussi les deux sexes remplissent leur esprit des mêmes idées. ...  

Molière was not disinterested in this style, and his two plot comedies, although imitations of Italian plays, have much of the taste for the romanesque in them. *Dom Gargie de Navarre* comes closest in his theater to Spanish drama and it was Molière’s good fortune that his audiences did not appreciate him in the serious role of *Dom Gargie*. These plays show some of the worst faults of imitating Spanish drama; poorly motivated actions, lack of realism and conventional devices that need little poetic imagination. Molière was fortunately not at home in the theater of another land.

He learned from this theater, however, as the writing of heroic verse was to be very useful to him in later plays.

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3Quoted from V. Fournel, p. 5.
At a moment when audiences were tiring of Cornelian drama, Molière took heroic lines and put them in the mouths of ridiculous, extravagant, personages. He took Arnolphe's famous "Je suis maître, je parle; allez, obéissez," from Corneille's Sertorius.

Le Menteur also represents two aspects of ancient comedy that had an influence on every comic playwright who had ambitions towards the creation of high comedy: character and plot. Fournel calls Le Menteur a "comédie de caractère," although most critics today are not prepared to go that far. It is a question here of emphasis, as Corneille's liar is much too chivalrous: his mendacity is a sort of nuisance which he is cured of at the play's end, although it is the source of much of the play's action. To arrive at "caractère" in the usual sense of the word, Molière exaggerated his hero's behavior to the extent that his mania governs the entire movement of the play.

This is not to say that Molière copied faithfully the ancient writers of comedies of character. The influence of Aristophanes, Menander, Terence, and Plautus on French comedy is very difficult to estimate. Menander and Terence, who were appreciated for their elegance, lack of crudeness, and realistic personages, are often contrasted with the crude, and frequently obscene, Aristophanes and Plautus. Delcourt situates Molière thus: "C'est à Menandre et à
Terence was regarded as the best of the ancients and serious comic authors preferred to be likened to him; Plautus was more widely known, however, and his types were adapted repeatedly from the "Capitan," to the valet, to the parasite and pedant. Plautus' plots were more concise and easy to follow, which made his comedies better suited to the "classical unities." Rotrou directly adapted Plautus three times: L'Éménipe, Amphitryon, and Les Captifs. He further complicated the original plots, as he preferred the unreal side of Plautus' theater, which is in truth realistic and often bitter. Molière's imitations of the ancients are so different from the originals that we can say that his true sources were not classical. L'Avare is only a loose copy of Plautus' Aulularia and the influence of the play is slight; his Fourberies is much more farcical than Terence's Phormio, according to Wheatley:

The only dispute concerning the plays has been on the question of whether Molière has improved on Terence's comedy or profaned it by making of the mildly amusing Latin play an uproarious farce.  


What he borrowed from ancient comedy, his immediate predecessors had already borrowed; the New Comedy formula popularized by Menander and used by Terence and Plautus. The plot often included a jealous, possessive old man who sought to prevent his beautiful young female ward from marrying a handsome young suitor. This was a "generation gap" conflict which had serious Oedipal overtones, according to Freudian psychologists. The old man was a father image whom the young man had to defeat because he stood in the way of sexual fulfillment. Molière obviously used this plot quite frequently; L'Avaré is a perfect example of strong sexual conflict between father and son. A comedy of intrigue in a relatively pure form, but without the father-son conflict, is Le Désert amoureux. This play relies heavily on witty humor. The double entendre is common, as a situation unknown to one of the personages makes the understanding of words possible on two levels. In Le Désert, Ascagne, who has masqueraded as a boy for four acts, is now ready to declare her true sex and become Valère's wife. She is also to duel her betrothed at this point, so she declares:

Ascagne par vous va recevoir le trépas;
Mais il veut bien mourir, si sa mort nécessaire
Peut avoir maintenant de quoi vous satisfaire.

The audience must be quick to catch nuances of meanings to find the artist's humor. The result of such humor
is a tendency toward gallantry. For a play which relies on witticisms, situational humor, puns, and the like, to be successful, the author must be writing for an audience capable and willing to comprehend the ingeniousness which accompanies a gallant turn of mind. The audience need not be necessarily aristocratic but it must prefer novels of courtship to the more peasant-like beatings of farce. The bourgeoisie, desirous of climbing the social ladder, provides a good audience for such comedy.

To get back to Le Menteur, the play also manifests Corneille's penchant for complicated intrigue. Searles' article stresses the role of plot complication in pre-Molière comedy: "From Le Menteur to Molière this plot complication is an outstanding feature of comedy." This feature was not particularly dear to Terence or Plautus, but was popularized by Renaissance dramatic theorists, such as Scaliger: "Scaliger is the first theorist to define comedy as a dramatic poem filled with intrigue and full of action." Molière thus took up where Le Menteur stopped— at the threshold of the comedy of character and at the highpoint of the comedy of intrigue. What Le Menteur lacks, realism, Molière supplied in his theater, and

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7 Wheatley, p. 109.
the addition of realism by way of farce was the final step in the creation of great comedy.

The farcical tradition was present in the form of short sketches given in town squares everywhere in France and skits performed along with tragedies, as well as the commedia dell'arte, a very popular form of theater in the Renaissance era. Farce was very physical, due to many bastonnades and the stock body gestures of the comedians, called lazzzi in the commedia. The farceurs appealed strongly to the senses, or to the instantly comprehensible, rather than to the intellect, hence their theater is more primitive. Agnelet's "bêe" in La Farce de Maître Pathelin is immediately humorous, because it imitates a sound that humans do not normally utter. We laugh instantly at this "bêe" which is humorous in itself, and which is a sign of craftiness. Agnelet has tricked the trickster, Pathelin, without much intellectual machination. Farce is based on the notion of trickery per se, rather than the nuances and complications of intrigue. The plot of a farce is usually simple enough so that it does not encumber the earthy nature of its farcical contents. The humor of farce, because it originated among the lower classes, tends to be more biting, crueler, and sexually oriented. The object of ridicule in a farce is often dealt with harshly for no good reason other than a laugh at someone's expense. In
New Comedy, the old man must be deceived for the consummation of the young person's joy. If he can be cuckolded, as in Molière theater, so much the better.

Farce may be created on a higher level than that of a direct and harsh attack upon a victim. In tempering his attack, Molière relies on a subtle, intellectual style of farce. Whereas Scapin plays jokes with his stick, the entêtés of the more complex comedies trick themselves through their inability or unwillingness to be reasonable. The spectator must be astute enough to see how extreme behavior, albeit of an intellectual or verbal cast, creates a comic situation. This is where the heroism of Corneille's heroes declare their mastery over the elements, then prove that they are capable of fulfilling their claims. Molière's heroes are made comic by not realizing their inability to see the disparity between what they say and what they accomplish. Alceste does not realize that he does not practice what he preaches. Instead of speaking sincerely to Oronte in the beginning of the "sonnet scene," he yields to social convention and hides his true feelings. When he explains his love for Célimène, he must dismiss his inconsistencies in the name of "love's madness." Take away the heroic declarations of his high comedies and this process is basically no different than the farce of his early Jalouse du Barbouille. In scene
vi, we find this piece of nonsense:

Le Docteur—... vite, vite, Monsieur Gorgibus; dépêchons, évitez la proximité.

Gorgibus—Laissez-moi donc parler.

Le Docteur—Monsieur Gorgibus, touchez là; vous parlez trop; il faut que quelque autre me dise la cause de leur querelle.

Villebriquin—Monsieur le Docteur, vous saurez que...

Le Docteur—Vous êtes un ignorant, un indocile, un homme ignare de toutes les bonnes disciplines, un âne en bon français. He quoi! vous commencez la narration sans avoir fait un mot d'exorde?

Scenes involving such personages as Alceste and Le Docteur usually go nowhere, accomplish nothing. These personages contradict themselves so completely in their verbal barrages that no one can solve any problems. Their movements serve literally as "stuffing" in the play. Futile expenditure of energy is one of the most important aspects of farce in the present study. The comic element is often missed in the "high comedies," for the audience is seeking to either find the "message" or remember the plot; the absence of physical farce and gallant humor seems to imply that the play is in truth serious. Molière's own defenses of his art, such as the Lettre sur l'Imposteur, have contributed to the overemphasis accorded the utility of comedy. Comedy is useful according to the classicists
because it corrects social ills. But comedy's role in the betterment of public morality does not help in explaining its success. Theatergoers do not attend productions of Molière's plays to be edified, they do go to be entertained. Molière's statement regarding rules hits truer to the mark than could any amount of apologetics: "Je voudrais bien savoir si la grande règle de toutes les règles n'est pas de plaire. . . ." (Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, vi).

Thus, the Plautinian side of Molière's theater, the roughish valets and farcical personages, should not be overlooked; that which has kept this theater so immensely popular throughout the past three centuries is its close relationships with farce and the commedia dell'arte.

The commedia, which used no scripts, but rather performed improvisations using standardized physical movements and stock characters, as well as masks to represent these characters, appealed to a lower level of thought. The mere appearance of a personage created laughter as the audience anticipated the fun that was about to begin. Molière's earlier servants, Mascarille and Sganarelle, are very much in the tradition of both French farce and the commedia dell'arte. Mascarille wore a "little mask" and bounced about the stage, using his imagination to help his master. Sganarelle, the valet, a more carefully characterized personage, beat and was beaten as he tried to somehow wend his way through a lowly existence.
Molière’s comedies are thus situated in the main stream of comic traditions and these traditions find a culmination in his theater. The notion of “character,” or strong personality traits that govern the flow of action in a play, begins with Menander, Terence, and Plautus and is transmitted to the Renaissance as one of the ideals of comedy. Before Molière, the closest any playwright came to the ancient comedy of character was Corneille’s Le Menteur. To the ancients, as well as to the dramatic theorists, “character” was not destined to provoke much laughter; preference was given to a realistic portrayal of types in contemporary society, as opposed to the passions of tragedy, which were not taken from everyday life. Fortunately, Molière infused this quasi-serious form with poetic imagination; his “characters” are tempered by the heroic diction of Cornelian tragedy and the vigor of medieval farce.

Alceste begins as a “character”: a serious dramatic persona whose motivation stems from certain fixed personality traits; his “type,” the misanthropist, may be seen in society, however infrequently. His realistic portrayal is colored by his exaggerated speech, and he becomes further complicated by being enamoured with a frivolous coquette. He is heroic on one hand, but ridiculous on the other, because of his inconsistencies. The final touch is rather subtle but necessary for comedy; he is to be
punished for his inconsistencies. Time and again in an almost mechanical manner, he is frustrated and tricked by his contemporaries. Molière is indebted to farce for this touch of vigor and liveliness. For some, Alceste’s troubles teach them the dangers of trying to rise above society, or escape the norm, or some similar lesson. To most, however, Le Misanthrope has no lessons to offer; it is a forceful, yet amusing, portrayal of the futilities encountered in everyday existence. From many comedy traditions Molière has forged the story of Alceste’s search for social intercourse free from human failings. This study will show how Molière’s dramaturgy developed from the traditions discussed above and how these traditions temper the play being treated; by manipulating all he had learned from his predecessors he was able to create comedies which vary widely from play to play within his own theater.

Each play has an individuality all its own, an atmosphere which removes it from every other comedy. Molière’s plays have often been compared to Balzac’s novels on the basis of their highly distinctive atmospheres. Mornet’s Molière contains this observation on atmosphere: “Molière crée une atmosphère qui varie d’ailleurs avec chaque pièce: élégante et seulement souriante avec Le Misanthrope, etc.”\(^6\) The atmosphere of a comedy is determined in part

by an interplay of the comic traditions discussed above.

The six plays treated in this study were chosen for their variations in atmosphere. To simplify the explanations of this selection, I will characterize the atmosphere in terms of the plot-farce content. This basis of comparison is only one of four elements of composition to be studied. However, it is this element which shows the greatest degree of development in Molière's dramaturgical art, and the plays were chosen to show this development.

He began with the comedy of intrigue for his first full length plays in poetry. Le Désert amoureux has been chosen to represent plays in the gallant, plot-oriented theater of pre-Molière seventeenth century France. There is a minimum of farce in this play, but these moments will be studied closely as a comparison to the abundant plot comedy. The first comedy which successfully and fully unites plot-based humor with farce is L'Ecole des femmes. The theme of cuckoldry, typical of sexually-oriented farce, is blended with plot-based humor which characterizes comedy of intrigue. The manner by which Molière greatly reduced the humor which is created by plot is the distinguishing characteristic of Le Tartuffe. Both styles of humor can be found, but farce, for various reasons, tends to greatly dominate plot. Le Misanthrope is the final step in the elimination of intrigue. By using Alceste's bizarre
behavior as the basis for nearly every scene in the play, Molière succeeds in creating the perfect intellectual farce. Scene after scene is a model of finity. Alceste ends where he begins, with the same convictions, the same marital status, etc. There are no scenes which contain the humor of intrigue because Alceste refuses to let events affect him. After Le Misanthrope, Molière's theater reflects the diversity of all the plays which proceeded it. Le Bourgeois gentilhomme typifies the subtle, less controversial plays of his post-Misanthrope career. Here Molière displays a variation of the New Comedy formula. He tones down the aggressiveness of his farce, making it more gently derisive, blending it with the comédie-ballet. The simplicity of plot in this play makes it possible for Molière to indulge in pure farce of the most elemental level, yet gracious enough to set to music and dance. Les Femmes savantes was chosen because it was destined by Molière to be a play as high in tone as Le Misanthrope or Le Tartuffe. Curiously, the play turns out quite differently; this is ascribable to its being written in this less controversial period. Plot becomes more important than farce, not in the sense of complication, but only in that the question of marriage dominates the nonsensicality of farce. Whereas the marriage question in Le Misanthrope yields to the bitter, more rhythmical chastisement of Alceste, Les Femmes savantes tells more of a story, that of the marriage.
The atmosphere of Molière's theater has pursued a course which passes through three major groups; the first is the atmosphere of witty, inoffensive comedy of intrigue, the second atmosphere is that of intellectual, tendential farce, and the third returns to a more benign level, while remaining grounded in farce. The plays which were chosen for study represent stages of development of these atmospheres.

Each play will be studied according to four elements of composition which will be called "will," "tension," "transition," and the previously discussed plot-farce distribution. "Will" is present when a personage decides or has decided that he must act in a given way. Another personage may not agree with his decision, and the conflict between the two wills becomes of great importance in determining the atmosphere of the play. Le Misanthrope and Le Bourgeois gentilhomme serve as extremes in this paper in terms of will. Alceste's desires are never fulfilled in any respect. On the contrary, Jourdain's wishes are gratified, or so he thinks, with few exceptions.

The confrontation of wills leads to a distribution of an element necessary to every theatrical performance, tension. Tension results from conflicts which arise in the interplay of wills. It is necessary to involve the audience to some extent in the fates of the various personages; the building of tension, as well as its release,
must thus be ordered to capture the spectator's attention. *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, because it presents the fulfillment of each personage's desires in a logical sequence, is the play which contains the least tension of any play chosen. The heightened tension of *Le Misanthrope* is caused by a step by step series of frustrations which drive Alceste to withdrawal. Other varieties of tension are created in the various groupings.

The poet must also provide effective transition in the ordering of the rhythm of tension. When a personage announces his intention to act, the author must show the results of his announcement. If Jourdain declares that his daughter will become ennobled, the play must deal with this problem in some sequence. If the sequence is logical and unfolds without major interruption, as it does in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, a certain atmosphere is created. If, as in *Le Tartuffe*, events are in no way predictable, transition will be more difficult to achieve, thus the atmosphere created is quite different. Each scene must be made to fit in with scenes that precede it and those that follow it. Failure to do this would give an audience, especially an audience conversant with the principles of dramaturgy, the feeling that the poet is negligent in his composition. It is true that Molière did not profess adherence to rules, but nonetheless his plays observe the rule of *liaison des scènes* with few exceptions.
The fourth element is the juxtaposition of farce and plot. The first three compositional elements are affected by the type of comedy Molière uses. The playwright, after establishing a conflict of wills, linking the parts of the comedy together, and distributing the flow of tension in his play, must order a comic rhythm which is appropriate to the first three elements. When the play calls for movement, usually leading to the consummation of a love affair between young lovers, humor tends toward gallantry and intrigue. The entrance of an oncé signals the beginning of farce. These scenes cause the play to stand still because problems cannot be solved when, for example, an Arnolphe is in control. Variations and combinations of farce and plot are found in each play and the resulting degree of complexity helps to determine its total atmosphere. The complexity of farce in Le Misanthrope, for example, creates a play whose ties to the comic genre are difficult to discern.

When one or another of these four elements is altered significantly, its atmosphere is naturally affected. The following plays may have similarities in terms of some elements. Liaison in Le Misanthrope and Le Bourgeois gentilhomme is similar for example, and the difference between the two lies in the treatment of will, tension, and farce. Le Dépité amoureux differs from Le Misanthrope.
on the basis of liaison and farce. Each play chosen presents qualities which characterize Molière's theater, a theater which possesses a great variety of comic atmospheres.
CHAPTER I

LE DÉPIT AMOUREUX

Molière brought two full-length comedies in verse with him when he came to Paris in 1658. These plays, L'Etourdi and Le Désert amoureux, are comedies of intrigue adapted literally from Italian comedies, L'Inavvertito by Beltramé furnished the plot for L'Etourdi, and L'Interesse by Nicolò Secchi served as a model for Le Désert amoureux. Because the comedy of intrigue had been in favor for many years in France, Italy, and Spain, audiences in Paris found it easy to appreciate Molière's adaptations.

Both L'Etourdi and Le Désert amoureux contain an imbroglio or complicated plot, the unfolding of which furnishes their major dramatic interest. The intrigue of L'Etourdi is somewhat less complicated than that of Le Désert amoureux because most of its incidents simply form a series of contretemps; the ingenious plans of the servant Mascarille to procure a young lady's hand for his master are constantly undone by his impetuous master's bungling efforts to help him. Le Désert amoureux has a more complicated plot, which unfolds slowly, taking nearly the full five acts to bring all the facts to light.
The first act of Le Désert amoureux is Eraste’s; he declares his love for Lucile, is elated when he receives a letter from her which shows that his love is reciprocated, then is desolate when Valère discloses that he has secretly married Lucile. Eraste tells Lucile’s servant, Marinette, that he has had enough of her mistress’s deceit.

Act II introduces Ascagne, Lucile’s “brother,” who reveals two secrets; the first is the surprising revelation that she has been masquerading as a boy for many years because her mother, fearful of her husband’s wrath were he to discover that his only son and heir died in his absence, replaced the deceased son with Ascagne, the daughter of a neighboring shopkeeper. The second secret is stranger yet: One night, believing himself to be in Lucile’s presence, Valère fell in love with Ascagne. Ascagne had arranged to marry Valère without his knowing the identity of his bride. The inevitable problem now arises when Lucile, upbraided by Eraste for her “secret marriage,” decides to consent to Valère’s courtship. Ascagne attempts in vain to dissuade her sister.

The remainder of Act II and the first half of Act III presents Albert’s (Lucile’s and Ascagne’s father) efforts to comprehend what is happening in his household. He is aware that things are not normal somehow, but he is not enlightened by Polidor, Valère’s father, until III, iv.
Confusion reigns when Valère tells Albert that he has married his daughter Lucile, and Lucile swears that Valère is only trying to win her hand by forceful stratagem.

Ascagne opens Act IV on a sorrowful note. She fears that Albert will discover her true identity, disinherit her, and leave her dowryless. She is despondent enough to mention suicide. Eraste then meets Lucile in the famous "dépit scene," IV, iii, which results in their reconciliation.

Mascarille's monologue opens Act V. He is to help Valère kidnap Lucile, but his cowardice causes him much anxiety. He too mentions suicide. Valère and his cohorts arrive to discuss the kidnapping. Ascagne then happens upon the stage to reveal yet another surprise; she is in truth the daughter of Albert, who had exchanged her for the shopkeeper's son. When the son died, his wife restored Ascagne to her rightful place, albeit in the guise of the deceased boy. Polidor has found out that his son has married Ascagne instead of Lucile and accepts her as daughter-in-law because he approves of her cleverness. Valère has offended him by marrying secretly, but his son has been duped in turn by Ascagne. He wants to take advantage of Valère's confusion to play a joke on him; he tells his son that Ascagne wants to challenge him to a duel. After an amusing confrontation, Ascagne tells Valère that they are man and wife. Valère does not seem to
mind, since it was Ascagne who charmed him many nights ago, rather than Lucile.

Throughout the play Lucile's servant, Marinette, and Eraste's valet, Gros-René, have been falling in and out of each other's good graces in tempo with their masters. The curtain falls with the announcement of their betrothal. Only Valère's servant, Mascarille, is left brideless. Thus, the play closes on the gay note of three marriages.

The plot, although very conventional in its complications and frivolity, incarnates most of the qualities of the comedy of intrigue, with important modifications. It is one of the least innovative plays in Molière's theater, but it is interesting to see what his conceptions of comedy were as he began his career as a playwright.

Will: The reign of love's capriciousness

The play differs widely from the plays of the later years because of the changeable nature of will among the leading personages. Each personage's desires are greatly altered by external events—a letter affects Lucile's intent to favor Eraste, and she suddenly switches to Valère:

Mon Frère, vous voyez une métamorphose; Je veux chérir Valère après tant de fierté; Et mes vœux maintenant tournent de son coté.

We must agree with his sister's appraisal (II, iii) of this "métamorphose":

Lucile has taken no efforts to find out why Eraste wrote such a letter. If she had learned the truth, however, the surprises and confusion of the scene involving Albert, Valère, and herself, III, xiii, would have been lost. The decision to suddenly favor Valère makes Lucile's motivation seem quite artificial and arbitrary. Eraste's actions seem unfounded also because he never confronts Lucile after he is led to believe that Valère has married her.

The audience is thus asked to "suspend its disbelief" and accept these situations, whether they are lifelike or not. And we must admit the necessity for artistic license, especially in the genre of comedy, where anything is permitted as long as it creates humor. Yet the humor created from these situations does not materialize until III, xiii (the scene of confusion between Albert, Lucile, and Valère) before which the spectator must occupy himself with following a complicated plot. Molière provides dramatic interest in the form of surprise rather than attempting to create a realistic atmosphere.

Ascagne's role is important because her marriage to Valère, as well as her identity, furnish most of the ingredients for the imbroglio. Why does she not confess everything and end the confusion? She is afraid of losing her dowry--again a recourse to a stock, comedy-of-intrigue plot device. Such motivation stems from her love interests
rather than reflecting a genuine love of money, as is the case with Harpagon. To Ascagne, money is merely of necessity for her true concern, her marriage with Valère:

Voudra-t-il avouer pour épouser une fille
Qu'il verra sans appui de bien et de famille?

When Ascagne learns that she is entitled (IV, i) to her rank in Albert's family (V, iv) the imbroglio unfolds rapidly. The question of marriage is an unending source for plot complications.

To the gallant dialogue of these young lovers, Molière has also added a group of servants who imitate, on a lower level, their masters' courtly behavior. The triangle Gros-René-Marinette-Mascarille corresponds to the triangle Eraste-Valère-Lucile. Without the trio of servants the play would be a comedy of intrigue in the purest form, but the servants add a new dimension to the play, that of farce. Their role in the creation of farce will be discussed later in this chapter. They also participate in the gallantry of the play. Whenever the young lovers, Eraste, Lucile, and Valère play the elegant game of courtship their servants speak in these scenes on the same gallant level. Marinette, for example, gives Eraste a billet doux from Lucile which elicits this gallant exchange:

Eraste
Quand puis-je rendre grâce à cet ange adorable?

Marinette
Travaillez à vous rendre un père favorable.
(I, iii)
When Marinette and Gros-René court one another, however, the vocabulary is less gallant and marriage seems to involve less complications:

Marinette
Et nous, que dirons-nous aussi de notre amour? 
Tu ne m'en parles point.

Gros-René
Un hymen qu'on souhaite
Entre gens comme nous, est chose bientôt faite. 
Je te veux; me veux-tu de même?

(I, iii)

If they desire to marry, it is done, or so they think. Unfortunately, their actions imitate that of their masters and Gros-René turns on Marinette after Eraste delivers his invective against Lucile:

Marinette
Gros-René, dis-moi donc quelle mouche le pique?

Gros-René
M'oses-tu bien encor parler, femelle inique?

(II, v)

Their behavior, although farcical, truly reflects the rapidly changing behavior of the gallant lovers in this play. Since Gros-René and Marinette are as inclined to change as Eraste and Lucile, their scenes complicate the plot even further.

Representing the older generation are the two fathers, Albert and Polidor. Rather than playing decisive roles in advancing the plot, they merely make their appearances to bestow their blessings on the happy couples. Polidor does act as the instigator of the joke played on Valère, but
neither he nor Albert have any important function other than to attempt to understand what is happening in their families and to consent to everything once they do understand. Their roles are part of the plot-oriented trappings of the play and their unimportance emphasizes the domination of the stage by the young lovers. These verses by Frosine illustrate the ease with which she and Ascagne have led Albert to consent to what is transpiring:

Nous avons ajusté si bien les intérêts,
mais si prudemment
Son esprit à l'accommodement,
(V, iv)

This accommodation has taken place off stage. Many of the plot details have been similarly revealed, rather than acted out on stage. The spectator is again expected to accept the fact that both Albert and Polidor have welcomed Ascagne as daughter and daughter-in-law, respectively, without the least hesitation.

We are in the world of "love's capriciousness"; whatever accommodation the lovers reach suffices to end the play on a gay note. Molière has adapted an Italian play, accenting the feminine roles, making the males subservient to their wishes. The influence of chivalrous Spanish comedy in pre-Molière French comedy makes itself felt in the works of the "poet of will"; Molière has not yet found the formula which will give him success. He is still experimenting, and although this play has many faults, most
notably Ascagne's complicated narrations, the "dépit scenes" as well as the farcical passages involving the servants, show the struggling playwright's emerging skills.

The capricious wills of Le Dépit belong to a stage in comedy that held sway during Corneille's time. This comedy relies on ingenuity in plot construction and a flair for wit that is associated with the aesthetics of the baroque. The audience for such comedy must be willing to accept literary devices rather than seeking profound psychological insights. No great observations on human nature can be made from Le Dépit, as the playwright's omniscience is all too evident; this is not uncommon in comedy, generally speaking, as comedy demands a certain amount of detachment to keep it from becoming serious. Yet the creation of the great high comedy that is to follow will lead Molière away from conventional comedy devices into the area of realism.

Tension: Harassment along the road to marriage

The complexity of plot also extends its influence into the sphere of tension. Moments of tension arise as a result of plot situations. Rather than creating tension through confrontations of personages whose wills are in opposition, Molière creates tension through the influence of incidents outside of the personages' control. Whenever a situation becomes too grave, the playwright simply reveals a new plot element which alleviates the problem.
He creates crescendoes and diminuendoes of tension throughout the play with deft ease.

Such ease is evident in Act I, an act whose transition (discussed in the next section) provides the smooth unfolding of a diminuendo-crescendo of tension. Eraste begins on a note of tension, a beginning common to the comedy of intrigue. This sort of beginning quickly orients the public to the center of interest, the tribulations of young lovers. Convention dictates that their troubles be not too serious, so Eraste sets the tone of the play at a "medium" level. He is neither anxiety-ridden nor content; rather he seeks assurance that his love is requited and that Lucile does not favor Valère:

Veux-tu que je te die? Une atteinte secrète
Ne laisse point mon âme en une bonne assiette.
(I, i)

The arrival of Lucile's letter dissipates his tension, but his joy is short-lived. Valère and Mascarille upset his tranquillity and begin the chagrin of love, that gently disturbing tension which pervades this play. Lover's chagrin is only a temporary ripple in their courtship, for they are destined to be married. They manifest their suitability for one another because it takes a plot element (Valère's misinformed state) to set them at odds; Lucile's letter establishes the note of accord that will be found again after the confusion has been cleared up.
Act II also begins on a note of tension which is of a medium pitch. Ascagne's fortunes must either rise or fall. Since her fortunes are dependent upon so many variables, such as Albert's future reaction to her question-able birthright, Molière can keep his audience suspended indefinitely by altering these variables. Tension remains constant in the next scene, the discussion between Valère and Ascagne, because Ascagne declines to enlighten Valère. The ensuing scene increases tension because another variable, Lucile's rapport with both Eraste and Valère, has changed. Tension begins a crescendo among the young lovers which will not be dissipated until the "dépit scene," then the dénouement.

The affair between Eraste and Lucile has now been thrown into full conflict. Lucile declares: "C'en est fait; c'est ainsi que je puis me venger." Lucile's resolution to pursue Valère of course threatens Ascagne's hopes; it is apparent that Ascagne could tell Lucile of her marriage to Valère, but she refrains because of another factor--her tenuous position in Albert's family. A lowly shopkeeper's daughter cannot marry the aristocratic Valère, which leaves the variables of social class and dowry to be settled.

Albert enters in a state of disquietude; he is worried about Ascagne's behavior and he wants counsel from his (her) tutor Métaphraste. At this point the tension
of intrigue is replaced by the tension of low farce. By not considering Albert's domestic concerns, Métaphraste irritates his patron, even if the irritation is slight. Métaphraste is endowed with the ability to speak at great length without saying a thing. He entertains the spectator, who is quite amused by this piece of nonsense, but vexes Albert, whose only thoughts are of Ascagne. Thus, Albert sends Métaphraste fleeing with his bell, rather than attempting to deal with him; this type of farce is simply a pause in the play. The tension between Albert and Métaphraste is as insignificant as the tension of the plot scenes, because Métaphraste is unwilling to communicate with Albert, and Albert chooses to reciprocate. However, communication between these two is not necessary to keep the play moving. In later plays Molière will create genuine tension through farce by putting his Métaphrastes in a position of power. The farce created by future "entêtés" will also be better related to stage business. In Le Dépit amoureux Métaphraste only irritates Albert because his prattle has nothing to do with the problems of any of the central personages, that is, the young lovers.

The meeting of Albert and Polidor illustrates the facility with which tension can be created in the comedy of intrigue. Albert's first concerns relate to money. During his conversation with Polidor he is relieved to
find that Polidor is not interested in his money, only to be thunderstruck when told of his daughter's marriage. He sums up the movement of his agitation in this aside:

O Dieu! quelle méprise! et qu'est-ce qu'il m'apprend?
Je rentre ici d'un trouble en un autre aussi grand.

(III, iv)

Albert is manipulated like a puppet, taken from the frying pan to the fire without a moment's respite. Polidor is moved by Albert's morose exit: "Je prends part à sa honte, et son deuil m'attendrit." Tension spreads rapidly from personage to personage as Polidor scolds Valère, who scolds Mascarille, etc.

The scene between Valère and Lucile is a good example of this un-serious, ethereal tension. Valère stands aside as Mascarille and Lucile exchange verbal thrusts. Lucile's slapping of Mascarille shows the surface quality of this tension, as neither combattant can seriously wound his opponent. Everything is on the level of irritation, especially in Lucile's case; she knows that her problem is temporary because Valère cannot possibly prove that she is his wife. Mascarille, barely involved in the conflict emotionally, reacts comically to the slap: "Je crois qu'elle me vient de donner un soufflet." The ensuing argument between Mascarille and Albert is another verbal skirmish which merely adds to the general vexation.
The beginning scenes of Act IV present everyone's fortunes at their lowest ebb. Ascagne is ready to abandon herself to despair in the first scene: "Si rien ne peut m'aider, il faut donc que je meure." Rather than turning to someone else to vent her emotions, she keeps her inner turmoil essentially within herself. She does speak to Frosonne, who eventually helps her, but her suffering throughout the play remains unknown to the other principals until the dénouement. The scene ends typically for Ascagne as she and Frosonne leave without speaking to the personages of the next scene, Eraste and Gros-René.

Some time has passed since these two last appeared on stage and events in the interim have made a big difference in their fortunes. Eraste and Gros-René have both attempted to regain their mistress' favor, but to little avail:

Eraste
L'ingrate m'abandonne à mon jaloux transport
Et rejette de moi message, écrit, abord.

(IV, ii)

We have returned to tension caused by dépit, lovers' spite, which we have not seen since Lucile's decision to favor Valère. This reprise of lovers' spite sets the stage for the "dépit scene" which is to follow. Everyone's fortunes are ready for the upswing which occurs in Acts IV and V.

The "dépit scene" incarnates the gallantry that has characterized this play. Eraste falls victim to his own
loquaciousness, raising the suspicion that perhaps
"milord" doth protest too much":

Hé bien, madame; hé bien; ils [her vous]
seront satisfaits;
Je romps avec vous, et j'y romps pour jamais,
Puisque vous le voulez; que je perde la vie
Lorsque de vous parler je reprendrai envie:

Lucile
Tant mieux; c'est m'obliger,

Eraste
Non, non, n'ayez pas peur
Que je fausse parole:

Eraste, of course, talks until he reaches complete illogic:

Lucile
... par la raison que nous rompons ensemble.
Et que cela n'est plus de saison, ce me semble.

Eraste
Nous rompons?

They reconcile on the grounds that neither wanted to
separate in the first place.

Act V shows us a desolate Mascarille. This desola-
tion is a part of his characterization; he reflects ten-
sion, however, when we scarcely expect it. In this scene
he seems a rather morose personage indeed after his many
mirthful escapades; his mention of death provides a mea-
sure of depth of characterization to his monologue:

Quand je viens à songer, moi qui me suis si cher,
Qu'il ne faut que deux doigts d'un misérable fer
Dans le corps pour vous mettre un humain dans
la bière,
Je suis scandalisé d'une étrange manière,
- Mais tu seras armé de pic en cap, - Tant pis,
J'en serais moins léger à gagner le taillis; ...
(V, i)
Rather than repeating the entirely carefree, crafty Mascarille of L'Ecoutard, who resembles the valet of the commedia dell'arte or Latin rogues from Terence or Plautus, this Mascarille reflects the play's affinity with Spanish comedy. Like the cowardly gracioso type, Mascarille would rather leave the swordplay to his master, Valère. This vacillation between duty and cowardice adds another quality of tension; truly Le Désert is a patchwork of comedy traditions that reflects Molière's tinkerings and efforts to find his own style.

After Mascarille's interlude, Ascagne's fortunes take a turn for the better in the final scene. Polidor prevents tension from developing by assuring Ascagne that Valère will accept her:

Que je vous en excuse, et tienne mon fils heureux; Quand il saura l'objet de ses soins amoureux, Vous valez tout un monde, et c'est moi qui l'assure. Mais le voici, prenons plaisir de l'aventure. (V, v)

Thus the scene will be a joke on Valère, who is expected to take it graciously. His gallant acceptance of fate leaves the scene rather lifeless; the appendage of the servants' affair leads to a final crescendo of tension which is on the farcical level.

Mascarille refuses to duel, but he alludes to Marianne's fickleness. After Gros-René promises fidelity, she reciprocates, thus dissipating the final note of discord.
Transition: The dictates of plot complication

The comedy of intrigue is characterized by the subordination of all aspects of dramaturgy to plot. The plot must unfold slowly to hold the spectator's attention. The ordering of the play is important because plot elements must unfold according to a predetermined story. Ascagne, the only well-informed one of all the personages, often appears upon the stage to reveal more plot elements that are necessary to the sense of the play, then she vanishes. When a personage is not necessary for the continuation of the plot, he drops from sight; Eraste disappears completely between Act I and IV. Again the personage has little interest in himself, as it is his importance to the plot which keeps him on stage. In his later comedies, Molière lessens the importance of plot as certain personages begin to dominate the stage.

The presence of Eraste in every scene of Act I insures effective transition throughout the act with a minimum of purely explanatory verse. Each personage's movements, while introducing plot elements, have a rapport with Eraste, and thus appear natural. Molière presents Gros-René, Marinette, Valère, and Mascarille, all in dialogue with Eraste. The entrances, all "by chance," are

Va, va petit mari, ne crains rien de ma foi,
Les douceurs ne feront que blanchir contre moi,
Et je te dirai tout.

(V, xiii)
unannounced, that is, there have been no indications that they are supposed to arrive; yet there is logic in their arrival. They all form a part of the two love triangles important to the plot--Eraste-Lucile-Valère and Gros-René-Marinette-Mascarille.

Eraste describes his apprehensions over Lucile’s love and the menace of Valère in I, i. Near the end of the scene Gros-René brings up Marinette’s name to contrast their relationship to the relationship between Eraste and Lucile. Scarcely has he spoken of Marinette when she enters. Thus begins scene ii.

Valère’s name is dropped throughout the first two scenes, so that the announcement by Eraste that "Valère vient à nous" is of little surprise. Valère exits without having told Eraste of his marriage; this is left to Mascarille who happens upon the scene. Marinette enters completely unannounced to begin the delivery of a message, a task which justifies the entrance of any servant. She begins quite simply: "Je viens vous dire que . . . ." This last scene assures the symmetry of Act I; upon Eraste’s temporary downfall he chastises Lucile in the presence of Marinette, after which Gros-René follows his master’s lead. First Eraste lashes out: "Oses-tu me parler, ñme double et traitresse?" Then Gros-René echoes: "M’oses-tu bien encore parler, femelle inique?" Both master and servant find
themselves at odds with their mistresses.

Complications in Act II give rise to a greater number of problems. This has partially to do with the quantity of personages who make their first appearance in this act. Interest is diffused among Ascagne, then Lucile, finally Albert. Ascagne's secrets are revealed in the first scene, a scene which becomes tedious because nothing occurs other than the delivery of explanatory verse. After she reveals that she is Valère's wife, he suddenly appears. His exit shortly before the end of II, ii sets the stage for Lucile's entrance, which begins II, iii. Attention now centers on Lucile, who explains her switch to Valère. Valère, who believes himself married to Lucile, exits, since the Valère-Lucile confrontation is to take place in Act III. This renders his departure necessary, yet we tend to feel a "swinging door" effect with personages beginning to come and go in a highly arbitrary fashion. After Ascagne exits, Lucile and Marinette continue to discourse on her "metamorphosis." Albert then enters, and sends Lucile to find Ascagne's tutor; attention now shifts to Ascagne. The scene between Albert and Métaphraste is an interlude having little to do with the plot.

The presence of Albert or Polidor in each scene of Act III assures an improvement in transition. After Mascarille's brief monologue, he announces Polidor's visit.
to Albert. Albert fears that Polidor has come to collect money, whereas Polidor, who has come in truth to smooth over the marriage between Lucile and Valère, fears Albert's wrath. After Albert is misinformed on the current state of matrimony, attention shifts to Valère who must feel the brunt of paternal choler. Polidor scolds Valère, who in turn scolds Mascarille. Each of these encounters forms a progression of scoldings; Albert-Polidor, Polidor-Valère, Valère-Mascarille, which is followed by a scolding of Albert-Valère and finally Lucile arrives to admonish Valère. Mascarille proceeds to argue with Albert after Lucile's exit. The final scene leaves Valère fuming over his rude treatment. Plot unfolds more smoothly in this act because no new plot elements have been added, and Molière is at last profiting from existing plot in order to create humor. The inevitable confrontation of Valère and Lucile (III, ix) which occurs in Albert's presence, capitalizes on the confusion over whom Valère has married.

Entrances and exits, as ever, are not justified or explained verbally. The logic of the situations, however, suffices to justify the movements of personages. Having just slapped Mascarille's face, Lucile exits to end III, x on a corporeal note. Everyone is left angered, save Ascagne, whose troubles are graver still.
Ascagne opens Act IV with more information necessary to the plot; dowry is her latest concern. This consideration, which Ascagne brings to light somewhat late, now keeps her from enlightening everyone. Frosine remarks, justifiably: "Mais ces réflexions devaient venir plus tôt." The scene ends with an indication from Frosine that she will help solve the problem.

Eraste chances by after his long absence of two acts, a rather long absence for a personage who was important enough to occupy the entire first act. After a scene of rather sophisticated discourse on the nature of woman by Gros-René, the "dépít scene" begins. This scene is well-prepared because Gros-René's réflexions in IV, ii were to have shorn up Eraste's resistance to Lucile. Lucile arrives in an obstinate mood for the game of "love's chagrin." Following the reconciliation of Lucile and Eraste, Gros-René and Marinette make up in a much less elegant manner in IV, iv. Two centers of interest have attracted attention in this act: Ascagne's precarious position in Albert's family and the affairs of Eraste and Gros-René. The "dépít scenes" leave only the marriage of Ascagne to Valère unresolved.

The first three scenes of Act V revolve around the kidnapping of Lucile. Valère and his cohorts Mascarille and La Rapière banty about notions of gallantry and
cowardice which are ended by Valère's announcement:

Ascagne vient ici; laissons-le--il faut attendre
Quel parti de lui-même il récoudra de prendre.
(V, iii)

Ascagne enters suddenly for her final disclosure: she
is Dorothée, not Ascagne, and becomes eligible for both
dowry and marriage to Valère. Each scene now adds per­
sonages to build for the final scene which includes the ten
principals. Scene V, v sets Polidor on stage to give his
blessing to Dorothée-Ascagne's marriage to Valère. He
also proposes the pleasantry to be played on his son:
Valère and his wife will duel.

The final scene is typical of classical stage tradi­
tion: all the principals reunite to add their final touches
to the dénouement. Valère and Dorothée are at last be­
trothed, everyone adds his blessing and Mascarille resigns
himself to celibacy.

The plot of Le Dépit amoureux, highly episodic yet
logical in the presentation of its episodes, requires many
verses that are entertaining only because they complicate
the imbroglio. Ascagne appears from time to time only to
spread her involved story throughout the play; her scenes,
scenes necessary to the ordering of the play for the most
part, are timed to correspond to the movements of other
personages. When the movement of personages and the struc­
turing of scenes revolve around the disclosure of a web of
secrets, it is difficult for the playwright to take advantage of whatever plot has been revealed to create humor. The use of plot to create humor will be discussed shortly. Suffice it to say that the notion of dowry in IV, i is seemingly added for no reason other than to keep the plot running smoothly. No scenes follow to take advantage of this complication, such as a scene between Valère and Ascagne on the importance of money or possibly between Ascagne and Albert on the inheritance of the estate. The problem of dowry disappears for six scenes. After the kidnapping project, which occupies the interim, Ascagne and Frosine enter to resolve this problem. The events which are strung together seem to have little interrelationship; this string of adventures needlessly occupies the spectator's attention seemingly exists for itself. In later plays Molière will include events calculated only to create comic situations, with little regard for plot machinations. The importance of transition diminishes as the plot becomes less dominant.

Plot and Farce: The rule of gallantry over popular humor

Humor in the comedy of intrigue tends toward the romanesque: gallant, refined, and literary, composed of banterings that center around young lovers. The principal personages in this play all engage in this type of humor, which will be referred to as romanesque comedy. Molière
added passages to *L'Intéresse* which contain little romanesque comedy; the spectator has little trouble identifying farcical passages because of the names of personages who participate in farce: Mascarille, Marinette, and Gros-René. Farce can be further distinguished from romanesque comedy on the bases of movement and subject matter. Plot serves to maintain a steady progression of events which lead from exposition to the dénouement. Farcical passages do not aid in advancing the completion of the play; the play stands still during these passages however lively the stage business may be. In terms of subject matter, the "romanesque" relies on situations in the plot to create humor, whereas farce is based on more down-to-earth subject matter, such as sex and the body. *Le Désit aimoureux* contains both these aspects of farce. The nonsense of Météphrases's scene forms a lull in the completion of the intrigue, whereas the badinage between Gros-René, Marinette, and Mascarille in the final scene is based on the specter of cuckoldry.

The first scene is amusing only because of Gros-René's presence. He adds his pragmatic reflections to his master's gallant language, thereby creating comedy through contrast. Gros-René knows that his loves will follow the same course as his master's, but he does not like his master's gallant perspective:
Le chagrin me paraît une incommode chose;
Je n'en prends point pour moi sans bonne et
juste cause,
Et même à mes yeux cent sujets d'en avoir
S'offrent le plus souvent, que je ne veux pas voir.
Avec vous en amour je cours même fortune,
Celle que vous aurez ne doit être commune:

Gros-René's practicality throughout the play does little
more than add the peasant perspective of situations to the
plot. He does not help advance the plot, therefore he
creates farce. Eraste worries over appearances, and Va-
lère's confident demeanor disturbs him:

Valère enfin, pour être un amant rebuté,
Montre depuis un temps trop de tranquillité.

Gros-René, on the other hand, worries so little about his
rivals that even their kissing Marinette does not disturb
him:

Que tantôt Marinette endure qu'à son aise
Jodelet par plaisir la caresse et la baise.

He displays a coarseness that mocks lover's chagrin in
favor of "he who laughs last laughs best." This is no
laughing matter for Eraste.

Mascarille and Gros-René together provoke farce be-
fore getting down to the business of plot. This piece of
nonsense has the qualities of a vaudeville dialogue:

Gros-René
Où tend Mascarille à cette heure?
Que fait-il? revient-il? va-t-il? ou s'il demeure?
Mascarille
Non, je ne reviens pas, car je n'ai pas été;
Je ne vais pas aussi, car je suis arrêté;
Et je ne demeure point, car tout de ce pas même
Je prétends m'en aller.
(I, iv)

Such an exchange has nothing to do with plot transactions and the sense of the play would not suffer were it left out completely. It is literally "stuffing" whose lack of forward motion in all respects creates farce.

Very little comedy arises from the plot, until II, ii, although many elements in the plot have been revealed at this point. But in II, ii Molière takes advantage of Ascagne's disguise as she and Valère discuss what their relationship would be were she a girl. This exchange is replete with the gallantry and badinage of plot-based humor:

Ascagne
Je disais que Valère
Aurait, si j'étais fille, un peu trop su me plaire,
Et que, si je faisais tous les vœux de son cœur,
Je ne tarderais guère à faire son bonheur.

Valèbre
Ces protestations ne coûtent pas grand'chose,
Alors qu'à leur effet un pareil si s'oppose;
Mais vous seriez bien pris, si quelque événement
Allait mettre à l'épreuve un si doux compliment.
(II, ii)

Ascagne has asked what would appear a rather unusual question, yet considering her unlikely situation (disguised as a boy while married to Valère) the question takes on a novel air: Valère, gallant and polite, finally acquiesces, agreeing to return Valère's "friendship":

Je n'avais jamais vu ce scrupule jaloux;  
Mais, tout nouveau qu'il est, ce mouvement m'oblige,  
Et je vous fais ici tout l'aveu qu'il exige.

Because this request is "tout nouveau," novel, in effect romanesque, Valère agrees to it, not wanting to offend the "delicate" Ascagne. Valère also may want to use this bond of friendship to advance his fortunes with Lucile, since Ascagne is supposed to be Lucile's brother. Neither Valère nor Ascagne can reveal his secret at this time, but this dialogue moves us closer to the important disclosures which follow; thus, the meaning of this dialogue lies in the preliminary meeting of two personages whose secrets will later bind them together. Ascagne prophesies future developments:

Ascagne
Vous saurez mon secret quand je saurai le vôtre.

Valère
J'ai besoin pour cela de l'aveu de quelque autre.

Ascagne
Ayez-le donc; et lors, nous expliquant nos voeux,  
Nous verrons qui tiendra mieux parole des deux.

Little humor occurs until Métaphraste's entrance in II, vi. There is no trouble in recognizing "le Docteur" of La Jalousie du barbouillé, only this time endowed with a name. The same style of farce dominates this passage:

Métaphraste
Parlez, courage; au moins, je vous donne audience.  
Vous ne vous plaindrez pas de mon peu de silence;  
Je ne desserre pas la bouche seulement,
Albert, à part
Le traître.

Métaphraste
Mais de grâce, achevez vitemet:
Depuis longtemps j'écoute; il est bien raisonnable
Que je parle à mon tour.
(II, vi)

The disparity between what he says and the truth is of
course enormous, and so blatantly obvious that it quali-
fies as "low farce." Later Molière will develop the art
of presenting paradoxical behavior, making it subtle, com-
plex, discernable only to the acute observer. In this
scene we simply watch the plot stand still as Albert at-
ttempts to learn something about Ascagne. After leaving
Métaphraste alone to deliver a farcical monologue, in which
we hear: "Oh! que les grands parleurs sont par moi détes-
tâs!" Albert sends him packing with a cowbell.

Romanesque comedy dominates the third act. Albert's
thoughts always tend toward his daily worries without
their becoming obsessions. Rather than having the idée
firme of the "entêtés" in his later plays, Albert is con-
cerned with specific incidents. When the incident is
clarified, his worries vanish only to return again in the
form of another incident. When the household is restored
to order, he finds tranquillity. His sudden changes from
elation to desolation are amusing because his second prob-
lem, Lucile's marriage, is more perplexing than the first,
borrowed money. Romanesque comedy is thus based on a
superficial game in which the playwright arranges the pieces to produce a desired effect. Act III, scene iv begins with both Albert and Polidor embarrassed over situations which they believe to exist. Polidor apologizes profusely because he believes his son married to Lucile, while Albert is humble because he believes himself financially in arrears to Polidor. Albert's confusion is eventually dissipated by Polidor. "Je ne veux de vos biens que ce que vous voudrez." Only half the misunderstanding has been settled, however, and Polidor has still to fully inform Albert:

Il ne faut rien feindre;
Votre ressentiment me donnait lieu de craindre;
Et Lucile tombée en faute avec mon fils,
Comme on vous voit puissant et de biens et d'amis...

(III, iv)

Albert and Polidor create humor by their reactions to situations as they appear. Their passivity makes them seem terribly marionnette-like. The fathers and Météphraste represent rudimentary figures in the romanesque style and farce respectively. In the romanesque, events control personages as though they were being manipulated by the hand of fate; in low farce, personages react despite events, as though they were robots. It is Molière's genius to have later tempered one style of comedy with the other to create personages who both react to events yet do not let events govern them—who are both autonomous and dependent.
The next scene of importance, III, xiii, pits Lucile against Valère and Mascarille. This transpires before a powerless Albert, whose only lines are: "Que veux-tu que je die? Une telle aventure me met hors de moi." Lucile and Valère argue on the most gallant terms possible until Mascarille joins in. Mascarille provides the only humor of the scene with this exchange:

Lucile
Et quoi donc confesser?

Mascarille
Quoi? Ce qui s'est passé
Entre mon maître et vous; la belle raillerie!

Lucile
Et que s'est-il passé, monstre d'effronterie,
Entre ton maître et moi?

Mascarille
Vous devez, que je croi,
En savoir un peu plus de nouvelles que moi!
Et pour vous cette nuit fut trop douce, pour croire
Que vous puissiez si vite en perdre la mémoire.
(III, xiii)

Leaving behind the gallant notions of "beau stratagème" and "juste colère," Mascarille brings the conversation down to earth in referring to the conjugal bed. Quite appropriate to the tone of the conversation, Lucile slaps Mascarille. He has put Lucile's virginity in doubt, which elicits a physical response from her. The degeneration of the scene into farce rescues it from gallant boredom.

The elegant "dépit scène" relies entirely on romanesque humor, as both Eraste and Lucile, who always employ
gallant vocabulary, dominate the scene. The humor created in this scene is of the finest essence, similar to that of Marivaux. Each lover affects a grimace only to have it disappear; Eraste's resolution melts before Lucile.

Eraste

Mais si mon coeur encor revoulait sa prison . . .
Si, tout fâché qu'il est, il demandait pardon? . . .

Lucile

Non, non, n'en faites rien; ma faiblesse est trop grande,
J'aurais peur d'accorder trop tôt votre demande.
(IV, iii)

During the latter part of their marivaudage, both servants, Gros-René and Marinette, have kept silent. Farce is suppressed, allowing this finest moment of romanesque comedy to transpire.

As a pendant to this gallantry, a shorter scene is added which again brings us back down to earth. Gros-René mocks their gallant reconciliation: "Voilà ton beau galant de neige, avec ta nonpareille." To parody the destruction of love letters and the returning of portraits, the servants give back knives, scissors, and cheese, to which Gros-René would add some soup had he not already swallowed it. Whereas the undermining of Eraste's resolution by Lucile's beauty took place tacitly, Gros-René protests against Marinette's subterfuge: "Ne fais point les doux yeux, je veux être fâché." By giving voice to this process of seduction, Gros-René transforms it into farce;
Eraste apologizes gallantly thereby letting the lady have her day, while Gros-René and Marinette are more candid:

Gros-René
Ma foi! nous ferons mieux de quitter la grimace.
Touche, je te pardonne.

Marinette
Et moi, je te fais grâce.

Gros-René
Mon Dieu! qu'à tes appas je suis acoquiné!

Marinette
Que Marinette est sotte après son Gros-René!

(G IV, iv)

Gros-René puts the blame on Marinette's "charms," whereas Eraste remains more abstract, less physical: "une flamme si belle doit, pour votre intérêt demeurer immortelle."
Thus Eraste’s love is eternal, Lucile is his Beatrice; Gros-René thinks of love in a more corporeal manner.

The final scene contains another contrast between love in romanesque terms and love in farcical terms. After Valère is enlightened as to Ascagne's identity, and to the fact that she is his wife rather than Lucile, he acquits himself rather gallantly by taking delight in the surprise of the whole affair:

Polidor
Un tel événement rend tes esprits confus;
Mais en vain tu voudrais balancer là-dessus.

Valère
Non, non; je ne veux pas songer à m'en défendre;
Et si cette aventure a lieu de me surprendre,
La surprise me flatte, et je me sens saisir
De merveille à la fois, d'amour et de plaisir.
Se peut-il que ces yeux? . . .

(V, viii)
Valère blames the incident on Dorothée's eyes, which is a topos common to baroque literature. This vestige of courtly love and Petrarchism finds its way into his vocabulary through the novels and plays of the early seventeenth century Baroque period. During Molière's career and after, courtly love diminishes as a taste for the "vraisemblable" wanes. In _Le Désert amoureux_, the gallant vocabulary of the young lovers dominates, but the contrast provided by the servants is a sign of the more earthy course Molière will follow.

Eraste wonders who will win Marinette, but Mascarille is willing to wait in line for her favors. Gros-René will have none of this:

**Eraste**

_Mais de son Mascarille et de mon Gros-René,
Par qui doit Marinette être ici possédée?
Il faut que par le sang l'affaire soit vidée._

**Mascarille**

_Nenni, nenni, mon sang dans mon corps sied trop bien,
Qu'il l'épouse en repos, cela ne me fait rien,
De l'humeur que je sais la chère Marinette,
L'hymen ne ferme pas la porte à la fleurette._

**Marinette**

_Et tu crois que de toi je ferais mon galant?
Un mari, passe encor; tel qu'il est, on le prend;
On n'y va pas chercher tant de cérémonie;
Mais il faut qu'un galant soit fait à faire envie._

**Gros-René**

_Ecoute; quand l'hymen aura joint nos deux peaux,
Je prétends qu'on soit sourde à tous les damoiseaux._

(V, viii)

Mascarille's desire to cuckold Gros-René terminates the play on a farcical note. We need not worry about
infidelity from the masters, since their love is situated in the eternal world of story-book love; infidelity belongs to the people—it is situated in everyday life and its humorous treatment provides the basis for much farcical literature.

Atmosphere: The Reverie of Courtship

Le Dépit amoureux has the atmosphere of a world far removed from reality. The story unfolds in a land where fortunes rise and fall without causing harm to anyone. Because literary convention reigns, there is little attention paid to providing motivation for actions—it is expected that Valère will accept his fate upon learning that Ascagne is eligible, that is, of suitable lineage to marry him. The servants are only appendages to the play who usually echo, often mockingly, their masters; Météphraste's role has no relevance to the plot whatever.

The need to organize plot complications reduces the importance of will to the point where each personage's desires must change for no other reason than to agree with plot needs. Eraste ends his long absence of two acts so that he may be reconciled with Lucile. In the interim he has been transformed from a jealous lover to a lover scorned only to set the stage for the "dépit scene." In later plays the contrary occurs, where every incident in
the play is dependent upon the comic hero's never-changing desires.

The necessity for many transitional elements also precludes scenes of strong tension. As soon as tension is established between two persons, one of them exits and tension dissipates. Lucile's exit after slapping Mascarille, followed by his comment: "Je crois qu'elle me vient de donner un soufflet," ends any possibility of genuine tension in the Valère-Lucile _affaire_.

The lack of serious tension in this play also leads to a lack of possibilities for farce; considering the importance accorded the lovers in _Le Désir_, the amount of farce sprinkled throughout the play is remarkable. Farce needs a victim, someone to cuckold, trick, beat, or generally play a joke upon. When Valère does not hesitate to accept Ascagne, he conforms to what is expected of him, precluding the possibility of making him the victim of another joke. Métaphraste, who creates tension unrelated to the plot, is made a fool of by Albert, with the audience's blessings. Valère cannot be made fun of because he, in accepting Ascagne, consents to the machinations of the plot and, as such, is too gallant to be victimized. The remaining possibilities for farce are the servants. They, however, are made to conform to the gallant tone of the play; Gros-René is exempted from cuckoldry by agreeing to be a "mari confident."
The lack of farce in *Le Dépit* also results from the importance of transition. In a farce, the plot is of little concern to the playwright, and loosely related scenes may follow in an order which could conceivably be rearranged with little loss of coherence. In this play, farce is not desirable because it gives rise to scenes which go nowhere, which slow down terribly a plot as complicated as this. Hence, lack of farce results from the lack of both a victim and a lack of simplicity of plot.

The resulting atmosphere is one which is removed from everyday life; tension is slight in the comedy of intrigue because it is a story of courtship and marriage, wherein apparent misfortune always turns out for the best. The incidents in the story are important in themselves to the extent that every personage is given desires to conform to those incidents. Finally, the humor of all the important scenes is witty and charming, with no desire to render anyone ridiculous. Life will be much more difficult for Molière's comic heroes in the high comedies which are to follow.
CHAPTER II

L’ECOLE DES FEMMES

The successful presentation of L’Ecole des femmes in 1662 signaled the beginning of Molière’s career as a writer of high comedy. His success also brought notoriety, as irate critics accused him of abusing various important persons, using language that shocks the bienséances, and impiety in general. These critics, many of them unquestionably jealous of his talents, saw only too well the qualities which set the play apart from all previous comedies. Molière had dared to step beyond literary convention by introducing realism into the genre of New Comedy; envious rivals witnessed the appearance of a comic personage, Arnolphe, whose frustrations and anxieties remind spectators of the difficulties they encounter in their day-to-day existence. Comedy writers had long relied upon either plot machinations or farcical "types" to create humor; neither source of humor was likely to distinguish its author unless the comedy could somehow make a comment on the "human condition." To please men of distinguished taste through the comic genre is no easy task.

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Mais lorsque vous peignez les hommes, il faut peindre d'après nature; on veut que les portraits ressemblent, et vous n'avez rien fait si vous n'y faites reconnaître les gens de votre siècle. En un mot, dans les pièces sérieuses, il suffit, pour n'être point blâmé, de dire des choses qui soient de bon sens et bien écrits; mais ce n'est pas assez dans les autres, il y faut plaisanter; et c'est une étrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens.

(Dorante in Critique de L'Ecole des femmes, vi)

To please "les honnêtes gens," Molière felt the need to invent, to dare, to recreate personages whose actions govern the flow of the play rather than external events to which the personages are fitted.

In this play, his first successful high comedy, he broke through the barrier of literary convention with the invention of Arnolphe; whereas Arnolphe becomes involved with a familiar comedy situation, one which makes him resemble Sganarelle in L'Ecole des maris (both attempt to request their respective wards in order to marry them without the fear of subsequent cuckoldry, only to have them stolen away by a young "blondin"), Arnolphe's powers also extend into another realm: the education of his ward, Agnès.

Complexities arise which are absent in previous comedies because Arnolphe assumes the roles of lover and tutor who apparently has the resources to make good his boasts. Agnès' genuine naïveté makes her prey to a menace that Isabelle, in L'Ecole des maris, easily avoids: complete
domination by her tutor and subsequent loss of freedom. Isabelle has the knowledge to subvert her tutor's mad scheme, whereas Agnès' lack of "education" seemingly makes her dependent upon Arnolphe. Sganarelle and Isabelle have conventional comedy-of-intrigue desires: Sganarelle wants to keep Isabelle from becoming a coquette, whereas Isabelle seeks to find a more suitable match than her humorless tutor. What Arnolphe desires is much more complex than the desires of personages in L'Ecole des maris.

Will: The Desire for Complete Mastery

Arnolphe's name is now officially Monsieur de la Souche. Besides the normal desire to acquire an aristocratic title, Arnolphe is quitting his given name because St. Arnolphe is the patron saint of cuckolds. The desire to escape cuckoldry, a theme common to low farces such as Molière's La Jalousie du Marbouillé, is being applied to a personage who aspires to the status of nobility. Arnolphe is a man of stature in his community; he knows other men of consequence, such as Oronte and Enrique. He has escaped the mold of convention represented by Sganarelle, a stock senex from New Comedy. In the first scene Chrysalde calls him "Seigneur Arnolphe," but Arnolphe insists on his newly acquired name for two reasons:

Outre que la maison par ce nom se connaît,
La Souche plus qu'Arnolphe à mes oreilles plaît.
(I, 1)
Arnolphe would rather be a stump than a cuckold.

He has decided to marry a young girl, a situation which might compromise a forty-two year old bachelor who has spent a good deal of time ridiculing cuckolded husbands in the neighborhood. To insure himself from a fate similar to that of his neighbors, he has kept his ward Agnès sequestered, both physically and mentally. But total sequestration is difficult to achieve, as he will soon find out. He has succeeded in keeping Agnès in a state of ignorance—she neither has experience in affairs of the heart, nor the knowledge that she is of the age of courtship. Such simplicity delights Arnolphe, who cannot restrain himself from laughing when she displays her incredible ignorance:

La vérité passe encore mon récit,  
Dans ses simplicités à tous coups je l'admire,  
Et parfois elle en dit dont je pâme de rire,  
L'autre jour (pourrait-on se le persuader?),  
Elle était fort en peine, et me vint demander,  
Avec une innocence à nulle autre pareille,  
Si les enfants qu'on fait se faisaient par l'oreille.
(I, 1)

But such perfect naiveté begs to be despoiled, and at the first opportunity (his trip), Arnolphe's scheme is imperiled.

Arnolphe is particularly vulnerable because his desires are double. On one level he seeks safeguards against cuckoldry: hence the isolation of Agnès, similar to that of Isabelle. He also desires complete mastery over Agnès, which is to be effected by withholding sexual and social knowledge from her, even on the facts-of-life level. In assuring her
complete purity, Arnolphe can prove his superiority over the numerous "patient" husbands in his town. To be cuckolded would be more than a mere trick to Arnolphe; it would destroy his dreams of superiority. His "Je suis maître, je parle; allez, obéissez." verbalizes all the strength of will he thinks he has. Sganarelle is a pitiful combatant indeed with his timid: "Je ne veux porter des cornes, si je puis."

Agnès' ignorance makes her unaware that she is opposing Arnolphe's will. Love does a much better job educating her than his bizarre schemes; what she wills is dictated to her from the heart and cannot be altered by any amount of moralizing. Throughout the entire play, she never hesitates in voicing her preference for Horace. She cannot conceive of Arnolphe's having any objections to Horace's visit:

Mais quand je l'ai vu, vous ignorez pourquoi,
Et vous en auriez fait, sans doute, autant que moi.

Now she wants to marry Horace, but only because Arnolphe has told her about the sin of love sans marriage. His plans thus run afoul despite her ignorance—she simply follows her natural inclinations. Arnolphe is always two steps behind her because inclinations have provided her with more cleverness than he had dreamed possible.

Horace only desires to court Agnès while avoiding the odious "Monsieur de la Souche." He takes no particular delight in flaunting his victories over Agnès' guardian:
"... qu'au moins ces choses soient secrètes."

rather he wants to steal her away as quickly and as quietly as possible. The simplicity of the love between Horace and Agnène contrasts with Arnolphe's complicated motivation.

Arnolphe's idée fixe of asserting his superiority over the hapless husbands in the community undergoes a change after Horace confides to him that a certain "Monsieur de la Souche" is the newest victim of cuckoldry. In their first meeting Arnolphe approves of Horace's role as a gallant lover because he senses a new anecdote coming up that victimizes one of his townsman:

Chacun a ses plaisirs, qu'il se fait à sa guise,
Mais pour ceux que du nom de galants on baptise,
Ils ont su ce pays de quoi se contenter,
Car les femmes y sont faites à coquerer,
On trouve d'humour douce et la brune et la blonde,
Et les maris aussi les plus bénins du monde.

(I, iv)

After Horace consents that he has found adventure in these parts, Arnolphe gloats:

Bon! voici de nouveau quelque conte gaillard!
Et ce sera de quoi mettre sur mes tablettes.

(I, iv)

After hearing that he is the latest victim, his attitude vis-à-vis Horace changes. He assumes the role of a confidant so that Horace will reveal the progress of his affair as well as his future strategy. When things are going well for him in their conversations Arnolphe affects a sympathetic air for Horace:
Diantre! ce ne sont pas des prunes que cela! 
Et je trouve fâcheux l'état où vous voilà. 
(III, iv)

When his fortunes undergo a reversal, he is reduced to asides and forced laughter. He must hide his true feelings so that he can outwit Horace; his will remains constant, but his language has shifted from that of the superior master to that of the "fourbe."

Among the minor personages, will is less important. Chrysalde, the "raisonneur," wants Arnolphe to be reasonable; the assumption is that they are friends and Chrysalde is trying to save Arnolphe from embarrassment. Chrysalde’s role is that of a philosopher-confidant, whose common-sense arguments form the counterweight to Arnolphe’s unreasonableness. Alain and Georgette simply want to avoid beatings from their often irate master.

No one in L’Ecole des femmes changes what he wants. Change occurs in the means to achieving their desires. From the imperious master of Act I, Arnolphe becomes a sighing lover in Act V. To avoid being victimized by Horace, Arnolphe has stopped ordering, since Agnès is too simple to be intimidated, and has begun appealing to her sense of pity. Agnès, in the face of Arnolphe’s change in behavior toward her, has quit her innocent demeanor (which was natural for her at that time) to take on the air of the scornful mistress;
Horace remains the hopeful lover throughout, as he is blown about by a series of peripeties. Molière never subjects Horace to a "dépit scene," because he prefers to concentrate on Arnolphe’s desires. Horace’s role is similar to Valère’s in _Le Dépit_ because they both accept their fates and are subjected to outside incidents.

Arnolphe is a masterful creation due to his desire to dominate others as completely as possible. Like Cornelian heroes he feels that he is "maître de l’univers," but when his moment of chagrin arrives (V, iv) he is swept away in a wave of newfound emotion: "Jusqu’où la passion peut-elle faire aller?" It seems entirely out of place for him to suddenly resort to begging after having previously displayed such confidence in his powers. He has gone from one extreme to the other: from complete mastery to abject humility. His will is strong, however, but strength of will is built on the exclusion of many conflicting considerations. In willing to dominate his fate he has become unaware that Agnès, dependent upon him as she appears to be, may not accept him as a lover. After abasing himself before her, he knows the futility of appealing to her on any other basis than as a tyrant—thus he falls back on total imprisonment. Molière has taken self-confidence and turned it into mania; the "obstacle" of New Comedy has become a comically heroic
figure, whose entêtement is a comic treatment of the confident gloire of pre-Molière and Racine drama.¹

Tension: A Duality of Modes

Arnolphe's dual role in this play produces two types of tension: a lighter tension develops when Arnolphe plays the senex, or obstacle to the lovers' happiness, whereas a deeper, more serious tension results from his role as a lover himself. The benign quality of the first variety of tension is caused by the domination of plot elements; as in Le Dépit, the playwright arranges incidents to make the future of Horace and Agnès seem secure at one point, then dim at another. Arnolphe tricks them, then is tricked in a series of cleverly constructed peripeties. The peripeties do not create serious tension because the spectator knows that Horace and Agnès are destined for one another, as were Eraste and Lucile. Arnolphe's refusal to participate in the game of courtship eliminates him as an acceptable suitor for Agnès. He must be willing to contend with Horace on equal terms, which is of course unlikely, to free him from the role of "obstacle." On the other hand his desire to dominate Agnès and his subsequent failure produce tension which is lifelike and serious.

¹See J. D. Hubert's parallels between L'Ecole des femmes and tragedy in his Molière and the Comedy of Intellect (University of California Press, 1962).
Even though he has legal control over Agnès as her guardian and tutor, he violates the rules of normal social behavior through his desire to isolate her. In a highly socially-oriented culture such as Molière's, such an action demands punishment. To compound his crime, Arnolphe ridicules that which he is responsible for, Agnès' ignorance; society must exact its retribution. His ultimate chastisement, a serious matter, and the union of Horace and Agnès, a conventional plot device, blend together throughout the play and create tension whose seriousness is attenuated by the strong affinity of this play and New Comedy.

A note of serious tension is struck in the first scene when Arnolphe boasts of his plans to subject Agnès to his reign of ignorance. The spectator senses the authenticity of Arnolphe's desire to defend himself against cuckoldry. He loves Agnès, but his love is darkened by his desire to control. His language is lively and amusing, indicating a seeming lack of emotional involvement; where else does one find such a vivid description of ignorance: "Je veux qu'elle réponde: 'Une tarte à la crème,!'" as well as tricked husbands: "L'un amasse du bien, dont sa femme fait part / A ceux qui prennent soin de le faire cornard;" yet we know that his air of superiority, an expression of a profound desire to control his own fate, will ruin his chances of becoming a successful lover.
In his assertion of dominance he challenges the world to prove him wrong. When Agnès brings him to his knees in V, iv, by refusing to accept him as a lover, the deep-felt impossibility of his challenge makes Arnolphe sense his limitations. In this sense Arnolphe's defeat is most lifelike because he now knows the limitations imposed by the fact of his being human.

Horace's conversation with Arnolphe in I, iv begins the superficial tension caused by his new role as the senex figure. Arnolphe's problem resembles that of Ascanio; neither can divulge his true identity in order to clear up a basic misunderstanding. Arnolphe remains silent before Horace because he can profit from his confusion. But numerous asides and monologues reveal his inner furor: "Oh! que j'ai souffert durant cet entretien!" (I, iv)

Their second discussion in III, iv wounds Arnolphe's pride more seriously; after all his precaution, Agnès has found the wit to send Horace a love letter. After having had to laugh at his own misfortune in Horace's presence, Arnolphe's monologue (III, v) shows his transformation from a jealous dog-in-the-manger to an aspiring 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,
Sot, n'as-tu point de honte? Ah! je crève, j'env rage,
Et je souffletterais mille fois mon visage.

(III, v)
Arnolphe is more overcome by Agnès' preference for Horace than by his inability to sequester her. Arnolphe has sunk to the depths of genuine despair because her connivance has only made him want her more.

In the next scene, Iv, i, Arnolphe turns his attentions back to the game of outwitting Horace:

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.

Again his reputation is at stake more than his love for Agnès. In his discussion with Alain and Georgette, he warms them to the task of driving away Horace by appealing to their sense of honor:

Et quel affront pour vous, mes enfants, pourrait-ce être
Si l'on avait ôté l'honneur à votre maître!
Vous n'oseriez après paraître en nul endroit . . .

After his abject failure to separate Horace and Agnès, despite his knowing every move Horace will make, Arnolphe tries to treat the cause of his problems rather than the symptoms. In V, iv Arnolphe becomes excruciatingly aware of his inability to control Agnès:

Ah! je l'ai mal connue, ou, ma foi: là-dessus
Une sotte en sait plus que le plus habile homme. (V, iv)

His newfound awareness reduces him to a sighing, rebuffed lover. Her refusal and his subsequent rage ("un cul de couvent me vengera de tout") drive him back to treating
the symptoms. The last three scenes place Arnolphe in the perspective of the senex; when Horace asks Arnolphe to help him escape the fate of marrying Enrique's daughter, Arnolphe responds by tricking him. Tension is again superficial because Arnolphe has relied on fate (the intercession of Horace's father) to aid him. He persuade Oronte to be firm with his son:

Il faut avec vigueur ranger les jeunes gens,
Et nous faisons contre eux à leur être indulgents.

(\textit{V, vii})

Of course the trick is on Arnolphe, but the trick results from unfortunate (for Arnolphe) coincidences. The robber is robbed in turn, ending the play on a merry note; Arnolphe exits without saying a word. Serious tension does not develop because Arnolphe has tried to manipulate exterior circumstances and failed. Molière has rescued Horace and Agnès, thereby ending the play on the facile détente of the comedy of intrigue:

\begin{quote}
Horace
Ah! mon père,
Vous saurez pleinement ce surprenant mystère,
Le hasard en ces lieux avait exécuté
Ce que votre sagesse avait prémédité.

(\textit{V, ix})
\end{quote}

Even Valère could not have put it in such gallant terms.

Tension has been used thus far to denote the state of Arnolphe's emotions. The spectator is expected to identify with the young lovers for the most part, except when Arnolphe assumes the role of lover. At this point Arnolphe's
ambivalence clouds the issue; our sympathies momentarily swing to his cause. What of Horace and Agnès?

The young lovers are deprived of many of the advantages accorded their counterparts in New Comedy. Horace has no crafty valet to help him, and Agnès is too naive to keep Arnolphe's plans off balance. Arnolphe holds all the trumps and when he threatens sending Agnès to a convent we applaud the victory of the young lovers. A well-defined distinction is maintained between protagonist and antagonist in this play. Because they are seemingly alone in their struggle, the lovers' ultimate victory is all the sweeter.

The only question that remains is whether they deserve to win. Horace has not succeeded in abducting Agnès and Agnès does not have the ability to deceive Arnolphe. On the other hand Arnolphe has bungled his job of defense so badly that he certainly deserves to lose. In truth, the lovers are supposed to win and they do; the plot of L'Ecole des femmes is still strongly couched in the tradition of New Comedy, therefore no reasons need be given for the outcome of the play.

Transition: Arnolphe as a Focal Point

Two important facts are revealed in Act I which have a great bearing upon the young lovers. Arnolphe is known in the neighborhood by his new name, Monsieur de la Souche; this use of two names leads Horace astray during the entire play. He makes Arnolphe his confidant, thereby revealing off-stage happenings as well as future plans to him; rather than the stock intermediaries, such as a crafty servant, Horace uses Arnolphe to help in his plans for Agnès' delivery. A battle of wits is constantly being waged directly between senex and adolescens. Horace tells of his father's impending return to France from America; this information has no bearing on the play until the dénouement, at which time Agnès' true identity is disclosed, making her eligible for marriage to Horace. The only other information needed to set the play in motion is Arnolphe's plan to educate Agnès. Thus in Act I, two relationships are established which govern the movement of the entire play: Horace-Arnolphe (based on Arnolphe's new name) and Arnolphe-Agnès (based on Arnolphe's plan for her education). Much economy is achieved by the lack of scenes between Horace and Agnès, as they meet only in Arnolphe's presence in V, iii.

The need for transition is diminished throughout the play by Arnolphe's perpetual presence on stage as well as his importance in Horace's plans. When Horace enters, it
is because he has come to see Arnolphe. Horace tells him about his father and his father's friend, Enrique; he then asks Arnolphe for money, which Arnolphe is glad to do. The first fortuitous circumstance occurs at this point, when Horace reveals that he is courting Agnès, the ward of a ridiculous neighbor of Arnolphe's.

This revelation leads Arnolphe back to his education of Agnès; he holds two tête-à-têtes with her, first to verify Horace's story, then to "reeducate" her by reading Les Maxims du Mariage. The uselessness of his plans is immediately demonstrated when Horace reappears to tell of Agnès' cleverness.

Arnolphe's efforts to trick Horace occupy Act IV and the first three scenes of Act V. The same sequence is repeated in each escapade: Horace tells Arnolphe of his recent success, then tells him what he plans to do. Arnolphe attempts to foil his plans, but Horace manages to win each encounter. Horace resembles Lélie in L'Étourdi; he is unwittingly his own worst enemy but succeeds despite himself.

After his ego-shattering encounter with Agnès in V, iv, Arnolphe decides to end this foolishness by sending her away. At this point the plot element introduced in Act I, the return of Horace's father, turns the tide of battle; for a brief moment Arnolphe seems to have the upper hand, but Horace ultimately wins, as is expected.
An improvement in this play over *Le Dépit* is in the justification for entrances. Everyone has a reason for entering and exiting; the role of chance has been significantly reduced. Horace has come to borrow money in Act I, and his future entrances are occasioned by Arnolphe's presence on stage, since he has assumed the role of Horace's confidant. Agnès enters when Arnolphe summons her, as do the servants. The flow of personages seems natural because of Arnolphe's roles of confidant to Horace and absolute ruler over his household. Chrysalde's entrance in IV, viii is made natural by his first line, which indicates that he often drops in to see Arnolphe: "Eh bien! souperons-nous avant la promenade?" Molière prepares for Oronte and Enrique by having Horace tell of his father's return which has led to the menace of a forced marriage. Naturally this new misfortune will have to be resolved; this leads to his father's entrance and the dénouement.

The personages are more dependent upon one another in *L'Ecole des femmes*, as all plot incidents have some bearing on the triangle Arnolphe-Agnès-Horace. When one of these three acts, his actions have an effect upon the other two, the result of which action prompts a counter-action; a concatenation of events takes place which is finally broken by Oronte's decision. However, the groundwork had been laid for this decision by Horace in I, iv when he told of his father's impending return from America.
The amount of purely transitional verse, verse whose only raison d'être is the recounting of plot elements which are unrelated to immediate stage business, is limited to Horace's tale about his father in America, and Enrique's tale about Agnès' past. Even Agnès' description of her first encounter with Horace is well-related to stage business, since it disproves the effectiveness of Arnolphe's schemes. Arnolphe's change of name flows from his desire to avoid cuckoldry and his vanity in general. He has ennobled himself and divested himself of the patron saint of cuckoldry in one stroke. This type of balance between plot elements (and change of name) and farce (the theme of cuckoldry) runs through L'Ecole des femmes, providing comedy which is neither too plot-oriented nor too farcical.

Plot and Farce: Maintaining a Balance Between Two Traditions

Molière incorporates many levels of comedy in L'Ecole des femmes by making them interdependent. Arnolphe's plan to educate Agnès is farcical, because he wants to avoid being cuckolded; at the same time he wants to master the fates by sequestering his intended bride, thereby preventing her from creating any rivals for him. Cuckoldry is of course a favorite theme of medieval and classical farce, whereas the tricking of a domineering old man by two young lovers is common to New Comedy, or the comedy of intrigue.
The inclusion of such stock characters as the bungling servants and the officious notary provide farce on the low level. Finally Molière succeeds in creating "high farce" in the person of Arnolphe, whose paradoxical behavior, caused by a lifelike inner conflict, adds a new element to the concept of character. Molière endows Arnolphe with a penchant for farce, as long as others are victimized; in insuring himself from falling victim to the same ridicule that he inflicts upon others, he dares to defy the world to play tricks on him. An underlying basis of farce motivates his desire to keep Agnès in ignorance; his goal cannot be very high when he would wish her to utter "Tarte à la crème," at an inopportune time. His mania to keep her from sexual and social experience of any kind indicates that he will settle for mere obedience, much the same as personages from low farce, such as Sganarelle in Le Mâdecin malgré lui or L'Ecole des Mariés. The difference between Arnolphe and Sganarelle lies in Arnolphe's boast that he can outwit "le hasard" by dominating Agnès:

Arnolphe
Mon Dieu, notre ami, ne vous tourmentez point; Bien rusé qui pourra m'attaquer sur ce point. Je sais les tours rusés et les subtiles trames Don't, pour nous en planter, savent user les femmes, Et comme on est dupé par leur dextérité.
(I, i)

Arnolphe is the first of Molière's comic heroes who is willing to openly challenge a higher power—in this case, fortune. Significantly, Molière has chosen that power which
governs action in the comedy of intrigue.

In challenging fortune Arnolphe places himself at the center of the play in every sense of the word. Rather than approaching Agnès as a lover, he establishes a tutor-pupil rapport—obviously he believes that human nature can be controlled through the proper ambiance; the flaw lies in the inevitable passer-by who appears and approaches Agnès as a lover. Arnolphe is at the crossroads of both outside influences and inner faults. He is willing to take on both Horace's attack and Agnès' education.

Arnolphe's rapport with Horace is the basis for the play's plot. He establishes a confidant-and-young lover relationship with Horace, enabling him to take steps to impede his courtship. These moves and countermoves keep the play moving forward. Between each meeting with Arnolphe and Horace, Arnolphe engages Agnès in a discussion on her wayward conduct. These efforts to arrive at an understanding of her behavior, as well as a desire to control her thinking, provide many farcical scenes. The influence of plot as an element capable of raising farce to a medium level can be seen in II, v:

Agnès
Il m'a pris le ruban que vous m'aviez donné.
A vous dire vrai, je n'ai pu m'en défendre.

Arnolphe (reprenant haleine)
Passe pour le ruban, Mais je voulais apprendre
S'il ne vous a rien fait que vous baiser les bras.
Agnès
Comment? est-ce qu'on fait d'autres choses?

Two plot elements are in interplay in this conversation; Agnès's ribbon is in question—Horace took it as a gallant gesture no doubt—plus the very innocence of Agnès. Arnolphe's dialogue turns to farce, however, because he interprets her hesitancy in the worst possible way. His mind is obviously not attuned to Horace's gallantry.

Later in the same scene Agnès naively exclaims her joy at Arnolphe's consent to her marriage—only to find that Arnolphe is to be her intended rather than Horace. This prompts him to order her to throw a rock at Horace, which she must do without equivocation. To reinforce his dictums, Arnolphe has her read the Maximes du Mariage, which sounds like a source book for much of Arnolphe's reflections on cuckoldry in I, i; for example, number ten calls to mind his description of the village wife who receives many gifts:

Des promenades du temps,
Ou repas qu'on donne aux champs,
Il ne faut point qu'elle essaye;
Selon les prudents cerveaux,
Le mari, dans ces cadeaux,
Est toujours celui qui paye.

(III, ii)

Agnès' response to her education is the love letter she includes with the stone thrown at Horace. It becomes clear that the intrigue between Agnès and Horace has the upper hand over Arnolphe's farcical enterprises. Arnolphe's
assertion of mastery over the forces of intrigue is given the lie by the young lovers throughout the first four acts.

Arnolphe chose Agnès because as a child she showed poise and merit. But his approach to her once she reached adolescence was not that of an aspirant to her hand; he did not place her on a pedestal as Horace does. Rather, he looked upon her as a thing to be owned, molded, and tucked away for his own use. In typically bourgeois style, he simplified his task and approached it in the most direct manner possible. In return he expected Agnès, ignorant of any other conduct, to submit to his every whim. That which he values most in her now, her ignorance, no longer exists, and it is only a matter of time before his plans are undone.

His defeat is signaled in V, iv when Agnès tells him pointedly that Horace has touched her heart where all of his maxims and sermons have failed. In this scene Molière passes through every comic resource at his command. It is in this scene that stock comedy of intrigue and medium farce give way to the high farce that characterizes his greatest comedies: Tartuffe, Dom Juan, and Le Misanthrope.

The previous scene, the first which has included Arnolphe, Agnès, and Horace is highly plot-oriented. Horace entrusts Agnès to his rival, Arnolphe, and Arnolphe delights in participating in this intrigue. He plays his part to the hilt, especially after Horace leaves:
Arnolphe (le nez dans son manteau, et déguisant sa voix)

Venez, ce n'est pas là que je vous logerai,
Et votre gîte ailleurs est par moi préparé;
Je prétends en lieu sur mettre votre personne,
(Se faisant connaître.)

Agnès (le reconnaissant.)

Hay!
(V, iv)

Such a recognition could have been taken from most any comedy of intrigue. But Arnolphe quickly shifts the scene to the "medium farce" that he has provoked throughout the play:

Ah! Ah! si jeune encor, vous jouez de ces tours;
Votre simplicité, qui semble sans pareille,
Demande si l'on fait les enfants par l'oreille;
Et vous savez donner des rendez-vous la nuit,
Et pour suivre un galant vous évader sans bruit.

Arnolphe marvels at the combination of Agnès' incredible naïveté with her talent for intrigue. He is unaware of the powers of love, even the power of the love he has for Agnès. When Agnès confesses her love for Horace and her dislike for her inquisitor, Arnolphe begins to feel his limitations:

Agnès
Mon Dieu, ce n'est pas moi qui vous devez blâmer;
Que ne vous-êtes vous, comme lui, fait aimer?
Je ne vous en ai empêché, que je pense.

Arnolphe
Je m'y suis efforcé de toute ma puissance;
Mais les soins que j'ai pris, je les ai perdus tous.

As he becomes more desperate to win Agnès, he marvels at the power of love:
And finally:

Ecoute seulement ce soupir amoureux!
Vois ce regard mourant;
Jusqu'où la passion peut-elle faire aller!

**Arnolphe has attained high farce in two senses:** by pleading with Agnès he has abandoned his scheme of forcing her to succumb to his will (which is the basis of the plot) thus turning the scene in circular motion—the plot stands still as he attempts that which is impossible for him: to assume the role of a young lover. At the end of this scene Arnolphe does what he intended to do at the outset—send Agnès away. Secondly, he falls victim to his own schemes; Agnès gives him the lie with her: "Horace avec deux mots on ferait plus que vous." Where he felt confident that Agnès could be handled with no difficulty, she turns on him in his role of lover, injuring him where it does the most harm. She shatters his pride, at least momentarily, by forcing him to disclose his true feelings; he loves her, in his own way, but has failed miserably in making her his wife. Plot, in the form of Agnès' attraction to Horace in true storybook style, has triumphed over farce, in the form of Arnolphe's vain boasts of superiority in matters of the heart, as well as his mastery over fate. That Arnolphe does not learn his lesson is proven by his recourse
to sending her to a convent. Thus, this scene moves through several phases of comedy:

PLOT -------------Medium FARCE -------------High FARCE

(Arnolphe's disguise) (Agnès's sexual ignorance, but (His pleading ability in intrigue) refusal)

His decision to continue imprisoning her.

Molière uses plot to keep Arnolphe from continuing in his desire to be a lover. The recourse to plot as a solution to his problems (first the convent, then Oronte's choice of bride for Horace) prevents Arnolphe from any further revelations and self-torture about his love for Agnès. Agnès remains a pawn in his plans to dominate the forces of destiny.

In his frantic battle Arnolphe enlists the aid of his servants and a notary. These personages furnish scenes of low farce to make Arnolphe's efforts seem even more fruitless. When they are present the plot stands in its tracks. Arnolphe cannot even enter his house in I, ii because neither servant can spare the time to unlock the door. Gestures abound in this scene, such as a blow to Alain's head and Arnolphe's efforts to make Alain remove his hat. Such a scene reinforces the suspicion that Arnolphe is not the absolute master of his house that he claims to be. The contrast between his officious, hurried
behavior and his servants' lazzi (gestures) provides a good deal of low comic relief.

The scene between le notaire and Arnolphe also provides a farcical interlude in Arnolphe's quest. Arnolphe's preoccupation is reminiscent of Mâétaphraste's single-mindedness in *Le Dîpit*. Le notaire's legalistic jargon is equivalent to Mâétaphraste's rhetorical virtuosity. This visit is simply a nuisance to Arnolphe, even though he requested the notary to come, because he is too involved with plot doings.

Atmosphere: the "Allée" and the Foyer

From the baroque atmosphere of *Le Dîpit* and *L'Étourdi*, *L'École des femmes* places us in the street in front of Arnolphe's house. Agnès and Horace belong to the unrealistic world of intrigue, but Arnolphe's presence transforms their world; the strong motif of farce provided by Arnolphe colors their world with the earthiness of the street. Horace's world, ever green and unreal, makes Arnolphe's world, bourgeois and realistic, more genteel. The web of intrigue in which Arnolphe, Agnès, and Horace participate creates a framework which the seventeenth century theater-goer expects to see. Yet Arnolphe's Rabelaisian humor, as well as his obviously farcical scenes with the servants and the notary, add a strong flavor of realism to literary convention.
The theme of courtship has been placed in a realistic perspective by the overly practical Arnolphe; his refusal to believe that Agnès is capable of intrigue adds the note of realism lacking in plays like *Le Désert*. Yet the victory of far-fetched plot incidents over a strong will provides the literary touch which recalls the play to the stage. This is, after all, only an illusion.

The inclusion of such realism in Arnolphe's speech could be attributed to the comedy-of-character genre, a genre which relies heavily on the powers of observation, psychological realism, etc. But Molière surpasses "character" with Arnolphe by keeping him in a state of tension throughout. He is interested in remaining at odds with the world; he loves to ridicule—both his fellow man and even Agnès—while remaining free from ridicule himself. Molière avoids stock qualities that characterize most "types" in Arnolphe's characterization, because he insists on keeping his hero blind to his feelings of love for Agnès until the critical dramatic moment. He does not reveal vacillation in his convictions until the time is ripe, that is, until a change in his behavior is sufficiently startling. Until V, iv, we know that he will go to any ends to control his own destiny; when he suddenly becomes dependent upon Agnès for his happiness, we are as shocked as he is.
Arnolphe has found that his bungling servants cannot help him fend off his rival. But his role as Monsieur de la Souche seems to provide effective protection against Horace and his role as Agnès' guardian is apparently sufficient to keep Agnès in check. When Horace wins, which he is made to realize in V, iv, he at last discovers the extent of his involvement. He has dared to try too much and he suffers for his ambition.

In true bourgeois fashion, he thinks he has found all the answers. He has been in the "street," ridiculing his contemporaries without respite; he now wants to enter into the foyer with his prize, Agnès, to show the world how to go about the business of marriage without bitter after-effects. Between the street and the foyer lies the allée, however, and it is there that Horace meets him and defeats him. This middle-ground between evergreen fantasy and the farce of everyday life still belongs to young lovers. The battle has been bitter, but a still more bitter pill must be swallowed when the battle moves indoors.
CHAPTER III
LE TARTUFFE

The most controversial of Molière's plays, the one which eventually suffered the rarely-invoked royal censure, Le Tartuffe, manifests much of the somber humor on which his reputation has been based. The "Lettre sur le comique de l'Imposteur" (attributed to Molière) has long directed critical attention toward the author's talent for the creation of satire and his desire to correct social ills. The strength of the cabal mounted to suppress this play, stronger than any since Le Cid made its début, attests to the importance of Le Tartuffe in Molière's theater. The period lasting from 1664, the first presentation of the play, until 1669, when permission was granted to give the final version, is the most important phase of Molière's career as a playwright. The three high comedies produced in this period, Le Tartuffe, Dom Juan, and Le Misanthrope, take him to the extremities of the comic genre. Le Tartuffe is his first play in which clear moral wrongdoing is blended into a comic situation; but concurrent with the desire to expose hypocrisy as a social vice, Molière's self-proclaimed intention for writing the play (the Lettre is more an apology for comedy than the true raison d'être

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of this play), is the equally important desire to create a comedy. This comedy is more apt to provoke hostile criticism than L'Ecole des femmes, because a controversial issue, religious hypocrisy, is treated, rather than a harmless one, such as the theme of courtship in L'Ecole des femmes, or sincerity in Le Misanthrope. This emphasis on Molière’s plays as autonomous creations is expressed by Bray: "Molière nous dit qu'il veut corriger les hommes et la critique s'évertue à justifier cette affirmation de circonstance. En vérité, il ne pense qu'à nous faire rire."1

While it is difficult to disassociate the theme of the play, religious hypocrisy, from its composition, most of the following discussion will revolve around Molière’s manipulation of comic tradition. L'Ecole des femmes represents the first significant step in the creation of non-traditional comedy: the domination of the stage by a personage whose inner paradoxes and penchant for mockery lead to his downfall. The traditional element of the young couple remains from New Comedy, although Arnolphe’s actions leave little room for the courtship of Horace and Agnès. Our attention centers on Arnolphe’s egotism. In Le Tartuffe Molière tries another formula: the elimination, for all practical purposes, of the young lovers, and the diffusion of interest among a group of strong-willed personages.

The play which results from such manipulation of tradition is a play unique in the world of theater. It is neither a comedy of character, manners, nor a comedy of intrigue. As Guicharnaud points out, Molière touches the periphery of these comic genres in forging an unclassifiable play.

Le propre des grandes comédies de Molière est de toucher à ces catégories, à la périphérie; mais leur centre est ailleurs. Elles sont toutes plus ou moins inclassables.²

Rather than being a study of hypocrisy as incarnated in a social type, hypocrisy is simply a vehicle for the creation of comic drama. This drama is created within the framework of a bourgeois family which is undergoing a crisis, the intensity of which makes the play similar to the other two important comedies of Molière's most creative years (1664-1669): Dom Juan and Le Misanthrope.

Molière has chosen to employ a large number of personages for Le Tartuffe. Rather than using the simple young lovers-obstacle-raisonneur formula of the Ecoles, and his two comedies of intrigue, he includes two more personages: Tartuffe and Elmire. He has divided the obstacle into two parts, the obstacle itself, Orgon, and the object of the obstacle's desire, Tartuffe. In an innovative departure from the New Comedy formula, the senex has a wife and is

head of a household; the role of Elmire as an object of desire to Tartuffe adds further complication to the plot. Orgon's mother adds the final combatant to the battle between two large camps. Orgon, Tartuffe, and Madame Pernelle will oppose Damis, Mariane, Valère, Cléante, Dorine, and Elmire.

**Will: Methods of Opposing Higher Authority**

The battle lines are quickly drawn in the initial scene, as Madame Pernelle and the entire household, with the exceptions of Orgon and Tartuffe, file on stage. Her entrance is extremely significant, for it establishes the will of the pro-Tartuffe camp. Madame Pernelle's perspective of this family's conduct indicates an aggressive desire on her part to subject the family to the rule of a higher authority. She upbraids each person for his independence, and his lack of humility and respect for living "comme il faut." Each personage makes an effort to speak, but she is unwilling to listen until she has properly scolded them all. Her desire to make them obey Tartuffe, rather than quarrel with him, is similar to Arnolphe's desire to control Agnès:

*C'est un homme de bien, qu'il faut l'on écoute,
Et je ne puis souffrir sans me mettre en courroux
De le voir querellé par un fou comme vous.*

(I, i)
Orgon, a typical "entêté," has been thoroughly duped by Tartuffe to the extent that he wants to give everything to him: his possessions, his daughter, his wife, himself. In I, iv he shows his mania for Tartuffe by refusing to listen to anything but news about his guest. The repeated "Et Tartuffe?", comic in its own right, manifests Orgon's fascination with the man. Tartuffe has absorbed him completely:

Il m'enseigne à n'avoir affection pour rien,
De toutes amitiés il détache mon âme,
Et je verrais mourir frère, enfants, mère et femme,
Que je m'en soucierais autant que de cela.

(I, v)

Molière never equivocates in delineating each personage's desires; Orgon has abandoned himself in his devotion to Tartuffe. The word "devotion" is not out of place here because Orgon believes that obeying Tartuffe is equivalent to piety.

To indulge his passion for Tartuffe, he has resolved to marry him to Marianne:

Oui, je prétends, ma fille,
Unir par votre hymen Tartuffe à ma famille.
Il sera votre époux, j'ai résolu cela;
Et comme sur vos vœux, je...

(II, i)

Orgon, hesitant to argue with Cléante, would subject his daughter to marry against her will. His blind passion lets nothing stand in his way: "Je ne veux pas qu'on m'aime." He merely wants obedience. The word "résolu," gives his
vocabulary the concreteness and sense of immobility which solidifies his stance: "Et tout résolument je veux que tu te taises."

Later, Orgon reinforces the schism between himself and his family:

Non, en dépit de tous, vous la (Elmire) fréquenterez. Faire enrager le monde est ma plus grande joie, Et je veux qu'à toute heure avec elle on vous voie. (III, vii)

He becomes virtually monstrous as his family attempts to discredit his guest. In a final gesture (final only for Orgon) Tartuffe finds further measures to take advantage of his patron. He gives him all his wealth.

After Orgon learns the truth about Tartuffe he goes to the other extreme in a display of thoroughly irrational behavior:

C'en est fait, je renonce à tous les gens de bien; J'en aurai désormais une horreur effroyable, Et m'en vais devenir pour eux pire qu'un diable.

If he cannot worship pious men and give them everything he owns, then he would detest them and punish them wherever possible. When Madame Pernelle gives Orgon a taste of his own medicine by refusing to believe his account of Tartuffe's treachery, Orgon can scarcely control himself. Dorine then voices the irony of his situation; the man who refused to believe anything which would contradict him has found his comeuppance:
Orgon
Allez, je ne sais pas, si vous n'étiez ma mère,
Ce que je vous dirais, tant je suis en colère

Dorine
Juste retour, Monsieur, des choses d'ici-bas;
Vous ne voulez point croire, et l'on ne vous croit pas.
(V, iii)

Tartuffe serves as the catalyst for the clash between Orgon and his family. His desires seem rather simple, and he fools no one except Orgon and Madame Pernelle. He wants everything Orgon can give him. His piety is exposed as a façade in the first scene, long before he makes his appearance: (Dorine to Mme Pernelle): "Tout son fait, croyez-moi, n'est rien qu'hypocrisie." His desire for Elmire is no secret either: (again Dorine)"Je crois que de Madame il est, ma foi, jaloux." Established as a seducer and hypocrite, Tartuffe plays his role to the fullest. When he attempts to seduce Elmire in III, iii, his language is cloaked in pious terms:

Que le ciel à jamais par sa toute bonté
Et de l'âme et du corps vous donne la santé
Et bénisse vos jours autant que le désir
Le plus humble de ceux que son amour inspire.

Love is provoked, not by sexual desire, but celestial love—in loving God we love others. Such a theologically-cloaked approach to seduction does not fool Elmire, but it gives Tartuffe an excuse to pursue her:

Mais plutôt d'un transport de zèle qui m'entraîne,
Et d'un pur mouvement . . .
He constantly blames his heart for confusing love for God with the more sexual variety:

L'amour qui nous attache aux beautés éternelles
Ne souffre pas en nous l'amour des temporelles.

He never ceases to put seduction in a religious framework, even when Elmire ostensibly consents to him in IV, v:

Contentez mon désir, et n'ayez point d'effroi;
Je réponds de tout, et prends le mal sur moi.

When his intentions are discovered by Orgon, his desire for Elmire vanishes and he aspires to a more ambitious design—he wants first Orgon's wealth, then his very liberty. In attempting to persuade the Prince to arrest Orgon, he is paid back in kind. Even though Orgon and his family are incapable of defeating Tartuffe, justice wins out in the end when he eventually oversteps his limits.

In the other camp, the combatants display a firmness of purpose ranging from Dorine's stubbornness to Mariane's timidity. Their desires do not change, but their manner of achieving fulfillment varies considerably. Dorine approaches Madame Pernelle, Orgon, and Tartuffe on down-to-earth terms. She is not afraid of saying that which needs to be said:

Il passe pour un saint dans votre fantaisie;
Tout son fait, croyez-moi, n'est rien qu'hypocrisie.

(I, i)

She respects the back of Orgon's hand, however, when they lock in combat. She must restrain herself: "J'enrage de ne pouvoir parler." Dorine loves a good fight and cannot
understand Mariane's hesitation to stand up for her inter­ests. Sarcasm is Dorine's weapon in dealing with con­trary wills:

Mariane
Et veux-tu que mes feux par le monde étalés ... 

Dorine
Non, non, je ne veux rien. Je vois que vous voulez
Etre à Monsieur Tartuffe, et j'aurais, quand j'y pense,
Tort de vous détourner d'une telle alliance.
(II, iii)

Cléante has virtually the same role as Dorine, with the difference lying in his more distinguished and abstract argumentation. He tries to show Orgon the fallacy of his beliefs, whereas Dorine prefers to treat the visible effects of his folly. Cléante uses reason in dealing with Orgon:

Hé quoi! vous ne ferez nulle distinction
Entre l'hypocrisie et la devotion?
Vous les voulez traiter d'un semblable langage,
Et rendre même honneur au masque qu'au visage;

Thus he voices the causes of Orgon's problems, albeit in terms that Orgon is unwilling to understand. Dorine deals with problems on a more practical level:

Il est bien difficile enfin d'être fidèle
A de certains maris faits d'un certain modèle.
(II, ii)

If Orgon persists, any wayward conduct on Mariane's part will be his fault. After all of Dorine and Cléante's solid arguments in both abstract and empirical terms, Orgon remains as untouched as ever.
Elmire refuses to enter into the fray, and with good reason. Had she abandoned herself completely to discrediting Tartuffe, Orgon would have sympathized with him all the more. By respecting discreet behavior, she makes the contrast between her dignity and Tartuffe's lust all the more striking. In fact, she scrupulously avoids Orgon whenever the family is in turmoil, rather than greet him while her family is squabbling with Madame Pernelle she says: "Je veux aller là-haut attendre sa venue." She is embarrassed at having taken part in the plot to expose Tartuffe:

C'est contre mon humeur que j'ai fait tout ceci; Mais on m'a mis au point de vous traiter ainsi.

When it is her turn to don the mask to trick Tartuffe, she proves entirely capable of holding her own. She uses her "honnêteté" to feign an air of gallantry which, if she were sincere, would qualify her for a role as a "young lover":

Il veut que nous soyons ensemble à tous moments; Et c'est par où je puis, sans peur d'être blâmée, Me trouver ici seule avec vous enfermée, Et ce qui m'autorise à vous ouvrir un cœur Un peu trop prompt peut-être à souffrir votre ardeur. (IV, v)

Less capable of battle is Mariane, who can do little more than enlist the aid of Dorine: "Contre un père absolu que veux-tu que je fasse?" Her unwillingness to act minimizes her role considerably; in L'Ecole des femmes Agnès proved much more capable of foiling her "obstacle" despite her ignorance. Mariane's lack of will is consistent with
this play, however, for Tartuffe is not interested in such an easily won prize as she. Valère is similarly lacking in will; he is reminiscent of Eraste in _Le Désert_.

**Eraste**
Mais j'espère aux bontés qu'une autre aura pour moi,
Et j'en sais de qui l'âme à ma retraite ouverte,
Consentira sans honte à réparer ma perte.

**Mariane**
La perte n'est pas grande, et de ce changement
Vous vous consolerez assez facilement.

Both abandon themselves to self-pity rather than participating in the fray against Tartuffe.

The role of Damis completes this gallery of personages each of whom approaches the struggle in a different manner. Damis is impetuous. His haste makes him no match for the studied coolness of a Tartuffe. When he is about to tell Orgon of his foe's treachery, his speech rings with the call to vengeance:

*Et vos discours en vain prétendent m'obliger*
*A quitter le plaisir de me pouvoir venger,*
*Sans aller plus avant, je vais vider l'affaire;*
*Et voici justement de quoi me satisfaire,*

(III, vi)

To derive such joy at denouncing Tartuffe is ill-founded, as Orgon believes only what he wants to believe—in this case, that Tartuffe can do no wrong. Damis' accusation, which Elmire has tried to stifle, brings on his banishment. Damis is right in making his accusation, but he has misjudged the power of his word when contradicted by Tartuffe's. Orgon interprets Damis' statement in the worst
possible way—Damis wants only to sully Tartuffe's reputation:

Ah! traître, osest-tu bien par cette fausseté
Vouloir de sa vertu ternir la pureté?

(III, vi)

Damis, ever impetuous, responds by attacking Tartuffe again, rather than appealing to Orgon as his father, or calling on his mother to substantiate his claim:

Damis
Quoi! la feinte douceur de cette âme hypocrite
Vous fera démentir

Orgon
Tais-toi, peste maudite.

It falls on cooler heads to carry on the struggle after Damis is dismissed. Too little will-power (Mariane) and too much (Damis) proves ineffective; once again le juste milieu, in the form of Elmire's plan wins the day.

Tension: The Crescendo of Seriousness

Tension in Le Tartuffe shows an improvement over tension in L'Ecole des femmes. By placing the action of his play in a large bourgeois household, Molière provides many possibilities for tension; tension is gallant between Mariane and Valère, farcical between Orgon and Dorine, intellectual between Orgon and Cléante, serious at the dénouement. Few are the scenes which are devoid of tension, because Tartuffe (or Tartuffe's spiritual presence in Acts I and II) keeps his victims constantly on the defensive.
with his ceaseless efforts to exploit them.

Scene one establishes tension as quickly as in any Molière play. Madame Pernelle's "Allons, Flipote, allons, que d'eux je me délivre" indicates the discord that Orgon's family is suffering from; no one is safe from the scourge of her tongue.

The large number of personages involved indicates the widespread effects of the strife--Tartuffe's cause is strong enough to withstand the ire and general censure of the entire household, consisting of six persons. Their lack of success in dealing with Madame Pernelle can be matched only by their inadequacy in dealing with Orgon. Clearly, superiority in numbers proves no guarantee of success.

The family approaches Orgon on an individual basis, beginning with Cléante in I, v. Cléante has two reasons for speaking to Orgon; he wants to persuade him that Tartuffe is not what he claims to be, and that the question of Valère's marriage must be settled now. He presents the first argument in as reasonable a manner possible, making clear the distinction between true devotion and the appearances of devotion à la Tartuffe. Orgon refuses to argue with him, giving deference to his reputation as a learned man. Vis-à-vis the dignified members of the anti-Tartuffe clan, Cléante and Elmire, Orgon remains silent.
Cléante, a 
raisonneur, has a stronger role than Chrysalde of Le Ecole des femmes. Cléante is a member of the family and has a stake in Orgon's decisions—Chrysalde acts as a friend, advising Arnolphe of the pitfalls attendant to his plans. Cléante, on the other hand, acts in greater earnest, for he seeks to insure the happiness of his brother's family. His level of intellect surpasses that of any personage yet encountered in Molière's theater; whether he is right or wrong in his arguments is not essential here—it is the level or abstraction he attains, as well as his degree of involvement, which helps to create the "honnête" atmosphere of Le Tartuffe. An analysis of the two situations, Chrysalde-Arnolphe and Cléante-Orgon holds a key to the distinction of atmosphere between the two plays. In L'Ecole the two friends are discussing a future event: Arnolphe's marriage. Chrysalde shows concern over Arnolphe's plans, fearing that he will fall victim to the same fate as other village husbands. Cléante approaches Orgon because he fears Orgon's folly will lead others to difficult straits. Orgon is intellectually inferior to his brother to the point where they cannot communicate. Instead of a debate among equals, we witness a sort of "lecture," as a father (Cléante) might give his misguided son (Orgon). The rub lies in Orgon's position of power, which renders Cléante's arguments ineffective.
Cléante says: "Sans avoir dessein de vous mettre en courroux," and he couches his speech in terms aimed at doing just that: speaking to Orgon in a level dignified enough to avoid squabbling. He succeeds in doing so, but he also fails to communicate with Orgon:

Cléante

Les hommes, la plupart, sont étrangement faits:
Dans la juste nature on ne les voit jamais;
La raison a pour eux des bornes trop petites,
En chaque caractère il passent les limites;
Et la plus noble chose, ils la gâtent souvent
Pour la vouloir outrer et pousser trop avant,
Que cela vous soit dit en passant, mon beau-frère.

Orgon

Oui, vous êtes, sans doute, un docteur qu'on révère;
Tout le savoir du monde est chez vous retiré;

Orgon dismisses these arguments on the basis that Cléante disparages everyone. Cléante's retort that a man with the ability to discern, of which there are others than himself, may well appreciate "la dévotion traitable," holds little interest for Orgon, who "knows what he knows." This hierarchy of intellects is a feature of the play which renders it more complex than L'Ecole, in which Arnolphe stands as an equal to Chrysalde in terms of self-esteem, if not equalling his friend in common sense. Orgon begins a series of bungling patres familiae who focus attention on the concept of domesticity. In this case, Orgon threatens the domestic balance in every manner possible in his infatuation with Tartuffe. Cléante's discourse provides the
clarification of action in the first half of the play; Tartuffe's connivance, abetted by Orgon's blindness, menaces the family with untold exploitation. At this point, tension promises to be similar to that of L'Ecole: Orgon-Tartuffe (like Arnolphe) opposed by the young lovers and their allies. The relationship between Dorine and Orgon, less intellectual, provides another level of tension.

While conversing with Mariane, Dorine slips in to listen. Her objections provoke Orgon's ire because he feels that it is not her place to give him advice. In his worst moments he resembles his mother in temperament by threatening Dorine with physical punishment:

**Orgon**

Te tairas-tu, serpent, dont les traits effrontés . . .

**Dorine**

Ah! vous êtes dévot, et vous vous emportez!

and later:

**Dorine (en s'enfuyant)**

Je me moquerai fort de prendre un tel époux.

**Orgon lui veut donner un soufflet et la manque.**

Orgon brings tension to the same level of seriousness as the tension created by Madame Pernelle. His recourse to slapping and loudness reflects frustration at Dorine's harassment, rather than a serious dilemma. Even the "dépit scene" between Mariane and Valère has a deeper substratum of tension than Orgon's scenes.
The young lovers are the first to feel the evil effects of Tartuffe's presence. Other members of the family have been irritated at Orgon's blindness and at Tartuffe's hypocrisy, but Mariane's sacrifice brings matters to a head. Mariane and Dorine lock horns when the former voices her hesitancy to oppose Orgon's desires. Dorine's sarcasm finds its mark after failing against Orgon:

Dorine
Quelle allègresse aurez-vous dans votre âme,
Quand d'un époux si beau vous vous verrez la femme?

Mariane
Ha! cesse, je te prie, un semblable discours.

Dorine's anger prompts her to rub salt in Mariane's wounds; the poor child receives the same treatment from Valère in the ensuing scene, the difference being that Valère is genuinely angry. It takes Dorine's intervention to bring them back together, showing the depth of the breach between them—this is not as gracious a "dépit" as Lucile and Eraste's. Dorine ends their argument only by turning their thoughts to stratagem for defeating Tartuffe.

Each member of the household has felt Tartuffe's presence although he has yet to appear. The tension he creates becomes all the greater when he at last makes his entrance. Almost immediately he has his scene with Elmire. The hypocrite, his odious character well-delineated by
Dorine, Cléante, and others, attempts to seduce his patron's wife. Orgon has already offered up his daughter to him, as well as permanent residence in his home, for all intents. Elmire, hardly meriting exposure to such a lecherous villain as Tartuffe, seems destined to be his next victim. By placing his hand on her knee and holding her clothing, he violates all the rules of respectable behavior. His underhandedness is revealed when he tries to persuade her that an affair with a dévot cannot lead to scandal:

Mais les gens comme nous brûlent d'un feu discret,
Avec qui pour toujours on est sûr du secret.
(III, iii)

Tartuffe has assumed his position at the core of the play. Whereas his influence was felt in the first two acts, he no longer shares the spotlight with Orgon. The spectator devotes his full attention to the impostor. Elmire's dislike for Tartuffe is as strong as is his desire for her; again Molière opposes two forces of relatively equal strength.

Elmire fully recognizes Tartuffe's intentions—his "mask" fools her not at all. The strength of Tartuffe's desires compensates for his failure to trick her. Molière provides his seducer with gallant language to give the scene a lofty tone, yet various gestures betray a very down-to-earth desire that appears difficult to keep on the
verbally, "honnête" level. These gestures reveal Molière's intentions to keep Tartuffe's scenes from becoming too gallant, thereby allowing his "humanity" to escape the spectator. At the end of this scene, Damis hopes to impress this point on his father.

The concatenation of events again reflects the family ambience of the play. One member after another attempts to approach either Tartuffe or Orgon on some sort of reasonable terms. But neither of these two is willing to surrender any power that they exercise. Damis, in confronting Tartuffe before Orgon, has no accurate idea of Orgon's blindness where Tartuffe is concerned. His expulsion, the realistic tone of which is reminiscent of the "Mauvais fils" paintings of Greuze, emphasizes Orgon's antipathy toward his own family. Rather than simply forgetting about his family in the mystic fervor that his guest inspires, he turns on everyone by giving all his possessions to Tartuffe (which is legally impossible according to French law of the time); he is forsaking his family.

The use of material goods (la donation) becomes more important as Tartuffe gains in power. In a bourgeois ambience, the loss of wealth can be the cause of extreme tension. When Tartuffe fails to seduce Elmire and is discovered, he takes recourse to the gift; interest has shifted from matters of sexuality to finance. The thought
of cuckoldry, which Arnolphe cringed at in horror, has not dawned upon Orgon until too late. The question of his family's happiness in toto has been thrown into tension because Orgon refused to recognize his guest's desires before he had entrusted and given all his possessions to him.

Act V is built entirely around serious tension resulting from Orgon's donation and the entrusting of "certaine cassette" to Tartuffe. M. Loyal's visit affirms the fear that the house now belongs to Tartuffe; this odious proxy for Tartuffe uses the same pious vocabulary in posing rather exorbitant demands:

Monsieur, sans passion:
Ce n'est rien seulement qu'une sommation,
Un ordre de vider d'ici, vous et les vôtres,
Mettre vos meubles hors, et faire place à d'autres,

... ... ... ...

After ordering them to leave the premises by the next day, he bids them farewell: "Le ciel vous tienne tous en joie."

He is followed shortly thereafter by Tartuffe and the Exempt. This final scene touches on the periphery of comedy; the detachment necessary for a spectator to view this family's plight in a comic light is vanishing. M. Loyal's affectations in the preceding scene kept his scene from becoming too serious; the audience likened his calculating, measured speech to that of Tartuffe. His detachment toward the family he was evicting also focused attention on himself more than on the victims, thus attenuating to some degree the tension between the two camps. The presence of
Tartuffe in the final scene renews the old antagonism the family feels toward their tormentor, as well as adding the final degree of tension, that of Orgon's impending arrest. Before Orgon can flee, Tartuffe collars him: "Tout beau, Monsieur, tou beau, ne courez pas si vite!" Everyone has convened for the moment of truth between the ambitious imposter and his seemingly hapless victims; Tartuffe and the King's representative, the gullible Orgon, and Madame Pernelle, and the personages who opposed Tartuffe on every level possible. Tartuffe has been stopped before, by Elmire, when his ambitions were more modest, but there is no reason to believe that anyone can thwart his ambitions now. We are led to the assumption that Tartuffe has duped the Prince; why otherwise would he not have arrested Tartuffe at the palace? Of course, considerations of logic are out of place here—Molière creates a comic scene from a maximum of tension by having Tartuffe arrested in front of the family. The state, protector of its citizens, descends into a family menaced by a skillful confidence man in order to restore the natural order. The Exempt does not simply arrest the trickster, but first lets him say his piece. After Tartuffe calls for justice, that is the consummation of his fraud, he is tricked in turn:

Tartuffe (à l'Exempt)
Délivrez-moi, Monsieur, de la criaillerie,
Et daignez accomplir votre ordre, je vous prie,
L'Exempt
Oui, c'est trop demeurer, sans doute, à l'accomplir;
Votre bouche à propos m'invite à le remplir;
Et, pour l'exécuter, suivez-moi tout à l'heure
Dans la prison qu'on doit vous donner pour demeure.

Tartuffe
Qui? moi, Monsieur?

Tension is brought to a close by the Guarantor, who demonstrates that someone like Tartuffe could never succeed. Tartuffe's ambitious enterprise to persecute his former host proves fruitless in a society ruled by a wise ruler. If Cléante, for all his sagacity, was powerless, at least the man in power was of the same intelligence.

Transition: The Blending of the "Désitt Scene"

As Tartuffe ascended the social hierarchy, from his modest designs at the beginning of the play, to his grandiose plan at the end, Molière had to pay close attention to transition to keep the episodes in the interim linked together.

Rather than trace the linking of each scene to its neighboring scenes throughout the plays, as has been done in the preceding chapters, a sampling of typical transitional sections will be considered, as well as the general movement of the play. As a whole, the play has a great unity, thanks primarily to the force of Tartuffe; scarcely a scene passes without the mention of his name. Act I admirably introduces everyone, including Tartuffe, in absentia, whose presence in Orgon's house has prompted a
division of the family. This division gives the act most of its organization. Act II centers around Mariane; Tartuffe's influence is felt here in a most conventional manner—the theme of forcing a girl to marry a disagreeable suitor is ancient. Act III shifts attention to Tartuffe's efforts to seduce Elmire and Damis' expulsion. Again the theme is old—the lechery of the "monk" type (this will be elaborated upon in the next section on pages 112 and 113). Act IV presents the scheme to trick Tartuffe and the impostor's expulsion. Act V shows the ascension through the hierarchy of society to the point where the King steps in to end the play. In every act Tartuffe's schemes provoke action from other personages. In this sense the "dépôt scene" of Act II takes on a distinctive flavor because of Tartuffe's presence and the scene is different in tone from its counterpart in Le Désert. In the latter play, "dépôt" is very intellectual; before Eraste approaches Lucile, he has an amusing dialogue with his servant in which they both agree to give up females forever. When love has its way and they succumb, the comic effect is light—obviously neither personage can resist the other. On the contrary Mariane and Valère are genuinely upset because of Orgon's decision and their "dépôt" is more serious in tone. Not only must they be reconciled, but they must find a way
to escape Tartuffe. The use of a third party, Dorine, facilitates this: she offers advice to them on how to delay the marriage until circumstances have straightened themselves out. Cairncross' statement: "a larger part of the second act is lifted straight from Molière's earlier Dépit amoureux," is thus misleading as Molière took pains to make the scene blend well with Tartuffe as a whole."

The subject of her marriage to Valère is first broached by Cléante near the end of Act I. Orgon hints that he is planning to substitute Tartuffe for Valère. He tells Mariane exactly this in II, i, after which Dorine makes her appearance to disagree with the projected marriage (II, iii). After Dorine attempts to persuade Mariane to be firm (II, iii), the "dépit scene," the major scene of Act II takes place. Valère's main reproach to Mariane is exactly the same as Dorine's--she seems to be offering little resistance to Orgon's plan. If Molière simply inserted the entire notion of Mariane's marriage into the framework of his original (1664) Tartuffe, he took great pains to make it an integral part of the play. The "dépit" shows Tartuffe's evil influence on all the members of a large family, and

is no less necessary than the first scene of *L'Avaré*, in which the young lovers show the serious effects of avarice on their affair. No farcical scenes precede or follow the "dépit" of *Tartuffe*, because the atmosphere of this play is necessarily more tension-ridden than that of *Le Dépit*; hence every scene is another portion of the tableau of a family under extreme duress. *Le Tartuffe* may be episodic, but each episode unfolds logically, as the villain shifts his attention to bigger and bigger schemes.

**Farce and Plot: The Discovery of High Comedy with a Minimum of Plot**

To elevate the tone of *Le Tartuffe* from that of *L'Ecole des femmes*, Molière did not reduce the quantity of farce or increase reliance on "character," rather he diminished the role of the physical absurdities of farce (beatings for example) and heightened the rapport of trickster-victim that characterizes farce. The notion of a personage seen as an unchanging type is important, of course, but the painting of characters is no more important to *Le Tartuffe* than to *L'Ecole des femmes*. The most important role of "character" in *Le Tartuffe* is the establishment of certain forces in the play (villainy, innocence, blindness) which through their interplay lead the spectator to an interest in seeing the "trickster tricked," or the blind man see. The unity of *Le Tartuffe* arises from a basic farcical situation; an ambitious villain tries to
bilk a gullible victim. The language he employs, both pious and elegant as the situation demands, raises the tone of the play from farce to comedy, but the structure resembles farce. A study of the play as an entity or any part of the play reveals the basically circular motion it has. At the end, Orgon is no wiser than at the outset; he still acts intemperately:

Orgon
He bien! te voilà, traître . . .

Cléante
Ah! mon frère arrêtez,

and though he has rid himself of his guest, the family is neither better nor worse off. Only Mariane's marriage indicates change from a situation given at the beginning of the play. In fact, her marriage has served as pretext for most of the incidents in Acts I, II, and III. The motion needed to move the play through Act IV and V comes from Tartuffe's ever-increasing appetite.

Le Tartuffe illustrates J. Schérer's comment on Molièresque dramaturgy perfectly: "A l'unité d'action Molière a substitué l'unité d'intérêt pour un caractère." The plot holds no interest in itself, although it is important in the sense that it keeps the play moving forward. The playwright does not suspend the motion of his play.

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whenever he focuses upon caractère; however, to create static moments would be poor writing. Instead he creates circular motion in which nothing is resolved and the comic hero expends energy in futile efforts to attain an unreasonable goal. If interest is in the "character" of the various personages it is only because of their desire to either victimize someone or the facility with which they are victimized; Molière has no desire to paint a static portrait.

The scene between Elmire and Tartuffe, with Orgon under the table (IV, v), shows the strong rapport of the play with farce. Of course, this is "honnête farce" as Guicharnaud calls it, but Tartuffe's intent to trick Orgon is simply a more sophisticated treatment of the theme of cuckoldry in low farce. When Elmire feigns worry about her husband possibly lurking nearby, Tartuffe rejoins:

Qu'est-il besoin pour lui du soin que vous prenez? C'est un homme, entre nous, à mener par le nez;
De tous nos entretiens il est pour faire gloire,
Et je l'ai mis au point de voir tout sans rien croire.

Tartuffe is right, of course; he has Orgon in such a state that he cannot possibly see things as they are. But he has also overstepped his bounds, because Elmire has convinced him of her sincerity. Tartuffe now gloats at his mastery over the shortly-to-be cuckolded husband. The tables are turned when Orgon crawls from underneath the
table. In a masterpiece of farcical comedy, complete with the appropriate gestures, Tartuffe advances, arms outstretched, to embrace Elmire: "Personne ne s'y trouve et mon âme ravie . . ." As the scene is sometimes played, Tartuffe goes so far as to embrace Orgon, but it seems unnecessary to go this far. The atmosphere of "honnêteté" calls for a mere meeting of the eyes. The play is kept moving after this scene with the gift and the cassette, but no comedy is produced from such devices. Since the quid pro quo and recognition are not used to create comedy in Le Tartuffe, plot becomes little more than a framework for the succession of various farcical scenes. In their first meeting Elmire met Tartuffe in order to talk of Mariane's marriage; the second meeting was arranged so that she could trick him. In both cases the marriage occasions the meetings but is rarely discussed.

Tartuffe as a stage figure is much more enigmatic than Arnolphe. We do not know whether he is entirely hypocritical to himself because he may have reconciled his lust with religion:

L'amour qui nous attache aux beautés éternelles
N'étouffe pas en nous l'amour des temporelles.

He may well believe that his intentions are good, and that a man must be allowed to act like a man, regardless of what others expect of him. As long as one is discreet and no scandal arises, the cause of devotion suffers no
harm. In the first scene with Elmire, a major one by any standards, she fails to communicate with Tartuffe. He is too busy pursuing (and justifying) his desires to pay any attention to her references to Orgon. As far as progress is concerned, the scene is a standstill—but we do see Tartuffe in action. His actions come as no surprise; the value of the scene thus lies in pure entertainment.

Molière entertains by pitting the lecherous impostor against his patron's wife; there is nothing innovative about this situation—only the atmosphere is different. Many medieval tales relate the story of the monk who is most interested in satisfying his appetites. Molière has made his play timely by transforming the monk into a personal confessor, a position which requires the ability to get along in polite society. Thus, Tartuffe speaks the language of the gallant lover and the "dévot" while his physiognomy suggests that of the corpulent parasite-monk ("le teint gros, gras, et frais"). Elmire's elegance makes him appear all the more despicable. This man has entered the foyer to exercise his wily talents on Orgon and victimize him as fully as possible; but for all his discourse he reaps no benefits—only a prison cell. The comic hero falls once again for having dared to try too much.

Orgon, much less complex in character than Tartuffe, is a holdover from the days of Sganarelle, and his character type will be repeated over and over in Molière's
theater. He acts blindly, never reflecting on his acts, ever doing what his emotions dictate. When he is present, the scene tends toward the "medium farce" that we have seen in L'Ecole des femmes. The situation is reversed, however, rather than being obsessed with his wife's cuckolding him, Orgon actually pushes Elmire into Tartuffe's arms. Elmire's reaction to this situation is to disregard Orgon's stupidity; in a very high, cultivated manner she respects him as a husband even if he errs. By maneuvering Tartuffe into a compromising situation she avoids confronting Orgon, and forcing a scene similar to those between Orgon and Damis or Orgon and Dorine. We must assume that Orgon would not spare Elmire's pride as he does in Cléante's case—after all, Cléante is a "docteur qu'on révère." Given Orgon's "type," (see page 100) the penchant for misogynistic behavior is strong, and Elmire in all her respectability is not to be subjected to rude treatment.

The gestures in this play reveal the strong farcical strain that runs through most of the scenes. Tartuffe, the personage who creates high farce through his sophisticated manner of tricking victims (using the mask of piety he gains their confidence before bringing his desires into the open) betrays himself to everyone (save Orgon) through his telltale gestures. By the use of the handkerchief in his first scene he shows his erotic temptations. The physical property of the handkerchief is no different than
Sganarelle's jug of wine in *Le Médecin malgré lui*. The spectator now thinks of Tartuffe as the type who "fait des tableaux couvrir les nudités/ Mais . . . a de l'amour pour les réalités." (from *Le Misanthrope*, III, iv). His straying hands in III, iii betray a similar inclination toward "les réalités." By refusing to slap Tartuffe, Dorine and Elmire keep these scenes on a more "honnête" level. On the other hand, Orgon tries repeatedly to slap Dorine, but never succeeds. When he crawls from beneath the table in Act IV the spectator's reaction is somewhat more overt than a "rire dans l'âme," however. Thus, the level of farce in *Le Tartuffe* is never as low as the scenes between Alain, Georgette, and Arnolphe, whereas the farcical tone attains the sophistication of Arnolphe's "high farce" (V, iv in *L'Ecole des femmes*) in both Tartuffe's seduction scenes. Plot is much less an integral part of the play than plot in *L'Ecole*, because the thin thread of Mariane's marriage, the pretext for most scenes up to Orgon's "discovery," has little bearing on Tartuffe's actions. His ever-increasing appetites cause him to move up the social hierarchy, from Orgon to Elmire, then to the King.

To say that Tartuffe's character, motivated by the desire to deceive others and thereby advance his own fortunes, is the essence of this play, would be misleading. It would be more accurate to say that Molière has created
a unified comedy while using all the traditional resources of comedy available.

Using the common plot device of Mariane's marriage to hold the scenes together, farce is developed into a style suitable for high comedy. Tartuffe and Orgon are presented as social "types." Rather than paint pictures of them, the playwright demonstrates the relationship between them and other personages. The play's unity stems from the strong familial atmosphere in which this play is couched.

Atmosphere: the Family in Turmoil

As we have seen, Molière composed Le Tartuffe from many comic traditions. Farce has played a large part in scenes involving Orgon, Dorine, Madame Pernelle, and Tartuffe; gallant plot comedy is present in the "dépit scene" of Act II. Gallant language is not confined to the young lovers, however. Tartuffe lets slip gallantries while attempting to speak to Elmire as a dévot; as she notes: "La déclaration est tout à fait galante." Cléante puts the causes of Orgon's troubles into the most abstract, intellectual terms possible, thereby raising the level of his scenes into the most rarified comic atmosphere.

Such a gallery of personages, each with his own individual characterization, constitutes a unified world—
world of the household. Orgon, the bungling pater familias, Dorine the crafty servant, and all the others in the household have their antecedents in previous Molière comedies. Yet in combination with Tartuffe, a distinctive atmosphere is created. Tartuffe's growing appetites take the place of plot devices as a device for moving the play forward, and in a sense, upward. From the outset Le Tartuffe becomes clearly the drama of Tartuffe's desire to possess everything Orgon has, beginning with his daughter, ending with his freedom. He is opposed by Orgon's family, in Orgon's house. When Tartuffe proves too powerful for the family, the King saves them. The family is thus situated in the social framework of the Kingdom as ruled by a wise monarch. Replacing the New Comedy formula of the young lovers vs. the odious senex figure is the more realistic drama of a family struggling with a villainous fraud. The notion of valuing "la fausse monnaie à l'égal de la bonne," a source of comedy taken from the bourgeois-oriented medieval farce, finds its most complete and powerful expression in this panorama of the bourgeois-in-society: Le Tartuffe. The panorama is complete because of the large number of personages and "types" involved, and powerful thanks to the force of Tartuffe. He alone brings down the force of the law to thwart his designs. In future plays Molière will use the newfound pattern of the father engrossed
in a mania for someone or something, but no figure as strong as Tartuffe will emerge as the incarnation of the comic hero’s desires. The atmosphere of the family as it struggles against its leader’s infatuation finds its fullest and most powerful expression in Le Tartuffe.
CHAPTER IV

LE MISANTHROPE

Critics often choose *Le Misanthrope* as the play which most closely represents the character and private life of Molière. Alceste's difficulties in dealing with Célimène are taken as symbolizing Molière's rapport with Armande, his wife; Alceste's feuds with his contemporaries represent his bitter relationships with other playwrights and men of letters. Such theorizing is in part prompted by the play's unconventional construction. Molière seems to be saying that this is a realistic drama, an attempt to display his own personal woes, by eliminating the standardized obstacles—the *senex*, or "dog-in-the-manger" type—as well as the young lovers who normally end a comedy with their marriage. Yet the play is a comedy, despite the absence of any "happy" couple (Eliante and Philinte included). This is a wager, to be sure. Can a comedy be made entirely of the somber stuff (hypocrisy and evil intentions) that darkened *Le Tartuffe*?

*Le Misanthrope* followed Molière's two most provocative plays, *Le Tartuffe* and *Dom Juan*. He was also writing plays in the farcical tradition, *L'Amour médecin* and *Le Médecin malgré lui* at this time as well as gallant court comedies...
such as the unfinished *Mélicerte*. It is thus natural that his most classical play, a play set in the aristocratic atmosphere of the salon, should fall in his experimental period, a time when he is treating religion and the supernatural. In this "étrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens," Molière chose to represent the higher echelons of society in a high comedy, and the result is the play which comes closest to the classical ideal of any in his theater.

The play is considered to be classical because, first, Molière omits much of the buffoonery present in most of his other high comedies, and secondly he simplifies the play by concentrating attention on one couple. Once again love is the issue, as it was in *Le Désert amoureux*; but Molière confuses the issue by constructing a lover who is neither entirely gallant nor entirely ridiculous. He does not pursue his lady's hand mindless of his own pride as did Eraste. He expects to reform Célimène, and judging her *conduite*, this is not as unreasonable an aspiration as Arnolphe's. Most of his desires are reasonable, taken one at a time—but in motion simultaneously, his desires reduce him at times to helplessness, at times to rage.
Will: the Universal Frustration of Desire

The play is based on an unsolvable problem. Alceste's will provides the dramatic action in this play and his will manifests itself in two desires. The first is his mania for complete sincerity, with no exceptions. The second is his love for the coquette Célimène, a person who is not the least interested in sincerity. His love provides the excuse for keeping him in the play, for otherwise he would have given up in disgust after two scenes. Thus, Alceste has a problem which has no other solution than the changing of his character, or Célimène's, and characters do not change in Molière's plays.

Alceste's desire for sincerity provides the background action:

> Je veux qu'on soit sincère, et qu'en homme d'honneur
> On ne lâche aucun mot qui n'entraîne du coeur.

(I, i)

But this is only the background, for this is "being," a state, not an action. The things that he wants are not active: "Je veux me fâcher, et ne veux point entendre."

His other source of motivation does provide for a sense of movement, however little movement may occur:

> C'est qu'un coeur bien atteint veut qu'on soit tout à lui,
> Et je ne viens ici qu'à dessein de lui dire
> Tout ce que là-dessus ma passion m'inspire.

(I, i)

Thus we have a man who is always proclaiming what he wants,
yet what he wants turns out to be negative. He wants sincerity because he thinks he wants to be distinguished, but the statement: "C'est n'estimer rien qu'estimer tout le monde" reveals his negative stance where others are concerned. He fears praise of others, because he wants it all. Similarly the lover in him wants her "all for himself," rather than giving himself to his loved one. The will of this unbending fâcheux provides the basic dramatic situation in Le Misanthrope, and this situation will change very little from the beginning of the play until the end.

The first scene makes Alceste's dual aspirations, sincerity and love, clear, as well as the impossibility of realizing these aspirations. The impossibility lies of course in Alceste's absolutist character. We are dealing with another extremist, an entêté, who is unwilling to make accommodations with his environment. Given these circumstances, plus the fact that there are no conversions in Molière's plays, the rest of the play is an exercise in futility for Alceste.

Everything which follows contradicts Alceste's wishes. He is sued for being sincere. His heart's desire flaunts her fickleness before his very eyes. Yet he would rather be opposed than succumb to imitating behavior that he loathes:

Je voudrais m'en contât-il grand-chose,
Pour la beauté du fait avoir perdu ma cause.
(I, i)
He wants to lose. In Act IV, scene iv, he shows how little he has changed:

    Je veux voir jusqu'au bout quel sera votre coeur,
    Et si de me trahir il aura la noirceur.

He wants to see what she is going to do with him. It may be said that he succeeds, but in a very negative way. Since his ideals are negative, that is, since he would rather lose than compromise, his desires are fulfilled. Yet he protests mightily against the injustice of it all. And it is in the protesting, the verbal, internal struggle that he wages against society that the play finds its substance.

Alceste's masochistic bent sets the tone for the play since he is constantly on stage inveighing against humanity (seventeen scenes out of twenty-two). When he is absent others take his place, notably the frustrated prude, Arsinoé. She reproaches Célimène in almost the same language as Alceste:

    . . . votre conduite avec ses grands éclats,
    Madame, eut le malheur qu'on ne la loua pas.
    (III, iv)

Arsinoé acts in the name of prudishness, but as Célimène reveals, what she wants is the same thing that Alceste is demanding in the name of sincerity, which is to control Célimène's behavior and make her more like themselves. If Arsinoé were able to make Célimène call a truce on her fickleness, she might gather some of the leftovers. Alceste wants Célimène to make her decision so that he may
act. Célimène does not want to commit herself, simply because she is a coquette. Obviously someone is going to be made unhappy in this play. Molière outdoes himself by satisfying no one. Even in Dom Juan, someone is placated, even if he is of stone.

Other minor personages, Oronte, the marquis, etc., are thwarted in various ways too numerous and obvious to discuss. Their frustrations form a substratum of lawsuits and petty rivalries that go nowhere. Alceste's desire to escape to the désert seems well founded, since Célimène is hesitating between herself and this group of fops and syco­phants. The truth is that Célimène is part of court soci­ety, whereas Alceste does not temperamentally belong.

There is a middle road, as usual, one which seemingly offers the solution to Alceste's problems. This median is the route travelled by Eliante and Philinte, that of reason. The advocate of le juste milieu usually has his way in Molière's theater, but here again Le Misanthrope is unique. Neither Eliante nor Philinte are satisfied at the dénouement, because they are unable to dissuade Alceste from retiring from the world. Molière has made both of them sympathetic to Alceste's problems, even if it is a quali­fied sympathy (see page 148), whereas in other plays, the entêté is opposed by the "reasonable group." Eliante ad­mired Alceste's "heroic" character:
Philinte's role is more subtle, and his motivation could stem from his love for Eliante, as well as love for Alceste; yet he always manifests his consideration for Alceste, calling him "notre ami." Since they want to change him, and this is impossible, they both suffer frustration, which is alleviated by Eliante's consent to marry Philinte in the final scene. This resolution is the only bright spot in the entire play, but even this is tempered by the ambiance of discontent that surrounds them. Rather than forgetting about their stubborn friend, they want to help him:

Allons, Madame, allons employer toute chose,
Pour rompre ce dessein que son coeur se propose,
(V, iv)

We know that future attempts to aid Alceste will prove no more fruitful than their efforts during the play.

The remaining personage of importance, Célimène, is left possibly the most broken of all the participants. She is endowed with a quick wit and a love for the sort of life she is leading. Yet she is attacked even more viciously than Alceste. Since Alceste does not expect any better from his contemporaries anyway, we are hard put to sympathize with him in his decision to flee society. Célimène, on the other hand, depends upon life in society.
for her existence. Arsinoé's meddling precipitates Célimène's destruction and makes of her a rather pathetic individual indeed. Since she, as well as Alceste, have merited their fate, we can see the justification for her chastisement. Yet her case has a pitiful aspect to it, in part prompted by her final speech:

La solitude effraye une âme de vingt ans;
Je ne me sens point la mienne assez forte,
Pour me résoudre à prendre un dessein de la sorte.

(V, iv)

This speech elicits a final reproach from Alceste: "Allez, je vous refuse," which neither endears us to Alceste nor causes us to condemn Célimène. Alceste's spite, which causes his own withdrawal, seconds the spite of those he loathes, thus causing, ostensibly, Célimène's disgrace. Most significantly, even Eliante and Philinte are chagrined at the turn of events; no one manages to fulfill his intentions. Célimène is left without suitors, Arsinoé and the various suitors are left with nothing save the knowledge that they are avenged, and finally Eliante and Philinte's marriage seems out of place in this tableau of frustration. Their marriage loses much of the gaiety inherent in the conventional marriage that closes a comedy.

Tension: the Absence of Détente

These frustrations are the determining factor in the building of tension in Le Misanthrope. Life for Alceste
is difficult because of his desire to shun insincere behavior, yet he wants to court someone who is an expert in the art of insincerity. Molière is careful to provide a foil for Alceste's angry demeanor, someone who confronts him on every count, in every scene, thus providing a constant display of his inner tension. He rarely even gives Alceste an aside, and never permits a soliloquy. Colloquy is the essence of this play—a gallery of personages try to deal with him, but succeed only in arousing his ire. Everyone has difficulty understanding what makes this man tick, and tells either him or someone else so.

The initial scene is an excellent example of Molière's patterning of tension. After Alceste has railed at humanity, Philinte presents the argument for "la parfaite raison." Four répliques later the subject of the lawsuit is broached by Philinte, Alceste goes to extremes again:

\[
\text{Je voudrais, m'en coutait-il grand-chose,}
\text{Pour la beaute du fait avoir perdu ma cause.}
\]

(I, i)

Two répliques later Philinte tries to disarm him with the illogic of his conduct:

\[
\text{Mais cette rectitude}
\text{Que vous voulez en tout avec exactitude,}
\text{Cette pleine droiture oú vous vous renfermez,
La trouvez-vous ici dans ce que vous aimez?}
\]

(I, i)

This brings Alceste down to earth, forcing him to defend the ways of love and to confess a measure of strangeness in
his thinking:

Il est vrai: ma raison me le dit chaque jour; 
Mais la raison n'est pas ce qui règle l'amour. 
(I, i)

The second scene, the "sonnet scene," is a classic in the creation of emotion. It is a scene which could be detached from the play and presented alone, according to Guicharnaud: "Molière y accumule ses familiers, les unifie, et maintient l'équilibre entre le sketch qu'on peut isoler et une solide continuité."¹ Alceste's frustration at being, in fact, forbidden to reveal his opinion to Oronte is an abbreviated version of the frustration he will feel during the entire play. When he does finally criticize the sonnet, Oronte argues with him despite the latter's assurances that he desires frankness. The first act ends with Alceste at the boiling point. Scene ii is very important in demonstrating Alceste's impossible situation--the inability either to do what he wants or to change what he wants.

The second act opens with Alceste as demanding as ever, as he locks himself in confrontation with Célimène. Her demands are simple: "Soyez content." He refuses to be placated with less than a definitive declaration: "il ne tient qu'à vous que son chagrin ne passe. . . ." Rather than passing, his chagrin is heightened by the arrival of new suitors: "Quoi! l'on ne peut jamais vous parler tête

à tête?" Alceste refuses to be anything but the center of attention.

His vacillation over whether to leave or not in scene iv sustains this chagrin, and keeps alive the tension between Célimène and him. Only an abrupt interruption by Clitandre ends the quarrel:

Alceste
Non, mais vous choisirez; c'est trop de patience.

Clitandre
Parbleu! je viens du Louvre, où Cléonte, au levé,

Alceste manages to remain silent for several minutes before interjecting his caustic remarks into their conversation:

Allons, fermez, poussez, mes bons amis de cour; Vous n'en épargnez point, et chacun à son tour,

The remainder of the scene pits Alceste against everyone with his bizarre manner of viewing human relationships. Even Eliante, in her speech on the way lovers see things through biased eyes, opposes Alceste. In such a state of contrariness he is approached with the news of Oronte's complaint. He is laughed at by the marquis and urged to leave by Célimène.

After exploiting so thoroughly the extent of Alceste's wrath, Molière turns the stage over to the suitors in Act III. Alceste will not appear until the final scene of this act, and even then he manages to stay calm. The role of fâcheux in this act belongs to Acaste, Clitandre, and
Scene i presents Clitandre's demasking of Acaste. Acaste, who appears satisfied and content is forced to confess his rationalization: "Il est vrai, je me flatte et m'aveugle en effet." This smacks strongly of Alceste's confession of inconsistent behavior in the initial scene. Clitandre's idea of an alliance reinforces the theme of rivalry, hence tension, in courting Célimène.

Arsinée, as we have stated earlier, is as effective as Alceste in bringing out Célimène's most cutting wit. Arsinée, being jealous like Alceste, carries on the battle against the coquette, this time in the name of propriety. Again, Célimène is annoyed at her presence, slightly at first, since Arsinée claims to be defending her against general médisance, but finally she bursts out into her best insults:

Et moi, je ne sais pas, Madame, aussi pourquoi
On vous voit, en tous lieux, vous déchaîner sur moi.

Vous avez le champ libre, et je n'empêche pas
Que pour les attirer vous n'ayez des appas.

(III, iv)

Rather than leaving in a huff, however, Arsinée remains to speak to Alceste. This provides the opportunity for her to promise proof of coquetry to the disbelieving Alceste. Act III, scene v is the only scene in which Alceste appears reasonable, but this is primarily because he distrusts the equally unreasonable Arsinée. She remains the
villainess in the creation of tension.

Act IV opens with the only scene which is not constructed directly around open tension. There is a subtle undercurrent, however, which is caused by the obvious suitability of Philinte for Eliante, and Eliante's attachment to Alceste. Her response to his proposal, "vous vous divertissez, Philinte," is non-committal, leaving us in suspense over the direction her inclinations will take. The scene corresponds to Philinte's attempts to reason with Alceste in scene I, i. Eliante and Philinte discuss Alceste's problems and clarify his stance, which is both noble and mad. This scene of reason provides contrast to scenes of jealousy and emotion which surround it. It gives way to new problems in the next scene, after having just defined those which have been developed beforehand.

We are returned abruptly to the violent world of Alceste's emotions in IV, ii. His discovery of a billet doux has destroyed the calm he possessed in Act III. He demands justice, vengeance. In a typically ego-centered moment, he implores Eliante to avenge him by marrying him. As Philinte has tried before her, she attempts to minimize the problem, but Alceste is again resolved to scorn the world.

Célimène's entrance begins the scene which shows Alceste at his most demented. She scarcely has to say a
word to make him cease accusing and begin pleading. This short passage from anger to submission is made in one réplique:

Alceste

Ajustez, pour couvrir un manquement de foi,
Ce que je m'en vais lire . . .

Célimène

Il ne me plaît pas, moi.
Je vous trouvez plaisant d'user d'un tel empire,
Et me dire au nez ce que vous n'osez dire.

Alceste

Non, non; sans s'emporter, prenez un peu souci
De me justifier les termes que voici.

He then falls to begging her to lie, in this famous piece of dementia:

Efforcez-vous ici de paraître fidele,
Et je m'efforceraï, moi, de vous croire telle.

(IV, iii)

This madness is ended with the arrival of Du Bois with more forebodings of evil. Alceste will shortly take out his ire on the servant, who cannot recall why Alceste is being threatened. The seeds of provocation which Alceste has sown in the beginning of the play are now blooming and he is reaping a harvest of frustration.

Act V brings Alceste back onto the stage in a state of definitive resolution. He has had enough of society's justice and Philinte's rhetoric will not budge him. More than being a replay of the initial scene, this discussion finds Philinte in sympathy with Alceste's woes, and Alceste,
rather than being irritated at others, hates them firmly.

Yet he cannot resist another confrontation, another moment to resolve the tension that has been building since the beginning of the play. He has gathered his wits long enough to demand a choice from Célimène. This last demand is finally answered in the last scene, the perfect moment of dénouement. The answer comes only after she admits to being in the wrong, only after everyone has berated her for her conduct. With nothing to lose by marrying Alceste, she remains at least true unto herself and refuses. Alceste has endured one humiliation after another and the refusal at last brings him to quitting society. Tension reigns as it has from the raising of the curtain to its fall.

Transition: Molière's Dramatic Art in its Maturity

We may say that this play is characterized by motionlessness. As Guicharnaud points out in his remarks on Alceste's fixed position, seated, the play contains the minimum of motion for a Molière comedy. Every scene seems to reflect the initial scene, implying a strong feeling of status quo.

The similarity of sentiments in Le Misanthrope, the universality of frustration, is indicative of the high degree of unity the play possesses. It is the closest Molière comes to the classical ideal of a single action with
no subplots which are unrelated to it, or which are not introduced in the beginning of the play. Transition is therefore the strongest in this play of all Molière's theater. Critics have often raised the question of the relevancy of the "sonnet scene," and the dialogue between Acaste and Clitandre, in the light of the otherwise tight construction of the play. These charges have been answered in correspondingly great abundance, as we shall see.

The initial scene is a model of perfection in Molière's expository technique. The simplicity of the play itself makes exposition uncomplicated, but Molière leaves no strings untied. He introduces the two facets of Alceste's behavior as well as lays the groundwork for the minor outside incidents such as his pending lawsuit. Finally, future encounters with the various fâcheux are made to seem inevitable. There are no clever ploys, such as the common deus ex machina which make the resolution of problems seem contrived, nor are there any personages who arrive that are not in love. There may not be many atrabiles, but they are all amoureux.

Alceste begins by accusing Philinte of insincerity. This accusation provides the excuse for their conversation, and causes Alceste to divulge his entire philosophy. His diatribe occupies most of the first scene and closes upon Philinte's speech on "la parfaite raison." He then reminds
his exasperated friend about his lawsuit. Alceste brushes it aside, an indication of the slight effect the workings of the outside world will have upon the action of the play. Finally we learn of Alceste's passion fatale for Célimène and the little interest he has for Eliante and Arsinoé.

The general direction of the play is expressed in Alceste's:

Je ne viens ici qu'à dessein de lui dire
Tout ce que là-dessus ma passion m'inspire.
(I, i)

The remainder of the play will be an effort to confront Célimène and find her reaction to his passion.

Scene ii relates to Alceste's diatribes of the opening moments, which makes Oronte's entrance seem somewhat sudden. Yet this unexpected arrival begins a pattern of intrusion into the world of the would-be couple Alceste-Célimène. He offers a surprising reason for his arrival:

J'ai monté pour vous dire, et d'un cœur véritable,
Que j'ai conçu pour vous une estime incroyable.
(I, ii)

This réplique offers a two-fold introduction to Oronte's insincere character. First he uses véritable to emphasize his sincerity, after which he exaggerates by using incroyable. He then displays his vanity, flaunting his court influence and his versifying. Alceste in turn displays his difficulties in breaking with civil behavior by refusing to state what he has "sur le coeur." His refusal is manifested in the repeated "je ne dis pas cela." When Alceste finally
reveals his true feelings Oronte becomes incensed at his criticism, whether solicited or not. After Oronte retires in anger, Philinte warns Alceste of approaching misfortune resulting from his incivility. His irascible friend again shows no interest in what others may do, and attempts to isolate himself with "ne suivez point mes pas." The "je ne vous quitte point" of Philinte is typical of Alceste's recurring problem of interruptions.

Molière has placed the critical confrontation between Alceste and Célimène at the beginning of Act II, thus both Acts I and II begin with a scene of major importance. Acts III, IV, and V also begin with a two-person conversation which serves to lay the groundwork for the remainder of the act. Alceste wastes no time in displaying the gravity of this situation: "Il faudra que nous rompions ensemble."

Célimène rebuffs him with pure logic:

C'est pour me quereller donc, à ce que je voi,
Que vous avez voulu me ramener chez moi.

(II, i)

She is fully aware that this discussion will lead to nothing but quarrel. The characteristic "Morbleu, faut-il que je vous aime!" sets the tone of their future conversations.

The second scene is excellent because it is not only a liaison scene, announcing Acaste's arrival, but it manifests Alceste's frustration over her popularity: "Quoi! l'on ne peut jamais vous parler tête à tête?" The third
scene emphasizes Alceste's unwillingness to give up. He wants to confront Célimène on every count, and his obstinacy forms the transition from the tête-à-tête of II, ii to the médisance led by Célimène in scene iv. Eliante's disarming speech on how lovers look on the positive side of human faults concludes the seemingly endless series of attacks to which Alceste has added more than his share.

He is virtually dragged off the stage by Oronte's complaint after promising to be the last to leave. Act II thus closes on Alceste's petulant insistence on his rectitude, and on his avowal to return. Again, a liaison scene which could contain nothing but information is built around Alceste's character. Rather than insist upon the possible outcome of the accusation or the untimeliness of it all, Alceste is more interested in maintaining an unbending stance in the face of opposition: "Moi, je n'aurai jamais de lâche complaisance." He storms off-stage to end this first round with Célimène.

Act III begins on the "offbeat" much the same as the initial scene of Dom Juan. In a dialogue apparently unrelated to the action of this play, Acaste discusses his disposition toward Célimène with his rival Clitandre. He has been deceiving himself and is quite willing to settle for an alliance with Clitandre. Their conversation provides transition between Alceste's unbending nature, so
clearly shown in II, iv, and the scenes to follow, which are based upon the arrival of Arsinoé, Acaste's: "je me flatte et m'aveugle en effet," contrasts strongly with Alceste's adherence to his own importance. The contrast between these two men of similar name is as marked as the difference between Arsinoé and Célimène in scene iv. The scene is also a recognition of the futility that reigns at Célimène's salon. She holds out hope for everyone, yet we know that she has no intention of choosing among her suitors. Clitandre hopes that he can eliminate Acaste as a rival, and again it is as futile as Alceste's demands on Célimène.

Scene iii consists of Célimène's accurate description of Arsinoé. This process was used with felicity in Tartuffe as the portrait-fulfillment sequence is especially effective in the presentation of caractère. The portrait of Arsinoé sounds suspiciously like Alceste:

Elle ne saurait voir qu'avec un oeil d'envie
Les amants déclarés dont une autre est suivie,
Et son triste mérite, abandonné de tous,
Contre le siècle aveugle est toujours en courroux.
(III, iii)

Her irascible character would make her a suitable mate for Alceste, but, as is shown in scene v, these two do not complement each other very well.

Célimène's description ends abruptly upon Arsinoé's entrance and underlines her hypocritical position. Just
as Alceste was forced to remain civil with Oronte, Célimène feels compelled to greet Arsinoé with a smile. The juxtaposition of these lines shows Célimène's ability to change her tune:

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Elle est impertinente au suprême degré
Et... Ah! Quel heureux sort en ce lieu vous amène?
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The same turn of events will take place in this scene as in the sonnet scene, the only difference lying in Célimène's superiority of wit. She knows what Arsinoé is trying to do and has no trouble in parrying her verbal thrusts. She, as Alceste, knows how to repay with the same money.

The scene replaces what could have been another encounter between Célimène and Alceste. Arsinoé's accusations are much more interesting, for Célimène can use all her weaponry without fearing any loss. She would just as soon keep her line of suitors intact. Jealousy on Alceste's part is in fact a less interesting motive for irritation than the moral self-righteousness of a prude. The fulfillment of the portrait is not yet complete. Célimène's: "Elle attache du crime au pouvoir qu'ils (ses appas) n'ont pas," is the only part of her speech which Arsinoé has conformed to. The source of motivation is her jealousy, "son jaloux dépit," which is proven in her conversation with Alceste.

Scene v shows Alceste's paradoxical situation. He will not believe that Célimène is interested in other suitors,
yet he constantly accuses her of this same crime. This man who wants sincerity at any cost cannot even be sincere with himself:

... quoi que l'on nous expose,
Les doutes sont fâcheux plus que toute autre chose.  
(III, v)

He is the last person in the play to want to see clearly. This psychological bind, this wide disparity between theory and practice provides the element which keeps the play moving. Molière, as all the moralistes of his time, was an acute observer of the paradoxes in human nature. The scene closes with a promise from Arsinè that her accusation will be proven true, the proving of which will provide the dénouement of the play.

The important discussion between Eliante and Philinte begins Act IV. It continues the series of exercises in futility for the suitors, but with a difference. Philinte's proposal will be accepted later by Eliante, and as such the proposal is one of the few compassionate moments in the play:

si . . . vous étiez hors d'état de recevoir ses vœux,
Tous les miens tenteraient la faveur éclatante . . .  
(IV, i)

The salient reasonableness of both these courtiers makes them as obviously well-matched as any of the younger lovers in Molière's plays. But the problem is again different, as Eliante prefers Alceste. This dilemma is not unlike the chain of preferences in Racine's Andromaque. As Pyrrhus
loves Andromaque, so Eliante loves Alceste. As Andromaque finally consents to use Pyrrhus, so Alceste approaches Eliante in IV, ii:

Eliante
Moi, vous venger! Comment?

Alceste
En recevant mon coeur.
(IV, ii)

Eliante's love is not as fatal as either Andromaque's or Pyrrhus's. Neither is Philinte as attached to Eliante as was Valère to Marianne in Tartuffe. Gutwirth's appraisal of the trio which most directly represents the three forces in the play, Alceste (mania), Célimène (fickleness), and Philinte (reason), leads him to a rather somber conclusion. Molière has painted a grim picture of the human condition:

Alceste hait les hommes, Célimène les méprise, Philinte s'en désintéresse. Si Mollière entend nous faire rire non pas seulement de son siécle ni des hommes, mais de l'homme—pouvait-il faire mieux que de le livrer à ce trio? Et le couple du misanthrope par vertu, de la coquette par désœuvrement n'achève-t-elle pas de dépeindre la condition déplorable de l'humanité? 2

Eliante, however, is willing to give Alceste good counsel:

Je compatis, sans doute, à ce que vous souffrez,
Et ne méprise point le coeur que vous m'offrez;
Mais peut-être le mal n'est pas si grand qu'on pense,
Et vous pouvez quitter ce désir de vengeance.

The juxtaposition of Alceste's unreasoned cries for vengeance and Eliante's compassion disarm us of any sorrow we may feel for this demented soul. She feels sorry, but maybe the injury is not so severe.

Célimène, younger, less patient, and less indulgent in her handling of Alceste, has difficulty in suppressing her scorn:

Que me veulent dire et ces soupirs poussés,  
Et ces sombres regards que sur moi vous lancez?  
(IV, iii)

The scene itself revolves around the stratagem used by Done Elvire on Dom Garcié—Célimène accuses him of unfounded jealousy and lets Alceste talk himself out. She then rebuffs him:

Allez, vous êtes fou, dans vos transports jaloux,  
Et ne méritez pas l'amour qu'on a pour vous,  
(IV, iv)

His ire is pushed to the extreme by his incomprehensible attachment to her. What could be stranger, yet more consistent with the unfolding of this play than Alceste's desire:

Je veux voir jusqu'au bout quel sera votre coeur,  
Et si de me trahir il aura la noirceur.  
(IV, iv)

The act closes on another urgent call to leave and another promise to return; each act thus closes on a note of further action to follow. The exits are well-motivated, except for Act I. This act closed less flamboyantly with
Philinte warning Alceste not to irritate his contemporaries, for fear of reprisal. The other exits are much more explicit in their foretelling of scenes to follow.

Act V, scene i is an encounter between Alceste and Philinte, only this time Alceste has something to complain about. Philinte takes the same role of peace-maker, always trying to render his friend more reasonable. Alceste's language is the same: emphatic, pompous, but more resolute in condemning his fellows:

Mais pour vingt mille francs j'aurai droit de pester
Contre l'iniquité de la nature humaine,
Et de nourrir pour elle une immortelle haine.

(V, i)

Philinte offers new reasons to find encouragement in human relations:

Si tous les coeurs étaient francs, justes, et dociles,
La plupart de nos vertus nous seraient inutiles.

(V, i)

These reasons are no more convincing to Alceste than the "vertu traitable" speech of the initial scene. Yet his ire does not prevent him from continuing his pursuit of Célimène with the same reluctance on her part to declare her intentions. Scene ii thus finds Alceste and Célimène in confrontation with Oronte seconding him in his desire to put an end to the chase.

Scene iii extends the confrontation, with Eliante adding her vote to end it all. This leads quite naturally to the final scene which brings together all the principals
in the play. Their meeting is occasioned by the excesses of Célimène's coquetry. She has at last talked (or written) too much against her suitors. She does not have much good to say about any of them, and, in truth, she is correct in her judgments. She confesses that she is in the wrong; yet if she is, her crime is that of being caught. In a closed salon society, one must use more discretion.

Alcestes, always willing to excuse her if she will consent to living in his solitude, makes his final proposal. It is final, however, only because Célimène at last confesses that she does not have the strength to reject the world. She, as all of us, needs others. The play ends in the most logical manner conceivable, Alcestes's withdrawal. Since he was introduced cursing human nature, he ends the only way possible. Such a conclusion crowns the mounting, carefully-ordered series of frustrations of the atrabilaire.

Plot and Farce: Plot Eliminated as a Source of Humor

In a play which so little resembles other comedies, because of its unepisodic structure and its constant display of frustration, how does Molière succeed in creating that famous "rire dans l'âme," that Donneau de Visé describes in his Lettre sur le Misanthrope? Alcestes's path to withdrawal, so logically and clearly presented in this comedy which approaches the structure of Racinian tragedy, is a
unique achievement in Molière’s theater, a play which is carried not by plot, but by a refinement of the coarsest of comic traditions, farce.

Obviously audiences do not “laugh in the soul” while viewing a farce; on the contrary, the slapstick nature of the farceur’s art produces a raucous laugh. What Molière retained from farce was considerable, however. As in farce, two personages discourse without achieving communication; neither Alceste nor Célimène consciously tries to fool the other. They are not circumspect in their dealings with one another and mince few words as they say what is “sur le coeur.” Their endless, futile discussions have great depth in terms of revealing psychological insights, whereas the farceurs always performed according to fixed, stock traditions relating to their “type.”

Despite the disparity in tone between Le Misanthrope and low farce, the audience laughs at the same type of humor. In farce the spectator laughs at a joke played at someone else’s expense. In the comedy of intrigue the joke is normally intellectualized and detached. Humor arises from circumstances over which the personages have no control and although they may be made to look foolish, the personages have little interest, for the audience, in themselves. In farce all humor is dependent upon a personage who manifests ridiculous behavior and his
subsequent punishment.

We have seen this victimizing principle at work repeatedly in other high comedies, such as _L'Ecole des femmes_ and _Le Tartuffe_; it is not worth our time to point out any of the obvious examples of victimizing that abound in _Le Misanthrope_. What is of interest here is the process by which Molière created high comedy, the "rire dans l'âme," from farce. As previously stated, farcical personages are ridiculous in an obvious manner; few spectators would identify with a Gros-René or a Métaphraste. Laughter is of the overt variety during a farce since the spectator can freely dissociate himself from that which he is laughing at. When a Charlie Chaplin takes the stage, this process becomes more sophisticated. We laugh as freely at him—-he is every bit as humorous as the clowns of farce—-yet he adds a touch of humanity. We see signs of something more profound and troubling within this sad, yet indomitable soul, Molière's creation of Alceste is the highest stage of this process because, although we can laugh at him freely, his aspirations and defeat arouse our emotions in a troubling way.

What do these three stages: farce, Chaplinesque humor, and Molièresque high comedy have in common in terms of the type of laughter they produce? We are not laughing at caractère here, although their unchanging stereotyped
qualities are amusing. In truth these personages are part of a process of catharsis, similar to catharsis in tragedy. Their folly and defeat purge our emotions, although the emotional drain is in the form of laughter rather than sorrow. This type of humor has been called "tendentious" by psychologists and it is based on cruelty. In farce, the butt of a joke receives his punishment in the form of a beating or he is victimized verbally, he usually does not have the intelligence to realize the extent of his punishment, or, if he is flogged, he offers little resistance. The spectator, not having identified with the victim, laughs aloud at the joke. When the spectator feels the plight of the victim, such as is the case with Alceste, the laugh is more subtle; Alceste has merited punishment because of his extreme behavior, yet his futile heroics, his quest for a noble ideal, sincerity, tempers laughter with pathos.

Whereas the comedy of intrigue creates a relaxed mood in which laughter arises from confused situations, humor in *Le Misanthrope* arises from the emotions, hence a laugh "in the soul." This style of humor does not rely on situations, but on personages who are given enough characteristics to make them seem human. The less puppet-like they become, the more lifelike they seem; for this reason Molière's high comedies are called "realistic." The realism that Molière creates has little to do with lifelike
situations; his realism stems from his personage's ability to interact with others as well as within themselves in a manner that the spectator can identify with. The absence of stock plot devices adds to _Le Misanthrope_'s lifelike qualities.

This delineation of psychological realism leads to an apparent conflict with those critics who maintain that comedy relies on disassociation of the spectator and the spectacle. People will not laugh at a play if they identify with the personages in it. Here it is a question of degree, as Alceste cannot be given anything definitive to do; he cannot change his conduct, because to do so would turn the play toward melodrama or tragedy. The ties with _Le Misanthrope_ to farce must again be emphasized. Because the conception of Alceste originates in farce, that is human behavior presented as inflexible, or "mechanical" to use Bergson's image, the play remains a comedy. Alceste never does anything that would alter his life permanently; rather he speaks endlessly and his words are like air—they affect no one, himself included. But they do contain a good many truths about human behavior. A certain balance between Alceste's ridiculousness and his humanity has been struck by Molière to keep both "le rire" and "l'âme."

Molière succeeded in creating this lifelike world by a process of refinement. First he sealed it off from the
rest of society, limiting the flow of personages on the stage. As he will succeed in creating a parade in Le Bourgeois gentilhomme from personages essential to the play and introducing no one new in the dénouement, he bans the notion of parade from Le Misanthrope. The dénouement results from the causes presented in the play, not from outside forces. The plot is as uncomplicated as any of Racine's tragedies, since action is dependent upon psychological impasses which may be summarized in a short statement. Just as Bérénice cannot marry Titus because their love conflicts with a political situation, Alceste cannot find happiness because his ethical standards conflict with his love for Célimène. Alceste tortures himself, and his ever-increasing torture provides the movement of the play.

The refinement of the interests into a highly sophisticated, ironic style of humor replaces the stylized comedy of the young lovers. Two personages discourse, but neither is capable of understanding the other. Alceste and Célimène never communicate because Célimène prefers the vacuous world of her salon, and Alceste wants to escape it. Their goals are so disparate that nothing can bring them together. Célimène is trying to avoid playing the game of "courtship as it leads to marriage," whereas Alceste attempts to pursue her no matter how often he must compromise and torture himself. Their affair is the negation of the stylized
"young lovers" plot interest that runs through most of Molière's plays. By keeping them constantly at odds because of their conflicting desires, plot incidents are minimized as a controlling factor. The disclosure of the letter by Arsinoé for example affects neither Alceste nor Célimène, but provides the occasion for another confrontation sans issue.

Atmosphere: a Coherent View of Frustration

The absence of outside incidents, discovery of identity, and other plot devices used extensively in Molière's comedies lends Le Misanthrope an air of evenness. Each scene reflects the constant tension established between Alceste and Célimène. Each scene is constructed around the strong will of Alceste and Célimène, without becoming encumbered with the necessity of explaining pre-existing conditions or offstage happenings not introduced in onstage dialogue. With the exception of IV, iv, the dialogue between Alceste and Du Bois, the servant, no scene displays the low farce present in great abundance in the other high comedies.

Every personage is a member of the same social class. As such, each tries to solicit his peers' approval and praise, with the glaring exception of Alceste. In this closed aristocratic atmosphere, Alceste raises the dissenting voice—he cannot abide the compromises necessary for a genteel society to function. In the lower classes, one
can speak his mind; Dorine's mockery of Orgon fits in well with the bourgeois setting of *Le Tartuffe*. In *Le Misanthrope* there is no hierarchy. Dissent is expressed in words and grimaces, not with beatings and open mockery. The "je ne dis pas cela" of the sonnet scene expresses Alceste's hesitancy to break with the rules of polite social behavior.

Molière has broken with the New Comedy formula as well as with Renaissance comedy traditions in general by confusing the obstacle with the young lovers. The ending of the play is comic however; as an "obstacle" Alceste is unwilling to travel the "middle road," and he is dismissed. Yet Alceste is *amoureux* and his inability to make accommodations with Célimène darken the euphoric note on which comedies normally end. We disagree with Alceste as an *atrabilaire*—no one should be so extreme in his condemnation of social behavior. We do not agree with Philinte, however. Facile acceptance of hypocrisy as part of human nature seems to justify the coquetry and idleness of Célimène's salon. Alceste's difficulties, his inability to compromise himself and accept salon life, have been presented in such a way that we cannot fully identify with him—he is irascible and petulant. Yet his cause is noble and his downfall reminds us of difficulties everyone encounters in living with others.
Le Misanthrope presents a unified view of life as seen from the perspective of the "comic." The troubles that Alceste experiences remind us that he who cannot step back and look at his condition with detachment loses his sense of perspective. Both Météphraste and Alceste have magnified the importance of their desire and have failed to achieve communication with the others. But the distance between Météphraste and Alceste is immense; the former, a stock pedant from low farce, has no realization whatever of his isolation, whereas Alceste has glimpses of his folly. He is aware that his love contradicts his quest for sincerity yet he justifies both with "la raison n'est pas ce qui règle l'amour." He takes both his belief in sincerity and his passion for Célimène most seriously, never realizing the impossibility of reconciling the two.

Thus, Molière paints a picture of frustration on the part of a man who cannot perform an act, namely marriage, which would terminate the futile motion of the play; neither can he step back and see his own ridiculousness. Either conclusion would remove the play from the comic genre.

Le Misanthrope is Molière's highest creation—a play which has the structure of a farce, yet presents a coherent view of the world in the light of comedy. This play is a testimony of man in the gesture in which Molière most excels; the grimace.
CHAPTER V

LE BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME

Molière has terminated the comic spectrum with Le Misanthrope. Beginning with two farces, he wrote comedies of intrigue sprinkled with farce; the addition of a central personage whose occasional glimpses of lucidity added a measure of profoundness to his characterization raised the tone of New Comedy. The creation of Alceste, a totally lucid comic hero who cannot escape his obsessions, the elimination of "low farce," in combination with the elegant personages of Célimène's salon pushes the limits of comedy to the extreme. The following plays are in the Tartuffe mold; the entêté clearly is in the wrong and his opposition, the young lovers and their allies, win the spectator's sympathy. After George Dandin and L'Avare, two bitter plays which close Molière's "experimental period" (1662-1669), the playwright's creations become lighter, less troubling. Tension is kept between the young lovers and the obstacle to their happiness, yet a benign atmosphere is created in the plays of the post-1669 years. The last two studies are devoted to plays typical of this final phase of Molière's production: Le Bourgeois gentilhomme and Les Femmes savantes.

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In this period, Molière returns to the formulas that have brought him success and financial gain. Whenever his high comedies failed to meet with great public favor, there were always the farcically-oriented, light comedies, such as *Le Médecin malgré lui*, or the gallant court comedy ballets, such as *Le Sicilien*, to bring in revenue. *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, written in collaboration with Lully, is basically a farce. The part given love interests is slight compared to the preponderance of buffoonery created by Jourdain. The stroke of genius Molière accomplished was the integration of the bourgeois setting of the play with the gallantry of court ballet. The farce of this play is obviously not as low as that of *Le Médecin*—beatings are minimized to a brief furor in the second act, for example, but it does occupy much of the stage doings. The plot, on the other hand, is integrated into the farcical happenings, and its importance is minimized almost as entirely as is the plot of *Le Misanthrope*.

The gallantry that tends to characterize plot-centered moments is never allowed to dominate the stage. Jourdain’s failure at gallantry (bungled compliments, burlesque curtseys) are in part responsible for this constant return to farce, and Jourdain is rarely absent from the stage. The only important parts of the play during which Jourdain’s presence is not felt are the "dépit scenes." Here the
dialogue of Covielle, a repetition on a lower level of his master's amorous prose, makes these moments farcical. This play, which follows the Tartuffe plot formula is in truth unique in its kinship to the farcical tradition.

Will: the Vicissitudes of Vanity

Beginning with a consideration of will and its frustrations, we find that Jourdain is one of those few entêtés in Molière's plays who suffers a minimum of pain. In fact, he even achieves a measure of success, but, as always, within the limits of the play. His mania is to raise his social status, and at the final curtain he is left in his delirium, believing that his daughter has married into nobility. He may awake the next morning to discover that everyone has duped him, that his family is still solidly bourgeois. But within the limits of the play he is never, like Orgon and Argan, brought to a moment of truth, and he is never, like Alceste and Arnolphe, forced to withdraw. In short, he is never visibly frustrated in his quest for nobility.

This is not to say that he never suffers reversals of fortune. He is mocked by Nicole and Mme Jourdain after being flattered in the first two acts. He meets resistance after refusing Cléonte as a son-in-law. Mme Jourdain upsets his dinner party-ballet with her untimely entrance, undoing his moment of glory. Smoothing the road to
gentility for Jourdain would have made for a dull play indeed. Molière makes his hero squirm at times, but, more importantly, problems are resolved without Jourdain ever realizing his folly.

We are not dissatisfied that Jourdain does not get his comeuppance, however, because it is evident that he has not made a great deal of progress. He is continually beginning and ending his quest at exactly the same place. He does not successfully woo the Marquise, but neither does he break with his wife. Jourdain is still more bourgeois than gentilhomme; he is refused the possibility of participating in gallant success or tragic failure. What he participates in instead is a kind of "mouvement à vide" as described by Danilo Romano,¹ his circular movements being of various sizes. Romano speaks of scenes that go nowhere, the plot remaining at a standstill. This in itself is a farcical situation, such as the rewriting of "Belle marquise, vos beaux yeux me font mourir d'amour." The scene is doubly circular. Jourdain literally doubles back on himself when he returns to the original syntax of his message. And, concurrently, the scene ends where it began because Jourdain, despite his efforts, has failed to learn anything about the fine art of composition. Nor has he even been made aware of his failure. He remains, as ever, slightly confused but supremely confident.

¹Danilo Romano, Essai sur le comique de Molière (Berne, 1950).
The play also presents a larger "mouvement à vide," one which makes it a farce. This movement reflects Jourdain's impotency in governing his family, his inability to climb the social ladder, finally his poor assessment of appearances. Never does he realize the meaninglessness of his lessons, the vacuity of the Turkish ceremonies, or the hopelessness of his own desire for nobility.

He is opposed by Nicole and Mme Jourdain. Nicole closely resembles the Dorine of Le Tartuffe; neither has any great fear of her master, and any apparent difference between the two is more of a reflection of the variance between Orgon and Jourdain. Orgon is so strongly attached to Tartuffe that he will not abide any attacks on his guest's character. Jourdain's mania is directed toward an ideal, nobility, and his vanity can be easily attacked, because he continually exposes his pride. When Nicole mocks his pretensions, Jourdain is reduced to helplessness. For example, he insists that she fence with him, and he is powerless to reproach her when jabbed:

M. Jourdain - ... Là, pousse-moi un peu pour voir.
Nicole - Hé bien, quoi? (Nicole lui pousse plusieurs coups.)

M. Jourdain - Tout beau! Holà! oh, doucement! Diantre soit la coquins;

(III, iii)

Madame Jourdain is unlike any of the other wives in Molière's theater. She has an obstinate, boisterous
approach to her husband's vanity, not unlike Nicole's approach. When Jourdain refuses Cléonte his daughter's hand, Madame Jourdain opposes him tenaciously:

M. Jourdain - C'est une chose que j'ai résolue.

Mme Jourdain - C'est une chose, moi, où je ne consentirai point.  
(III, xii)

She and Nicole form an active alliance in undoing Jourdain's designs, especially when he pursues his liaison with Dorimène. While Jourdain talks to Dorante about his gallant adventure in III, vi, Nicole tries to overhear their conversation. Whereas she gains only a slap from Jourdain, his wife is already well informed of his escapades: "Ce n'est pas d'aujourd'hui, Nicole, que j'ai conçu des soupçons de mon mari." (III, vii) Her desire to prevent her husband from going astray makes her diametrically opposed to Elmire in temperament. Elmire is honnéte, and refined; her hesitancy to embarrass Orgon reflects the hierarchy of personages in Le Tartuffe. Mme Jourdain's pragmatism keeps her disputes with Jourdain on a farcical level, a level consistent with the atmosphere of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme.

The unimportance of her role is stressed in the fact that in the final scene she is the last personage to learn the identity of the masqueraders. As the play closes she remains the wife of the duped Jourdain, no better off than at the outset, but satisfied that her daughter is safely
married to Cléonte, and that Dorimène is removed as a rival. The emphasis is still on Jourdain's buffoonery, however, and her satisfaction blends with the euphoria of the final scene.

Progress is made, however, for as Jourdain moves in circles, and his wife strives valiantly to follow him, the lovers travel a straight line. They have their vicissitudes caused by the authority that fathers possess, but in keeping with the gay tone of the play, their frustrations are short-lived. Their problems, characteristically related to Jourdain's mania, are resolved with an economical double coup. By disguising themselves in the trappings of the mysterious Orient and speaking incomprehensible language, Cléonte and Covielle so strongly resemble Jourdain's instructors of Acts I and II that he is assured of their high importance. Thus, Jourdain cheerfully leads his daughter and her wonderous suitor to the altar. By disguising him, Molière transforms Cléonte from a gallant lover into a farceur. More attention is given to the ridiculousness of the part he must play than the fact that his love interests represent whatever plot the play has. His marriage, as well as Dorante's, serves as a pretext to bring the play to a close. Dorante's marriage adds to the gay euphoria created by the duping of Jourdain; he is even duped into consenting to his mistress's marriage. Rarely has Molière created so much joy as in the final scene.
of this play.

**Tension: the Absence of Confrontation**

The distribution of mirth throughout the play is highly related to moments of tension and their resolution. We have seen how Molière distributed dramatic moments, moments of tension during which we become concerned over the fate of a protagonist, throughout his high comedies. *Le Misanthrope* is one long period of tension. *Le Tartuffe* is most typical of high comedies because of its repeated crescendoes and climaxes of tension. The post-1669 plays, naturally pose problems in a manner that raises less concern.

In *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, moments of tension are minimized to a great extent because there is less confrontation of individual wills. We will also see that these moments are of short duration, due to the quick breakdown of strife into farce.

The middle of Act III, the very center of the play, brings together the two opposing parties. On one side are the lovers and their ally, Mme Jourdain; on the other side is Jourdain, alone. Cléonte is not mentioned until Act III, scene vii, but he soon becomes the center of attention for the remainder of the act. Whether or not Lucile and Cléonte will be married is a plot-oriented problem, which produces the peak moment of tension in the twelfth scene of Act III. The interim, scenes viii-xi, center around the
lesser tension of the dépit. The inclusion of this scene, while tied to the theme of the play, because it illustrates the deceptive power of words and appearances, adds to the fragmented appearance of the play. The dépit is plot-centered because its cause lies in a circumstance, the prude aunt's presence, which leads to a misunderstanding. This plot-inspired tension contrasts nicely with the following central scene, xii, which although plot-oriented, is dependent upon a clash of wills resulting from Jourdain's mania, rather than upon smaller circumstances. In this central scene, Cléonte explains his lack of titles and Jourdain rejects him for it. With his rejection, Jourdain demonstrated, this time ironically, his own lack of nobility—the very fault for which he reproaches Cléonte. Thus, Molière shows that human relations are rendered difficult by external circumstances—the inopportune presence of the aunt—as well as the internal one of will. Jourdain's will makes it impossible for him to smooth the way for a marriage of his daughter to someone he deems mediocre in social status. Since Jourdain's idée fixe will not change, it takes a change in circumstances to keep the play moving. Act III tends toward plot because it would become boring to explore Jourdain's fatuity in a void. Hence the introduction of love matters which allow for a new perspective of Jourdain. As a pendant to the lovers' problems, we are shown Jourdain's problems in matters of gallantry. The
contrast between the two sets of lovers (the young aspirants vs. Jourdain) emphasizes the vacuity of Jourdain's enterprise. The younger set appears all the more honest and sincere. Jourdain's world remains one of Quixotic pipe-dreams and imaginary conquests.

Thus, in the center of Act III, between the depicting of the lovers' plight and the inane machinations of Jourdain's courtship, falls the scene of refusal. In this scene we see a process that has become typical in Molière's plays—the resolution of tension through farce. Tension has been building since the first mention of Cléonte's name in scene vii. We know that he must put the question to Jourdain, and that given Jourdain's pretentions, it is unlikely that he will consent. Scene xii fulfills these expectations. M. Jourdain not only breaking the tension, but setting off a chain of arguments in rapid succession. The affair would be serious indeed (this can be said of any comedy), but Jourdain's buffoonery: "Ma fille sera marquise en dépit de tout le monde et si vous me mettez en colère je la ferai duchesse," coupled with his wife's overpowering pragmatism: "Je ne veux point qu'un gendre puisse à ma fille reprocher ses parents..." turn the scene to mirth. The next scene removes any last lingering doubts. Covielle has a plan which relies on Jourdain's credulity—need we fear any longer? Tension is thus short-lived, as we know
that Jourdain can be easily led by the nose and Molière has succeeded in minimizing the problem. No M. Loyal is about to descend and cloud the issue, no one must face any consequences. The arrival of the Marquise shifts our attention back to a more amusing topic, Jourdain's buffoonery.

Dramatic moments of less tension are found both preceding and following the central episode. The first two acts contain their own climactic moment, one which does not affect the plot of the final three acts, that is, Lucile's marriage. This climactic moment is the fray between the various men of learning. This farcical turn of events is hinted at from the first scene, when we learn that thoughts of financial gain have excluded any considerations of instruction. Since the essence of money-making is the limiting of competition, all Molière need do is to add competitors. The crescendo of Acts I and II is abetted by the arrival of the fencing master, then the philosophy teacher. The climax, physical mayhem, exaggerates their barely-hidden incivility. Jourdain would seem all the more civilized were it not for his announced cowardice: "Je serais bien fou de m'aller fourrer parmi eux pour recevoir quelque coup qui me ferait mal." Like Métaphraste of Le Dépit, these men are more interested in their own verbal output than in communicating with others. Each personage is given professional vocabulary to carefully characterize his role,
yet their brief roles are not couched in the framework of a plot; thus their scenes constitute a farce, a parade.

The first two acts are brief, and brief they must be since they have little reason for being other than to set the tone of the play, one of harmlessness. Jourdain is presented to us in an almost complete void. Nothing he does appears to be leading anywhere. We know nothing about anyone else who will appear in the following three acts, other than the Marquise. She, of course, is given no special attributes and only the mention of her name is of consequence; she provides the excuse for learning how to curtsy and write verse. Such activities are hardly sinful and we laugh at Jourdain's preoccupation with frivolities. This beginning is consistent with the nature of Act III in which the moment of tension is of a similarly harmless nature. This act extends the farcical tone of the prelude and the plot is not revealed until Mme Jourdain's: "Mais songeons à ma fille," of scene vii. For the first half of the play Molière has held us in suspension, treating us to humor, ballet, and song, while establishing the unopposed will of Jourdain.

The problem of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme is of so little weight that we flow through the third act still awaiting Jourdain's moment of truth. In the prelude he acts merely as a bystander. In Act III he exercises his authority, but
only to become involved in squabbling. In Acts IV and V we await a moment in which, as Moore suggests, the mask will be removed. The possibilities exist indeed, yet the demasking never materializes.

The tension of the last two acts is of similarly short duration. The scenes concerned are Act IV, scene ii and the last scene of the play. The first moment is Mme Jourdain's intrusion on her husband's elegant dinner. After accusing Dorimène of homewrecking and Dorante of knavery, she and her husband turn the scene into name-calling. Thus, the pall of unfaithfulness is lifted by squabbling, the normal turn of events in this household. The scene is capped by a typical return to Jourdain's fatuity: "Elle est arrivée bien malheureusement. J'étais en humeur de dire de jolies choses, et jamais je ne m'étais senti tant d'esprit."

(IV, ii)

Any lingering doubts over the future of Dorimène and Jourdain are relieved several scenes later when she consents to marry Dorante.

The last dramatic moment is that of Mme Jourdain's objections, which occurs in the final scene. The scene is easily made gay with a word of enlightenment and the play ends with a magnificent spectacle. Molière once again passes by an opportunity to complicate his play. It seems as though the dancers are becoming impatient in the wings.
and everyone is anxious for the ballet to start. Plot yields to spectacle, as it has so often in Molière's theater. It is in the brevity of vexation that, among other things, we can distinguish between high comedies of the Tartuffe period and comedies of this period. Certainly this play ranks far below Tartuffe as a troubling play.

In this sense we may say that the play's dénouement passes unnoticed. The essence of dénouement is the resolution of a major problem, and as we have seen, no problem has been allowed to become intolerable. It is the antithesis of Le Misanthrope, where no dénouement takes place, but for the opposite reason. Alceste's anguish is intolerable and cannot be resolved. In both plays, the hero is seeking to "distinguish himself" and his search gives impetus to the movement of the play. Their approach to distinction is the reason for the wide difference in tone. Alceste insists upon raising himself above his mundane surroundings, whereas Jourdain wants desperately to join it. As Alceste becomes increasingly irritated, Jourdain becomes gratified. The illusion of nobility is not difficult to create when a 'blind' person such as Jourdain is involved.

**Transition: Effortless Unity is Achieved**

Although the play does have somewhat disconnected nature, with Acts I and II forming a prelude to Act III which contains the main plot, followed by Acts IV and V, both
"Turkish fantasies," Molière took pains to link the various scenes together, assuring them a smooth unfolding. In no way does he surprise us with sudden occurrences. Each scene is prepared for in such a way that it is expected. Molière has provided better transition in this play than even in Le Misanthrope and it is only the nonsensical nature of the play itself that makes it appear disjointed.

Scene i is announced by the play's description "comédie-ballet." What could be more appropriate than the entrance of masters of music and dance? Since their arts are to be put to the service of the bourgeoisie, what could be a better subject of conversation than money? Scene ii elaborates on the instructors' ability to flatter—not only to flatter their patron, but enhance their respective trades as well: "La musique et la danse, c'est là tout ce qu'il vous faut." Act I ends appropriately with demonstrations of song, then dance.

Act II takes up the same discussions only this time they are supplemented with a mime of ballet by Jourdain. The Maître d'armes takes up the farcical tone of Act II with a demonstration of his craft. The scene continues the downward trend of Act II, the depth of which is no less than physical mayhem. Molière prepares us for this dramatic moment with the addition of that art which best demonstrates man's degree of civilization, philosophy. What
could be more ironic than using this sophisticated discipline to precipitate an argument? Even the rather crude Maître d'armes refrains longer from name-calling.

After the tumult, the Maître de philosophie is retained. The magnificent philosophy lesson obviously has no real purpose in itself other than showing that Jourdain aspires to being a young lover and his instructor is asked to contribute to his amorous skills. Thus Dorimène's role serves to link the various lessons together, and give them more meaning. After all, instruction of culture is of little use unless it can be applied to such solid arts as courtship and social climbing.

Similarly the tailor scene is of use in preparing us for the idea of costume. Not only does nobility entail an intellectual education, but a sartorial one as well. Thus, Jourdain's penchant for clothing, first brought to light upon his entrance (I, ii) is more fully displayed and provides a fitting motif for the second intermède. The basic elements for what Jourdain takes to be the essence of cultivation have all been represented: music and dance, philosophy and dress.

Act III extends the farcical tone of the prelude. The difference in tone shifts from the tongue-in-cheek treatment of Jourdain's mania to open mockery. First he is assailed on his manner of dress by his servant, then his
wife. Then both of them chastise him because of the noise and dirt brought in by his instructors. The objective of the second part of the play—the marriage of his daughter—is mentioned in scene iii, but the scene is constructed primarily on a mocking review of his cultural accomplishments. The women attempt to debunk him on his knowledge of "philosophy":

Nicole
De quoi est-ce que tout cela guérit?

Fencing is not exactly his forte either, as proven by Nicole's unschooled mastery over him:

Jourdain
Mais tu me pousses en tierce . . .  
Et tu n'as pas patience que je pare.

Finally his connections with nobility, Dorante specifically, are brought up. Mme Jourdain states:

Oui, il (Dorante) a des bontés pour vous . . . 
Mais il emprunte votre argent.

Then who should enter but Dorante himself for another loan. Thus Molière arranges his scenes to best reinforce and display Jourdain's credulity.

His money-lending had not been brought up beforehand, but since the subject has been broached, it is immediately exploited in scene iv. Dorante shows his skill with words, a very useful substitute for money in Molière's plays. Scenes v and vi turn our attention to Jourdain's love interests—Dorante being the intermediary. With the
characteristic transitional efficiency of this play, Dorante represents first Jourdain’s spendthrift nature, then his bumbling attempts at gallantry and social climbing. The affair with Dorimène is a skillful method of introducing the beau monde into the play on a meaningful basis, one which touches Jourdain on his weakest points. This weakness causes him to spend money on parasites and court someone whom he could never communicate with. The natural order begins to assert itself here as has been the case with Arnolphe, Orgon, and the rest; Jourdain is out of his element and cannot find his way back.

In Molière’s plays the ever-present astute servant is ready to restore normalcy, and Nicole is responsible for undoing Jourdain’s intrigue. When Mme Jourdain spoils her husband’s elegant soirée, his spirits are dampened. But he will not remain vexed for long. Still a brighter, more colorful, more mysterious, in short more noble world is about to descend upon him, fulfill his wildest dreams and raise his family to international aristocracy.

Covielle’s simple plan, a plan which begins a parade in Act IV similar to that of Acts I and II, is all that is necessary to fool such a gullible type as Jourdain. This time the parade is masked and consists of personages we have seen in Act III. Acts IV and V are constructed around this masquerade. The goal of these final acts is to fool Jourdain into marrying his daughter to Cléonte, but the goal
becomes lost in the farce of ceremony. The play is kept moving by the simplest of plot devices—everyone is gradually told who the Grand Turk's son really is. The informing takes so little time that the greatest part of each scene is a display of Jourdain's credulity. This nonsensical repetition of "Turkish," translations, and ceremonial rites, gives the last third of the play a measure of unity. The fourth act is short and passes quickly, as though it were merely a preface to the Turkish ceremony.

The first scene of Act IV is naturally a reflection of the ceremony, Jourdain's induction into the Turkish faith and culture, which culminates in a bastonnade. This time Mme Jourdain, in all her simplicity, is totally aghast at her husband's extravagances and convinced of his insanity. Never willing to leave her good sense behind and join in the fun, this most far-fetched madness leaves her in the lurch and she will remain there until the last scene. It should be noted that no one sympathizes with her, since she and her husband are the only ones in the dark at this point.

In the rest of Act V Lucile and Mme Jourdain are told the truth so that they may appreciate the festivities. Just as Act IV introduces Jourdain to Turkism, Act V brings everyone into the act, Jourdain excepted. The flow of the play is as logical as possible from Act IV, scene ii, to the end.
Plot and Farce: A Blending of Ceremony and Farce

The easy flow of stage events in this play is more than just a reflection of well-ordered transition and quick resolution of tension. As we will shortly see, the nature of the plot makes this play rather dreamlike and ethereal. Molière is at his best in creating a plot that will give way to as much farce as possible. In somewhat the same way that Le Misanthrope avoids the problem of plot defects by being structured around its protagonist, Alceste, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme is also highly concentrated around Jourdain. The only plot device that is essential to this play is a disguise, and this disguise is consistent with the importance given to external appearances by Jourdain.

The very first scene sets the farcical tone of the play; the instructors are in M. Jourdain's home to present music and dance, amusements commissioned by the ignorant Jourdain. Their acts second the genre of the play, a comedy-ballet, whereas their attitudes suggest the down-to-earth nature of their enterprise, the taking of his money:

Maitre de Musique
Nous avons trouvé ici un homme comme il nous le faut à nous deux. Ce nous est une douce rente que ce M. Jourdain avec ses visions de noblesse qu'il est allé se mettre en tête.

Maitre à Danser
C'est un homme, à la vérité, dont les lumières sont petites, qui parle à tort et à travers de toutes choses et n'applaudit qu'à contre-sens; mais son argent redresse les jugements de son esprit. Il y a du discernement dans sa bourse.
They have clearly come to capitalize on Jourdain's mania while presenting their cultivated arts. Their presence has little to do with plot; rather than leading to Jourdain's love affair, they aid in precipitating the fray in Act II. They have kept a bourgeois perspective of life and scorn Jourdain's attempt to acquire "culture" and ennoble himself. They respect his money, however. The second scene, Jourdain's entrance, takes us further into farce:

Jourdain
He bien, Messieurs? Qu'est-ce? Me ferez-vous voir votre petite drôlerie?

Maître à Danser
Comment, quelle petite drôlerie?

Jourdain
Eh la! Comment appelez-vous cela? Votre prologue ou dialogue de chansons et de danse.

Jourdain's reference to the elegant arts as a "drôlerie" sets the down-to-earth tone of his speech. The patron of the arts is even more gross than expected. His costume adds to the burlesque presentation. With the exploitation of his taste in music, we are entirely fulfilled in our expectation of a tasteless parvenu.

The tone of conversation shifts then to a serious level—the importance of the arts. In this discussion we are further informed of Jourdain's program:

Jourdain
Je l'apprendrai donc. Mais je ne sais quel temps je pourrai prendre; car, outre le Maître d'armes qui me montre, j'ai arrêté encore un Maître de philosophie qui doit commencer ce matin.
Thus, the stage is set for Act II and the tone established for the first *intermède*. These elegant *intermèdes* are usually preceded by less farcical passages, since the contents of both are inappropriate for Jourdain's buffoonery. The audience is thus in a better mood for ballet.

Act II is artfully placed as we are now ready for a more down-to-earth style of humor, such as the mime of ballet by Jourdain. Plot is blended in a certain measure with references to the Marquise, but the gestures connected with her mention are farcical. This abasement of gallantry is further exploited in Jourdain's confrontation with the Maître d'armes:

*Jourdain*

De cette façon donc, un homme sans avoir du coeur, est sûr de tuer son homme et de n'être point tué?

Thus anyone can participate in the noble art of fencing. The scene with Jourdain and the Maître de philosophie culminates in this same lowering of gallant intentions. The Marquise is again the object of Jourdain's thoughts; references to her, instead of inspiring gallantry, become part of farcical repetitions: "Me font vos beaux yeux, mourir, belle Marquise, d'amour." The tipping during the tailor's scene again combines farce with a noble motif.

Act III emphasizes this play's reluctance to become involved with plot. Scene iii, laugh-centered, has no plot interest, and is an extension of the first part of the play. This scene extends judgments on Jourdain's powers
of reason:

Mme Jourdain
Nicole a raison et son sens est meilleur que le vôtre. Je voudrais bien savoir ce que vous pensez faire d'un maître à danser à l'âge que vous avez.

A plot element, the question of his daughter's marriage is alluded to, but it is avoided by a hasty return to our farcical situation:

Jourdain
Je songerai à marier ma fille quand il se présentera un parti pour elle; mais je veux songer aussi à apprendre les belles choses.

In no way are we encumbered by long tirades on marriage, nobility, etc., or more importantly, elaborate plans for her marriage to someone of Jourdain's choosing. Even Dorante, parasite and suitor of the Marquise, is introduced naturally into the woof of the conversation:

Mme Jourdain
Il y a fort à gagner à fréquenter vos nobles, et vous avez bien opéré avec ce beau Monsieur le comte dont vous êtes embéguiné.

The tone of the discussion remains at a farcical level, that of empty squabbling and nonsense in Jourdain's reply:

Jourdain
... C'est une personne d'importance plus que vous ne pensez; un seigneur que l'on considère à la cour, et qui parle au Roi tout comme je vous parle ... et devant tout le monde il me fait des caresses dont je suis moi-même confus ... .

Mme Jourdain
Oui, il a des bontés pour vous et vous fait des caresses; mais il emprunte votre argent.
More is revealed about Jourdain's preoccupation with nobility and himself than about his liaison with the Marquise. Such plot devices, here extraneous since neither Dorante nor Dorimène are present, are kept to a minimum. Not until scene vi, two scenes after Dorante's entrance, do we become involved with the Marquise. Jourdain's penchant for wasting money remains the center of attention in scene iv:

**Mme Jourdain**

Cet homme-là fait de vous une vache à lait... Il ne sera pas content, qu'il ne vous ait ruiné...

Scene vi is the first moment in the play in which farce gives way to gallantry. Although Jourdain is still money and nobility-oriented, his speech momentarily rings with gallant sentiment:

**Jourdain**

Il n'y a point de dépenses que je ne fisse, si par là je pouvais trouver le chemin de son coeur. Une femme de qualité a pour moi les charmes ravissants, et c'est un honneur que j'achèterais au prix de tout chose.

Scenes vii and viii are similarly centered around external events and function as liaison scenes. Although it begins as a lover's dépit, scene ix brings us back to farce, thanks mainly to the use of repetitions:

**Cléonte**

C'est une perfidie digne des plus grandes châtiments.

**Covielle**

C'est une trahison à mériter mille soufflets.
The tone is raised in another chain of repetitions midway through the scene when Cléonte prompts Covielle to second his chagrin:

Cléonte
Marque-moi bien, pour m'en dégouter, tous les défauts que tu peux voir en elle.

This leads to the Petrarchian enumeration of her charms. Cléonte's dialogue is mixed with Covielle's less-than-elegant comments: "Elle a la bouche grande." These oppositions yield another scene which mixes farce and dépit. Compare this scene to the dépit in Tartuffe—in this play Molière constructs a spat which is much more lively. The four-way exchange of dialogue is kept amusing by having the valets mime their masters:

Cléonte
... et je vais loin de vous mourir de douleur et d'amour.

Covielle
Et moi, je vais suivre ses pas.

Covielle gives Cléonte's statement life, due to the relief in which it is set—Covielle couldn't possibly be a galant so he just adds his "me too."

As has been mentioned previously, scene xii is the most tense of all the moments in the play, and that the tension is released rather quickly in a farcical manner. The nature of the scene is just that, a mixture of tension, created by Cléonte's elegant speech, a speech which will fail to convince despite its honnêteté, and farce, which is
created by Jourdain's unexpectedly frank refusal:

Cléonte
Mais avec tout cela je ne peux point me donner un nom où d'autres en ma place croiraient pouvoir prétendre, et je vous dirai franchement que je ne suis point gentilhomme.

Jourdain
Touchez là, Monsieur. Ma fille n'est pas pour vous. (III, xii)

The dialogue is made even more down-to-earth by Mme Jourdain's surprised reaction: "Que voulez-vous donc dire avec votre gentilhomme. . . ."

The scene thus effectively juxtaposes high and low speech, creating a plot-centered, yet very lively, moment. The self-admitted non-gentleman uses the language that a gentleman should use, and vice-versa. This ironic situation makes defeat less disastrous and more in keeping with the tone of the play.

Scene xv is all gallantry and consistent with the elevated stature of the two socialites, Dorante and Dorimène. Again it is Jourdain's entrance which provides farcical behavior, no matter how brief. Molière is effective here in keeping gallantry from becoming boring, since Jourdain's version of that quality, manifested in his gauche curtsy, is amusing enough to provide contrast with genuine social graces. Yet the scene is elevated enough to set the stage for the third intermède.
Acts IV and V provide more of this same blend of plot and extraneous tomfoolery, neither one of which seems obtrusive. As we have previously seen, the entrance of Mme Jourdain in scene ii is farcical and sweeps gallantry away in favor of chastising and squabbling. The disguised Covielles's entrance continues the dominance of farce over plot doings. The fact that the scheme which causes things to turn out well is the result of nothing more than Covielles fanciful imagination at work, rather than external events forced onto the play, makes this a much less complicated plot. Everything which unfolds until the play's end is a result of this scheme—one which provides, it should be mentioned, the element of spectacle. In this way we see farce (Jourdain's credulity), mixed with ceremony (Lucile's acceptance). The fourth intermède is the apotheosis of farce. A beating is administered in the form of a ritual, with musical accompaniment. Farce is the same in any setting, in any language: "Dara, dara bastonara."

Another burlesque of ceremony occurs in scene iii of Act V:

Dorante
Monsieur, nous venons rendre hommage, Madame et moi, à votre nouvelle dignité, et nous réjouir avec vous du mariage que vous faites de votre fille avec le fils du Grand Turc.

Jourdain (après avoir fait des révérences à la turque)
Monsieur, je vous souhaite la force des serpents et la prudence des lions.
Jourdain's joy knows no bounds in scene iv of the last act. The Turkish language provides the nonsense that farce is made of:

**Jourdain**

Je vous l'avais bien dit qu'il parle turc.

**Dorante**

Cela est admirable.

His credulity also provides the machinery for more buffoonery in scene v, which is essentially a plot scene:

**Jourdain**

Ah, je suis ravi de vous voir si promptement revenue dans votre devoir, et voilà qui me plaît, d'avoir une fille obéissante.

His credulity, in fact, seems to know no bounds. Even Dorante is marrying against his wishes, yet right under his own nose. Laughter is provoked by the revival of his love interests, heretofore obscured by his new experience with oriental aristocracy. The occidental and oriental sides of his misadventures justify the notion of a ballet of all nations.

**Atmosphere: the Parade**

*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* is an easy play to follow in its workings, one which basically demands little attention to details. Its broad use of spectacle and farce would make this play suitable for comic opera. Again it is similar to *Le Misanthrope* in its economy of means. All plot elements are provided for by personages introduced in the
natural course of the play. No one new appears after scene vii, Act III, Cléonte being the last to be mentioned.

This play exemplifies a measure of perfection in Molière's stagecraft. Nearly every scene contains a well-justified farcical sketch. Few of the scenes are dependent upon plot needs, and these few are not the important ones. The play rushes forward, giving a sense of expectation and fulfillment. At the same time it provides an atmosphere of levity and joy in which events can take place. Tension is made short-lived, just as gallantry is made humble. No play could be less troubling than this glittering, fast-moving parade of bourgeois, charlatans, and lovers.

Rather than evoking a household torn by strife, as in Le Tartuffe or L'Avaré, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme presents a household visited by imaginary potentates and men of learning. While everyone seeks to deceive Jourdain, their deceit is harmless, their intentions agreeable. Jourdain, while clearly in the wrong, is much too vain and ridiculous to be dislikable. The bourgeois setting is transformed into a spectacle of elegant ballet and masquerade, while retaining the down-to-earth farce seen in the "darker" comedies. Molière has little time for the realism that clouds Le Tartuffe; rather than portray social ills or tortured heroes, he remains fanciful and ethereal. As Adam has stated: "Le Bourgeois gentilhomme n'est ni une étude
The absence of a raisonneur (Cléonte's role is that of a suitor) adds to the unpedantic natural air of the play.

The simplicity of plot and its obvious lack of importance give the play an added measure of smoothness. As fanciful and unrealistic as the gallant comedy of intrigue, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* avoids the necessity of mental gymnastics. Molière has created a work which combines the mordant sting of farce with the elegance and movement of parade; rather than creating a sense of moving from one condition to another, personages come and go in a steady stream, communicating and dealing with one another as if in a dream. The realistic worlds of the musician, the pedant, the bourgeois, the courtier and the imaginary world of the Oriental potentate are sketched in this deft piece of farce become spectacle.

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*Adam, op. cit.,* p. 383.
CHAPTER VI

LES FEMMES SAVANTES

Molière first conceived the idea of writing a high comedy, "une pièce achevée" similar in importance to Le Misanthrope, in 1668. The play which resulted, Les Femmes savantes, was not finished until 1670, at which time royal license was granted to present it; another two years elapsed before its presentation. Molière did not want to present his masterpiece until he was sure that it was perfect. The play was a success in terms of box-office receipts, and although no one would today equate it with the high comedies of the Tartuffe period, Les Femmes savantes adds another variety of atmosphere to his theater.

This atmosphere helps complete the picture of Molière's dramaturgy; to this point his high comedies had been strongly grounded in farce--now he is capable of separating his genres. The farce that gives his previous high comedies their earthy flavor is in short supply in this play, despite Schérer's comment to the contrary: "Les Femmes savantes développent en une ample comédie de moeurs la farce qui avait marqué les débuts de Molière à Paris . . ."¹ On the

¹Jacques Schérer, Molière, Oeuvres complètes, III, p. 584.
contrary, he wanted to suppress his ties with low farce and the *commedia dell'arte* as he did in *Le Misanthrope*. Yet Alceste compensates for the absence of low farce with his heroism, flamboyancy, and strength of will. With *Les Femmes savantes*, Molière is clearly entering a new phase in his career; a phase that lacks the strength and the bitterness of the years 1662-1669.

This loss of bitterness resulted in a gain for at least one genre in his theater: the comedy-ballet *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* shows the felicitous effects of his new mellowness; ballet blends well with comedy that is lacking in rancor. The desire to write high comedy in this period evinces his concern with form in comedy. Alceste's lucidity leads *Le Misanthrope* close to serious drama; an awareness of inescapable contradictions on the comic hero's part detracts from his "mechanical" behavior and draws him close to tragedy status. The Romantics' opinions on Alceste as a tragic figure, show the confusion possible in his case. In this later period his personages revert to the Orgon type: blind, easily fooled, a perfect foil for the young lovers. The low-keyed atmosphere of the comedy-ballet lends itself well to Orgons and Argans; in high comedy five acts of unheroic behavior can lead to boredom.

Rather than being totally bland, however, the play is redeemed by several features. There is much comic verse
throughout the play; the playwright still has the poetic verve necessary to spice many of the scenes. While keeping a comic atmosphere, Molière retains the background of realism that marks his high comedies. For this reason the play may be called a "comedy of manners," but "manners" like "character" seems more a denotation of high tone, as well as a way of classifying a unifying principle in the play. It would be more accurate to say that manners, in this case, pedantry, simply provides a theme from which comedy can arise. The faithful imitation of learned salons is not likely to create great comedy; Molière's ability to infuse reality with poetic verve gives the play any success that it has; in this play he tones down reality, balancing it with a strong euphoric mood. The realistic qualities that gave previous high comedies their bitterness diminish and cease to strain the limits of genre. In both mood and form Les Femmes savantes is clearly a comedy.

Finally, the plot, carefully conceived and executed to blend with the onstage action of the play without resorting to the deus ex machina, adds to the smoothness of the play as did the plot of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme. Its dénouement is ingenious enough to be interesting, yet unobtrusive. Best of all, the dénouement draws in most of the personages involved in the plot. Again it is a question of a family divided into two camps.
Will: An Even Distribution Among Many

As in Les Précieuses ridicules, women have become "entêtées." Philaminte's devotion to the advancement of learning provides the excuse for dividing her family into two camps: those for "learning" and those against. The theme of pedantry, which colors the vocabulary of Philaminte and her group, does not have any more thrust to it than hypocrisy or hypochondria. Learning happens to have become Philaminte's passion, but any mania would have sufficed. Her mania is a manifestation of strong will, which she possesses in abundance as do all the other members of her family, and her strength of will carries the play more than any other factor, as we shall see.

Her entrance in II, vi is similar to Mme Pernelle's. She enters in a huff upon seeing Martine, whom she has dismissed. Her will is summed up in her short, imperious statements: "Je veux qu'elle sorte," "Quoi! vous la soutenez?" and most explicitly: "Je ne veux point d'obstacle aux désirs que je montre." Without telling Chrysale the cause of Martine's dismissal, she wants to enroll him on her side:

Et vous devez, en raisonnable époux,
Etre pour moi contre elle, et prendre mon courroux.

She makes clear the fact that one must choose in her family; either one is for or against her desires, there is no abstention,

Chrysale continues to ask the nature of Martine's
offense, and Philaminte builds her case by saying, "C'est pis que tout cela." When she arrives at the moment of accusation she announces grandly:

Elle a, d'une insolence à nulle autre pareille,  
Après trente leçons, insulté mon oreille,  
Par l'impropriété d'un mot sauvage et bas  
Qu'en termes décisifs condamne Vaugelas.

The remainder of the scene displays Martine's weakness in correct usage and Philaminte and Béline's horrified reaction.

Her desire to make Chrysale side with her proves vain as he argues for practicality when dealing with servants. Chrysale has no better success in presenting Clitandre as a future husband for Henrietta. Once again Philaminte has her opinions:

Ce Monsieur Trissotin dont on vous fait un crime,  
Et qui n'a pas l'honneur d'être dans votre estime,  
Est celui que je prends pour l'époux qu'il lui faut,  
Et je sais mieux que vous juger de ce qu'il vaut.  
La contestation est ici superflue,  
Et de tout point chez moi l'affaire est résolue.

No personage in Molière's theater has ever expressed himself in more resolute terms than Philaminte! Her position as wife emphasizes the high degree of control females have attained in Chrysale's family.

Philaminte's thoughts turn to more grandiose topics than Henrietta's marriage when she is in Trissotin's presence. In III, ii she announces her plans to establish an academy composed of females; men have excluded them too long from partaking of the joys of science and erudition:
Et je veux nous venger, toutes tant que nous sommes,
De cette indigne classe où nous rangent les hommes,

Her mania is expressed in the idea of vengeance over the
male sex, and her motivation is most profitably approached
from the standpoint of vengeance and equality rather than
learning. Armande is also tired of being relegated to
housewifely tasks and she seeks equality:

C'est faire à notre sexe une trop grande offense,
De n'étendre l'effort de notre intelligence
Qu'à juger d'une jupe et de l'air d'un manteau,
Ou les beautés d'un point, ou d'un brocart nouveau.

Philaminte has the same vision of a higher purpose as
many other heroes in Molière's theater, but she does not
have either the depth of an Arnolphe, nor the amount of ex-
posure on stage. She has no flashes of insight into the in-
sanity of her desire; at the dénouement she is as blandly
entranced as at her entrance. She tells Armande that, al-
though Henriette has Clitandre, philosophy is always there
for consolation:

Ce ne sera point vous que je leur sacrifie,
Et vous avez l'appui de la philosophie,
Pour voir d'un oeil content couronner leur ardeur.

She is simply happy that Trissotin has been exposed and
that the knowledge of his being deceived will serve to
punish him. Also, Philaminte does not occur in enough
scenes to become heroic in stature. The scenes she appears
in (thirteen of twenty-eight) are group scenes, major ones,
in which she forms a part of her camp, albeit as head.
She does not isolate herself at any point; rather, she seeks to include everyone in her group. This group interaction precludes any notion of heroics. When Trissotin is unmasked, she easily blends back into the euphoric mood of the dénouement.

Trissotin, like Tartuffe, is unmasked and sent packing at the end of the play. Yet Trissotin is not nearly the voracious, daring monster that Tartuffe is. Hubert's judgment: "In Trissotin, Molière has created a character almost as repulsive as Tartuffe, but somewhat more clever." is misleading in that he would equate the two in terms of evil, and give Trissotin the plaudits for being better at it. This is hardly the case, as Trissotin has nowhere near the force of appetite of Tartuffe, nor the desire to dominate. He appears more as a pure parasite than as a destroyer.

When he speaks to Henriette in V, i, the scene lacks the intensity of Tartuffe's attempts to seduce Elmire. Trissotin reasons with her in terms of intellectual values, never showing any intense desire:

Un tel discours n'a rien dont je sois altéré.
A tous les événements le sage est préparé.

Trissotin imposes no immediate threat to the moral order as did Tartuffe. He is no less the villain with his "il faut que je vous aie, il n'importe comment," but he is

\[2\] J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect, p. 241.
willing to wait and let Philaminte handle his affairs:

Nous allons voir bientôt comment ira l'affaire,
Et l'on a là-dedans fait venir le notaire.

As a sage, he stoically attenuates his desire; Tartuffe, in his religious fervor, is much more imposing. Thus, the reality imposed by Trissotin's villainy diminishes and euphoria is heightened by his impotency. No one needs to intervene to save Henriette; Trissotin has no desire to seduce her—only to persuade her. The possibility of Trissotin's surpassing his benefactors is slight, because he remains subservient to Philaminte's orders, as powerless as Chrysale.

His biggest scene, the quarrel with Vadius in III, iii, provides the most ample opportunity for him to exercise his will. He gets no further than name-calling, however, and the tone of the scene is no higher than the squabbling of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme. The scene concludes on this low note:

Vadius
Ma plume t'apprendra quel homme je puis être.

Trissotin
Et la mienne saura te faire voir ton maître.

Vadius
Je te défie en vers, prose, grec, et latin.

Trissotin
Hé bien, nous nous verrons seul à seul chez Barbin,

Suffice it to say that Trissotin's presence is no more than a reflection of Philaminte's will; he adds none of the
malevolent darkness that Tartuffe evokes. Whereas Tartuffe dominates Orgon, making himself the center of Orgon's being, Trissotin is something of a Maître de philosophie with his desire to flatter and to please Philaminte.

Chrysale assumes the role usually held by the mother in Molière's high comedies, that of chief ally of the young lovers. A great deal of humor is created by the fact that he should be the ruler of the household, yet he never succeeds in dominating his wife. He seems to be headed in the right direction when he tells Bélise exactly what he thinks of her love of science:

C'est à vous que je parle, ma soeur,
Le moindre solécisme en parlant vous irrité;
Mais vous en faites, vous, d'étranges en conduite.

After a long enumeration of his complaints, all of which are directed at Bélise, he turns to his wife to settle their daughter's marriage. The tables are immediately turned, however, when Philaminte tells her version of how Henriette will be married. After she leaves him with her orders, Ariste enters to find out how the conversation went:

Ariste
Est-ce qu'elle balance?

Chrysale
En aucune façon.

Ariste
Quoi donc?

Chrysale
C'est que pour gendre elle m'offre un autre homme.
Chrysale's helplessness is time and again the source of humor in this play. He resembles the "Capitan" of Spanish comedy, always bragging of what he has done, or will do, without having the courage to own up to his statements. As soon as Philaminte approaches he changes his tune:

Chrysale
Nous verrons si ma femme, à mes désirs rebelle . . .

Clitandre
La voici qui conduit le Notaire avec elle.

Chrysale
Secondez-moi bien tous.

Martine
Laissez-moi, j'aurai soin
De vous encourager, s'il en est besoin.

(V, ii)

The young lovers have more of a role in this play than in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* or *Le Tartuffe*. They plead their own case before Philaminte, counterbalancing the lack of importance accorded to intermediaries. With Philaminte, Bélise, Armande, and Trissotin to contend with, Molière creates a measure of symmetry by opposing them with Chrysale, Ariste, Henriette and Clitandre. Regrettably, Martine has a much less significant role than servants of the Dorine type.

Henriette, endowed with a high degree of lucidity and maturity, loses much of her charm for it. She knows too well how to rebuff Trissotin's advances with cold, calculating language:
Ne poussez point ma mère à vouloir par son choix
Exercer sur mes voeux la rigueur de ses droits;
Otez-moi votre amour, et partez à quelque autre
Les hommages d'un coeur aussi cher que le vôtre.
(V, i)

Unlike Elmire who is discreet and cultivated, or Agnès, innocent and charming, Henriette appears stiffer and less sensitive to the struggle that divides her family.

Clitandre resembles Cléonte, the worthy suitor who does not satisfy the current mania. Much too honnête to prescribe to Philaminte's pedantic behavior, he prepresents the ideal lover: able to discern the merit of his contemporaries, half raisonneur, half ardent suitor. His attack on Trissotin does little to endear him to Philaminte:

Mais Monsieur Trissotin n'a pu duper personne,
Et chacun rend justice aux écrits qu'il nous donne.
(IV, ii)

Strength of will is thus evenly divided among the personages of the play, rather than being concentrated in one personage. The lovers have a good deal of force, Chrysale speaks his mind on many occasions (even to his wife in the final scene) and the learned ladies with their consort Trissotin all are strongly attached to the realization of their desires. After the harnessing of enormous force by heroes of the Alceste, Tartuffe and even Jourdain variety, we are left somewhat disappointed at the even distribution of energy among so many personages. Because Molière has reverted to the traditional New Comedy formula in which the
marriage of the lovers is predominant, we must look to
balance as the source of his art.

**Tension: Seriousness Avoided Through Symmetry**

Tension is distributed evenly throughout *Les Femmes savantes*—in fact distribution of tension contributes to
the establishment of symmetry. The first scene, an argu­
ment between Henriette and Armande establishes the con­
flict that has divided their family. The theme of pedan­
try, an excuse for Armande to reprimand her sister, is
part of the pattern leading to the domination of one part
of the family over the other. We soon learn that Armande
is interested in Clitandre:

> Je vois que votre esprit ne peut être guéri
> Du fol entêtement de vous faire un mari,
> Mais sachons, s'il vous plaît, qui vous songez à prendre.
> Votre visée au moins n'est pas mise à Clitandre?

Henriette is strong, however, and she has as little
trouble rebuffing her sister as she will have in dealing
with Trissotin.

While Henriette can hold her own, Chrysale's weakness
swings the tide of battle to Philaminte's side. Ariste
constantly exhorts him to confront his wife, but he buckles
when she exercises her authority. Molière establishes a
rhythm of tension by having Chrysale's courage shored up,
then destroying it. Things appear favorable for the union
of Henriette to Clitandre until Philaminte's entrance in
This major scene which centers around a less serious incident, Martine's dismissal, foreshadows the more important dispute over Henriette's marriage. Philaminte wins this round in II, vii, and Chrysale again confers with Ariste.

The second round seems to go to Chrysale, when he gives Clitandre to Henriette in III, vi. Armande warns that Philaminte is not present and that victory is not yet Chrysale's. Act IV finds the issue in doubt again, as Armande and Philaminte devise new strategy. Clitandre's failure to convince Philaminte in IV, ii, swings the balance back to the maternal side.

Act V opens with the encounter between Henriette and Trissotin, in which neither side wins. The next scene shows preparation on Chrysale's side for the last struggle. After neither Chrysale nor Philaminte succeed in V, iii, Ariste's stratagem, a letter stating that Chrysale's fortune has been ruined, wins the day, as Trissotin has no further interest in Henriette. For the moment Philaminte confesses her blindness and the play ends on a gay note. The only somber incident is Trissotin's knowing that he has been duped, and this is not nearly as bitter as the withdrawals of Arnolphe, Alceste, and Harpagon.

Molière has distributed tension evenly throughout the play without ever achieving the heights of the
"bitter comedies." Philaminte's "entêtement" is glossed over and forgiven, even though she is brought to an awareness of her folly. Trissotin never gains the heroic stature of previous Molièresque obstacles and his punishment is similarly lost in the euphoria of Henriette's marriage. Technically Molière has succeeded; Les Femmes savantes is a well-written play, yet the vigor of his previous high comedies is not attained. The graciousness manifested by previous pairs of lovers is also lacking. The elegant dé­ pits of Le Dépît, Le Tartuffe, and Le Bourgeois gentilhomme added a measure of humanity to the affairs of those plays. Henriette and Clitandre appear too mature, too reasonable, too strong, to enlist much sympathy.

The same pattern of tension is followed, however, in this play with respect to the presentation of major problems. As in most high comedies, the apparent issue, the cause which creates dissention is discussed. Armande and Bélise carry the banner of science throughout Act I, while attempting to assert their domination over other members of the family. Chrysale is given the task of arguing for the juste milieu; he formulates the logical argument that characteristically renders the cause of the entêtés absurd in Molière's high comedies:

Raisonner est l'emploi de toute ma maison,
Et le raisonnement en bannit la raison,
L'un me bûcle mon rôt en lisant quelque histoire;
L'autre rêve à des vers quand je demande à boire.

(II, vii)
Chrysale's speech is colored by his *terre-à-terre* vocabulary, which distinguishes him from the usual *raisonneur*. This role is spread out among the members of Chrysale's camp, as they all use their powers of reason to combat their opposition.

After clarifying his stance he addresses his wife; she expects more of the same argument, but Chrysale changes the topic to a new problem, Henriette's marriage. Thus Molière follows a pattern common to his high comedies; first the symptoms of some sort of unrest, then the elucidation of the problem (false devotion, sincerity, pedantry), followed by the introduction of the most pressing problem, which is always someone's marriage plans. In *Les Femmes savantes* the question of Clitandre was broached early, but only between the daughters. The serious consideration of marriage is usually a matter for the parents, and their involvement comes later in the play (normally Act II, or Act III in the case of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.) When the parents first deliberate upon the proposed marriage, grave doubts are cast upon it by the "obstacle," and the framework of the plot is established. In *Les Femmes savantes*, the obstacle is formed of a larger group than is normally the case, and they are opposed by a correspondingly large "pro-lovers" group.
Within the framework of concern over the lovers occurs the spat in III, iii between Trissotin and Vadius. The intensity of tension in this scene falls between the fray in "Le Bourgeois gentilhomme" and Alceste's encounter with Oronte. Whereas Jourdain's instructors come to blows over the importance of their arts, Vadius and Trissotin keep their argument on the verbal level. Nevertheless, they engage in the same sort of name-calling and squabbling that characterized "Le Bourgeois gentilhomme." The sonnet scene of "Le Misanthrope" is much more refined; Alceste refrains from criticizing Oronte's sonnet as long as possible, until he can no longer restrain himself. When the quarrel ends they part on civil terms:

**Oronte**

Ah! j'ai tort, je l'avoue, et je quitte la place.
Je suis votre valet, Monsieur, de tout mon coeur.

**Alceste**

Et moi, je suis, Monsieur, votre humble serviteur.

Later, of course, Oronte will seek vengeance for Alceste's criticism; but insofar as tension is concerned, "Le Misanthrope" remains honnête and refined. In "Les Femmes savantes" Vadius and Trissotin depart bitter enemies, vowing to meet one another again in combat "chez Barbin." Thus tension never reaches the raucous stage of the instructors, a stage which abounds with the gaiety and frank laughter of "Le Bourgeois gentilhomme"; neither does tension rise to the dignified stage of the sonnet scene, since Vadius and
Trissotin have none of the heroic élan of an Alceste, nor the deceitfulness of an Oronte.

In the dénouement tension is of a similarly benign tone. The lovers' cause sinks to its lowest ebb in V, iii when Philaminte browbeats her husband into submission:

Philaminte
Henriette et Monsieur sont joints de ce pas;
Je l'ai dit, je le veux; ne me répliquez pas;
Et si votre parole à Clitandre est donnée,
Offrez-lui le parti d'épouser son ainée.

Chrysale
Voilà dans cette affaire un accomodement.
(à Henriette et à Clitandre.)
Voyez, y donnez-vous votre consentement?

Henriette
Eh, mon père?

Clitandre
Eh, monsieur!

Chrysale shows an astonishing lack of understanding by asking the young lovers to submit; their reaction reflects their resignedness to his impotency. Although their cause is in grave doubt, the scene remains amusing because of Chrysale's vacillation. Bélise closes the scene with a réplique which crowns the new marriage arrangement with the blessings of science:

On pourrait bien lui faire
Des propositions qui pourraient mieux plaire;
Mais nous établissions une espèce d'amour
Qui doit être épuré comme l'astre du jour!
La substance qui pense y peut être reçue,
Mais nous en banisons la substance étendue.

Thus, the physical aspect of marriage will be excluded in
favor of spiritual delights.

The even-texturedness of tension is maintained through the constant use of learned jargon. The lovers seemed doomed, yet their doom is really a benefit for the cause of learning. By tying the serious questions of domination of the household and Henriette's marriage to the obstacles' preoccupation with science, Molière succeeds in keeping tension at a moderate pitch. The choice of preoccupation becomes important here, as pedantry can be ridiculed without raising serious questions of morality. Obviously, Molière is not treading on such dangerous ground as in the comedies of the "bitter period," 1662-1669; he may be ridiculing social vices, yet few would accuse him of impiety when he aims at pedantry, medicine, vanity, and so on.

In this way subject matter helps to determine the degree of tension in the play, as well as the characterization of the various personages. In a play such as L'Avare, where avarice is the mania, the situation of father versus son leads to a primitive struggle with strong Oedipal overtones. In this case the rapport of the personages involved in the struggle overrides the seriousness of the mania. When science, medicine, and literature are called into question, tension becomes amusing, and at times, farcical. Molière is reaching into his farcical origins to supply a topic for comedy; like Le Docteur, Météphraste, Jourdain's
instructors, and the long line of physicians in his farces: Trissotin, Vadius, and the learned ladies create comedy which is light and benign. The difference between farce and a high comedy of Les Femmes savantes type lies to a great extent in the concept of their organization.

Transition: The Movement from One Camp to Another

The farce has little need to justify the placing of one scene after another; more serious comedy forms, however, demand a greater degree of organization. The comedy of intrigue calls for intricate transition from one scene to another as we have seen in Le Dépit. Transition is less certain in a play like Le Tartuffe, because the plot is subordinated to stage action. In Les Femmes savantes Molière has taken much more care to supply adequate transition from scene to scene and act to act. The lovers' story is well-integrated into the theme of pedantry which is infused throughout the entire play. A study of Act III will show how attention is concentrated first on one group, then the other, with careful transition between the two.

Act II closes on the note of Chrysale avowing new resolution in dealing with his wife:

\[
\text{C'est souffrir trop longtemps,} \\
\text{Et je m'en vais être homme à la barbe des gens.}
\]

When the curtain rises for Act III, Chrysale's opposition is presented together, gathered for a typical séance, in
which the strength of their attachment to Trissotin and to their version of learning is displayed. Rather than leaving the group composed homogeneously of "believers," however, Henriette is persuaded to sit in; much the same as Alceste was present as a dissenting voice in Célimène's salon, Henriette represents the opposition. When she rises to leave in scene iii, Philaminte stops her:

Holà! je vous ai dit en paroles bien claires,
Que j'ai besoin de vous.

She needs her, of course, to make the transition from discussion of poetry to a consideration of her marriage to Trissotin.

Rather than persuade Henriette that she should marry Trissotin, she leaves her alone with Armande. The two sisters quickly reduce the question to a matter of the superiority of one side over another. In this scene (III, v) the maternal camp dominates and Armande closes with:

Une mère a sur nous une entière puissance,
Et vous croyez en vain par votre résistance . . .

And her sentence is interrupted by the return of Chrysale to the stage, this time in seemingly complete command. He presents Clitandre as a spouse, which provides Henriette with a rejoinder to Armande's call for obedience:

Il nous faut obéir, ma soeur, à nos parents;
Un père a sur nos voeux une entière puissance.

Act III ends with Chrysale's forces having made a complete recovery from their debacle that closed Act II.
A complete changeover of personages has occurred from the first scene of Act III to the last, Armante excepted. She is retained as a dissenting voice as Henriette was included in her mother's circle earlier. By keeping the groups separated, yet alternating them on stage, both sides are given equal opportunity to convince themselves they will win.

Molière keeps them separated until the dénouement, at which Chrysale and Philaminte alternately express their will to the confused notary: "Deux époux, c'est trop pour la coutume." An accord is reached quite easily in the dénouement after Ariste arrives with the letters. In a manner characteristic of the plays of this period, problems are solved by a clever ploy, rather than a deus ex machina. All that needs to be done is the unmasking of Trissotin; this subject is not discussed beforehand, as Ariste has concentrated on shoring up his brother's courage. Rather than rely on this uncertain method, which has proven fruitless in previous encounters, Ariste resorts to a plan which will expose Trissotin. The plan is a surprise to both Chrysale and the lovers. The use of secrecy provides a quick as well as effective ending. Its effectiveness lies in the similarity of its means with the tone of the play. In Tartuffe the King's intervention corresponds to the gravity of Tartuffe's crimes. Trissotin's attempted
marriage into Chrysale's family is easily parried with a simple scheme. As in most of the plays of this period, there is no elaborate plot to resolve; plot considerations have been kept to the simple question of the marriage and the struggles that surround it. Transition is executed smoothly, as Molière alternates the appearances of the two camps, often leaving a member of the opposition in "unfriendly" company.

When Molière deviates from this procedure, lapses may occur in liaison des scènes. For example, Armande and Clitandre are left onstage at the ends of IV, iv, after the rest of Philaminte's group exits. After they exchange a series of sarcasms, Armande suddenly exits, for no apparent reason, and Chrysale, Ariste, and Henriette enter. Although Clitandre's presence in both scenes provides liaison, there is no justification given for the sudden changeover in personages from one scene to the other. Such negligence is rare in Molière's theater and is rarely seen after his comedies of intrigue. Because it is a well-constructed play from most points of view, with transition running so smoothly as to be unnoticed, Molière also succeeds in toning down occurrences of obviously farcical scenes as well as making the plot seem unobtrusive.
Plot and Farce: The Absence of Both Gallantry and Farce

The "well-written" play envisioned by Molière no doubt would center around personages whose behavior would be consistent. Possibly the criticism of his previous heroes that they acted paradoxically, that is, they professed one thing then did the opposite, influenced Molière to construct personages who follow their mania blindly without ever realizing the extent of their folly. He had done this in lower forms of comedy, as in Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, but his high comedies all featured the hero who strove for supremacy while, at supreme moments of lucidity, caught a glimpse of his hopeless situation. In the study of Arnolphe's last confrontation with Agnès in L'Ecole des femmes, this process was called "high farce," for the tone of speech was lofty, yet the circular movement of farce, characterized by a lack of progress on the hero's part, made the scene farcical. In Les Femmes savantes, this process does not occur; at no time does Philaminte, Trissotin, or any of the other entêtés vacillate. They therefore act consistently according to their mania.

Also present in the previous high comedies was the level of farce that we have called "medium" farce. In L'Ecole des femmes Arnolphe's program of education led to a desire to dominate Agnès both as a father and as a lover.
To avoid being cuckolded he withheld knowledge of sexual matters with the assurance that her ignorance was a guarantee of fidelity. When fate and Agnès' ability to outwit Arnolphe eventually brought about his downfall, the play culminated in the tendentious spirit that characterizes farce. Instead of a beating, Arnolphe was defeated by more sophisticated means--yet the desire to maim is strong in this play. Les Femmes savantes again has little of this level of farce. The closest the play comes is in V, i, when Trissotin attempts to persuade Henriette to consent to their betrothal. His last réplique ends the scene on a tendentious note:

Nous allons voir bientôt comment ira l'affaire,
Et l'on a là-dedans fait venir le Notaire.

This scene has inspired Adam, who dislikes the play as a whole, to make the following remarks:

D'éminentes beautés rachètent les erreurs. C'est d'abord la grande et admirable scène du Ve acte, entre Trissotin et Henriette. Trissotin est, dans cette scène, prodigieux. Il est douceux, habile, froidement impitoyable. Henriette se débat en vain. L'homme la veut. Il la veut malgré elle, froidement, sans tendresse, sans pitié. Depuis Tartuffe, Molière n'avait rien écrit de plus puissant.\(^3\)

Such praise seems highly exaggerated; as stated previously, Trissotin lacks the force of Tartuffe. Trissotin is not the vedette of this play, however. Evil types are given

\(^3\) Adam, III, p. 394.
smaller roles in the later plays, while the "obstacles," more misleading than malevolent, are given still more importance.

Molière turns away from the notion of chastisement in these plays as the tendentious spirit of farce gives way to its circular aspect. While Trissotin does show an odious side to his characterization, he is dependent upon Philaminte's will; Chrysale's camp also acts as a foil for the ladies. Philaminte is the only personage to truly rise above the others. She wants to dominate her family with her pedantry. She never is chastized for her faults, remaining as committed to her entêtement at the play's end as ever. She consoles Armande in these terms:

Vous avez l'apprêci de la philosophie  
Pour voir d'un oeil content couronner leur ardeur.

Only Trissotin is dismissed, and this with everyone's consent. Philaminte, like Orgon, remains, yet she does not feel the weight of her transgressions as does Orgon; her discovery of Trissotin's fraud elicits her feeble cry:

Qu'il a bien découvert son âme mercenaire!  
Et que peu philosophe est ce qu'il vient de faire! 

Molière has not supplied a strong enough case against Philaminte and her clique to call for a scene similar to Orgon's repentance. Philaminte's recognition is glossed over, with the emphasis placed on the marriage.

As a whole, the play shows the futility of attempting
to correct human behavior. The only way to arrive at justice is to manipulate those whose stubbornness prevents happiness for others. As in *Le Misanthrope*, the comic hero is left chagrined, not at himself, but at the malevolence of others. Neither Alceste nor Philaminte are capable of putting themselves in other persons' shoes.

The plays are also similar in their lack of *lazzi*, physical gestures. The suppressing of acrobatics and farcical gestures was intended to raise the tone of the plays, as *lazzi* belong to the *commedia dell'arte*, a low form of comedy. Both have their brief moments of *lazzi*, however, corresponding to Du Bois' scene in *Le Misanthrope*, the only scene reminiscent of *lazzi* is the scene in which l'Epine falls over a chair, III, ii. His tumble elicits the following reactions from the pedants:

**Philaminte**
Voyez l'impertinent! Est-ce qu'on doit choir,
Après avoir appris l'équilibre des choses?

**Bélise**
De ta chute, ignorant, ne vois-tu pas les causes,
Et qu'elle vient d'avoir du point fixe écarté
Ce que nous appelons centre de gravité?

The other servant presented, Martine, also furnishes some of the livelier moments of this play. In II, vi, Martine's dismissal causes the first confrontation between Chrysale and Philaminte. After Philaminte makes Martine's misuse of words into a heinous crime, Martine proceeds to
demonstrate to what degree she is ignorant of the discipline of grammar:

Belise

Veux-tu toute la vie offenser la grammaire?

Martine

Qui parle d’offenser grand’mère ni grand-père?

Chrysale sees no reason for making an issue of Martine’s speech, as long as she can accomplish the duties for which she was engaged:

Qu’importe qu’elle manque aux lois de Vaugelas, Pourvu qu’à la cuisine elle ne manque pas?

(II, vii)

His logic contrasts sharply with the nonsensical fervor for purity that Philaminte strives for; this contrast between the desire to descend back to earth and the desire to ascend to purity creates the most interesting moments in the play. Chrysale is acting as a sort of raisonneur, without the usual abstraction that accompanies the speech of this role, while Philaminte plays the normal role of comic hero.

The play turns strongly to the question of Henriette’s marriage after the mania problem is explored. In the comedy of intrigue, there would be many factors added to the plot in order to achieve the maximum imbroglio to be unknotted; Molière having long ago abandoned the desire for plot complication as a source of interest, reuses marriage as a focal point for the first time since Le Dépôt. He wanted
to write a carefully constructed play, and this entails
the necessity for a correspondingly well-drawn plot. The
plot is integrated successfully into the fabric of the
play, with Henriette’s choice of Clitandre as a spouse and
the opposition of the entêtés being established in the
first scene. From time to time, delightful scenes having
little to do with plot enliven the general tone: Martine’s
scenes, as well as the scenes of Trissotin’s sonnet and
the quarrel between Trissotin and Vadius. The reading and
praise of Trissotin’s poetry is one of the best displays
of mordant wit in the play, and reflects the tendentious
aspects of farce. Had the opposition offered more caustic
comment on their inane behavior, the scene would have been
still more effective. The extravagancies of the ladies
make the scene lively, despite the fact that the center of
interest remains the marriage.

Since Philaminte’s primary goal is to insure Trisso-
tin’s entrance into her family, scenes often become plot-
centered, rather than being centered around pedantry. In
previous high comedies the marriage question was sidetracked
by the hero’s inability to reconcile love and his mania;
thus Tartuffe’s mania for power leads him away from that
which is given to him, Mariane; the inner conflicts of Al-
ceste, Arnolphe, and Harpagon make love an obstacle rather
than a goal.
In as "unimportant" a play as a comedy-ballet, Jourdain refuses to worry about his future son-in-law; his "je veux songer à de belles choses" keeps the play centered on the madness of his search for nobility. Even when his power is threatened he replies in accordance with his mania: "Et si vous me mettez en colère, je la ferai duchesse."

Philaminte simply relies on brute force of will: "Je l'ai dit, je le veux;"

The dénouement has little to do with science either; Ariste's plan of feigned bankruptcy diverts our attention to Trissotin's desire for money rather than any elucidation of his pedantry. The discovery that Tartuffe is an impostor or that Alceste cannot continue in salon society makes the dénouements of their plays much more effective. *Les Femmes savantes* gains neither in gallantry nor in heroics because of its emphasis on plot, however uncomplicated the plot may be.

Molière uses, to be sure, much of the gallant and heroic vocabulary of his earlier high comedies; the expression "flamme," "céleste," "je le veux," and so forth, abound, yet they have been deprived of their force in this play. The lovers profess gallant sentiments without really establishing the rapport that other lovers possess in previous plays. Their speech centers on the struggle they must wage rather than on misunderstandings, reconciliation, or love.
Henriette
Le plus sûr est de gagner ma mère;
Mon père est d'humeur à consentir à tout.
(I, iii)

Gallant discourse occurs in Clitandre's conversation with Armande, but again the speech is designed to clarify the plot, rather than existing in and for itself:

Clitandre
Tous mes feux, tous mes soins ne peuvent rien sur vous; Je vous trouve contraire à mes voeux les plus doux.

The dénouement is also lacking in the grace and gallantry of dénouements in Le Dépit and L'Ecole des femmes as well as the force of dénouements in Le Tartuffe, Le Misanthrope, and even Le Bourgeois gentilhomme. Unrelated to either romanesque plot developments or the hero's mania, Ariste's letter does little more than bring down Trissotin and swing the tide of battle to Chrysale. Philaminte admits having been duped, yet there is little shame in her admission. Having suppressed farce as a source of humor, the most interesting parts of the play occur earlier in the contrast of Chrysale's and Martine's naturalness with the pedants' bizarreness. Adam's statement that Les Femmes savantes is a "drame bourgeois" because of its emphasis on Philaminte's desire to marry her daughter to Trissotin is true only if the above scenes are excluded. Certainly the play suffers from a want of either farce, on any level, or gallantry. Hubert's assessment of this play as

4Adam, p. 395,
"savage" because of satirical attacks levelled at Cotin through the personage of Trissotin ignores the total atmosphere Molière has created throughout the full five acts. In comparison to Tartuffe of L'Avaré, this play is much more benign.

Atmosphere: A Dissipation of Force

The most salient feature of Les Femmes savantes is the maintaining of contrast between the members of this household. Chysale, Henriette, and Martine speak in a down-to-earth style which reflects their disdain of pedantry. Philaminte, Bélose, Armande, Trissotin, and Vadius use a style that rings with the glory of science and learning; their speech is colored by frequent allusions to laws of physics and poetry. Lacking is a raisonneur like Cléonte of Le Tartuffe to bridge the gap between the two groups; Clitandre comes the closest in IV, iii when he opposes the good sense of the Court to the unnaturalness of the pedants:

Qu'elle a de sens commun pour se connaître à tout;  
Que chez elle on se peut former quelque bon goût;  
Et que l'esprit du monde y vaut, sans flatterie,  
Tout le savoir obscur de l'apèderie.

Clitandre's speech loses some of its force because he also fills the role of suitor to Henriette. In Le Bourgeois gentilhomme Cléonte filled the same dual function, yet the problem of Jourdain's mania was not given the serious proportions of pedantry in this play; there was therefore

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5Hubert, p. 241.
no need to present issues in as serious a perspective as
was the case in Le Tartuffe. Les Femmes savantes remains
as light in tone as Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, while making
a grave issue of the evils of pedantry.

Molière has attempted to repeat the formula that
brought him success in his earlier high comedies, yet some­
thing is lacking: heroism. The members of Philaminte's
clique have the potential for heroic action, as shown in
their desire to devote their lives to "l'esprit" rather than
"la matière," but none of them have the power to push their
desires to the extreme. They easily capitulate when Ariste
fools them, Philaminte allows her husband to contradict her
constantly, and Trissotin lacks the daring and force to
bring anyone to his knees. Force of will has been too even­
ly distributed throughout the personages to permit the po­
tentially serious situation of Trissotin's schemes to be­
come troubling. Everyone speaks as though he can accomplish
whatever he desires yet no one succeeds in dominating any­
one else's will.

Distribution of tension, well-calculated to create
serious moments of the most effective intervals, does not
improve the quality of the play because tension seems arti­
ficial and contrived. Molièresque high comedy demands an
unending deep-seated tension between personages, as well
as an inner tension within a comic hero. Neither of these
types of tension are established in this play, therefore it lacks the heights of emotion of the more successful high comedies. Transition is achieved simply by relating most stage action to Henriette's marriage. Unfortunately too much attention is paid this facile plot device and more interesting scenes such as Chrysalé's defense of Martine and the art of cookery, or Trissotin's sonnet scene, are in short supply. The confrontations involving marriage all sink into a fruitless struggle for power. Molière hesitates to include those farcical scenes that set a comic hero in a circular course, in which his foibles are exposed for the frank amusement of everyone. By excluding farce from Les Femmes savantes, Molière deprived his play of the strength that makes his high comedies successful.

The atmosphere of Les Femmes savantes is therefore more refined and "honnête" than that of Le Misanthrope or Le Tartuffe. Unfortunately Molière's theater is at its best when the playwright indulges in scenes that lead nowhere, and are intended to victimize a comic hero. This play, lacking these qualities for the most part, remains too serious to provoke the uproarious laughter of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, yet too light to provoke the "rire dans l'âme" associated with powerful comic heroes.
CONCLUSION

Les Femmes savantes is Molière's last attempt to recreate the serious atmosphere of his previous high comedies. He achieves the high tone of Le Misanthrope, eliminating the lazzz and nonsensical farce that runs through his comedy-ballets and many high comedies. Yet the total atmosphere lacks the force that gives comedies of high tone the vibrancy necessary to make them masterpieces. The impossibility of Philaminte's undertaking, an effort to harness everyone in the yoke of scholarship, is downplayed in favor of the creation of a euphoria in which Henriette's marriage can be consummated. Plays in the 1662-1669 period made the hero's mania the highlight, rather than a marriage; the euphoria necessary to make a play a comedy finds its origin in a return to sanity. Thus Le Tartuffe and L'Avaré end with their heroes skulking off to a just banishment. Alceste's case confuses the issue, for he is both a hero to be chastised and a lover who should be married.

Le Bourgeois gentilhomme represents a play in which no is banished, one which ends in the highest state of euphoria possible. Large doses of farce blend well with a general
lack of bitterness, making the play's benign character a success. The same style of comedy creates a similar atmosphere in _Les Fourberies de Scapin_ and _Le Malade imaginaire_. These comedies do not purport to be serious in tone, and the glossing over of problems that was a fault in _Les Femmes savantes_ becomes a virtue in other plays of this period.

The plays that raise Molière above other writers of comedy, however, and cause writers such as Meredith to praise him as the great "scourger of society" are the "bitter" plays whose creation begins with _L'Ecole des femmes_ and ends with _L'Avaré_. In these comedies the playwright attains the heights of seriousness while remaining comic through the use of contrast; believing that life should be lived according to a set of rules that they have devised, the comic heroes constantly fail to make others conform to these rules, as well as fail to adhere to the rules themselves. This situation, an impasse that the hero finds intolerable, creates a subtle humor that only the discerning spectator can appreciate. Thus, comedy is "high." The origin of Molière's high comedy is not in the comedy of character as written by the ancients, however, it is in farce.

In the study of _Le Dépit amoureux_ it was shown how Molière began with a literary convention, the comedy of
intrigue, and added farcical passages to enliven the play. The farce added to Le Dépit is light, and it was not until L'Ecole des femmes that he succeeded in creating serious heroic comedy from farce. He took fear of cuckoldry, a theme common to farce, and made it the obsession of someone who becomes outraged at the thought of it. His grandiose plans to avoid cuckoldry are blended into the framework of a comedy of intrigue, producing a truly innovative play. The successive elimination of plot as a focal point and the correspondingly greater emphasis upon heroism led to the masterpieces of the Tartuffe period. The lack of well-executed plot in even his highest comedies attest to Molière's reliance upon the structure and processes of farce. Le Misanthrope is the antithesis of low farce in terms of tone, yet the two are nearly identical in their structure; both are displays of a given "type," unchanging, yet fascinating in their inability to attain a goal, or simply "get anywhere."

Nothing holds Molière's plays together other than a homogeneity of atmosphere. Most criticism refers to the "character" of the hero as the adhesive element, yet this concept does not take into account the diversity of types included in most of the plays. In truth, Molière succeeds in juxtaposing series after series of confrontations of varying degrees of tension. The success of the plays results in part from his skill in distributing tension of
varying quality, depending upon who is locking horns. Debates between Cleonte and Orgon differ greatly from spats between Orgon and Dorine. Yet the inclusion of both varieties of tension in one play helps create a uniform atmosphere such as one might expect in a large bourgeois household.

This series of confrontations give the illusion that the play is moving forward, but the dénouement always leaves the personages in their original state, save the young lovers who are at last betrothed. Little progress has been made despite a large amount of verbal flow because each personage adheres to his given type. This inability to bend their will further strengthens their kinship to the stock characters of farce, although the personages of Molière's comedies are given greater individuality to make them appear more realistic or lifelike. Thus, their comedy-producing similarity to mechanisms that Bergson dotes upon in _Le Rire_¹ is modified by a fanciful addition of verbalizing that Moore describes as "poetic."² The lyric outbursts of a comic hero attains a measure of fantasy that only a poet of the first order can create.

¹Henri Bergson, _Le Rire_ (Paris, 1900).
²See either his article "La Poésie de Molière," CALEF, No. 16, or the chapter "Speech" in his _Molière: a New Criticism_ (Oxford, 1949).
Molière's personages are both "le mécanique" and "le vivant" because humans all have a mechanical side that manifests itself in a deluge of words. When confronted with a deluge from another "mechanism," often neither listener nor speaker communicate. This process can be kept extremely mechanical, such as in low farce, or it can be made more complex by showing the inevitable paradoxes that can result from a rigorous adherence to mechanical behavior.

This same aspect of Molière's theater can be studied in more intellectual perspective; the treatment of intellectual ramifications as indicated through a finding of "action" in the plays has been popular over the last twenty years. Professor Moore's _Molière: a New Criticism_ initiated a trend in scholarship which has sought to find not so much a "moral" as the true subject of each play; the critics associated with this trend treat the work of art independently of the playwright's biography, treating it as a virtually autonomous creation.

The cohesive factor in _Le Malade imaginaire_, for example, is not the apparent hypocondria of Argan, apparent because the plot seems structured around this malady, but the power of words to deceive. By isolating and analyzing the important scenes, Moore has determined the "action" of the play, that is, what the play is truly "about." The separation of plot and action, a good definition of which
can be found in Fergusson's *The Idea of a Theater*, has enabled Moore and his disciples and persons influenced by him to discuss the profound meaning of Molière's theater, as opposed to extraneous topics that have been exhausted, such as medicine, religion, or pedantry in Molière's time. In an article on *L'Avaré*, Marcel Gutwirth has advanced the theory that the play really is concerned with a primitive life-and-death struggle in which the lovers attempt to expel death in the form of Harpagon. Hallam Walker's article on the same play sees the desire to free oneself from obsessions in order to "possess one's desire" as the theme; symmetry and repetitions are offered as proof of Molière's intention of structuring the play around this idea.

These critics have gotten away from the notions of comedy of character with their insistence on broader underlying implications in the plays. Harpagon's character has been called "uneven" by hostile critics, an unmerited accusation since Molière was not particularly interested in

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creating a well-constructed character. The issue, in other words, is much more profound than avarice; Molière is making a statement on the human condition that is no less significant than anything Racine or Corneille have to say. Their studies, which center around an analysis of internal structure of the plays, find a sort of culmination in J. D. Hubert’s Molière and the Comedy of Intellect. This full-length work treats each play individually, stating its predominant theme. The theme of L’Etourdi, for example, is fencing; by culling the metaphors that reoccur throughout the play Hubert has determined that Molière imitates the thrusts and parries of fencing in the play’s structure. A parody of tragedy is the theme of L’Ecole des femmes, while Le Malade imaginaire deals with the theatricality of Argan’s hypocondria.

An even closer study of the plays is offered by critics interested in linguistic phenomena. Garapon’s article on the variety of diction in Molière’s theater is based on word frequency among the various personages. He concludes that the often repeated statement: "Molière n’a pas de style propre, mais prend le style de chacun de ses personnages" (p. 103) is accurate. The Maître de philosophie, 

6J. D. Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect (University of California Press, 1962).

for example, has a very abstract vocabulary which distinguishes him from the coarse Maître d'armes who has a limited vocabulary.

In an even more exacting manner, using numerical analysis as his point of departure, Charles Muller has affirmed the variation in tone of various scenes. The romanesque tone of L'Avare's first two scenes, which are scenes between the lovers, can be seen in the abundance of possessive pronouns in those scenes. There are two personal pronouns for every possessive pronoun, a ratio found in classical tragedy. When Harpagon enters, a comic tone dominates, partially ascribable to the dropping of the ratio from 2:1 to 10:1. His conclusions are the same as Gara­pon's: Molière's style varies according to the tone he is attempting to create, to such an extent that he seems to have no particular style of his own. Doolittle's article on L'Avare affirms the above conclusion that Molière's style is conscious and deliberate rather than haphazard. Many critics have felt that the first scenes of L'Avare are poorly written; yet the lovers' language in these scenes is necessarily stiff and unnatural, for Molière is


9James Doolittle, "Bad Writing in L'Avare," ECR, VI, No. 3.
attempting to show the adverse effects of Harpagon's avarice on their courtship. These three critics, Garapon, Muller, and Doolittle have thus justified a seeming lack of consistency on Molière's part, stating that any "inconsistencies" are called for by artistic necessity. Molière's theater is being vindicated of many accusations resulting from a dogmatic approach to what a comedy should be like.

The biographical approach to Molière and his theater has tended to soften the overly-rigorous relationship between the author and his work. Simon's book has as much to say about the plays themselves as his life. He suggests parallels between Célimène and Armande Béjart, for example, while not insisting on an exact identity of one to the other; Molière's life undoubtedly influences his plays but he is certainly not displaying his private woes on stage. Simon's experience with the theater is evinced in many commentaries on Molière's stagecraft. This approach also takes into account the history and climate of the times; thus he combines some of the best features of historical criticism with some of the detachment and perspective of the "new" critic.

Fernandez' approach is similar to Simon's in that

11Ramon Fernandez, La Vie de Molière (Paris, 1939).
he studies the man using his works as a starting point. Although written in 1939, his study is quite modern in its insistence upon the importance of the plays. The bulk of his work concerns biography, however.

Although the foregoing critics provided insights which have helped shape this paper to some degree, their approach contrasts somewhat with the direction of the paper. Weinberg best states in his *The Art of Jean Racine* the difference between finding the intellectual message of the play and studying the composition of the play and its effects on an audience: "But poems, and especially plays, do not exist in the abstract, and the bare statement of their organizing idea has little potential with respect to our emotions." Instead of uncovering an idea, which Molière was presumably trying to illustrate in a play, this dissertation has attempted to study and compare several plays in order to show how differing "atmospheres" were created and how each atmosphere produces a unique theatrical experience. The approach chosen to determine these atmospheres was a selection of compositional aspects that serve as guides for situating and comparing the plays; in the following summaries of each of the compositional guideposts, criticism that influenced their selection will be indicated.

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The evolution of will in Molière's personages begins at four points: farce, the comedy of intrigue, the comedy of character, and tragedy. In farce Molière found the automatism of comedy; speech in this medium is an exaggeration or caricature of our natural tendencies to speak according to pre-established patterns that, at times, we have no control over. Communication often becomes impossible because two persons are on "different wave lengths," so to speak, and each seems to be chattering away simply for the pleasure of hearing himself talk. While this free-flowing dialogue appears to be a sign of strong will, or force of personality, it is really an absurd piece of "sound and fury."

The first example of farcical dialogue studied in this paper was Métaphraste's scene in Le Dépît. His speech exemplifies the fixity of character that makes of farcical personages "types." It is not difficult to see the evolution of the caricatural type in farce to the fixity of an Arnolphe.

The comedy of intrigue was attempted by Molière, Le Dépît representing this genre. This style of comedy relies on ingenious plot situations to dazzle the spectator, and is written in the "medium" style, five acts in length, as opposed to the "low" style and brevity of farce. The inclusion of Métaphraste in a comedy of intrigue shows
Molière's penchant for farce; rather than following the genre that he began with and relying totally on plot, he cannot resist the temptation to further enliven his play with a farcical type. In later plays, plot complications become less and less a source of comedy as Molière relies more on "character."

Traditionalist, pre-Moore criticism discusses Molière's high comedies as comedies of character. This form is a variation of New Comedy, which is constructed around a central figure who is given a highly developed personality. Menander and Terence all wrote comedies in this style, which is called "high comedy" because of the playwright's care in representing realistic tableau of contemporary life. A moral can be easily extracted from these plays, which are more profound than the romanesque comedy of intrigue. Molière's characters are more confusing than those of the ancients, however, as they act inconsistently; Harpagon spends money when it seems unlikely that a miser would do so, and Alceste detests insincerity, yet loves a woman who is insincere. Molière's contemporaries duly criticized him for his carelessness. In this century critics have proven less dogmatic in their views on character as a dramatic device; Lancaster's comments simply situate the plays in terms of their focus on character, manners, or plot.

Schérer is more subtle in his views:

Bien des scènes de ses pièces sont inutiles à l'intrigue, mais toutes servent à mettre en relief un caractère; elles sont donc utiles, non à l'unité d'action, mais à celle de l'intérêt... c'est même ce que l'on exprime en disant que L'Avare est une comédie de caractère.  

According to this interpretation, Molière still uses character as a center of dramatic interest, but only in opposition to plot-oriented comedies can his high comedies be called "comédies de caractère." This view insists less on Molière trying to portray a character per se than using it as an organizing force.

A useful distinction lies in "type" as opposed to "character." In Guicharnaud's work, the author keeps the view that Molière constructs personages who are unchanging types, yet none of the plays are classifiable:

Le propre des grandes comédies de Molière est de toucher à ces catégories, à la périphérie; mais leur centre est ailleurs, Elles sont toutes plus ou moins inclassables...  

The fourth source may be the most important of all: the use of heroism as seen in tragedy. Corneille's heroes had a strong influence in the creation of Molière's high

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comedy; Arnolphe's dictum: "Je suis maître, je parle; allez, obéissez," is identical to a line in Corneille's Sertorius. The utterance of such forceful speech, coupled with the hero's subsequent unglorious downfall, creates a parody of the heroic tragedy of pre-Molière days. Hubert's chapter on L'Ecole des femmes "A Burlesque Tragedy" stresses the notion of a parallel between this play and tragedy. A good study of the development of high comic heroes from the early Dom Garcie de Navarre appears in Gutwirth's book. Molière's unique attempt in the "comédie heroïque" genre was a complete failure, yet this play led him into the writing of heroic verse, which in turn led him to his own style of high comedy. Dom Garcie and Alceste find themselves delivering the same speeches at times, proving that the leap from serious drama to comedy can be short; the former personage is to be taken seriously as a jealous, possessive lover, whose gallantry is destined to counteract his woeful behavior, whereas a measure of exaggeration renders the same behavior in Alceste comic. In both cases these heroes exhibit a good deal of will, as they constantly make demands upon others.

From the origins of farce, comedy of intrigue, and

16 Marcel Gutwirth, Molière ou l'invention comique (Paris, 1966).
heroic drama we can trace the development of will in Molière's personages. Arnolphe is a central figure in this development, as he is the first personage to heroically defy the forces of destiny that often make cuckolds of his less forceful neighbors. He is also the first to catch a glimpse of his inability to govern his own destiny; the bitterness of his defeat is heightened by his profession of certainty in his quest and the subsequent complete impotency he feels when Horace wins Agnès. Strains of both farce and comedy of intrigue are interwoven into L'Ecole des femmes, making it a true crossroad in the history of comedy. Yet the dominant factor in Molière's first high comedy is Arnolphe's force of will, a factor that governs the direction of the play. Fernandez' article on Molière, "The Comedy of Will," stresses awareness as a comic force in the delineation of Arnolphe's will:

Like Arnolphe, he (Alceste) has to admit the failure of his will, but more subtly and more profoundly than Arnolphe, since he reveals, at the end, that in him as in everybody else, "il est toujours de l'homme," that reason "is not what governs love," and that his heroic heart is a captive heart.17

His article, as well as Doolittle's article18 and


Guicharnaud's book, all stress the fall of a strong-willed hero as a sign of the passage from Cornelian-Cartesian optimism to Jansenist pessimism in the seventeenth century. Man is no longer capable of achieving great deeds by force of will; the "Je le veux" of Augustus in Cinna has little relevance for Molière's age. Arnolphe and Alceste come to the realization that love forces them to do things that are contrary to the dictates of reason, and that they are powerless to change the will of others in their unbending, rigid ambience. Alceste would force others to be sincere, yet he even has difficulty in following his rules; his withdrawal signals man's failure to control human nature. In later plays, rather than attempt to reform the comic hero, that is, show him his errors, the problem is sidestepped in the dénouement, and the hero remains blind to his folly. Orgon and Philaminte confess their misjudgment only insofar as choice of houseguests is concerned; they never show any signs of being cured of their inclination toward extreme behavior.

Tension

As we have seen, extreme willful behavior leads to tension. The "entête" declares his unnatural scheme, and

\footnote{Jacques Guicharnaud, Molière: une aventure théâtrale.}
because he is always in a position of power as guardian or father of a marriageable girl, dissension arises over whom the girl will marry. This situation does not occur in the comedy of intrigue as the young lovers are given the spotlight; they successfully outwit the old man (obstacle), often aided by a crafty servant, or, as in the case of *Le Dépit*, they overcome confusion that momentarily clouds their future. In later plays, Molière emphasized the obstacle, giving the lover less and less of a role, from *L'Ecole des femmes*, in which Agnès and Horace have significant roles, to *Le Misanthrope*, in which the young lovers disappear, and the obstacle becomes a lover. The greater the role of the obstacle, the more dissension is likely to occur. The tension created in the high comedies varies according to the situation in which it develops. Tension between Arnolphe and Horace is not serious; their rapport is taken from literary convention, that of young lover-versus-obstacle. The rapport of Agnès and Arnolphe is much more strained. The latter, through his heroic speech, has put himself in the position of having to effect an unnatural scheme which would victimize his ward; at the same time he has fallen in love with her, which leads him to a realization of his powerlessness. Horace has little role in bringing down Arnolphe—it is Agnès, whose natural inclinations lead her to Horace, and whose charms seduce Arnolphe—who ingeniously creates tension.
Tension built on plot-centered happenings is light and easy to resolve, as we saw in Le Dépit. Whenever the lovers have had enough of their dépit, they arrive at an accord. The tension of farce is more serious; being popular, rather than literary, farce tends toward cruel humor. The purpose of farce is often to trick someone, or victimize the butt of the humor. The victim is often cuckolded, as sex is no stranger to farce.

As long as there is no "story" to this sort of tension, the play can remain a comedy. Serious tension is therefore usually involved in circular movement with a consequent tendency to suppress plot (the events in the play) and stressing the unchanging aspects of man's nature. Arnolphe is more than someone who fails to win Agnès—he is the eternal comic hero who has set his goals too high and cannot own up to his boasts. The audience approves of his downfall, in fact it applauds the bitterness of his exit. This tendentious humor is amusing only because the playwright has created the proper comic atmosphere for it; without Arnolphe's heroic exaggerations or Agnès' naïveté, the play would become a serious drama, as the guardian's plans perse, to virtually imprison his ward, amount to a morally repellent act. In addition to his grimacing demeanor, the comic atmosphere is aided by the artificiality of the dénouement that brings about his failure. We disregard the
circumstances of his defeat because the spectacle of failure suffices in itself. After so much boasting, the contrasting spectacle of the victory of the supposedly weaker young lovers is striking.

Adam has labelled Les Femmes savantes as a "drame bourgeois" because Philaminte's scheme to marry Henriette to Trissotin attracts the major interest in the play:

Dès qu'il n'est plus question du vain problème de la science des femmes, dès qu'il s'agit seulement de savoir si Philaminte réussira à dominer son mari et à se faire le mariage de sa fille la pièce remonte . . . mais c'est, encore une fois, un drame bourgeois et non plus une comédie.20

He is right in that Philaminte is powerless to create comic tension; the plot aspects of the play take the spotlight, not turning comedy to "drame," but turning Molièresque high comedy into traditional New Comedy. It takes a concentration of energy to make a comic hero successful in Molière's plays, and energy is too evenly distributed among the personages of this play to give the play "circular motion."

The pedantry of Philaminte's group needs to monopolize the stage as much as the devotion of the Tartuffe camp to assure the success of pedantry as a comic force. Too often

Trissotin is merely an obstacle rather than a source of humor; scenes such as his sonnet scene must be multiplied for the play to have the illusion of going nowhere. Rather than being totally centered in the reality of a feminine academy, the realism of Philaminte's desire to dominate often takes the foreground. In contrast, the reality created by Tartuffe's appetites in his two seduction scenes, and the euphoria of his subsequent fall, or the euphoria of Jourdain's mad ceremonies carry these plays, rather than the reality of their roles as obstacles. Tension in their scenes is excellent because it is serious, yet comic; in _Les Femmes savantes_ tension reverts to tension in traditional comical heroics of the "obstacles."

The serious aspects of comedy are usually couched in terms of individuals who differ from the society around them. Meredith's _Essay on Comedy_ sees "the comic" as a force which restores the natural social order when someone seeks to create an unnatural state. The accent is put on Molière plays as comedies of manners. Tension arises when a Philaminte attempts to reform society; Martine cannot be made into an enthusiast of rhetoric however, which proves that efforts to alter character are in vain. Rather than dealing harshly with offenders such as Philaminte, the

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comic points out the weaknesses in their enterprise and gently chastises them.

Bergson's *Le Rire* also proposes the contrast between the rigidity of an unnatural manner of behavior and the flexibility of the "living" as the essence of the comic. According to his theory, Martine's cause will triumph because of its unstudied naturalness. Philaminte's adherence to rules and codified behavior will lead her to poor decisions and she will eventually fall victim to a Trissotin.

Criticism of the comic in post-Freudian years has tended to view tension in terms of Oedipal conflict. Rather than being a social phenomenon, Mauron describes the comic as a manner of expressing the father-son conflict in an atmosphere of euphoria. The son's victory is the euphoria of the play, while reality is expressed in the father's quest to suppress his son. *L'Avarre* is the most direct representation of this myth, as the seriousness of tension arises from Harpagon's desire to dominate his household. The humor of the stealing of Harpagon's cas- sette, and the tricking of the senex, creates a euphoric setting in which the young lovers are married. *L'Avarre* becomes a huge joke on the senex figure and, in a much less important manner, the story of a marriage.

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This concept of comedy is based strongly on the notions of high comedies as New Comedies. This form existed side-by-side with tragedy in ancient Greece and later in Rome. Comedy told of the victory of life over death, life being the marriage of the lovers, and death being the senex. Tragedy told of the fall of a great hero. Thus comedy has no individualized story, only a form; its heroes are types, and its titles reflect this: Le Misanthrope, L'Avare, etc. The plot of tragedies varies greatly, and each story concerns a specific man: Othello, Oedipus Rex, and so on. Cook's work contains the best comparisons of these two genres. Comedy therefore contains as much tension as tragedy, as tension created the sustained interest needed in drama, only the form of the two genres varies.

It seems inaccurate to label Molière's plays as Oedipal conflicts alone, as Le Misanthrope, George Dandin and Dom Juan, to name only a few, do not follow this pattern. The distinction of society correcting its wayward (comedy of manners) or man as an isolated being (comedy of character) does not account for the strength of tension in the plays. Molière does more than describe character or social behavior; his theater may better be defined as the theater of conflict.

In an ambiance of euphoria, Molière's comic heroes participate in a struggle that is best suited for the comic, according to Freud's definition: they declare their schemes, the declaration of which causes anxiety among the spectators; when the scheme fails, the disproportion between the degree of anxiety and its sudden release creates laughter. In this way, Molière's ability to create heightened tension, then resolve it quickly, constitutes the essence of his genius as a comic playwright.

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Whereas plot was not of major concern to Molière, the ordering of his play was. Plot needs determine the order of a comedy of intrigue; in Le Désespoir, transition depended upon bringing the necessary personages on stage at the proper moment. At times, entrances and exits were not well "justified," that is, no adequate reasons were given for their movement.

Schérrer, whose Dramaturgie classique describes the degree to which Molière adhered to the rules and practices of the dramaturgy of his day, shows that he usually took pains to regulate stage movement for the best possible effect. He was not the hurried playwright who carelessly strung

farcical "numbers" together and called the result a play. The above sections on transition have attempted to show that beginning with *L'Ecole des femmes* (this may also be true of earlier low comedies and farces) Molière linked his scenes together as well as any tragedian. To achieve linkage, or "liaison des scènes," all the playwright need do is leave a personage on stage from the scene immediately preceding; thus, the two scenes are linked by "liaison de présence," a procedure common to Molière. Problems are avoided in most of the high comedies and comedy-ballets by centering them around a single personage. If Jourdain is perpetually on stage, "liaison des scènes" occurs nearly automatically. In fact, the construction of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, according to Schérer, is rare because the acts are linked by the *intermèdes*. The play unfolds virtually without pause as personages on stage before the *intermèdes* appear immediately after them.

Because most of Molière's plays rely heavily on tension for their dramatic interest, rather than plot, less explanation is needed for circumstances of which the audience is unaware, and attention is focused on tensions which arise on stage. The plays are arranged to sustain a rhythm

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of tension that may be unbroken, as in *Le Misanthrope*, or of varying degrees of intensity, as in *Le Tartuffe*. In any case, most of the plays revolve around a single personage as he encounters other personages who disagree with him. The ordering of the play usually calls for an exposition in which the hero's problem is declared, one which is based on an obsession; he speaks to a confidant who attempts to show him his errors and offers reasons designed to release him from his obsession. After the problem is discussed and the case for normalcy is presented, a more specific problem is brought up, usually the marriage of the hero's ward or daughter to a suitor with whom she is enamored. The hero then indicates what choice he has already made for her, and the choice reflects his obsession; if he is a hypocondriac, she will marry a doctor, if he is a religious fanatic, she will marry a "dévot," and so on. In a number of the plays, those which follow the New Comedy formula to the letter, the hero wants to marry his ward. As the play progresses, the hero finds opposition everywhere, from the "blondin" his daughter has chosen, from his servants, from his daughter, and, most importantly in several of the high comedies (*L'Ecole des femmes*, *Le Misanthrope*, *Coeur de Dandin*) from himself. Tension is resolved when the hero finds that he cannot force his will on his daughter or anyone else, and his daughter can marry
the attractive suitor. The most common device for settling the marriage problem is to overpower the hero; to accomplish this the opposition group tricks the hero (if he is to marry his ward) or the hero’s champion into betraying evil intentions. This action is the "unmasking," and is most effective in such plays as Le Tartuffe, Le Malade imaginaire, and L’Avare. In L’Ecole des femmes, outside circumstances foil Arnolphe’s plans (a device from the comedy of intrigue) and in Le Misanthrope the problem is never truly resolved. Farcical comedies such as Le Mâdecin malgré lui or Le Bourgeois gentilhomme also avoid problems by having the lovers trick the father, who has no one specifically in mind for his daughter anyway.

In many of the high comedies the marriage question receives little attention, serving only as a pretext for keeping the play in motion. Marriage represents the passing from one state to another, presumably from a state of anxiety to a state of felicity. As such, the road to marriage is the only "story" in the play, that is, the only forward motion possible. The bulk of the play concerns a series of confrontations that really lead nowhere; this series requires little explanation, little justification for its ordering and although the play seems disorganized--Bray calls Le Bourgeois gentilhomme "un monstre que cette comédie, si on la rapporte au type classique."\(^{27}\) it forms a

\(^{27}\)René Bray, Molière, homme de théâtre (Paris 1954), 254.
large circle of incidents. These incidents demonstrate the futility of the hero's obsession and finish by playing some sort of joke on him. Even in a play as reserved and of such high tone as *Le Misanthrope*, it is nothing more than a joke on Alceste played by Célimène and society. When Alceste stays in Célimène's presence in Act II, and leaves when asked to stay, this nonsensical, futile motion recalls farcical processes; when he retires at the play's end, he is no better, nor no worse off than when he first entered. Regardless of what he says or does, nothing changes, nothing happens. Since he is also a lover, the marriage does not occur that normally ends a play. Molière has arrived at the creation of a state of perfect circular motion in which each personage speaks and then does what he says he is going to do, which amounts to nothing. Transition in such a play requires a minimum of care, since nothing takes place to confuse the plot.

As we have seen above, *Les Femmes savantes* becomes strongly centered around Henriette's marriage. Both *Les Femmes savantes* and *L'Avare* open with the marriage problem in the initial scene, yet the latter play quickly focuses upon Harpagon's mania and the marriage becomes a father versus son struggle. In the former play the marriage becomes a game rather than a struggle, as the force of the "evil" camp is much less intimidating. Transitional elements become more noticeable in such a play, which is
well-constructed and harmoniously balanced to distribute whatever tension there is throughout the play. We notice Ariste’s stratagem in the dénouement, while plot concerns in Le Tartuffe, such as “la donation,” become incidental to the powerful seduction scenes. In neither case do transitional, that is, explanatory verses, become as obtrusive as they do in comedies of intrigue.

Plot and Farce

Considerations of both plot and farce have been raised throughout the preceding summaries as they are nearly inseparable from commentary on other compositional elements. Discussions of Molière’s plays must begin with his plots, as he began his career with the comedy of intrigue and his succeeding plays keep the same form, even though emphasis shifts from plot to confrontation.

Per se, plot implies the “romanesque,” that is, the leaving behind of realism for a world of fantasy. The more complicated a plot becomes, the more romanesque it becomes; realism is shunned in plays of the Le Désir type in favor of intellectual delight. In Le Désir, Eraste and Lucile play a game of courtship in which comedy is built on inoffensive plot devices, such as mistaken identity or unknown circumstances. No one tries to harm anyone’s feelings in such a play; rather they attempt to straighten out confusing situations that lead to “désir.” Everyone is basic-
cally sympathetic towards his contemporary and only the situation is to blame for hurt feelings. On the other hand, farce is tendentious, as Mauron points out: "La farce s'apparente à l'esprit tendancieux et la comédie d'intrigue à l'esprit inoffensif." Cuckoldry, beatings, and general victimizing give farce its earthy tone. Situations are unimportant in farce; interest centers around realistic personality traits that characterize a farce's participants. Various social classes and occupations are represented to give farce an air of realism. When "Le Docteur" comes out to deliver a mechanical (and often nonsensical) speech on some pseudo-erudito topic, he is given some form of rude treatment by his impatient listener. Molière added farce to Le Dépit in two manners; he gave Métaphraste a scene, similar to Le Docteur's in La Jalousie du barbouillé, and he added the servants, whose aping of their masters creates a farcical pendant to the "dépit scenes." Their spats and reconciliations, as well as Métaphraste's scene, serve as "stuffing" for the play, whose emphasis is placed on the "forward motion" of the marriage of Eraste to Lucile. Métaphraste is farcical due to the nonsensicality of his verbiage, and because Albert drives

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28 Mauron, p. 40.
him away rudely, thereby effecting a "trick." Marinette, Gros-René, and Mascarille are farcical thanks to their speech which doubles their master’s elegant speech on an earthy level. Mascarille talks of cuckoldling Gros-René, again a trick characteristic of farce.

Modern criticism is nearly unanimous in affirming the presence of farce throughout all of Molière’s comedies. We have seen farce in a comedy of intrigue, and it has been pointed out in the high comedies, even in Le Misanthrope. Lanson’s Molière et la farce was revolutionary for the time, 1901, as he saw medieval French farce as the origin of Molière’s high comedies; scholars had usually emphasized the relationship of Molière to Plautus and Terence.²⁹ Lanson’s case for the kinship of Molière to farce rests on the sharing of "masks," or rigidity of character, the imitation of manners, the "lesson," and finally the spontaneity of these two theaters. This article helped show the way for a fresh, new critical approach to Molière, one which concerns itself largely with the plays themselves, rather than their philosophical implications.

René Bray’s Molière, homme de théâtre approaches the man as an actor, manager, director, and complete man of the theater; this work gives many instances of comedy taken

from farce in the high comedies. These two statements summarize this rapport:

De la farce elle (high comedy) garde la médiocre importance donnée à l'agencement de l'action, l'audace réaliste, la typification des caractères, le primat du comique... On comprend que Molière, de 1661 à 1664 n'ait pas écrit de farce; il a intégré ce genre aux Écoles et à Tartuffe; il l'a enrichi et il en a haussé le ton; c'est ainsi qu'il a créé la grande comédie.30

By raising the tone of farce Molière found his style of high comedy; yet Bray keeps a clear distinction between the comedy of character or manners and the farce. In later criticism, farce has been tied to all the comedies, including Le Misanthrope:

C'est la comédie populaire qui dicte les interruptions si fréquentes (que l'Abbé d'Aubignac proscrit du genre sérieux), l'automatisme de mainte réplique, les vers qui s'accouplent ou s'opposent, la symétrie qui gouverne les interventions des marquis dans la scène des portraits, etc.31

Alceste's "je ne dis pas cela" repeated several times is of the same comic type as "Qu'allait-il faire dans cette galère?" We recognize the second line as farce because of its environment, Les Fourberies de Scapin; Alceste's line is no less farcical than Argante's even though it occurs in a high comedy.

30Bray, p. 316-317.
31Scherer, Molière, III, p. 331.
Aside from similarities in comic devices, the farce
and *Le Misanthrope* contain a similar structure, according
to Guicharnaud:

... aux deux pôles du genre comique se
situënt la farce et *Le Misanthrope* : les
personnages de cette pièce correspondent,
dans leur plein psychologique, aux per-
sonnages de la farce, dans leur vacuité.
Dans les deux cas, ils coïncident exacte-
ment avec ce qu'on nous montre d'eux. 32

Guicharnaud makes this statement with regard to the lack
of deception in both types of plays: Alceste and Gros-
Guillaume both do what they say they are going to do, which
usually is nothing. The difference lies in tone, which Mo-
lière succeeded in raising, due, to a large extent, to the
influence of heroic tragi-comedy of the *Dom Garcia de Na-
varre* type.

Thus farce in a Molière high comedy can be identified
either according to form or content. The form of farce is
circular, as opposed to the linear progress of a comedy of
intrigue. This diagram illustrates movement in *Le Misa-
thrope*: (following page)

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32 Guicharnaud, p. 533.
Alecst and Célimène: eternally opposed to one another, never able to reach an accommodation. They travel on separate "wage lengths"; if they could escape their respective circles, they might be able to make some progress towards happiness (marriage?). Marriage would make the play unrealistic, however.

Eliante and Philinte: their marriage ends the play on a traditional note, and the proper form has been adhered to; this couple is not the one we are interested in, however.

The form of Le Misanthrope closely approximates the lack of progress in a farce, such as Le Médecin volant. The former is higher in tone, more "honnête," however. The contents are similar when, in a high comedy, servants are given lazzis, or farcical gestures to perform; at times the "entêté" or the high comic personage performs lazzis, such as Tartuffe's wandering hands, or Orgon's crawling under the table. Repetitions ("et Tartuffe?"), symmetry (the servant's reconciliation in lower terms than their master's), and general down-to-earthness (cuckoldry or "enfants par l'oreille") are shared by both comic forms.

The emphasis on farce in Molière's theater helps explain the force that his plays possess as well as their ageless quality. If his personages are willful, domineering, unchanging types, who constantly provoke tension in plays unencumbered by plot, all this is due to a large measure, to farce. His plays have been appreciated by the masses because
they rely on popular humor: spontaneous, unschooled, and at times cruel. Molière may mock the pretentions of the bourgeoisie, but he also ridicules the overly-gallant, exaggerated behavior of the Marquis. His comments on the human condition apply to any class, at any moment.

Atmosphere

Of the plays treated in the above pages only Le Désert and Le Bourgeois gentilhomme had genuinely harmonious atmospheres. Molière may ridicule Météphraeste and Jourdain, but they receive rather mild treatment. Jourdain in particular is accommodated rather than confronted and Météphraeste is not dealt with at all. The other four plays were characterized by dissension, however, as the Météphraestes assumed greater importance and had to be reckoned with. The setting for confrontation varied from the street, which before and after Molière's theater was the normal setting for a comedy, to the interior of a bourgeois household, which became the location of predilection for Molière, to the salon, which Molière used in two ways: the aristocratic salon of Célimène and the pseudo-academic salon of Philambinte. By coloring the interior of each household with the hue of the "fau dévot," the courtier, and the pedant, Molière created unified atmospheres. Mornet labels the atmospheres of several plays thus:
Molière crée une atmosphère comique où tout s’accorde et se fond. Atmosphère qui varie d’ailleurs avec chaque pièce: élégante et seulement souriante avec Le Misanthrope; plus haute en couleurs avec Le Tartuffe; plus joviale avec L’Avare ou Les Femmes savantes; plus bouffonnes avec Le Bourgeois gentilhomme ou Le Malade imaginaire, etc. Toujours, dans le comique... la faculté de dédoublement réalise l’unité vivante. 

Other critics such as Guicharnaud are sensitive to the homogeneity of the plays although they do not necessarily deal with the question directly; Guicharnaud’s qualifier "honnête" is useful in describing the high tone of the plays he has chosen. Hall mentions the atmosphere of Le Tartuffe as one of suspicion:

An atmosphere of suspicion pervades the play. Dramatic events are unfolded against a sombre background of espionage and suspicion which gives them depth in space as well as time.34

All these judgments stem from an observation that each play revolves around a central motif; beginning with the light, fantastiste, unreal atmosphere of courtship in Le Dépit, Molière created atmospheres that became more serious and realistic. Whereas L’Ecole des femmes takes place in a conventional framework, that of the comedy of intrigue, the emphasis of Arnolphe, an obstacle to the young lovers’ marriage, leads to greater tension, revealing more insights

into human behavior. Here the eternal, farcically comic theme of cuckoldry receives treatment in a play written in a high tone. A paradoxical situation arises when the aggressive Arnolphe finds that he can barely refrain from becoming a pleading, sighing, suitor. The stock "old man" of farce has been replaced by lifelike, highly characterized heroes. Man's inability to choose wisely when he attempts to codify his behavior is given fresh treatment throughout each of the plays treated above. Variations in will, tension, plot, and farce, lead to unique atmospheres in which the drama of the blind, unreasonable, and ultimately frustrated comic hero unfolds.

Molière's theater possesses a richness unequalled by other writers of comedy, because each of his plays differs so widely from every other play, regardless of similarities in genre; each high comedy has its own tempo, tone, and texture, each comédie ballet its own cadence, each farce its own measure of earthiness, each comédie d'intrigue its own blend of gallantry and nonsense, each play its own atmosphere,
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