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Abstract

This dissertation studies money in French comedy from the late Renaissance to the early eighteenth century. It examines how comic theater, by showing new forms of money, reflected and problematized concepts of value, credit, and trust at a moment when France's financial and monetary system was rapidly evolving.

The first chapter provides an overview of money in Renaissance farces and comedies, and briefly examines treatments of the subject in other European literary traditions in this time period. It shows how farces presented a variety of simple currencies, and how comedy, with its more complex portrayals, developed out of this genre. The second chapter covers the period 1600-1670, when metallic currencies began to be portrayed in more detail, and comedies began to show interrogations of social and monetary value together. Chapter three focuses on 1670-1684, when a new generation of playwrights brought paper money onto the stage where it took on a new dramatic role as bearer of value. The fourth chapter examines the years 1685-1700, an increasingly difficult time for the French economy, when paper money was manipulated in concurrence with portrayals of "counterfeit" noblemen, the kind of dual counterfeiting that the stage was ideally suited to portray. The final chapter covers the years 1700-1720, the period just prior to the John Law affair, when the stage was used to show full-scale financial systems in the hands of individuals of common social origins. Comic theater in these years was simultaneously a reflection of monetary development and a venue for shaping perceptions of money and those who handled it.

The dissertation aims to track the development of theatrical representations of evolving monetary concepts, particularly the passage from coin to paper. Focusing specifically on comedy, a genre whose subject had a unique relationship with the social milieu of its spectators, the goal of this work is to show how playwrights, at the same time as they helped define a literary genre, both reflected and contributed to the development of economic thought.

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MONEY PLAYS: PERFORMING CURRENCY IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH
COMEDY

Matthew J. Pagett

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MONEY PLAYS: PERFORMING CURRENCY IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
FRENCH COMEDY

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Matthew Jon Pagett

Dedicated to the memory of my grandparents, Conway and Thelma Pagett, and Max and
Patricia Bearden

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ABSTRACT**MONEY PLAYS: PERFORMING CURRENCY IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
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Matthew J. Pagett

Dr. Joan E. DeJean

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financial systems in the hands of individuals of common social origins. Comic theater in these years was simultaneously a reflection of monetary development and a venue for shaping perceptions of money and those who handled it.

The dissertation aims to track the development of theatrical representations of evolving monetary concepts, particularly the passage from coin to paper. Focusing specifically on comedy, a genre whose subject had a unique relationship with the social milieu of its spectators, the goal of this work is to show how playwrights, at the same time as they helped define a literary genre, both reflected and contributed to the development of economic thought.

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INTRODUCTION

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a number of influential French comic playwrights made money a main focus of their work. Over this period of time, their plays showed changing forms of money in increasingly central ways: first as coin, and gradually in more complex manifestations, like credit and paper. The plays studied here reflected, taught, and provided a space to imagine new ways of conceiving money. Their plots, dialog, and staging combined to create a unique venue for exploring questions of economic thought.

It is easy to use money without giving much thought to what it actually is, especially in today's world, where it has been dematerialized into numbers on a screen. Economic crisis has provided occasions in recent years for rethinking how money corresponds to value, and in the seventeenth century, a similar process was unfolding. This dissertation aims to show how theater engaged with the evolution of money in seventeenth-century France, where for the first time it was beginning to be imagined collectively as paper and not metal.

Viviana Zelizer has stated that the “noneconomic aspects [of money] have not been systematically explored.”¹ This dissertation will respond to this assertion. It will examine how money has not been fully considered as a material object, outside of its theoretical ideal nature as an infinitely exchangeable, anonymous and fungible marker of value. This study is situated at the intersection of economic history and literature, and in part it falls in line with the notion of a “new economic criticism” advanced by Mark

Osteen and Martha Woodmansee.² As some of the recent critical response around David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5000 Years* shows, the dialogue between economics and other disciplines such as history or anthropology can be fruitful but also controversial.³ Criticisms that each discipline does not fully understand the other can be common, and with literature the combination can be just as problematic, if not more so. Yet many scholars have been successful in negotiating this disciplinary juncture. In English, Mary Poovey's work has examined the simultaneous development of paper money and generic form.⁴ Other studies have looked specifically at money and theater, such as Theodore Leinwand's *Theatre, Finance and Society in Early Modern England*.⁵ In *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare*, Douglas Bruster likewise bridges the gap between economics and literature in a material economic reading of Renaissance English theater.⁶ The work of Marc Shell has also brought together literature, art, and money.⁷

In seventeenth-century French studies, few have practiced this type of "new economic criticism." In a sixteenth-century context, Philippe Desan, in *L'Imaginaire*

¹ Viviana A. Zelizer, *Economic Lives: How Culture Shapes the Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 93.

² Mark Osteen and Martha Woodmansee, eds., *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

³ David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011). See, for example, Mike Beggs, "Debt: The First 500 Pages" in *Jacobin* 8 (2012): <http://jacobinmag.com/2012/08/debt-the-first-500-pages/>, and subsequent discussion.

⁴ Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁵ Theodore Leinwand, *Theatre, Finance and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶ Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). See also Peter F. Grav, *Shakespeare and the Economic Imperative* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Frederick Turner, *Shakespeare's Twenty-first Century Economics: The Morality of Love and Money* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁷ Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley: University of California, 1982); *Art and Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

économique de la Renaissance, explores some of these matters in the works of Rabelais and Montaigne.⁸ In twentieth-century studies, Jean-Joseph Goux's research, including that on Gide, has laid important theoretical groundwork in the field.⁹ More specific to the chronological and generic focus of this dissertation, Guy Spielmann has examined the construction and transformation of the genre of comedy in seventeenth-century France in the context of a general crisis of such values as marriage and socioeconomic status.¹⁰ Martial Poirson has concentrated on the interactions between economy and spectacle in a large corpus of *ancien régime* theater, in an approach that examines both the economic conditions of theatrical production and the systems of value shown in theater, mostly in the eighteenth century.¹¹ Finally, current work by Catherine Labio investigates theatrical representations of the collapse of the Mississippi Bubble.¹²

The plays of Molière, more than other works of seventeenth-century theater, have in particular been the subject of economic analyses. These analyses, however, often center more on the exchange relationships between characters than on the material nature of the money itself. Notable work in this area includes that of Richard Sörman, Larry Norman, Helen Harrison, and Ralph Albanese.¹³ In a recent study, Pierre Force placed

⁸ Philippe Desan, *L'Imaginaire économique de la Renaissance* (Mont-de-Marsan: Editions InterUniversitaires, 1993).

⁹ Jean-Joseph Goux, *Économie et symbolique* (Paris: Seuil, 1973); *Les Monnayeurs du langage* (Paris: Galilée, 1984); *Renversements: L'or, le père, le phallus, le langage* (Paris: des femmes, 2009).

¹⁰ Guy Spielmann, *Le Jeu de l'ordre et du chaos. Comédie et pouvoirs à la fin de règne, 1673–1715* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002).

¹¹ Martial Poirson, "Comédie & économie: argent, morale, et intérêt dans les formes comiques du théâtre français (1673-1789)" (doctoral thesis, Paris X–Nanterre, 2004).

¹² Catherine Labio, *The Great Mirror of Folly: Finance, Culture, and the Crash of 1720* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

¹³ See, for example, Richard Sörman, "Pourquoi 'vivre pour manger'?" in *Nourritures: Actes du 40e congrès annuel de la North American Society for Seventeenth-Century French Literature*, *Biblio 17*, no. 186 (2010): 266–276; Larry F. Norman, *The Public Mirror: Molière and the Social Commerce of Depiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Helen Harrison, *Pistoles/Paroles: Money and Language in*

Molière's works in the context of larger philosophical relationships between money and value.¹⁴ Others have gone into some of the structural elements of finance present in French theater: Stoyan Tzonev, for example, has surveyed the figure of the financier in *ancien régime* comedy, and Leo Orkey has provided a useful catalog and categorization of the money that appears in seventeenth-century plays.¹⁵ Yet work remains to be done to bring out the rich implications of the history of money (specifically, the development of paper as money, and the evolution of coin) in relation to theater, and that is the goal of this dissertation.

From Greek Old Comedy through to New Comedy, Roman comedy, and French farces, money has always been a privileged subject for comic playwrights. In France, comedy was the theatrical genre where money was most often represented. In seventeenth-century France, though, different types of money started to be used. At the end of the Renaissance, coin, which had been used in Renaissance farces, made brief but important appearances on the stage. In the second half of the seventeenth century, it became increasingly visible in plays, where its presence grew along with that of other kinds of value-bearing objects, such as diamonds. During a time when finance was becoming ever more important to affairs of state, paper, too, began to appear in theater.

As the century drew to a close, money became an increasingly important element of comedic theatrical production, which itself was more popular than ever before. More

Seventeenth-Century French Comedy (Charlottesville: Rockwood Press, 1996); Ralph Albanese, "Argent et reification dans *l'Avare*." *L'Esprit créateur* 21, no. 3 (1981): 35–50.

¹⁴ Pierre Force, *Molière ou Le Prix des choses. Morale, économie, et comédie* (Paris: Nathan, 1994).

¹⁵ Stoyan Tzonev, *Le Financier dans la comédie française sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Nizet, 1977); Leo Orkey, *The Role of Money in French Comedy during the Reign of Louis XIV* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1947).

comedies than ever were produced during the end of reign years: the period between 1635–1672 counted 223 comedies, making up 38% of theatrical production, while the 316 comedies produced between 1680–1715 accounted for 77% of all French plays.¹⁶ At the end of the century, actors were favoring comedy because it was more profitable—so much so that they were ordered by the king in 1712 to perform a tragedy for every comedy that they produced.¹⁷ About a third of comedies between 1661 and 1715 feature money as either a prop or as a principal plot element.¹⁸ Comedy, with its portrayals of daily life, embraced these representations in a way that tragedy, although it was considered more prestigious, could not.¹⁹ The different forms of money it showed, in the form of coins, transactions, and paper money, were more than mere props. Their evolving forms and characteristics were often instrumental in the action of plays, and were sometimes the subject of them as well.

In this popular genre, a certain way of representing money developed over the century. This study examines the evolution of what I call the “monetary imaginary” in theater from this time. It encompasses an idea of money that is constructed on the stage, where a distinction is made between money as an object (the gold or silver to which value can become attached) and money as an abstract idea (detached from any particular material manifestation such as coin). I have restricted my study to theater because of its

¹⁶ Christian Biet, *Droit et littérature sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), 16; Spielmann, *Jeu*, 125.

¹⁷ Henry Carrington Lancaster, *Sunset: A History of Parisian Drama in the Last Years of Louis XIV. 1701–1715* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), 27.

¹⁸ See Spielmann, *Jeu*, 125 and Henry Carrington Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: JHUP, 1924-42. (Reprint, 1966)), 3:863–868. As Spielmann notes, this number did not take into account *foire* production or unpublished Comédie-Italienne production. Orkey cites 145 comedies with money between 1661–1715, a period during which there were over 424 comedies produced overall (according to numbers from Lancaster).

unique role as both a visual and literary representation of the world. Although there is no evidence to demonstrate a causal relationship between theatrical representations of money and subsequent developments in monetary policy or practice, the plays from this period show a rich monetary imaginary of theater which developed in parallel with the monetary practices of the time. While Desan defines the economic imaginary in dual terms, as “à la fois économie de l’imaginaire et imagination économique,” I will focus specifically on the latter definition: how economy was imagined.²⁰ This moment in French theater interrogated money visually and dramatically on the stage, from its coin forms to its written and printed forms.

The increase in representations of money on the stage came at the same time as theater audiences were becoming an interactive and demanding public, as Jeffrey Ravel has shown.²¹ Theater was a place for visually examining ideas of exchange in front of a participatory audience. Theater and money shared similar names—a *pièce de monnaie*, and a *pièce de théâtre*—and were linked in other ways as well. *Billets*, paper tickets, bought entrance to a play, and *billets* also referred to forms of paper money such as bills of exchange, bearer notes, and lottery tickets. And from the Middle Ages on, the marketplace was a privileged location for theatrical performances. When theater left the church, it went to the market, the fundamental place of exchange, and remained there into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with *foire* theater. The market was a place of exchange between individuals, and also one of transformation. Jean Duvignaud writes of

¹⁹ Lancaster, *Sunset*, 144.

²⁰ Desan, *Imaginaire*, 15.

²¹ See Jeffrey Ravel, *The Contested Parterre: Public Theater and French Political Culture, 1680–1791* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

a market sale as the “magical” operation of wheat turning to gold.²² The theater provided a space for representing similar types of transfigurations.

In addition to this longstanding relationship between market and theater, certain political and historical factors in the seventeenth century that contributed to the development of a new economy may partially explain the increased focus on money in French theater. During this time the French monetary system was evolving to face the growing needs of its foreign and economic policies. The expenses of war had a significant impact on the monetary system in France, in particular because of the new kind of war that Richelieu had initiated in 1635. For the first time, war required constant mobilization and thus a continuous flow of money to provide for diplomatic payoffs to allies, and to pay and supply soldiers, whose number over the course of the century more than quintupled.²³ Beyond the problem of expense, there was also the concern that coin could leave the country. The French were typically able to directly supply their armies, which avoided a net flow of metal coinage out of the country, but when this was impossible it meant that the money followed the soldiers and the war out of France.²⁴ The French colonial trade was not directly bringing in gold and silver—in fact, so scarce was coinage in Canada that a de facto system of paper money based on playing cards was

²² Jean Duvignaud, *Sociologie du théâtre : essai sur les ombres collectives* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 78.

²³ Daniel Dessert, *Fouquet* (Paris: Fayard, 1987), 95; in 1635, at the beginning of the French intervention in the Thirty Years' War, the French army consisted of 69,000 men (Joël Cornette, *Le Roi de guerre* (Paris: Payot, 1993), 57). During the reign of Louis XIV, the French army grew to 158,000 men in 1689, all the way to 400,000 in 1693 (Martin in Paul Sonnino (ed.), *The Reign of Louis XIV: Essays in Celebration of Andrew Losky* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1990), 120, 122-3).

²⁴ D.W. Jones, *War and Economy in the Age of William III and Marlborough* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1988), 42-3.

implemented there in 1685—and this lack of coin inflow meant that war had the potential to drain not only the treasury, but the country of coin.

An early example of money in comedy illustrates an awareness of the disruptions in coin circulation that France was in danger of facing throughout the seventeenth century: in part of Scarron's 1648 *L'Héritier ridicule*, the servant Filipin, explaining the absence of an inheritance he claimed he was to receive, blames his lack of money on his banker, who he says had a delay in receiving the coins. Another character sympathizes, lamenting the fact that “cette guerre de Flandre enlève tout l'argent.”²⁵ Set in Madrid, the play reveals an awareness of the difficulty war brought to a complex international monetary system. The play had an enduring success over the next three decades (with performances in 1648 and 1649, and 29 performances between 1659–1680), and the questions of credit, money, and value of objects that it introduces presage those treated in dozens more plays in the decades to come.²⁶

There was a growing awareness, on and off the stage, of the limitations of gold, silver, and copper as money. On the same page of Furetière's 1690 *Dictionnaire Universel* are the definitions for two words that guide this study: *billet* and *billon*.²⁷ The *billet*, the paper note, could in theory eliminate the need for coin money; the other, *billon*, referred to the debasement of precious metals. The *billet* gave the possibility to make any number a reality simply by writing on paper; *billon*, an alloy of copper and silver, was a

²⁵ Paul Scarron, *L'Héritier ridicule, ou la dame intéressée* (Paris: Toussaint Quinet, 1650), 5.2.

²⁶ A more elaborate examination of the costs of war is seen in Dancourt's 1698 *Les Curieux de Compiègne*, where wealthy bourgeois characters follow the soldiers they sponsor to the lines to see how their money is spent.

²⁷ Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel, contenant generalement tous les mots françois ...* (The Hague & Rotterdam: Arnoud et Reinier Leers, 1690), 1:272.

sign of continuous degradation of value. Billon could be assessed by weighing it, melting it down, and determining the exact composition of the precious metals inside; the value of *billets* depended on if they could be redeemed or not.

The history of money is intertwined with the words used to describe it. To understand the rich numismatic vocabulary that farces and comedy exploited, it is useful to keep in mind some basic elements of the early modern monetary system in France. Silver, gold, and copper were the precious metals used in coins. The main unit of account was the *livre*, and it was just for keeping accounts—there was no one-livre coin. The *livre* was further broken down into 20 *sous*, each of which was worth 12 *deniers*. The word *franc* (which had been a coin until 1641) was typically used to mean one *livre*. The *louis d'or*, introduced in 1640, was a valuable gold coin whose value varied over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was usually worth at least 10 *livres*, and at times double that or more. A *pistole*, referring to a Spanish coin, was used almost always to designate an amount of 10 *livres*. Finally, another coin, the *écu*, was generally worth 3 *livres*. These represented the most common high-value coins in theater. Low-value coins such as the *liard* were numerous. A selection of coins is listed in the appendix.

What exactly was paper money in the seventeenth century? The documents used in these plays are not what we would commonly think of today as paper money, such as printed banknotes, but were most often a variety of handwritten bills and notes. As coin was difficult to transport and had to be guarded, financiers, merchants, and bankers in France had long used paper to conduct their legitimate business. Such paper instruments allowing people to more easily conduct long distance trade had been around since at least

the Middle Ages, but bills of exchange (*lettres de change*) began to be used even more in France in the seventeenth century when supplies of specie ran low, to avoid long-distance transport of coin, or needless back-and-forth trips. The state privileged their use to conserve specie.²⁸ In seventeenth-century France, this paper increasingly took on a role of money that circulated independently of its original purpose. First used as a record signed by a borrower and kept by a lender, it later evolved into an independent bearer of value, that could be exchanged and cashed in by parties entirely outside of the original loan transaction.

Bankers, merchants, and others had been accustomed to dealing with official forms of paper money as well: the crown had been issuing *Billets d'Épargne* since the Thirty Years' war, and continued throughout the reign of Louis XIV to issue various forms of paper documents promising payment at some future date.²⁹ By 1701 the French crown was issuing *Billets d'État*, bearer notes emitted by the state. Since it was often difficult to get these notes reimbursed by the state, they circulated at a discount and were bought and sold on the secondary market. In the decades prior to the Law system, the state was experimenting with paper money in a way that was made possible by decades of informal, private, and parallel practices.

Although *lettres de change*, *billets au porteur*, and other financial instruments had their legitimate uses, theater often showed the newer and illegitimate uses of paper. Theatrical examinations of money rejoined those in commercial texts, such as Jacques Savary's 1675 business handbook, *Le Parfait négociant*, where eight chapters are

²⁸ Henri Levy-Bruhl, *Histoire de la lettre de change* (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1934), 24.

²⁹ Daniel Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1984), 186–87.

devoted to forms of paper money.³⁰ Examples he cites include *billets en blanc*, notes where the name of the beneficiary was left blank, to be written in by the last holder, which were reputed as having been invented to hide usury, and were banned for this reason.³¹ The *billet au porteur*, the bearer note which subsequently developed, could be redeemed by whoever possessed it—and could therefore circulate as cash, again opening up the potential for usury.³² Savary attests to the value these instruments had to the state and to commerce, while simultaneously warning of (or perhaps advertising) their dangers when misused:

Il est certain qu'il n'y a rien de plus utile à l'État & au public, que l'usage des lettres & billets de change : Mais il faut aussi demeurer d'accord qu'il n'y a rien de plus dangereux que ce commerce, & qui produise plus d'usures & de faillites, quand les Banquiers, les Negocians, & les Marchands le font avec convoitise, & imprudence.³³

Savary's instructions and examples of how these instruments were used and misused, like that of a young man from a good family who found himself overextended after having traded his personal notes for *lettres de change*, resemble those found in theater. He cites the same types of abusive usury transactions that are depicted in plays. In one example reminiscent of a scene in *L'Avare*, a borrower receives clothing and paper notes but must repay a much higher amount in coin. Savary insists upon the need to leave a written trail of accountability on the documents themselves, avoiding the kind of unclear wording that could be used for convenience, usury, or abused by others; precisely the kind of ambiguity that is attested to and pointed out in theater.

³⁰ Jacques Savary, *Le parfait négociant, ou instruction générale pour ce qui regarde le commerce* (Paris: Jean Guignard, 1675).

³¹ Savary, *Le parfait négociant*, 188.

³² Savary, *Le parfait négociant*, 188.

In conjunction with paper money, the late seventeenth century also saw a divide in accounting practices between public and private, which was echoed on the stage. While merchants used both Roman numerals and the newer Arabic numerals in their accounting, and used precise double-entry accounting, the clerks of tax farmers used only Roman numerals (a method believed to be more resistant to forgery), and double-entry accounting was not used in royal finances until 1716.³⁴ In conjunction with paper money, the late seventeenth century also saw a divide in accounting practices between public and private, which was echoed on the stage. While merchants used both Roman numerals and the newer Arabic numerals in their accounting, and used precise double-entry accounting, the clerks of tax farmers used only Roman numerals (a method believed to be more resistant to forgery), and double-entry accounting was not used in royal finances until 1716.³⁵ The presence of paper money in theater in seventeenth-century France paralleled the rise of a new financial class, a group of professional financiers who collected taxes and loaned money to the state. As the financial system became more complex, these men became increasingly powerful.³⁶ By 1709, when the title character of Lesage's *Turcaret* boasts of his good standing amongst the farmers-general, he references an elaborate and secretive system that had developed over the course of the seventeenth century out of the crown's need for short-term cash flow.³⁷ Financiers were defined by the type of mechanisms they used, which generally fell into three sorts. A *fermier*, or tax farmer,

³³ Savary, *Le parfait négociant*, 122.

³⁴ Jean-Claude Perrot, *Une histoire intellectuelle de l'économie politique* (Paris, EHESS, 1992), 20-1.

³⁵ Jean-Claude Perrot, *Une histoire intellectuelle de l'économie politique* (Paris, EHESS, 1992), 20-1.

³⁶ For a detailed account of the evolution of financiers in the first half of the century, see Françoise Bayard, *Le monde des financiers au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 448.

³⁷ Alain-René Lesage, *Turcaret* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1999), 1.5.

bought the rights to collect specific taxes. A *traitant* was someone who made short term contracts (“traités”) with the king regarding an affair the crown was conducting, and from which it was awaiting the revenue—for example, the sale of royal property. The *traitant* advanced money up front, managed the undertaking, and took its revenue. Finally there were *prêteurs*, who made direct short-term loans to the king. In reality, financiers were secretive, preferring to use intermediaries to sign their contracts—Françoise Bayard writes of the pervasiveness of this dissimulation as “une véritable institution.”³⁸ In comedy, financiers are portrayed ostentatiously, comically, as buffoons whose main purpose, in the eyes of other characters, is the control of, and easy access to, large sums of money. These various types of financiers appear increasingly often in comedy after Molière. To better understand the various kinds of players in the real-world financial scene is to better appreciate what makes those characters tick.

These financiers occupied a subversive place in the seventeenth-century social hierarchy that was echoed in comedy. Plays showed an impoverished old aristocracy confronted with the rise of a newly moneyed class which often tried to buy its way into nobility. The move to paper money correlated with a process of aristocratic devaluation and accompanied representations of commoners who, with newly acquired wealth, purchased titles and material accoutrements to match. Theater by its nature already invited the audience to think about the stakes of social representation: how dressing and acting the part could effectively persuade others that one had a different identity.

Counterfeiting of coin had long been a capital offense (subject to particularly gory

³⁸ Bayard, *Le monde des financiers*, 267. See also 104, 165, 228, for information about the different types of financiers.

punishment), and forgery, too, was punishable by death. As nobility became a currency, the character of the social counterfeit who manipulated this monetized social status took on a special role in theater. With money, anybody could become somebody.

These plays show a world where other social upsets were facilitated by the use of new monetary instruments. New forms of money in theater were shown as propelling a number of new developments in social systems. The trade of usurer was no longer limited to Jews (although some portrayals of moneylenders were tinged with anti-Semitism). Women with the right mastery of money could become economically independent much more easily than in the past. And new monetary instruments could serve as a power equalizer between people of different classes: servants could outsmart and out-earn their masters. Fortunes could be made or broken in an instant. Theater provided both a venue for publicly examining and showing the societal changes which accompanied monetary evolution.

This study will also consider how theater, in addition to dramatically problematizing a changing socioeconomic structure, presented characters with various degrees of financial literacy. By showing these characters learning about money, and by dramatically illustrating how paper money could be used, plays featuring money gave spectators a demonstration of contemporary financial operations. The depiction of these evolving practices and forms of money on stage could have had an effect novels could not: it showed them, and displayed their use, instead of just describing them. I argue that this contributed to the construction of a collective public knowledge and imaginary of money, similar to the process that Jean Howard writes of regarding sixteenth-century

English urban comedies that helped to “constitute [the audience] as Londoners.”³⁹ As we trace the development of this monetary imaginary in theater across the century, we can envision the Parisian theater audience and the financial knowledge that playwrights assumed they had (or did not have). In an ever-more complex monetary and financial system, French money plays may have helped constitute their audiences as financially savvy. We see examples of characters discovering this new world of finance with varying degrees of success. In Dancourt’s 1704 *Le Galant jardinier*, a gardener thinks he can negotiate a piece of paper he has found. “Ma fortune est faite,” he declares, confident that the paper is a bill of exchange or a letter of credit, and that by possessing it he will become rich.⁴⁰ He is wrong, but his dream embodies the fascination with value being created out of paper.

More than examining money as something that appears in plays as simply instrumental, as a vector of gift and exchange, this dissertation shows how the changing character of money itself was exploited and developed by theater. Money on the stage was more than just realia. Since daily life involved using coin of all sorts, in theater its use was sometimes shown without interrogation, but it was often revealed as subject to manipulation, as was paper. Pieces of paper money were physical testaments of credit relations, whose value depended on the understanding that the person who issued them could be trusted to pay. Paper and credit went hand in hand; credit was negotiated and priced on stage as notes circulated between characters. For in these financial intrigues, money became something to be circulated, not saved. As Christian Biet writes, “Il faut

³⁹ Jean Howard, *Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598–1642* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 39.

que « ça » circule, et vite, dans tous les sens du terme. L'argent ne doit point être enfoui, et les personnages archaïques qui l'enfouissent doivent être enterrés.”⁴¹ This circulation was accelerated by monetary innovation. The promises written on paper notes were often mutually accepted half-truths: the unavoidable fictions of a credit economy.

Understanding how forms of paper money were entering into popular acceptance, and how the role of coin was evolving, means these plays can be seen from a new perspective. By 1717, when John Law's banking experiment (which ran from 1716-1720) began the replacement of coin with banknotes in France, a theatrical imaginary of paper money had thoroughly developed. At that point, France was, as Daniel Dessert writes, a “société qui a été préparée depuis des décennies à une pratique ne pouvant plus surprendre.”⁴² This dissertation shows how theater contributed to that preparation.

Plan of the dissertation

Two important years in French financial history punctuate the temporal selection of the plays in this study: 1661, the year of the most dramatic state-sponsored attack on finance, and 1720, when the Law system collapsed. In 1661, as Louis XIV began his personal reign, he led a *Chambre de Justice* to investigate his *surintendant de finances*, Nicolas Fouquet. In part, the investigation alleged that fraudulent acts had been committed by financiers using “obviously valueless” paper documents in complicity with officials to purchase *rentes* (life annuities). Paper had allowed fraud to permeate the

⁴⁰ Florent Carton Dancourt, *Le Galant jardinier* (The Hague: Foulque, 1705), sc. 5 (“Ma fortune est faite”).

⁴¹ Christian Biet, *Droit et littérature sous l'Ancien Régime. Le jeu de la valeur et de la loi* (Paris: Champion, 2002), 333.

⁴² Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société*, 187.

system.⁴³ But the trial was also an effort to fine financiers in order to clear off the debt that the crown had accumulated during nearly 25 years of war, an undertaking that was repeated with less success in 1716 when the debt was much higher.⁴⁴ The regency's attempts to deal with this debt led to the instatement and subsequent 1720 collapse of John Law's system, the national experiment that had replaced metal money with banknotes and ended in a disastrous crash. The plays I have chosen to study interrogate the monetary concepts that were key to these events.

The dissertation begins with a look at how money was problematized in comic theater before 1600. The first chapter shows how comedy initially began to make sense of a complex monetary and numismatic world. It starts with a brief examination of some of the classical sources for French comedy. Then, a reading of a wide selection of extant French farces from the early Renaissance shows their great attention to the intricacies of local economic forces, and how they illustrated a world that included an abundance of different kinds of coin, and established dramatic models for transfer of money (stealing, borrowing, buying, selling, and the like). The chapter concludes with a study of a selection of plays from England, Spain, and Italy that contributed in form and content to the elaboration of seventeenth-century French economic comedies. It also provides an introduction to some monetary concepts which remain relevant for the rest of the study, such as devaluation and debasement, and the distinction between money of account and money of exchange.

⁴³ Julian Dent, *Crisis in Finance: Crown, Financiers and Society in Seventeenth Century France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 83.

⁴⁴ Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France 1560–1715* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 63.

In the following chapters, about 45 plays form the crux of this study's examination of seventeenth and early eighteenth-century comedy. They are presented in four chronological periods, each of which addresses a specific theme in French monetary history.

Chapter two examines the period from 1600–1669, when a combination of institutional factors led to the growth of French comedy as a genre. In the seventeenth century, French comedy was somewhat slow to feature money prominently, with the exception of some early examples, such as Pierre Corneille's 1633 *La Galerie du palais*, Scarron's *L'Héritier ridicule* (1649), and a handful of others which are studied in the first part of the chapter. As generic rules and conventions for comedy were established, portrayals of money also began to take shape as something beyond the simple exchange of coin. By the time of Molière, money featured in important ways, even if it was not always the main focus of the plot. *Le Festin de Pierre* (1665), with its striking louis d'or scene, could be seen as marking the beginning of a period where the materiality of money took center stage. One of the earliest seventeenth-century plays to give a detailed portrayal of moneylending was *L'Avare* (1668), the first of Molière's comedies to show the intricacies of finance.

Chapter three covers the end of the Molière period and the post-Molière years, from 1670–1684. The 1673 death of the *comédien du roi* marked the beginning of an era for the dramatic authors who took up the difficult task of following in his footsteps. Playwrights such as Edmé Boursault, Charles Chevillet (known as Champmeslé), Jacques Robbe, and Jean Donneau de Visé used topical financial and monetary subjects to

successfully draw audiences to their comedies. Plays from this period show nobility as a social currency and explore a growing acceptance of paper as a form of money.

The fourth chapter studies the years 1685–1699, when two prolific and today underappreciated playwrights, Jean-François Regnard and Florent Carton (known as Dancourt), portrayed paper as a cash-like currency exchanged between various parties on the stage. In the hands of these authors, money took the stage as never before. Regnard, influenced by the Théâtre Italien, Plautus, and Molière, wrote a number of plays built around money, often re-adapting older dramatic models with an economic twist.⁴⁵ Much of the oeuvre of Dancourt deals with financial and monetary matters, often of a topical nature. These plays showed how to evaluate paper money as well as the currency of nobility, in the face of those who would counterfeit or manipulate both.

Finally, chapter five examines fifteen plays written between 1700 and 1720, where paper was incorporated into a full-blown paper money economy. Alain-René Lesage was responsible for some of the most enduring works of financial comedy, most famously his 1709 *Turcaret* which forms the thematic core of the chapter.⁴⁶ These years were a time of great instability and change in the monetary system, when the wheels of finance were more visible on the stage than they had ever been. Plays from this time show large-scale systems, and dramatize the corruption they enabled.

Some of these post-Molière playwrights, although prolific, now seem to occupy a disproportionately small space in the French canon. For too long the works of just a few

⁴⁵ Lancaster, *Sunset*, 216.

⁴⁶ Lancaster, *Sunset*, 262.

authors have been extensively studied while others have fallen by the wayside.⁴⁷ In part, this has been because the subjects were seen as less interesting or more difficult to contextualize. Understanding what these forms of money were, and how successive generations of playwrights problematized them, brings a new and fresh perspective to a rich period of dramatic literature and economic history.

⁴⁷ Dancourt, for example, was the the sixth most performed author in the Comédie Française, with 5,639 performances through 1969, far ahead of Marivaux and Beaumarchais. (André Blanc, *F.C. Dancourt (1661–1725)*, *La comédie française à l'heure du soleil couchant* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1984), 6.)

A note on sources:

The availability of so many early editions online through resources such as Google Books and Gallica has been invaluable to conducting this broad study. The opportunities for conducting research on early editions of French texts have been greatly expanded by these new tools. Future advances in text recognition may make detailed concordances and conclusive searches possible across a broad corpus; current limitations mean that search tools cannot be considered exhaustive. Editions consulted on Google Books and Gallica are cited by place and date of original publication in so much as they can be considered photographic reproductions. Where possible, quotations from plays are cited by act, scene, and line or page.


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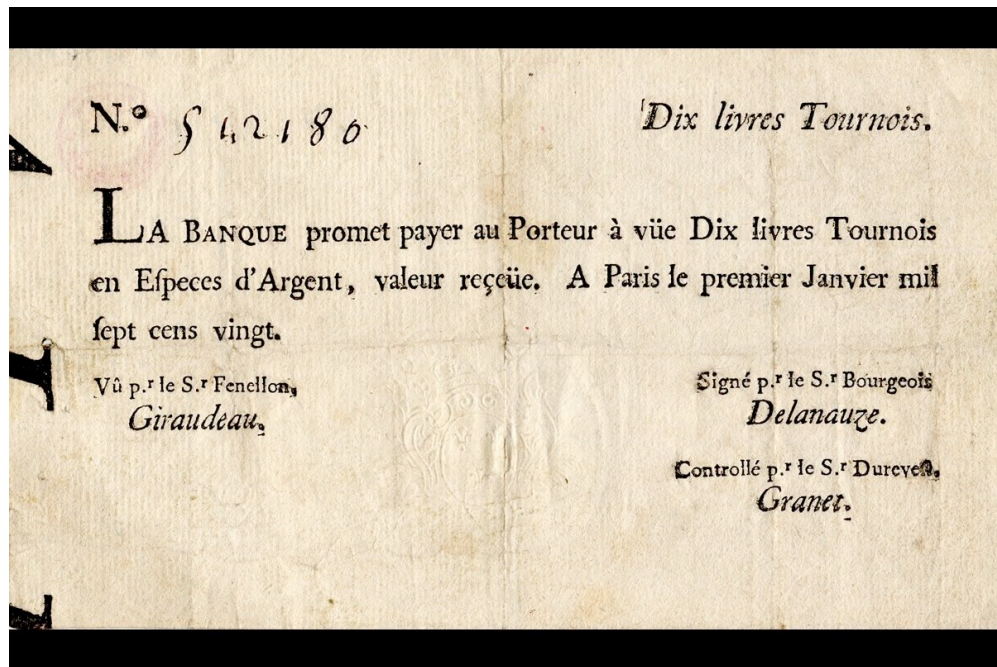
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Bouillon

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Billet d'État, 1716

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Law Bank Bill, 1720

This paper money still leaves a blank for the serial number, but all other elements, including the signature, are printed.

CHAPTER ONE

Coin Matters: Money in Comic Theater until the late Renaissance

French comic theater from the Renaissance to the mid-seventeenth century prominently featured money, represented mainly in the form of coins. At the same time, other currencies of exchange, ideas of credit, and theories of economy were sometimes presented as well. Starting with fifteenth-century farce, and continuing into the early Renaissance, the treatment of money in theater paralleled some, but not all, real-world monetary, financial, and economic developments. As a metal-based economy in France began to turn to a credit system, comic theater showed the changing relationships between individuals, their money, and each other. This chapter will examine how French comic theater before 1600 illustrated monetary concepts by demonstrating and commenting on the use of coin, credit, and other currencies on the stage. After a brief look at the classical plays that provided examples for French playwrights, it will start by looking at farces from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that provided a framework for how money and transactions were later represented in seventeenth-century theater. It will conclude by considering how notable English, Spanish, and Italian theatrical examples from the late Renaissance to the seventeenth century showed paper and credit transactions in even greater detail.

Of the several medieval theatrical genres in France, farce is the only type still performed in present times. Its origins reach back to antiquity, to the *phylakes* and Atellan farces of Greece and Rome.⁴⁸ In Renaissance France, farces were traditionally

⁴⁸ George Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 10–13.

played during religious mystery plays, and entertained spectators with tales from daily life.⁴⁹ There were generally between two and five characters, often stock figures like cobblers, priests, lovers, and cuckolded husbands. The farce, with its basic plot, limited subject matter, and flat characters, brought quick and ready laughter to a varied audience, and was an important source of inspiration for later generations of comedy writers, notably Molière. As Sara Beam writes in her study on farce and political culture in France, farces were “a public form of entertainment enjoyed by a wide segment of society, from the common people of the cities to the noble elite” and “a central medium for the dissemination of information and ideas.”⁵⁰ Farce audiences were broad and included “the non-literate working poor, who made up the majority of French city residents.”⁵¹ The farce, because of its public nature and everyday subject matter, is an ideal space for examining collective concepts of money—which, like theater, is a codified means of representing exchange between people. It is thus not surprising that money and transactions were central to the plots of many farces.

About 170 French farces from the Renaissance have survived, most likely only a fraction of the many which were not copied, printed, or otherwise preserved.⁵² The authors are rarely known, and they are often difficult to date with precision. The subjects sometimes come from fabliaux or the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*. Along with food and sex, money is one of the most common recurring elements in them. Reading the extant

⁴⁹ André Tissier, ed., *Recueil de farces* (Geneva: Droz, 1986–2000), 1:31.

⁵⁰ Sara Beam, *Laughing Matters: Farce and the Making of Absolutism in France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 18, 7.

⁵¹ Beam, *Laughing Matters*, 70.

⁵² Of the many comic plays performed in Renaissance France, most have not survived until today—there are about 250 which have. 171 of these are titled as farces in the list that Sharon Collingwood uses for her

farces through an economic lens, the wide variety of different types of coinage within them quickly becomes apparent. Upon closer reading, it becomes clear that some interrogate critical concepts in the development of a credit economy, although they generally do not contain detailed economic commentary such as that which can be found in contemporary prose, as in the *Tiers Livre* of Rabelais, for example.⁵³ As Desan writes, the Renaissance economy was a time of transition between a system based on precious metals and one based on credit: “On pourrait avancer que l’économie de la Renaissance se résume à une hésitation profonde entre le crédit et le bimétallisme.”⁵⁴ By showing the uses and limitations of money on stage, farce captures the early moments of these hesitations that will be largely overcome in the seventeenth century.

Based in part on their Greek and Roman predecessors, farces showed a complex localized monetary system, and authors used coins as linguistic and aesthetic objects. They put coins into motion in the micro-economy of the stage, and also used alternative forms of currency, such as food and sex, to move the plot forward. These farces also sometimes address larger ideas of money, such as credit, devaluation and inflation, and they show characters concluding agreements both on paper and orally. The farce’s strong popularity in the Renaissance, combined with its public nature, make it a privileged genre for examining attitudes towards money. Much as these farces can inform our understanding of economic thought at the time, they could have played a didactic role for contemporary spectators. Placing money on the stage was a way of both providing real-

study of farce and commerce (Sharon Collingwood, *Market Pledge and Gender Bargain* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 9). See also Beam, *Laughing Matters*, 27.

⁵³ François Rabelais, *Le Tiers Livre* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994).

⁵⁴ Desan, *Imaginaire*, 24.

world material for theater, and also of making sense of a complicated economic world. Money on stage was a symbol of transactions between characters but also a powerful evocation of relationships between spectators, and even between the public and the state. “Moralités” to some extent too also had a monetary message, and a few examples will be included in this chapter.

French comedy had its origins in classical Greek and Latin theater, dramatic traditions that had brought money onto the stage in their own way. A brief look at the works of classical literature that sixteenth and seventeenth-century authors would have had access to, and in many cases consciously had in mind as models, helps shed light on some of the tropes of finance in French comedy. The Greek comedies of Aristophanes, and the Latin plays of Terence and Plautus, showed money in ways that were basic as well as surprisingly advanced, and these representations form some of the principal models for economic subjects in early modern French theater.

Greek Old Comedy, as can be seen in the extant plays of Aristophanes, makes use of money in its depictions of daily life, and in some cases provides commentary on money and its role in society. *Acharnians* (425 B.C.) is a celebration of the virtues of peace and its role in allowing an open international marketplace; it highlights the economic cost of war.⁵⁵ *Peace* is very much along the same lines, focusing on the economic prosperity that would result from peace; the play is nuanced by an awareness of the consequences of peace for arms manufacturers.⁵⁶ *Wealth* (388 B.C.) shows how the god Wealth distributes riches unequally since he is blind and cannot distinguish honest

⁵⁵ Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, in vol. 1 of *Aristophanes*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

men from those who are not.⁵⁷ He is cured in the play by an opportunistic citizen, but the goddess Poverty warns against his rehabilitation, arguing that if everyone has wealth, nobody will have any motivation to work. The protagonist in *Clouds*, Strepsiades, is plagued with debt, struggling with insomnia because he cannot stop thinking about his monthly debt payments due to the expenses of his spendthrift son.⁵⁸ At one point, Strepsiades pays Socrates for lessons in philosophy, after which he gives an argument that interest is unnatural. Just as there is a fixed quantity of water on the earth, he argues, there should be a fixed amount of money, and creating more out of nothing would be against nature.⁵⁹ Such a view of interest and why it is considered unnatural will prevail until the early modern period.

The money within these Greek plays gives a notional idea of certain prices and wages, and of the situations where money is used. Military men in *Acharnians* are said to be paid 3 drachmas a day; this is also the price Lamachus offers to pay for an eel.⁶⁰ A sickle-maker in *Peace* (421 B.C.) claims to get 50 drachmas a sickle when business is good; Euripides, in *Women at the Thesmophoria*, arranges for a dancer to provide sexual favors for the price of a drachma.⁶¹ In *Wasps* Philoclean complains of having gotten “only two obols” to have gone on a diplomatic mission.⁶²

The plays of Aristophanes also offer an occasional glimpse of Athenian state finance. In *Wasps*, Loathecleon runs through an impromptu calculation of Athenian state

⁵⁶ Aristophanes, *Peace*, in vol. 2 of *Aristophanes*.

⁵⁷ Aristophanes, *Wealth*, in vol. 4 of *Aristophanes*.

⁵⁸ Aristophanes, *Clouds*, in vol. 2 of *Aristophanes*.

⁵⁹ Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 184.

⁶⁰ Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 131, 179.

⁶¹ Aristophanes, *Peace*, 581; *Women at the Thesmophoria* (in vol. 3 of *Aristophanes*), 609. “A very high price,” a note indicates.

wealth, to attempt to show the ravages of corruption.⁶³ In *Lysistrata*, the women of Athens embark on both a sexual and monetary blockade, shutting down the Acropolis, arguing that they want to “keep the money safe, and to keep [the men] from using it to finance the war.”⁶⁴ *Lysistrata*, when she is told women cannot manage money, protests that women already manage household budgets.⁶⁵ *Assemblywomen* shows an imaginary society where women are running Athens; money would be eliminated and sex equally and forcefully distributed (it would be necessary to sleep with someone ugly before sleeping with someone pretty).⁶⁶ In this experiment a money economy is ultimately replaced with a food economy; fines are to be paid in food, and a lottery determines what people have for dinner.⁶⁷ The prices and availability of food are also discussed in *Knights*.⁶⁸

A few commentaries on coinage stand out. *Wasps* gives a comic look at the practical aspects of moneychanging: Philoclean complains that a trick was played on him where, expecting change of obols back from a drachma, he instead received fish scales, and upon putting them in his mouth (Athenians carried their small coins in their mouths) had to spit them out because of their foul taste.⁶⁹ In *Frogs*, the Chorus leader argues that Athens is neglecting her patrician citizens much as she is neglecting her currency, and

⁶² Aristophanes, *Wasps*, in vol. 2 of *Aristophanes*, 375.

⁶³ Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 305.

⁶⁴ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, in vol. 3 of *Aristophanes*, 331.

⁶⁵ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 333.

⁶⁶ Aristophanes, *Assemblywomen*, in vol. 4 of *Aristophanes*.

⁶⁷ Aristophanes, *Assemblywomen*, 341.

⁶⁸ Aristophanes, *Knights*, in vol. 1 of *Aristophanes*.

⁶⁹ Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 323; they had no wallets (Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 89n37). Similarly, “Charon’s obol” refers to the custom in antiquity of placing a coin in the mouth of a deceased person to pay for their passage into the next world.

compares recently arrived citizens to new, debased money.⁷⁰ In *Assemblywomen*, the Neighbor recalls a debasement scheme where he suffered financially from copper coins which were introduced and then no longer accepted.⁷¹ *Birds* also has monetary elements: a man turned into a bird for unpaid debt, an association drawn between financial health and good health, and a description of “owls from Laurium,” the silver coins stamped with owls that served as legal tender in Athens, which would “nest in your wallets, and hatch out small change.”⁷²

Greek comedies thus presented money in a variety of ways, within a rich local economy. Roman comedies also featured money prominently; those plays which inspired direct or loose imitations in seventeenth-century France (such as Plautus’s *Aulularia*) will be commented upon in later chapters.

By and large, French farce writers used money in many of the same ways as their antique predecessors. The transactions portrayed are broadly of two types: common transactions that provided a familiar taste of everyday life, and those that were entertaining because they were exceptional. In various forms money often serves as a plot device in farce. As an essential part of daily life, money issues present themselves as characters find, lose, need, or spend money. In the 1530 *Un Amoureux*, for example, Roger returns early from a trip to town because he realizes he has forgotten his purse: this leads to him surprising his wife with her lover.⁷³ In other plays, arguments about money

⁷⁰ Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 124.

⁷¹ Aristophanes, *Assemblywomen*, 363.

⁷² Aristophanes, *Birds*, in vol. 3 of *Aristophanes*, 31, 103, 169.

⁷³ *Un Amoureux*, in vol. 4 of Tossier, *Recueil de farces*, line 102.

are significant plot points and even feature in the title (*Lucas et le Bon Payeur*).⁷⁴ Still other plays revolve around transactions or the marketplace.⁷⁵

Coins themselves often play a central role. Some farces show characters who get taken advantage of because they are unaware of the intricacies of a complicated world of money. A variety of types of coin, and the existence of multiple systems of account meant that navigating this monetary system could be confusing. Farces also display a richness of monetary language, as writers made monetary terms integral parts of the text, taking advantage of wordplay to create situations of ambiguity and to give lines double meanings. Finally some farces feature coins prominently as objects whose aesthetic value is used to help assay their intrinsic value. Whereas comedies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tend to play on a larger financial and systemic complexity, their farce predecessors show a richly complicated monetary world at the local level.

Farces showed many of the different kinds of coin in circulation in Renaissance France. In the sixty-five works in André Tissier's *Recueil de farces*, for example, we find

annel, blanc, carlin, couronne, croix, demy escu, denier, dragme, ducat, escu, filipus, franc, gros, karolus, liard/liart, livre, maille, mouton d'or, nicquet, noble, parisi, patard, patin, royal, seraphin, sol parisis, sol/solz/soulz/soulz (sous), teston, tournois, trezain, unzain⁷⁶

These terms designated French coins, foreign coins, and other monetary units. These coins were the media of exchange in the Renaissance economy. Their variety meant one had to manage the difficult task of keeping track of their changing relative values in order

⁷⁴ *Lucas et le Bon Payeur*, in vol. 6 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*.

⁷⁵ *Mahuet badin, natif de Bagnolet, qui va à Paris au marché pour vendre ses œufs et sa crème*, in vol. 10 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*.

⁷⁶ Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, 1:500, 2:382, 3:346, 4:362, 5:329, 7:582, 10:414, 11:368, 12:380 (Definitions are listed in the appendix).

to use them; they could not be used simply by looking at a number stamped on them, as there was none.

There existed a parallel accounting system to manage these different values: money of account, which existed only on paper. Its main unit was the *livre*, which designated only this unit of account, not a specific metal coin. As we have already seen, one livre was made up of 20 *sous*, and each sou was made up of 12 *deniers*.⁷⁷ The denier and sou, were, however, represented in actual coins.⁷⁸ The words livre and franc were often used synonymously, because the franc was a coin issued at a value of one livre.⁷⁹

In addition to the different types of coin, and the difference between medium of exchange and money of account, another source of confusion was possible because there were two different moneys of account in use until the Renaissance: the *livre paris*, and the less valuable *livre tournois*. The coexistence of these two systems complicated every sort of economic transaction.⁸⁰ Even though the *livre paris* had already fallen out of government use in the fifteenth century, confusion between the systems was still possible locally and was demonstrated in some farces.⁸¹ The instability in meaning, or the existence of two possible meanings at once, imbued exchanges with ambiguity.

As Sharon Collingwood notes, a dishonest merchant could have used confusion between the two moneys of account to his advantage.⁸² This is evident in what is perhaps

⁷⁷ Originally, the *livre* or *librum* referred to a pound of silver.

⁷⁸ Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 16.

⁷⁹ Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 17.

⁸⁰ Something similar in modern life might be shopping in a store on the U.S.–Canadian border and being quoted a price in dollars, without being told if it were in U.S. or Canadian dollars.

⁸¹ Martin Wolfe writes that “by the fifteenth century the *livre paris*, an essentially local monetary unit ... had disappeared almost completely from government accounts.” Martin Wolfe, *The Fiscal System of Renaissance France* (New Haven: Yale, 1972), viii.

⁸² Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 91.

one of the best-known farces today, *Maître Pathelin* (likely written between 1456–1460). In it, the lawyer Pathelin tricks a draper out of his merchandise, persuading him to allow him to buy it on credit (but refusing, later, to pay). Early on, the draper exploits this difference between moneys of account.⁸³ As Collingwood explains: “By allowing Pathelin to assume his price was first quoted in paris money of account, the draper has made his product seem cheaper, enabling him to gull his customer into paying 20% more.”⁸⁴ Transactions in other farces also show or allude to this distinction between prices. In the late fifteenth-century *Le Savetier Calbain*, the title character makes allusion to this marketplace technique when he sings words he heard at the market:

La semelle de cuyr vault
Troys solz paris et demy ...
Troys solz, tout à une parolle,
Vous cousteront, par mon serment.⁸⁵

The merchant first advertises the leather in the more valuable *sols parisis*. Though he at first clearly indicates which unit of account was being used, when he drops the price he omits that information, making the goods seem less expensive.

Even converting between different coins in the same unit of account could be confusing. Of the 1534 *Mimin le Goutteux et les Deux Sourds*, Collingwood writes of a “convoluted arithmetic [...] intended to amuse” when the Valet attempts to account for how much money he spent purchasing a book for his master (who in fact had asked him

⁸³ It is rarely possible to date farces with precision; except when noted otherwise, when available I will use the dates established by the editor of the edition cited (Here *Maître Pathelin*, in vol. 7 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*). Indications of authorship are also very rare, and will be noted when available.

⁸⁴ Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 91.

⁸⁵ *Le Savetier Calbain*, in vol. 3 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, lines 195-96, 203-4. Text references for farces are to line number of the Tissier *Recueil* edition.

for a doctor, not a book).⁸⁶ The deaf Valet first says that the book cost him “six karolus,” equivalent to 60 deniers.⁸⁷ The Valet then, misunderstanding his master’s repeated cry for a doctor, goes to get the book bound, and returning, attempts to account for the cost by recalling which coins he used to pay for it.

Il m’a cousté sept solz et maille;
 Car j’ay baillé demy trezain,
 Deux solz et trois, puis ung unzain.
 Autant le convint achapter.
 Attendez, je m’en vois getter:
 Ung et deux et trois, ce sont quatre;
 Et puis, il nous fault rabatre
 Justement toute la moytié.
 C’est le compte. Sans l’amytié,
 Je ne l’eusse eu pour le pris.⁸⁸

The Valet uses tokens to verify his account (“je m’en vois getter”), but the two sums still do not add up.⁸⁹ Like Collingwood, Tissier concludes that this is because the point of the scene is the Valet’s confusion in his accounts.

This accounting mix-up is also a prime demonstration of a material way of thinking about money. The Valet asserts that a price was set (“Autant le convint achapter”) but his inability to name the price, even after trying to remember the coins that he spent, indicates a detachment from the idea of a price in money of account, favoring instead a mentality of using coins as medium of exchange. This confusion between medium of exchange (the coins he used) and money of account (an agreed-upon price) shows a disparity between different systems of accounting and therefore different

⁸⁶ Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 20.

⁸⁷ *Mimin le Goutteux et les Deux Sourds*, in vol. 5 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, line 24; Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, 5:81n.

⁸⁸ *Mimin le Goutteux*, lines 79–88.

systems of determining value. The idea of abstracting money into a numerical amount, and seeing it as equivalent to the total sum of a group of coins, is crucial to the development of a credit economy in theater and off the stage, and is not yet present here.

In addition to showing transactions, farce writers used a rich monetary vocabulary which gave a depth to economic language that modern translations cannot fully convey. Some of these words were descriptive of visual features, such as the “croix” featured on the back of coins. Because there were many different coins, authors were able to choose from a large repertoire of words, which had a variety of secondary meanings and implications, and which also offered a wide range of rhyming possibilities.

In the late fifteenth-century *L'Official*, when an ecclesiastic judge is investigating the circumstances of a premarital sexual encounter, he asks a witness if Colin paid Marion for sex, not by asking how much he gave her, or if, indeed, he gave her money at all. Instead he assumes that he paid her, and then uses a vocabulary of the different specific kinds of coins Colin could have used: “Quans escus, quans testons ou soublz / Luy baila-il?”⁹⁰ This has the advantage of rhyming with the previous line, “Mais Marion estoit desboulz,” but also shows a different way of thinking about money. The judge is not referring to money of account expressed in a number, but instead wants to find out how many and what kind of precise objects Colin exchanged for sex, reinforcing the physicality of coins as media of exchange.

In *Les Deux Maris et leurs Deux Femmes*, the plot turns around marital relations, not money, and so the vocabulary of coinage fulfills mainly a lexical role, that of being

⁹⁰ A full explanation of the values of the demi-trezain and unzain has to take into account the varying exchange value of each of these coins. See Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 20.

easy to rhyme: “escu” has the distinct advantage of rhyming with “cocu,” “blancs” with “enfants,” “maille” with “chaille.”⁹¹ Here, money is not seen on stage (a bet for one écu is never paid): rather, it is evoked orally to punctuate arguments. The many words for money are a rich source of rhymes in other farces as well (“voyla un liart / Et ne fais point du criart”) and authors enjoyed the liberty of being able to choose from the large number of extant coins to fit the rhyme they wanted.⁹² While the indeterminate, non-specific word “argent” is also common, the many examples of characters asking about specific types of coin, when the general term could have done just as well, emphasize the evaluation of each coin, reinforcing the idea of a local, personal level of transactions.

Ways of speaking of a lack of money were varied, but often involved a character listing the different kinds of coins they did not possess. In *Les Deux Maris et leurs Deux Femmes*, when the second wife explains to her husband the origins of a bottle of wine that she had received from another man in exchange for her charms, she cites the small *denier* and the *maille* coin, worth just half of a denier: “Nous n’en devons denier ne maille; / Je l’ay payé en beau contant.”⁹³ *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier* begins with the first two characters bemoaning their lack of money.⁹⁴ They decide to drown their sorrows in a tavern and, when it comes time to pay, they describe the coins they do not have:

LE SAVETIER. Je n’ay pas ung tournois,
LE CHAUDRONNIER. Par les patins bieu, je n’ay croix.

⁹⁰ *L’Official*, in vol. 2 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, lines 272–73.

⁹¹ *Les Deux Maris et leurs Deux Femmes*, in vol.1 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*.

⁹² *Jeninot qui fit un roi de son chat*, in vol. 5 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, lines 115–16.

⁹³ *Deux Maris, Deux Femmes*, lines 519–20.

⁹⁴ *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier*, in vol. 2 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, lines 15–16.

LE SAVETIER. Par mon [serment, et] je n'ay pille.⁹⁵

The evocation of *tournois* and *patin* coins, and *croix* and *pille* designating the obverse and reverse of a coin, are part of lines in triolet form; this repetition further emphasizes the emptiness of their pockets. *Le Chaudronnier* also begins with a wife complaining to her husband that they have no money, as does the 1496 *L'Aveugle et le Boîteux*, which starts with two beggars looking for money.⁹⁶ So does the late fifteenth-century *Le Pâté et la tarte*, where the first of two clever beggars complains of being hungry, emphasizing that he has no form of money whatsoever: “je suis de fain tout velus; / Et si n'ay forme de monnoye.”⁹⁷ By using the rich vocabulary of coinage to describe the money characters do not have, authors create an economy of need, where the circulation of even small amounts of money can become an object of much dramatic action.

Many references made to different types of coin signal in particular their beauty or solidity, highlighting a link between aesthetic value and intrinsic value. Whether they appear on stage or not, the characteristic qualities of a good coin—beauty, weight, and purity—are invoked as a means of assessing value, since coins had to be examined carefully on these bases to determine their worth. Mark Taylor defines the aestheticization of coin as the result of its “dematerialization or idealization,” equating the terms.⁹⁸ In these farces, aestheticization works hand in hand with a very material evaluation of the intrinsic worth of the coin.

⁹⁵ *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier*, lines 82–84.

⁹⁶ *Le Chaudronnier*, in vol. 3 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, line 8. Tissier dates the farce from sometime between 1500–1550 (3:86); *L'Aveugle et le Boîteux*, in vol. 11 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, Tissier, line 1.

⁹⁷ *Le Pâté et la tarte*, in vol. 3 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, lines 11–12.

⁹⁸ Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 150.

An example of this can be found in *Les Deux Gentilshommes et le Meunier*, when the miller's wife promises to obtain for him (by leading two gentlemen to think that she will sleep with them) coins that are "ausy rouges que seraphins," a reference to the word seraph, an oriental gold coin, and a play on words with the seraph angels, literally the "burning ones."⁹⁹ She promises that they will be "des escus de poys," which is to say that they will be good coins, unadulterated and not counterfeit.¹⁰⁰ Her first lover gives her 100 écus, and the second promises "sis vins flipus / Avecques sent soublyz de monnaie," a reference to the *philippus*, another valuable gold coin.¹⁰¹ In this farce, where money is exchanged for the promise of sex, the coins themselves are described as analogous to objects of desire: they are praised for their aesthetic qualities, indicators of their value, and described in a way similar to other objects of beauty. Monetary terms are also linked to sex by equating female beauty with descriptions of coins. The miller, making a sexual advance on a noblewoman, describes the sexual act in terms alluding to money: "Alons faire le demené / Que je ambate vostre escu."¹⁰² Other examples linking beauty to coins include references to "beaulx ducats" and "beaulx escuz."¹⁰³ These designations show an attachment to the coin as an aesthetic object as both a means of assessing value and a valuable object in itself.

In part because of this attention to individual coins, but also because of how they circulate, the economy of farce is perhaps best described as a microeconomy. In the

⁹⁹ *Les Deux Gentilshommes et le Meunier*, in vol. 1 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, line 95.

¹⁰⁰ *Les Deux Gentilshommes et le Meunier*, line 95.

¹⁰¹ *Les Deux Gentilshommes et le Meunier*, lines 254–55.

¹⁰² *Les Deux Gentilshommes et le Meunier*, lines 547–48; "escu" could refer to female genitalia.

¹⁰³ *Les Femmes qui font refondre leurs Maris*, in vol. 6 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, line 430; *Le Pauvre Jouhan*, in vol. 10 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, line 274.

farce's small economy, plots generally do not revolve around large sums of money, and that money typically does not go very far. The scale of economic transactions in French farce is often reduced: small coins buy small things. These farces also show what characters spend money on and how they go about doing it. The objects that circulate on stage are typically food, wine, and clothing; sex is often on the market as well. Though the amounts are small, these farces show a vivid world of transaction and negotiation, where clothing, food, drink and sex are the main commodities that many farce characters aspire to acquire. Usually the sums are manageable, of the kind that one can imagine would be associated with the low-income characters that farces typically portray.

Money circulates in its most basic forms: betting and begging; stealing and taking; buying and selling; and the occasional payment of wages. In several of these farces, domestic disputes center over which member of the couple controls the purse-strings. In others, characters beg and trick their way to accumulating some money. But these accumulations are never massive: characters do not become truly rich in farces, as they do in late seventeenth-century comedy. This mirrors the economic conditions of the times, as Pierre Vilar describes the history of the proto-capitalist fifteenth-century economy to be:

Le gain marchand est spéculatif, fragile. L'usure (si répandue) étant un prêt à la consommation ne peut aboutir à une accumulation *globale*. Son mécanisme est exactement l'inverse du processus emprunt-entreprise. Mais ce qui ne crée pas de "capital" peut créer, localement, des "capitalistes." Ce qui ne peut assurer la "croissance" prépare le "démarrage."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Vilar, "Croissance économique et analyse historique," in *Conférence internationale d'histoire économique* (Paris: Mouton, 1960), 71.

In these farces, the portrayal of monetary circulation is much the same: there are no large accumulations, although some characters do become somewhat richer than they were before. The ways farces portrayed money being exchanged on stage in the Renaissance, while they had roots dating back to antiquity, did represent a change from medieval times. The idea of money being abstracted into an object in circulation was, argues Desan, a “new theoretical horizon” in the Renaissance.¹⁰⁵ In this sense what we see in farce parallels the economic developments of the time.

One of the primary ways farces show money is in situations where the main characters have no money and never did, or where they have spent all they had and are looking for more. Some characters resort to theft to deal with their lack of funds. In *Le Savetier Calbain*, a domestic dispute over money leads Calbain’s wife to intoxicate him in order to steal his wallet, in which she finds an abundance of valuable coins. In *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier*, the cobbler counts as future revenue three coins, which he says that he plans on stealing at some future time.¹⁰⁶ Regardless of whether or not he is serious, his reference to a dependence on future revenue indicates the mechanisms of the credit economy which is on its way. As Desan writes, “à la Renaissance l’économique acquiert une dimension temporelle qui permet de projeter les actions commerciales dans l’avenir.”¹⁰⁷ Even just the act of counting a future theft as potential income is theorizing money as a quantity in time, and extending the temporality of money, as well as that of the farce, beyond its ostensible temporal limits.

¹⁰⁵ Desan, *Imaginaire*, 45. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁰⁶ *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier*, lines 87–88.

¹⁰⁷ Desan, *Imaginaire*, 48.

There are also instances when characters manage to extract money from other characters in ways that are not entirely honest, but not necessarily illegal either: this is perhaps best described as trickery. Several plays show women manipulating men for money. In the 1480 *La Pipée*, where all of the characters are birds, one, a female, attracts her admirers and then literally pulls out their feathers, giving an evocative visual demonstration of the alternate meaning of “plumer,” that of fleecing someone of their money.¹⁰⁸ *Les Trois amoureux de la croix* also features a woman who collects money from her admirers without delivering anything in return.¹⁰⁹ The three admirers each give her ten of a different type of coin (ducats, écus, and royaux), after which she sets up a meeting with them which she has no intention to attend.

Beggars were an established part of the social order in Renaissance France and their daily lives, too, are featured in farces, where their actions are often portrayed as devious. In *Le Pâté et la tarte* a beggar tricks a stingy shop owner’s wife out of a pastry. He has made a pact with a fellow beggar to split everything they find, and this ultimately includes the beating they receive for trying to find something to eat. One bitterly declares that they are “recevant de bos,” a play on the word “receveur” or tax collector for wood (*bois*), as in the stick they were beaten with.¹¹⁰ But characters do not stop at begging from mere mortals. They also implore God, whom they generally ask for larger sums. In *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier* the two artisans, in a mock liturgical chant, ask God to send them “cent mille escus.”¹¹¹ One hundred thousand écus was a princely

¹⁰⁸ *La Pipée*, in vol. 12 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*.

¹⁰⁹ *Les Trois amoureux de la croix*, in vol. 11 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*.

¹¹⁰ *Le Pâté et la tarte*, line 290; Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, 3:212n.

¹¹¹ *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier*, line 98.

sum—enough to feed the carnal desires of the two characters for well beyond their lifetime—and the valuable écu coin stands in contrast to smaller coins in which daily transactions would have usually been conducted.

Les Deux Savetiers also deals with divine intervention, as two cobblers, one rich and one poor, discuss the merits of their respective financial situations.¹¹² The rich cobbler insists that money comes from God. His poor colleague thus decides to pray for precisely 100 écus and no less. In a clumsy ruse the rich cobbler decides to trick him: he hides behind an altar, and, imitating the heavenly voice, offers him a smaller amount of money, and then money in another kind of coin, both refused. Finally, the rich cobbler tosses over a sack of 99 écus, which the poor cobbler accepts after some hesitation. At the end of the story the rich man loses not only his coins, but his coat as well. By showing this quick reversal of fortunes this farce seems to teach a moral lesson, illustrated with the bag of money on stage. It also teaches a monetary lesson: that beggars can and should be choosers, accepting only the finest coins.

A slightly more advanced aspect of monetary exchange in farces was the portrayal of betting. Farces feature a number of different types of transactions where money moves, but not necessarily in exchange for goods. One such way this happens is through casual bets that characters make with one another. Sometimes they are for a relatively large amount, like an écu (a great deal of money for a peasant), and sometimes for a smaller amount (more likely to be paid than larger bets which were mainly fantasy). In *Le Chaudronnier*, the husband bets his wife a small amount (“deux patars,” the equivalent of 2 sous) to see who can hold still the longest. When she accepts the challenge he adds on a

soup to the bet.¹¹³ Unlike some bets for large amounts which seem to have only a rhetorical purpose, this is one that can easily be paid, and indeed it is.¹¹⁴ Bets of larger sums of money are often exercises in exaggeration, such as when the two husbands in *Les Deux Maris et leurs Deux Femmes* decide on a much larger amount than the small coins they are used to dealing with. The first husband bets the second an écu that his wife is unfaithful to him, but this bet never gets paid—perhaps because the husband has more pressing matters to attend to when he discovers the truth.¹¹⁵ Betting thus has a dual role in farce, with sums that are only imagined, and through coins that are actually paid out. “Moralités,” whose moral judgments were broad and far-ranging, sometimes addressed betting. The *Moralité des enfants de maintenant*, for example, takes a critical look at those who lost money gambling: a character named “Discipline” sternly advises that money is only for human necessities, not for pleasure—a theme repeatedly revisited in seventeenth-century comedies.¹¹⁶

While money moves through betting, there are few representations of moneylending in these farces. In the one example of lending on credit I have found, the lender is unwilling—and it is not a moneylender lending on interest, but a taverner whose customers cannot pay. In the middle of *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier*, the taverner informs the two drinkers of how much they owe. They promise to pay him back the next day, but he is unhappy with this development, threatening to send an officer of

¹¹² *Les Deux Savetiers*, in vol. 12 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*.

¹¹³ *Le Chaudronnier*, lines 76, 88.

¹¹⁴ *Le Chaudronnier*, line 175.

¹¹⁵ *Les Deux Maris et leurs Deux Femmes*, line 568.

¹¹⁶ *Moralité des enfants de maintenant*, in vol. 3 of *Ancien Théâtre François ou Collection des Ouvrages Dramatiques les plus Remarquables depuis les Mystères jusqu'à Corneille*, ed. Viollet le Duc, 10 vols. (Paris: P. Jannet, 1854–1857), 80.

the law after them if they fail to do so.¹¹⁷ When the taverner comes to collect the next day, the two debtors intentionally act crazy. He bemoans his poor decision to lend them money (“Pretez vostre argent à telz gens, / Qui n’ont pas vaillant ung festu!”) before taking his leave of the spectators.¹¹⁸ The taverner realizes that even if he were to bring his debtors to justice, it would be to no avail as they simply do not have the money. The internal economy stutters when characters are not able to pay what they owe, and when transactions are cut short in the middle. Even though the later Renaissance is a time when the development of credit was becoming widespread (we can think of Panurge’s celebration of debt in Rabelais’s *Tiers Livre*), farces like this one, written in the first half of the sixteenth century, do not typically represent such operations in detail, although some, as we will see later, do explore the issues at hand in the developing credit mentality.

Some plays from this time period pointed out corruption and abusive financial practices, such as when, in the *Moralité de Charité* the “Avaricieulx” buries his money underground, and earns money in unsavory business dealings including usury. These practices are denounced onstage: when a poor man describes how the Avaricieulx exploited him, “Charité” deems his actions “droicte puante usure.”¹¹⁹ “Tricherie,” in talking about merchants who will lie for the tiny sum of “deux blancs,” points to how morals can be corrupted with money.¹²⁰ The public scorning of these financially deviant

¹¹⁷ *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier*, lines 122–32.

¹¹⁸ *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier*, lines 186–87.

¹¹⁹ *Moralité de Charité*, in vol. 3 of *Ancien Théâtre François*, 376.

¹²⁰ *Moralité de Charité*, 378.

characters on stage sent an unambiguous message to the spectators about the moral hazards of usury and greed.

Food was, in many senses, a parallel currency of daily life. Just as many peasants in the Middle Ages and beyond paid dues to their lords not in cash, but in kind, the circulating food present in farces is very much a currency.¹²¹ In *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier*, the first two characters ask for money from God so that they will always have wine to drink and food to eat.¹²² They seem to have no other use for money; they have no aspirations to buy their way into nobility, for example. When Calbain's wife steals his money in *Le Savetier Calbain*, it is to buy cloth to make a dress. In *Trois Galants et Phlipot* (1544–46), when the young Phlipot gets to try out several different careers to see which one he might like, he imagines being rich mainly in terms of the kind of bread he thinks he will be able to eat: “Nous ne mangerons plus que miches. / Fy de gros pain!”¹²³ Although the play is interesting from a social standpoint, as it represents the idea that a young man could pick from any number of potential careers, Phlipot sees the benefits of money only in culinary terms, that of access to the high quality bread that most peasants would never see. In *Le Gentilhomme et Naudet*, Naudet at first profits from the relationship his wife Lison has with the local lord, by gaining his share from the Gentleman's gifts of wine and food, before cuckolding the latter himself and breaking up the arrangement.¹²⁴

¹²¹ See discussion of this throughout the early modern period in James Lowth Goldsmith, *Lordship in France: 1500-1789* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 10.

¹²² *Le Chaudronnier, le Savetier, et le Tavernier*, lines 98–104.

¹²³ *Trois Galants et Phlipot*, in vol. 2 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, lines 403–4.

¹²⁴ *Le Gentilhomme et Naudet*, in vol.1 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*.

Money in farce is primarily a means to an end. Characters like the Tailor in *Le Couturier et Ésofet* do dream of having more money. In a song that Tissier identifies as a “chanson de métier,” he sings that life is good when you have money:

Ilz mainent bonne vie et bon esbatement,
Les gentilz cousturiers,
Quand ilz ont de l'argent.¹²⁵

Yet the Tailor seems only to care about the simpler pleasures, making no mention, for example, of wanting to have more money than anyone else. He just wants to have enough to enjoy life. Attitudes towards money in farces were generally different from those in the comedies of the seventeenth century. Characters of farces are rarely shown desiring money for money's sake. Rather, they are focused on the material pleasures which money can bring them. Some even go so far as to disdain money, as in *Le Bateleur*, where the valet declares at the end of the play: “Soulcy d'argent n'est que labit” (“Souci d'argent n'est que chose vaine”).¹²⁶

This does not stop characters from negotiating the price of everything down to the sou. These farces thus interrogate not just what things cost, but what they are worth. Farces give some indication as to the prices of certain things that are bought and sold, mainly modestly priced items such as drinks or food. Some of the more expensive items are also some of the most discussed; in *Maître Mimin étudiant* (1480–90), Mimin's mother complains that the books they purchased for him cost “deux cens livres,” a huge amount (rhyming the monetary term “livres” with the word for books).¹²⁷ This was

¹²⁵ *Le Couturier et Ésofet*, in vol. 2 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, lines 96–98.

¹²⁶ *Le Bateleur*, in vol. 4 of Tissier, *Recueil de Farces*, line 296; transcription from Tissier, *Farces françaises*, 2:86.

¹²⁷ *Maître Mimin étudiant*, in vol. 3 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, line 27.

roughly the amount of money a peasant could have lived off of for a year. In *Les Deux Maris et leurs Deux Femmes*, the first of the two wives portrayed in the play complains to her husband that he spends his entire day from the morning in the tavern “à boire vin / Et despendre neuf ou dix blancs,” coins of comparatively tiny value.¹²⁸

In general, prices for many things are negotiated in farces, and are a function not just of value, but also of how one might pay. One important question of price comes up in *Les Brus* (ca. 1536), when two monks approach three prostitutes and try to persuade them to sleep with them without paying. They have no luck, even after threatening force, and only succeed when they pull out a bag of money, offering a sum of 101 écus, “tout compté.”¹²⁹ (This is about 300 livres, easily a year’s wages for a peasant). When the women accept, the second monk remarks that “argent faict par tout la voyée,” to which the older woman, who was leading the negotiations, responds: “Qui a argent, il a des brus.”¹³⁰ Here the transaction of money for sex is dependent not just upon the fact of a financial offer, but on a very clear readiness of the cash. The emphasis is on the bag full of money, and on the transaction carefully overseen by the older woman who wants to make sure that the other women will in fact receive it. *Maître Pathelin* is another example of the negotiation of payment, as Pathelin successfully attempts to purchase goods on credit.

Negotiation is shown in detail in many farces. In what could be seen as an entertaining lesson in basic economics, in *La Farce de arquemintation*, a farmer does not

¹²⁸ *Les Deux Maris et leurs Deux Femmes*, lines 340–46.

¹²⁹ *Les Brus*, in vol. 12 of Tossier, *Recueil de farces*, line 274.

¹³⁰ *Les Brus*, lines 287–88.

realize that one needs money to buy shoes.¹³¹ As Collingwood writes, he “is incapable of the abstraction of monetary exchange.”¹³² Many farces show transactions on stage in an informative and entertaining way, showing characters who master the economy as well as those who, like this farmer, have much to learn. Their portrayal on stage is a way of both showing the importance of understanding economic affairs, as well as providing demonstrations in how to conduct them.

In *Le Badin qui se loue* (ca. 1500), the main character proves to be adept at extending negotiations and receiving pay, without ever delivering on the service he promises. Negotiating his pay with his new masters, Janot initiates the discussion assertively: “J’auray six francs pour le moins,” he declares, along with specifying cuts of meat he will not eat. After his future master agrees, the rest of the farce is a back-and-forth with Janot’s new masters asking him to do things he pretends not to understand. He asks for more compensation, blackmails his master’s wife, and takes money without providing a service. When he is sent out to get pâté, Janot plays dumb: having been given money to accomplish his errand, he then asks how much he should pay for it. “Ne sçaurois-tu marchander?” his exasperated wife asks.¹³³ Her lover then advises Janot to purchase one that costs “trois solz.”¹³⁴ Janot’s claimed ignorance of all affairs mercantile, and his incessant inquiries serve as an interesting interrogation of business practices, and reveal an idea of the value of both service and money. At the end of the farce, he leaves with a beating—but takes the money for the pâté with him.

¹³¹ Emile Picot, *Farce Nouvelle de arquemintation à quatre personnages* (Paris: Librairie Henri Leclerc, 1914). Quoted in Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 37.

¹³² Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 37.

¹³³ *Le Badin que se loue*, line 247.

This can be compared to another negotiation for service wages, in *Jeninot qui fit un roi de son chat*, where the title character, candidate for the job of servant, asks for precisely eighteen francs per month, along with a ration of nuts; the husband makes a counter-offer of three francs per year including clothing, which Jeninot immediately accepts.¹³⁵ This is only half of what Janot asks for and quickly gets in *Le Badin qui se loue*; Jeninot does not initially appear to be a strong negotiator. But in fact, he has interpreted the agreement differently than his employers. Having negotiated that he be “clothed,” he insists that his employers actually put the clothes on his body.¹³⁶ And they do in fact dress him, but after more unreasonable requests Jeninot is beaten and dismissed without pay. His comical requests are also indicative of the implicit assumptions contained in agreements of employment; the naive Jeninot makes the spectator laugh, while also serving as a reminder of the dangers of not explicitly defining the terms decided in negotiations, in a time when the majority of agreements were oral and binding.

Another farce, *Le Retrait*, also shows this dynamic interchange between sexual, gustative, and monetary economy, in a parody of taxation.¹³⁷ In it, the valet Guillot is the only character who succeeds in amassing money, and he does so by “taxing” the transactions of those around him. The farce begins as a woman tries to set up a meeting with her lover while her husband is away on an unsuccessful attempt to collect rent from a tenant. As the lover arrives, he declares his love for pleasure and his disdain for money:

¹³⁴ *Le Badin que se loue*, line 253.

¹³⁵ *Jeninot qui fit un roi*, lines 64, 87.

¹³⁶ *Jeninot qui fit un roi*, lines 238–39.

¹³⁷ *Le Retrait*, in vol. 1 of Tissier, *Recueil de Farces*.

“Fy d’avoir, qui n’a son plaisir, / Fy d’or, d’argent, fy de richesse!” he repeats.¹³⁸ When Guillot asks him for money to watch the door, the lover gives him an écu. When the couple asks Guillot to bring food, he declares that he will take some, and when they ask for wine, he pours himself a drink as well.¹³⁹ At each step along the way, Guillot levies this sort of tax on the services he is providing. Later in the farce, he collects more money when he re-sells the lover’s partridge to the husband. “Je prens argent à toutes mains,” he says proudly.¹⁴⁰ This farce shows a clever valet, motivated by money, exchanging various goods and services for money: being a lookout, providing food, and keeping quiet. The valet takes money and eats or drinks everything that passes through his hands, taking a little each time. In this alternative economy, the husband is unable to get paid, while the lover renounces gold because he has enough money not to care about it, valuing happiness in love over it. The only person to truly collect is the valet, Guillot.

This allusion to taxation rejoins the ways in which farces also dealt with larger economic and social issues, such as monetary manipulations, credit, and the relationship between nobility and money. In Renaissance France, both currency debasement and devaluation could severely impact the value of the coins a person held. Debasement, in which coins were taken back by the crown and replaced with reminted coins with a lower percentage of precious metal, had an inflationary effect on prices.¹⁴¹ Devaluation, on the other hand, was a royal declaration that coins (which had no face value stamped on them) would be worth *more* in terms of account (instead of 10 livres corresponding to the

¹³⁸ *Le Retrait*, lines 106–7.

¹³⁹ *Le Retrait*, line 195.

¹⁴⁰ *Le Retrait*, line 356.

¹⁴¹ Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 22–23.

amount of gold in a louis d'or, for example, it would then cost 12 livres for that amount of gold, to take a seventeenth-century example. If the currency of account was devalued, those who were owed money stood to suffer). In *L'Official*, the witness Guillot precedes his testimony with the ramblings of an old man, comic digressions from his topic that are also economic commentary. He talks about manners and styles that have changed from past times, then addresses the issue of inflation. A cord of firewood, he complains, costs nearly eight times as much as it used to: forty-six sous, whereas it used to be six.¹⁴² He mentions the end of the *mouton d'or* coin, and the debasement of coins:

Tout est tourné à la rebours.
 Les moutons d'or n'ont plus le cours;
 On ne parle que de ducas;
 Et pour l'or à douze caras,
 On en fait bien à dix et huit.¹⁴³

Charles VII ceased to mint the *mouton d'or* in 1436. Following Tissier's conclusion that the play was written around 1500, we might agree with Collingwood's analysis that Guillot's "lamentation" of the coin's absence is tied to the fact that for him, "the *mouton* is a golden symbol of his lost youth."¹⁴⁴ Collingwood links Guillot's lamentation of debased money to his complaints about a debased and morally corrupt society.¹⁴⁵ It can be further argued, as will be seen below, that Guillot is also making a case for the development of a credit economy.

Rising prices, although not necessarily linked to currency devaluation, are also an issue in *Le Couturier et Ésopet*, where in response to the complaints of his apprentice

¹⁴² *L'Official*, lines 178–80.

¹⁴³ *L'Official*, lines 213–17, see also analysis in Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Tissier, *Recueil de Farces*, 2:84; Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 25, quoting Laufaurie II 108.

¹⁴⁵ Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 26.

Ésopet that he has not been paid a salary in two years, the tailor responds that he is suffering under the rising cost of bread: “j’ay tout besoing de gaigner, / Veu que le pain est enchery.”¹⁴⁶ Similarly, in *La Pipée*, Bruit d’amour complains that some merchandise is becoming more expensive while the price of the “cuiderie” (essentially costume jewelry) that his interlocutor sells keeps falling, making it hard for those merchants to earn a living.¹⁴⁷ And as Collingwood convincingly shows, *Les Femmes qui font refondre leurs Maris* offers a commentary on debasement. The *fondeur de cloches*, or bellfounder, who offers to recast these women’s older husbands into younger models, makes economic commentary throughout the play. Collingwood devotes several pages to a study of the play, concluding that the wives “are punished for their greed, and are shown to be just as foolish as those who relinquish good old coins in exchange for shining but debased ones” and that “as a commentary on economics, [this farce] can be seen as an illustration of public attitudes to reminting. A public suspicious of currency manipulation would expect neither strong coin nor good husbands from reminting.”¹⁴⁸ Yet in this play like others, the commentary on state monetary policy is mainly restricted to examinations of its local effects: on how it increases prices for staple goods and makes daily life more expensive. Currency shortages were also shown in farces: such as in *Le Bateleur* when the Valet bemoans a lack of money in France: “Sang bieu, il n’y a croix en France?”¹⁴⁹ His master then proposes selling on credit.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ *Couturier et Ésopet*, line 45.

¹⁴⁷ *La Pipée*, lines 206–7.

¹⁴⁸ Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 30.

¹⁴⁹ Collingwood, *Market Pledge*, 31; *Le Bateleur*, line 151.

¹⁵⁰ *Le Bateleur*, line 152.

At the time, though, selling on credit to someone a merchant did not know was generally an unwise idea. A use and understanding of credit, though, would prove essential to commercial success in a time of increasing international trade. Renaissance farce dealt with the growing importance of credit by putting its key components—such as trust, agreement, and guarantee—onto the stage.

Farces such as *L'Official* and the late fifteenth-century *Le Cuvier* demonstrate the conventions of a time when a verbal agreement was just as binding as one signed on paper. *Le Cuvier* shows the dangers of relying too closely upon a written agreement. When Jacquinot's wife and her mother, tired of his domestic laziness, have him write up a list of all of the household duties they expect him to do, he agrees, but says that he will only do what is written.¹⁵¹ Accordingly when his wife falls into the laundry tub, he refuses to rescue her, because that is not on his list of duties. He eventually saves her, but only once she agrees that he will be master of the house. This vivid example indicates the double-edged properties of putting agreements into writing. It was, as Jacquinot discovered, always possible to find a loophole. *Les Deux Gentilshommes et le Meunier* gives an indication of how easily written documents could be manipulated in the justice system given sufficient funds. The miller, who is engaged in a legal dispute, exclaims that the sum of 100 écus is enough to pay the necessary bribes and counterfeit documents for him to win his trial: "Y sufrayt de quatre vins / Pour payer faulces lettres, vins, / Arierages, mises et debtes."¹⁵² The miller implies that he knows where and how to do all of these things, and that he had only been lacking the money.

¹⁵¹ *Le Cuvier*, in vol. 3 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, lines 165–66.

¹⁵² *Les Deux Gentilshommes et le Meunier*, lines 184–87.

In a play which has some elements in common with the tale of Theophilus and the later Faust legend, *Le Chevalier qui Donna sa Femme au Diable* (1505), a character sells his wife to the devil in exchange for being made rich. The Chevalier is an early example of that recurring seventeenth-century character, the noble who has wasted all of his money. In this play, the Chevalier lost his money gambling and cannot even borrow money from his entourage, who leave him as soon as they realize he is destitute (it is only when he gets his money from the devil that they try to come back).¹⁵³ This play has the happy ending that *Faustus* and *Le Festin de Pierre* do not, thanks to direct divine intervention. The angel Gabriel, the Virgin Mary, and God himself intervene to take the letter back from the devil (who was insisting on its validity, since it was signed in blood and sealed), and the errant Chevalier is forgiven by God and by his wife. Fournier classifies this play as a *mystère* because, he argues, the appearance of the Virgin Mary at the end was intended to affirm her existence.¹⁵⁴ I would argue that the play also sends an economic message: that of trying to enforce, systematize and model proper economic behavior, where even the devil insists on honoring paper contracts.

In *L'Official*, credit is dealt with first in the sense of credible testimony. The young Marion is trying to prove that Colin seduced her with a false promise of marriage, and realizes she can rely on the testimony of her neighbor who heard everything, and who, importantly, is considered a credible witness. “Guillot,” she says, “est homme de credit: / On le croiera du premier coup.”¹⁵⁵ And this is indeed the case: on the basis of

¹⁵³ *Le Chevalier qui Donna sa Femme au Diable*, in vol. 3 of *Ancien Théâtre François*, 460.

¹⁵⁴ Édouard Fournier, ed., *Le Théâtre Français avant la Renaissance, 1450–1550 : Mystères, Moralités et Farces*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Laplace, Sanchez et cie, 1873), 175.

¹⁵⁵ *L'Official*, line 39.

Guillot's testimony, Colin is condemned to pay a fine ("cent soublz" to be given to the poor) and to marry Marion.¹⁵⁶ The equivalence between oral and written agreements in this farce is made clear by the same Guillot, who declares to his audience that "qui veult promectre / Soynt par foy, par tesmoingtz ou lestre, / Y doibt sa parolle tenir," warning that divine justice awaits those who fail to live up to their obligations.¹⁵⁷ He further emphasizes the morality of his point to the audience of the farce, declaring that they too must be "veritable / Et en foy très constant et stable."¹⁵⁸ We see here the importance of verbal testimony, which holds, in the case of a credible witness, just as much weight as that of a written marriage promise.

Were these kinds of lessons necessary to build trust in a system that relied upon credit in the broadest sense, that of being able to believe someone at their word? The emphasis on Guillot, throughout the text, as a man of "credit," could also suggest a link to financial credit. His commentary on rampant inflation is, in a sense, an invitation to rely on credit: why save coin money if it will be worthless, and if borrowed money will be easier to pay back in the future? We might read Guillot's commentary as pointing to the decreasing real value of coin money in order to highlight the alternative, credit. This interpretation corresponds with the other exhortations in the play, particularly at the end, to being true to one's word, and respecting one's engagements. With this commentary and the financial implications of Colin's marriage promise in mind, the play can be read as an exaltation of the value of respecting financial promises, not just marriage promises.

¹⁵⁶ *L'Official*, line 330.

¹⁵⁷ *L'Official*, lines 335–60.

¹⁵⁸ *L'Official*, lines 363–64.

In other farces, some limited discussions of credit can be seen, such as in the *Farce de marchandise* (15th century), where “Pou d'Acquest” (Small Profit) teaches “Marchandise” how to obtain credit through flattery, to the protest of the latter who argues that “c'est oultraige / De contrefaire son langage.”¹⁵⁹ These characters express an understanding that insincere language can be used to advance one's economic interest, and that trickery can go beyond the feigned forgetfulness of Pathelin, and into more subtle (and perhaps more realistic) realms. While they fall short of elaborating detailed concepts, they nevertheless hint at elements of economic thought—that of the reliability of credit—that will later be further developed on the stage.

Guillot's commentary in *L'Official* extends to people who act as if they belong to the nobility, even though they do not have the money. He criticizes, for example, people who wore riding boots to give the appearance of owning a horse, without actually owning one: “on chevauche à credict / En espargnant avoyne et foing.”¹⁶⁰ The use of the word “credict” is interesting here, as it is the same word that Marion used to describe Guillot at the beginning of the farce, but here emerges the financial meaning that the word was beginning to take on at this time. One of those aspiring but penniless noblemen is featured in *Le Gentilhomme et son Page*, where the Gentleman promises to his page that he will give him all of his money. The Page knows however that the Gentleman's income is all fictional, since he has never been paid.¹⁶¹ By putting on the stage a noble without money who seems delusional (we cannot even be sure of his claimed nobility), this farce

¹⁵⁹ *Farce de Marchandise*, in vol. 3 of *Ancien Théâtre François*, 255. Also known as the *Farce de Pou d'Acquest* in Fournier, ed., *Le Théâtre Français avant la Renaissance*, 64.

¹⁶⁰ *L'Official*, lines 144-45.

¹⁶¹ *Le Gentilhomme et son Page*, in vol. 10 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*, lines 248-49.

shows that the creation of the moneyless nobleman was not a seventeenth-century phenomenon. There are also some bourgeois characters in Renaissance farce who search for traces of nobility in their past. In *George le Veau*, the title character is convinced that he must have noble blood, and insists on looking through the genealogical register at church to find his origins.¹⁶² Even though he is a peasant, when he discovers that his mother's father was a merchant, he first believes this means he is a gentleman, until he realizes that even this lineage (which he does not realize would not have actually conferred nobility) is a "bastard" one.¹⁶³ In the farces that deal with nobility, there is a strong correlation between the validity of one's nobility, and the amount of money one has. Further, credit is tied to appearance. Because there are few indications of people becoming quickly rich, there are few representations of those characters trying to then obtain nobility, compared to the many in the seventeenth century. Instead, it is question here of the gap that exists between economics and status when a noble no longer has money.

These pages are intended to examine how money circulated in farce, as well as how the Renaissance transition from a coin based to a credit based economy was shown. Money is present in many of these farces, but mainly through borrowing, begging, and stealing, or through buying and selling. Abstraction of money was just beginning to be problematized in the way it would be later. While coin is shown as a means of conducting transactions, it is placed on par with food and sex. There is perhaps some sense to this: if these characters were to acquire more money, those are the things that they would likely

¹⁶² *George le Veau*, in vol. 11 of Tissier, *Recueil de farces*.

¹⁶³ *George le Veau*, line 284.

spend it on. More complex financial instruments are rare in these plays, as are rags-to-riches stories of the kind that can be seen in later centuries. That said, there are decisions with financial consequences, such as Colin's marriage promise in *L'Official*. Concerns of inflation are aired there as well, and also in *Le Couturier*. There is a growing awareness of money as more than just a collection of coins, but as a much larger system. More complex ideas, are not, it seems, shown on the stage yet, although they begin to be explored in prose, for example in the works of Rabelais. There, the Picrocholine war, Panurge's praise of debtors, the Abbey of Thelema, the role of Pantagruelion, and Panurge's work as a moneychanger are all vivid portrayals of a changing economic world, which Desan's study examines convincingly and in depth.

In late Renaissance England, however, paper money and finance became prevalent on the stage much earlier than when they did in French theater. This was in large part due to the fact that England, having experienced bullion shortages, developed a credit economy, even at the local level, much earlier than in France. The next part of the chapter will take a short look at some relevant examples from Italy, England, and Spain. The discovery of the New World along with rapid population growth led to dramatic economic change in sixteenth-century Europe, and in some countries this was clearly visible in theatrical production. Uses of metallic money and credit developed distinctly in different countries, as did their representations in theater. In England, concerns about shortage of bullion led to credit being used for even the smallest transactions, and theater explored this credit society vividly: plays used money not just as a prop but as a way to develop new portrayals of commercial relationships. In Spain, where the economy was

awash in precious metals from the Americas, and inflation was rampant, monetary language and subjects were highly present in comedy. In Italy a banking system in place for centuries facilitated international trade, but there, depictions of money tended to adhere to the traditional models of Roman comedy. This brief look at theatrical representations of money in Italy, England and Spain will not focus on the reception by French playwrights of these works but will, by juxtaposing and comparing the theatrical production of different countries, attempt to provide an international context for the rest of this study.

When Renaissance Italian comedy featured money, it was often in basic ways. While a relatively advanced banking system had developed in Italy, Italian Renaissance comedies mostly used Roman New Comedy as a model for the treatment of money. So even though a banking system existed in late sixteenth-century Venice (large payments had been made for hundreds of years by orally transmitting instructions to a banker), coin was still used for most small transactions, and theater from the time reflects this.¹⁶⁴

In the sixteenth century, “learned comedies” or *commedie erudite* developed out of the fifteenth-century tradition of playwrights imitating Plautus and Terence, and depicted monetary content in ways similar to those classical authors.¹⁶⁵ Machiavelli’s *La Mandragola* (*The Mandrake*, 1513–20), for example, features a classic scheming parasite character who looks for free meals and arranges for money to pass through his hands

¹⁶⁴ Frederic C. Lane and Reinhold C. Mueller, *Money and Banking in Medieval and Renaissance Venice*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1985), 62.

¹⁶⁵ Herrick, *Italian Comedy*, 60. See Herrick 67–68 for more on this: e.g. Ariosto's *Necromancer*, *Cassaria*.

whenever possible.¹⁶⁶ In *La Moschetta* (*The Coquette*, 1528) by Angelo Beolco, a stolen money-purse plays a pivotal role in a situation of domestic strife and male rivalry.¹⁶⁷

Pietro Aretino's *La Cortigiana* (*The Courtesan*, 1525–1542) features a character who wants to pay to learn how to become a courtesan, and a servant who extracts money.¹⁶⁸

Grazzini's *La Strega* (*The Witch*, c.1547) features a character who earns money acting as a middleman negotiating romantic relationships.¹⁶⁹ The classic characters of the parasite and of the courtesan as “unscrupulous gold digger” are featured in Niccolò Buonaparte's *La Vedova* (*The Widow*, 1568).¹⁷⁰

But rarely do these plays put ideas of what money is into question. Guarini's *L'Idropica* (*The Dropsical Lady*, 1583), which shows servants working to trick a pedant out of 200 ducats, is a possible exception.¹⁷¹ The money is the sum that Lurco requires from anyone wishing to marry his stepdaughter, and his insistence on cash comes with a chauvinistic judgment on credit:

LURCO. Traffic in women is not done on credit.

MOSCHETTA. Why not?

LURCO. Because this is a merchandise that brings repentance to him who buys it.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *La Mandragola*, in *Five Comedies from the Italian Renaissance*, trans. and ed. Laura Giannetti and Guido Ruggiero, 71–116 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2003); Herrick, *Italian Comedy*, 80.

¹⁶⁷ Angelo Beolco, *La Moschetta*, trans. Antonio Franceschetti and Kenneth R. Bartlett (Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1993). Marvin T. Herrick, *Italian Comedy in the Renaissance*, (1960; repr., Urbana: University of Illinois, 1966), 46–48.

¹⁶⁸ Pietro Aretino, *La Cortigiana*, trans. J. Douglas Campbell and Leonard G. Sbrocchi, in *Renaissance Comedy: The Italian Masters*, vol. 1, 99–203 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Herrick, *Italian Comedy*, 87.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Herrick, *Italian Comedy*, 138.

¹⁷⁰ Herrick, *Italian Comedy*, 150.

¹⁷¹ Herrick, *Italian Comedy*, 159.

¹⁷² Quoted in Herrick, *Italian Comedy*, 160.

Discussions such as this one that mention credit do not go nearly as far in theorizing finance as do English plays from the period. While money has a role in these plays, it is rarely the focus.

Another genre of Italian theater at this time was the improvised *commedia dell'arte*, which had its origins in the marketplace.¹⁷³ It is not possible to know if these plays contained precise references to types of coin and financial instruments, since only some summary outlines of the plots survive. But we do know that they did at least contain, however, general references to money and theft; and there is the stock character Pantalone, who is often represented as an old merchant or retired businessman.¹⁷⁴ The physical gestures or *lazzi* survive today as adaptations and additions on earlier versions; one example in a modern-day performance guide describes the traditional mime for money, “the thumb making little rubbing movements against the first and second fingers, which are held together.”¹⁷⁵ The stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte* were later adopted by French playwrights. Plays by Molière and Regnard clearly show roots in the plots and characters of this oral, improvised comedic tradition. Italian theater troupes had been in France since at least 1548, and their presence in Paris throughout the seventeenth century played a constitutive role in French theater.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ John Rudlin, *Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994), 23.

¹⁷⁴ I.A. Schwartz, *The Commedia dell'Arte and its Influence on French Comedy in the Seventeenth Century* (Paris: H. Samuel, 1933), 16.

¹⁷⁵ Barry Grantham, *Commedia Plays: Scenarios, Scripts, Lazzi* (London: Nick Hern, 2006).

¹⁷⁶ Schwartz, *Commedia dell'arte*, 43. The *commedia dell'arte* had an influence on Spanish playwrights as well, such as Lope de Vega. On this see Nancy L. D'Antuono, “Lope de Vega y la *commedia dell'arte*: temas y figuras,” in *Lope de Vega y los orígenes del teatro español. Actas del primero congreso internacional sobre Lope de Vega.* Madrid: EDI-6, 1981, 217-228. Quoted in Thomas E. Heck, *Commedia dell'arte: A Guide to the Primary and Secondary Literature* (New York: Garland, 1988), p. 83. Likewise, the *commedia* clearly had an influence on English plays.

Additionally, *comédie erudite* were adapted into French by Pierre de Larivey (1550–1612). Pierre de Larivey adapted economic subject matter to the French context in a series of more or less loose translations of Italian comedies. In *Les Esprits* (1579), he translated an Italian examination of greed, changing the Italian *ducats* to French livres. The play had a direct Italian model, Lorenzino de Médicis’s *Aridosia* (1536), and was likely an inspiration for Molière’s *L’Avare*.¹⁷⁷ In *Le Laquais* (1579), an adaptation of Dolce’s *Il Ragazzo* (1541), he retained the scenes in the Italian play where the servant, Catherine (as she is called in the French version) runs away from her master’s house, taking all the silverware with her. She says she knows a man who will change it into “beaux escus au soleil.”¹⁷⁸ Although this is rendered in a slightly more evocative manner in the Italian version (“cambiai gli argenti in oro”), a textual change was necessary to avoid the repetition of having her say “changer cet argent en argent.”¹⁷⁹ The choice of words also recalls a monetary reality: to illicitly change stolen silverware into currency would have required somebody willing to break the law by handling stolen goods or by making counterfeit coin. In the last scene (a monologue in the French version, while she shares the stage with another character in the Italian version), Catherine speaks to the spectators directly, suggesting that she may return the silver to her master’s house after all, but then appears to have a possible change of heart as she tells the audience to leave without waiting to find out what she will do, “pource que je ne trouve bon que soyez tous

¹⁷⁷ Pierre de Larivey, *Les Esprits*, ed. M.J. Freeman (Geneva: Droz, 1987); Madeleine Lazard, *Preface to Les Esprits*, p. 27; Aulotte, *Comédie*, 133.

¹⁷⁸ Pierre de Larivey, *Le Laquais*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Luigia Zilli (Paris: Nizet, 1987), 3.5.1457, p. 150.

¹⁷⁹ Lodovico Dolce, *Il Ragazzo*, in vol. 2 of *Commedie del Cinquecento*, ed. Ireneo Sanesi (Bari: Laterza & Figli, 1912), 3.14, p. 260.

tesmoings de ce que je veux faire de cette vaisselle.”¹⁸⁰ This somewhat ambiguous ending calls attention to the fact that she could, hypothetically, secretly change the family silverware into another form, escaping and melting down the evidence of her crime into untraceable currency—all while keeping such an unlawful and subversive act off of the stage. But while the influence of the Italian theater on the French theatrical tradition is clear, it is not the source for the rich representations of finance and credit that French theater will later showcase.

In late Renaissance England, money, and in particular credit, took the stage in a much more vivid manner than had been seen before. Recent scholarship has examined the relations between early modern English theater and economy, attesting to the rich economic and literary interest of a period which runs from about 1590 to 1620. These plays portray an advanced credit society and the perils of borrowing on interest, showing money as an area of dramatic opportunity. Critics such as Jean-Christophe Agnew, Jean Howard, Peter Grav, Ceri Sullivan, and Douglas Bruster have shown how English playwrights used theater to shape public perceptions of money and merchants. There was a correlation between the rise of theater as a commercial activity, and the increasing importance of commerce in England in the late sixteenth century, as capitalism began to develop on a new scale.¹⁸¹ Additionally, Bruster points to high inflation in the last two decades of the century as contributing to social unrest in England at the time.¹⁸² To this unstable state of affairs, he adds that London’s population as nearly doubling between

¹⁸⁰ Larivey, *Laquais* 5.5.2367–71, p. 197.

¹⁸¹ Bruster, *Drama and the Market*, 4.

¹⁸² Bruster, *Drama and the Market*, 18.

1576 and 1642 infused the city with a mass of people that contributed to, and made possible, the growth of theater.¹⁸³

In these plays, money began to be written, as it was in real life. Writing down money, in the form of accounts (such as selling on credit) or bills (such as bearer notes), was a crucial part of the English economy. Muldrew estimates that 90 percent of consumption exchanges were made on credit in England at this time.¹⁸⁴ Usury had been legalized in 1571, and between 1553 and the closing of theaters in England in 1642, at least forty-five plays had usurers as a significant character.¹⁸⁵ “Merchants of this period,” writes Sullivan, “were accustomed to risky dealing in complex fictions, including the credit of cash.”¹⁸⁶ Coins were complicated as well: thirty to forty different kinds of gold coin were in circulation in England in the late sixteenth century, and as in Renaissance France, each coin had to be appraised individually.¹⁸⁷ Sixteenth-century English merchants were well aware of the fluctuating value of coin and credit, and playwrights were, too. Howard’s study, in particular, looks at dramatizations of London debt counters as ways to examine an “emerging culture of credit and debt.”¹⁸⁸ Ben Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humor* shows, for example, the constantly borrowing Fungoso as “the poster

¹⁸³ Bruster, *Drama and the Market*, 21.

¹⁸⁴ Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 100.

¹⁸⁵ Arthur Bivins Stonex, “The Usurer in Elizabethan Drama,” *PMLA* 31, no. 2 (1916): 191n3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/456955>; Peter Grav, *Shakespeare and the Economic Imperative* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 10.

¹⁸⁶ Ceri Sullivan. *The Rhetoric of Credit: Merchants in Early Modern Writing* (Madison [NJ]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 78.

¹⁸⁷ Sullivan, *Rhetoric of Credit*, 78. Unlike most of Europe, England at this time only allowed circulation of her own coin (Lynn Muchmore, “Gerrard de Maylnes and Mercantile Economics,” *History of Political Economy* 1, no. 2 (1969): 350, doi:10.1215/00182702-1-2-336).

¹⁸⁸ Howard, *Theatre of a City*, 110.

boy for the dangers of a culture of credit.”¹⁸⁹ As Howard convincingly argues, showing these situations on stage undoubtedly had a double effect both of warning and promoting consumer culture.¹⁹⁰

Accounting practices were also developing in England during this time, bringing changing perceptions of how to value a business. Sullivan argues that “just as assignable credit instruments liberated the ethos of the merchant from his person so the striking of a trial balance divorced the value of the business from its cash and other physical assets.”¹⁹¹ To begin to value a business according to its worth on paper was a significant step in the evolution of commercial thought. Commercial language was evident in many plays and in much theatrical discourse from the time period.¹⁹² In the introduction to his *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), for example, Ben Jonson posited the relationship between playwright and spectator in the language of a bill of exchange.¹⁹³ Transactions were changing to become less personal, and Bruster writes of the “construction of subjectivity” that took place in the “increasingly anonymous center of English commerce,” visible in Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors* (1594), for example.¹⁹⁴

English theater also examined the real contemporary places of business. Gresham’s Royal Exchange, built in 1568, became a central place for English commerce as well as representations of it. The second part of Thomas Heywood’s *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (1605) portrays the difficulties of international trade and local

¹⁸⁹ Howard, *Theatre of a City*, 85.

¹⁹⁰ Howard, *Theatre of a City*, 88.

¹⁹¹ Sullivan, *Rhetoric of Credit*, 80.

¹⁹² Bruster offers a detailed study of commercial language in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, in *Drama and the Market*, 97–117.

¹⁹³ Agnew, *Worlds Apart*, 119.

¹⁹⁴ Bruster, *Drama and the Market*, 70.

exchange, as well as showing an example of very personal state finance on stage when Queen Elizabeth asks for a loan (her lender is the one who speaks the words that are the title to the play).¹⁹⁵ The play shows and celebrates Gresham's building of the Royal Exchange in London, a place where merchants could discuss their business while protected from the elements.¹⁹⁶ Sullivan examines the attitudes of merchants in the play as they lose increasingly large sums of money, arguing that "mercantile loss is seen to rival aristocratic conspicuous consumption, merchants making and losing money easily with a fine pose of indifference."¹⁹⁷ To show that they are prosperous and to assuage any doubts (since their losses are public knowledge) these merchants spend freely on more business and on charity, showing no concern at their loss. Writing about Exchange plays, Jean Howard posits that the Exchange was an "ideologically charged site" that writers used to explore the "fault lines" of the city, and notes that

while the stage Exchange makes reference to the historical Exchange, what is important is not mimetic fidelity but how the theater *re-presented* this place and made it intelligible to London's theatergoing public.¹⁹⁸

This same argument, the process of "re-presentation" in theater, can apply equally well to monetary instruments such as bills of exchange; their use, for example, is demonstrated in William Haughton's *Englishmen for my Money* (1598), a play that, as Howard advances, "Englishes" the commercial themes in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*, in vol. 1 of *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood* (1874; repr., New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), pp. 317–18.

¹⁹⁶ In France, Corneille's *Galerie du Palais* or *La Place Royale* are similar in their showcasing of urban commercial structures.

¹⁹⁷ Sullivan, *Rhetoric of Credit*, 91.

¹⁹⁸ Jean Howard, *Theater of a City*, 32.

¹⁹⁹ Howard, *Theater of a City*, 39, 42; William Haughton, *Englishmen for My Money*, in *Three Renaissance Usury Plays*, ed. Lloyd Edward Kermode (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

Perhaps one of the more well-known theatrical examinations of the credit economy, *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) is a reflection on business, credit, and obligation, and shows that in the city, business ostensibly was to be protected at the expense of community ties. Even though the community wishes to protect Antonio, they realize that if doing so were to put into question the value of a contractual agreement, trust in business transactions throughout the city would be eroded. Ultimately, it is an example of political plunder, of forced assimilation and confiscation of Shylock's assets, and of the prevalence of community values over written documents. In this portrayal of an international commercial and financial market, Shylock's hatred of Antonio stems in part from the fact that Antonio has lent money without interest, undercutting his efforts to lend for profit. He decries Antonio not just as a rival but as someone who is stupid for losing the chance to make money, "the fool that lent out money gratis."²⁰⁰ The power of the written bond between Shylock and Antonio conflicts with the community based judgment that ultimately deems it unenforceable. Katharine Eisaman Maus argues that Shylock, "unable to trust to love and generosity, [...] relies instead on contractually enforceable promises and networks of mutual material need."²⁰¹ Beyond relying upon the verbal promise, Shylock looks at the letter of what is written to make his point, insisting repeatedly on the written agreement—"So says the bond"—but the importance of the written document ultimately cedes to the imperatives of the community.²⁰² Interestingly, just as no effort is shown to verify the authenticity of the written bond, and no character

²⁰⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 1997), 3.3.2.

²⁰¹ Katharine Eisaman Maus, introduction to *The Merchant of Venice*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 1997), 1084.

calls it into question, neither is any effort made to verify the identity or credentials of Portia who poses as a judge: her credibility is based on a letter read aloud by the Duke.

Another Shakespearean examination of credit, *The Comedy of Errors*, draws many elements from Plautus's *Menaechmi* and *Amphitruo*, and reflects on the major components of lending: credit, identity, authentication, and time. The play calls into question values of personal credit, as lenders who thought they were dealing with a known friend suddenly see that their "friend" no longer recognizes them. Paper bonds are not at issue in this play, where characters conduct business based on recognition. As a consequence, the introduction of "counterfeiting" (Antipholus of Syracuse's wife Adriana uses the word) throws a wrench into the whole system since, among identical twins, it is undetectable at first glance.²⁰³ It is only by means of authentication by Emilia, mother of the twins, that the mystery is revealed. Like identity, time is of the essence in *The Comedy of Errors*, where the relationship between time and money has serious importance. Aegon is on a deadline to find 1000 marks to avoid execution; a chain of deadlines leads to the arrest of Antipholus of Ephesus. A personified time is disparaged by Dromio of Syracuse, who calls it a "bankrupt" and a thief.²⁰⁴ It is as if time, like its financial derivative, interest, is an unwanted presence, to be shunned and loathed.

Peter Grav argues that in *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare seeks to discredit the social value of the rising capitalist system, and that the playwright "seems determined to reveal the new man whose societal standing is built on wealth to be nothing more than

²⁰² *The Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.238; Maus, introduction, 1087.

²⁰³ Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2.2.169.

²⁰⁴ Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors*, 4.2.57-58.

a paper tiger.”²⁰⁵ Grav argues that “the money never really mattered in the end” because the characters’ financial differences are resolved.²⁰⁶ While this is true, it is also interesting that it is through a resolution of accounting errors that the money problem is resolved. The double case of mistaken identity in the play calls to mind the development in Renaissance business practice of double-entry accounting. Just as a single accounting error can disrupt an entire ledger, as the “errors” accumulate throughout the play, the consequences become increasingly fraught with danger, starting with beatings and leading to arrests and finally drawn swords. But just as in double-entry accounting, when the numbers are compared, the errors can be found and resolved. The play ends not only with a reunion of husband, wife, and brothers, separated for thirty-three years, but with a precise public reconciliation, in the accounting sense of the word, of who did what: which Antipholus took the gold chain, which one went to dinner with his wife, and so on.

Two other well-known plays can also be read as examinations of money and credit. Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* (1612) gets at the heart of the issue of “making money,” because it shows the true nature of the alchemical scheme: not actually turning base metals into gold, but rather, bilking gullible investors into contributing ever greater sums of money to finance the theatrically staged quest. When in presence of these investors, the search for the philosopher’s stone is conducted in a specialized language, designed to impress them into purchasing more equipment. The play also depicts counterfeiting, when the character named Subtle explores the supposed difference between “casting” pewter Dutch dollars, which he says is legal, as opposed to “coining,”

²⁰⁵ Grav, *Shakespeare*, 42.

²⁰⁶ Grav, *Shakespeare*, 53.

which is punishable by death.²⁰⁷ The main focus of the play is really upon the manipulations of language, and how talking about monetary issues can affect their value—in Sullivan’s reading, the play is about “merchants who venture their credit on profitable dealing in risky fictions.”²⁰⁸

Finally, perhaps one of the plays to deal most with usury on a spiritual level is Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* (1592). While he could have used his deal with the devil to amass all of the material wealth he wanted, the title character instead seeks to gain knowledge about the world (and ultimately to meet the most beautiful woman who ever lived), showing key elements of borrowing on credit: enjoy now, pay later. In the play’s credit agreement, Faustus writes out his contract, in blood, with a specific time delay (twenty-four years) before Lucifer is allowed to take possession of his “body and soul, flesh, blood, or goods.”²⁰⁹ While relatively little money appears in the play, the agreement is a metaphor for the dangers of usury.

Additional plays such as *Edward IV*, *The Faire Maide of the Exchange*, *Fortune by Land and Sea*, and *Eastward Ho*, to name just a few, also portray money, debt, and paper in active scenes of commercial exchange. A drive to spend in order to maintain appearances is also visible in Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*, for example. The presence of money in the new genre of English city comedies (or what Howard calls “London comedies”) was a vivid illustration of the new kinds of commercial interactions that were taking place in London. These examples demonstrate how theater was a space for

²⁰⁷ Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), 3.2.151.

²⁰⁸ Sullivan, *Rhetoric of Credit*, 121.

²⁰⁹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, in *English Drama 1580–1642*, ed. C.F. Tucker Brooke and Nathaniel Burton Paradise (Lexington,: D.C. Heath, 1933), 1.5.110.

illustrating and exploring evolutions in the ways money was seen, used, and defined. The reasons French theater used credit less at the time may be related to the different role that coins and debt had in each society. In England, a debt system had developed in part out of precious metal shortages. This led to the increased importance of honor and reputation, where it was of vital importance to maintain one's credit which meant keeping one's word, and maintaining one's reputation, at all levels of society. Yet, like in France, aristocrats on and off the stage could not always be trusted to repay their debts. At the same time, wealthy members of communities continually forgave debts to the poor; they felt this gave them grounds for respect and for applying efforts of moral reform.²¹⁰ While a similar culture of credit had not evolved to such an extent (i.e., across socioeconomic levels) in France at this time, French comic theater nevertheless cultivated and questioned ideas of respectability, honor, and trust.

Spain's importation of millions of kilograms of silver from the Americas during the sixteenth century, in combination with population increases, led to a 400% inflation in prices and wages during this time.²¹¹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the comedies written in the late sixteenth century show an acute awareness of concepts of money, inflation, and exchange value. The works of prolific playwright Félix Lope de Vega, who by the late 1580s had become the dominant author on the Spanish stage, make use of a

²¹⁰ Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Macmillan: London, 1998), 309–10.

²¹¹ Marjorie Grice-Hutchinson, *Early Economic Thought in Spain 1177–1740* (London: George Allen, 1978), 45. Although the importance of this influx can, as Sullivan notes, be overestimated. Sullivan remarks that “recent historians have argued that sixteenth century Europe wide inflation cannot be attributed solely to changes in the money supply,” citing population increases and a conversion to cash crop farming as possible reasons. Sullivan, *Rhetoric of Credit*, 81n62. Nevertheless, the Spanish importation of New World silver more than tripled existing European supplies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Grice-Hutchinson, *Early Economic Thought in Spain*, 138.

variety of monetary content.²¹² He used money extensively in his comedies as a way to put into question the contemporary system of social values. E.H. Templin writes of an “intertwining of monetary and non-monetary values” that is “a manifestation of the general intertwining of values [...] within, and despite, their traditional hierarchy.”²¹³ Templin’s study details how in these comedies, monetary themes are often combined with love, for example.²¹⁴ Love is described in terms of credit in *La Fe Rompida (Broken Trust, 1600)* when the amorous young king Felisardo, after seducing a young peasant woman, feeling guilty that he has betrayed his noble fiancée, talks about love in terms of forged metal and buying on credit.²¹⁵

Templin’s examination of Lope de Vega’s character types who deal with money shows some characters who are familiar to readers of French money plays: notably the gracioso, or comic character, who “shows a propensity for spending [which] is not inconsistent with his role as the financial conscience of his master.”²¹⁶ There are also clever female characters who “exhibit predatory instincts” and for whom “sex is secondary to money, and money is secondary to the game and test of wits and wills” such as in *El Desdén Vengado (Disdain Avenged, 1617)*.²¹⁷ The expansion of the Spanish empire, and the search for gold and silver, are also a subject of plays, such as *El nuevo mundo descubierto por Cristóbal Colón (The New World Discovered by Christopher*

²¹² Melveena McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain 1490–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 67.

²¹³ E.H. Templin, *Money in the Plays of Lope de Vega*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, vol. 38, no.1, 2.

²¹⁴ Templin, *Money in the Plays of Lope de Vega*, 3.

²¹⁵ Lope de Vega, *La fe rompida*, in vol. 11 of *Obras Completas de Lope de Vega* (Madrid: Fundación José Antonio de Castro, 1993), 22.

²¹⁶ Templin, *Money in the Plays of Lope de Vega*, 13.

²¹⁷ Templin, *Money in the Plays of Lope de Vega*, 16.

Columbus, 1614) showing an awareness of the colonial enterprise that is present in England as well, but is not so evident in French comedy.²¹⁸ But these comedies also comment on larger issues of changes in societal values in the face of a changing economic situation. Templin addresses this issue in writing about “exemplariness,” seen in comedies in “a strange get-rich-quick and get-poor-quick world, in which men are gamblers and wholesale spenders of money and of themselves, in order to maintain obligations and ideals and keep up appearances,” such as in *Las Grandezas de Alejandro* (*The Greatness of Alexander*, 1621).²¹⁹

Other authors addressed money as well. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón’s *La Verdad Sospechosa* (*The Truth Suspected*, 1619) provided a model for Corneille’s 1644 *Le Menteur*. In the Spanish play, the young lover Don Garcia, who claims to be from Chile and to possess gold mines, uses language, along with that of his valet or gracioso, that is full of monetary expressions, citing, for example, as a proverb “In gold we trust,” in a world where “money opens every door.”²²⁰ *El Burlador de Sevilla* (*The Seducer of Seville*, 1616–1630), attributed to Tirso de Molina, was a precursor to Molière’s *Festin de Pierre*, and, like the French play, revolves around questions of credit. As McKendrick writes,

[Don Juan’s] catchphrase whenever he is warned that he will one day be called to account for his crimes, “Tan largo me lo fiáis” (“You certainly allow me extended credit”—*fianza* being a financial and legal term meaning credit or bailbond) becomes the play’s leitmotif, reminding us that while Don Juan thinks time is on his side (penance, he thinks, is for the infirm and the aged) it is in fact rushing him onwards towards his doom.²²¹

²¹⁸ Templin, *Money in the Plays of Lope de Vega*, 23.

²¹⁹ Templin, *Money*, 25.

²²⁰ Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, *La Verdad Sospechosa* (Madrid: Castalia, 1999), 1.3.

²²¹ McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain*, 125.

As this brief look at these plays and Templin's study of Lope de Vega shows, in the appropriately named Golden Age of Spanish literature, theater in Spain foregrounded money, while not always in a sophisticated way, to an extent that would not been seen in France until several decades later.²²²

In these three European literary traditions, the different roles money played in the theater were tied to each society's use of money. In England, where credit and paper money had taken hold at an individual level by the Renaissance, very modern forms of money and trade were represented and celebrated in the theater. The Italian Renaissance theater, however, seemed mostly to stand by classical models of representing money, in ways similar to much of the French farcical tradition. In Spain, characters in theater were shown along with the social implications of a new monetary world, where society was destabilized by rapid inflation and changing fortunes. In the next chapter, we will see some of the ways in which French theater incorporated elements of all of these different aspects of representing money and value in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Beginning in the late sixteenth century, classical French comedy started to develop out of a variety of different genres. One of the elements which determined how comedy developed was the evolving idea of its purpose: whereas the medieval *mystère* had a religious instructional or didactic goal, comedy had no such explicit pretense. Whereas farces and *sotties* showed simple, sometimes allegorical characters, comedy increasingly endeavored to show complex characters, who could be seen to represent human traits more generally but in more realistic detail. One of the functions comedy

retained was didactic: that of showing how one should act in an increasingly modern economic world.

By the second half of the sixteenth century, as French comedy was starting to develop as a genre, plays began to deal with notions of finance, money, and credit in more complex ways. They were inspired, in part, by other European plays, as authors like Larivey brought the Italian model of comedy to the French stage, and later as Spanish models were adapted by Rotrou and Corneille. These more developed French comedies took on the longer and more refined form that would continue to gain in popularity in the seventeenth century, and also showed more complex economic situations. Some of these works, which often closely mirror the originals, provided models for treatment of monetary and financial material that later seventeenth-century authors followed.

Money was at the origins of French comedy. A creditor's threat looms in the last two acts of Jodelle's *L'Eugène* (1552), seen as the first French comedy and the harbinger of a new genre. The list of actors designates Matthieu as a "créancier" who plays an important although not central role, threatening a character with prison if he does not pay his debt. The debt is resolved when the title character, an abbot, sells Matthieu an office. He agrees to use the proceeds to cancel Guillaume's debt on the condition that he be allowed to sleep with his wife Alix.²²³ The implicit exchange of sex for money, along with the idea that a wife could be considered as an object of exchange are both reminiscent of farces; the mediation of these medieval-type exchanges through the extra

²²² In another literary form, a key characteristic of *Don Quixote* is that it parodies the tradition of the chivalresque novel, famously showing money as opposed to showing an idealized world without it.

layers of coins and venal offices lends a more contemporary economic complexity to the story.

In Jacques Grévin's *La Trésorière* (1559), another of these first French comedies, a *trésorier* and his wife are at the center of a local coin economy described in fascinating terms.²²⁴ Introduced in 1522, *rentes* or life annuities sold by the crown paid from 5-7 percent interest to their holders, and were a main element of state finance throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²²⁵ The treasurer in this play is responsible for disbursing such sums of money, for example in quarterly annuity payments to the gentlemen Loys. In fact, though, he is corrupt and leverages his position and a claimed lack of ready money in order to collect "interest." He occupies an official function, which he is presented as corrupting for personal gain. When he leaves in act 1 (giving his wife's lovers an opportunity to step in), he says it is for the king's business, business that he thinks will net him 3,000 francs.²²⁶ In act 5, Richard accuses him of having "pillé l'argent de France."²²⁷

At the same time, during the course of his business out of town, his wife demands gifts from her several lovers and does not complain when they pay in coin. In this early comedy, the interplay between coin and paper is revelatory of the early stages of banking in France, where paper serves an ambiguous role: sometimes trusted, but not as much as

²²³ Étienne Jodelle, *L'Eugène*, in vol. 1 of *Le Théâtre Français au XVI^e et au XVII^e Siècle ou Choix des Comédies les Plus Remarquables Antérieures à Molière*, Édouard Fournier, ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Laplace, Sanchez et Cie, 1873) 5.3, p. 57.

²²⁴ Jacques Grévin, *La Trésorière*, in *La Trésorière, Les Esbahis*, ed. Elisabeth Lapeyre (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1980).

²²⁵ *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, edited by E.E. Rich et. al, 376.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521087100>

²²⁶ Grévin, *Trésorière*, 1.2.158, 193.

²²⁷ Grévin, *Trésorière*, 5.1.1230.

an oral contract. And coins, in fact, can tell just as much about their payment history as could a book of accounts.

For example, one of the Trésorière's lovers is the young Protonotaire, who, no longer receiving his father's allowance, must resort to borrowing money. To do so, he turns to his servant Boniface, who takes up the classic role that servants in theatre will thrive in during the seventeenth century: finding money. He asks the Trésorière for a loan for his master, and when she obliges, he discovers that he recognizes the coins as ones his master and others had paid her in the form of gifts:

... Ils sont tous de poix,
 Je les ay eus tous pour le pris
 Que ceste dames les a pris.
 Je recognoy bien cestuy-ci,
 Et ce double ducat aussi,
 Un noble, un angelot encore:
 C'estoit pour des brasselets d'or
 Que Monsieur luy donna un jour.
 Ce demourant vient de l'amour
 Des bonnes gens de son quartier.²²⁸

Quite conceivably, the Protonotaire intends to borrow money from either the Trésorier or his wife, and pay interest, just in order to continue giving her gifts.

Another of her lovers, the gentleman Loys, is well aware that he is paying for love, but is surprised to learn he is not the only one. In his numismatic vocabulary, the coin he cites is the more valuable *écu*: "Aujourd'huy l'on n'ha plus d'amis / Si n'est la bource et les escus."²²⁹ Like the Protonotaire, he sends his servant to negotiate the terms of his loan, and in his case, of his payment due. Richard comes back with the verdict: 25 *écus* interest on each transaction. And Loys also sends along 50 *écus* in lieu of a necklace

for the Trésorier's wife, Constante. Yet he does this thinking he is her only lover: when

Richard informs him of the contrary, his attitude changes:

... Je ne suis plus
De ceux qui donnent des escuz
Pour m'entretenir en sa grace:
Je suis d'une trop noble race.²³⁰

The play ends not in a marriage but in a banquet of financial (and marital) restitution: under threat of being taken to prison by Loys, the Trésorier agrees to pay the money he owes and to repay the interest. Boniface and the Protonotaire keep the money that they had 'borrowed' but which in fact was the same money they had spent on the Trésorière. The Trésorier forgives his wife, and all gather together to celebrate: "la compagnie / Qui est ceans mangeroit bien / Le Trésorier et tout son bien."²³¹

This restitution, like others, are thus made immediately so as to be without doubt. This reflects an early Renaissance banking tradition where credit really only functioned well between merchants or bankers related by blood. Richard knows this, arguing that his own restitution ("le vin") be delivered immediately:

... J'ayme bien mieux dans ma main
Le voir que d'attendre à demain,
Car je sçay bien que les promesses
De leur naturel sont traitresses.
Parquoy, si voulez paix à moy,
Foncez argent.²³²

His master, on the other hand, recognizes that paper can work against him: although the Trésorier had promised in restitution to essentially give him his payment

²²⁸ Grévin, *Trésorière*, 2.2.523–534.

²²⁹ Grévin, *Trésorière*, 3.1.626–627.

²³⁰ Grévin, *Trésorière*, 4.3.1087–1090.

²³¹ Grévin, *Trésorière*, 5.3. 1406–1408.

twice, Loys wants to be sure that he will not at a later point use the *quittance* that he had given him to deny this deal:

Entrons doncques en la maison
Affin de ravoir ma quittance,
Car je veux du tout assurance.²³³

This double payment acts as compensation for all of the “interest” Loys had been forced to pay. That interest was calculated not at an advanced level per month and year, but on a very rough ad-hoc scale, negotiated between the two parties (via Richard in the case in the play) is really more of a cut off the top of the payment than a legitimate interest calculation. Whether the Trésorier was actually short on money and really needed to get it from his cousin, or that was just a pretext, cannot be determined from the play. Richard and Loys had agreed these terms so that Loys could remain on friendly terms with the man, in order to be with his wife.²³⁴

In this fascinating early comedy, many of the tropes for seventeenth-century money plays are laid out, albeit on a small scale. This local economy, based on sex and individual coins, resembles that of farces. As Madeleine Lazard points out, the names of the characters correspond to their social role, a “habitude farcesque.”²³⁵ Yet here already the role of the servant emerges as that character in between high and low classes, who intervenes with a knowledge of money to benefit their master (and, to an extent, themselves). And here too is a connection to a larger financial system, that of state *rentes*.

²³² Grévin, *Trésorière*, 5.1, 1291–1296.

²³³ Grévin, *Trésorière*, 5.1, 1298–1300.

²³⁴ Grévin, *Trésorière*, 1.1.100.

²³⁵ Madeleine Lazard, “Du théâtre médiéval à la comédie du XVIe siècle : continuité et rupture,” *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'Humanisme, la Réforme et la Renaissance* 44 (1997): 71, doi:10.3406/rhren.1997.2111.

As money changes over the next century and a half, these characters will be the ones to truly master it, and comedy is where they shine.

Later comedies in the sixteenth century had monetary content as well: in François d'Amboise's *Les Néapolitaines* (1584), a young Parisian merchant is advised by his servant to borrow money from a Neapolitan student, who, he heard from a banker, has just received a sum of money.²³⁶ In Rémy Belleau's *La Reconnue* (1562), the sack of Poitiers during the Wars of Religion is the backdrop to a discussion of the economic benefits of war for soldiers. Much of the play focuses on the distinction between Paris as center for economic consumption, and the provinces as a place for economic exploitation. One character, the Capitaine, has returned to Paris with both money and a young woman. The play shows Paris as a city where anything can be bought, in an early characterization of it as a place for consumers. This is shown on stage in the example of a gentleman from Poitou—the young woman's father—who is in town for a separate legal matter. At one point he considers purchasing venison to eat, and judges that he will be able to find some, declaring that “à Paris, tout pour de l'argent.”²³⁷ In Paris he is able to recover his money from the trial but he does not recover his daughter, who has fallen in love with his lawyer. Paris is thus posited as the city where everything is possible: all kinds of food, and all sorts of financial and familial redistribution.

This more complex treatment of financial and monetary matters essentially began in the Renaissance, although traces of its roots are visible in medieval farces. One of the ways in which this took place was by dealing with money as a general concept, and not

²³⁶ François d'Amboise, *Les Néapolitaines*, ed. Hilde Spiegel (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), 2.8.1314, p. 50.

just on a limited, small scale of circulation. While medieval farces most often looked at money as a token of exchange that could be used to acquire food and sex, a few of them showed more advanced ideas of a larger economic awareness that was further developed in the Renaissance. A brief look at some early French examples of this kind of treatment has provided a context for their seventeenth-century successors. The next chapter will consider the ways in which comedy in the early seventeenth century developed as a genre by incorporating an array of economic subject matter, culminating in Molière's plays which interrogate these monetary and financial concepts in a manner that is still highly relevant today.

Just as farces demonstrated to spectators how to navigate elements of the market economy, beginning in the late sixteenth century, comedies began to show the workings of an economy where consumer credit played an increasingly important role and where socioeconomic status was much less stable. These plays show a world where a new financial system was taking shape, and where new monetary instruments played a role in the economic ascent (and descent) of individuals. Building off of this background, seventeenth-century plays captured stories from real life, and by retelling them, contributed to the development of a comedic economic aesthetic which relied heavily upon new forms and uses of money. This money could be stunning in its visual appearance, novel in its material form, or notable because of who had it and how they had obtained it.

²³⁷ Rémy Belleau, *La Reconnue*, in vol. 1 of *Le Théâtre Français au XVI^e et au XVII^e Siècle*, 5.3, p. 128.

CHAPTER TWO

Money in French Comedy from 1600-1670

In the first three quarters of the seventeenth century, French playwrights brought money into a new role on the stage. While at the beginning of the century, comedy mostly avoided money, as in the case of most of Corneille's plays, plays towards the middle of the century soon began to problematize questions of debt, credit, and value. At the close of this period, Molière seized upon these examples and used them to infuse his character comedies with real-world monetary interrogations.

One reason that there were more examples of credit in English comedy may have been because comedies were produced in much lower numbers in France than in England during this time period. Whereas English and Spanish comedies were produced in large quantities around the turn of the century, the situation in France was much different. A combination of factors including civil war and competition from other genres contributed to this low production.²³⁸ The genre itself was slow to develop for the next decades as writers attempted to distance themselves from the low comedy of the farcical tradition, but had few dedicated venues in which to perform these plays. It also suffered from a 1588 edict by the Parlement de Paris forbidding representations of comedies, in effect until 1594. Colette Scherer has referred to the period from 1600–1630 as a “desert” lacking in comedic production.²³⁹ In the 1630s, production and publication of comedies

²³⁸ Madeleine Lazard, *Théâtre en France au XVIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1980), 196.

²³⁹ Colette Scherer, *Comédie et société sous Louis XIII : Corneille, Rotrou et les Autres* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1983), 18.

surged in the wake of a 1629 ordinance allowing the Comédiens du Roi to play in the Hôtel de Bourgogne.²⁴⁰

One play produced during this “desert” period was the *Comédie de Proverbes* (produced 1616; first published 1631), written, as the title suggests, almost entirely in proverbs. Quite a few of those proverbs deal with money, either using small coins in expressions (“ne pas [faire un pet] à moins de cinq sols”), comparing things or people to the value of gold (“vous vallez mieux que votre pesant d’or”), or insisting upon the dangers and prevalence of counterfeiting (“je me mettrais en quatre et ferois de la fausse monnoye pour vous”).²⁴¹ These expressions, while evocative, would nevertheless not seem out of place in the fifteenth century. One stands out, however: “un homme de paille vaut une femme d’or.”²⁴² By this time, the phrase “homme de paille” could still have its primary referent as an actual scarecrow, but it could also be a reference to the front man for financiers who wished to remain anonymous. By the early seventeenth century, the expression had a clear financial meaning. It is this type of reference, an allusion to a newly developing financial system, that began to appear increasingly often in theater at a time when French society and finance were both undergoing dramatic change.

Rotrou, Corneille, and their Contemporaries

After 1629, playwrights started bringing new life to comedic productions, including more elaborate uses of money on the stage. Perhaps because they had better

²⁴⁰ C. Scherer, *Comédie et société*, 26.

²⁴¹ Adrian de Montluc, *La Comédie de proverbes*, in *Le Théâtre français au XVIe et au XVIIe Siècle ou Choix des comédies les plus curieuses antérieures à Molière*, ed. Édouard Fournier (Paris: Laplace, Sanchez et Cie, [1874?]), 35, 42, 32.

access to purpose-built theaters, one way they enlivened their plays was by taking a more active role in dictating how actions were to be portrayed on the stage. This “*éclosion de l’écriture didascalique*” saw a large increase in the number of stage directions authors included in their plays. These *didascalies* multiplied across all genres, whereas they had been nearly absent in previous decades.²⁴³ Marc Vuillermoz’s detailed analysis of objects in plays from 1625–1650 reveals a large number of letters, swords, and clothing, but shows a relatively small presence of money, even while precious metals were very prominent in the clothing in dramatic productions.²⁴⁴ The wardrobe of a prominent married couple of actors, the Le Noirs, for example, was full of gold and silver-embroidered clothing, part of what Vuillermoz calls a “hyperbolic” movement of theater towards gold on clothing.²⁴⁵

The trend towards gold clothing recalls anthropological observations of money and value, especially those concerning objects of exchange and value in groups of people far removed from Western economic systems, where valuable objects were often primarily used as objects of adornment. Maori cloaks and axes, or kula shells, for example, share, with gold, the fact that their value as exchange object lies in their decorative function.²⁴⁶ In French theater of the first half of the seventeenth century, even as money in the form of gold coins tended to be seen somewhat less on the stage, it was increasingly present in the form of costumes. This happened at the same time that there

²⁴² Montluc, *Comédie de proverbes*, sc. 6, p. 83.

²⁴³ Marc Vuillermoz, *Le Système des objets dans le théâtre français des années 1625–1650 : Corneille, Mairat, Rotrou, Scudéry* (Geneva: Droz, 2000), 34.

²⁴⁴ Vuillermoz, *Système des objets*, 49.

²⁴⁵ Vuillermoz, *Système des objets*, 44–45.

²⁴⁶ David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 93.

was a desire among playwrights that theater represent a higher class of characters than farces had, and for whom the objects in these plays were key indicators of socioeconomic status.²⁴⁷

Another function of gold was its use, in more “serious” works, as an expression of royal power. For example, in Scudéry’s tragicomedy *Andromire* (1641), Andromire asks: “Sçais-tu . . . que de l’or d’un Throsne, on peut faire un cercueil?”²⁴⁸ The relationship between royalty and gold has an anthropological parallel in cultures that attach social status to objects of adornment, as “a king who gives away his crown is a king no longer.”²⁴⁹ More often in comedy for the time period, however, characters aspired to obtain gold rather than dreading its responsibilities.

In comedy and tragedy alike, the letter was a far more common object than gold coins. Between 1625–1650, no object was used on stage for dramatic function more than the letter.²⁵⁰ Its use on stage, often in the form of counterfeit letters, shared some of the conceptual bases with later uses of paper forms of money on the stage, such the act of using material clues to attempt to identify the true author of a letter. This is important to ideas of authentication of monetary documents: such as, for example, proving that a payment order is genuine.²⁵¹

Jean Rotrou’s *La Bague de l’Oubli*, first performed in 1629, foregrounds questions of gold and paper money by showing a letter as a means of payment. It is a

²⁴⁷ Vuillermoz, *Système des objets*, 89–91.

²⁴⁸ Georges de Scudéry, *Andromire* (Paris: Antoine de Sommerville, 1641), 2.3, p. 34; Vuillermoz, *Système des objets*, 173.

²⁴⁹ Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*, 93. See also Mauss’s 1938 essay on the category of the person, cited by Graeber here.

²⁵⁰ Vuillermoz, *Système des objets*, 181.

close adaptation of Lope de Vega's *La Sortija del Olvido* (1619), where usurpers attempt to take advantage of a king after giving him a ring that causes memory loss, their plan thwarted only by the loyal *gracioso* character (Fabrice, in Rotrou's adaptation). Rotrou retained much of the original story but eliminated some financial details, such as a cash gift that the king gives to his servants, as well as a promise of 50,000 ducats and the revenue of four or five cities to his rescuer.²⁵² Rotrou keeps the gift the king promises to Fabrice for having delivered good news. This gift is the result of a negotiation, which is an invention of Rotrou: the king having promised Fabrice "un monde" in return for his services, Fabrice asks for a slightly more tangible "royaume" or "empire," upon which the king makes a counteroffer of 2,000 ducats.²⁵³ The gift thus progresses from the metaphorical to the real, the point at which Noémie Courtès sees the money as functioning as the "signe du comique," where the play, because of its inclusion of this material element, becomes undoubtedly grounded in the comedic genre.²⁵⁴

This gift of money, though, takes on a particular form: that of a paper promise to pay which never materializes in coin. Whereas gold is a recurring theme throughout the play, in the form of the gold ring, in a notable dialogue focusing on the supposed lethal attributes of gold, and in the gold jewelry that Fabrice steals, these 2,000 ducats exists only on paper. When the king promises them, Fabrice requests a written confirmation: because, he argues, contrary to how things worked in previous reigns, the king's

²⁵¹ On the dramatic effect of using material characteristics of letters to identify their authors, see Vuillermoz, *Système des objets*, 46–47.

²⁵² Lope de Vega, *La Sortija del Olvido*, in *Obras de Lope de Vega* (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1930), 9:590–624.

²⁵³ Jean Rotrou, *La Bague de l'oubli*, in vol. 9 of *Théâtre complet*, ed. Georges Forestier (Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 2007), 2.6.400–10, pp. 142–43.

²⁵⁴ Noémie Courtès, introduction to *Bague de l'oubli*, 37–38.

financiers cannot be trusted to give it to him on the strength of his own word.²⁵⁵

Throughout the rest of the play, Fabrice attempts to get the king to sign the *ordonnance* he has prepared, so he can present it to the treasurer to receive his payment. But when he repeatedly presents the document to the king to be signed, Fabrice is cruelly disappointed. The king is under the effect of the “ring of forgetfulness,” and so, incredulous, he first rips up the document.²⁵⁶ Later, the king remembers the promise (but not his destruction of the document) and Fabrice goes to prepare a new order. Upon his return, the king is again wearing the ring and again destroys the document which Fabrice presents to him.²⁵⁷

Upset by his failure to get the money the king promised him, the frustrated Fabrice then resolves to trick the king out of wearing his ring by spreading mistrust about gold. He tells the king that gold has recently been shown to kill people who wear it, and the king, credulous under the effect of the ring, gives up his jewelry. Even before Fabrice informs him of the supposedly toxic effects of gold, the king agrees that the metal has ill effects: “Je sais que l’or peut tout dans le siècle où nous sommes, / Il est le seul sujet de tous les maux des hommes.”²⁵⁸ This commentary on gold, not found in the Spanish text, rejoins a larger commentary on gold and writing shown in the play. In the play, writing and gold together are suspect and dangerous. The ring itself, which makes the wearer lose his memory, does not rely on an effect produced by the metal, nor does it rely upon an effect intrinsic to its production: the fabrication of the ring is merely outsourced to a

²⁵⁵ Rotrou, *Bague de l’oubli*, 2.6.411–16, p. 143.

²⁵⁶ Rotrou, *Bague de l’oubli*, 2.8.518–519, pp. 151–52.

²⁵⁷ Rotrou, *Bague de l’oubli*, 3.7.836–37, p. 173.

²⁵⁸ Rotrou, *Bague de l’oubli*, 4.4.1005–06, p. 184.

goldsmith. The key to the magic effect of the ring relies rather upon an inscription written in strange characters that is placed on a piece of paper between the gold ring and its diamond stone.²⁵⁹ Once the trick is discovered and the inscription removed, the ring loses its effect.²⁶⁰

While it eliminates some gifts of money from the Spanish version (that of the king to his servants, and a final gift of money to Fabrice), Rotrou's adaptation of the play more strongly insists on the relationship between gold and paper, in both the order Fabrice needs to get his gold from the treasurer, and in the piece of paper in the king's ring, which has a power far beyond that of gold. In this play, paper is a necessary preliminary to getting gold. Fabrice needs the signed order so that the king's treasurers will pay him in coin. Without the signature, though, the promise is only as good as the king's memory (or his desire to keep his word). The king signs other documents in the play, presented to him by his scheming sister and her lover when he is under the effect of the magic ring, but he repeatedly refuses to sign Fabrice's document. In Lope de Vega's play, the king does not rip the document to pieces as he does in Rotrou's version. By invoking that image, Rotrou's version suggests a portrayal of stricter control of royal finances, the vulnerability of a king's financial promises, and quite literally the dangers of gold in the hands of the monarch. Above all, it highlights paper's role as a written record, and suggests its potential for misuse as opposed to the reliability of gold (it suggests that paper can subvert gold).

²⁵⁹ Rotrou, *Bague de l'oubli*, 1.5.208–09, p. 128.

²⁶⁰ Rotrou, *Bague de l'oubli*, 5.6.1316, p. 205.

Whereas Rotrou's play visibly foregrounded money, Pierre Corneille was to write a new kind of comedy, in which, while still acknowledging the role of money, he preferred to focus on higher issues such as love. Many of Corneille's plays relegate money to the background, even where questions of wealth are clearly relevant to the characters' situations. In his *Mélite*, likely performed late in the same year as *La Bague de l'Oubli*, Corneille wished to show a world where love was superior to money. In the play, Éraste uses forged love letters to break up the relationship between his friend Tircis, and Mélite (whom Éraste had fallen in love with first). *Mélite* (published in 1633) interrogates the relationship between wealth and value, and explores the power of paper exchanged on stage, interrogating its materiality in ways relevant to its power as a value-bearing instrument.

The characters that Corneille valorizes live up to this ideal of being above money. In his *Examen* later added to preface *Mélite*, Corneille wrote that he wanted to portray characters of a higher class than the characters of Plautus or Terence, "qui n'étaient que des marchands," and for the most part he does.²⁶¹ All of the characters in the list of actors are defined only by their relationships to each other—friend, lover, rival, brother—and not by a designator of their larger social class or role, with the exception of the Nourrice.²⁶² The Nourrice, designated only by her job, is the principal character who extolls the virtues of marrying for money. The only other character who is not described in terms of his affective link to other characters is Cliton, described in the list of characters simply as Mélite's neighbor. Appearing last on the character list, he also

²⁶¹ Pierre Corneille, *Mélite ou les Fausses lettres*, in vol. 1 of *Théâtre complet*, ed. Alain Niderst (Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 1984), p. 104.

comes out lowest in moral terms in the play. Even as Éraste perpetrates a terrible fraud which nearly causes the death of Mélite and Tirsis, he severely criticizes Cliton for accepting to help him in exchange for money. “Ces âmes du commun font tout pour de l’argent,” complains Éraste,

Et, sans prendre intérêt au dessein de personne,
Leur service et leur foi sont à qui plus leur donne;
Quand ils sont éblouis de ce traître métal,
Ils ne distinguent plus le bien d'avec le mal,
Le seul espoir du gain règle leur conscience.²⁶³

This tirade against money is one of several in the play that decry money and posit love as a truer value. Mélite explicitly prefers love to money, declaring that “le bien ne touche point un généreux courage.”²⁶⁴ Likewise, in the course of the play Tirsis renounces his planned marriage with the ugly but rich Doris in order to be with Mélite. Throughout the play, it is the Nourrice, the character representing the lower classes, who repeatedly presses characters to marry for money, not love.

As love, not money, is the focus of the play, accordingly very little coin money appears on stage. Éraste gives Cliton “dix pistoles” to help him, with the promise for more, but it is the only appearance of metal currency in the play.²⁶⁵ There is what could be considered another form of currency in the play: the paper currency of Tirsis’s sonnets and Éraste’s false letters (the importance of which is underlined in the full title of the play, *Mélite ou les Fausses Lettres*). This currency is rejected, though, because both the sonnets and letters are counterfeit. Tirsis wrote down his feelings for Mélite and

²⁶² Corneille, *Mélite*, p. 106.

²⁶³ Corneille, *Mélite*, 2.5.622–27, p. 126.

²⁶⁴ Corneille, *Mélite*, 4.1.1240, p. 145.

²⁶⁵ Corneille, *Mélite*, 2.4.506, p. 122.

originally intended to pass them off as those of Éraste, whereas Éraste falsely signed the name of Mélite to the missives he ordered be delivered to Philandre. Éraste's false letters are treacherous to those who believe them uncritically.

At the end of the play, the forger Éraste is forgiven by Mélite and Tirsis, since the letters ultimately brought the couple closer together. Whereas the traditional crime for a forger was death, here, for his forgery Éraste receives the reward of marrying Tirsis's sister, Cloris. Both the power of paper, and the consequences for those who abuse it, are minimized. Here the only character punished is Philandre, who, because of counterfeit paper, believed Mélite loved him, and ruined his relationship with Cloris. Corneille in this way relegates coin money, along with marrying for money, to lower class sentiment, and instead privileges relationships based on love. Furthermore, the play shows the potential for treachery that paper has, by showing that not only is it not to be trusted, but that those who pervert it can get away with it unpunished.

As in *Mélite*, the list of characters in Corneille's *La Veuve* (1631) is composed of many without immediately distinguishable social identities, and likewise includes a Nourrice. There are also a few servants in the character list. As in *Mélite*, the Nourrice is a character "who knows only the logic of money."²⁶⁶ She acts as a stand-in for nearly all monetary thought in the play. She plays both sides, working for both Philiste and his rival Alcidon to secure Clarice's affections, claiming to Alcidon that she is helping him "pour vous plus que pour votre argent," the first mention of money in a play that otherwise

²⁶⁶ Alain Niderst, "Notice" to Pierre Corneille, *La Veuve ou le Traître trahi*, in vol. 1 of *Théâtre complet*, ed. Alain Niderst (Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 1984), 242.

tends to avoid it.²⁶⁷ In both *Mélie* and *La Veuve*, the Nourrice was played by a man wearing a mask, which allowed the portrayal of comic, sometimes obscene gestures.²⁶⁸ The relegation of monetary logic to this kind of comic character further underlines Corneille's commitment to sideline financial values.

All of the characters who are concerned with money in *La Veuve* are portrayed negatively or as being outdated. The Nourrice sees things only in terms of financial interest. The treacherous Alcidon mentions money when he says he is going to make up a story about bribing his way into Clarice's prison.²⁶⁹ Philiste considers himself beyond money in deciding who he is going to marry, arguing that worrying about such matters is a vestige of an older generation, characterized by the reflections of his mother Crysante, who believes that "le bien en ce siècle est une grande douceur. / Étant riche on est tout."²⁷⁰ Philiste explains that

Les femmes de son âge ont ce mal ordinaire
De ne régler qu'aux biens une pareille affaire,
Un si honteux motif leur fait tout décider,
Et l'or qui les aveugle a droit de les guider.²⁷¹

Again, by associating marriage for money with an old generation not up to date with modern times, Corneille posits a new relationship between love and economy.

Even as characters in this play eschew metal money, they develop other forms of currency, and also use economic language. When Clarice gives Philiste a token of her love, she gives him a bracelet made not of gold but of her own hair (a common

²⁶⁷ Corneille, *Veuve*, 1.2.156, p. 254.

²⁶⁸ Jacques Scherer, *La Dramaturgie classique en France* (1950; repr., Paris: Nizet, 1983), 41.

²⁶⁹ Corneille, *Veuve*, 5.3.1677, p. 301.

²⁷⁰ Corneille, *Veuve*, 3.7.1086–87, p. 282.

²⁷¹ Corneille, *Veuve*, 3.3.935–38, p. 277.

occurrence in theater from this time period).²⁷² And when Doris tells her mother about how both she and Alcidon are faking their love for each other, she talks of their “fictions” as being a form of money:

Je démêle aisément toutes ses fictions;
Ainsi qu’il me les baille, ainsi je les renvoie,
Nous nous entrepayons d’une même monnoie . . .²⁷³

Doris later adds, “je lui rendais sa change.”²⁷⁴ In addition to this sort of explicit linkage of sentimental and economic language, characters employ the usual economic metaphors in talking of their love: caresses which are said to have “tant coûté,” for example—metaphors which, by their overuse, see their value diluted.²⁷⁵ As Helen Harrison notes, “words which a listener can immediately recognize as nothing other than conventional currency lose their buying power.”²⁷⁶

By relegating talk of actual money to the ranks of the Nourrice and the unsympathetic Alcidon, Corneille seems to be trying to elevate his comedy out of the rank-and-file world of coins exchanged on stage, and to reinforce the idea that only people of a lower stature are concerned with money. When monetary imagery is used in Doris’s metaphorical sense, it is to designate a false love, another less than noble use for it. The effect is that Corneille’s plays show characters who are admirable because they look to love, not money, much as the playwright in his comedy, claims to want to paint a “portrait de nos actions et de nos discours” that in fact privileges an idealized human

²⁷² Corneille, *Veuve*, 2.4.645, p. 268; Vuillermoz, *Système des objets*, 102–3.

²⁷³ Corneille, *Veuve*, 1.3.180–182, p. 254.

²⁷⁴ Corneille, *Veuve*, 3.4.1023, p. 280.

²⁷⁵ Corneille, *Veuve*, 3.8.1156, p. 284.

²⁷⁶ Helen Harrison, *Pistoles/Paroles: Money and Language in Seventeenth-Century French Comedy* (Rockwood Press: Charlottesville, 1996), 48–49.

character over monetary reality.²⁷⁷ His comedy thus provides an interesting counterpoint to that of Rotrou, and a benchmark in the relegation of monetary comedy to a supposedly lower status.

Corneille's *La Galerie du Palais* (1632) is about a commercial space. Although eschews questions of commerce from its main plot—so much so that even the public market space of the title is featured only in two acts of the play—the limited appearances of the commercial setting show purchases of goods made on credit. Negotiation (if it happens at all) and handling of coin are relegated to subordinates. When a *lingère* offers Hippolite some lace, she is picky and declines: the omnivorous commercial appetite displayed, for example, in *Pierre Pathelin* is absent here.²⁷⁸ When, later in the same scene, Dorimant expresses interest in a book, he does not pay, saying he will send “un de mes gens” to deliver the money later, his ability to buy on credit is a detachment from the experience of handling money. The scene ends with a *mercier* pleading in vain for people to buy his gloves, ribbons, and other goods.²⁷⁹ When Dorimant's squire Cléante comes by to pay for and pick up the books in act 4, the transaction is conducted without any negotiation and indeed even his asking the price seems to surprise the bookseller, who announces “Chacun le sait / Autant de quarts d'écu, c'est un marché tout fait”.²⁸⁰ In the same scene, Florice leaves with a sample for her mistress for which she is not asked to pay, and she too is allowed to buy on credit, leaving with only a promise to bring money (i.e. business) from her mistress in the future. These transactions are typical of nobles,

²⁷⁷ Corneille, *Veuve*, p. 245.

²⁷⁸ Pierre Corneille, *La Galerie du Palais*, in vol. 1 of *Théâtre complet*, ed. Alain Niderst (Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 1984), 1.5.127, p. 326.

²⁷⁹ Corneille, *Galerie du Palais*, 1.7.195, p. 328.

who would not carry money with them, who would delegate the details of their purchases to their subordinates, and whose social standing allowed them to purchase on credit.

While this play highlights merchandise and the bickering of merchants between themselves, as well as strategies for selling to customers, it nearly completely avoids the question of coin itself. It does address questions of quality of merchandise: Florice is worried about a fabric which “en moins de trois savons rien n’y tient presque plus.”²⁸¹ Interestingly, in the editions from 1660–1682, Hippolite insists on knowing the price (“Ne les vantez point tant, et dites-nous le prix”), an insistence on the monetary aspect of the transaction which is not present in the original edition.²⁸² (There is another instance of this kind of strengthening of monetary language in the 1660–82 versions of *Mélite*, where Éraste’s lines are changed to talk about the “faux attrait de l’or.”)²⁸³ The original focus on quality instead of price indicates both a desire to show characters who are above money, and the revised version is a concession, perhaps, to a world where money does in fact count.

Although money is an important issue in Corneille’s *La Suivante* (1633), it is talked about in vague terms. There are no coins, only characters with “biens,” a way of speaking of money that was used to show quantities a step above the lower class dealings in small coins in farces.²⁸⁴ Characters seem to consider themselves above money, and reject offers of it, or of goods. Amarinte, for example, rebuffs the offer of a diamond to

²⁸⁰ Corneille, *Galerie du Palais*, 4.11.1459–60, p. 367.

²⁸¹ Corneille, *Galerie du Palais*, 1.6.115, p. 325.

²⁸² Corneille, *Galerie du Palais*, 2:911.

²⁸³ Corneille, *Mélite*, 2:868.

²⁸⁴ Pierre Corneille, *La Suivante*, in vol. 1 of *Théâtre complet*, 1.8.303, p. 401; Harrison, *Pistoles/Paroles*, 107.

get her to talk: “Aux filles de ma sorte,” she says, “il suffit de la foi.”²⁸⁵ In this play, “merit” reigns victorious over “peu de biens,” in the case of Florame, in both his opinion and that of Daphnis.²⁸⁶ The only objects of exchange are women: as soon as Florame and Daphnis are publicly promised to each other by Geraste, Geraste asks for Florise in exchange. “Elle vous est acquise,” Florame promises, but Geraste, like a shrewd buyer, insists that she be fetched immediately.²⁸⁷ Amarinte, in the play’s closing monologue, reinforces this idea of purchase: “Viellard, qui de ta fille achètes une femme.”²⁸⁸ Again, it is the unlikeable, morally dubious character (like the Nourrice in earlier plays) who refuses to see love as a factor in marriage, and can only admit interest for money, thinking that Daphnis stole her men with wealth.²⁸⁹

Wealth is similarly moved to the background in *La Place royale* (1637). There are, though, elements of the play which show distrust in paper. A fake letter, and a later fake marriage promise, here function as dramatic devices. Alidor’s fake letter is torn up by Angélique: “Vous traitez du papier avec trop de rigueur,” he complains.²⁹⁰ His retort is typical of Corneillian treatment of paper and of coin money: in this early seventeenth-century comedy, money can be essential to the intrigue of characters and plot, but monetary details are not.

Other authors started to portray the character of the financier in more detail at this time. In Discret’s *Alizon* (1636), an old rich bourgeois man named Karolu, who is listed

²⁸⁵ Corneille, *Suivante*, 3.4.780, p. 417.

²⁸⁶ Corneille, *Suivante*, 3.8.891, p. 421; 4.6.1180, p. 430.

²⁸⁷ Corneille, *Suivante*, 5.8.1638–39, p. 443.

²⁸⁸ Corneille, *Suivante*, 5.9.1693, p. 444.

²⁸⁹ Corneille, *Suivante*, 5.9.1669–72, p. 444.

²⁹⁰ Corneille, *La Place royale ou L'Amoureux extravagant*, in vol. 1 of *Théâtre complet*, 2.2.387, p. 467.

in the character list as a “vieil Bourgeois de Paris,” plays a sort of intermediary who has a hand in both state finance and usury.²⁹¹ As Fleurie describes him,

Il donne des advis, fait vendre des offices,
Il est gaigne denier, il poursuit des procez,
Et fait prester argent à rente ou interests.²⁹²

To “donner un advis” meant to propose a revenue gaining plan to the crown: anything from proposing a new type of tax to reporting somebody who could be paying more tax. An early seventeenth-century French particularity which saw a great deal of growth in the second two decades of the century, the practice led to a hodgepodge system of state-approved revenue schemes where the *donneur d’avis*—the person who proposed the scheme—was often eligible to receive a share in the profits.²⁹³ To refer to a character as a “donneur des advis” in 1636 was not an innocent gesture: the growth of this practice had reached a peak in the previous decade, and the 1635 was the year in which the largest amount (in total sum) of “advis” had been issued.²⁹⁴ The activities of these financial mercenaries had not gone unnoticed.

Karolu’s status as “bourgeois,” which was the legal status of many financial “hommes de paille,” contributes to his ambiguous nature.²⁹⁵ He meets with “partisans” to do business, explaining, “c’est la que joliment se gaigne la pecune / Alors qu’en peu de temps on veut faire fortune.”²⁹⁶ Showing this character and how he makes money in finance in part fulfills the promises of the colporteur earlier in the play, who peddled

²⁹¹ L.C. Discret, *Alizon*, ed. J.-D. Biard (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1972), 10.

²⁹² Discret, *Alizon*, 1.4.286–88, p. 20.

²⁹³ Bayard, *Monde des financiers*, 89.

²⁹⁴ Bayard, *Monde des financiers*, 88.

²⁹⁵ Dent, *Crisis in Finance*, 121.

²⁹⁶ Discret, *Alizon*, 1.4.277–78, p. 20.

books to Fleurie and the spectators promising such contents as “la methode [...] pour gaigner force escus.”²⁹⁷

Karolu’s nature as a new sort of financial man is symbolized in the play’s duel scene which pits him against an old soldier. He arrives to the dueling ground proud of the fact that he is not wearing chain mail, but using only “une main de papier” (a group of 25 sheets of paper folded together, according to Furetière) to protect his “entrailles.”²⁹⁸

Karolu represents a new sort of creature: a member of the newly rising financial class who is defined by his multiple interests (a hand in many pots) and who here stakes his livelihood on a new kind of wealth, virtual money, based on paper, and quite literally his life on paper as well.

This play was also updated to reflect changes in the monetary world. “Deux testons” from the 1637 first edition was changed to read “un Louis de trente sols” in the 1664 printing. The teston, already an old coin but still in circulation in the first half of the sixteenth century, would have dated the play too much.²⁹⁹

A few years later, Scarron’s *L’Héritier Ridicule* (1648) took a different approach to examining money, interrogating the value of precious metals coming from South America. The play also frames the question of marriage economically, starting in the first act, as Hélène bemoans the fact that Don Diègue is not rich enough to make a suitable husband for her, complaining that

ce n’est pas pour rien aujourd’huy qu’on se donne,
Dom Diègue est fort pauvre, estant ce que je suis,
Je veux vivre en la Cour, sans bien je ne le puis:

²⁹⁷ Discret, *Alizon*, 1.2.75, p. 13.

²⁹⁸ Discret, *Alizon*, 5.3.1619–20, p. 81. Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel*, 2:521.

²⁹⁹ Discret, *Alizon*, pp. 56, 99, 103, 118.

Mon bien est mediocre, & j'aime la dépençe.³⁰⁰

Dom Diègue is supposedly in line to receive an inheritance from a rich uncle, said to be governor of Peru. His valet Filipin, announcing the news, says that his uncle's *commis* has sent

en argent monnoyé diamants, & lingots,
Cent mille beaux écus, trente jeunes magots,
Autant de perroquets de cachou plein deux quaiſſes,
Bref trois vaiſſeaux chargez de toutes les richesses
Que possedoit vostre oncle!³⁰¹

Later, Filipin, posing as the rich Dom Pedro de Buffalos, enumerates these items one by one to tempt Héléne. Filipin suggests that his master should pretend not to receive the inheritance, in order to assess Héléne's intentions: if she is no longer interested, he can choose the loving Léonor instead, and, in the words of Filipin, "changer vostre argent faux en or."³⁰² He tries it, and she falls for the trap, no longer wishing to marry Dom Diègue, instead interested in the rich but crude Buffalos. When in the last act Filipin meets Héléne again, he pretexts that he has "only" ten thousand ducats because of a hold-up at the royal mint: the king is sending all of his money abroad. (Filipin refers to "Patagons," a Spanish coin introduced in the seventeenth century, and whose name alludes to the South American origin of the silver.) Héléne seems to accept this excuse and even provides explanation to justify it ("Cette guerre de Flandre enlève tout l'argent").³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Scarron, *Héritier ridicule*, 1.5, p. 23.

³⁰¹ Scarron, *Héritier ridicule*, 2.2, p. 37. The play was a moderate but lasting success, with 32 performances between 1648–1680.

³⁰² Scarron, *Héritier ridicule*, 2.5, p. 51.

³⁰³ Scarron, *Héritier ridicule*, 5.2, p. 115.

Several elements of the play stand out as commentaries on financial and social structures: first, the role of Dom Diègue's valet Filipin, who successfully imitates a rich nobleman to the point where Hélène nearly marries him, blind to his crudeness because she thinks he is rich. Here, a man needs nothing other than money to be seen as marriage material for a certain kind of woman, and financial values displace traditional social ones. Scarron's commentary on "real" versus "false" also speaks to the reasons for which Dom Père (played by Filipin) is not able to access his money readily. Even though he claimed to have three boatloads of treasure, he contends that he needs to have it minted before it can be used. Scarron thus draws attention to a fundamental concept developing in the seventeenth century: that even what appears valuable, such as bars of gold, needs to be converted into an exchangeable form before it can be actually used.

As the century progressed, comedy started to represent money in ways more directly related to a changing Parisian economic reality, where social status and economic status were beginning to be intertwined in a more complicated manner. Boisrobert's *La Belle Plaideuse* (1655) delves deep into matters of love, money, and class, showing that falling in love in Paris can be expensive, and that social ascension requires careful financial planning. The play, a key source for Molière's *L'Avare*, seems to be the first to have used the device of the son unwittingly trying to borrow money from his father, which was apparently inspired by real events.³⁰⁴ In the play, this transaction involves a loan for 15,000 livres, of which only 3,000 is in coin, and the rest in items such as "perroquets," "canons," and "guenons" that are due to arrive on a ship from Cape

³⁰⁴ Lancaster, *History*, 3:53.

Verde.³⁰⁵ Not a great deal can be discerned about the performance of this play; there is little information to be found apart from an entry in the Parfaict brothers' *Histoire du Théâtre Français*, who give the performance date as 1654 and who judge that, apart from the scenes which were thought to have inspired Molière, the play is “du plus médiocre.”³⁰⁶ For our purposes though, the play is important because it shows usury on stage in a manner that is (supposedly) directly inspired from real life, providing the basis for a series of derivative works. Tallemant des Réaux writes that Boisrobert was inspired by an incident that had taken place between the Président de Bersy and his son, who, as in *La Belle Plaideuse*, as well as in Molière's *L'Avare*, found each other in the awkward situation of unexpected familial usury.³⁰⁷ The incorporation of real life material into the play was not without controversy: Tallemant seems to indicate that Boisrobert agreed to modify his performance of the play in order not to offend Bersy; nevertheless, the play in its printed form appears to include much of the original story.

The play is striking in that it shows key elements of later seventeenth-century plays involving women who trick men out of money. It also shows operations of usury in detail, as well as examining their social implications. There are discussions about the dangers of borrowing on credit, and perhaps most strikingly from a monetary or numismatic standpoint, there are clear pronouncements and judgments on the value of different kinds of currency. Filipin is excited at the prospect of receiving “ces Louys tout

³⁰⁵ François le Métel Boisrobert, *La Belle plaideuse* (Paris: Guillaume de Luyne, 1655), 4.2, p. 70.

³⁰⁶ Claude Parfaict and François Parfaict, *Histoire du théâtre français, depuis son origine jusqu'à présent* . . . (Paris: Mercier and Saillant, 1745), 8:69.

³⁰⁷ Tallemant de Réaux, *Historiettes*, ed. Antoine Adam (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 1:408–9.

neufs sortans de la monnoye,” an image that contrasts sharply with Ergaste’s evocation of what he considers to be his father’s “escus moisis que l’on met à couvert.”³⁰⁸

In the play, Corinne, her mother Argine, and her Argine’s maid Nicette have come to Paris from Brittany in order for Argine to win a separation from her husband and obtain the countship of their land in Brittany. Corinne and Ergaste fall in love, but Ergaste’s father is wary of the woman he spends his money on. Ergaste’s complaints to his father are those of the typical teenager: he has no money for food or clothes, “tandis qu’avec éclat j’en voy d’autres parestre.”³⁰⁹ A prying neighbor suggests that Amidor should solve his problems by giving his son an allowance, in order to keep him from resorting to borrowing money (Amidor retorts that his son would just spend it all).³¹⁰

The father is in fact saving for the son’s benefit, to augment his *rente* by a thousand francs a year, for only one purpose: “pour t’eslever sur ta condition.”³¹¹ In contrast to later plays featuring misers, Amidor’s actions and words can be read as consistent with his desire for his son to have a higher financial and social rank. Amidor plans and saves to make this ascension possible through money, and so he is thrilled when his son ends up marrying a countess. In contrast to other plays focusing on the character of the miser, Amidor’s actions can be regarded as simply prudent means of staying on this course of ascension, and not necessarily as greed or love for money *en soi*.

The play is also about rampant consumerism and deceptive appearances, set in part in the Foire Saint-Germain, where Amidor arranges to catch his son in the act of

³⁰⁸ Boisrobert, *Belle plaideuse*, 1.8, p. 18.

³⁰⁹ Boisrobert, *Belle plaideuse* 1.8, p. 18.

³¹⁰ Boisrobert, *Belle plaideuse* 4.7, p. 82.

³¹¹ Boisrobert, *Belle plaideuse* 1.8, p. 18.

meeting his predatory mistress. There as in later in the play, Corinne's use of a mask disguises her true identity. In a richly evocative scene, the Foire emerges as a place of chance encounters, and illicit meetings to discuss loans and money. Corinne, while wearing her mask, makes Amidor believe that she is a countess, and lets him overhear a conversation with an associate where she talks of being owed several thousand écus in bills from merchants.³¹²

Another key theme throughout the play is the dominance of cash. Corinne, her mother Argine, and their maid Nicette are on the search throughout the whole play for "argent contant," cold hard cash. They need money both to make progress in their trial ("Tantost nos chiens de Clercs, je croy qu'ils estoient yvres, / Montoient nos contredits à quatre vingt dix [li]vres") and to support their living costs in Paris while they plead their case.³¹³ Nicette tells the aspiring lover Ergaste that they need cash, and not the songs he has been writing in an attempt to seduce Corinne:

Comme dit ma maitresse, il nous faut du solide.
Sur vous beaux bouts rimez dont on s'est bien mocqué,
Nous ne trouuerions pas credit d'un sold marqué.
Cependant il faut viure, entretenir mesnage,
Ce qui ne se fait point avec ce badinage.³¹⁴

The insufficiency of writing is emphasized throughout the play. In the first scene, Corinne demands of her lover a written marriage promise to satisfy her mother before she will allow the marriage. Quickly though, it becomes clear that what they need is not just the promise, but money. At the same time, the dangers of credit are underlined, as on several occasions Amidor berates his son for falling victim to credit, bemoaning "le peril

³¹² Boisrobert, *Belle plaideuse*, 5.5, p. 96.

³¹³ Boisrobert, *Belle plaideuse* 1.3, p. 5.

[...] où je te voy tombé.”³¹⁵ This play, a reflection on consumerism, social climbing, the importance of cash and the dangers of credit, is striking in how it foregrounds themes which will consistently reappear later in the century. Reputations and social status turn on money, and appearances cannot be trusted. At the end of the play, Corinne (disguised as a countess) pretends to cite all of her potential sources of revenue: money due to her from bankers and merchants, in the form of bills which she claims to have.³¹⁶ These are the sort of bills which will be shown monetized and circulating in the next decade in theater. In this play, though, the only appearance which can be trusted is that powerful image of the freshly minted gold *louis d’or*—those “Louys tout neufs sortans de la monnoye.”³¹⁷

Chappuzeau’s *L’Avaro Duppé ou l’Homme de Paille* (1663) is the next in the series of plays focusing on the character of the miser. The title alludes to a “straw man” which referred to an intermediary in financial affairs who allowed the real participants in transactions to remain anonymous. The play’s straw man episode is quite literal though. Along with some other elements, it comes from a Spanish picaresque novel, *La Garduña de Sevilla, y Anzuelo de las Bolsas* (1642), by Alonso de Castillo Solórzano, of which a French translation by Douville, Boisrobert’s brother, was published in 1661.³¹⁸ In the Spanish text, the straw man episode appears not to allude to any financial symbolism, because the Spanish word for straw man does not have the secondary meaning it does in French or English (in Spanish, the Italian word *testaferro* is used for this purpose). While

³¹⁴ Boisrobert, *Belle plaideuse* 1.4, p. 7.

³¹⁵ Boisrobert, *Belle plaideuse* 1.8, p. 18.

³¹⁶ Boisrobert, *Belle plaideuse*, 5.5, p. 98.

³¹⁷ Boisrobert, *Belle plaideuse* 1.8, p. 19.

³¹⁸ Lancaster, *History*, 3:307; Alonso de Castillo Solórzano, *La Fouyne de Seville ou l’Hameçon des bourses*, trans. Antoine Le Métel d’Ouille (Paris: Billaine, 1661).

Chappuzeau's play features very few financial transactions, and the scarecrow is, in fact, just a man made out of straw, its satirical significance seems clear, given that several scenes can be read as oblique or direct attacks upon financiers.

Chappuzeau used a combination of sources to create a play that mixed character comedy, subtle financial satire, and contemporary social commentary. The play's monetary plot bears some things in common with Plautus's *Aulularia*, which had been translated into French in 1580.³¹⁹ Chappuzeau, though, interprets the play into a seventeenth-century financial context. Like in *Aulularia*, the main character, Crispin, receives a sum of money which he guards jealously throughout most of the play. In Chappuzeau's version, the money comes from an inheritance from a man Crispin defines as his friend, a rich Portuguese man whom he calls "Monsieur le Juif."³²⁰

While in Molière's adaptation, lending would be crucial, here financial operations have almost no importance. The objects of value are precious stones and gold coins inside the bag; in order to cast doubts on the value of the bundle Crispin says they are just "vieux papiers" which are clearly meant to sound unimportant (unlike *Le Tartuffe*, for example, where the papers in a *cassette* are of crucial importance, or a later play like *Turcaret* where papers can have clear financial importance).³²¹ And Chappuzeau also grounds himself in contemporary social happenings. In a nod to the real-life Bersy story as told by Tallemant and used in *La Belle Plaideuse*, love makes a greedy man melt:

³¹⁹ *L'Avaricieux*, trans. J. de Cahaignes (quoted in Lazard, *Le Théâtre en France au XVIIe siècle*, 160). For a detailed study of the history of reception of the play by Plautus see Katrin Eberle, *Plautus' Aulularia in Frankreich - die Rezeption der Figur des Geizigen von Pierre de Larivey bis Albert Camus* (Narr, Tübingen, 2006)

³²⁰ Samuel Chappuzeau, *L'Avare duppé ou l'Homme de paille* (Paris: Guillaume de Luyne, 1663), 2.2, p. 26.

³²¹ Chappuzeau, *Avare duppé*, 2.8, p. 47.

Crispin spares no expense in ordering a full meal from the local cabaret when he discovers Ruffine has come to his house.³²²

Yet the play's extended metaphor of the "homme de paille" adds a financial twist to this story. Crispin plans to bury his gold, but can barely get it into his house because of its weight. He thinks that his rich neighbor Geronte, who wants to marry his daughter, is really after his money. Ultimately Lycaste is successful in playing a clever trick that succeeds in getting the money: he sets up the straw man outside Crispin's house, and beats on the door repeatedly until Crispin, furious, fires a gun at what he thinks is an intruder. When the man falls, seemingly dead, Crispin's gardener convinces him they must flee before the archers arrive to find the murderer. Crispin can only take a small box full of gold, and Geronte's nephew Lycaste takes advantage of the confusion to steal the remaining treasure. When Crispin discovers the plot, Lycaste agrees to return the money but only to Geronte's daughter whom he wishes to marry. Like in the real world, a "straw man" takes the brunt of attacks while someone else makes off with the money.

Usury is evoked only vaguely in the play. Indirectly, however, a few lines stand out as extradiegetic commentary on financiers. When, at the beginning of the second act, Crispin is fighting with two *crocheteurs* who want to help him carry his bundle, they act offended that he does not want their help. The first one asks

Avez-vous peur que nous vous le mangeons?
 J'avons porté souvent jusqu'à des millions
 Chez les gros partizans on vous en peut répondre
 Mais depuis quelque temps ils nous laissent morfondre.³²³

³²² Chappuzeau, *Avare duppé*, 2.9, p. 53.

³²³ Chappuzeau, *Avare duppé*, 2.1, p. 25.

This seems to be a commentary indicating that times are difficult for financiers: perhaps a reference to the trials of the 1661 *Chambre de Justice*. When, at the beginning of act 3, the stage directions indicate that Philippin is to come on stage carrying a straw man, the scene opens onto a tirade ostensibly addressed to his master Lycaste, but in which he appears to address a larger audience. In it, Philippin says that greedy straw men should be burned and attacks money-hoarders:

Les biens ne sont donnez que pour les employer;
Ceux qui ne donnent rien ne sont bons qu'à noyer.³²⁴

Chappuzeau's *Avare Duppé* combines elements of a classical plot with some of the innovations introduced in Boisrobert's play, all while adding even more explicit references to the contemporary French financial class. While it is not as well-known as Molière's play, it is important in its own right (and not merely as a source for *L'Avare*) because of its clear and innovative financial satirical content.

Molière

Although other mid-century works featured financial content in a variety of original and creatively adapted plots, Molière is the only seventeenth-century French comic playwright apart from Corneille whose works have survived in most canonical lists of French literature. Molière built some of his brilliant character comedy upon a number of economic themes that used classical and early modern sources in innovative ways, by introducing a contemporary financial and monetary vocabulary.

³²⁴ Chappuzeau, *Avare duppé*, 3.1, p. 59.

L'Avare (1668) shares much with the *Aulularia* and the earlier seventeenth century plays modeled upon it.³²⁵ Like in *L'Avare duppé*, the main character is a widower. In *L'Avare*, Frosine asks for money for an upcoming trial; in *L'Avare duppé*, Ruffine pretexts a trial to get closer to Crispin. And as in *L'Avare duppé*, the main character screams bloody murder when his treasure is stolen. Molière keeps the twist on the provenance of the money introduced by Boisrobert: instead of just finding a cache of hidden gold in his house, Harpagon has amassed his treasure by moneylending. Molière takes this theme of usury a step further though, by examining the character traits associated with it. In addition to showing and satirizing the operations of a greedy moneylender who hides his activity from the public and from his family under the guise of a miserly outward appearance, Molière also explores the question of how one can be a usurer.

He does this primarily through an investigation of the character of Harpagon, whose relationship with money is verbalized in a series of monologues expressing his internal worry, which he struggles to quell as soon as he notices someone around him, such as in the beginning of the play. Indeed, his words precede his appearance on stage, as they are read aloud on the stage in act 2 in the form of his written debt conditions, before Harpagon himself appears. The conditions go from ones his son Cléante is willing to accept (the borrower must be from a good family) to ones that shock him (the high interest rate).

³²⁵ Jean-Baptiste Poquelin de Molière, *L'Avare*, in vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Georges Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

As in Boisrobert's *Belle Plaideuse*, the play shows interest rate calculations on stage, but they are made more explicit to the audience. If the operations need interpretation in the twenty-first century, it is worth noting that they also did in the seventeenth century. The first two interest rates probably would have been easily interpreted by a seventeenth-century spectator: Harpagon first promises the money "au denier dix-huit," which is to say at about 5.5% interest (for every 18 deniers, one denier would be due in interest). He then adds the condition, pretexting additional borrowing costs on his end, that the borrower would be responsible for covering those costs "du denier cinq," in other words at an additional 20% interest. Calculating the total cost is somewhat more complex though, then as today, because it involves compounding one interest rate on top of the other. It is for this reason that Cléante, in his outraged response, cries out simply "c'est plus qu'au denier quatre," which La Flèche confirms in the next line, an operation which both calls attention to the usurious rate, and relieves the spectators of the duty of any mental math.

Harpagon's activity as a moneylender compounds his character as a miser, and is rather remarkable in 1668 Paris. Some critics have considered "miser" and "moneylender" to go naturally together but the two are not the same.³²⁶ Usurious moneylending was traditionally the domain of Jews; for a bourgeois citizen to be involved in the activity would have been both illegal and socially reprehensible, and so the choice to retain this element from Boisrobert's plot is significant. In *Aulularia*, Euclio discovers gold in his house, and then shows himself to be a miser: the discovery of the

treasure reveals his character, his genetic tendency to greed. In *L'Avare*, however, Harpagon represents greed unchecked: he does not wait to find a treasure, but instead he amasses one. This, we can imagine, is the trait of a truly greedy person. Because of its roots in the Boisrobert story, which itself goes back supposedly to a true story, the characterization has even more verisimilitude.

The reasons for Harpagon's desire for secrecy are several: he wants to maintain an image of poverty so he is not obligated to give his money away to the needy, and he does not want to be a target for thieves. Then there is the important social stigma attached to moneylending: Harpagon thus represents something in between the Jewish moneylender, not often visible in French theater, and the financier, who operates behind various intermediaries to hide his true identity—and after the 1661 *Chambre de Justice*, the idea of the financier as official scapegoat would still have been fresh in the minds of spectators. Some have argued that Harpagon's greed is a form of resistance to death.³²⁷ When Harpagon discovers his money has been stolen, he cries out “Au voleur! Au voleur! À l'assassin.” Molière's text includes the word “assassin” which was not found in Plautus's original, though it did appear in the French translation by the abbé de Marolles.³²⁸ While this association between theft and death certainly seems valid, I would propose that Harpagon's love for money might have more to do with life: that of the growth of his money and its circulation within the city.

³²⁶ Jean-Marie Apostolides, for example, equates a miser to a usurer in “Molière and the Sociology of Exchange,” trans. Alice Musick McLean, *Critical Inquiry* 14, no. 3 (1988): 480, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343700>.

³²⁷ Michael S. Koppisch, “‘Til Death Do Them Part: Love, Greed, and Rivalry in Molière's *L'Avare*,” *L'Esprit Créateur* 36, no. 1 (1996): 46.

³²⁸ Jürgen von Stackelberg, “Molière et Marolles: À Propos des sources d'*Amphitryon* et de *L'Avare*,” *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 92, no. 4 (1992): 684–85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40530927>.

Although he likes his coins, it is important to note that Harpagon is not a hoarder.³²⁹ He only has the sum of gold at his house because it was recently returned to him by a borrower. The financial action of the play turns upon his desire to find someone to whom he can lend his stash of gold. In this way, his greed is focused not on retaining a pile of physical gold, but upon a larger and more abstract fortune that is circulating in Paris. This abstraction requires a degree of professional accounting that Plautus's Euclio did not have, although it is interesting that even Euclio could not bear to keep his gold in his house. It is certainly true that Harpagon's actions would not have left him subject to condemnations against hoarding: in fact, by putting money into the hands of young spenders he would have been doing a service to the Parisian economy.

It is also clear from the text that Harpagon feels that having his money lent out is in fact the safest place for it: his attestation that he is "bienheureux qui a tout son fait bien placé" and his suggestion that his son invest his money "afin de le trouver un jour" both indicate a belief not necessarily just that fortunes should be increased, but that they are fundamentally safer when invested than when in the home—or, in the case of Cléante, on his body in the form of expensive clothes ("je mets sur moi tout l'argent que je gagne").³³⁰ Harpagon loves the money he has so much that he wants to make it grow. He cannot bear to keep it at home, unproductive, and considers that by lending it out, even while separating himself from it, he counterbalances the risk of losing it with the potential gain. In the sense that he can bear to be parted with his money, he really is not a miser after all.

³²⁹ Unlike Euclio. A distinction also noted by David Konstan, in *Greek Comedy and Ideology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 158.

This anxiety provides for a fuller explanation of the peculiar conditions he brings to the lending agreement, where his miserliness is codified. His substitution of seized furniture for money allows him to profit more from the agreement (as he is getting more value for the furniture than he would have by selling it). His additional interest charge, pretexted by having to borrow the money from someone else, would ostensibly place him in the role of bourgeois intermediary to the world of moneylenders whom young men from good families might otherwise wish to avoid. But as the spectators know, the money and therefore the greed are clearly his.

And although Harpagon carefully weighs his coins (he refers to his “bons Louis d’or, et pistoles bien trébuchantes”) he is not as adept at weighing words: in fact, he delegates the written word to others.³³¹ He dictates the terms of the loan agreement to La Flèche, and encourages the Commissaire to take down Maitre Jacques’ statement.³³² At the end of the play his dismissal of these efforts—“Nous n’avons que faire de vos écritures”—is a denial of the power of writing.³³³

Molière’s *Le Festin de pierre* (1665), like *L’Avare*, also examines value, and also relies upon an established literary tradition which has its roots outside France. In addition to telling a story about a young gentleman who abuses his social and financial credit, it also tells a monetary story, firmly affixing the character of the Spanish spendthrift noble to the French theatrical tradition. While his spending is emphasized over the course of the play, so is a particular relationship to money and to new forms of it. Dom Juan lives on

³³⁰ Molière, *Avare*, 1.4, pp. 13, 15.

³³¹ Molière, *Avare*, 5.1, p. 61.

³³² Molière, *Avare*, 5.2, p. 63.

³³³ Molière, *Avare*, 5.6, p. 73.

credit with merchants, his servant, and the rest of society; he is shown paying cash to only one person (the pauper). He notably refuses to pay his creditor Dimanche (or, as some have argued, he does pay him, but in words and caresses).³³⁴ Dom Juan is not the only of Molière's characters to refuse to pay: in the *Précieuses ridicules* (1659), Mascarille attempts to refuse to pay the porters, with a contrived air of nonchalance since he wants to appear noble.³³⁵ Similarly, Dom Juan's detachment from monetary (and matrimonial) debt conveys an air of nobility—that is to say, of being a member of that social class who could not be pursued in court by lower classes for unpaid debts.

In the famous scene where Dom Juan does pay, he uses gold in a visually striking manner. Indeed, while several studies have examined the nature of the exchange relationships in *Dom Juan*, it is worth taking a closer look at the actual media of exchange in the play.³³⁶ Particularly striking is the contrast between the small copper or billon coins used by Lucas and Pierrot as they make a bet over whether or not they see men drowning of “quatre pièces tapées et cinq sols en doubles,” and the gold louis d'or that Dom Juan gives to the pauper later in the play.

Dom Juan's famous reliance upon the simple reason of mathematical certainty in place of faith (“Je crois que deux et deux font quatre, Sganarelle et que quatre et quatre font huit”) evokes a world where personal, local relationships are replaced with detached,

³³⁴ Michel Serres, “Le Don de Dom Juan ou la naissance de la comédie,” *Critique* 24, no. 250 (March 1968): 253.

³³⁵ “Comment, coquin, demander de l'argent à une personne de ma qualité?” Molière, *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, in vol. 1 of *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1.7, p. 14.

³³⁶ See Michel Serres, “Le Don de Dom Juan”; and Force, *Molière*, for example.

calculated ones.³³⁷ Such a reading suggests a bankruptcy of traditional signs of social value. In this way, it also refers to the transition from traditional smaller money in the play—made of copper or billon—with relatively new money: the louis d’or, a coin introduced in 1640, made in the new manner with minting machinery instead of being hammered, stamped with the image of the king, whose introduction in a clean, uniform coin visually represented the growing central royal power over smaller, local forms of payment. There is also an important difference in value between the two coins. The gold louis d’or would have been worth the equivalent of many of the smaller coins that Pierrot and Charlotte use. Pierrot vaunts his “sols en doubles”: at a rate of 10 livres per louis d’or, each louis d’or would have been worth at least 100 of those smaller coins. The small money had a clear implication: it was peasant money.

Those not-so-precious metals in the shipwreck scene contrast with the gold embroidery on Dom Juan’s clothing (Sganarelle mentions his “habit bien doré”), which provides the peasant Pierrot with an instant visual definition of Dom Juan’s social status, leading him to deduce that he must be “queuque gros gros Monsieur, car il a du dor à son habit tout depuis l’haut jusque en bas.”³³⁸ Although he took his clothes off to dry upon reaching land, Dom Juan gets dressed again in front of Pierrot, who is fascinated with the complexity and stylishness of his courtly attire.³³⁹ Just as the gold of a coin would indicate its superior value from afar, the gold on the clothing of a nobleman served as a socioeconomic identifying sign. As the peasants in the play later learn, however,

³³⁷ Jean-Baptiste Poquelin de Molière, *Le Festin de pierre*, in vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes*, 3.1, p. 875; Larry W. Riggs, “Dom Juan and Harpagon: Molière’s Symbiotic Twin Archetypes of Modernity,” *Papers on Seventeenth Century French Literature* 26, no. 51 (1999): 408.

³³⁸ Molière, *Festin de pierre*, 1.2, p. 854; 2.1, p. 860.

noblemen, like coins, could hide a true value worth far less than outward appearances would indicate.

In this way, the play is also about promises made and broken: Dom Juan's marriage promise to Charlotte; which by accepting means that she breaks her promise to Pierrot ("Ça n'y fait rien," she tells him), and which he later breaks, and his simultaneous promise to Mathurine, which he does not keep either.³⁴⁰ It is about the debts he runs away from, like his promise to pay Monsieur Dimanche.³⁴¹ It is about the familial promises broken, such as Dom Juan's promise to his father that he will change his ways.³⁴² The one promise Dom Juan keeps is his promise to the Statue that he will go to dinner with him (even in the seventeenth century, food has currency in theater).³⁴³ The promises in the play call to mind financial promises, like those which constitute the basis of paper money (a promise to pay) as well as the implicit promise of coin money (that somebody will want to exchange it for goods). Dom Juan himself attaches a financial vocabulary to his promises, asking Sganarelle: "tu prends pour de bon argent ce que je viens de dire . . . ?"³⁴⁴

Molière's *Le Tartuffe* (1669), which features little money in the form of coins, nevertheless also examines questions of value and appearance, calling to mind the human equivalent of counterfeiting, the work of the con artist. The cassette full of coins in *L'Avare* is replaced with one filled with paper: sensitive documents of a political nature.

³³⁹ Molière, *Festin de pierre*, 2.1, p. 861.

³⁴⁰ Molière, *Festin de pierre*, 2.3, p. 867.

³⁴¹ Molière, *Festin de pierre*, 4.3, p. 887.

³⁴² Molière, *Festin de pierre*, 5.1, p. 895.

³⁴³ Molière, *Festin de pierre*, 4.8, p. 894. ; see also Serres, "Don de Dom Juan," 254, 262. As Serres notes, every character keeps their feast promises.

³⁴⁴ Molière, *Festin de pierre*, 5.2, p. 897.

Much of the action of the play turns upon an inheritance that Orgon signs over to Tartuffe which needs to be confirmed, in the end of act 3, by a written contract (“Allons vite en dresser un Écrit”).³⁴⁵ The power of writing is affirmed throughout the play: in the marriage contract that Orgon presents to Mariane, for example (“Je porte, en ce Contrat, de quoi vous faire rire, / Et vous savez déjà ce que cela veut dire”).³⁴⁶ Much of the action of the play focuses on the discrepancy between what Orgon sees and what he hears: he cannot believe his ears (the complaints of Cléante or Elmire, for example) and he can barely believe his eyes when he witnesses Tartuffe’s attempt to seduce Elmire. In a play where visual and oral deceit are rampant, the written contract stands as a powerful bond.

Part of what separates *Le Tartuffe* from earlier plays with economic content is the nature of the gift that Orgon gives to Tartuffe. He calls it a “donation” (“la donation m’embarrasse l’esprit”).³⁴⁷ It is interesting because it is one of the few spontaneous gifts that come to mind in comic theater up until this point—most often, an inheritance is the result of a son or daughter suddenly discovering a long-lost parent. Here, the terms of the gift seem to employ some of the same vocabulary, as Orgon says to Tartuffe that he is “un bon et franc Ami, que pour Gendre je prends.”³⁴⁸

Le Tartuffe is thus revolutionary not because it presents money in a particularly strong way but because it problematizes the very nature of value itself. The transfer of inheritance from rightful heir to interloper is symbolic of the transfer from nobility to newly wealthy, mirroring the allusions of disruption in the political undertones of the

³⁴⁵ Molière, *Le Tartuffe*, in vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes*, 3.7.1183, p. 157.

³⁴⁶ Molière, *Tartuffe*, 4.2.1227–28, p. 160.

³⁴⁷ Molière, *Tartuffe*, 4.8.1578, p. 172.

³⁴⁸ Molière, *Tartuffe*, 3.7.1179, p. 157.

troubles of the Fronde. Additionally, the power of paper—the marriage contract, the “donation” that Orgon considers he cannot back down from (he speaks about it as if it were a *fait accompli*)—is presented here in a binding way that had not been before in French comedy. Perhaps most strikingly, the intervention of state justice at the end of the play to save Orgon from financial ruin is impressively clear (“Nous vivons sous un Prince ennemi de la fraude”).³⁴⁹ The king is the one who has the power to break a contract and to absolve him of his crimes:

D'un souverain pouvoir il brise les liens
Du Contrat qui lui fait un don de tous vos biens,
Et vous pardonne enfin cette offense secrète
Où vous a, d'un Ami, fait tomber la retraite;³⁵⁰

This is a long way from the “qui me paiera mes écritures” of *L'Avare*. It is the imposition or the recognition of a state-sponsored system of trust: the implementation of a market authority of sorts. As Georges Forestier notes, at the time, it was legally admissible for a “donation” contract to be canceled for reasons of ingratitude.³⁵¹ Here that power is directly symbolized by the royal agent.

The most important sum of money that actually appears in the play are the 1000 louis that Valère brings Orgon when his house is being seized. With urgency, he offers to help Orgon escape the threat of justice looming because of the political nature of the papers. It is not just the money, but also the ready carriage and the offer of a safe place to stay that Valère brings which are of capital importance to an escaping potential political

³⁴⁹ Molière, *Tartuffe*, 5.7.1906, p. 188.

³⁵⁰ Molière, *Tartuffe*, 5.7.1935–38, p. 189.

³⁵¹ Molière, *Tartuffe*, 1407n17.

prisoner.³⁵² This very real sum of money contrasts with that mentioned by the aptly named Monsieur Loyal: “Oui, Monsieur, je sais que pour un million / Vous ne voudriez pas faire rébellion.”³⁵³ A million was certainly a large sum of money at the time: to put it into perspective, Nicolas Fouquet upon his arrest had just under 1.5 million in cash on hand.³⁵⁴

Molière’s *La Comtesse d’Escarbagnas* (1672) is the only one of his plays to explicitly feature a financier as a character. Monsieur Harpin is listed as “receveur des tailles,” an ambiguous designation which makes his exact economic rank difficult to determine. He could be anything from a relatively low-level figure to someone who commanded considerably greater resources. Julie complains to the countess that a tax collector is a disappointment, compared to a viscount (“La chute est grande”).³⁵⁵ His role in the play is mainly limited to his complaints that the countess is accepting his gifts while really wanting to court the viscount.

In the history of the representation of money in seventeenth century French theater, Molière’s theater occupies a particular place: it problematized questions of debt, obligation, and lust for money for the first time on a large scale, by giving an indication of the universal qualities of those characters who act upon monetary issues.³⁵⁶ At the same time, he never directly attacked the financial class. As a businessman, Molière was successful, running the theater for which he wrote and acted. Given the proximity of his

³⁵² Molière, *Tartuffe*, 4.6.1850, p. 186.

³⁵³ Molière, *Tartuffe*, 5.4.1763–64, p. 182.

³⁵⁴ Daniel Dessert, *Fouquet* (Paris: Fayard, 1987), 353.

³⁵⁵ Molière, *La Comtesse d’Escarbagnas*, in vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes*, 1.2, p. 1027.

³⁵⁶ Some money also appears in *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (1671), where the rusing valet manages to extract money from G ronte, who first wants to have Scapin sell clothing in order to raise funds (similar to Harpagon’s loan agreement in *L’Avare*).

royal patronage, his comedy had to point at larger issues, not specific people. In the following decades, comedic authors would aim at more precise targets.

Comedy succeeded in portraying not just the way in which money was used between individuals, but the larger way in which it was conceived. State finance, after all, is a form of money, and one that was being created for the first time in seventeenth-century France in a centralized manner. Plays like Chappuzeau's *Avare duppé* not only showed money changing hands, they showed the kind of person, a new creature, who was the handler and amasser of that money: somewhere in between bourgeois and noble, somewhere in between detestable and inspiring in his social ascension.

The remaining chapters will focus on the evolving role of money in theater in the following four decades, as it was shown in the hands of financiers, usurers, con artists and social climbers. As money increasingly took on the form of paper, it also more easily made the transition from the hands of the nobility to those of rising rich. As money was represented in different ways and detached from its traditional appearance, it mirrored socioeconomic changes in France, and accompanied the unprecedented rise in popularity of comedic theater there.

CHAPTER THREE

Money in French Comedy, 1670–1684

By the beginning of the 1670s, the successors of Molière were starting to take the stage. The 1660s had marked a turning point in theatrical representations of money in France, and the following decade saw an expansion in the complexity and implications of how financial transactions were shown. The vilification and purge of the financial class during the four years of the 1661 Chamber of Justice, which saw the scapegoating of Nicolas Fouquet, was in the recent past, and France was becoming engaged in a path to mercantilism and colonial exchange to a greater extent than ever before. Harpin, the financier character in *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* (1671), is not presented in great detail, yet his presence is indicative of new developments in financial comedy. In the years following Molière's comedies of manners, a number of comedies examined issues of money and finance in a new light. They examined a variety of forms of both paper and coin money, and showed the increasing importance of financial knowledge in a world where paper instruments were becoming more common.

This chapter will examine eight plays from 1670–1683, written by members of this sometimes lesser-known new generation of authors who wrote in Molière's last years and in those following his death: Noël Hauteroche, Jacques Robbe, Charles (Chevillet) Champmeslé, Jean Donneau de Visé, Thomas Corneille and Edmé Boursault. The plays chosen are emblematic in their treatment of developments in the financial system, as well as in their examination of the interplay between money and a changing social order.

Guy Spielmann, in his insightful study of fin de règne comedy, invokes a need to redefine ideas of theatrical genre for this period, as increasingly one of “total spectacle,” in the Opera in particular and emulated to some extent by other troupes.³⁵⁷ The power of grand displays and visual effects had grown from previous decades to be an impressive and encompassing form of entertainment. Molière’s 1671 tragicomedy *Psyché*, for example, features machines descending from the “sky,” various characters moving on and off-stage via machines, and, at one point, called for 300 characters to be suspended in clouds above the stage.³⁵⁸ There was a decided focus on the visual during these years of theater across all genres, and I will argue that as an elite audience was watching these plays they were also witnessing the visual construction of a monetary imaginary.

Two main themes dominate these plays: first, the evolving role of paper and credit as a substitute for traditional bearers of value such as coins, and second, the growing monetization of nobility and the necessity of carefully examining the credentials of those who claimed it. All of these representations of value are subject to evaluation: just as characters are shown judging the social importance of nobility, monetary instruments are carefully examined and assessed. The economic decline of the nobility in the seventeenth century was closely linked to the rise in power of a bourgeois financial class. When financial instruments were shown in theater in the hands of these newly powerful individuals, the social consequences of the rise in power of the financial class were made apparent. In an increasingly complex monetary world, the interactions between the financial class and an aristocracy in decline form the crux of these plays.

³⁵⁷ Spielmann, *Jeu*, 45.

³⁵⁸ Lancaster, *History* 3:523.

For a member of the bourgeoisie, entering the nobility had a positive effect on social prestige, but was financially favorable as well: nobles were exempt from paying the *taille*. Robbe's *La Rapinière* (1682) explores the increasing reach of indirect taxes that affected all classes, showing renegotiations in the value of both nobility and money. Hauteroche's *Le Deuil* (1672) examines how the value of nobility is reevaluated to reflect one's financial worth, and provides a good example of the rags-to-riches myth that endured over the next decades. Donneau de Visé and Thomas Corneille's *La Pierre philosophe* (1681) shows a similar reevaluation of the value of nobility, and the search for new wealth. Jean-Marie Apostolidès has examined the ways in which Molière's theater exposed the contradictions between a general economy based on accumulation and a political order based on spending.³⁵⁹ This next generation of money plays continues to explore this theme, showing characters from the bourgeois class who aspire to enter the nobility, and who have a different view on money than their desired aristocratic brethren. The first section of this chapter will examine how these three plays in particular show a reevaluation of the role of nobility, as characters privilege money over social status.

Plays from this period also show a consumer financial world where the negotiation of credit markets and the use of paper takes on a growing importance. Donneau de Visé's *Les Intrigues de la lotterie* (1670) shows how paper lottery tickets start to stand in for objects of value, and how they begin to circulate: an important step in the transition of the currency imaginary from coin to paper. The second section of this

³⁵⁹ Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le prince sacrifié : Théâtre et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 137.

chapter will examine how plays show systems created and run by individuals who exploit information and monetary knowledge for personal gain, as well as the particular role that paper plays within those systems.

Finally, a trio of plays show larger systems at work. Champmeslé's *Le Parisien* (1682) shows a consumer credit system at odds with traditional systems of value, in the context of the newly reinvigorated Indies trade. His *La Rue Saint-Denys* (1682) shows how contractual frameworks can be used to create the appearance of wealth. Last, Boursault's *Mercure Galant* (1683) gives another picture of an information network, and further develops the technical and imaginary problematics at stake with new uses of paper. This final section will show how these plays inscribe their subjects in a financial and information system larger than one run by just one character, and how they show the importance of being able to navigate a large and interconnected economic world. Above all, this chapter will show how theater, as a shared space of representation and of mutually recognized artifice, was the ideal venue for imagining the changing roles of social status, and the growing difference between how currency appeared and how it was assessed.

While many plays throughout the seventeenth century showed the traditional role of nobility in decline, the first three plays to be examined here show particularly well the extent to which characters replace traditional social values with monetary ones. They no longer respect the traditional class hierarchy, privileging wealth instead. They transform traditional social value into monetary form. One of the main operations they use to turn

social status into money is through taxation. The figure of the tax collector emerges as one who converts traditional values such as food, land, and titles into money.

The first dramatic examination of the tax collector to be considered here had a precedent in Molière's work. Hauteroche's one-act *Le Deuil* (1672) examines questions of greed and hoarding in ways which recall Molière's *L'Avare*, exploring and further advancing questions of money and nobility, as well as interrogating the form of value that an inheritance takes between father and son. One of the main characters of *Le Deuil*, Jaquemin, is described in the character list as a farmer and tax collector: the "Fermier & Receveur de Pirante."³⁶⁰ Like Molière's designation of Harpin as a "receveur des tailles" in *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, this indication shows, as Spielmann notes, the incorporation of the financial class into the available repertoire of theatrical characters in French comedy. As Tzonev notes, and as we have seen, financial characters had had a role in French comedy since at least Grévin's 1558 *La Trésorière*.³⁶¹ The details of Jaquemin's role in *Le Deuil* are, however, presented as significantly more developed and complex than those of previous financial characters, including Molière's Harpin, even while Jaquemin's function is on a smaller scale. As Pirante's *receveur*, Jaquemin's job is to convert assets such as rented land into monetary income for his employer, and this conversion of value, in parallel with the assessment of his own value, is a main focus of the play.

³⁶⁰ Noël Lebreton de Hauteroche, *Le Deuil*, in *Oeuvres de Monsieur Hauteroche* (The Hague: Adrian Moetjens, 1683 [1682]). (Play has independent pagination within larger volume; citations here are to act, scene, and page).

³⁶¹ Spielmann, *Jeu*, 104.

The play's protagonist, young Timante, pretends that his father Pirante has died in order to trick Jaquemin into paying him a sum that was due to Pirante. In keeping with that tradition of comedies earlier in the century that posited a son wanting to obtain money from a father who is unwilling to part with it, Timante's valet Crispin attributes Pirante's reluctance to greed, refers to him as "vostre avare de Pere," "un franc avare," and "un vray prosne-misere."³⁶² Of course, what Timante and Crispin are truly upset about is that Pirante will not finance a lavish, spendthrift lifestyle. What they call Pirante's greed could also be seen as financial responsibility, or thrift. Although he possesses farms and collects revenue like an aristocrat, he does not appear to want to spend in a conspicuous way. Timante's fraudulent transaction, both a theft of his future inheritance and a transgression against the frugal values of his father, thus has parallels to the motivations of Cléante in *L'Avare*.

The farm transaction that Timante negotiates is perhaps the most detailed look at this sort of finance in theater up to this date. For Jaquemin is a *fermier* in the first sense of the word: his income depends on the production of the grain farms he operates for Pirante. He complains that he has been paying too much rent when "depuis soixante & quatre, / C'est misere, & les Grains sont de nulle valeur."³⁶³ Crispin and Timante are prepared to reduce Jaquemin's rent, a contract for long-term income, in order to procure their own short term gain: the payment of a large "pot de vin" which because of its size—a hundred Louis—surprises Jaquemin.³⁶⁴ The two scammers are eager to get the

³⁶² Hauteroche, *Deuil*, 1.1, p. 4.; 1.14, p. 35.

³⁶³ Hauteroche, *Deuil*, 1.5, p. 19.

³⁶⁴ A "pot de vin" did not necessarily have a negative connotation in ancien régime France; it was traditional at the conclusion of a negotiation. Here, the high amount implies suspicious dealings.

contract signed, so instead of going to the notary as Jaquemin asks, they suggest instead simply adding a clause to the current lease guaranteeing the rent reduction. By negotiating this lease in such favorable terms for Jaquemin, Timante converts his father's goods into short term cash at a disadvantageous rate.

Just as proving one's nobility could require significant genealogical research in archives, proving financial transactions also necessitated examining written evidence. The payment methods that had been in place between Jaquemin and Pirante attest to the importance of keeping a paper trail in an increasingly complicated financial world. Jaquemin, upon being told that Pirante died without saying a word, is troubled when he realizes he never obtained a receipt for three payments he made, and which he worries might have gone unrecorded. Crispin, after first registering feigned surprise at Jaquemin's poor business practices ("Vous avez fait des Paymens sans Quittance!"), reassures him that the payments were received. The gesture, along with the quickly agreed renewal of Jaquemin's farm lease, is only a ruse to put Jaquemin at ease before persuading him to issue the last payment directly to Timante.³⁶⁵

On stage, Jaquemin gives the money to Timante and accounts for it. Timante also adjusts the lease contract on stage, writing in the amount he has received. Jaquemin then reads it aloud. Everything is done in an orderly fashion. Just as previously Crispin had drawn attention to the fact that Jaquemin had received payments without getting a receipt, this very public act of writing out a detailed receipt points to the importance of good payment practices. The insistence on paper receipts, and the shock registered at their absence is characteristic of a financial world where keeping a paper trail becomes a

necessary fact of life, even if business is being conducted between two people who know each other well. The progression from personal dealings to impersonal ones passes through these kinds of instruments (paper receipts) that are intended to assuage any uncertainty about future events, but which also call into account traditional notions of trust (for if Jaquemin had not previously demanded receipts for his payments, it was because he trusted Pirante).

While Timante's motivations seem rather clear (he wants to acquire money in order to spend it like a young spendthrift noble), a different relationship between money and nobility is posited in this play concerning Jaquemin, who has risen up through the ranks and, because of his wealth, can be considered by some characters to have as much social status as a noble. Timante and Crispin, for example, agree that for some, Jaquemin's wealth seems to make up for his lack of a good family name, although his social value is somewhat diminished by his greed. Their discussion of the relationship between wealth and nobility indicates a criticism of a class of newly wealthy individuals who buy titles of nobility for themselves. Timante argues that

. . . Jaquemin, quoy qu'il soit sans naissance,
A l'avarice pres, est Homme d'importance;
Il est le Cocq du Bourg, connu pour un Crésus,
Et possède du moins cinquante mille écus;
Cela répare assez le défaut de rang.

CRISPIN. Peste,
Puis qu'il a tant de bien, il est noble de reste:
Combien de soy-disans Chevaliers & Marquis,
Se targuent sottement de Noblesse à Paris,
Dont en s'emmarquisant la plus haute Noblesse,
A seulement pour Titre une grande richesse,
Sans cela leur naissance est Basse & sans éclat,

³⁶⁵ Hauteroche, *Deuil*, 1.5, p. 16.

Et leur bien en un mot, fait tout leur Marquisat:

TIMANTE.
 Si l'on n'a d'argent on n'est pas honneste homme,
 Il en faut pour paroistre.

CRISPIN. Aussi pour en avoir,
 Il n'est ressort honteux qu'on ne fasse mouvoir.
 Loix, justice, équité, pudeur, vertu severe,
 Par tout au plus offrant on n'attend que l'enchere;
 Et je ne sçache point d'honneur si bien placé,
 Dont on ne vienne à bout dès qu'on a financé.³⁶⁶

Titles in this sense become another type of currency, but one not to be taken at face value. This long discussion between master and servant of new members of the nobility who bought titles points a sharp accusation at the newly moneyed, newly titled class. Although Jaquemin is described as having started off as a servant in Pirante's household before working his way up to being a financier, despite his origins, his acquired status is such that Pirante approves (after the fact) the illicit marriage that he learns has taken place between Timante and Jaquemin's daughter, Babette.³⁶⁷

The play ends on this marriage, which is not seen on stage. There is no reckoning for the son who faked his father's death, and he is in fact forgiven: Pirante seems content to accept that his son has married his tax collector's daughter. Nicomede supposes that this is because Jaquemin is rich, even though throughout the play, Jaquemin still refuses to admit that he has any money—he even claims that the 100 louis of *pot de vin* he was asked to pay made him have to resort to borrowing money.³⁶⁸ Issues that once would have been large problems, such as marrying between classes, or a son stealing from his

³⁶⁶ Hauteroche, *Deuil*, 1.4, p. 11–12. “Financer” here means “to pay for.”

³⁶⁷ Hauteroche, *Deuil*, 1.5, p. 15; 1.14, p. 37.

father, are here posited as sins that can be quickly forgiven and forgotten. The play thus ends on an ambiguous note as class divisions seem to have become less relevant: the lesson, if there is one, is that frugality has its rewards, and that money can make up for a low birth. Indeed, by positing the unimportance of family origins in favor of ready cash, the play shows that wealth, as long as it is verified and documented, takes precedence over class.

While Jaquemin managed actual grain-producing farms, the main character of Jacques Robbe's *L'Intéressé ou La Rapinière* (1682) is a tax farmer, who made his money from the circulation of goods through the customs gates he controls. In addition to showing this financial operation, the play explores the changing role of nobility across two axes: both in the sense of the increasing power of commoner characters who, having started from nothing, became rich; and in the sense of the increasingly tight financial grip of the corrupt tax farmer on the public, and in particular on the nobility, through the spread of taxation. At the same time, the play examines that taxation mechanism itself along with the parallel economy it tries to co-opt.

The play is set in Italy. Most of the other characters in the play are Italian, but the title character is a Frenchman who has spent the last twenty years in exile in Italy. In the first scene, Fernand and Dorante realize that he is the son of the famous Rapinière, a reference to the corrupt Le Mans police official from Scarron's *Roman Comique* (1651) "dont je lisois encor la semaine dernière," says Fernand, "la ridicule histoire & la haute

³⁶⁸ Hauteroche, *Deuil*, 1.8, p. 22.

valeur.”³⁶⁹ In this expository scene, the play’s Rapinière is designated as the heir to the “voleur” of Scarron’s story, and intertextually inscribed in a French context.

Read as a document of fiscal history, *La Rapinière* is a story of creeping taxation. In one scene, the title character wants to change the tax system so that bourgeois residents would be required to pay taxes on the wine that they bring in from their own properties outside the city. La Rapinière proposes that instead of trying to change the laws, they simply make the technically exempt residents go from office to office, insisting they get their paperwork redone at each one until they finally pay the tax out of frustration.³⁷⁰

La Rapinière is also about social ascent, particularly visible in the case of the title character’s apprentice. La Roche is an orphan who was adopted by La Rapinière, put into boarding school, then appointed to serve as a *laquais* for Madame Griffon, then to the same position for Monsieur Griffon, and finally to be his *valet de chambre*. He was then married to the chambermaid, and given the job of *Controlleur* as a wedding gift, then made *Receveur* “pour l’amour d’elle” (his wife).³⁷¹ La Roche was able to ascend to the financial class because he found a patron interested in grooming him (in addition to using him as a convenient way to keep his chambermaid wife available for his own amorous pursuits).

While La Rapinière is a successful member of the financial class who has risen to the level of a *fermier général*, a high ranking tax officer, Dorante is the product of a marriage between the daughter of a rich *partisan* and a gentleman with little money,

³⁶⁹ Jacques Robbe [Barquebois, pseud.], *L’Intéressé ou La Rapinière* (Paris: Estienne Lucas, 1683), 1.1, p. 6. It is an interesting intertextual parallel: in Scarron’s book, “La Rappinière” helps in the production of a play by the actors passing through town.

³⁷⁰ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 4.5, p. 73.

whose father wished to protect himself from the financial class by which he felt threatened.³⁷² After Dorante's father died in battle, his mother chose La Rapinière as her son's guardian (*tuteur*). Thus Dorante's grandfather and guardian are both financiers.

This is just the backstory, however, to the play's main focus, which is a detailed look at the fiscal operations of La Rapinière. He runs a network of sub-farms that he leases out to smaller-scale tax farmers. When one of these farmers, Le Blanc, complains that he is unable to earn enough money to pay for the farm, his complaint gives some hint as to the size of La Rapinière's operation: he says he pays to the "Grand bureau," the central taxation office, 20,000 écus each term.³⁷³ La Rapinière is thus of significantly greater financial stature than Jaquemin in *Le Deuil*, whose total wealth was estimated at a still-impressive 50,000 écus.

With the context of his large tax empire established, several scenes show the detailed operations of one of the customs gates that La Rapinière runs. There, he instructs his deputies to inspect everyone and everything passing through, so that he can attempt to levy duties on them. These customs gate activities show the close relationship between money and food or other products deemed taxable. La Roche, reporting on his collections for the day, says that he has collected 30 écus, but also makes an account of the "chapons, poulets, oeufs, fruits" he has seized.³⁷⁴ The emphasis on the value of food and wine points to the continued existence of an economy based on food, which, like in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century farces, plays a parallel role to the monetary economy. It also shows

³⁷¹ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 4.6, p. 76–7.

³⁷² Robbe, *Rapinière*, 1.1, p. 4.

³⁷³ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 1.5, p. 16.

³⁷⁴ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 2.3, p. 31.

the very fundamental level at which the impact of tax collection is felt; La Roche's cries of "Saisissons, saisissons" resonate throughout the play, as do many scenes of seizure of valuable goods, showing the increasingly invasive power of tax farmers.³⁷⁵

If medieval farces represented food and sex as items that could serve as transactional objects for barter, *La Rapinière* shows them as something more: items which are subject to taxation as they pass through the city gates. The food economy present in medieval farces, from wine, to bread, to roasted chickens, is here monetized. Those items are no longer shown as barter material, but as bearers of value to be classified, regulated, and taxed. This is the creeping reach of taxation, which in the hands of La Rapinière increasingly moves towards the upper classes of society who were normally considered exempt. Throughout the play, various characters such as a match seller, a baker, and a vinegar maker are stopped and taxed by his deputies. The exemption for nobility is alluded to in a scene when a meat roaster pretending to be nobleman, hoping to evade inspection by riding in a carriage, is stopped by La Roche and Jasmin. Although he claims to be returning from a hunt, he is quickly found out by the two tax agents who demand a bribe from him.³⁷⁶ This shakedown, or "tour de bâton," was a way of extracting bribes from guilty parties, without necessarily confiscating merchandise.

While La Rapinière is not able to collect a share of all of the bribes his deputies collect, in general he exhibits a ruthless market mentality, and his love for money dominates all other emotions. From his hurried dismissal of Le Blanc's problems (he warns the sub-farmer to pay, threatening to send the agents of justice after him if he does

³⁷⁵ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 3.4, p. 53.

³⁷⁶ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 5.2, p. 85.

not), to his later attempts at seduction, he is portrayed as a cold-hearted usurer. It is particularly in this attitude that we see his desire to sublimate the sexual economy with that of the monetary. While on a walk with Isabelle, whom he is trying to seduce, and Léonore, he dismisses their enjoyment of the pleasures of nature, and instead argues to them that money is the ultimate pleasure: “[le plaisir] du gain doit seul faire tous nos desirs.”³⁷⁷

La Rapinière’s main concern regarding money is to spend as little as possible. For him, money is something to be earned and saved. He criticizes those who desire richly decorated and furnished apartments, insisting to Léonore that

... tout cela n’est fait que pour des folles,
 Qui ne sçachant combien l’argent coûte à gagner,
 Ne sçavent pas aussi comme il faut l’épargner.³⁷⁸

Furthermore, he describes the nobility as spendthrifts who depend on men such as himself to afford their lavish lifestyles: “Vous sçavez comme moi, que ce n’est qu’à nos bourses, / Que tous vos beaux Marquis ont toutes leurs ressources.”³⁷⁹ La Rapinière here rejects a “noble” idea of a lifestyle based upon spending, instead clearly positing what he considers the terms for success: saving money. Members of court society were obliged to spend money to maintain appearances, but La Rapinière is certainly not a figure who feels he needs to make his way at court.

For while La Rapinière throughout the play vaunts the merit of his own savings and what he considers to be a self-made socioeconomic ascent, it is also evident that the success of his career relies upon corruption on one hand, and miserliness on the other.

³⁷⁷ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 1.8, p. 23.

³⁷⁸ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 2.4, p. 34.

Miserliness, though, involves keeping money. Beyond considerations of how to amass money, *La Rapinière* addresses several other contemporary monetary worries, one of which was the insecurity inherent in transporting currency. In order to try to arrange a meeting between Fernand and *La Rapinière*, for example, Dorante has the former use the pretext that he is going away on a journey and needs somewhere safe to keep his money.³⁸⁰ This lesson in financial insecurity is driven home in the next scene when a baker who has come into town to sell his wares sees that his cash box in danger during Jasmin's inspection at the customs gate. Jasmin verbally denies wanting a bribe, but gestures to suggest that he would accept money in exchange for letting the baker go—as seen in a stage indication in the 1683 edition, “Il luy fait signe de donner de l'argent.”³⁸¹ The rest of the scene is a detailed bribery/extortion scene, as Jasmin and *La Roche* have the baker reveal the contents of his pockets. They even ask him if the coins he is producing are legitimate, addressing another contemporary monetary insecurity: “Ce Ducat est-il bon?” *La Roche* asks; “Et cette piastre au moins, pese-t'elle?” Jasmin asks.³⁸² After they carefully evaluate the quality of the coins, they let the baker go, confiscating his case, where they discover a variety of luxury goods hidden under his loaves of bread, which they keep for themselves. *La Roche* jubilantly takes inventory:

Ah, le galant miroir! Ah, le beau passement!
Le joli coffre!

JASMIN. C'est un carré de toilette,
Tout garni de bijoux.

³⁷⁹ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 3.1, p. 46.

³⁸⁰ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 2.5, p. 37.

³⁸¹ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 2.6, p. 39.

³⁸² Robbe, *Rapinière*, 2.6, p. 40.

LA ROCHE. La belle cassolette!
 Par ma foy je ne vis jamais rien de si beau.
 Quel crime, de porter cela dans un Bureau! *à part*³⁸³

By insisting that it was “criminal” to try to get these luxury goods past the customs gate, La Roche was perhaps technically right as the goods were undeclared, but he expresses a comic level of moral self-justification.

Thus the play particularly focuses on the insecurities of value: the difficulty in keeping property, coin, and paper safe. One of the most striking scenes in *La Rapinière*’s examinations of written documents is the counterfeit marriage contract that Dorante arranges, because it shows how contracts can be fraudulently manipulated, and then considered as binding. As Dorante explains,

Avec le bon secours d’un honnête Notaire,
 Quoi qu’il passe entre nous, pour un peu scélérat,
 A qui j’ai ce matin, fait dresser un Contract,
 Entre vous & ma soeur; j’en ai fait faire un autre,
 Sur du même papier, & tout semblable au vôtre,
 Entre Monsieur Jasmin & Dame Béatrix.³⁸⁴

Beatrix worries about the consequences of faking such a contract, saying that in Paris “ils y sentent la Greve / Terriblement, ici, les Galeres au moins,” but Dorante reassures her he has his reasons to believe that Rapinière will feel obligated to let the contract stand.³⁸⁵

When it comes time to sign the marriage contract, the notary slips out, not wanting to be held liable for the deception, and his clerk switches the contracts after purposefully dropping the pen to distract La Rapinière.³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 2.7, pp. 41–42.

³⁸⁴ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 3.5, p. 56.

³⁸⁵ *ibid.* The mention of Paris here serves both to reaffirm the play’s ostensible Italian setting, as well as call attention to the supposed stricter punishment for such crimes in France.

³⁸⁶ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 5.7, pp. 95–6.

The play ends after La Rapinière discovers the marriage to which he had unwittingly signed his agreement. Angry, he threatens to disinherit Dorante if he cannot punish the conspirators via the justice system, invoking a specifically Italian means of doing so: putting all his money in the bank, an institution which did not exist as such in France at the time.

... si sur ce point la justice me manque,
 Je vais mettre demain, tout mon bien à la Banque,
 Et deussiez vous tous deux cent fois en enrager,
 Me faire un héritier, qui puisse me vanger.³⁸⁷

Putting money in the bank would have been a novel concept in Paris at the time, as there were only a few institutions in Europe with such a name (including one in Venice). There was, since 1674, the *Caisse des Emprunts*, founded by Colbert, which took deposits from individuals: it lasted only a decade, but was essentially a state-run deposit bank, which issued *promesses* in exchange for deposits, that could be negotiated (it was refounded in 1702).³⁸⁸ Yet this is not something Molière's Harpagon could have done, for example. La Rapinière's use of the deposit bank indicates an availability of, and trust in, institutions that his predecessors in Molière's theater did not have.

La Rapinière himself gets involved in deposit banking, facilitated by the fact that he has a safe place to keep money, he controls the physical access to the town, has financial knowledge, and membership in a business class. Fernand makes his way into La

³⁸⁷ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 5.8, p. 101.

³⁸⁸ Herman Van der Wee, "Monetary, Credit, and Banking Systems," in vol. 5 of *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, edited by E.E. Rich, C.H. Wilson, et. al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521087100.006>, 376–78.

Rapinière's good graces by offering him what is essentially an interest free loan. He talks of having 14,000 écus that he needs to deposit somewhere safe while he travels:

Je cherchois quelque endroit, pour mettre en assurance
Quatorze mil écus, qu'on m'avoit remboursez,
Et que mon peu de soin n'avoit pas replacez,
Dans mon entêtement de quitter l'Italie."³⁸⁹

Fernand, relating this conversation to Dorante, says he never mentioned interest, and that when Rapinière did, it was not to offer a rate of ten percent, "comme on fait entre les gens d'affaires" but instead an offer to hold the money without charging a fee.³⁹⁰ La Rapinière stands, though, to benefit from the free use of the money while he holds it.³⁹¹

La Rapinière puts the character of the tax farmer center-stage, portraying this character in such a way as to associate the desire for gain with a corrupt moral code. By firmly linking the financier and his deputies with corruption and theft, the play posits the increasing threat of taxation along the same lines as the insurgent danger of the rising bourgeois financial class: a portrait which likely contributed to the play's success. The play's foreign setting might have contributed to an idea of tax collectors focusing on the land of nobles in the countryside, and on the legitimate occupations of the people, portraying the tax collector as a veritable parasite. But most importantly for the purposes of this study, the play shows how luxury items and daily foodstuffs were converted through taxation into money.

Another search for gold is portrayed in *La Pierre philosophe* (1681), a collaboration between Thomas Corneille and Jean Donneau de Visé. A hybrid comedy-

³⁸⁹ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 4.2, p. 68.

³⁹⁰ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 4.2, p. 69.

³⁹¹ Robbe, *Rapinière*, 4.2, p. 69.

spectacle, it dramatized the search for gold via alchemy, and showed characters who put traditional value aside for new sources. The play, which was by all accounts unsuccessful, survives only in the form of one printed edition from the time, a plot summary or *livre de sujet*.³⁹² Although the full script has not survived, this printed record nevertheless provides a detailed description of the plot, in which Maugis, described as a “Chymiste,” attempts to search for the secrets of alchemy in a homemade laboratory. Lured by the promise of finding treasure in ruined castles, Maugis and his servant Crispin embark upon a dangerous quest to finance their alchemical experiments.

The search shows the sacrifice of real bearers of value for chimerical money. The willingness of Maugis to sell his houses and land in hopes of getting rich symbolizes the destruction of traditional bearers of wealth in the hopes of finding a new kind.³⁹³ He marries his daughter to someone he thinks is a powerful figure in the world of alchemy, disregarding any other questions of origin for the hope of acquiring great new wealth.

Much of the play turns upon the false hopes, deception, and roguish characters of the world of alchemy, brought into existence by complex theatrical means, as in the personification of the four elements represented by Gnomes, Sylphs, *Ondins*, and Salamanders, whom Maugis encounters after taking a dolphin ride.³⁹⁴ By portraying the search for the secrets of money in such a fantastical way, the play contributed to and reflected a highly imaginative vision of money. The on-stage reconstruction of an alchemical laboratory would have played a part in this vision. The *livre de sujet* describes

³⁹² Donneau de Visé, *La Pierre philosophale, comédie mêlée de spectacles* (Paris: C. Blageart, 1681).

³⁹³ Donneau de Visé, *Pierre philosophale*, 8.

³⁹⁴ Donneau de Visé, *Pierre philosophale*, 18.

a transformation of a room that could have only taken place with the use of complicated stage machinery:

La Table & les Meubles deviennent Fourneaux, & tous les Paneaux qui tenoient lieu de Tapisserie, ne paroissent plus, en sorte qu'on ne voit que des Creusets en un lieu, où un moment auparavant, on voyoit toute autre chose. Les uns sont pour calciner, les autres pour fondre, quelques-uns pour sublimer & pour distiler, & d'autres pour d'autres usages, avec toutes les sortes de Feux dont se servent les Chymistes.³⁹⁵

The Philosopher's stone comprises, as the title indicates, the main object of research and desire in this play. As Martial Poirson and Gaël Le Chevalier write in their detailed analysis of the play, the stone is a "point de convergence d'un ensemble de représentations de l'argent, [et] aussi une source essentielle de ces mêmes représentations, qu'elle enrichit de toute la puissance onirique des émanations de la conscience collective."³⁹⁶ The stone is at once a vehicle of every possible representation of money, and it is the source of representations of its own. The laboratory on the stage gives way to the stage as laboratory, as a place for experimenting with ideas of money and how it is made.

We will now see how other plays from this decade showed the manipulation and circulation of this value in the forms of paper. Like *La Pierre philosophale*, the next two plays were written or co-written by Jean Donneau de Visé, the editor of the *Mercurie galant*, the monthly gazette whose publication corresponded with a new age in the French information economy. Donneau de Visé's interest in monetary subjects is indicative of

³⁹⁵ Donneau de Visé, *Pierre philosophale*, 7.

³⁹⁶ Martial Poirson and Gaël Le Chevalier, "La Pierre philosophale," *Féeries* 3 (2006): paragraph 33, <http://feeries.revues.org/index156.html>.

their topical nature. These two plays at opposite ends of the 1670s show fraudulent financial schemes that are run by one individual, and that trade in paper and information. *Les Intrigues de la lotterie* (1670) shows how one woman hopes to make money off of a rigged lottery, and *La Devineresse* (1679) shows how one woman runs a fortune-telling scheme whose main goal is money. Both plays capitalize on current events and attest to the importance of separating illusion from reality, and to an increasingly central role of authentication and negotiation in monetary transactions.

Donneau de Visé's *Les Intrigues de la lotterie* (1670) was one of the first French plays to begin to closely examine elements of paper money. Lottery tickets belonged to the worlds of both paper and coin money, since they were purchased with coin, but as paper tickets they could be redeemed for a value written on them. They were centrally issued by one authority and could usually be transferred between individuals after their purchase (before or after they were opened and the prize revealed). While lottery tickets did not by any means constitute a full-fledged paper economy, they presented many of the characteristics of paper money.

The play explicitly examines issues of trust, authentication, and valuation. Characters need to know how to authenticate tickets so that they can be sure they get what they paid for. The tickets are written documents, potentially exchangeable for prizes, and the play's material examination of these bearers of value provides a lesson in imagining paper-value transactions. Secondly, the organization of the lottery itself was a testament to a new kind of market relationship: one which is in many respects financial in nature. The play shows how characters approached the concept of advertising,

orchestrating, and managing these schemes. Finally, the lotteries in the play show the power of speculation and of sudden wins and losses.

In telling the story of the lottery, the portrait as a whole has a tendency to outweigh the various adventures of individual characters. The love story in the *Intrigues* is minimal: indeed, the intrigues are really, as the title indicates, mostly lottery-related. (Later plays, like Dancourt's *La Lotterie*, focus more on one individual.) Donneau de Visé, in his preface to the play, addresses worries that this focus on topical matter could come at the price of dramatic interest. He writes that he attempted to mitigate this risk by introducing new characters, "qui n'avoient jamais paru sur la Scene."³⁹⁷ Like Boursault's *Mercur Galant* (1683), the economic focus provides both a framework for a series of characters and events and a multifaceted examination of issues of monetary transaction. Orkey is certainly correct in his assessment that the subject "added reality" to the play, but I will argue here that the treatment went beyond this effect.³⁹⁸ By showing the issuance of paper from a central source and its negotiation on an open market, as well as showing interrogations of authenticity, the play provides an early dramatic examination of the problematics of trust and negotiability inherent to a paper money economy.

At the time the play was staged, lotteries were not a new concept. They had been around since the sixteenth century in various incarnations. Inspired by Italian examples, François I authorized the first French state lottery in 1539 in an effort to bring money in to the royal treasury, but it was apparently not very successful.³⁹⁹ There were no large-

³⁹⁷ Jean Donneau de Visé, *Les Intrigues de la lotterie* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1670), *Preface*, p. 2.

³⁹⁸ Orkey, *Role of Money*, 56.

³⁹⁹ Gérard Descotils and Jean-Claude Guilbert, *Le grand livre des loteries*, (Paris: La Française des Jeux, 1993), 18-20.

scale lotteries until the middle of the seventeenth century. Lorenzo Tonti had proposed a scheme known as the *tontine* to the crown in the 1650s, but his project was not immediately implemented: it took until 1689 for the first lottery-tontine to be organized by Louis XIV.⁴⁰⁰ In 1660, 1661, and 1685, the king organized or authorized large lotteries whose proceeds went to charitable ends.⁴⁰¹ Theater alludes to many others organized by private individuals, a veritable lottery craze sweeping Paris.⁴⁰² Characters talk about other lotteries, and the different motivations of their organizers who fit the lottery to their needs: one, Madame Doucet, is said to have arranged for her creditors to receive desirable prizes in order to appease them.⁴⁰³ Another lottery is said to have been established for a woman to find a husband.⁴⁰⁴ The main reason many ran a lottery, though, was because it was profitable, and the lottery of Celiane, the subject of *Les Intrigues de la lotterie*, provides an exaggerated example of this.

Celiane runs a type of lottery whose functioning might not have needed too much explanation to a contemporary spectator. The innovation she introduces is the degree to which she introduces fraud into it. As the organizer, Celiane sells tickets, collects the money, and records the name of those who purchased them. Then, once all the money has been collected, she prepares the tickets, in theory writing on the winning tickets the name of a prize it can be redeemed for (called *billets noirs* because they have writing on them), and leaving the losing tickets blank (known as *billets blancs*). In reality, she has left all

⁴⁰⁰ John Dunkley, "Bourbons on the Rocks: Tontines and Early Public Lotteries in France," in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, no. 30 (2007), doi: 10.1111/j.1754-0208.2007.tb00338.x , 310–11.

⁴⁰¹ *Le grand livre des loteries*, 22.

⁴⁰² Orkey, *Role of Money*, 56.

⁴⁰³ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 3.6, p. 63.

⁴⁰⁴ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 3.6, p. 65.

the tickets blank. She then puts these tickets into *boîtes* and seals them with wax. Each participant is given a box (in theory this is done at random but the play hints that this can be manipulated). If a winning ticket is enclosed, they bring it to the organizer to redeem for the prize written upon it.

The degree to which potential participants in a lottery are willing to purchase tickets is reliant upon their belief that they have a chance of getting a winning ticket. Maintenance of this belief is crucial for the lottery's success: otherwise all trust in its legitimacy evaporates. Once Celiane's servant Gervais finds out about her scam, he is content to receive a refund for his tickets. Florine then aptly remarks that the crowd of angry people outside the house would have been satisfied merely if they were to know that somebody—anybody—had won.⁴⁰⁵ By not introducing a single winning ticket, Celiane took her fraud too far.

Lotteries, the play indicates, were widespread and widely publicized by word of mouth. Du Bois claims that “de la France aujourd’huy voila tout l’entretien; / Il est fort à la mode.”⁴⁰⁶ Later he continues, saying,

J’en ay trouvé par tout,
Et Paris en est plein, de l’un à l’autre bout.
On n’entend à present parler que Lotterie.⁴⁰⁷

The organizers of these lotteries used paper to advertise their existence. Du Bois offers printed evidence as proof:

Pour vous assurer que je ne vous ments pas,
Et que je ne dis rien sans bons Certificats,
Par ces Billets moulez, vous pourrez tout connaistre.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 1.3, p. 6; 1.5, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁶ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 1.9, p. 18.

⁴⁰⁷ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 2.1, p. 25.

Although they may have been advertised as such, lotteries like the one in the play still depended to some extent on social circles, trust, and names: one had to know and trust the person who is organizing the lottery, and one had to have an idea of who was playing. If someone a player knew were to receive a prize, it was much more believable than if a stranger did. The lottery depends on trust, which Celiane jeopardized when she filled the boxes without witnesses present. As her cook, Michelette, notes, she should have at least given winning tickets to her friends and staff so that they could attest to her trustworthiness (adding, “C’est ce qu’a fort bien fait Madame de Grinbelle”).⁴⁰⁹ In this play, preventing those in the know from talking is just as important as positive publicity. Florine reminds Michelette that if she talks, she will risk losing all of her unpaid wages.

By focusing on the ways in which Celiane runs a rigged lottery, Donneau de Visé’s play elaborates an imaginary of fraud. It shows the importance of guarantees of authenticity, and shows how they can be undermined. In the second act, a player claims their box was tampered with, based on the fact that the seal had come undone.⁴¹⁰ Earlier in the play, Clarimond, described simply as a “Fourbe” in the character list, brings a ticket to Celiane’s house to collect the mirror he says he has won, and Florine refuses to give it to him because his ticket is counterfeit. She says that although the handwriting looks like that of her mistress, it must be fake.⁴¹¹ This points to a key element in the organization of this lottery: claimants of prizes must be able to prove that the ticket they

⁴⁰⁸ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 2.1, p. 26.

⁴⁰⁹ Donneau De Visé, *Intrigues*, 1.13, p. 23.

⁴¹⁰ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 2.9, p. 38.

⁴¹¹ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 1.2, p. 4. (“Voilà son caractere; / Et celui qui l’a fait, le sçait bien contrefaire.”)

are holding is authentic. In principle Florine would have been able to distinguish the handwriting of her mistress from an imitation. In fact, she is certain the ticket is fake because she knows that no winning tickets were issued.

By placing objects in circulation in exchange for pieces of paper, the lottery blurred traditional coin-based notions of purchase and acquisition. It made those pieces of paper become the virtual stand-in for objects of value. These objects were often luxury goods, as evidenced in a list Du Bois recites of the items that people are using as prizes for various lotteries:

J'en ay trouvé d'Argent, de Lits, d'Argenterie,
 De Meubles, de Bijoux, de Toile, de Tableaux,
 De vieux Livres de prix, & de Livres nouveaux,
 D'Echarpes, de Liqueurs, de Vins, de Friandises,
 De vieux Colifichets, de vieilles Marchandises,
 D'Etoffes, de beaux Pointcs, de Jambons, de Pâtez.
 Un Curieux en fait de belles Raretez,
 De Coquilles de priz, Cailloux, Cristaux, Grains d'Ambre.
 Si vous avez besoin d'une Robe de Chambre,
 J'en sçais une qui n'est du tout que de cela,
 Et tous les Gens du Cour ont mis à celle-là.⁴¹²

The play also examines the material conditions of lotteries. Early in Act 3, Du Bois, the character who seems to know the most about lotteries, reveals that he has an idea. He suggests that his master, Cleronte, attempt to sell this idea which he is sure will bring in “plus d'un million.” He encourages Cleronte to advocate for the right to a monopoly on making and selling the necessary material components for running one: “Boistes, Cire & Papier.”⁴¹³ Thus Du Bois seizes on the essence of what the lottery is about: the paper on which the prize is written, the box in which the paper is contained,

⁴¹² Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 2.1, p. 25.

⁴¹³ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 3.3, p. 53.

and the wax which confirms that the box was sealed by the preparer and not tampered with in the interim. These material elements of the lottery are subject to fraud or claims of it. By focusing on them, Du Bois places the novelty of the lottery trend in material elements of media of exchange and their importance for mediating relationships of trust.

The new characters that Donneau de Visé writes about are skilled negotiators who know how to mediate a world of financial transactions. One such character is Florine, who is present in all fourteen scenes of the first act. She is the center of attention and exchange because everybody must come to her to claim their lottery tickets; Celiane does not appear in act 1. Apart from detecting fraud, Florine can also recognize a bad deal: she wisely refuses the offer of Cleronte, who tries to seduce her with an offer of future money. He claims he will give her 500 louis, but only gives her two on stage. “Porte ces deux Lotiis à quelque Lotterie, / Et tu pourras gagner bien plus que je n’ay dit.”⁴¹⁴ Cleronte’s offer is symbolic of the speculative economy that dominates in this play: the mere prospect of gain has replaced, for many characters, more concrete ideas of actual value. Florine knows better than to accept. Her employer, Celiane, takes a more active role in act 2, present in twelve out of seventeen scenes. For the organizer of the lottery, her appearance on the stage seems to come late: moreover she arrives not to manage her own lottery but to participate in another one, trying to convince her hesitant domestic staff to join her in purchasing tickets.

In the play’s discussions of the lottery, a picture emerges of the potential large gains resulting from speculative purchases. Du Bois opens 29 of the 30 tickets he bought to discover that they are all losers, and so he sells the opened tickets, along with the one

unopened ticket, to a neighbor, who discovers that the last ticket is a winner, worth 400 pistoles. Rather than vowing to never play the lottery again, Du Bois instead decides to try another one where he thinks there is no cheating. “Quand la Fortune en veut,” he assures Florine, “on fait des gains notables.”⁴¹⁵ He then proceeds to list a series of anecdotes of remarkable and unexpected gains: the story of a man who won a gold vase in a lottery, sold it, won it again, and sold it again, three times in all; that of a woman who won a mirror worth more than 100 louis d’or for an initial outlay of only 20 francs; an old servant who won 6,000 francs having spent only two louis; a woman who had nothing and won enough money in a lottery to find a husband; and a man who won a sum so large that his daughter had to be bled to recover from the surprise:

En tenant leur argent, ils ne le croyoient pas;
Ils ouvroient de grands yeux, dans leur joye incertaine;
Et regardant tant d’or, le croyoient bon à peine.⁴¹⁶

In these transactions, the lottery ticket is part of a series of exchanges: coins for tickets, tickets for objects, objects for coins, and some winners are described as having difficulty accepting this process. In this example, a family who won a great deal of money “could barely believe the gold was good.”⁴¹⁷

The play also presents a less optimistic view, however. Florine counters the stories of Du Bois with bad luck stories where the unfortunate losers killed themselves. A portrait is thus painted of dreams and hopes encouraged by stories of great winners, told against the tragic stories of those who lost.

⁴¹⁴ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 1.7, p. 12.

⁴¹⁵ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 1.9, p. 16.

⁴¹⁶ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 1.9, p. 17.

⁴¹⁷ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 1.9, p. 17.

These tickets are far from being perfect proxies for value, however: deception abounds. A discrepancy between estimated and actual worth of a prize appears towards the end of the play when Michelette, who lost 11 months of wages in lottery tickets, finally wins something. Because she is not wearing her glasses she is only able to read part of the ticket, which she reads aloud: “Estimé mille Ecus.”⁴¹⁸ When she finds her glasses and puts them on, she realizes that the ticket in its totality says “Un Peroquet, estimé mille Ecus.”⁴¹⁹ The other characters are appalled as they realize they have been deceived: she was the only winner, and her prize, they agree, is certainly not worth the 1000 écus listed on the ticket.

This play and others like it deal with the implications on monetary thought of a lottery mania that was sweeping Paris at the time. By separating the question of value from coins, and by placing paper as an intermediary to acquiring objects of value, lotteries bear resemblance to later banknote systems, and share their instabilities and collapses as well. This 1670 de-centering of money would play a pivotal role in the economics of comic theater over the next decades, as paper took on an increasingly detached role from coin.

Another of Donneau de Visé’s plays went beyond traditional means of representation in theater, by relying upon a variety of impressive mechanical special effects. Just as lotteries were a topical subject which dealt with a great deal of money in circulation, this play used these devices to take on the popular subject of fortune tellers, particularly examining the transactional aspect of their operations. *La Devineresse, ou les*

⁴¹⁸ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 3.6, p. 67.

⁴¹⁹ Donneau de Visé, *Intrigues*, 3.6, p. 68.

faux enchantemens (1679), a collaboration between Donneau de Visé and Thomas Corneille, was first staged at the Hôtel Guénégaud on November 19, 1679.⁴²⁰ In financial terms it was a great success, earning over 50,000 livres in ticket sales in its long run, which lasted until March 10, 1680.⁴²¹ Much of its success was doubtless due to its topical nature. Performed at the height of the trial of fortune teller and alleged poisoner Catherine Monvoisin (known as “La Voisin”), the play, even though its plot is not as dark, seems to have capitalized on the newsworthiness of the *affaire des poisons*.

While the *affaire* was a sordid real-life intrigue of murder and conspiracy, *La Devineresse* focuses on the trickery of a fictional fortune teller. Poirson writes of how the play de-dramatizes the affair and demystifies sorcery.⁴²² As Julia Prest notes, the play takes a delicate political issue and relaxes it; turning a poisoner and abortionist into a simple trickster and fraudster.⁴²³ In accomplishing this transference, the play places a specific emphasis upon the financial side of the fortunetelling business. Whereas La Voisin was accused of selling poison and abortion services, the role of Madame Jobin, the main character of *La Devineresse*, is more often one of performing illusions, mediating information and negotiating its price. Her characterization as a fraudster who takes money from her credulous victims provides a portrait of matters of belief, deceit, and the nature of credit in the broad sense of the word. The play focuses on the day-to-day operations of her business, with the transactional aspect featuring prominently.

⁴²⁰ Thomas Corneille and Donneau de Visé, *La Devineresse, ou les faux enchantemens*, ed. Julia Prest (MHRA: London, 2007).

⁴²¹ Pierre Mèlèse, *Donneau de Visé: fondateur du Mercure Galant. Un homme de lettres au service du roi* (Paris: Droz, 1936), 152; Prest, *Devineresse*, 1.

⁴²² Martial Poirson, “Les classiques ont-ils cru à leurs machines? La force du surnaturel dans *La Devineresse ou Les Faux enchantemens* (1679),” in *Revue d'histoire du théâtre* 56:3(2004), 181–194.

⁴²³ Prest, *Devineresse*, 15.

Jobin's monetary swindles are shown crossing all class boundaries, as she prices her services on the basis of how much each client can pay. Part of the goal of this portrayal may have been to contribute to an understanding of how the real-life La Voisin was able to earn 30,000 livres in a year. By providing a democratized cross-section of the customers/victims of the fortune teller, the play shows Jobin above all to be a shrewd businesswoman rather than a figure of the occult.⁴²⁴ *La Devineresse* foregrounds the mediation of spectacle and illusion. Just as spectators paid money to see a machine play with impressive visual special effects, in the play, Jobin charges for the services that she arranges, which are often performances of illusions.

It is a paper financial scheme that nets Jobin the most money. At the beginning of Act 4, a character designated only as "Le Financier" tells how Jobin used the promise of marrying an attractive and rich young woman in order to dupe him out of 2,000 écus.⁴²⁵ He describes how Jobin first lured him in emotionally with the mysterious apparition of a young widow in her mirror, and then financially by promising that the woman was very rich. Jobin further baited the trap by showing the young woman in need of a large sum, 200 louis, for which she was waiting because of a delay in the arrival of a bill of exchange. The financier gave the young woman the money, which she returned to him when her bill of exchange arrived: "C'estoit une adresse," he explains, "pour faire grossir la somme."⁴²⁶ Soon after, Jobin informed him that the woman would need 2,000 écus to win her trial, which he delivered in cash—and then never saw his young mistress again.

⁴²⁴ For La Voisin earnings, see Mèlèse, *Donneau de Visé*, 150.

⁴²⁵ Corneille and Donneau de Visé, *Devineresse*, 4.1, p. 109.

⁴²⁶ Corneille and Donneau de Visé, *Devineresse*, 4.1, p. 109.

While the prospect of love was certainly part of what drove the financier into the plot, he also explains his intentions in monetary terms, claiming that he was duped in a financial transaction: “Je croyois trouver trente mille livres de rente avec une belle Personne,” he says, “Qui auroit fait moins?”⁴²⁷ The woman left the financier with a wry goodbye letter that, another character notes, could in fact serve as a sort of *Quittance* proving the fraud.⁴²⁸ Paper is thus incorporated into the play as another magical element of sorts: a way to make something appear out of nothing.

Beyond the insistence on illusion and reality though, what links the play strongly to the actions of La Voisin and other fortune tellers is the insistence on the monetary aspect of the fortune teller, as a way of relegating the occult to the transactional. By using the imagery of business, the play provides a lesson in demystifying the occult, and by staging fraud, the play also examines the monetization of illusion.

Finally, a trio of plays from 1682–1683 show characters in an increasingly complex economic contexts. From the legal frameworks of bankruptcy, to colonial trade policies, to the promotion of Paris as a city of business and information exchange, these plays show the inscription of financially minded characters in a larger world where their knowledge allows them to prosper. Champmeslé’s *Le Parisien* and *La Rue Saint-Denys*, and Boursault’s *Mercurie galant*, show an economic world in evolution, in everything from its scale to its means of exchange.

Champmeslé’s *Le Parisien* (1682), like his *Rue Saint-Denys* from the same year, turns upon questions of paternal death and inheritance. In the play, which strongly echoes

⁴²⁷ Corneille and Donneau de Visé, *Devineresse*, 4.1, p. 109.

⁴²⁸ Corneille and Donneau de Visé, *Devineresse*, 4.1, p. 110.

Molière's *Fourberies de Scapin*, a spendthrift son, Clitandre, tries to go against his father in terms of both money and love, wanting to avoid the marriage his father has arranged for him, and trying to get money from his father in order to impress the girl he does love.⁴²⁹ In his preface to the play's printed edition, Champmeslé writes that the play's 15 or 16 performances were successful beyond his expectations. Part of the play's success may have come from the fact that Molière's widow starred in it; but its success may also have been related to its inscription within greater anxieties over social class and value. *Le Parisien* examines the contrast between traditional sources of value and new ones, by putting both nobility and money on the stage. Only the money, though, is real. The play takes the spectator from the scribblings of notaries, to stashes of coins hidden away in a mattress, to jewels and silver coming from South America, testifying to a material world where money was taking on new roles and a new, national importance. It shows the conflict between bourgeois saving and noble-style spending, as well as the increasing difficulty of being able to tell who is noble and who is not. Crucially the play shows how this financial world of credit and negotiation is best navigated by those who are initiated to its ways.

Le Parisien shows a consumer credit system where decisions about lending are based on calculated likelihood to repay, where social standing alone is no longer taken as a sign of creditworthiness. Both Clitandre and his father turn to Frontin to navigate this world. From the first act, the play revolves around Clitandre's search for cash. Up until this point, merchants and usurers were happy to lend to Clitandre because they knew his

⁴²⁹ The play's ending reveals a case of mistaken identity following a shipwreck; the girl Clitandre loves is in fact the one his father wants him to marry after all.

father had money, were expecting him to die soon, and that they would be able to collect as he got the inheritance. But as the play begins Frontin tells him that all the sources are dry: the creditors are worried by Jerome's longevity, and are doubtful that they will be repaid anytime soon.

Despite his valet's warnings of the increasing difficulty he has in finding credit, Clitandre agrees to finance a large purchase of soldiers' uniforms, to help his love interest's brother out of trouble. When Geraste, a captain in the army, says he needs 100 pistoles, Clitandre sends Frontin to get them, telling him to be creative: "Cherche, imagine, invente."⁴³⁰ Frontin, however, in the next scene exclaims his frustration because he knows that all of the usual sources of ready cash ("le Marchand, l'Usurier, le Notaire") will not lend anymore, or "sans Caution," without a guarantee.⁴³¹ At this point, all credit based on name alone has been exhausted. This situation represents a key aspect of the traditional credit system, where lending was based on interpersonal relations. Laurence Fontaine writes in this sense of a "marché des obligations sociales et du pouvoir sur les hommes" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries rather than a credit market in terms of pricing the amount of time for which money is lent.⁴³² The use of Frontin as an intermediary to find lenders renders Clitandre's borrowing more impersonal. But the end result is the same: lenders make their decisions based on a quasi-actuarial assessment of Clitandre's father's lifespan.

⁴³⁰ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 1.6, p. 13.

⁴³¹ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 1.7, p. 13.

⁴³² Laurence Fontaine, "Relations de crédit et surendettement en France. XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles," in *Des personnes aux institutions. Réseaux et culture du crédit du XVIe au XXe siècle en Europe. Actes du colloque international centenaire des FUCAM. (Mons, 14-16 novembre 1996)*, edited by Laurence Fontaine, Gilles Postel-Vinay, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and Paul Servais (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia Bruylant, 1997), 216.

The play shows characters entering into a world of financial transactions that were traditionally viewed unfavorably, and into a new economy where social boundaries are transgressed in favor of profit. Geraste's purchase of clothes from another captain who was otherwise going to sell them to a "fripiier" is an example of this kind of transaction. Geraste, "un peu moins Juif," says Lysette, "les a pris pour un quart."⁴³³ As Furetière indicates, "Juif" was synonymous for "fripiier" and for usurer: "On appelle aussi un usurier, un Marchand qui trompe, ou qui rançonne un *Juif*, parce que les *Juifs* sont de grands usuriers, fripiiers, & trompeurs."⁴³⁴ Geraste's entry into this world of transactions signals passage into the "unnatural" gains that were the focus of traditional prohibitions of usury.

The play shows many cases where characters get into close contact with financial instruments and dealings with merchants, usurers, and notaries; characters are shown haggling and attempting to pull revenue out of any possible source. The methods by which Frontin ultimately gets money are intimately personal: he obtains it directly from Clitandre's father, telling Jerome that his son has been arrested and that the guards will release him in exchange for a small bribe (similar to *Les Fourberies de Scapin*). When faced with this situation, Jerome too depends on Frontin's mastery of money. He wants to negotiate the sum down by two-thirds, relying upon Frontin's abilities: "Frontin, par ton adresse / Ne m'en pourroit-on point diminuer deux tiers?"⁴³⁵ When Frontin explains that negotiating a lower price will be impossible, Jerome agrees to pay. It seems that Jerome, a businessman, recognizes Frontin's negotiation skill but relegates it to be exploited by

⁴³³ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 1.6, p. 12.

⁴³⁴ Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, 2:396.

him as the employer, as if this use of financial *adresse* were similar to performing physical labor. In his plea to Jerome for money to bribe the guards, Frontin also negotiates for his own benefit, starting first by asking for an undetermined sum—“quelques Pistoles”—then revealing his real request, for 100 louis.⁴³⁶ Frontin also argues that he can navigate the military system, with the appropriate money for bribes, to get Clitandre promoted and out of harm’s way. Time and again, Frontin intervenes as the negotiator; for in the monetary world portrayed in this play, knowledge of how the system works is key to being able to profit from it.

The importance of navigating the economy is especially true in one aspect of economy that the play examines, that of the influx of money from the Indies trade. While Frontin is charged with negotiating the domestic financial system, Jerome wants his son to learn about another kind of commerce. Jerome has signed a contract agreeing to marry Clitandre to the daughter of a man engaged in the Indies trade. He describes Des Moulins as a “bon Bourgeois, / Au trafic étranger instruit dès son jeune âge.” Jerome encourages his son to leave France to take part in the Indies trade, in order to get rich:

Abandonnez la France, aussi bien ce Païs
 N’est plus pour s’enrichir ce qu’il estoit jadis.
 Des procez épineux, la chicanne est bannie,
 La foy dans le commerce est par tout rétablie,
 La guerre est declarée aux pâles Usuriers,
 La Finance n’est plus en pillage aux Fermiers,
 Le Sort d’intelligence avec ses Economes,
 N’y fait plus qu’à pas lents la fortune des Hommes,
 Et comme au seul mérite il attache son choix,
 Dans tout un siecle à peine en élève-t-il trois.
 Chez un Peuple plus brute, où la simple ignorance,
 Au milieu des trésors, languit dans l’indigence,

⁴³⁵ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 1.9, p. 19.

⁴³⁶ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 1.9, pp. 17–18.

Allez, mon Fils, allez par des soins diligens,
 Profitant de l'erreur, où sont ces bonnes Gens,
 Vous ouvrir un chemin, aux fortunes heureuses,
 Remporter de chez eux des Perles précieuses,
 Des Diamans de prix, des Rubis de valeur,
 Et de l'or, des Mortels le vray chasse-douleur.⁴³⁷

Jerome assures Clitandre that his future father-in-law will be able to teach him all of the tricks of the trade, and promises that he will learn from him everything about “les commerces secrets.”⁴³⁸ Furthermore he encourages his son to read the works of travel writers François Bernier and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in order to understand the customs of the different nations he could be trading with.⁴³⁹ By invoking the major influx of precious metals from the Indies trade, the play turns upon money in the largest of senses. French commercial ventures towards the Indies trade were starting to increase significantly in the 1680s.⁴⁴⁰ In particular, on January 6, 1682 (just one month before the performance of *Le Parisien*), the *Compagnie des Indes* lost their monopoly on the Indies trade by royal decree, allowing private traders to use space on the company’s ships if they paid the freight.⁴⁴¹ The discourse Jerome employs to persuade Clitandre to go abroad for the Indies trade is a strong exhortation of the perceived value of colonial commerce, which seems to position it as the replacement for the easy enrichment of France’s earlier decades that Jerome evokes, like that of being a tax farmer, and “pillaging” state finances, or that of usury. In the late 1710s, it was the trade of shares in such companies that would result in the Mississippi Bubble.

⁴³⁷ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 2.2, pp. 23–24.

⁴³⁸ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 2.2, p. 24.

⁴³⁹ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 2.3, p. 25.

⁴⁴⁰ Pierre Goubert, *Louis XIV et vingt millions de français*, rev. ed. (Paris: Fayard, 1991), 198–203.

The play is thus inscribed in a larger context of international trade. This division of labor, with the valet engaged in domestic negotiations, and the master hoping to engage in international trade, mirrors the traditional image of the noble who is allowed to engage in overseas commerce, but forbidden to exercise a trade at home. If Jerome pushes his son into business, it is perhaps because he feels that his own skills are no longer effective in a changing world, and that a new kind of knowledge is needed. Indeed Jerome, who certainly enjoyed financial success in the past, is often shown failing in his own negotiations in the play: first in trying to get Frontin to negotiate a lower bribe to get his son out of jail; and then later in the play, in another of Frontin's tricks, he falls into a trap where he thinks he is tricking a young woman out of a diamond ring. He has the technical knowledge, being the son of a jeweler, and succeeds in negotiating a low asking price down even further, but does not realize the larger danger when he walks into a setup and stands falsely accused of contract murder. Jerome also fails in his efforts to try to get out of the marriage contract he arranged for his son, which carries a cancellation penalty of 12,000 francs. Jerome, even though he got increasingly wealthy through finance, seems powerless in the face of a financial world of strong paper and international trade, and in one where servants outwit their masters. His control of coin and credit is what has defined him as a financial man, and it is his own son's efforts to steal coins from him that weaken his grip, symbolically and literally, on his money.

While coins drive the immediate economy in *Le Parisien*, turning up in unusual places, the play consigns them to an old economic system. As Clitandre's monetary needs

⁴⁴¹ Jules Sottas, *Histoire de la Compagnie royale des Indes Orientales: 1664–1719* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1905), 72. Since the 1629 Code Michau, nobles were authorized to participate in overseas *compagnies*, but

increase, Frontin has the idea to ask his master's mother if she has any money hidden away, telling her it is to purchase a captain's commission in the army.⁴⁴² Indeed she does, uncovering 66 "double Louis," which were wrapped in a package hidden in her mattress, and which are describes as being "tous batans neufs"; behind a pile of old books, she has hidden another 100 louis in a money purse; and finally, she has saved 124 "demy Louiis" in an old sock behind a painting.

But Jerome, who discovers the plot, takes the money from him and criticizes his wife for having hidden it away. He argues that he could have been putting the money to good use earning interest:

Oüy, cet argent m'eust fait du profit davantage.
 Qui le laisse moisir n'en connoist pas l'usage;
 Si ce trésor caché depuis le temps qu'il l'est,
 Eust esté dans mes mains, un honneste intérêt
 L'eust fait doubler, tripler, en moins de rien.⁴⁴³

In this key phrase, Jerome distinguishes his knowledge of money from that of his wife: "someone who lets it mold doesn't know how to use it." Here he affirms his financial skill—that of placing money in wise investments or loaning it—and his commentary serves as a comment on devaluation. Spectators would also be aware that Madame Jerome has kept these coins for a while: the "double louis" coins, described as looking brand new, were last minted in 1652, thirty years before the play's production (gold coins wear easily, so their "newness" is a sign that they have not been touched). Jerome argues that his wife should have instead loaned the money out: where it would be safe, the transaction recorded on paper, and earning interest.

this was a chance to participate without financing an entire voyage.

⁴⁴² Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 2.9, p. 37.

Even though he is quick to criticize hoarding, Jerome too keeps coins hidden at home. Frontin announces the false news of Clitandre's death to Jerome so that his son can be free to break into his strongbox to steal his money. Frontin's comments show at once the materiality of keeping money safe, as well as showing how it can be taken from what is thought to be the most secure place in the home. Their on-stage attack on what Frontin calls the "Dortoir aux Pistoles" with files, hammers, and picks thus perhaps gives credibility to the idea that money is safer when it is circulating in the form of loans.⁴⁴⁴

Jerome seems to think he can control paper. He states that the Commissaire can write the report of his son's death later, confident that because they are friends, "s'il en est besoin il l'antidatera."⁴⁴⁵ The marriage contract which from the first act positions the play in a network of lawsuits, loans, agreements, contracts and penalties only has power so long as it is in existence; the power of the forfeiture clause in the marriage contract is only as strong as the integrity of the notary who keeps the documents. Jerome's efforts to destroy this contract fail, however. He asks the notary, who is his own brother, and who is holding the only copy, to burn the relevant documents. He refuses with horror, calling the act of trying to corrupt a notary "blasphemy."⁴⁴⁶ The integrity of a notary is thus portrayed as being stronger than familial ties: a lesson Jerome learns about the strength of paper. In the play, the bearers of value which at first seem most reliable are objects and coins, symbolic of the old economy and particularly relevant in the context of depreciation.

⁴⁴³ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 4.1, p. 70.

⁴⁴⁴ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 4.5, p. 78.

⁴⁴⁵ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 4.6, p. 79.

⁴⁴⁶ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 3.2, p. 42.

By invoking the one branch of the commercial trade which was acceptable for the nobility to take part in, the question of nobility remains open. While money circulates throughout the play, those who have the specialized knowledge to find it are not noble. Clitandre's future father-in-law who masters the Indies trade is a "bon Bourgeois"; Frontin, who navigates the credit market, and makes cash come out of the most unlikely hiding places, is a servant; and Jerome, who built his fortune himself, is not portrayed as noble either. While the theatrical dream of getting rich from the Indies trade is not new—it was comically alluded to in Scarron's *Héritier ridicule* (1648), for example—here it takes on a more credible face. Similarly the role of a servant with "adresse" is not new (La Flèche in *L'Avare*, and Molière's Scapin both come to mind) but here the role of the servant is portrayed in more financial detail.

Clitandre's constant spending is a heavy weight for his father to bear, since the legacy he wants for his son is to take the form of both money and financial knowledge. Jerome clearly values these two things more than noble status. When, in a ruse to break Clitandre's arranged marriage, Lysette and Frontin disguise themselves as a pregnant countess and a squire, ready to "retirer son Fils des bras de la Roture," to "parfumer sa Race," Jerome seems to assess their value quickly, and dismisses them, saying that literally they are worthless: "Non, vous ne valez rien."⁴⁴⁷ For Jerome, real value, in the form of money, is all that counts. The play constantly indicts nobility and shows a search for real value—real coins—in a context where credit is increasingly unavailable without proof. Nobility alone ceases to have currency in *Le Parisien*.

⁴⁴⁷ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 2.5, p. 28.

The connection between nobility and value, between blood and money, appears in very clear terms when Jerome hears the false report of Clitandre's death. He vows to exact his revenge, yet he speaks in financial terms, equating the blood spilled by his son to financial compensation. He tells Frontin that he will make his son's killer pay, quite literally: "Il n'aura pas pour rien versé le sang d'un Fils, / Et chaque goutte au moins me vaudra cent Louïs."⁴⁴⁸ Jerome devotes more attention to the formalities of this complaint than to any urge to physically track the killer down. The "illustre vengeance" that he promises to obtain for his son is primarily the bureaucratic and administrative procedure involved in obtaining his blood money, as his first thought is to go to the Commissaire, his friend, to lodge a complaint.⁴⁴⁹ Jerome thinks of his own son in monetary terms, but Clitandre thinks of his father in the same way. The explicit connection between blood and money here echoes the connection Clitandre makes between the death of his father and the arrival of his inheritance: when Jerome dies, he will receive his money. Even Jerome's desire to sell his wife's house, worth at least 20,000 francs by her estimation, reveals a desire to convert a traditional seat of value, land and a house in the country, to metallic values. To do so he has goaded his neighbor into purchasing his house, having filed a lawsuit against his neighbor accusing him of encroaching on his property with trees he planted, and hoping to encourage the neighbor to buy his house in order to make the lawsuit go away.

The play's ending leaves open the possibility for reconciliation but does not guarantee it; the couples, we imagine, could get married but all Jerome is interested in is

⁴⁴⁸ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 4.6, p. 79.

⁴⁴⁹ Champmeslé, *Parisien*, 4.3, p. 75.

his *cassette*, which he mentions in his last line in the play recalling Molière's Harpagon. He is concerned, it seems, with the real in an attempt to avoid the artificial; his embrace of coin money, and desire to keep it safe, are a reaction to instability.

The play thus focuses on the instability of traditional bearers of value. By examining the implications of finding new sources of money, the role of skilled mediators and masters of money, and the growing importance of money over nobility, *Le Parisien* shows a world in transition. Money is key to this change, both as something to be accumulated, and as something which itself is changing in form, from the crisply minted coins hidden away in the Jerome household to the potential gains of the Indies trade. Throughout, the power of paper as a bearer of value is shown as resistant to attempts to tamper with it, and increasingly appears as something to be trusted and relied upon.

In *La Rue Saint-Denys*, characters convince a man's family that he is dead in an attempt to obtain his inheritance. Like the plays earlier in the chapter, it examines the relationship between nobility, bourgeoisie, and money. It does so in the framework of a complex structure of fraudulent financial obligations, with an *homme de paille* at its heart—an early example in theater of the representation of a financial straw man, a person who is paid to hide the true identity of the actual possessor of wealth. Theater is ideally suited to portray this question of roles and representations, and bears particular similarities to cases like these, which are backed by written documents specifying each individual's roles and duties (not unlike the script of a play).

The play begins with a theft of four bottles of wine which St. Blaise, a servant, steals from his master's shop and hides in a drawer full of lace.⁴⁵⁰ Since the servant does not actually remove them from the shop, the theft shown in the opening scenes is in some ways more a malicious misplacement, and thus foreshadows the nature of the financial crime that will be revealed later in the play: the larger misattribution of funds that composes the entire wealth of his master, Guindé. The shop owner confesses to his son that

les marchandises qui sont dans ce magasin, les billets de change qui sont faits à mon profit, l'argent comptant qui est dans mon coffre fort, & cette maison dont je me dis le propriétaire, tout cela n'est point à moy.⁴⁵¹

Guindé is only pretending to be the owner of these assets, which actually belong to Armosin, the father of the young woman he would like his son Jean to marry. When Jean Guindé and his father learn of Armosin's imminent surprise return to Paris, they arrange for a messenger to deliver the false news of his death to his daughter Margot, in order to pressure her into marrying him. Yet her lover Damis has hired a messenger to deliver the opposite news: that Armosin is on his way back, and that any marriage should wait for his return. As the play continues, the guests arrive for the feast that Jean Guindé has planned, each of them portrayed with ridiculous bourgeois mannerisms, until the moment of the final resolution when the contracts that had been signed and messages sent are untangled.

⁴⁵⁰ Charles Chevillet [Champmeslé, pseud.], *La Rue Saint-Denys ou le Banqueroute de marchands* (Paris: Jean Ribou, 1683), 1.1, p. 3.

⁴⁵¹ Charles Chevillet, [Champmeslé, pseud.], *La Rue Saint-Denys*, in vol. 2 of *Petites comédies rares et curieuses du XVIIe siècle*, ed. Victor Fournel (Paris: A. Quantin, 1884) 1.4, p. 217. [This citation is from the Fournel edition as the text is illegible in the 1683 Ribou version consulted.]

The play rests upon a legal structure designed around fraud, from a fake letter to fake news leading to a marriage, all for financial reasons. Armosin had given Guindé his property and money because he planned to declare bankruptcy: they made a contract forming a company together, to which Guindé fraudulently claimed he brought a number of goods (without taking responsibility for Armosin's debts). After taking possession of a secret counter-letter where Guindé recognized that the goods were in fact his, Armosin then left town without telling anyone.⁴⁵² When their creditors came, Guindé was able to prove that he owned the majority of what was valuable in his own house; the creditors took what little remained, which is to say what was attributed to Armosin in the contract. The marriage between Jean Guindé and Margot is planned by the elder Guindé as a sort of continuation of the contract that he made with Armosin; it is what will enable him to take complete control over Armosin's goods, especially if he is declared dead.

This struggle to obtain control illegitimately coincides with a portrayal of the characters as members of a particularly and grotesquely bourgeois social class, articulating in particular the tension between desire for money and desire for social acceptability. The play's characters are firmly rooted in the bourgeois merchant class: the first character in the list of actors, the supposedly dead Armosin, is listed as a "Marchand," as is Guindé. The play's full title, *La Rue Saint-Denys ou Le Banqueroute*

⁴⁵² The counterletter was already notorious for its fraudulent use in the seventeenth century (Furetière's 1690 *Dictionnaire* defines *contrelettre* as an "Acte qui en détruit un autre, où il y a de la simulation, qui contient une déclaration contraire. Il y a bien des gens qui mettent leur bien à couvert par de fausses obligations, dont ils ont par devers eux les *contrelettres*. La Coustume de Paris annule toutes *contrelettres* qui sont faites contre la teneur d'un contrat de mariage. Il n'y a gueres de *contrelettre* qui ne sont faites en fraude de quelqu'un. C'est pourquoy elles devroient estre absolument deffenduës" (Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, 1:643).

de marchands, sets the action of the text even more firmly in a commercial context.

Margot's lover Damis criticizes the man destined to be her husband by calling him

l'esprit le plus marchand qui soit dans la Ruë S. Denys, & la Personne la plus bourgeoise que Paris ait jamais veu naître, avec son jargon de Boutique qu'il employe partout, son rire à faire peur aux petits Enfans, & son frotement perpétuel de mains qui accompagne si joliment ses badaudes manières. C'est un vray Personnages [sic] à mettre sur le Theatre.⁴⁵³

This description is indeed theatrical: from his words, to the sound of his laugh, to the actions of his hands, the young Jean Guindé is portrayed here as love for money personified and therefore as a bourgeois cliché. The development of a bourgeois merchant type, characterized by his manners as a shopkeeper, parallels that of a class that knows how to manipulate financial documents and business arrangements.

Jean Guindé's merchant vocabulary, pervasive in his speech, further defines this bourgeois character and contributes to a transactional characterization of the fraudulent marriage plan. When Margot's aunt, Madame Binon, thanks him for a compliment, he responds in terms of a fabric seller: "Ce n'est qu'un échantillon d'une Piece de galanterie mesurée à l'aune des perfections de Mademoiselle Margot."⁴⁵⁴ When Margot does not respond, Binon explains that it is out of modesty. Continuing to use a merchant vocabulary, the young Guindé says to Binon:

Oh, je le sçay bien. Aussi jusques à un certain jour je veux bien luy faire crédit, mais la nuit de ce certain jour-là je veux estre payé comptant ... Comme il y a long-temps que j'ay fait mes avances, quand cette Marchandise sera arrivee à bon port, j'en feray monter les Effets à cent pour cent. ... Ce sera un joly petit Assortiment que le nostre. ... Nous ferons sans cesse un gentil petit négoce de Badineries.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ Champmeslé, *Rue Saint-Denys*, 1.2, pp. 5–6.

⁴⁵⁴ Champmeslé, *Rue Saint-Denys*, 1.16, p. 49.

⁴⁵⁵ Champmeslé, *Rue Saint-Denys*, 1.16, pp. 49–50.

Indeed, the young Jean Guindé is shown from the beginning of the play as having adopted a merchant language, referring to his destined marriage as “une Marchandise qu’il faut promptement mettre en vente.”⁴⁵⁶ His precision of language (he is shown correcting his father, who insists on an excessive use of the word “*chose*”) demonstrates an acquired and intentional use of a merchant vocabulary, one which he wears as a misplaced mark of financial success. Despite the “theatrically” ridiculed bourgeois quality of all of his actions, he claims to be a gentleman. “N’avez-vous pas veu la Carte de nostre Généalogie,” he asks Binon, “qui est dans la Salle où nous avons soupé, où il y a une belle Bordure d’ébène?”⁴⁵⁷ The proof of his *noblesse de marchandise* relies mainly upon a few ancestors of dubious nobility. “Il y a peu de Nobles,” declares Binon, “qui ayent porté la Marchandise si haut.”⁴⁵⁸ As the relationship between nobility and commerce was under revision at this time, we might read this comment as both satire and as an inverse warning: being a merchant can also bring down one’s noble status.

Just like the false claims to nobility, so we know Guindé’s assets to be fictional. When all of his guests are assembled, Jean Guindé responds to the compliments of his cousin by saying “Je ne suis que de Paille, Monsieur mon Cousin, comme vous,” recalling the *homme de paille* that his father is. When the Guindés’ plot is revealed in the end, the man to whom Armosin chooses to marry his daughter is not someone who has a firmer claim to nobility, but instead, simply someone who has more money. Damis is the son of a banker whom Armosin knows to be rich. It is interesting to note that Armosin does not take him at his word: “Monsieur, vous estes honneste Homme, si ce que vous

⁴⁵⁶ Champmeslé, *Rue Saint-Denys*, 3.4, p. 20.

⁴⁵⁷ Champmeslé, *Rue Saint-Denys*, 1.16, p. 51.

dites est vray; mais demain nous en parlerons plus amplement.”⁴⁵⁹ His cautionary remark indicates that in a society where noble appearances often betray common origins, matters of class take second place to financial concerns, and that those financial concerns must always be verified. He knows all too well how easily they can be simulated.

This resolution also indicates the triumph of the social values of the merchant and financial classes. Armosin’s choice depends not upon nobility but upon money, and the depreciation of Jean Guindé in his eyes is due only to his financial fraud. He rejects the idea that Jean Guindé is worth as much as his daughter: when Boisdouillet insists that “Monsieur vaut bien Madame,” Armosin reveals to all that Guindé is merely his “facteur” or agent.⁴⁶⁰ The final verdict, that his daughter will wed the son of a banker, thus rests upon a sort of financial status where rank is equivalent to wealth, and where false appearances are decoded with more clarity than those concerning nobility.

Nobility cannot be bought, though, in Boursault’s *Mercurie galant*, or *La Comédie sans titre* (1683) as it was renamed (likely upon the request of Donneau de Visé). It is one of several theatrical works that bear a connection with the monthly gazette. The popular play (29 performances in 1683 alone) is filled with references to the *Mercurie galant*; the premise is that Oronte, the cousin of the gazette’s author, is in the latter’s house while he is away, and a stream of visitors mistake him for that cousin whom they know by name but not by face. These visitors are the characters who populate the pages of the monthly: widows announcing the deaths of their husbands, soldiers wanting their exploits to be published, small businessmen looking for advertisements. (The play even features a

⁴⁵⁸ Champmeslé, *Rue Saint-Denys*, 1.16, p. 53.

⁴⁵⁹ Champmeslé, *Rue Saint-Denys*, 1.20, p. 65.

vulgar version of the monthly's characteristic *énigme*.) There is a cursory romantic intrigue in the play: young Cecile's father would like to marry her to the author of the *Mercurie galant*, and Oronte, as her lover, hopes to take advantage of his family relationship. Like *La Devineresse*, the play shows the use of money and information as parallel currencies. Furthermore, it interrogates questions of coins and new uses of paper. As the play from its outset concerns matters of false appearances and mistaken identities, it particularly examines the ways in which both coins and paper can be deceptive and used to manipulate the truth.

Money is present from the first scene of the play, having literally fallen from above in the form of a strange false coin. Oronte's valet, Merlin, recounts that Cecile threw him a "quadruple" from her window—in fact, the coin was hollow, and spring-loaded to reveal a note inside. The fake coin is quite interesting: the quadruple louis was a large coin, weighing over 50 grams, and Merlin was only able to tell the spring-loaded quadruple was fake because its weight was unusual. While the device of the hollowed-out coin is not the main focus of the scene, characters comment on it and remark upon Cecile's intelligent manner of passing a message. The coin is again mentioned in the second scene of act 2, when Lisette wants to make sure Oronte received it.⁴⁶¹ By incorporating a written document inside of a coin, the play visually signals at a subversion of old orders of value: coins, the message seems to be, are not as solid or reliable as they may have once been considered, since the real value lies in the message, not the coin. (An image of this coin appears below). The coin's size was unusual and

⁴⁶⁰ Champmeslé, *Rue Saint-Denys*, 1.20, p. 64.

⁴⁶¹ Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 2.2, p. 22.

noticeable. These coins were almost too large: hollowing them out was often a way to steal some of the gold if one were then able to fill it with a less valuable metal and pass the coin off for real. (Another possible reading is that paper in this case *cannot* substitute for gold, at least not in the eyes of Merlin).

Quadruple Louis from 1644, obverse (enlarged):



Reverse:



(Actual diameter 34.00 mm, weight 26.9 grams)

Louis d'or, 1665:



(Actual diameter 25mm, weight 6.75 grams)

While this kind of currency manipulation was certainly illegal, the first scene also contains mention of a larger financial crime: that of a tax collector (*Commis des Gabelles*) who has reportedly stolen 200,000 francs. Merlin has a piece of paper indicating that there is a 1,000 louis reward for information leading to his capture.⁴⁶² The thief, the aptly named Longuemain, is listed in the character list with his title, “Receveur des Gabelles.” He appears in act 2 to ask Oronte to help save his reputation by putting a favorable word in the *Mercurie galant*. In trying to justify his theft, which he insists on qualifying not as *vol* but as *fraude*, he reveals an interesting system of relative moral accounting. Longuemain insists that many “Banqueroutiers” are in fact living much better than he is:

Mais combien en voit-on, Banqueroutiers parfaits,
 Vivre du revenu des crimes qu'ils ont faits?
 Pour un à qui l'on fait ces injures atroces,
 Plus de dix à Paris ont deux ou trois Carosses.
 Qu'un homme ait de bien clair jusqu'à cent mille écus,
 On luy preste sans peine un million, & plus:
 Chacun ouvrant sa bourse, à sa moindre requeste,
 Luy jette avec plaisir son argent à la teste;
 Et quand ses Creanciers redemandent leur bien
 L'Emprunteur infidelle abandonnant le sien
 A la face des Loix fait un Vol manifeste;
 Et pour cent mille écus un million luy reste.⁴⁶³

He rests his defense on his assertion that since many people have stolen much more than he has, he should not be blamed. Above all, Longuemain seems to want to become part of this class. He claims that one needs 100,000 francs in “bien clair” to access large amounts of capital, and that is precisely the amount he suggests he will have

⁴⁶² Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 1.1, p. 8.

⁴⁶³ Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 2.4, pp. 26–27.

if, according to the plan he relays to Oronte, he returns half of what he stole in exchange for the forgiveness of the Fermiers Généraux.⁴⁶⁴

Strangely though, he only offers Oronte 100 louis in exchange for publishing this story; which, as Oronte mentions, pales in comparison to the 1000 louis reward offered for his capture. Money in large quantities becomes primarily a source of capital to be reinvested in fraud, a means to acquire even more money through false bankruptcy. Longuemain's crime, it would seem, and the reason he is sought for punishment, consist mainly in the scale of his theft: not large enough to escape, and not small enough to escape notice.

The *Comédie sans titre* explores the issues involved when commoners try to buy their way into nobility. One such case is Monsieur Michaut, who used the wealth his father acquired as a doctor to purchase an impressive house in a different neighborhood, and who insists that his servants call him "Chevalier." Believing Oronte to be the publisher of the *Mercure*, Michaut asks him to write a story highlighting his family's nobility, reminding him of the many cases in which the *Mercure* finds a way of discovering nobility in distant ancestors. Oronte refuses, stating he cannot find even the smallest trace of nobility in the man's origins; even the offer of a diamond worth 80 pistoles is not enough to sway him.⁴⁶⁵ For what concerns Oronte himself, his future father-in-law claims to have verified his nobility before agreeing to have his daughter marry him—"On m'a dit de quel sang vous avez receu l'estre: / Enfin je suis content tout

⁴⁶⁴ According to Furetière, "bien clair" refers to this sense of "clair": "que les affaires d'un homme sont claires, que son bien est clair, pour dire, qu'elles ne sont point embrouillées, que personne ne luy en dispute la possession." *Dictionnaire universel*, 1:550.

⁴⁶⁵ Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 1.3, pp. 11–13.

ce qu'on le peut estre"—interestingly, Boisluisant did not rely on written documents, but on verbal testimony.⁴⁶⁶

One of the play's main themes is thus that of paper which twists the truth. Lisette says that Oronte's relationship to the author of the *Mercure galant* will make it much easier to fake the contract, since, she says, there are plenty of corrupt notaries in Paris.⁴⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that such a corrupt notary might fall into the same class of "faussaires" that Oronte mentions in Act 3 as people who might be on the run from justice when a frenzied Du Mesnil, a Norman language teacher, arrives, and he asks him:

Avez-vous sur les bras quelque méchante affaire?
Estes-vous assassin, empoisonneur, faussaire?
Estes-vous poursuivy des Archers?⁴⁶⁸

Being a "faussaire" was a dangerous line of work; the fact that Oronte and Lisette think they can resort to one creates a perception that this type of person was prevalent in Paris at the time. Such a state of affairs would have been a serious danger for the credibility of any sort of paper documents, including forms of paper money.

Paper is used both to manipulate truths and serve as proof of manipulation in the play. Towards the end of the play, two prosecutors appear who accuse each other of defrauding their clients. Their accusations rely on paper documents: an invoice (*memoire de frais*, also called a *papier volant*), and the receipts (*quittances*) indicating the outrageous sums they allegedly charged.⁴⁶⁹ For these characters, whose very career

⁴⁶⁶ Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 5.2, p. 76.

⁴⁶⁷ Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 2.2, p. 21.

⁴⁶⁸ Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 3.6, p. 54.

⁴⁶⁹ Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 5.7, p. 86.

depends upon drafting and delivering paper documents, it is the paper itself which is used as damning evidence for overcharging clients.

Another innovative use of paper, similar to later printed banknotes in its form and printing style, is featured when the printer Boniface comes to Oronte with a unique business proposition: new and improved *billets funéraires*, cards to advertise funerals. And the play, by showing such uses of paper, contributing to imagining its eventual monetary imaginary, also highlights the immediate and definitive properties of cash transfers. Oronte's cousin Claire comes to him for advice: as her lover has recently left her, she wants to know if she should return a gift of 2,000 louis that he gave her. Oronte argues that she does not need to return the gift since he left her without cause.⁴⁷⁰ When the man in question, Monsieur De La Motte, arrives, Claire holds firm to her claim on the money:

Pour cela c'est un autre chapitre.
Je les prétends à moy par un assez bon titre:
En m'en faisant un don vous en fistes mon bien.⁴⁷¹

Once he declares his reason for ending the relationship (he thinks, based on signs he has seen in nature, that she will be unfaithful to him), and asks for the money back, Claire denies owing him any money and repeats her claim to what she considered a gift. He refuses to marry her to get it back, saying: "Je renonce à l'amour qu'on vend au poids de l'or."⁴⁷² He is as reluctant to get married as he is insistent on getting his money back. The sum thus plays the role of a deposit of sorts. Although he defers judgment on the matter to Claire's cousin Licidas, he still considers the issue in terms of a "procès," and

⁴⁷⁰ Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 3.3, p. 45.

⁴⁷¹ Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 3.4, p. 48.

while the reader is not privy to the result, the judgments of the characters seem to indicate that by any account, a sum of cash transferred as a gift can be considered unrecoverable.⁴⁷³ A parallel, albeit on a smaller scale, is provided later in the play, when Merlin is motivated by cash to marry Lisette: Boisluisant, Oronte, and Cecile each contribute 100 louis to compose an improvised dowry (a pittance compared to the 12,000 livres in “revenu certain” that Boisluisant proposes to Oronte for Cecile’s dowry).

While the play shows new uses of paper, traditional bearers of value such as cash are still the primary currency. But at times these are subverted by paper, as in the case of the hollowed out coin, and subservient to it, as a valuable diamond could not change what was written in the genealogical registers. And as in *La Devineresse*, information is present here as another sort of currency, to be bought and sold by the author of the *Mercurie galant*. Thus the play presents several elements of the paper money economy that will soon be in play in France, at least on the stage.

In the 1670s, the turn in theatrical production towards comedy also saw a turn towards comedies that portrayed current events and elements of daily life: manners as opposed to morals. As the focus on money in these plays tended to be on more specific and more detailed examples, we also see how the questions these plays examined contributed to larger interrogations of how money could be conceptualized.

Whether it be the relatively unsuccessful *Pierre philosophe* or the resoundingly popular *La Devineresse*, it is also important to keep in mind the fact that these plays are the ones that, for whatever reason, have been preserved in some form until now. This is

⁴⁷² Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 3.4, p. 52.

⁴⁷³ Boursault, *Comédie sans titre*, 3.4, p. 52.

not the case for all plays, particularly those which were the most critical of a certain social class: Donneau de Visé's *L'Usurier* (1685) is a prime example of a play that, likely due to the many people it inconvenienced, was never published and is now considered lost.

While these plays span only a short period of time—just over a decade—the ground they cover is significant. 1685, the year *L'Usurier* was performed, and the beginning date for the next chapter, was also the year of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes leading to an exodus of Protestants along with their money. As religious tensions mounted (and had a financial impact) and the importance of France's colonial empire grew, we shall see how socioeconomic tensions as represented on stage grew even more fraught, especially concerning characters' relationships to money. The use of paper instruments, and paper-based financing, started to be portrayed in increasingly great detail as well. This decade was a transition in money plays, from simplistic or symbolic representations to those that began to take on great detail, interrogating the nature, use, and meaning of financial instruments.

CHAPTER FOUR

Money in French Comedy, 1685–1700

The 1680s and 1690s were a tumultuous end to the century, both for France in general, and for its theater companies. Emigration following the 1685 Revocation of the Edict of Nantes led to a social transformation which drained France of money. The Nine Years' War, from 1688 to 1697, meant years of regular battle close to the French borders, and a high consumption of money, resources, and manpower. A cold winter and famine in 1693–1694 wreaked havoc as well. On the theatrical side, things were changing too. The Comédie Française, founded in 1680, was the main theater troupe performing in French, located at the Théâtre de Guénégaud / Jeu de Paume de la Bouteille until 1687, and then at the rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain starting in April 1689. The Théâtre Italien had more than a decade of increasing success, after it had begun performing in the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1680 and started incorporating more French scenes into the plays.⁴⁷⁴ It was closed in 1697 by royal decree. These two decades were thus a time of simultaneous concentration (the formation of the Comédie Française being the result of the fusion of two troupes) and of competition, as the Théâtre Italien began to feature plays and writers who could compete with their rivals for the public's attention.

The necessity of searching out new and exciting subjects for plays, the increasing destabilization of coin (in particular, a 1691 devaluation), and the search at both the state and individual level for new money at this time, meant that it was only natural that theater began to examine money in ever greater detail. This chapter will examine how a

⁴⁷⁴ Lancaster, *History*, 2:599.

series of plays from this time period dealt with the instability of coin, the use of paper money, the credit market, and the relationship between money and nobility. In these years, paper changed in theater to take on the characteristics of cash, to be circulated between third parties. The theatrical focus was no longer just on understanding its essence, but on how it could be quickly used. In some cases, money was portrayed differently depending on its origin, in line with theories of accounting which were then developing: money was developing as an abstract concept, as something that could be accounted for with numbers in a ledger.

Here, I would like to examine how comic theater showed and explored these different traits of money, as something whose value changed depending on its form, on who held it, and on its source. Much like claims to nobility, possession of money in these plays was not always a “sure thing”: it necessitated evaluation to determine its value. But these assessments were conducted with increasing speed and ease. Quite often, paper in these plays takes on the full status of cash, sometimes to the peril of those who do not examine it closely enough. Just as fake nobles almost get away with their impersonations, and are generally unmasked only very late in the game, plays from this decade, more than ever before, show successful counterfeiting and the volatility of money.

Many plays in this period were written by either Dancourt or Regnard, the two prolific playwrights whose works filled the stage of the French and Italian troupes. Another, who will here be presented to introduce this chapter’s themes, is Edmé Boursault. In Boursault’s *Les Fables d’Ésope*, performed at the Comédie Française in January 1690, paper is manipulated to affect two currencies: that of nobility, and that of

money of account.⁴⁷⁵ Instead of coins being clipped or otherwise manipulated, or paper bills being faked or stolen, the play focuses on the wealth that can be manipulated at the stroke of a pen by notaries falsifying contracts, or by financiers in account books. Among his many mentions of examples of the century's corruption, Ésope wonders "Combien un Financier, pour être en équipage / De Zeros criminels remplit-il une page?"⁴⁷⁶ Ésope describes a new world where the nobility no longer has money, and where moneyed classes use their wealth to buy nobility. He says he knows of no rich nobles—and speaks of nobility and money as having recently become somewhat incompatible: "La Noblesse & l'argent sont brouillez, ce me semble."⁴⁷⁷ In this play, the triumph of a rich bourgeois class is linked to their control over and ability to falsify paper documents for both social and monetary purposes.

Boursault's play is emblematic of the way in which many plays from this decade approach money. Three main themes typify what makes plays from this decade different from previous ones: first, the emphasis on the manipulation of money at a higher level than just coins (say, by notaries manipulating their account books). Second, there are the shameless purchases of offices by the bourgeoisie, and depictions of the nobility as not just temporarily embarrassed, but systematically poor. Here, the idea of the "counterfeit" is extended and elaborated upon greatly, as the non-noble characters easily perform the role of noblemen. Third, there is the element that connects these two themes: a depiction of a world where bourgeois took money from nobles precisely through their knowledge and use of financial techniques, in particular, the credit market. This chapter will examine

⁴⁷⁵ Edmé Boursault, *Les Fables d'Ésope* (Paris: Theodore Girard, 1690). Also known as *Ésope à la ville*.

⁴⁷⁶ Boursault, *Fables*, 4.3, p. 62.

how Regnard and Dancourt, more than any other authors at the time, participated in creating a theatrical landscape where the evolution of financial and currency practice was directly tied to the socioeconomic ascent of the bourgeoisie.

Jean-François Regnard was no stranger to the world of money and finance. His 1682 purchase of an office in the Bureau of Finance was the beginning of more than a decade of more or less regular interaction with the financial world.⁴⁷⁸ With parents who each came from prosperous merchant families, Regnard was quite literally born into commerce, “sous les Pilliers des Halles.”⁴⁷⁹ He had a good idea of where money came from, too: as a young man traveling in Sweden, he witnessed firsthand the inner workings of copper and silver mines.⁴⁸⁰ He also had the experience of having a price put on his life, when he was kidnapped and held for ransom. This constant lifelong contact with trade and money is clearly visible in his work. Three plays typical of his monetary theater in this time period—*Le Divorce*, *L’Homme à Bonne Fortune*, and *La Sérénade*—provide an overview of the monetary themes in his work.

In Regnard’s first play, the three-act *Le Divorce* (1688), the plot revolves around what is essentially a financial dispute: the marriage between Sotinet and Isabelle is strained by money.⁴⁸¹ She married him for his wealth, hoping for his timely demise. Sotinet’s position, that of a lower ranking tax farmer—a *sous-fermier*—is no pinnacle of

⁴⁷⁷ Boursault, *Fables*, 4.5, p. 70.

⁴⁷⁸ Gifford P. Orwen, *Jean-François Regnard* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), 23.

⁴⁷⁹ Orwen, *Regnard*, 16.

⁴⁸⁰ Orwen, *Regnard*, 45–46.

⁴⁸¹ Jean-François Regnard, *Le Divorce*, in *Comédies du Théâtre italien*, ed. Alexandre Calame (Geneva: Droz, 1981), 29–119. The play was not an immediate hit: the initial 1688 Théâtre Italien production was a failure, but a Gherardi revival in 1689 met with more success. (Antoine de Lérès, *Dictionnaire portatif historique et littéraire des théâtres* (Paris: Jombert, 1763), 147–148.) The play makes a few oblique and

high finance. He does not seem to aspire to any sort of nobility: monetary concerns remain very real for him; social ones less so. Sotinet is upset by Isabelle's gambling and excessive spending, and her brother Aurelio wishes to help her divorce him, as they are both frustrated that he has taken too long to die. Sotinet's own servant, Mezzetin, collaborates with Arlequin (Aurelio's former servant, listed in the character list as an "Intrigant") to facilitate the divorce, financially and otherwise. Throughout the play, money takes the stage in a variety of forms, from counterfeit coins to bearer notes, as the characters endeavor to acquire enough money to pay for the proceedings. In a comedic tradition where a marriage typically takes place in the final scenes of a play, this work's explicit reference to divorce is charged with meaning from the outset. Questions of money come immediately to mind, such as deciding who is to get the dowry after a separation. By portraying marriage as an economic contract, the play opens the negotiations up to interpretation. The play examines in detail the social and economic consequences of marriage agreements, and how they are negotiated with debt and imaginary money: sums which are spoken of in promise but never actually delivered.

As in earlier plays, like Champmeslé's *Le Parisien*, the financial adroitness of the servants is put to use in the interests of their masters: it is Arlequin and Mezzetin who are most able to mobilize the resources and perform the work required to raise money.

Although he is designated as an "Intrigant," Arlequin at times appears more as comic relief than as a sophisticated financial operator. Mezzetin, the other valet, is portrayed as the true master of the financial aspect of their partnership, claiming 90 of the 100 louis in

direct theatrical references which may have to do with this history; to the opera (1), (2,3), to the Hôtel de Bourgogne (2,3), the Comédie Italienne (2,3).

the money purse that Arlequin steals, for example. Furthermore Mezzetin motivates Arlequin with the promise of romantic intrigue; by assuring him that he will be able to marry Isabelle's servant Colombine.⁴⁸² Throughout the play Mezzetin leverages love and relationships to procure money; indeed it is he who proposes to use Sotinet's own money to pay for the divorce proceedings.

One of the main themes of the play is that of appearances which disguise reality. This is particularly true from a monetary standpoint. From the very first lines Arlequin is portrayed as being concerned with money, albeit in a way that can appear unsophisticated. His ability to procure it is first true in a physical sense, as he subtly picks Sotinet's pocket while shaving his face, taking 100 louis d'or.⁴⁸³ A counterfeiter on the lam, Arlequin justifies his long absence to Mezzetin by claiming that he escaped execution after being arrested for a pastime of making of what he euphemistically calls "médailles," explaining:

je m'amusais à mettre le portrait du roi sur des pièces de cuivre, que je couvrais d'argent, et que je donnais à mes amis pour du pain, du vin, de la viande, et autres choses nécessaires: mais ... on fut dire à la justice que je me mêlais de faire de la fausse monnaie.⁴⁸⁴

Arlequin is also a social counterfeit, playing roles in exchange for money or the promise of it. He pretends to be a barber, a dance instructor, a broke young gentleman, a Chinese ambassador, and even agrees, in exchange for the promise of a sausage, to pretend to be a lawyer and plead Isabelle's divorce case in court.⁴⁸⁵ Adding to the metatheatrical quality of these roles is both the fact that he hopes to receive compensation for them, and that he

⁴⁸² Regnard, *Divorce*, 2.1, p. 71.

⁴⁸³ Regnard, *Divorce*, 1.4, p. 53; 2.1, p. 70.

⁴⁸⁴ Regnard, *Divorce*, 1.2, p. 40.

has a director of sorts, Mezzetin, who coordinates his performances. Isabelle, in contrast, makes a curious statement in favor of authenticity. When Colombine suggests that she apply makeup to hide the effects of some difficult nights, Isabelle refuses, claiming that she wants to appear “moins jolie, et être un peu plus vraie.”⁴⁸⁶ But it is in Arlequin’s very nature to dissimulate in his actions and appearance, and he is skilled at doing so: as a counterfeiter, he succeeds in narrowly escaping execution, and in the play, he is successful at nearly all of his attempts to acquire money.

Similarly, Aurelio, a nobleman, is portrayed from the outset of the play as someone who has an appearance of wealth, but little actual financial means. He is described by his valet Mezzetin in unfavorable fiscal and social terms: “gueux comme un Rat, & il y a long-temps que votre Noblesse seroit tombée par terre, si la Roture ne l’avoit souûtenü.”⁴⁸⁷ Arlequin, too, returning after his adventure-filled absence, remembers his former master as “celuy qui a tant de Noblesse, & qui n’a jamais le sol.”⁴⁸⁸ While the servants are motivated to help him out of the promise for future gain, he has no money now and they trust him mainly because he is, as Mezzetin puts it, an “honnête homme.”⁴⁸⁹ Nor do they have much to lose, if they are the ones to be collecting the money. Yet it is Aurelio’s noble reputation that assures the two that he will treat them correctly and pay them. Sotinet’s low social origins are pointed to in the comically staged trial which closes the play, where Arlequin, acting as Isabelle’s lawyer Cornichon,

⁴⁸⁵ Regnard, *Divorce*, 1.4, p. 48; 1.6, p. 58; 2.3, p. 82; 2.6, p. 91; 3.4, p. 104.

⁴⁸⁶ Regnard, *Divorce*, 1.5, p. 56.

⁴⁸⁷ Regnard, *Divorce*, 1.1, p. 35.

⁴⁸⁸ Regnard, *Divorce*, 1.2, p. 39.

⁴⁸⁹ Regnard, *Divorce*, 1.2, p. 39.

accuses Sotinet of having once been a lackey.⁴⁹⁰ Here as elsewhere, both servants, in their mockery of Sotinet, continue their “soutien” of the noble characters as Mezzetin described. Throughout, the idea prevails that noble characters are deserving of money; their nobility has a sort of currency of its own.

The play also showcases some interesting aspects of paper money by featuring a form of it not seen on stage before, gamblers’ markers. Disguised as a dancing instructor, Arlequin wishes to show to his potential customers what is indicated in a stage direction as “*une Valise, qu’on apporte pleine de marques faites de cartes.*”⁴⁹¹ Arlequin says they are the result of a week’s work and are “argent comptant: Je n’ay qu’à aller chez le premier Banquier, je suis seur de toucher un demi Louis d’or de chaque billet.”⁴⁹² It is impossible to know whether these are real or not; Arlequin does not actually cash them in, but instead relies upon the promise of being able to do so, in order to drive up the price that he will charge Isabelle for dancing lessons. Her servant Colombine tells him that the rate for a dance instructor used to be just one écu a month, as opposed to the marker, worth a half-louis at each visit. The cards Arlequin has could be completely fake, but for his immediate purposes, it does not matter so long as he is able to use them to convince others of his worth. Even though he does not actually use them, the presence of these cards, and his description of their use, are telling. According to what he says, people are paying him with these markers that they would have either won at gambling

⁴⁹⁰ Regnard, *Divorce*, 3.6, pp. 110–111.

⁴⁹¹ Regnard, *Divorce*, 1.6, p. 64.

⁴⁹² Regnard, *Divorce*, 1.6, p. 64. Furetiere defines the word *marque* as follows: “*Marque, se dit particulièrement au jeu des jetons, des fiches, ou autres choses semblables, qui servent de monnaie pour mettre au jeu, ou pour marquer les points, ou les parties qu’on gagne. J’ay perdu 100. ou 200. marques. Les marques valent plus ou moins, selon qu’on veut jouer gros ou petit jeu.*” (Furetiere, *Dictionnaire Universel*, (La Haye, 1690) 2:565)

tables, or that they are writing to him. His assertion that they could be negotiated with any banker seems optimistic, however.

Arlequin also claims to handle another form of paper money, a bearer note. Here, he seems to use it more as a way to indicate a certain social standing, playing the role of a broke young Gascon gentleman, than for any immediate monetary gain. Disguised as the comically named “Chevalier de Fondsec,” he explains to Isabelle that

un devoiement, Madame, causé à ma bourse par les fréquentes crudités d’une fortune indigeste, m’a obligé d’avoir recours au remède astringent d’un petit billet payable au porteur, que j’apportais à monsieur votre époux.⁴⁹³

Gambling is portrayed in the play as an activity where money circulates mainly in the form of written debt, and where the illicit gains available make it comparable in moral terms to usury. Throughout, though, the play mainly shows how gambling can be monetized, in these two cases by Arlequin, and again when Colombine (acting in the role of Sotinet’s lawyer) accuses Isabelle of having run an illegal gambling den in their house. Isabelle allegedly alerted the authorities to the operation, forcing Sotinet to pay a 3000 livre fine, one-third of which she then received by being the informant—all to satisfy her own constant need for money.⁴⁹⁴

There are also references to a monetized sexual economy in the play. In his critique of the Opera, Arlequin (in the role of the dancing instructor) says that to join that troupe would be a “prostitution” of his glory; a term that is quite literal when he speaks of the “filles” who perform there.⁴⁹⁵ He uses the word again when disguised as a Chevalier, when Isabelle asks him to spend the afternoon with her—“je ne sçay pas si je pourray me

⁴⁹³ Regnard, *Divorce*, 2.3, p. 82.

⁴⁹⁴ Regnard, *Divorce*, 3.6, pp. 109–110.

prostituer à vostre visite”—before listing a number of women who he suggests give him gifts in exchange for his presence. Regnard continued this part of the Arlequin character in the 1690 *L’Homme à Bonne Fortune*.⁴⁹⁶ This gift economy is based upon the objects that lovers might obtain or give instead of money; Isabelle is accused of having pawned jewelry, sold the silverware, and stolen paintings, her material pillage of her husband completed by converting his valuable objects to cash.⁴⁹⁷

Furthermore, says Colombine (as the ‘lawyer’ Braillardet), Isabelle almost called off the marriage because the engagement gift Sotinet gave her was not considerable enough: she allegedly complained of having received only a “carreau de cinq cens écus” from her future husband (evoking the “diamonds” of playing cards).⁴⁹⁸ This is part of a larger non-cash economy present in the play. Isabelle’s spending is dependent upon a credit economy which the play references; her husband Sotinet accuses her of spending too much and leaving him the bills: “Je ne vois icy que des Marchands qui apportent des partis, ou des Maistres qui demandent des mois.”⁴⁹⁹ These theatrical hallmarks of consumption (M. Dimanche as representative creditor in *Le Festin de Pierre* is another example that comes to mind) are here presented in the form of a concrete complaint from husband to wife, as Sotinet engages in the decidedly bourgeois behavior of complaining about money.

⁴⁹⁵ Regnard, *Divorce*, 1.6, p. 61.

⁴⁹⁶ Regnard, *Divorce*, 2.3, p. 83.

⁴⁹⁷ Regnard, *Divorce*, 3.6, p. 110.

⁴⁹⁸ Regnard, *Divorce*, 3.6, p. 113.

⁴⁹⁹ Regnard, *Divorce*, 2.2, p. 76.

When Sotinet reprimands Isabelle for spending too much money, she responds that he should not be complaining because she “lowered herself to take his name.”⁵⁰⁰ Colombine recalls women who refused to take the name of their husbands: “Je connois un homme qui s’appelle Monsieur Jocet, & sa femme se fait appeller Madame la Marquise de Bas-Aloy,” a base alloy, like one would say of a coin.⁵⁰¹ Isabelle’s transaction of her name against his money came at a price; she essentially mortgaged it for the time period of her marriage, which she expected to be rather shorter than it has turned out to be. The financial angle of the play hinges upon a sum of imaginary money that sealed the marriage. Sotinet asserts that when he married Isabelle, he falsely claimed receipt of a dowry of 20,000 écus.⁵⁰² Isabelle’s divorce is, then, a financial coup, because this amount, even though she never had it, is ordered awarded to her at the conclusion of the trial which ends the play, along with an alimony of sorts: “une pension de trois mille livres.”⁵⁰³

Le Divorce is first striking in its very premise: instead of a typical ending of marriage, the play ends in divorce.⁵⁰⁴ Appearances, in the play, are likewise divorced from reality. Above all the play shows the dangers for the uninitiated in getting involved with imaginary or non-existent money. Sotinet’s acceptance of the non-existent 20,000 livre dowry calls to mind another sort of imaginary: that of the credit market, where interest exists only on paper, until it is called in. This play thus foregrounds the

⁵⁰⁰ Regnard, *Divorce*, 2.2, p. 76.

⁵⁰¹ Regnard, *Divorce*, 2.2, p. 77.

⁵⁰² Regnard, *Divorce*, 3.6, p. 117.

⁵⁰³ Regnard, *Divorce*, 3.6, p. 118.

⁵⁰⁴ “Divorce” at the time could have referred to a legal separation of husband and wife without an actual dissolution of the marriage. See Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel* 1:696.

circulation of debt in various forms. By highlighting the consumption and gambling economy of a newly rising spending class, those who claim to be noble hijack the newly acquired wealth of the bourgeoisie. *Le Divorce* is thus about a very economic divorce: more that of a man from his money than of a man from his wife. It is a conversion of an economic arrangement (marriage followed by quick death) into an alternative arrangement: the alimony payments which take the form of a life annuity. The play's use of various sorts of markers of wealth and debt is innovative, and set the stage for other representations to come.

One of these was Regnard's three-act comedy, *Arlequin Homme à Bonne Fortune*, which was performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne by the Italian troupe in January 1690.⁵⁰⁵ As the play opens, Arlequin represents himself as a caricature of a nobleman who has risen up from the rank of lackey, and who keeps someone he formerly worked alongside, Mezzetin, as his current servant.⁵⁰⁶ In fact the source of Arlequin's wealth is quite base, consisting primarily of the revenue he obtains from stealing watches, breaking into shops, and pickpocketing.⁵⁰⁷ He also receives presents, such as clothing, from several mistresses with whom he maintains relationships.⁵⁰⁸ And he even delves into the negotiation of paper money. Like other plays in this decade, this comedy presents a nobleman who is actually a servant in disguise. The comedic and critical hinge is that

⁵⁰⁵ Regnard, *Arlequin homme à bonne fortune*, in *Le Théâtre italien de Gherardi* (Paris: J.B. Cusson, Pierre Witte, 1700), 459–532. The French scenes from the play are reproduced in Gherardi's 1700 collection of the Théâtre Italien plays, although the lazzi and scenes in Italian are left out. The edition thus presents the play only as a collection of scenes ("Scènes Françaises de l'Homme à Bonne Fortune").

⁵⁰⁶ Regnard, *Arlequin*, 462. In Dancourt's *Le Retour des officiers* (1697), we see another variation on this theme, as Rapineau is a sous-Fermier (Laquais-financier) (1,1) and he keeps his brother as his valet.

⁵⁰⁷ Regnard, *Arlequin*, 463.

⁵⁰⁸ Regnard, *Arlequin*, 464.

these characters are indistinguishable from genuine noblemen save one difference: they actually have money, as opposed to the nobles who have lost it all.

Take, for example, just one aspect, the negotiation of paper money—the only kind of money Arlequin seems to have. His entry, disguised as a viscount, immediately heralds questionable payment practices as he refuses to give any money to the coachman who demands payment. “Je n’ay point de monnoye,” he insists, and asks the person he is visiting if she can pay the coachman instead.⁵⁰⁹ She does not have any money either, but has someone from her household staff pay him. Arlequin represents himself as an officer on winter leave (starting in 1688, France had been at war on nearly all fronts) who has no money, but as a “joly homme” obtains it, as other officers do, from the women he sees: “Pour de l’argent, je croy que tant que les femmes en auront, nous n’en manquerons gueres.”⁵¹⁰ Arlequin’s emphasis on his sexual currency is matched only by his ability to manipulate paper money. In addition to being a social counterfeit, Arlequin reveals to one of his lovers upon his imminent arrest that he is a monetary counterfeit as well:

Vous sçauvez donc, qu’estant obligé de partir pour l’Allemagne, & ne pouvant trouver d’argent sur mon Billet, (car les Billets des Vicomtes ne sont pas autrement reputez argent comptant) j’en fis un que je signay, La Harpe, (c’est le nom de ce fameux Banquier.) Sur ce Billet-là on me donna deux cent pistoles. Je partis. Presentement, (voyez, je vous prie, le peu de bonne foy qu’il y a dans le Commerce!) ce vilain Monsieur de la Harpe ne veut pas payer ce Billet-là.⁵¹¹

Having failed to get credit using his own name, Arlequin decided to game the system, signing with a more reputable name. His reasoning indicates a point where bearer notes become money: or rather the point at which they are not (“les Billets des Vicomtes ne

⁵⁰⁹ Regnard, *Arlequin*, 489.

⁵¹⁰ Regnard, *Arlequin*, 489, 492.

sont pas . . . reputez argent comptant”). Arlequin comically maintains that because he wrote La Harpe’s name on the note, La Harpe—whose “fame” has not lasted into the twenty-first century—should be required to pay. His simple usurpation of the banker’s name betrays the weakness of this monetary system based primarily on trust, and specifically on the appearance of trustworthiness of the holder of the bill. Whereas in Regnard’s *Le Divorce*, the Arlequin character is a counterfeiter of coin, here he manipulates the weakness of paper.

Arlequin’s mistress, eager to help him out of trouble, offers him diamonds and gold jewelry, which says he will take to a goldsmith in hopes of getting the 200 louis that he owes after having written the counterfeit note.⁵¹² The remaining scenes do not indicate the outcome of this search, or if he in fact eludes arrest. What is clear is how the play shows the ease with which nobility can be counterfeited for monetary gain: the coachman took Arlequin, his lovers gave him money, and someone paid a note he presented, all on the basis of his appearance, the fact that he looked the part of a genuine nobleman. The play heralded a major theme of the plays from this decade: the pervasiveness of the “counterfeit” noble. Arlequin’s role is typical of a presentation of nobility throughout the decade as having an inflated, artificial value. As money is passed from “genuine” nobles to the rising lower classes in the theater, the form it takes corresponds with characters who are manipulated with increasing ease.

Four years later, in Regnard’s *La Sérénade*, the enterprising lackey is shown as having evolved into a character who is almost ready to take over for his master. In the

⁵¹¹ Regnard, *Arlequin*, 497.

⁵¹² Regnard, *Arlequin*, 498.

first of Regnard's plays to be performed at the Comédie Française (July 1694), the clever Scapin sings an offer of financial education to the audience in the last scene: "J'offre ici mon sçavoir faire / A tous ceux qui n'ont point d'argent."⁵¹³ In a play that foregrounds the thieving servant to an extent not seen in any previous play, Scapin is a hero in the form of a rusing valet, who uses his knowledge of negotiating money to fleece everyone he can, not so much for his own interest but to serve his master. A valet, he wants to be a *maître*.⁵¹⁴ To do this, he has the skills and opportunity to outperform his master financially. He relies upon the vulnerabilities inherent in the system of negotiating bills of exchange and bearer notes: mainly, the ease with which they can be stolen, and the high possibility that they can be counterfeited and that those who hold them can impersonate a trustworthy agent.

Scapin lives from finance; since his master does not pay him, he says, "je loge en Ville, & je vis d'emprunt."⁵¹⁵ His schemes depend on leveraging his financial knowledge, because neither he nor his master have any assets: "que diable engager, que vendre? Pour tout meuble et immeuble, vous n'avez que votre habit & le mien, encore le Tailleur n'est-il pas païé."⁵¹⁶ Furthermore, Scapin complains that his master's monetary needs have put his skills to the test. "Depuis que je travaille pour vous," Scapin complains, "les ressorts de mon esprit emprunteur sont diablement usez."⁵¹⁷ Indeed, Scapin points to his financial skills as an indicator of the inequity of his relationship with Valère. In a revealing

⁵¹³ Regnard, *La Sérénade*, in vol. 1 of *Les Oeuvres de Mr. Regnard* (Paris: Pierre Ribou, 1708), 1.19, p. 42.

⁵¹⁴ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.9, p. 22.

⁵¹⁵ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.2, p. 6–7.

⁵¹⁶ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.8, p. 21.

⁵¹⁷ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.8, p. 21.

monologue, he portrays the troubled, unfair state of the valet who is smarter than his master:

Ce n'est pas une petite affaire pour un valet d'honneur, d'avoir à soutenir les intérêts d'un Maître qui n'a point d'argent. On s'acoquine à servir ces gredins-là, je ne sçai pourquoi, ils ne paient point de gages, ils querellent, ils rossent quelquefois; on a plus d'esprit qu'eux, on les fait vivre, il faut avoir la peine d'inventer mille fourberies, dont ils ne sont tout au plus que de moitié; & avec tout cela nous sommes les valets, & ils sont les Maîtres. Cela n'est pas juste. Je prétends à l'avenir travailler pour mon compte; ceci fini je veux devenir Maître à mon tour.⁵¹⁸

Scapin's monologue is a particularly limpid explication of the valet-master relationship which had been theatrically framed at least since *Dom Juan* as an expression of inequity between financial payment and services rendered. Here, though, the valet's economic role has grown substantially.

For Scapin, money is the solution to all problems. The plot of the play revolves around the fact that Scapin's master, Valère, and Valère's father, Grifon, both wish to marry the same woman, Léonore. Scapin suggests to Grifon that a cash payment might help: "avec trois ou quatre cens pistoles ne pourrions-nous point le mettre à la raison."⁵¹⁹

Grifon, too, sees money as the solution to persuading the reticent Léonore to marry him: "je m'en vais dépenser tout mon bien pour m'en faire aimer: je lui donnerai des Presens, des Bijoux, des Maisons, des Contrats, des Cadeaux, des Festins, des Serenades."⁵²⁰

When Marine, a servant to Léonore's mother, in an attempt to dissuade Grifon from the marriage, tells him that his desired bride spends excessively, she implicitly paints the

⁵¹⁸ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.9, p. 22.

⁵¹⁹ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.7, p. 20.

⁵²⁰ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.7, p. 20.

marriage in terms of financial value (“pour un mary vous valez cent fois mieux qu’un autre”), terms which Grifon seems to accept.⁵²¹

The play’s credit economy turns around a usurer, Monsieur Mathieu, whose paper is considered as good as cash. The paper notes that circulate in the play are issued in exchange for coin. Grifon, who wants to buy a necklace from Mathieu, had previously given him a bag of coins worth 1000 francs in exchange for a note from Mathieu acknowledging the transfer.⁵²² When Mathieu delivers the necklace, 200 louis still remain for Grifon to pay. Grifon says that he will give any of Mathieu’s men 200 louis as payment for the necklace he is purchasing as long as they have paper from him: “avec un billet de votre main, cela suffira; c’est de l’argent comptant.”⁵²³

But paper is not in fact as good as coin. It has its own particular vulnerabilities as a payment means. It bears the risk of being easily forged or of not being honored, as well as sharing coin’s risks of being intercepted, or of being paid out to the wrong person. Furthermore, it is very easy to steal. Mathieu employs his valet Champagne to pick up the coins from Grifon, giving him the note. In the play’s monetary economy which comprises coins, jewelry, and notes, Scapin recognizes that paper is the weakest link. Scapin encounters Champagne, who boasts about his association with Mathieu, and when he learns that Champagne has this note for 2,800 livres, he steals it from him after getting him drunk in a tavern: a tactic so effective given the small size of the note that

⁵²¹ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.11, p. 29.

⁵²² Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.5, p. 11. This exchange indicates that Grifon loans money to Mathieu. As Scapin says, “Le bon homme négocie avec les usuriers aussi-bien que nous, mais ce n’est pas de la meme manière” (1.5, p. 12).

⁵²³ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.5, p. 12.

Champagne does not even know he has lost it until he tries to cash it in later.⁵²⁴ Wearing a disguise that partially covers his face, Scapin presents it to Grifon, pretending to be Mathieu's employee.⁵²⁵ Although he does not recognize Scapin, Grifon is persuaded to hand over the money because Mathieu's handwriting is on the note, and because he is convinced by the name Scapin invents and the somewhat important sounding relatives he references (whose importance, to the spectators, is comically exaggerated: he proudly claims as his uncle the "Sous-portier de l'hostel des Fermes").⁵²⁶

While waiting for the money, Scapin encounters Valère and says that he will be getting 200 pistoles from his father.⁵²⁷ Grifon brings 200 louis as payment, which Scapin says there is no need to count.⁵²⁸ Expressing surprise at the promptness of Scapin's arrival to collect, Grifon remarks that Mathieu is unusually quick to collect on a debt. He uses the expression of "moldy money," which Regnard had used before in *Le Parisien*: "Mr. Mathieu ne laisse point moisir l'argent entre les mains de ceux qui lui doivent."⁵²⁹

The money which changes hands in the play—the bag of 1000 francs Grifon gave to Mathieu, and the 2,800 livres he pays out to Scapin whom he thinks is Mathieu's representative—again, ostensibly payment for the necklace Mathieu sells Grifon. Scapin uses part of the money to organize a serenade, where the dancers, actually thieves in disguise, rob Grifon at gunpoint, taking the valuable necklace out of his pocket.⁵³⁰ In the last scene, Marine and Léonore reveal themselves to be among the thieves, and Valère

⁵²⁴ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.16, p. 36.

⁵²⁵ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.12, p. 30.

⁵²⁶ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.12, p. 30.

⁵²⁷ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.13, p. 32.

⁵²⁸ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.14, p. 33.

⁵²⁹ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.5, p. 33.

⁵³⁰ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.18, p. 40.

offers the necklace to Léonore as an engagement present. Scapin admits his theft of 200 louis to Grifon, and then sings his offer of financial assistance to the public with the chorus repeating his words.

La Sérénade revolves around money, on the intersecting axes of marriage, usury, and theft. Money is the motivator for all characters. The marriage proposed between Grifon and Léonore was explicitly posited as a financial transaction. Grifon and Mathieu are both identified as usurers, and in fact the necklace transaction shown in the play is fairly suspect: it resembles the sort of inflated transaction used to hide payment of interest on a usurious loan, since Grifon at one point claims the necklace is actually worth twice what he paid.⁵³¹ But the play's most novel implementation of money is that of Scapin who positions himself as a master of money whose services are for rent. Here, he seems to take nothing for himself at all. He will perhaps get a portion of the money he stole if Valère gives it to him, but this is not indicated. In his willingness to help Valère persuade his father to approve his marriage, Scapin's actions parallel those of his namesake in Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. The difference here is mainly one of financial sophistication, and socioeconomic trajectory. As a valet, he is positioned as a master of money, and his "relations" in the financial world seem to be up-and-coming former valets. The play heralds a world where the grasp of the rich on their money is tenuous in the face of rising lower classes.

Florent Carton, known as Dancourt, is the other playwright whose works dominate this time period. His extensive comedic production often focuses on the daily lives of bourgeois characters, and particularly on situations regarding money. Dancourt's

ability to capture the essence of financial comedy is visible in many of his plays (he wrote over 35 in this time period), but particularly in the five that will be presented here: *Les Bourgeoises à la mode* (1692), *La Femme d'intrigues* (1694), *Le Moulin de Javelle* (1696), *La Lotterie* (1697), and *Les Curieux de Compiègne* (1698). His plays had varying degrees of success, and were performed often at the Comédie Française in the years following his death. It is only recently that his name has dropped off lists of canonical French literature. Performers and publishers now tend instead to favor the plays of Molière which are more translatable to present times, in part because they are less anchored in a specific socioeconomic, historical, and geographical context. Indeed, Dancourt's plays evoke specific settings in and around Paris which would have been well known to audiences at the time but require an effort of comprehension for modern readers. Similarly, I will argue, his use of money necessitates a certain familiarity with contemporary financial and economic practice to be fully understood: his comedies show money in a way that none had before. Like Regnard, Dancourt was no stranger to monetary matters; instead of state finance, though, he was more intimately involved in smaller-scale transactions. Although he received a pension of 1000 livres from the Comédie Française, he often had dealings with moneylenders, had luxurious furniture (in the name of his wife), and had his goods seized and pension garnished for his debts in the mid-1690s.⁵³² Indeed, as André Blanc notes, Dancourt was so experienced in dealing with these kinds of monetary affairs that he was the person the actors put in charge of negotiating on the secondary market the slow-to-be-paid royal *ordonnances* the troupe

⁵³¹ Regnard, *Sérénade*, 1.18, p. 40.

received.⁵³³ Whether his work simply mirrored contemporary monetary practice, or rather advanced it and served a pedagogical function, may be impossible to say: but at the very least, it provides an entertaining and educational window into how money was used and seen in late seventeenth-century France.

In Dancourt's *Les Bourgeoises à la mode*, performed in November 1692, money circulates between husbands, their mistresses, and their wives.⁵³⁴ The play shows two women, Angélique and Araminte, using their servants to take money from their own unfaithful husbands, Simon and Griffard. In a parallel plot, a false Chevalier attempts to marry Simon's daughter, Mariane. His true name, Janot, is revealed in the last scene, as well as the fact that he is the son of Amelin, a clothing seller who helps money and gifts move between men and their mistresses. Amelin also reveals in the last scene that her son will be rich, as she has saved 20,000 écus that she will give him as his inheritance, upon which a satisfied Mariane claims she would marry him with or without the money.⁵³⁵ The play ends as Angélique promises both to obtain the agreement of Mariane's father for the marriage, and to reconcile Araminte with Griffard.

From the beginning, the play is inscribed in a bureaucratic and financial context, as it is set in the house of Simon, a notary. The financial role of the notary in seventeenth-century France was important, as notaries acted as intermediaries for loans and *rente*

⁵³² André Blanc, *F.C. Dancourt (1661–1725) : La Comédie française à l'heure du Soleil couchant* (Tübingen: Narr; Paris: Editions Place, 1984), 61–62.

⁵³³ Blanc, *Dancourt*, 63.

⁵³⁴ Dancourt [Florent Carton], *Les Bourgeoises à la mode* (Paris: Thomas Guillain, 1693). The play was performed at the Comédie Française and likely written in collaboration with Saint-Yon (Lancaster 4:784).

⁵³⁵ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 5.14, p. 233.

contracts (all of which above 100 livres had to be registered with a notary).⁵³⁶ This setting, combined with the play's backdrop of gambling in the same house, provides ample occasion for money to circulate. In addition, several non-noble and poor characters aspire to make a fortune with their own financial knowledge. Three main kinds of money circulate in the play: jewelry (a diamond), coin, and paper (two bearer notes). Each has its particularities which are examined by the negotiating characters, Frontin and Lisette, as they help the wives take money from their husbands.

The play presents the two servants as non-noble characters who use the financial knowledge they have acquired in order to advance their own interests. It is another play where a servant named Frontin has commercial knowledge and acts as a negotiator for valuable objects and for bills; his role is again that of the character whose wits and knowledge drive the action forward. Frontin acts as the servant for several characters, and is ultimately loyal only to himself. The list of characters reflects this: he is not designated with the title of "valet" or "laquais" but simply as an "Intrigant." But although Frontin is presented as an experienced *intrigant*, in fact Lisette emerges as the main "intrigante" in this story. She, too, has a plan to become rich. Lisette may be the one of the first female aspiring *valet-maitres*; and she is certainly one of the first to use money so successfully. In a monologue at the end of the first act, Lisette reveals her intentions:

Adieu Madame Amelin. Nous aurons donc de l'argent comptant, & nous donnerons a joüer, Dieu merci. Tout se dispose à merveilles pour ma petite fortune. La passion du Chevalier, l'humeur de ma Maîtresse, qui ne songe qu'à ruiner son Mari: elle achette cher, vend à bon marché, met tout en gage;

⁵³⁶ Julie Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy: Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 34–35.

je suis son Intendante. Voila comme les Maîtresses deviennent soubrettes, & comme les soubrettes deviennent quelquefois Maîtresses à leur tour.⁵³⁷

She asks Frontin to join forces with her, and together they implore Angélique and Araminte to suffer a few mild amorous advances from Griffard and Simon in order to keep up the appearance of a relationship while they work. Frontin and Lisette propose their plan to the two women, and ask them how they would like to have their husbands ruined: in one fell swoop, or gradually, “tout doucement.”⁵³⁸ In quick need of cash, the wives choose the more expeditious method.

Lisette’s relationship with Araminte’s husband, Griffard, is an interesting counterpoint to the typical relationship of a valet who tries to steal and cheat the master. For while she is ultimately helping to relieve Griffard of his money, she is also assisting him in giving it to his mistress. Once again, the gift economy intersects with questions of money transferring hands in exchange for something else (here, as a sort of payment for services). Lisette suggests to Griffard that 200 pistoles might be an acceptable gift for Angélique and then works with him to find the best manner to give her the money. An outright present, she suggests, would be too forward, and Angélique would not agree to take the money in the form of a loan. Lisette suggests a means of delivering the money that could hide its origin: that of disguising it as a “restitution” or payment on a gambling debt. Griffard worries that Angélique will not know that he is at the source of the money; Lisette reassures him that she will tell her mistress. Lisette further offers to bring the money to Angélique in person, and negotiates the amount upwards, to “deux cens Louïs

⁵³⁷ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 1.13 [misprinted as 1.12], p. 32.

⁵³⁸ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 3.6, p. 74.

neufs” as she gets Griffard’s agreement.⁵³⁹ The distinction between “pistoles” and “Louïs neufs” is important: she says of the latter that “la restitution en sera plus honnête.”⁵⁴⁰

Here again we see the importance of the difference in exchange rates (the *passé*, as is also seen in *La Femme d'intrigues*). Yet she tells Frontin that the amount will be only 200 pistoles.⁵⁴¹

This manner of gift giving takes advantage of coin’s anonymous nature compared to a bearer note. It also relies upon a system of accounting. Lisette explains it to Frontin onstage:

FRONTIN. Tu nommes cela une restitution?

LISETTE. Ouy, c’est une nouvelle maniere de faire des presens sans consequence, où je trouve qu’il y a beaucoup plus de bienséance que dans toutes les autres.

FRONTIN. Tu as raison, celle qui reçoit ne s’engage à rien, & le donneur est pris pour dupe.⁵⁴²

This “new way of offering gifts” depends upon the credible existence of a network of gambling debts, ironically using the structures of that immoral activity to give a present with “bienséance.” True to the agreement between the two wives, when Lisette arrives with the money, Angélique tells her to give it to Araminte, since the sum comes from her husband. The ability of the wives to maintain this arrangement depends on mutual self-interest; the women are here shown exacting mutual revenge with a shared financial benefit.

The Chevalier, too, is portrayed as using his intelligence to profit from others. He is in fact not noble, but a commoner in disguise, and Frontin praises his ability to extract

⁵³⁹ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 3.9, p. 85.

⁵⁴⁰ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 3.9, p. 85.

⁵⁴¹ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 3.10, p. 86.

money from people: “Le jeu, les femmes, tout ce qui sert à ruiner les autres, est ce qui lui fait figure, & tout son revenu n’est qu’en fond d’esprit.”⁵⁴³ But he had an able teacher in his mother Amelin, who wears several hats: described in the character list as a merchant, she is a “Marchande de Modes” or fashion merchant who sells clothing to the upper classes. She also extends them lines of credit. At one point she complains of being owed more than 10,000 livres in bad debt, which she expects she will never see.⁵⁴⁴ She likewise engages in more direct forms of lending. When Angélique needs money and does not wish to go to a usurer, she instead turns to Amelin, to whom she already owes money (310 livres), to negotiate the ring she had told her husband was stolen. Indeed, in addition to the credit which has been extended to her, Angélique actually wishes to borrow money from this merchant, much to the surprise of Lisette, who thinks Amelin will not agree to any further loans.⁵⁴⁵ But once she is offered the diamond ring as collateral, Amelin accepts. In the play’s final act, Angélique has obtained a bearer note but does not know how to negotiate it; she expresses regret that Frontin did not cash it.⁵⁴⁶ Lisette has an alternative suggestion: a return to Madame Amelin, who, she reminds her, “n’est pas une connaissance inutile.”⁵⁴⁷ Since when Lisette proposed a solution for Angélique’s debt earlier in the play, Amelin easily accepted the diamond as collateral in exchange for

⁵⁴² Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 3.10, pp. 86–87.

⁵⁴³ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 1.2, p. 6.

⁵⁴⁴ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 1.8, p. 22. For a discussion on the emergence of the *marchande de modes* at this time see Joan DeJean, *The Essence of Style* (New York: Free Press, 2005), p. 43.

⁵⁴⁵ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 1.6, p. 18.

⁵⁴⁶ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 5.5, p. 212. [Note: the page numbers in this edition proceed from 119 directly to 200.]

⁵⁴⁷ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 5.6, p. 213.

covering her debt and an additional loan of 600 additional écus, Lisette imagines, correctly, that Amelin will be similarly quick to negotiate a bearer note.⁵⁴⁸

Frontin, on his end, convinces Simon that Araminte is in financial difficulty from extensive gambling debts. The sum, 1000 écus, is large compared to the others, and seemingly made even larger by the conversion into livres. Frontin's calculation renders the amount precise, and crucially, renders it into the *livre*, the accounting unit that corresponds to paper money.

FRONTIN. [...] Elle doit plus de mille écus, afin que vous le sçachiez.

M. SIMON. Mille écus !

FRONTIN. Oüi vraiment, mille écus, valant trois mille deux cens cinquante livres.⁵⁴⁹

In repeating the sum, Frontin again specifies the amount in livres, likely aware that Simon would probably not have the coin on hand, but as a notary, would certainly be able to write the amount out in a bearer note. By referring to money of account and not to an amount of coins, Frontin encourages Simon to choose paper money. Just as Lisette does with Griffard, Frontin discourages Simon from giving Araminte the bearer note in person, arguing that it would be impolite. Asking for the note directly, Frontin offers reassurances that he will not steal the note for his own purposes. This is because the note really is as good as coin. Once it is out of his hands, Simon makes no indication that he will be able to do anything to stop it. Even once he discovers the ruse played by the two wives and two servants, there is nothing he can do to recall his paper.

The bearer notes in the play are shown to have two main properties: they are vulnerable to use by the wrong person, and they require a certain specialized knowledge

⁵⁴⁸ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 1.12, p. 31.

to be used. But using the diamond ring as money also necessitates knowledge.

Angélique's effort at selling a diamond ring that her husband gave her is blocked by his efforts to recover it, since he believes it to have been stolen and has distributed handbills to all of the goldsmiths in the city advising them of the theft. Although Angélique knows the diamond cannot be negotiated due to this communication with the goldsmiths, Frontin does not. Confident that he can exchange it for money, he tells the Chevalier that he knows some goldsmiths who will give him 200 pistoles for the diamond, within just fifteen minutes.⁵⁵⁰ Ultimately, though, the handbills and the diamond's identifiability make it a poorly negotiable bearer of value.

Just as monetary instruments had various characteristics, money itself is shown as having different natures depending on its source. Lisette and Angélique both refer to the latter's husband, whom she feels should provide her with spending and gambling money, as her "homme d'affaires."⁵⁵¹ His is the money, that, according to them, should pay for her consumption of luxury goods. In what is mostly an excuse for not being able to pay, Lisette advances a notion of different sources of money for different purposes, when she explains to Amelin why Angélique prefers to use only money from her husband, and not from her gambling winnings, to pay her debts:

Oh quand elle gagneroit mille pistoles, elle aimeroit mieux mourir que d'en acquiter la moindre dette; c'est une chose sacrée que l'argent du jeu, diantre ce sont des fonds pour le plaisir, où l'on ne touche point pour le nécessaire.⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁹ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 4.9, p. 118.

⁵⁵⁰ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 4.10, p. 203.

⁵⁵¹ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 1.12, p. 30.

⁵⁵² Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 1.12, p. 30.

Explanations such as the one proffered by Lisette point towards a new way of thinking about money, where sources of income and types of expenses are categorized into different accounts, in line with the theories of accounting that were starting to be put into practice both at the state level and at the business level at this time in France.

The links in the affective economy that are caught up between the various presents are visible when the network of gifts is unwound at the end of the play. The financial links do not mirror the emotional ties. While Angélique and Araminte, who are friends, had immediately shared with each other the fact that the husband of each wanted to take the other as his mistress, the husbands are not aware of this until the end of the play. This knowledge is the information that enlightens the series of transactions to which all of the characters become privy in the last scenes. Amelin reveals that she lent 600 écus to Lisette acting under Angélique's orders with the diamond for collateral.⁵⁵³ Angélique in turn reveals that she knows her husband gave Araminte a bearer note for 1000 écus as a gift—news to Araminte's husband, Griffard.⁵⁵⁴ Araminte, justifying her acceptance of this gift, in turn reveals that she knows Griffard has given 200 louis to Angélique.⁵⁵⁵ At each revelation, the wives insist that they were simply taking money because they knew that their husbands were giving it to their mistresses. The only person outside of this simultaneously affective and “*effectif*” economy is Amelin, who asks Simon for her 600 écus back since the ring is no longer in her possession.

Finally this play, too, shows counterfeit nobility as a knowledge which can be learned and emulated. While Simon, the notary, described by Lisette as being “bourgeois

⁵⁵³ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 5.13, p. 227.

⁵⁵⁴ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 5.13, p. 228.

depuis les pieds jusqu'à la tête," makes no claims to nobility and indeed does not want his daughter to take on the noble airs his wife displays, Angélique emulates many noble mannerisms, particularly spending habits.⁵⁵⁶ Lisette even invokes the cause of noble ruin to explain why Angélique will not be paying her debt to Amelin:

AMELIN. J'aime les gens de qualité, c'est mon foible; ils ont toujours de petites manieres qui les distinguent, & l'on fait bien son compte avec eux, n'est il pas vrai?

LISETTE. Le bon temps est passé, Madame Amelin, les gens de qualité n'ont point aujourd'hui d'argent de reste.⁵⁵⁷

Amelin has little room to argue because she knows that, like Angélique, her son the Chevalier is not who he claims to be. Frontin also knows his true identity as Janot because the two were schoolmates. In a calculated extortion attempt, Frontin demands that the Chevalier share the monetary benefits of his impending marriage, or else he will reveal his identity. His demands are both monetary and more intangible: he wants the proceeds of a bearer note that Janot had given him to cash, the diamond that he stole from his mother, clean clothing to be presentable as a gentlemen and "avec cela quelques bonnes habitudes, & tout ira bien. J'ai de l'esprit, vous serez pourvû, je vous demande vos vieilles pratiques."⁵⁵⁸ In this phrase, and in the story he tells about their origins—that they were both clerks for a procurator, that Janot was fired for sleeping with the mistress and Frontin for sleeping with the servant—Frontin implies that Janot had always had both "les inclinations plus nobles" as well as knowledge of how to imitate noble mannerisms.

⁵⁵⁵ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 5.13, p. 229.

⁵⁵⁶ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 1.3, p. 188.

⁵⁵⁷ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 1.12, pp. 199–200. Amelin is speaking of her son.

⁵⁵⁸ Dancourt, *Bourgeoises*, 3.12, p. 92.

This sort of counterfeiting is, though, portrayed as a learned skill: Janot learned it from his mother. Frontin now demands that Janot teach it to him.

In this play, we might say that, as Janot has learned, money talks. That is, a certain manner of speaking and acting encourages others to think that there is money behind the façade. And in a very practical sense, a healthy sum of money encourages good marriages. By acting in the “mode” of nobility, these bourgeois women spend money, and search for it, in a way previously reserved to the upper classes. Indeed, it is likely only because members of this class agreed to pay Amelin (much of her noble clientele having reneged on their debts) that she was able to amass such a fortune. This play, by an alternate reading of its title, invites a question—*à la mode de quoi?*—and provides what is, in part, a monetary answer. By satirizing these bourgeois appropriations of noble economic behavior, the play points out how vulnerable to reappropriation both money and nobility can be.

The character of the bourgeois woman as a clever intermediary is amplified in Dancourt’s *La Femme d’intrigues*, performed in January 1692 at the Comédie Française. In this metatheatrical, self-conscious spectacle, a focus on money links together different layers of interpretation and meaning. It is a complicated play from the outset: the five-act comedy features a cast of 28 characters, more typical of Shakespeare than of classical French comedy.⁵⁵⁹ The first listed is Madame Thibaut, designated simply as a “Femme d’Intrigues,” and a few other characters follow whose names and descriptions indicate deviousness and add to the multiplicity of characters: La Ramée is designated as a

⁵⁵⁹ Dancourt, *La Femme d’intrigues* (Paris: Thomas Guillain, 1694).

“Fourbe, sous le nom de Cleante son Capitaine,” and Angélique, as a “Fille déguisée en homme.”⁵⁶⁰

The plot is similar to that of *La Devineresse*, and the *Mercurie Galant*: a series of characters arrive to negotiate their various dealings with Thibaut, whose business activities include being a clothing reseller, a pawnbroker, a matchmaker, and more. Thibaut and La Ramée both intend to trick the other into a marriage where they will take the other’s money. With the enterprising Thibaut we see the mechanisms of an economy based on corruption combined with that of the economics of marriage, and of remarriage in particular. Like Jobin in *La Devineresse*, Thibaut maintains an expensive network of informants and associates inside Parisian households.⁵⁶¹ We see the details of her business relationships with them; her associate La Brie refuses to trick a captain for 100 pistoles because, he says, it is not enough to cover the costs: a captain is more expensive to fool than a bourgeois, and paying someone to imitate a notary would cost at least that much.⁵⁶²

Thibaut lends on collateral, and provides a delivery service, using teachers to deliver gifts and letters to young women on behalf of others.⁵⁶³ Yet she maintains complicated relationships with her associates, such as with a dance teacher to whom she provides old clothing and other goods, but who refuses to participate in a transactional economy that doesn’t respect his “genius”: “je verrois crever tous les Financiers du

⁵⁶⁰ Lancaster and Spielmann call her “Thibaudet”; she is listed as Thibaut in the 1694 Guillaumin edition.

⁵⁶¹ Dancourt, *Femme*, 4.11, pp. 116–117.

⁵⁶² Dancourt, *Femme*, 1.5, p. 20.

⁵⁶³ Dancourt, *Femme*, 1.3, p. 12.

Royaume plutôt que d'apprendre à danser à leurs Maîtresses pour une pistole."⁵⁶⁴ Here, even the one louis he would earn as a dancing instructor would be too offensively low to accept; even though Thibaut was offering to give him 30 in exchange for his services as an intermediary. Thibaut concerns herself with other sorts of transactions, usually taking a small cut in exchange for her help; helping a spendthrift son sell his father's silverware, for example, or helping a woman "launder" the presents she receives from her lovers, by convincing the husband she is selling them used at a low price (again, a perversion of the gift economy).⁵⁶⁵ Wives use her to put the details of their married lives into financial terms, such as Ardalise, who "fines" her husband Orgon when he gets angry at her. This "tax" is always translated into a purchase from Madame Thibaut.⁵⁶⁶

The play also presents another expert in fraud. La Ramée, a "Fourbe" like the Frontin characters in previous plays (*Le Parisien*, for example), possesses a natural capital of *savoir-faire*. Impersonating his captain Cléante, he has taken for his own use the carriage and the large sum of money (2,000 livres) he was given to recruit new soldiers. Not only does he spend the cash, but he buys clothing on credit for himself in his captain's name. His facility at spending betrays the fact that he was not always a soldier, he says, but once genuinely rode in a carriage:

Mon adresse & mon sçavoir-faire m'avoient mis dans le monde dans une assez belle situation; mais mon bonheur m'y fit de jaloux, on me suscita des affaires; je m'enrolai pour me garantir des brutalitez de la Justice.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ Dancourt, *Femme*, 1.4, p. 17. The singing instructor has similar reservations.

⁵⁶⁵ Dancourt, *Femme*, 4.2, p. 88; 4.5, p. 95.

⁵⁶⁶ Dancourt, *Femme*, 5.5, p. 132.

⁵⁶⁷ Dancourt, *Femme*, 2.1, p. 31.

La Ramée's up-and-down journey through the ranks of society is presented as being driven by his knowledge of the means of financial and social manipulation (like his present scheme to impersonate a captain and marry a rich widow); and, he claims, tempered only by the jealousy of others.

Thibaut, herself a widow, is also a merchant of widows. And she is simultaneously a merchant of husbands: Thibaut tells Torquete, the widowed fishmonger, that she has "un magasin de maris à vous offrir."⁵⁶⁸ Angélique's entry into the play puts this question of dual-gender marriage sales at the forefront.⁵⁶⁹ Disguised as a man, she asks Thibaut to help her purchase an office in the military nobility. Thibaut instead advises her client to find a rich wife, and explains the procedure in transactional terms:

Tâcher à vous associer avec quelque riche veuve ... les autres jeunes gens qui épousent des femmes déjà surannées en font ... leurs Intendantes & leurs Fermieres. Si vous voulez avant qu'il soit deux jours, je vous livre la veuve d'un Marchand de marée qui me persecute pour lui trouver un joli mari.
ANGÉLIQUE. Une femme de vingt-cinq mille livres de rente, le joli poste pour un jeune homme

...
THIBAUT. ... où trouverez-vous encore un metier dont le travail de six semaines suffise pour vous défrayer de toute l'année?⁵⁷⁰ (*emphasis mine*)

The job is being a young and handsome husband, and the pay is good. The transaction focuses on the steady revenue stream afforded by the fixed income of the potential wife, showing the purchasing power of a wealthy widow. What Thibaut promises is the real aspiration in the play: not to attain a one-time lump sum, but rather a steady and high

⁵⁶⁸ Dancourt, *Femme*, 5.7, p. 140.

⁵⁶⁹ This genderbending is also visible in an interesting typographical slip in a later edition, where the title of the play which appears at the top of the page when she enters, as well as three other pages, reads "Le Femme d'Intrigues" and not "La Femme" (1.6, p. 32; also on pp. 14, 18, 80) in Dancourt, *La Femme d'Intrigues*, in *Les Oeuvres de Mr. Dancourt* (The Hague, Etienne Foulque, 1706); [Independent title page and pagination: The Hague, Etienne Foulque, 1705].

⁵⁷⁰ Dancourt, *Femme*, 2.6, pp. 42–43.

fixed income. Here, gender matters not so much as the transactional nature of marriage, which can be manipulated by both sexes.⁵⁷¹

The conversion of marriage partners, even widowed, into currency is reinforced by the fact that the money at stake in this play is the dower (*douaire*), the money left by a husband to his wife in case of his death; and not the dowry (*dot*), the money that the woman brings to a marriage. The economic state of widows is presented as one of financial independence. But one of Thibaut's clients, Torquete, a recently widowed fishmonger, makes the argument that she needs a husband because she does in fact need help in dealing with her financial affairs, arguing that her children do not respect her, her farmers do not pay her, and her creditors pursue her in public.⁵⁷² Nevertheless she also turns her argument in favor of a young husband, ostensibly so that he will be around longer to help her.

Even children become merchandise.⁵⁷³ Thibaut, suddenly burdened with the illegitimate child of one of her associates, finds a convenient way to rid herself of it when Dubois, who recently lost his wife and child, reveals that he needs to acquire one so that he can keep his wife's dowry; a wife dying too soon without leaving a child generally meaning that the dowry would need to be returned to the parents. When Thibaut talks about the (non-existent) mother that she supposedly needed to pay to get the child for Dubois, her account of the negotiation uses and exploits a variety of monetary terminology. Dubois initially offers 1000 écus for the child; an amount that Thibaut says

⁵⁷¹ Angélique later in the scene reveals her true self and her intentions to Thibaut: in fact, she wants to borrow 50 pistoles (leaving a diamond ring for collateral) in order to finance a gambling expedition, dressed as a man, to spy on her lover and her rival.

⁵⁷² Dancourt, *Femme*, 5.7, p. 141.

is more than double what is necessary, but which she uses to calibrate his willingness to pay. While Thibaut refers to each unit of negotiation as a “sac de mille francs,” her summary of the negotiation, from 6,000, to 7,000, to 8,000, shows the differences between units: “Deux mille écus l’ont émuë, les sept mille francs l’ont ébranlée, & les huit cens pistoles ont achevé de la déterminer.”⁵⁷⁴ And although these amounts refer to very precise amounts of coins that could be passed across a table, picked up, and weighed, Dubois decides to pay instantly with three bearer notes he has on him, stating that “les trois ensemble font quatre cens vingt livres plus que la somme.”⁵⁷⁵ This amount, Thibaut says, is not for enough her servant Gabrillon’s share, and so she persuades Dubois to further give her a diamond worth 15 pistoles.⁵⁷⁶ This is potentially a hedge indicating her doubts at being able to negotiate the bearer notes.

The difference in monetary terms is apparent throughout the play. Already, the rising value of the louis d’or is at issue, when Thibaut names a price of 10 pistoles for some lace, and Orgon offers 10 louis d’or, mentioning that the “passe,” or difference in value between pistoles and louis d’or, is for the “vin de marché”—a difference large enough to receive Thibaut’s approval.⁵⁷⁷ Characters are also shown who put non-cash based currencies at play; but they are generally not successful in their transactions with Thibaut. When a young count and his lover, “Mlle. Gogo,” ask Thibaut to perform their marriage, they have nothing to offer her but his sword and her watch.⁵⁷⁸ When Thibaut

⁵⁷³ Dancourt, *Femme*, 4.10, p. 113.

⁵⁷⁴ Dancourt, *Femme*, 4.12, p. 119.

⁵⁷⁵ Dancourt, *Femme*, 4.12, p. 119.

⁵⁷⁶ Dancourt, *Femme*, 4.12, p. 120.

⁵⁷⁷ Dancourt, *Femme*, 5.5, p. 138. (In fact the lace was already given to Orgon’s wife by her lover; the money will be shared between Thibaut and Lisette.)

⁵⁷⁸ Dancourt, *Femme*, 2.7, p. 49.

asks what resources they will live from, Gogo assures her that as a woman, she will always be able to find male friends to give her money.⁵⁷⁹ Thibaut refuses to wed the couple: their lack of cash, and of any resource that can be monetized on an immediate basis, mean there is no business interest for her. These plays show how money is subverting the traditional family structure just as it is subverting the social order in buying children, and in having clothing merchants perform marriages.

The play also shows several scenes of complicated accounting, where Thibaut acts primarily as a financial planner or credit counselor. She maintains an ability to present and untangle complicated states of financial affairs. In one scene La Brie, disguised as a notary, provides the details to Madame Thibaut of the transactions he is undertaking on her behalf, with the goal of sounding off an inflated asset list that will catch the attention of La Ramée who is present in the room (“[il] a pris le hameçon,” Thibaut says after he has left).⁵⁸⁰ La Brie presents Thibaut’s assets as if he were preparing to draw up a marriage contract between Thibaut and La Ramée. Her assets include “quatre Baux, cinq quittances, & deux Contracts de constitution,” and La Brie also mentions the investments and loans he has (supposedly) made on her behalf: 2,000 pistoles to be lent to “un jeune homme de famille, qui les employera à se faire un équipage pour donner dans la veuë à la veuve d’un Partisan,” as well as 22,000 francs to invest in a new building for the Opéra.⁵⁸¹ Éraste, too, has a complicated pre-marital accounting that Thibaut helps him prepare. He counts 100,000 francs in assets, 10,000

⁵⁷⁹ Dancourt, *Femme*, 2.7, p. 50.

⁵⁸⁰ Dancourt, *Femme*, 2.4, p. 37.

⁵⁸¹ Dancourt, *Femme*, 2.3, p. 35.

écus in debts, and a total lack of cash.⁵⁸² Thibaut positions herself as his financial advisor. “Faites un memoire de vôtre bien, & de vos dettes sur tout; mais qu’il soit fidelle: je me fais forte de trouver moyen de vous tirer de l’embaras où vous estes.”⁵⁸³ This paper turns out to be responsible for condemning his chances at a marriage: it falls out of his pocket and his fiancée Torquete finds it, discovering his 29,000 livres worth of drinking, clothing, and gambling debts.⁵⁸⁴ Even though the marriage falls through, Éraste leaves Thibaut with the list of his debts in hopes that she can help: he expects that she will still be willing to serve as a sort of credit counselor, helping him negotiate his debts down.⁵⁸⁵ This focus on accounting, on finding solutions to economic problems, and on the role of an outside advisor to provide guidance on these matters points to the theatrical construction of a figure who, instead of using financial knowledge uniquely for individual gain and trickery, contracts their services out to others.

This position involves helping others get a clearer idea of their financial situations. The Marquis, a penniless noble who would like Thibaut to find him a rich widow to marry, uses a curious form of accounting to explain his finances:

Il me reste du côté de ma mere assez considerablement de bien; mais comme mon pere m’a laissé encore plus considerablement de dettes, je ne vous ferai le detail que de mon revenu le plus liquide.⁵⁸⁶

He then details his yearly “revenues” which consist entirely of credit extended to him by merchants: 700–800 pistoles worth of fabric from one merchant; 2000 écus in linen and

⁵⁸² Dancourt, *Femme*, 5.4, p. 130.

⁵⁸³ Dancourt, *Femme*, 5.4, pp. 130–131.

⁵⁸⁴ Dancourt, *Femme*, 5.9, pp. 146–147.

⁵⁸⁵ Dancourt, *Femme*, 5.11, p. 151.

⁵⁸⁶ Dancourt, *Femme*, 3.10, p. 80.

silk from another. Before he can give the details of his transportation expenses, Thibaut interrupts him:

THIBAUT. C'est à dire, Monsieur le Marquis que tout vôtre revenu est en fonds de credit.

LE MARQUIS. Fonds de terre ou fonds de credit, qu'est-ce que cela fait? Ne touchai-je pas cela tous les ans?

THIBAUT. C'est quasi la même chose.⁵⁸⁷

The idea that one can actually be “credit rich” is a new phenomenon (and here, certainly used to comical effect). The idea of nobles receiving lines of credit was certainly not new, but the conceptual conversion of credit into a sentiment of personal wealth required a level of accounting more advanced than had been shown in theater in the past. Much like Scapin in Regnard’s *La Sérénade*, the Marquis lives off of credit: it is, in his mind, simply money. Thibaut is, though, careful to establish the distinction between wealth based on credit and wealth based on land, making the distinction that one serves for clothing, but the other for food.

THIBAUT. Vous êtes un petit maitre, & il y a de petites maîtresses en ce païs-ci. Si je vous allois donner une femme, dont le revenu fust comme le vôtre, tout en étofes, la cuisine seroit bien mal fondée.

LE MARQUIS. Vous avez raison. Comme j’ai grand fonds de credit moi, il faudroit pour diversifier les choses que la Dame eût grand fonds de terre.⁵⁸⁸

Thibaut then proposes that the Marquis wed a widow with 400,000 livres of *rente*. In this transaction, it is difficult to determine with precision who is the merchandise, and who the customer. It appears that the Marquis is just one of many of his type. As to the potential bride, she too seems to be one of many available widows that Thibaut has in

⁵⁸⁷ Dancourt, *Femme*, 3.10, p. 81.

⁵⁸⁸ Dancourt, *Femme*, 3.10, pp. 81–82.

mind. The Marquis does promise, if the marriage works out, a payment of 300 pistoles to Thibaut.

This play, like *Tartuffe*, ends with the entrance of an agent of the state, a *commissaire* in this case, who reveals Thibaut's true nature (with a scammed client as a witness). Nevertheless, *La Femme d'intrigues* presents a compelling case in which credit begins to take on a life of its own, where the very idea of wealth is interrogated and redefined somewhere between traditional land rents and consumer credit.

In Dancourt's one-act *Le Moulin de Javelle* from 1696, a valet character again shows financial savvy and an eye for bearer notes.⁵⁸⁹ The play is set in the summer when many eligible gentlemen are away in the army, and women must make do with the bourgeois men who remain. The eponymous setting is a tavern of ill-repute, where people from different social classes meet for seafood and amorous encounters. As the drunk coachman remarks, "il n'y a point de lits au moulin de Javelle, on n'y loge pas; mais cela n'empêche qu'on y couche."⁵⁹⁰ It is a place where, indirectly at least, money and food change hands for sex. Within this system of exchange, a bearer note is shown as being just as good as cash.

As the play opens the character known as "La Comtesse" is traveling in a coach with two servants. The drunk coachman demands payment as they stop at the Moulin, intending to leave them there where he assumes she has come for an amorous encounter.⁵⁹¹ The relationship between nobility and money is crystallized particularly

⁵⁸⁹ Dancourt, *Le Moulin de Javelle*, in vol. 5 of *Les Oeuvres de Mr. Dancourt* (The Hague: Etienne Foulque, 1706), [independent paginations and title page (The Hague: Etienne Foulque, 1705)]

⁵⁹⁰ Dancourt, *Moulin*, 1.2, p. 6.

⁵⁹¹ Dancourt, *Moulin*, 1.2.

well in these scenes of the play. The Countess is coming to visit George Ganivet, a man her servant Finette describes as ridiculous, but whose money, the Countess argues, is a redeeming quality: “d’accord, c’est un Bourgeois, mais il a de quoy vivre en homme de qualité: Il est fort riche, & je n’ay point de bien, il est très ridicule, j’en conviens, mais enfin. . . .”⁵⁹² Her intention is to marry Ganivet, and to ally herself with the Chevalier, another noble in need of money (in his case, it is in order to go to war), in an attempt to fleece her new husband for all they can. The nobility of the Countess is feigned, however. She is known by the tavern-keeper’s wife as the daughter of a local laundress—a “Blanchisseuse de la Grenouillere.”⁵⁹³ In the last scene, the Countess and her disguised servant are unmasked and their true common origins revealed. For his part, Ganivet announces his intention to purchase an office and marry a noblewoman in order to join the nobility: “c’est le moyen de parvenir, n’est-ce pas?”⁵⁹⁴

The Chevalier, though, is indeed of noble origin—his problem is simply that he lacks money. Ganivet’s father, a bourgeois procurator, ruined the Chevalier’s heritage, and here he relies on a commoner to help get his money back. Ganivet’s aunt used to lend him money at an outrageous interest rate (“au denier un” or 100%).⁵⁹⁵ Thus when the Chevalier gets a chance to steal from Ganivet, he takes full advantage of it. To do so he relies upon his servant L’Olive, who already takes care of the Chevalier’s monetary business with coin, paying his overdue debts to the tavern-keepers and negotiating

⁵⁹² Dancourt, *Moulin*, 1.3, p. 8.

⁵⁹³ Dancourt, *Moulin*, 1.4, p. 11.

⁵⁹⁴ Dancourt, *Moulin*, 1.32, p. 62. [Note: 2 pages are numbered 62 in this edition; this is the first].

⁵⁹⁵ Dancourt, *Moulin*, 1.24, pp. 47–48.

additional services with louis d'or coins, for example.⁵⁹⁶ When the Chevalier tells L'Olive that Ganivet has a bearer note in his pocket worth 400 louis, L'Olive confirms he will take charge of negotiating it for coin as well. Throughout their discussion, the Chevalier seems reticent to have L'Olive simply steal it, and wants to know exactly how he intends to proceed. L'Olive's reassurances are an indication that he is really the brains behind the monetary side of their business partnership. He tells his master not to worry about the details: "demeurez ici seulement, & ne vous embarrassez pas du reste."⁵⁹⁷

L'Olive and the Chevalier are proud of their skill at taking other people's money through ruse. L'Olive explains:

Nous avons de grandes ressources aux Parties casuelles [...] Nous jouissons de plus de 20000 livres de rente en fond d'esprit & de sçavoir faire; Nous avons des droits sur tous les Provinciaux qui viennent débarquer à Paris, sur les enfans de famille qui entrent de trop bonne heure dans le monde, sur les Bourgeois qui veulent contrefaire les gens de qualité, sur les successions qui tombent en mains mineures; que diable sçais-je moy, notre domaine est d'une si grande estenduë & si je n'y comprends pas les vieilles coquettes.⁵⁹⁸

Two things stand out in this description. The first is that even though he elsewhere refers to the Chevalier as his master, here L'Olive speaks in the first person plural. The resources he speaks of are shared mutually between him and the Chevalier. Second, he inscribes them in a context of state taxation rights. By referring to the "parties casuelles," the state revenue from the sale of venal offices, he implies a recognized legitimacy of the economic activity he and the Chevalier carry out: a sort of transposition of noble privilege, extracting money from those who try to buy nobility.

⁵⁹⁶ Dancourt, *Moulin*, 1.10, p. 21.

⁵⁹⁷ Dancourt, *Moulin*, 1.24, p. 49.

⁵⁹⁸ Dancourt, *Moulin*, 1.23, p. 45.

L'Olive directly "taxes" the vanity and aspirations of Ganivet. Disguised as a nobleman, he flatters Ganivet before selling him a non-existent office, at a price of 2,000 écus, cash in hand.⁵⁹⁹ As payment, Ganivet gives him a diamond worth 3,000 livres and the bearer note worth 400 pistoles without hesitation. The bearer note is not negotiated, nor do the characters think it needs to be. In the transaction the note and the diamond are taken by L'Olive to be as good as ready money. In the last scene, Ganivet agrees to marry the "Countess" and makes no mention of the diamond and the money he gave to L'Olive: an indication that the money is fungible, and as good as gone. With the false Countess unmasked, and Ganivet's money transferred to the Chevalier, in a sense its rightful owner, there is a sort of return to traditional socioeconomic order.

In this short play, the French nobility is presented in a moral and economic decay that is not uniquely caused by but which acutely corresponds to war, a theme that Dancourt will explore in further detail in *Les Curieux de Compiègne*. Again, financial knowledge is coupled with the *savoir-faire* of being able to imitate the nobility, and of being comfortable handling and manipulating currency. As traditional social values of the nobility are shown lacking real foundation (that is, their appearance is detached from any real sort of value), more abstract forms of money such as bearer notes take on their own ability to circulate as cash.

This transfer of value away from objects and towards the paper that represents them is explored in further detail in Dancourt's one-act *La Lotterie*, performed in July 1697 at the Comédie Française. The play tells the story of Neapolitan con artist Sbrigany, a merchant who started out in his shady financial career bribing customs officials to

⁵⁹⁹ Dancourt, *Moulin*, 1.33, p. 69.

smuggle counterfeit goods, and who here is shown organizing a larger scheme: a rigged lottery.⁶⁰⁰ The topic has much in common with that of Donneau de Visé's 1670 *Les Intrigues de la lotterie*, but there are some important differences. Instead of all of the tickets being losers, here they are all winners, *billets noirs*. But although everyone is a winner, the prizes leave something to be desired, as they are nearly all small things such as handkerchiefs.⁶⁰¹ None are worth more than the price of the ticket and so while everyone is a winner, in terms of net gain everyone is also a loser. And while the organizer, Sbrigany, does not personally write out the tickets, he remains much more involved in the lottery's operation than Donneau de Visé's Céliane. His servants, Lisette and Petronillo, have an important role in the lottery's operation, as in Donneau de Visé's play. *La Lotterie* focuses on financial literacy in a specifically Parisian setting. By showing a lottery in its most deceptive form, with false promises and misleading writing, it makes an implicit (and at one point, explicit) pedagogical statement. While Donneau de Visé's play aimed to provide a panorama of lotteries in Paris, here the idea seems to be that this blatantly rigged lottery will, once and for all, put an end to the illusion that one can win by playing.

La Lotterie is set in Paris, where Sbrigany and his daughter, natives of Naples, have lived for two years.⁶⁰² Their immigration correlates with an idea of complicated financial schemes that are brought over to France by Italians, calling to mind cases like that of Lorenzo de Totti, who introduced the *tontine* to France in 1653, and generally

⁶⁰⁰ Dancourt, Florent Carton, *La Lotterie* (Paris: Thomas Guillain, 1697). [Here as elsewhere I choose to retain the original spelling with a double "t"].

⁶⁰¹ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.5, p. 12.

⁶⁰² Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.1, p. 2.

fitting with an image of trickster Italians who are more financially sophisticated than Parisians. The play was likely inspired by a real person, an Italian named Fagnani who was authorized by the king to conduct a lottery to sell his merchandise, and whom some of the participants later accused of defrauding them.⁶⁰³ Lotteries in general are portrayed as a sort of foreign-influenced trick early in the play, when a character known only as Le Flamand proposes his own rigged lottery to Sbrigany.⁶⁰⁴ Commenting upon this offer (which he turned down), Sbrigany points to a lack of Parisian financial savvy:

A ce que je puis voir les Estrangers ne sont pas trop dupes, & il n’y a pas de Païs au monde où une Lotterie comme la mienne rendist si bien qu’à Paris.⁶⁰⁵

He says that it is only in Paris that he would risk organizing this kind of lottery: a city where, he says, “il n’y a rien à craindre, ce sont gens glorieux pour la plûpart, qui ne se plaignent jamais d’estre dupes, pour éviter la honte de l’avoir esté.”⁶⁰⁶

Like Donneau de Visé’s *Devineresse*, this play purports to have a didactic value for spectators, teaching them a financial lesson. Lisette argues that his scam lottery, by taking the deception of lotteries to the extreme, will teach people once and for all not to be fooled, thus eliminating the need for an *Ordonnance de Police* prohibiting them.⁶⁰⁷ Lisette similarly argues later that Bastien, when he receives his disappointing prizes, has at least learned his lesson, and that his experience might also serve to instruct others:

Voilà déjà un Paysan corrigé de Lotterie, & je gagerois bien que son exemple servira d’instruction à tout son village. Que l’on vous aura d’obligation.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰³ Blanc, *Dancourt*, 75.

⁶⁰⁴ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.3, p. 9.

⁶⁰⁵ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.4, p. 10.

⁶⁰⁶ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.8, p. 20.

⁶⁰⁷ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.8, p. 21.

⁶⁰⁸ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.12, p. 32. Bastien’s prizes for his six tickets (all of them winners) included a pair of slippers (*Pabouches*), a mousetrap, a pack of toothpicks, a jar of pommade, a bottle of *eau de Cordouë*, and a stick (*un bâton de bresil*) (Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.11, pp. 27–30).

There is also didactic value for modern day readers. The scenes with Bastien show how this lottery works: a player purchases a card with a number on it. That number corresponds to a prize box, and inside the box there is a ticket upon which the prize is written if it is a winning ticket. The process is similar to that in Donneau de Visé's *Intrigues*, with the numbering of the tickets here being shown more prominently (it is not clear if the tickets in the *Intrigues* were numbered; here, they foreshadow the numbering on the printed paper money that will be issued in the first decades of the eighteenth century).

The interpretation of writing is a key element in the play. The lottery tickets are examined closely to determine their value. Whereas in the *Intrigues*, the organizer of the lottery had written all of the tickets herself (an easy task since they were all losing tickets), here it is the shop-boy Petronillo, also Italian, who was given the task of writing out the winning tickets (of which there are an impressive 30,000). The prizes are subject to orthographic and semantic interpretation. In one case, a ticket that reads “un gobelet d’or” is not necessarily redeemable for a golden goblet. Petronillo argues that, depending on who the box is destined for, it could be read as “gobelet D.O.R.,” by pointing out a smudge in the ink. If the holder of the box is a woman, a bourgeois, or a nobleman, however, then, he says, they can be given a golden goblet.⁶⁰⁹ This is an interesting precursor of future paper money systems, and can be read as an oblique commentary on forms of private paper money: while the paper may have a value written on it, depending

⁶⁰⁹ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.7, p. 19.

on who is holding it, it may be interpreted differently by those who are in the position of the payor.

But although the matter of the golden goblet is worked out between Sbrigany and his scribe before the boxes are given out, in another case, a customer comes to complain. A procurator's wife has received a confusing ticket that looks like it designates a silver inlay "buffet," but instead of a buffet, the real prize she gets is actually a "busc" (a corset pin) decorated with silver threads. Sbrigany has Petronillo, whom he introduces as the person who wrote the tickets, interpret the writing for her. The woman threatens to retaliate with writing of her own (a lawsuit from her husband), but Petronillo biting suggests that her husband instead teach her "how to read."⁶¹⁰ In a similar point, the Marquise, who thinks she is collecting a large *coffre de chine*, instead is presented with a choice of miniature, pocket-sized trunks. These misunderstandings, presented for comic effect, also have a didactic effect on the spectators: a message that they should question what is written on a note.

The spectators also get a detailed look at the accounting of the lottery. Two louis buys 8 tickets ('deux boites "de huit billets chacune" cost 4 louis).⁶¹¹ Bastien either paid six écus for his six tickets, or says they are only worth that much.⁶¹² In all, Sbrigany makes 25,000 écus from the lottery, he tells Lisette. Lisette tells Mariane that the profits came to 80,000 livres.⁶¹³ There are 30,000 tickets, so at 3 livres per ticket, this would work out to a gross receipt of 90,000 livres, which fits with the profit numbers, leaving

⁶¹⁰ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.26, p. 65.

⁶¹¹ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.23, p. 58.

⁶¹² Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.11, p. 30, 31.

⁶¹³ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.20, p. 47. At 3 livres to the écu, this comes out to be about the same amount.

some room for costs. There are a few large prizes, just to make the lottery seem legitimate, but they are all pre-arranged for certain people; they are gifts sent in a discreet manner, provided by the sender and therefore not at Sbrigany's expense.⁶¹⁴ The small prizes are not worth much: the handkerchiefs distributed are just worth 13 sous each, approximately 2% of the cost of a ticket.⁶¹⁵ Another cost is hush money. Instead of keeping quiet out of fear of losing his job, a fear which motivated the servants in Donneau de Visé's play, Petronillo recognizes his leverage and asks for a cut of the profits in exchange for his silence. In a rough approximation of Gallicized Italian he blackmails Sbrigany, who first offers 100 pistoles, then accepts Petronillo's demand for 200 louis d'or (but only promising them though; the spectators will not see this money changing hands).⁶¹⁶ Here the servant is portrayed in a less submissive, more proactive and indeed closer to an equal role: nevertheless, this amount is only a small percentage of the lottery revenues. And as for Sbrigany, he must hide his motivations for filling the lottery with winning tickets, a fact he advertises, attempting to explain that he is not interested in making money, but simply that he is organizing his lottery for fun: "Je fais cela pour me divertir."⁶¹⁷ In the play he does much of the advertising himself.

Social ascension via money is a topic of this play as well. The play first posits a sort of aristocracy of fraud. Sbrigany's customs fraud operations, which took place prior to the time of the play, were run with the help of Éraсте, his daughter's lover. Mariane's social status is rather clearly not noble; Lisette says she is born "pas du plus pur ni du

⁶¹⁴ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.20, p. 48. These gifts, coming from people who, for whatever reason, wish to hide their actions, here again show a perversion of the gift economy.

⁶¹⁵ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.7, p. 41.

⁶¹⁶ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.6, p. 17.

plus noble sang [napolitain]” but that she does have the family predisposition of seeking fortune.⁶¹⁸” But Sbrigany wants to rise in the social ranks through money. He wants to use the lottery money to marry his daughter well: “je ferai ma fille grosse Dame,” he says.⁶¹⁹

Although Sbrigany has noble ambitions for his daughter, Sbrigany had promised her to Éraste only as long as it was convenient and necessary for his own schemes—he wanted to use Éraste, who worked at the customs gates, to smuggle merchandise. Now that Sbrigany is running a lottery, he needs to use his daughter for other ends, promising her to a *commissaire* to better his chances at running the lottery successfully without undue government interference. As Lisette says to Mariane, “c’est un habile homme que vôtre pere, il n’y a rien qu’il ne mette à profit.”⁶²⁰

The end of the play is telling: it is a financier, Éraste’s uncle, who saves the day. He tells Sbrigany, who is worried about the angry mob outside who is threatening to burn his house down, that the reason for their anger is that he is making too much money from his lottery. The financier encourages him not to simply refund the money, but uses a different expression, that of putting the money back into circulation: “Remettez cet argent dans le commerce.”⁶²¹ He is, essentially, accusing Sbrigany of hoarding, and more seriously, of being caught for it. The financier’s suggested plan of action is also indicative of what seems to be a certain amount of experience in dealing with public reactions to greed. He suggests giving the angriest protestors their money back, or giving

⁶¹⁷ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.3, p. 8.

⁶¹⁸ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.1, p. 2.

⁶¹⁹ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.22, p. 54.

⁶²⁰ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.1, p. 4.

them nice prizes, and then deciding what to do with the rest of the money. This posits the French financier as thus, if not morally superior, at least tactically superior to the Italian lottery organizer, perhaps implying financiers were no strangers to stealing money and then paying back the absolute minimum.

Like Donneau de Visé's play, Dancourt's *Lotterie* shows instruments of paper that are bearers of value, but which are necessarily mediated by the organizer of the lottery and are not intrinsically worth anything without that redemption. And while the cards purchased are in practice refundable, the intimidation factor of the individual requesting a refund is taken into consideration when determining who gets paid first and best (here, an imposing Gascon takes from Sbrigany some tobacco and other small items as "interest"). As an angry mob gathers around Sbrigany's Parisian house, we get a preview of the crowds of desperate investors in the rue Quincampoix at the end of the Law affair. The play firmly inscribes questions of authentication and the paper money problematic in a larger content of demystification of money and elucidation of monetary swindles. It also provides a vivid dramatic foreshadowing of France's first large scale financial collapse two decades later.

The moral, economic, and military decline of France come together in Dancourt's *Les Curieux de Compiègne* (1698), set in an army camp. Even though the Nine Years' war was technically over by this point, a sort of demonstration army camp had been set up in Compiègne to provide a show of military power to the court.⁶²² In the play, the

⁶²¹ Dancourt, *Lotterie*, 1.30, p. 74.

⁶²² Lancaster 4:804, also Joël Cornette, *Chronique du règne de Louis XIV* (n.p., SEDES 1997), 434.

Chevalier de Fourbignac is out of money and living lavishly off credit.⁶²³ His companion, Clitandre, is in love with the daughter of the bourgeois merchant who is lending him money to go to war. Their creditors have followed them to the camp as tourists. The play's incipit explicitly establishes the premise which is by now familiar: the penniless noble and the resourceful valet. The Chevalier bemoans not only the loss of his money but also that of his mental resources: "où est donc ton esprit," he asks himself, "crains-tu de demeurer court, toi dont la cervelle est le magasin des expédiens."⁶²⁴ And precisely at this moment where he doubts his ability to make money, Frontin arrives on stage.

For once the Chevalier character is actually living up to his title: the play is set in an army camp, a place where he can fulfill his noble duty of military service. Yet his name, "Fourbignac," and his Gascon origins are given to be indicative of his true character (as well as the decidedly non-dangerous aspect of the camp set up during peacetime). He has been followed to camp by his lenders, a group of merchants and usurers who are lodged nearby, and to whom he claims to pay interest assiduously, since he is not sure of being able to repay the principal.⁶²⁵ Frontin's master, Clitandre, is in the same situation. The Parisian merchants who provided these young Chevaliers with financing to go to war have decided to come see for themselves the use to which their money is being put.⁶²⁶ Clitandre finds himself in the position of having to entertain them

⁶²³ Dancourt, *Les Curieux de Compiègne*, in vol. 6 of *Les Oeuvres de Mr. Dancourt* (The Hague, Etienne Foulque, 1706). [note: the play is independently paginated within the volume, and has independent title page with same publisher, but year of publication 1699].

⁶²⁴ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.1, pp. 3–4.

⁶²⁵ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.2, p. 5.

⁶²⁶ They are from the Rue du Roule, a street which was created in 1689 by royal decree - further research is needed here, but in 1700, at least, there were several goldsmiths on this street (*Les orfèvres de Paris en 1700: Procès verbaux de visites et déclarations ...* Jules Guiffrey, ed., Paris 1879, p. 19).

lavishly, but without being able to pay the bill.⁶²⁷ In one sense, this situation demonstrates how difficult it is for the nobility to escape from the control of the moneyed class, even in exercising their noble duties.

The young noblemen along with Frontin plan to rely on a certain sort of intelligence that is portrayed as being reserved to them alone, in order to rid themselves of their inconvenient bourgeois visitors. They consider their bourgeois followers to be stupid, even though they admit they have business sense: Frontin and Clitandre insist that their Monsieur Valentin, “à son négoce près, est un Bourgeois aussi bourgeois & aussi neuf”; the Chevalier’s followers “sont à peu près de même, habiles gens dans leur commerce; mais d’autre part très imbecilles.”⁶²⁸ The distinction that they make between business sense, and some ‘other’ sense, is intriguing, since it is after all their goal to defraud them in a business (financial) transaction. It may be that they take them for bourgeois who are good at business/merchant activity, but inexperienced in finance. Frontin is portrayed as having this sort of intelligence that allows for success in the world; and he offers to teach it to his collaborator Guillaume as well.⁶²⁹ And it is also important to note that while Frontin works as the primary facilitator for financial transactions, Clitandre and the Chevalier do nevertheless have skills of their own.

The bourgeois-nobility exchange is very clearly monetized in this play. There is, throughout, an idea that the cash-rich bourgeois are a group of people to be milked for their money; they are known as “les curieux,” tourists out to see an army camp, whom one should not feel guilty about overcharging or fleecing in gambling. As Guillaume

⁶²⁷ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.2, p. 6.

⁶²⁸ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.3, p. 10.

says, “je profite de leurs sottises; main je m’en gobarge.”⁶³⁰ The tourists are to be exploited in marriage as well. By means of a local intermediary, a bourgeois woman, Madame Robin, offers the Chevalier 30,000 écus in ready money in exchange for his hand in marriage.⁶³¹ It is a marked change from the offers of *rente* contracts that characterized early dramatic depictions of marriage; here, it is cash in hand. The ‘real’ love story, between Clitandre and Angélique (the arrangement between the Chevalier and Robin being purely monetary), is complicated by questions of money and nobility together. As Frontin explains, the relationship is complicated by the fact that “cet honnête Marchand est un Bourgeois fort riche, & mon Maistre est un Gentilhomme fort gueux.”⁶³² Finally, the relationship between Clitandre and his merchant sponsor, Valentin, is essentially one of usury, declined in two forms: Valentin sells Clitandre merchandise at a high price before buying it back at a low price; and he sometimes loans a few hundred pistoles to Clitandre in exchange for a note made out for 1000 écus, an activity that Frontin argues classifies him as a “fripon” but not a “usurier.”⁶³³ He is careful to make the semantic distinction. In his dictionary, Furetière defines a *frippon*’s activities to include ‘illicit gains’; this nevertheless remains distinct from the definition of usury which involved highly illegal lending.⁶³⁴

⁶²⁹ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.8, p. 21

⁶³⁰ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.6, p. 19.

⁶³¹ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.4, p. 14.

⁶³² Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.8, p. 22.

⁶³³ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.8, p. 23.

⁶³⁴ Fripon: “Qui desrobe secrettement, qui tasche à tromper ceux qui ont à faire à luy, qui fait des gains illicites au jeu ou dans le negoce, & qui est sans honneur & sans bonne foy. Il y a bien des *frippons* parmi les chicaneurs, parmi les joüeurs. Les pages, les laquais sont souvent *frippons*.” (*Dictionnaire Universel* 1690 2:118).

Throughout the play, the question of appearance versus value takes on importance. War was traditionally an activity reserved to the nobility, yet here bourgeois characters disguise themselves as gentlemen in order to see the sights.⁶³⁵ Two of them, relates the merchant Mouflard, were wearing clothes too similar to those of a regiment, are accused of having “contrefait” the regiment’s uniforms.⁶³⁶ The stripping of their clothes by the soldiers, and the derogatory cries hurled at them seem a demonstration of nobility affirming its right to the military domain, even if they no longer exclusively dominate the economic.

The two noble characters, Clitandre and the Chevalier, also perform another noble prerogative, that of showing disdain for money or for its unseemly gain. In a scheme arranged by Frontin each noble has “caught” the other’s pestering bourgeois followers and is about to torture them for spying. When the two groups encounter each other, each of the accused bourgeois offers money to escape. The refusal of Clitandre and the Chevalier to take their coins is followed by a counteroffer: they would like to wed their love interests. Indeed, they do not want a lump ransom sum, but a steady guaranteed income from a rich bourgeois wife. “Ce n’est point l’interest qui nous gouverne,” says the Chevalier, “à moins qu’on ne nous fasse un établissement solide.”⁶³⁷ Angélique and her parents agree that she will marry Clitandre, and Mouflard agrees to renounce his engagement with Robin, yet the two bourgeois prisoners are not to be freed until the contracts are signed, the Chevalier insists.⁶³⁸ Here, what is important is the monetization

⁶³⁵ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.15, p. 41.

⁶³⁶ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.15, p. 44.

⁶³⁷ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.22, pp. 57–58.

⁶³⁸ Dancourt, *Curieux*, 1.23, p. 61.

of marriage into a financial instrument: the noble characters are shown not taking money in a one time deal, but arranging things so that they will have “rente”—in effect, establishing for themselves a regular cash flow, a key component of what the nobility used to be.

As the century drew to a close and the theatrical landscape in Paris was changing, the social role of comedy was also developing. These plays heralded a new function for theater, one which would begin to highlight in particular financiers and financial practices on a large scale. These plays show an important transitional period for currency in three senses: in the transition from coin to paper, in the devaluation of the currency of nobility, and in the necessity and monetization of financial knowledge. In the coming years, which were to see France’s first experiment with paper money, the stage had been set for the dramatic representation of a new kind of financial world. These plays teach an audience that was increasingly aware of developments in financial practice not just how to read, but also the importance of knowing how to determine the true value of someone, something, or some piece of money that might often be significantly different from its initial appearance. They show lower class characters who use knowledge of this financial world and who are at the point of completely overtaking their masters and upsetting the established social order. In the next two decades on the stage, those characters reach their full potential.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Reign of Paper: Money in French Comedy, 1700–1719

More so than in any previous time in France, the first two decades of the eighteenth century were a time of intense financial strife. They were also a time of monetary innovations, such as the *billets de monnaie* which started to circulate in 1701. Even though private paper money of various sorts had been circulating in France for years, these mint bills were the first state-issued paper money in France to be in general circulation. They were notoriously hard to redeem at their face value, and so they circulated on the open market at a steep discount. In 1709, the state credit system was grinding to a halt in a difficult year made worse by war and famine.⁶³⁹ By the 1720s France had witnessed a complete bubble and crash cycle, its first in modern financial history, with the collapse of John Law's bank. Theater throughout these two decades showed the booms and the busts, featuring a fast and furious ascent of lower class characters who played dirty and got rich quick with their financial skill, but who suffered downfalls as well.

The financiers who were the targets of these satirical works were not always happy to be in the spotlight: *Turcaret* (1709) was pulled from the stage after seven performances (likely under pressure from financiers), not to be seen again until 1730. Yet this play by Lesage remains one of the best known of the period. Others, such as Dancourt's *Les Agioteurs* (1710) knew an immediate and lasting success but are less often performed in modern times. Still others, such as Dorneval's *Arlequin Traitant*

⁶³⁹ Guy Rowland, "France 1709: Le Crunch," in *History Today* 59:2, 2009.

(1719), enjoyed an immediate but topical success, and are nearly completely absent from the contemporary stage. The bulk of this chapter will focus on how these plays put into place the imaginary of a full-blown paper money economy. They also show how bankruptcy and other forms of large-scale disappearance of money display the weaknesses inherent both in systems of account and in centralized accumulations of money or capital where wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few. In this way, by demonstrating the agitation and collapse of paper money economies, these plays foreshadowed real-world financial events, and prepared spectators for them.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, French comic theater had consolidated financial knowledge into theatrical subject matter. Discussions of paper money and credit were, by this point, beyond the realm of novelty and had come into a life of their own. Some plays used the material to rewrite previous works (in the tradition of *L'Avare* as a rewriting of *Aulularia*). *L'Avocat Pathelin* by Brueys, first performed in 1706, is a retelling of the Pathelin farce, with a much updated financial vocabulary. Regnard's *Les Ménéchmes* (1705) has a great deal in common with its namesake, Plautus's *Ménechmi*. Other plays, like Dancourt's *Les Enfants de Paris* (1704), used contemporary subjects and continued to provide explorations of books, accounts, usury, and contracts.⁶⁴⁰ The first part of this chapter will examine how plays from the beginning of the century seized upon the use of credit instruments that had been introduced in previous years, and not only featured paper money and credit, but used them to develop the characters who employed them. The remainder of the chapter will consider in greater detail the

⁶⁴⁰ Dancourt, *Les Enfants de Paris* (The Hague: Etienne Foulque, 1705) in vol. 1 of *Les Oeuvres de Dancourt* (The Hague: Etienne Foulque, 1706).

innovative representations of paper money economies and those who mastered them. Before that, though, plays developed a use of paper money that was almost completely accepted by characters, showed a nobility squeezed to the breaking point, and brought moneylending into the domain of French bourgeois practice.

In Regnard's *Le Retour Imprévu* (1700), Clitandre exploits his family's credit and liquidates their assets, borrowing money and selling off the paintings in his father's house while he is away, in order to have the funds he needs to impress his future bride, Lucile.⁶⁴¹ His valet Merlin carries out financial transactions such as taking out an advance from his father's farmer and selling his paintings and tapestries, all at a steep loss in order to take advantage of his absence, during which Clitandre and Merlin have worked hard to spend as much as possible (and Merlin boasts of his prowess in this department).⁶⁴² Merlin's "skills" are put into clear financial terms by a Marquis who boasts of his own ability to debauch young men and help them shed their bourgeois ways by teaching them how to gamble and spend. The Marquis recognizes the clear role of a helpful valet in order to find this spending money: "ce coquin-là vaut vingt mille livres de rente."⁶⁴³ This pillaging of the family heritage comes at the same time as his father, Géronte is trying to build it up: he appears to be away on a business trip, likely involving international trade (he is said to be held up at the Customs house after bringing some merchandise there from Bordeaux).⁶⁴⁴ Merlin argues that the "profits" that Clitandre's father will make will

⁶⁴¹ Jean-François, Regnard, *Le retour imprévu*, in vol. 1 of *Les Oeuvres de Mr. Regnard* (Brussels: Freres t'Serstevens, 1711), 299–337. An imitation of Plautus's *Mostellaria*.

⁶⁴² Regnard, *Retour*, 1.4, p. 306.

⁶⁴³ Regnard, *Retour*, 1.6, p. 313.

⁶⁴⁴ Regnard, *Retour*, 1.4, p. 308; 1.9, p 315; 1.11, p. 318.

balance out Clitandre's expenses, a loose accounting but an effort to keep an account, all the same.

Clitandre is described throughout the play as an "enfant de famille," yet a threat by André, a usurer, to have him imprisoned for failure to pay a debt betrays a somewhat lower than noble family standing, as nobles were not yet subject to being imprisoned for debt.⁶⁴⁵ Géronte, when accused by André of being a usurer, does not deny the charge.⁶⁴⁶ Like Harpagon in Molière's *L'Avare*, he hides a sum of money in his house (20,000 in "louis vieux" buried in the basement), a sum which Clitandre holds until his father agrees to his marriage.⁶⁴⁷ The play puts forth a conflict between noble-style spending and bourgeois acquisition. Géronte's role in commerce and his implied financial and lending activities all had for a goal to acquire capital: a house, paintings, tapestries, mirrors; the sort of "real estate" currency that he could pass on to his son. "Les enfans ont," he says "bien de l'obligation aux peres qui se donnent tant de peine pour leur laisser du bien."⁶⁴⁸ And while he imagines that his son has wisely saved his money, or as Merlin suggests, has put it to work in loans and real estate purchases, the reality is closer to a perversion of the prodigal son parable—but it is the father who leaves while the son stays and spends. The play is an imitation of Plautus's *Mostellaria*, taking from it the elements of the father away on business, and the ingenious servant who helps deceive the father, but adapting it to the context of late seventeenth-century social and financial credit.

⁶⁴⁵ Regnard, *Retour*, 1.12, p. 320.

⁶⁴⁶ Regnard, *Retour*, 1.12, p. 321.

⁶⁴⁷ Regnard, *Retour*, 1.13, p. 326.

⁶⁴⁸ Regnard, *Retour*, 1.11, p. 318.

Regnard's *Les Ménéchmes* (1705), an eighteenth-century adaptation of Plautus's *Ménechmi*, shares many plot points with the Roman comedy but features a monetary innovation: the Chevalier collects an inheritance of 60,000 écus from a notary who pays him entirely in *billets*. The Chevalier seems happy to collect this money in this way, encouraging his valet Valentin to notice the particularly good quality of the *billets* he received:

J'ay reçu mon argent: regarde, je te prie,
Des billets que je tiens la force & l'énergie;
Tous billets au porteur, des meilleurs de Paris:
L'un de trois mille écus, l'autre de neuf, de six,
De huit, de cinq, de sept; j'acheterois, je pense,
Deux ou trois Marquisats des mieux rentez de France.

VALENTIN. Quelle aubeine! Le bien vous vient de toutes parts;
De grace, laissez-moy promener mes regards
Sur ces billets moulez, dont l'usage est utile.
La belle impression! les beaux noms! le beau style!
Ce sont là les billets qu'il faut negocier,
Et non pas vos poulets, vos chifons de papier,
Où l'amour se distile en de fades paroles,
Et qui ne sont par-tout pleins que de fariboles.⁶⁴⁹

While the humor here comes from the fact that while the Chevalier is pointing out the quality of the notes based on their provenance and ability to be redeemed (“les meilleurs de Paris”), and Valentin is pointing out the aesthetic quality of the notes (which a priori has nothing to do with their value), his observation does have significance in monetary history. The “moulez” or printed aspect of the notes would seem to indicate a newer form of paper money, a pre-printed one, called “blanks,” where the lender’s name would be

⁶⁴⁹ Regnard, *Les Ménéchmes*, in vol. 4 of *Les Oeuvres de Mr. Regnard* (Paris: Pierre Ribou, 1708), 4.8, p. 258.

printed, but the date and amount would be filled in by hand (See the following illustrations for examples of this type of note).

At the turn of the century, accepting paper payment still meant deciding if the payer was trustworthy. One example of this is found in Dancourt's 1701 *Colin Maillard*, where the lackey Lepine claims not to carry a purse and offers to write a bill on behalf of his master for Mathurin, the gardener, who refuses: "Je n'avons pas de foi pour des billets de Capitaine."⁶⁵⁰ But later in the play, Mathurin has recourse to the same payment method: he claims not have a purse either, and when he wants Lepine to speak for him and deploy his elegance in his service, he himself offers "un billet de cent francs," which Lepine accepts.⁶⁵¹ The play's title refers to the game known in English as Blind Man's Buff. Instead of using a blindfold, the play makes comical use of disguised characters who impersonate others and tease each other with monetary offers: it is only when one would try to cash them in that they would realize they had been had.

But those plays are set at a relatively small scale. Boursault's *Ésope à la Cour* (1701) introduces the world of corrupt financiers that dominates the stage in the first decades of the eighteenth century.⁶⁵² Griffet is an old financier who has risen up through the ranks, and who aspires to be a tax farmer.⁶⁵³ This play also addresses the cause of the nobility without money: when Crésus suggests that the goods of Ésope's enemies be confiscated and given to Ésope, Ésope refuses, stating that it would be too great a

⁶⁵⁰ Dancourt, *Colin Maillard* (The Hague: Etienne Foulque, 1706), in vol.6 of *Les Oeuvres de Mr. Dancourt ...* (The Hague: Etienne Foulque, 1706), independent title page and pagination, 1.8, p. 28.

⁶⁵¹ Dancourt, *Colin Maillard*, 1.13, p. 38.

⁶⁵² Boursault, *Ésope à la Cour* (Amsterdam: Adrian Braakman, 1702). Performed in December 1701 at the Comédie-Française.

⁶⁵³ Boursault, *Cour*, 4.5, p. 81.

punishment: “Estre de qualité sans du bien, c’est un sort / Pour peu qu’on ait de coeur, plus cruel que le mort.”⁶⁵⁴ The play also points out the tendency for the newly rich to purchase nobility, and the shame of their children at their commoner parents:

Il n’est pas sous le Ciel de gens plus malheureux
Que ceux dont les enfans sont plus elevez qu’eux:
Qu’un homme de Finance ait annobli sa race,
En l’avouant pour pere on croit lui faire grace,
Et qu’un riche Marchand fasse un fils Conseiller,
Ce fils en le voyant craint de s’en canailler.⁶⁵⁵

The play’s central monetary metaphor is one of royal control of monetary policy, which compares devaluation of currency to court politics:

Nous sommes des jettons que le Roi fait valoir:
Comme souverain Maitre, a qui tout est facile,
Il nous fait valoir un, ou nous fait valoir mille.⁶⁵⁶

It is also one of financial management. In the first scene, we learn Crésus has found “un bien immense,” with which he has returned to enrich his kingdom.⁶⁵⁷ He wants Ésope to take on the role of managing his finances, as well as ridding the court of flatterers.⁶⁵⁸

With a rich imagery of coin money, the play highlights the role of the state financial minister.

One of the other themes developed in comedy from this period is that of bankruptcy. Although it was present in previous decades (see Fatouville’s *Le Banqueroutier*, for example, performed in 1687 and 1718), here it takes on a fuller manifestation. In Nicolas Boindin’s *Le Port de mer*, a one-act comedy performed in

⁶⁵⁴ Boursault, *Cour*, 5.7, p. 102.

⁶⁵⁵ Boursault, *Cour*, 3.5, p. 65.

⁶⁵⁶ Boursault, *Cour*, 2.5, p. 49.

⁶⁵⁷ Boursault, *Cour*, 1.1, p. 18.

⁶⁵⁸ Boursault, *Cour*, 1.3, p. 24.

1704, antisemitism and bankruptcy are both portrayed without condemnation and even positively.⁶⁵⁹ Bankruptcy is described by La Saline, a lackey, as “une manière honnête de profiter de la conscience des gens, & de partager à l’aimable le bien d’autrui.”⁶⁶⁰ Indeed, it is portrayed as being like the lottery: if others are so foolish as to trust someone with their money, they should not be surprised to see him run away with it. That is, at least, the opinion of La Saline, who reveals that he ran away with a cash chest in the past, his flight out of the country impeded only by his loss of the money in a shipwreck.⁶⁶¹ He is, as the fallen cashier, a sort of counterpart to the lackey-financier character. At the same time, in this play, the people to be feared are pirates and Jews. The play shows a variety of foreign visitors to this port and portrays them as frighteningly exotic; the only real pillage, though, is that organized by La Saline.

Dancourt’s 1704 *Le Galant Jardinier* has one of the most explicit theatrical examples of paper money. It features prominently a piece of paper which is thought to be money. In fact, this imagined paper money does more to drive the plot forward than any actual money. The gardener, Lucas, announces that he has discovered a piece of paper, which has fallen out of the pocket of La Montagne, the disguised servant of young lover Léandre. Because he thinks La Montagne to be a “fils de Maltotier,” Lucas tells his wife Mathurine that their fortune is made, since he believes the piece of paper must be “queque bon papier de conséquence, queuque contrat de construction, vois-tu, queuque lettre de change.”⁶⁶² Since he does not know how to read, Lucas he does not realize the

⁶⁵⁹ Nicolas Boindin, *Le Port de mer*, in *Quatre comédies*, ed. John Dunkley (Paris: STFM, 1997).

⁶⁶⁰ Boindin, *Port de mer*, 1.4, p. 154.

⁶⁶¹ Boindin, *Port de mer*, 1.2, p. 144.

⁶⁶² Dancourt, *Le Galand jardinier* (The Hague: Etienne Foulque, 1705), 1.5, p. 17.

piece of paper is something else entirely: a handbill announcing a search for that young lover, and promising a 30 pistole reward to his finder; his stereotypical peasant speech adds to the comic effect. But Lucas believes it is paper money, and that it means that he will have enough money so that he and Mathurine can both become financiers, buy a title of nobility, and be rich enough to travel in a carriage. The idea is that just a little bit of capital will be enough for them to get started:

Si j'ay une fois de l'argent, crac, je me boutte dans les affaires, je me fais Partisan, tu sera Partisane, j'acherterons queuque charge de Noblesse, & pis; & pis on oublira ce que j'avons été, & je ne nous en souviendrons morgué peut-être par nous même.⁶⁶³

The transformation of Lucas from gardener into future financier was not initiated on the stage: while he recounts to Mathurine that he found the paper, there is no indication that this is shown to the spectators. What is shown is this capitalist dream that Lucas is both imagining for himself, and that he retells in the stories of others he has seen accomplish it. Furthermore he is imagining Mathurine's full participation: she too will be a financier.

This dream depends on the idea that paper can hold value, something fascinating and mysterious for these two characters, but which Lucas does seem to think he can master. Indeed, ideas of fiction and reality are introduced in a short monologue in the preceding scene, when Mathurine is trying to reconcile herself to the fact that Léandre and La Montagne are pretending to be gardeners: "Ils avont biau faire & biau dire," she says, "je ne saurois m'accoutumer à ce qui n'est point."⁶⁶⁴ The changing value of the piece of paper leads her to ask questions: is it not stealing, she asks Lucas, to not give the

⁶⁶³ Dancourt, *Jardinier*, 1.5, p. 17.

paper back? His dismissive response, “Bon, voler une feuille de papier!” is followed by a justification: stealing from the rich is not stealing.⁶⁶⁵ Paper for this character first has value, and then does not: a comical and convenient understanding of its nature.

The interpretation of the document is shown as difficult for this illiterate couple: they first have to hold it correctly. Mathurine asks if it is “l’écriture dont ont écrit des livres.” Lucas’s response—“Hé oui, tant mieux, c’est de la meilleure, celle-là, de la plus véritable, de celle qu’on croit davantage”—precedes an announcement to Mathurine that she is holding the paper upside down.⁶⁶⁶ In this farcical display of attempted interpretation, the apogee of Lucas’s explanation is that paper is white, and the letters black.⁶⁶⁷ Mathurine seems to mock him but his response—“N’est-ce pas beaucoup que de savoir faire la différence”—is followed immediately by a verbal interpretation by La Montagne whom they overhear telling Léandre the true nature of the bill.⁶⁶⁸

For Lucas, metal money is real, as demonstrated when he tries to extort the 30 pistole reward from La Montagne that the document promises. When La Montagne offers him first 15, then an extra 15 louis “pour mettre les choses dans l’équilibre,” Lucas takes his scale example to heart: “Pour que la balance panche de queque côté, il faut du poids de plus,” he argues, successfully receiving 4 more louis coins.⁶⁶⁹ This literal example of a scale with gold on each side, tipping the actions of Lucas one way or the other, serves as a reminder of the very real presence of metal money, as does another scene at the end of

⁶⁶⁴ Dancourt, *Jardinier*, 1.4, p. 14.

⁶⁶⁵ Dancourt, *Jardinier*, 1.5, p. 18.

⁶⁶⁶ Dancourt, *Jardinier*, 1.5, p. 18.

⁶⁶⁷ Dancourt, *Jardinier*, 1.5, p. 18.

⁶⁶⁸ Dancourt, *Jardinier*, 1.5, p. 19.

⁶⁶⁹ Dancourt, *Jardinier*, 1.7, p. 29.

the play, when a conjurer makes a book appear that is “plein de louis d’or”: money embedded, it would appear, within the pages.⁶⁷⁰ While paper is evoked in the play, the metallic images are those that resonate the most.

The play focuses on excessive spending as a cause for dismay in Dubuisson, the father of Léandre’s love interest, who does not want to see his daughter married off to a spendthrift, a *dissipateur*. Taking advantage of this, Léandre orders huge amounts of food in the name of his rival, and when the bill comes, Dubuisson reads it aloud. “C’est une piece qu’on me fait,” complains the rival.⁶⁷¹ But when Dubuisson finds out it is Léandre who has ordered all of this food, his concern dissipates as Orgon, Léandre’s father, appears in the last scene and says not to worry about the spending: “quelques dépenses qu’il puisse faire, j’ai assez de bien pour le soutenir.”⁶⁷²

Paper is clearly taken as a possible representation of money in this play, and also as a powerful vector of information (the handbills that were spread across Paris looking for Léandre, along with posters stuck to walls). But metal money still has a very real presence, as Lucas demonstrates, and as the immediate perceived value in the “conjured” book of coins shows as well. This play shows the powerful attraction of paper money—Lucas thinks that in it, he can find the power to become a financier himself—as well as the firm value held in specie. Dubuisson, concerned about the dissipation of wealth, had put his daughter in a convent, taking her out only for this arranged marriage. The way to his heart, it seems (although not to his daughter’s, who met her lover in a chance carriage encounter) is through money.

⁶⁷⁰ Dancourt, *Jardinier*, 1.23, p. 61.

⁶⁷¹ Dancourt, *Jardinier*, 1.14, p. 48.

A final lottery play is worth mentioning. The deception is much more advanced (involving mail fraud) in Dufresny's *La Coquette de Village* (1715). In it, Girard, the village tax collector, uses a clever ruse to make a complicated grab on the local Baron's farms. The manipulation involves a different sort of lottery than the ones previously seen. In this one, the results are sent out by mail. By having his Parisian cousin print counterfeit lists of the winners, Girard causes Lucas, the Baron's farmer, to think he won the lottery. He then takes advantage of Lucas's foolhardiness to buy the rights to the Baron's farms. While the play does not deal with paper bearer notes in the way others do, it does deal with important aspects of money on paper: in the counterfeiting of the list, where the printed appearance of the lottery results is replicated; and again in the list itself, where the ticket numbers correspond to names (this mechanism is not too far removed from banknotes with serial numbers, although those numbers do not correspond to names). By establishing the role of paper as a centralized accounting mechanism, the play is in line with contemporary notions of money of account.

All of these plays from the first years of the eighteenth century show the large variety of ways in which paper money and financial systems were portrayed, and demonstrate the public's ease in understanding, and interest in, such content. In the first ten years of the century, the stage was thus alive as never before with money of all sorts. A few plays, though, in the years following, use these subjects to show an innovative new kind of character in a more evolved context. The rest of this chapter will show plays where the protagonists are an integral part of a sophisticated paper financial system.

⁶⁷² Dancourt, *Jardinier*, 1.23, p. 66.

The face of the usurer was changing. In Dancourt's *Madame Artus* (1708), usurers are distinctly feminine.⁶⁷³ While earlier plays had shown the role of women as ringleader of economic operations (Madame Jobin in *La Devineresse*, or Madame Thibaut in *La Femme d'intrigues*, for example) or women taking on an important role in searching for money (Lisette in *Les Bourgeoises à la mode*), this seems to be one of the first times that a female character is explicitly portrayed as running a usury operation. For while a character like Amelin in *Les Bourgeoises à la mode* did engage in lending on credit, she was still primarily a *marchande de mode*, not a full-blown *friponne*, *intrigante*, and usurer, as is the case here. Artus lends at 16 percent, but “n'en prend que cinq pour cent pour elle; / C'est pour des charitez qu'elle prend le surplus.”⁶⁷⁴ (Here, the numbers are spoken in percentages, and not “au denier huit, etc.,” a more modern way of describing the rate and another indication of the prevalence of money of account). Usury though is just one part of her financial trickery: she uses contracts and legal manipulations to attempt to get what she wants (the young Dorante's hand in marriage, for example). Yet in the end, her attempts to pull one over on Dorante are undone by a notary loyal to his family.

Unlike such dramatizations, often the real powers of finance took pains to remain invisible. Financiers, by the turn of the century, had banded together into corporations, as ways for interested parties to share in profits while being able to shield themselves from liability, by using appointed “straw men” or figureheads that now hid entire groups of real financiers. As Root writes in *The Fountain of Privilege*, the reliance of Louis XIV on

⁶⁷³ Dancourt, *Madame Artus* (Paris: Pierre Ribou, 1708).

⁶⁷⁴ Dancourt, *Artus*, 4.5, p. 63.

corporations as a source of credit was something he would never admit publicly because it “directly conflicted with the official rhetoric of divine right monarchy.”⁶⁷⁵ The king needed to save face by distancing himself publicly from these corporations while he continued to deal with them. Yet the tacit acceptance of the financiers’ practical role in state finance contrasted with a public discrediting through attacks on the figure of the financier in the theater. One of these attacks, *Turcaret*, may have hit a little too close to home.

Financiers were arrested under the reign of Louis XIV, and increasingly satirized in theater as time went on. Molière, whose comedy attacked the vices of society, almost never mentioned financiers, with the exception of *La Comtesse d’Escarbagnas* in 1671. As we have seen, later comedies by other authors, like Robbe’s *La Rapinière*, developed the figure of the bumbling, loose-pocketed financier that Molière had briefly sketched. But *La Rapinière* was performed only once before disappearing from the stage. Of the other portrayals of various sorts of financiers in French comedy during the later years of the reign of Louis XIV, few, if any, are flattering. And few reached the canonical status of Alain-René Lesage’s 1709 *Turcaret*, a play that delved deeply into issues of class and corruption, and, in the face of opposition from a lobby of financiers, was explicitly ordered to be performed by the Dauphin.⁶⁷⁶

A key question in all of these plays is that of finding somewhere to safely keep one’s money at a profitable interest rate. Under Louis XIV, one way to do this was to purchase state debt in the form of venal offices, which paid yearly gages (wages), akin to

⁶⁷⁵ Hilton Root, *The Fountain of Privilege: Political Foundations of Markets in Old Regime France and England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 176.

interest payments on the initial price of the office. Another way to invest was through crown issued rentes, annuities whose returns could reach 8 percent; regulations limited the returns of private rentes to just five percent.⁶⁷⁷ State debt was plagued by repeated default, especially in losses linked to currency devaluations which were in fact “disguised defaults.”⁶⁷⁸ Earlier theater under Louis XIV, like *L’Avaro*, emphasized the importance of “placing” one’s money well. Later plays examined the social consequences of many of these investment opportunities: how ideals of nobility were weakened by the sale of offices and titles; or how corruption and moral decay went along with usury. It was only with *Turcaret* that France would see a production that so viciously attacked not only usury but the very figure of the financier.

In *Turcaret*, the Baronne and the Chevalier are two nobles who attempt to defraud the eponymous financier of his money. The Baronne has eaten through the little money that her husband left her, and instead of living frugally, she chooses to try to support her spendthrift lifestyle by taking advantage of the financier Turcaret. The Chevalier is, in turn, looking to squeeze the Baronne to support his gambling debt. The play is circular: we see Turcaret literally empty his pockets of all his money and fall to his ruin, while Frontin, the valet, collects it all in the end.

The story of how the play came to be is troubled: from what can be read in the critique that Lesage published with his play, and from contemporary theater history, it would appear that *Turcaret* was given to the Comédie-Française to be performed, but that

⁶⁷⁶ Alain-René Lesage, *Turcaret*, ed. Pierre Frantz (Paris: Gallimard, 2003).

⁶⁷⁷ Philip T. Hoffman, Gilles Postel-Vinay, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal. *Priceless Markets: the Political Economy of Credit in Paris, 1660–1870*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 21.

⁶⁷⁸ Hoffman et. al, *Priceless markets*, 23.

the actors refused to play it, which very likely meant, as Lancaster writes, that “pressure was exerted by tax-collectors and their friends to prevent further performances.”⁶⁷⁹ But then a royal intervention coming from the Dauphin ordered that the play be performed “incessamment.” Yet it disappeared from the stage after only seven performances, a result which, given its successful ticket sales, historians of the theater such as Lancaster take as a sign that a financier lobby exerted pressure directly on Lesage to have it be removed.⁶⁸⁰ The play was printed in 1709 but not performed again until 1730, after which point it became a steady part of the repertoire of the Comédie Française.

The play uses fierce satire to attack the figure of the corrupt tax farmer. In the early eighteenth century the general public began to see the kind of representations of finance on stage that they had not seen before. We can trace from the comedy of the late seventeenth century a growing body of commentary from characters who discover the novelty of paper money: both how to borrow it and how to negotiate it. Turcaret shows an image of the implications to the social order that these changes, and the associated rise in power of the financier class, may have meant.

One of these areas was in the redefinition (or devaluation) of nobility. The massive growth in the number of royal offices in the seventeenth century increased again as Louis XIV needed to raise money for war. Accompanying this rise of venality, we can see in theater portrayals of another trend and perhaps a perceived consequence of it: the dilution of value of titles of nobility. In late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century comedies, nobles were increasingly described either as nobles in name only, or as nearly

⁶⁷⁹ Lancaster, *Sunset*, 262.

⁶⁸⁰ Lancaster, *Sunset*, 262.

destitute characters whose only resource was their name. Comedy at this time simultaneously featured rich bourgeois who attempted to acquire noble airs and sometimes took on noble names (as in Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*).

While *Turcaret* is famous for being a great money play, it is also a play about social credit. The servant Marine is the sharpest observer of social order, showing no qualms about her desire to climb the social ladder, and giving Frontin a deadline of three years to come up with the cash needed to do so. If Marine and Frontin are clearly rooted in the play at the lowest social order—that of domestic servants—many signs indicate that the Baronne and the Chevalier are of dubious nobility, and that Turcaret and his wife are of more humble origins than they would imply. Turcaret himself is revealed to have been the son of a pâtissier, whose grandfather was a lackey to one of the people he lends money to.⁶⁸¹ His wife, who claims to be a countess, is in fact the daughter of a blacksmith. The play incarnates a strong sense of the possibility of social ascension, and of fall from grace. As Lancaster writes, Lesage, careful to remain within the restriction demanded by the rules of French theater to confine the action of the play to one day, attempts to show the entire cycle of social mobility by showing simultaneously the fall of Turcaret, and the rise of the valet Frontin.⁶⁸² The play thus invites the spectator to see the character of Frontin as a future financier. Even the dim lackey Flamand is said to be “following in the footsteps of his master” when Turcaret obtains an appointment for him as a gatekeeper.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸¹ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 3.4, p. 105.

⁶⁸² Lancaster, *Sunset*, 259.

⁶⁸³ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 5.3, p. 157.

The play consistently portrays the Baronne as being of an unascertainable origin; only her trajectory is certain (she wants to be rich). We learn from Marine that she is the widow of a foreign colonel who was killed the previous year in Flanders.⁶⁸⁴ We know that she was left with only a “small amount of money” from her dead husband, who is named as “Monsieur le Baron de Porcendorf.”⁶⁸⁵ The clear reference to a foreign nobility would most likely have been synonymous with a nobility of questionable status. The only time a full name for her is spoken is when cited in a fraudulent document: “Agnès-Ildegonde de la Dolinvillière.”⁶⁸⁶ As A. Hamilton Thompson notes, “the first syllable of the name is dol = fraud. A similar English word would be ‘Cheat-ington.’”⁶⁸⁷ She has some degree of reputation to maintain, that would be damaged if Turcaret rejected her: if she were rejected, her reputation would need to be “rehabilitated” by finding a suitable noble to marry.⁶⁸⁸ It is not certain that a marriage to Turcaret would lower her in the world (as would a marriage to the Chevalier, both poor and of dubious nobility): it is only if he fails to marry her that “people would start to talk a little.”⁶⁸⁹ According to what Marine says, the Baronne would not quite be a “femme de qualité” if she stayed with Turcaret: she could only aspire to be mistaken (“confondue”) for one.⁶⁹⁰ The play consistently paints her as character on the verge of nobility and good reputation, someone whose existence in society could be validated either by a marriage into money or a

⁶⁸⁴ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.1 p. 39. The contemporary spectator would have recognized this as a clear reference to the decisive French loss in the 1708 Battle of Oudenarde (202n1).

⁶⁸⁵ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 4.7, p. 141.

⁶⁸⁶ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 4.7, p. 141.

⁶⁸⁷ Lesage, *Turcaret*, A. Hamilton Thompson, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1918) p. 154. Other page numbers cited refer to the Frantz edition.

⁶⁸⁸ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.1, p. 41.

⁶⁸⁹ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.1, p. 41.

⁶⁹⁰ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.1, p. 42.

marriage to a noble with a good name. She spends the play trying to negotiate a counterfeit currency (nobility) for a real one (cash).

While Turcaret's mistress may or may not be noble, his wife is most certainly not—although she is pretending to be. Marine, before knowing her true identity, sees through the ruse, describing her as a “comtesse de lansquenet” and suspects her of being from Normandy, with a bourgeois family who saves up to send her a small allowance in Paris, that increases or decreases depending on her gambling fortunes.⁶⁹¹ In fact, Madame Turcaret prides herself on holding lavish parties in her provincial town and being the first to know of all the latest Parisian fashions.⁶⁹² She seems to be pleased in her role as a big fish in a small pond—the first lady of Valognes—and confidently touts her contrived nobility. In this way Madame Turcaret is the counterpart to the Baronne: she uses her money in an attempt to gain noble stature.

Of even less certainty is the provenance of the young Chevalier. He takes the title of Chevalier, but this is not a landed title, and it had little identifiable meaning at this point in the century, except perhaps for the order of the Chevaliers de Malte. Even more than the Baronne, the play portrays him as being of dubious nobility: we know nothing about his family. We learn that he is not a Chevalier de Malte but, according to the Baronne's servant Marine, he is rather a “chevalier de Paris” whose only crusades involve gambling.⁶⁹³ It is clear to Marine that he is “un grand comédien,” and, along with his servant Frontin, a “fourbe” even.⁶⁹⁴ Indeed, he is attempting to capitalize on a sort of

⁶⁹¹ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.2, p. 45.

⁶⁹² Lesage, *Turcaret*, 5.6, p. 161.

⁶⁹³ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.1, p. 40.

⁶⁹⁴ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.1, p. 40.

social credit—nobility—that he barely has (if he has it at all). In order to get money from the Baronne, his valet, Frontin attempts to cast him as “un enfant de famille” who would be ashamed to be unable to pay his debts.⁶⁹⁵ The relationship between debt and nobility in theater has famous precedents, with roots going back to Molière’s 1665 *Dom Juan*, where in one scene, the seductive noble Dom Juan uses persuasive and insistent words to avoid paying his debt to M. Dimanche (temporarily, at least). But the Chevalier is no Dom Juan: he has neither family money nor social credit to back him up.

Finally, the play shows two characters who are of the lowest social order: Frontin and Marine. It is they who will make off with the money in the end, an ending that suggests that they will rise out of their socioeconomic status and that Frontin will himself go on to be a financier. He has the last line in the play, having successfully bilked Turcaret out of tens of thousands of francs: “Voilà le règne de Turcaret fini; le mien va commencer.”⁶⁹⁶ Dessert has argued that what was to become a trope of the valet becoming a wealthy financier was almost always a myth in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This theme, increasingly common in literature at the time (*Turcaret* is one of the most striking examples), simply did not bear out when compared to the origins of the major financiers of the late seventeenth century: in his study of hundreds of the most important financiers, not a single one came from the world of domestic servants.⁶⁹⁷ Furthermore, 79% of the major financiers he studied were nobles.⁶⁹⁸ But of these, only 12.9% were nobles from the third generation or higher. This suggests that a

⁶⁹⁵ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.2, p. 49.

⁶⁹⁶ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 5.14, p. 177.

⁶⁹⁷ Daniel Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle*. (Paris: Fayard, 1984), 96.

⁶⁹⁸ Dessert, *Argent*, 87.

great many were descendants of those who bought or faked their titles, which would put them in the category of a relatively wealthy recent nobility. That wealth would have been important since starting out as a financier would have required a certain amount of capital. Indeed, as Bayard's work shows, this type of laquais-financier progression may indeed have been possible in the early seventeenth century. But by the time of *Turcaret*, we can concur with Dessert that the "artificial character" of the "laquais-financier" played the role of a sort of scapegoat.⁶⁹⁹ While financiers did not usually come directly from being servants, they did tend to come from bourgeois merchant families. This exaggerated scapegoating served to reinforce an image of the financier as less than noble.

Both *Turcaret* and *Frontin* are clearly then in the realm of fictional representations: *Turcaret* as an unpolished, corrupt tax farmer of servant origins and *Frontin* as a clever opportunist. Both were recastings of what financiers actually were. The portrayal of these financial manipulators as being as far from noble as possible is, I think, particularly important given how ignoble their actions were. For in addition to showing him as a bumbling fool, the play shows *Turcaret* engaged in a variety of criminal operations that leave the spectator with no pity for him.

Just as it became increasingly common to have portrayals of nobles without money, the value of money itself began to be questioned in theater. In the early eighteenth century, theater was portraying the changing nature and value of money in many ways, particularly by showing an increased use of paper money. *Lettres de change* and *billets au porteur* played a key role in avoiding restrictions on usury, and increasingly began to appear in French comedy starting in the late seventeenth century.

⁶⁹⁹ Dessert, *Argent*, 104.

The role of paper money in the play is crucial because it hinges upon the problem of credit that Turcaret uses and abuses to gain the maximum profit from his position. In *Turcaret* we see an abundance of paper, and the instability in the value of other objects—such as coins and jewels—which traditionally were the bearers of value in theater. Furthermore, we see how Turcaret’s abuse of paper money ultimately leads to his downfall.

Different forms of value are shown in this play: metal coins, *billets au porteur*, a diamond that is to be offered as collateral for a loan. When Marine advises the Baronne of the goods she can collect from Turcaret, she mentions “de bons effets, de l’argent comptant, des bijoux, de bons billets au porteur, des contrats de rente.”⁷⁰⁰ What the play shows best is the power of paper, and linked with it, the power of credit. *Turcaret* shows the potential for treachery in paper: both bearer notes that fall into the wrong hands, and fraudulent judicial orders that are sufficiently believable to elicit payment for a non-existent debt.

The theme of money in *Turcaret* is announced from the start in the list of actors, where Turcaret is described as a “traitant,” which is to say, one of the tax farmers who would have contracted with the king to deliver a certain amount of revenue at the beginning of the year (or in fixed payments throughout the year) in exchange for the right to collect certain taxes. And a very real, practical form of money is referred to in the very first line, in a precise amount: “Encore hier deux cents pistoles?”⁷⁰¹ But we do not see any ‘real money’—that is to say, coins—on the stage until later. Crucially, the first

⁷⁰⁰ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.1, p. 41.

⁷⁰¹ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.1, p. 38.

representation of money shown is not metal but paper: the *billet au porteur* Turcaret gives the Baronne in the quite large sum of 10,000 écus. Even Turcaret himself does not see metal money when it appears on stage the first time, even as it is passing through his hands: without looking, he gives Marine “une poignée d’argent” saying “Tiens, je donne sans compter, moi.”⁷⁰² The only other time actual coinage is handled is when the financier gives all the money he has “left over” in his money pouch—60 pistoles—to Frontin to make a purchase. There is also a diamond, appraised at various different amounts, which stands in for money on several occasions.

Indeed, most of the money in the play is in the form of credit, as when the Chevalier claims to have lost 1000 écus “sur sa parole” (it is a testament to his skill at finding money that someone would have extended him credit for this large sum).⁷⁰³ In another instance, Turcaret, after having broken all of the Baronne’s mirrors and pieces of porcelain in a jealous rage, apologizes by purchasing 10,000 francs worth of the goods—buying it, we are led to believe, on his credit with the merchant or using a *billet*. And then there are two purloined notes crucial to Frontin’s rise. When Turcaret pays the man whom he believes to be a bailiff but who in fact is an impostor, he pays him with a *billet au porteur*. Turcaret can do this because he is creditworthy and uses a note guaranteed by the tax farmers he does business with: “ma prose,” he says, speaking of the note he had given to the Baronne, “a son mérite; elle est signée et approuvée par quatre fermiers généraux.”⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰² Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.5, p. 59.

⁷⁰³ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.2, p. 44.

⁷⁰⁴ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.5, p. 56.

As this study has shown, the *billet au porteur* was a relatively new kind of money in theater. While characters in many plays by this point knew what it was, they did not necessarily know how to use it. When the first billet in this play is received by the Baronne, she is not baffled by the novelty, just surprised by the sum. Yet she is not able to use it without help: “je veux changer cet effet-là de nature; il en faut faire de l’argent. Je ne connais personne pour cela.”⁷⁰⁵ Her inability to know where to negotiate the bearer note herself, or who to take it to, suggests that the *billet au porteur* was a strange gift to give a woman such as her; and indeed, the kind of gift that only a tax-farmer, used to dealing in paper and aware of its advantages and how difficult it would be for her to negotiate, would give. It is not an elegant gift.

This play invites us to consider the possibility of how a man who is considered to be rich can so quickly run out of money: for not only does he give it away indiscriminately to the women he falls in love with, but his very operation of usury and corruption seems built on the edge of bankruptcy. Turcaret pays little attention to his cash on hand and seems to be constantly moving money in and out; the text shows him living in a sort of cash flow crisis. Aside from the two moments when he opens and empties his money-pouch, all we know of Turcaret’s money is that his paper is good. As a tax collector, he would have had the possibility to borrow enormous amounts of money—he has after all just purchased a significant piece of real estate—but this would not necessarily mean cash.⁷⁰⁶ We know that the play takes place in the harsh winter of 1709, when thousands in Paris died due to hunger and cold. Accompanying the upsurge in

⁷⁰⁵ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 1.8, pp. 65–66.

⁷⁰⁶ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 3.3, p. 101.

spending for the War of Spanish Succession, there were huge increases in borrowing in Paris as payment of wages was suspended: both private and public debt grew significantly.⁷⁰⁷ The idea of a financier going bankrupt was not unimaginable. Otherwise, it is difficult to see why Turcaret would have stopped paying the quarterly pension he sent to his wife to keep her in the provincial town of Valognes and out of Paris. She comes to the city only because he is five quarters behind on his payments.

The play also shows the various kinds of financial operations the corrupt financier was portrayed as running. First, his *billets au porteur*, while not necessarily being nefarious in themselves, would have lent themselves perfectly to criminal means, such as his operations of usury and planned bankruptcy, where he makes a profit off of the fraudulent bankruptcies of his associates. In what concerns usury, as a financier he would have had a large portion of capital available to him at certain times. In one fast-paced scene, we see Turcaret discuss the detail of his business operations with his intermediary, the evocatively named Monsieur Rafle. In this scene, Turcaret goes from a somewhat pitiful loose-pocketed buffoon to a heartless manipulator. Both the precision of the operation and his cold mastery of it contrast sharply with earlier representations of the financier as simply a fool. He uses his capital to lend money to a Marquis in exchange for a family diamond at a high interest rate (the same diamond he will offer to his mistress when the Marquis fails to pay him back on time). To a young noble (an ‘enfant de famille’ as the Chevalier claims to be), he offers a loan at 200% interest.⁷⁰⁸ He sells a 5,000 franc rente contract at an interest rate above the legal limit to a locksmith friend of

⁷⁰⁷ Mark Potter, "Good Offices: Intermediation by Corporate Bodies in Early Modern French Public Finance," in *The Journal of Economic History* 60, no. 3 (Sep 2000), 611.

Rafle's who supposedly "honestly" built up the sum through his "hard work and savings."⁷⁰⁹ He consigns the detail of these operations to M. Rafle, who acts as his intermediary in these and in even larger crimes, as when, for example, he negotiates a deal with a clerk he had appointed to an important money handling position to skim some off the top for him.

In addition to that, Turcaret abuses his position by selling offices—2,000 francs, for example, for a position in Valognes, which he tries to sell twice—and he also uses his power to put inconvenient lovers and husbands into far-flung positions: he boasts about having sent some "all the way to Canada."⁷¹⁰ But the biggest event of the play, which leads to Turcaret's demise, is when, in one of the play's open mysteries, he appears to have been complicit in a massive bankruptcy fraud. When Rafle informs him that a *caissier* he guaranteed ran away with 200,000 écus, Turcaret responds cryptically, "C'est par mon ordre qu'il... Je sais où il est."⁷¹¹ This is why, we are told, Turcaret is escorted out of the play in the end. However it is not entirely clear whether his "associés" are really agents of justice, other members of his corporation, or if this is perhaps even an arranged escape.

Since the spectator never actually sees Turcaret getting taken away—and so it is impossible to know for sure if he is really arrested, or indeed, by whom—we are led to think that it is by his "associates" in the company who were his guarantors. But the only witness to this is Frontin, the clever valet who has proven to be a master manipulator.

⁷⁰⁸ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 3.7, p. 112.

⁷⁰⁹ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 3.7, p. 115.

⁷¹⁰ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 2.3, p. 82.

⁷¹¹ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 3.8, p. 112.

There is no clear state representative of the law as when, in *Le Tartuffe*, a royal agent takes Tartuffe away. Here, Turcaret disappears without a trace. Furthermore, the only other manifestation of justice that appears in the play is a con artist bailiff with a forged order. There is no state justice in *Turcaret*, only fraud. With the success of Frontin and Marine, the time when the scammers end the play having succeeded in their enterprise has finally come.

The financier in France can be defined largely as anyone who handled the crown's money: from royal officials, to private individuals, *traitants* or *partisans*, who effectively made short term loans to the king.⁷¹² What did it take in order to become a financier? According to Turcaret, not much: as he says, “Nous nous étudions à prendre ce que le monde a de meilleur; voilà toute notre science.”⁷¹³ In its combination attack on fake nobles and corrupt tax farmers, *Turcaret* certainly contained elements to be feared. Attacks on financiers who practiced usury may have had the intended effect of making the alternative—state perpetuities, and venal offices—look more attractive. According to this message, the ‘honest locksmith’ who chose to invest his money with Turcaret would have done better to purchase a royal *rente*. By placing corrupt *traitants* as the scapegoats for the country's economic woes, theater such as *Turcaret* places the blame firmly on the financiers.

This may be the reason why there is no great attack on financiers in Molière's comedy. As Stoyan Tzonev notes, Molière “se voulait auteur dramatique qui avait

⁷¹² Tzonev, *Financier*, 14.

⁷¹³ Lesage, *Turcaret*, 2.4, p. 86.

épargné les financiers afin de mieux servir le roi dans sa politique financière.”⁷¹⁴ As an author who depended in part on royal support, he certainly would have been sensitive to such matters. And while Robbe’s *La Rapinière* touched on many of these issues, it did not feature such a total financial destruction. Furthermore, propagating the myth of the rising valet along with the fall of the ridiculous financier may have even functioned as a sort of straw man—or a lightning rod, as Dessert says—of criticism away from any portrayals of actual fermiers généraux, in a similar way that the corporations themselves may have helped insulate their members against attacks. Even *Turcaret* himself worked through an intermediary for his shadier business dealings.

This play however, may have gone too far, not only satirizing the financier but driving home accusations of systematic corruption. By highlighting the changing status of both nobility and money; while casting a strong criticism on the figure of the financier, *Turcaret* proved to have both the power to frighten the financier lobby for decades, and that to last on the literary canon for centuries later, as a play that showed the intersection between social currency and economic currency in a crisis of devaluation.

Dancourt’s *Les Agioteurs*, performed in 1710, dramatizes a paper economy in a detail unlike any that had been shown in theater before, with the possible exception of *Turcaret*.⁷¹⁵ But while *Turcaret* showed a money-lender, financier character who traded in paper, thus only implying the existence of a larger market, *Les Agioteurs* showed, for the first time in French theater, a full-fledged paper money market on the stage, albeit a corrupt market subject to manipulation. Like *Turcaret*, written a year earlier, Dancourt’s

⁷¹⁴ Tzonev, *Financier*, 60.

play examines the new financial ecosystem that had developed out of a proliferation of paper financial instruments at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Particularly fascinating about this play, from the perspective of the monetary imaginary, is the way in which questions of the nature of paper money and its redemption value are put front and center. Dancourt used the full force of the theatrical genre to visually and dramatically examine the effects and uses of a newly fungible kind of money, by using set design and staging methods that allowed him to fit a large variety of characters and subplots within the confines of French comedic tradition—and to employ the large number of actors in the wealthy company he wrote for. He also tapped into a recent literary and theatrical heritage of putting into question the socioeconomic value of members of the aristocracy. This simultaneous reevaluation of value (of money and of nobility) combines in *Les Agioteurs* to create a rich portrait of examination of value in general. Like paper money, social value is negotiated in the play at varying rates, and real power lies with those who are performing the negotiation.

Les Agioteurs was not a huge success: the sales in cash terms were “mediocre.”⁷¹⁶ It was only published the next year in a volume of collected works. It did, though, reach 20 consecutive performances, so had more staying power in the short run than *Turcaret* which had likely been forced off the stage by a powerful cabal of upset financiers. The plot has a fairly sparse, meandering love story that is co-opted by economic intrigue: Zacharie, explicitly listed in the play’s character list as a “usurier,” is the godfather of Trapolin, who has promised to marry Sara, but is really just interested in getting money

⁷¹⁵ Dancourt, *Les Agioteurs*, in vol. 7 of *Les Oeuvres de Monsieur D’Ancourt, Seconde Edition* (Paris: Pierre Ribou, 1711).

from her. In fact, Trapolin is secretly hoping to marry Sara's niece Suzon, who is secretly in love with Clitandre, who owes Trapolin money and wants to borrow more. Zacharie is also infatuated with Suzon and hopes to marry her. All of these love stories are resolved with the discovery of a secret letter towards the end of the play. The rest of the play—three long acts, which are in all about as long as a normal five act comedy (such as *Turcaret*, for example)—shows the workings of Trapolin's *agiotage* operation, the diverse cast of characters he deals with, and the scams he runs and those to which he falls victim.

A quick summary of the play and its performance history should start with the title, *Les Agioteurs*, which refers to people who trade financial instruments for a criminal profit. Interestingly this word only started to appear in 1710. The title of this play is thus one of the word's first uses in print, so Dancourt's treatment of the subject is quite topical. The more acceptable practice of "agio," from the Italian "adgio," referred to the legal and accepted version of exchanging paper for money, and taking a small fee. The term in this sense only came into this use around the beginning of the eighteenth century. Today, the common English translation for the word *agioteur* is "stockjobber," but it is not really the best one for this specific context. Another translation might be "speculator." In this play, it refers specifically to a derogatory term for somebody who performed "agiotage," which was the unsavory practice of recuperating the difference in value between different forms of money (paper and coin) and taking an unacceptably large profit off of the transaction.

⁷¹⁶ Blanc, *Theatre du XVIIe siècle*, 1258.

The word “agioteur” is an invention of the early eighteenth century, like the practice itself in France. Furetière’s 1690 *Dictionnaire Universel* does not give a definition for *agioteurs* or for *agio* in its monetary sense. Jacques Savary des Brûlons, in his 1675 merchant’s guide, *Le Parfait Negociant*, does not mention it. But by 1726, in his *Dictionnaire Universel du Commerce*, he defines *agio* as a banking term which describes the *Change* or difference between ‘bank money’ and ‘cash money,’ which is to say the spread between paper and cash.⁷¹⁷ He also gives another definition, that of the “profit qui revient d’une avance que l’on a faite pour quelqu’un,” which he is careful to distinguish is not interest, but essentially a fee for a commercial cash advance (and which he calculates at about 6% a year), as well as a related definition. He then defines the words *Agiotage*, *Agioter*, and *Agioteur*. *Agiotage* is almost always illicit, he writes, and *Agioter* as a verb means to lend at high rates of interest and practice usury. He describes an *agioteur* as follows:

Terme nouvellement en usage parmi les Marchands, Négocians, Banquiers & Gens d’affaires, qui signifie une personne qui fait valoir son argent à gros intérêt, en prenant du public des billets, promesses, assignations & autres semblables papiers, sur un pied très-bas, pour les remettre dans le même public sur un pied plus haut.

Les Agioteurs sont des pestes publiques, & des Usuriers de profession, qui en bonne police mériteroient punition exemplaire.⁷¹⁸

In addition to his mention of *agioteurs* in the entry for *agio*, in his entry for “commerce en papier,” Savary des Brûlons defines *agiotage* as the “illicit” paper trade in which “*agioteurs*” take part.⁷¹⁹ A search of online resources turns up no results for

⁷¹⁷ Jacques Savary des Brûlons, *Dictionnaire universel de commerce* (Amsterdam: Jansons, 1726), 47.

⁷¹⁸ Savary des Brûlons, *Dictionnaire universel de commerce*, 48.

⁷¹⁹ Savary des Brûlons, *Dictionnaire universel de commerce*, 822.

“agioteur” and “agiotage” before 1700, and shows use of the first term starting to increase in the second decade of the eighteenth century.

One of the first print sources for the term is undoubtedly also one of Dancourt’s sources. In the June/July/August issue of the 1710 *Mercure galant* gazette (the first published by Dufresny after the death of Donneau de Visé, the original publisher) a story called “L’Agioteur Dupé” tells a fascinating tale of an organized deception and robbery of a Jewish moneylender by a gang of experienced Parisian ruffians or “filous.” They trick the moneylender into giving them real paper notes in exchange for bags full of stones. Since the word was still new, in telling the story, Dufresny on several occasions takes care to explain to his readers what exactly an *agioteur* is. At the beginning of the story, he refers to his protagonist as “un de ces Juifs parisiens [...] qu’on nomme depuis peu *Agioteurs*.”⁷²⁰ There is a further explanation of the term at the end of the *Mercure galant* piece: “Le mot d’*Agioteur* vient du mot Italien *Adgio* Supplément ou Ajustement. *Adjustamento*, Ajustement ou Convention d’intérêt entre les Agens de Change ou Banquiers. *Quel vantaggio ché si da o ricevè per adjustamento della valuta d’una Moneta a quella d’un altra*.”⁷²¹ This definition makes no moral judgment on agioteurs (it does not argue that they make an unconscionable profit); it is simply a technical description of the practice. For our purposes a few things stand out: first, the title of the story, “L’Agioteur Dupé,” which points out this new kind of financial professional; second, the sort of moral justice that the story portrays, as the blood-sucking money-changer gets robbed; finally, the apparent need to explain to the readers of the monthly gazette just what an *agioteur*

⁷²⁰ *Le Mercure galant*, June-August 1710, p. 178.

⁷²¹ *Le Mercure galant*, June-August 1710, p. 186.

was. Dancourt's play has a very similar scene in it. While the privilege for the *Mercure galant* issue is dated September 3, 1710, Dancourt's play was first performed on September 26. It is believed by some that he added the scene midway through the performance run, which is certainly possible given the structure of the play.

The use of this word as the title of the play, and its use throughout the play, indicates an intersection between new financial practices and new ways of talking about them. The play came at a time when new forms of paper money had been circulating in large quantities. What Savary des Brûlons describes as the illicit paper trade was made possible in large part by the complicated monetary situation at the beginning of the eighteenth century: the louis d'or had fluctuated in value in the first decade of the eighteenth century; and related to this, *billets de monnaie*, mint bills, had been put into circulation from 1702–1707.⁷²² The rise in use of *billets de monnaie* came about after a monetary reform: people were to exchange their old coins for new ones, but the crown was unable to mint enough of the new coins and thus issued these bills in their place. After 1703 the legal status of the mint bills changed to be interest bearing tradable credit notes—essentially paper money—but the market for them was very volatile.⁷²³ With the combination of these and other forms of state and personal obligations that were circulating, the idea of a paper money system was certainly in play in the first decade of the eighteenth century in a way it had not been before. In 1708 Samuel Bernard even floated the idea of setting up a note-issuing bank.⁷²⁴ This play examines the volatility in

⁷²² Blanc, *Theatre du XVIIe siècle*, 1257.

⁷²³ Rowland, "Le Crunch."

⁷²⁴ Rowland, "Le Crunch."

this market of notes, specifically the opportunity for profit when the *agioteurs* would buy the paper low and then sell it high.

This indeed was a time when *agiotage* was very much in the public eye. By the end of 1710, concrete action was being taken against abusive *agioteurs*. François Moreau traces a political meaning for the story in the *Mercure galant*: it coincides in date with the launch of an offensive by Marc-René d'Argenson, the *Lieutenant Général de la Police*, against the abuses committed by Parisian *agioteurs*.⁷²⁵ By December, 66 *agioteurs* had been arrested in the operation.⁷²⁶

Dancourt uses various theatrical means to show the details of these paper transactions. The peasant Lucas is the character who most directly embodies the fascination with paper money. At the play's opening, when he learns that Trapolin has made his fortune from "changing paper into money, and money into paper," he is fascinated but attributes it to sorcery. After all, he says, "il est bien raisonnable que les sorciers de Paris en sçachant plus que les sorciers de village."⁷²⁷ His cousin Claudine explains to him that it is not sorcery: she has seen people trade pieces of paper for sacks of gold and even for a house. Lucas, increasingly interested, wants to know how the paper is made, and if she has seen it up close. She says that she has, and describes it in comically naive terms: "je vis du noir & du blanc, des lettres comme on écrit, & pis d'autres lettres comme on compte, m'est avis qu'ils appellont ça des chiffres [...] Et pis il

⁷²⁵ François Moreau, *Le "Mercure Galant" de Dufresny (1710-1714) ou le journalisme à la mode* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1982), 55.

⁷²⁶ Moreau also writes that the *Nouvelles d'Amsterdam* gazette indicated that many of these paper-money-manipulators had been arrested in November, and the gazette of December 12 indicated that 66 had been arrested by d'Argenson.

⁷²⁷ Dancourt, *Agoteurs*, 1.1, p. 108.

y a encore de grandes rayes avec des noms en paraphes.”⁷²⁸ Lucas remains convinced these signatures mean it is a magic spell, and says he just needs to get his hands on some of that paper. This is a similar description to that in act 3, where we learn that Lucas has found some paper, and he wants to turn it into money, in an echo of Dancourt’s 1704 *Le Galant Jardinier*.

Unbeknownst to Lucas, the paper is not money, but a love note (in fact, a love note that untangles all of the play’s secret love affairs). Lucas presents it as money though, telling Zacharie in the words that he imagines one would use in such a situation, “On me devoit queuque argent, je sis allé pour le recevoir, & on ne m’a baillé que du papier.”⁷²⁹ At Claudine’s request, Zacharie agrees to cash in the note at par. But then he reads its sentimental prose aloud, before laughing and saying: “Cela est trop plaisant, par ma foy cela vaut de l’or.”⁷³⁰ As Zacharie and Sara read the note in its entirety, though, they also find out that Trapolin has been deceiving them, and punish the messenger. Lucas complains to Trapolin that his “papier ne vaut rien [...] on ne trouve dessus que des coups de bâton & des injures, & si on appelle ça des billets doux encore.”⁷³¹ The play is thus framed by Lucas’s comic search to understand the mysteries of paper money, and at the end, his failed attempt at negotiating what he thinks is paper money. There are a variety of paper notes circulating in the play: “promesses des Gabelles,” “billets de Compagnie,” as well as “papier” in general.⁷³² The most striking scene, though, is when the peasant Lucas marvels at the use of paper money, without even knowing what a

⁷²⁸ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 1.1, p. 109.

⁷²⁹ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 3.23, p. 197

⁷³⁰ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 3.23, p. 198.

⁷³¹ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 3.25, p. 203.

“billet doux” is—thinking that because it is “doux” it should be all the better for exchanging for money. The degree to which his misunderstanding is comical is indeed an indication that the spectators would have, for their part, been well aware of what such a financial note was and how it should be negotiated.

The play uses various means to attempt to convince the spectators of the existence of a paper market. The theatrical conventions in place at the time necessitated that all of the action take place in one location. This location is, as we know from the character list at the beginning of the play, in Trapolin’s house. Yet the spectators are still able to observe from this one location his control over a network of other *agiateurs*, when he sets the new rate of paper.⁷³³ The play, by means of dialogue and action, indicates the existence of a coordinated market for paper: “on est trois ou quatre bureaux de bonne intelligence,” Trapolin says.⁷³⁴ As coin becomes rare, it is Zacharie who first sets the rates of exchange between paper and money. He tells his associate Trapolin,

Cependant puisque le papier nous gagne, & que l’espece est rare, il est bon de baisser aujourd’hui le papier de huit pour cent: quand nous nous serons defaits du nôtre, on le remettra sur le même pied, ou on le rehaussera, s’il est possible.⁷³⁵

To set the change in rates across a network of associated *agiateurs*, they use paper communications: Trapolin has Guillaume write “petits billets d’avis” of the change in interest rates that he will bring to four *bureaux* or offices, and he lists the names and addresses of the persons to be notified. The “petits Bureaux,” he says, will follow suit.⁷³⁶

⁷³² Dancourt, *Agiateurs*, 3.6, p. 172.

⁷³³ Dancourt, *Agiateurs*, 1.9, p. 125.

⁷³⁴ Dancourt, *Agiateurs*, 1.9, p. 124.

⁷³⁵ Dancourt, *Agiateurs*, 1.8, p. 124.

⁷³⁶ Dancourt, *Agiateurs*, 1.9, p. 125.

A few of the names he lists, while evocative (“Monsieur Villain,” “Monsieur Saint-Denis”), sound quite typically French instead of stereotypically mocking Jews, Italians or other foreigners as in Boindin’s *Port de Mer* (with the notable exception of “Madame Bersabée”). Here, the integration of usury takes another step into the French culture and financial system.

Dancourt was very conscious of the possibilities of how the stage could be used, taking full advantage of it to display a well-thought out space of finance. When Claudine and Lucas appear to negotiate his love note, for example, they are designated as starting the scene downstage, in the “fond du Theatre” which corresponds with what would have been their logical entry pattern on a deep, narrow stage.⁷³⁷ We also know that Trapolin’s office is upstairs (when the devious Dargentac says he has to go downstairs to deal with an associate).⁷³⁸ Finally and perhaps most theatrically there is a device on stage to show Trapolin’s close collaboration with, along with his ability to possibly disavow, Craquinet whom he designates as the moneylender in the operation. This illicit association is shown visually through use of a secret passageway in between the houses of Trapolin and Craquelin, accessible through a locked cabinet in Trapolin’s office. The use of this passageway is demonstrated on stage as Trapolin tells Dubois to take the key to the locked cabinet, open it, and knock firmly on an oak door in its rear.⁷³⁹ Through the passageway, Trapolin exchanges paper money and other lending documents with his associate, as well as joining him for dinner every night to discuss their affairs, without

⁷³⁷ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 3.23, p. 196.

⁷³⁸ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 3.13, p. 185.

⁷³⁹ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 2.3, p. 134.

risking their being seen together in public.⁷⁴⁰ Trapolin says that this is to keep the public in the dark about their association, as people had been beginning to suspect something.

In the second act, another agioteur, evocatively named Cangrene, consults Durillon and Trapolin with an ethical question relating to interest rates. He would like to know how much interest he can morally keep over the life of a renegotiated loan.⁷⁴¹ The negotiations in the play rest upon a few main elements: the presence of a paper market and its variability, often controlled by Trapolin; the variety of forms of paper money; and the different lending and exchange operations that are shown. The first and main element that the play shows is the discount rate that is applied to paper. This is something that all of the characters (Lucas excepted) take for granted. Exchanging paper money for cash always results in getting less than the face value, and while it is probably the case that the play is heavily exaggerating these discount rates, they go from anywhere from 30% to up to 60% of the value of the paper. Usually it is somewhere around 30%—as is seen in the *Mercurie galant* story, 35% was considered a standard rate. But in the play, the rate varies widely. These discount rates are not, however, necessarily excessive compared to some actual ones from the day: in 1709, for example, mint bills at one point plummeted to be worth 50% of their value.

The play shows Trapolin's power to manipulate standard discount rates. He is shown as running a network of *agioteurs* whose interest rates he controls to some extent, although there is also the idea of a larger market at play. As we have seen, if there seems to be an excess of paper on the market at a low price, he buys paper, and tries to sell high.

⁷⁴⁰ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 2.4, p. 137.

⁷⁴¹ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 2.9, p. 150.

The part of the market Trapolin does not control, he knows intimately. He mentions to one associate, Madame Malprofit, who is using her husband's name in an attempt to get rich into the moneylending business, that her husband's paper is well respected in the marketplace: "Son papier a sur la place un credit," he assures her.⁷⁴²

When the transaction goes wrong, we get an idea of what a desired interest rate was for Trapolin. For example, when Trapolin berates his associate Craquinet who loans out 13,000 francs in paper for a note for only 15,000 francs payable in six months, he is also bemoaning the fact that he failed to charge enough.⁷⁴³ Taken at face value, the loan is for an effective interest rate of 30 percent annually. That, of course, assumes the paper is at par (because the loan is in paper, but the reimbursement is to be in cash). At what seems to be Trapolin's standard discount of 50%, it is more like a 300% rate of annual interest.⁷⁴⁴ Still, Trapolin complains about Craquinet to Zacharie—"c'est un imbecile [...] qui ne sçait pas profiter de l'occasion"—when he learns that the borrower is a new *traitant* who needed the money immediately and who thus would have been willing to pay more.⁷⁴⁵ The high rates Trapolin aims for—possibly but not necessarily exaggerations—serve to put a quantifiable numerical figure on the dramatic characterization of greed.

As we have seen, Trapolin, acting as an intermediary who will cash in paper, also runs a usury operation with the help of Craquinet. Thus a Mlle Urbine, described as a "jeune Coquette," hopes to borrow 6,000 or 7,000 francs in cash, in exchange for the

⁷⁴² Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 3.6, p. 170.

⁷⁴³ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 1.8, p. 123.

⁷⁴⁴ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 1.8, p. 123.

⁷⁴⁵ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 1.8, p. 123.

12,000 in paper due in four months—an annual rate of nearly 150%. Trapolin implies that a counternote of 15,000 will be necessary: an annual rate of nearly 450%! Urbine is shocked by this sum but agrees all the same.⁷⁴⁶ The idea is that Urbine will go to the lender Craquinet who serves as Trapolin’s front man, his *homme de paille*. Urbine’s financial advisor will sign a note agreeing to pay 15,000 francs. In exchange, Craquinet will give him the note he received from Trapolin for 12,000 francs. Then, that advisor will bring it back to Trapolin to be cashed in for 6,000 francs. Essentially Trapolin, like Harpagon in *L’Avare*, has vertically integrated the lending operation.

As in earlier usury plays, there is a subtle distinction maintained between negotiator and lender. When Mlle Urbine asks Trapolin to arrange the loan, he insists he does not loan the money: “ce n’est pas moy qui prête, je n’en ai point moy de papier; ce sont des Turcs, des usuriers, des fripons.”⁷⁴⁷ In theory, Trapolin limits himself to positioning himself as merely the person arranging the loan of paper (a similar situation to the one in *L’Avare*, for example), and then taking on the role of changer of that paper into money. In effect, he holds both the benefit from the loan and from the cashing of the paper received in the loan. But unlike in *L’Avare*, here he explains and negotiates the arrangement directly with the borrower.

Sometimes Trapolin makes other arrangements as well: paper for paper. Sometimes, the agioteurs give their own paper to his borrowers in exchange for the paper the borrower is trying to negotiate. For example, with the aptly named Madame Malprofit, who brings him 8,000 francs in paper hoping to receive 4,000 francs in cash,

⁷⁴⁶ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 2.5, p. 140.

⁷⁴⁷ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 2.5, p. 140.

Trapolin instead reassures her that he will deal with her debtors himself. He intends to pay them with his own paper and thus make an additional profit.⁷⁴⁸ In cases such as these, where paper is paid for with paper, we see the development of a veritable paper economy. It is one where Trapolin is a major player, as his integration of different operations and his control of a network mean that he can, to some extent, keep people from cashing in his paper: when Clitandre threatens to take Trapolin's notes elsewhere, Trapolin remarks that nobody will negotiate his paper without his agreement.⁷⁴⁹

This is in contrast with coin, which *Les Agioteurs* shows to be unreliable. The play retains some sense of justice by showing how these agioteurs actually lose money as well. When the usurers are punished, it is not because they have fallen victim to state justice or counterfeit paper, but rather through mistakes and tricks involving coin. One such transaction is that which comes from the *Mercure galant* "Agioteur Dupé" story, where Trapolin is fooled into thinking bags full of rocks contain coins. The perpetrator runs off with the paper money. At another moment towards the end of the play, the hapless Dubois gives a client what he thinks is a bag full of 1000 francs in gold, but which actually contains 3000 francs worth.⁷⁵⁰ The spectators do not find out what happens, but it is safe to assume the money is as good as lost.

While Dufresny in his *Mercure Galant* story included an explanatory note for his readership (as he could, in a periodical), here we see an explanation and demonstration (while likely an exaggeration) of the acts of an agioteur. This play serves in a sense to educate, elaborate, and show this concept visually and spatially in a way that narrative

⁷⁴⁸ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 3.7, p. 173.

⁷⁴⁹ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 3.5, p. 169.

literature cannot. The idea of presenting an economy where all paper money is largely fungible—that is to say, it can be exchanged for other pieces of paper money, or coin money—is nearly totally present at this point. While it is true that on many occasions Trapolin or Zacharie examine closely the paper which they are preparing to buy, their customers often just ask for “paper.” Only a few years later, the development of this imaginary of a fungible paper money economy would prove key to the actual implementation of a full paper money system such as John Law’s.

The play also shows the social consequences and implications of credit. After they are tricked, Trapolin and Dubois go to a café to chase after the thief who took their money, and what Dubois says is revelatory of the need to protect the status of their credit: “Ne faites point de bruit de l’aventure au moins, cela nuirait à votre credit, & au mien peut-être.”⁷⁵¹ Here, the call to credit intertwines social and financial meanings. The social freedom of this play is explicitly posited: anybody can become rich provided they know how to write and count.⁷⁵² It is no longer just the Jews who make money from usury. This was already the case with Harpagon, but here the bourgeois usurers are running the entire market. And while there is a decline of the nobility, there is yet still respect for them (although this may be because they have heritages and rents that can be tapped into for collateral).

The play shows the rags-to-riches myth, and also its reversal, riches-to-rags. Lucas the peasant again comes to mind as the emblematic character of this idea, because he comes to Paris hoping to make his fortune, imagining that if others can do it, so can

⁷⁵⁰ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 3.21, p. 195.

⁷⁵¹ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 3.21, p. 195.

he. We might recall the two characters in *Turcaret* with similar stories: the title character, Turcaret, was once a servant or valet, and the enterprising Frontin is himself a valet on the way to becoming a financier. In this play, the agioteurs are not necessarily either well placed or with noble pretensions: they are simply rich. And no matter how many actual rags-to-riches cases there were (and there well may have been some, especially early in the seventeenth century), their portrayal in theater sends a powerful message about the volatility of the financial world.

The portrait painted in *Les Agioteurs* is somewhat distinct from that of *Turcaret* and seems to provide a plausible explanation. Trapolin comes into money and into a profitable operation through family connections (his godfather). Likewise, the peasant Lucas who hopes to make his fortune counts on the help and advice of his cousin, Claudine. Finally, *Les Agioteurs* drives home another key point in that opening scene with Lucas: the indication that a knowledge of reading, writing, and counting is vital to financial success. While Dessert argues that the laquais-financier character such as *Turcaret* serves as a social lightning rod (“paratonnerre social”), *Les Agioteurs* positions a different sort of scapegoat.⁷⁵³ And perhaps Claudine, the cousin to the peasant Lucas, has the most realistic idea: she says that she wants to make her fortune through marriage.⁷⁵⁴

The play invites us to look at the social composition of those who lend money. The non-Jewish characters in the play practice usury openly. It is worth noting that those who get punished the most severely are those characters, Trapolin and Craquinet, who try

⁷⁵² Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 1.1, p. 107.

⁷⁵³ Dessert, “Mythe ou réalité?” 34.

to enter the system and use it to their advantage. As Blanc points out, the fact that two of the characters—Zacharie and Sara—have Hebraic names, and two—Trapolin and Craquinet—have names that sound French, does not point to anti-semitism so much as shows that now everybody is becoming a moneychanger.⁷⁵⁵ Zacharie is portrayed as Jewish: his name is one possible clue, confirmed by a comment directed towards him (“Mais parmi toutes ces conversions-là, Monsieur Zacharie, ne feriez-vous pas bien de songer un peu à la vôtre?”).⁷⁵⁶ In his discussion of the *Mercure galant* story (*L’Agioteur Dupé*), Moreau also highlights the fact that the story is clearly painted in racial terms, with the moneylender as Jewish and with the thief, Picard, as a “franc gaulois” who is playing on the Picardian reputation for honesty. In Dancourt’s play, the difference is that religion does not stop one from becoming an agioteur.

Finally there is the larger idea of the decline of the nobility, although they still retain some of what we might call “credit.” One such scene is when the Baronness (of “de va part tout”) asks Trapolin for a loan in rather abusive language, addressing him in the informal “tu” form. While Trapolin treats her with disrespect, calling her a “belle folle,” his friend Durillon indicates that there is still a reason to listen to her: “Avec tout cela, ces femmes de condition ont des manieres, un certain air de superiorité que determine à faire tout ce qu’elles veulent, malgré qu’on en ait.”⁷⁵⁷ The Baronness

⁷⁵⁴ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 1.1, p. 107.

⁷⁵⁵ Truchet, Blanc, *Theatre du XVIIe siecle*, 1259.

⁷⁵⁶ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 1.7, p. 121.

⁷⁵⁷ Dancourt, *Agioteurs*, 2.13, p. 162.

represents a corrupt nobility in financial decline: she wants to receive an advance on her future revenues in order to gamble (a request to which Trapolin reluctantly agrees).⁷⁵⁸

Like *Turcaret*, this play shows how ideas of nobility are in flux. Lucas seems to embody this aspirational hope perfectly: he argues that if he is too old to be a lackey, then he will just have to be a master, indicating a subversion of traditional social order.⁷⁵⁹

Urbine, the “coquette,” is a character who also plays with ideas of noble dress privilege. Durillon is surprised to see that she wears a train—“[elle] porte la queue”—but she says she can get away with it because in the neighborhood she has moved to, social ranks are so mixed up: “Dans le Fauxbourg comme dans le Marais les rangs sont si heureusement confondus, que l’on y fait telle figure que l’on veut, sans apprehender la médisance.”⁷⁶⁰

In this play as in others, the nobility are shown to be dissipators of money, and the rising bourgeois class as those who know how to handle and negotiate money.

For the first time, Dancourt brought it all together: ideas of a full fledged paper money economy combined with these portraits of a money-starved nobility taking out loans on their future revenues. This play is an innovative theatrical look at the nature of money and at those who handle it. The fascinating thing about this play is the power of words: while there had previously been the words *partisan*, *traitant* or *fermier* to describe members of the money-handling class, the addition of a new word, *agioteur*, makes it possible to construct a new character, a new scapegoat of sorts, defined by Savary as he who participates in the *commerce illicite du papier*. In a way, it even works to legitimize the trade in paper by decrying those who abuse it.

⁷⁵⁸ Dancourt, *Agoteurs*, 2.13, p. 161 –162.

⁷⁵⁹ Dancourt, *Agoteurs*, 1.2, p. 111.

Plays from the remaining ten years before the collapse of the John Law system continue these portrayals of systematic usury and monetary instability. Indeed, the literature concurrent with the Law affair would demand a chapter of its own. Here, just a few of these will be briefly mentioned.

Continuing in the theme of usurers, in Legrand's *Usurier Gentilhomme* (1713), paper money and contract stipulations catch two fathers in a complicated marriage negotiation revolving around money and nobility. The title is striking, alluding to the questionable social status of one of the two fathers, Mananville (he was a peasant who came to Paris and got rich through usury). The play chronicles his efforts to marry his daughter into the nobility by giving his son the fake title of Baron. It also shows the details of his usury operations and elaborates in detail on the possibility of the rags-to-riches myth. The role of the valet here is also one of facilitation: after Crispin resorts to scare tactics the two fathers agree to cancel the marriage agreement without the penalty stipulated in the contract. Since the play does not end in marriage the message appears to be that those who succeed are not always successful in their effort for social ascension.

Dorneval's *Arlequin Traitant* (1716), just a few years later, examines what happens when this paper market is taken to the next level.⁷⁶¹ Dorneval himself was interested in the Philosopher's Stone. According to Chamfort, he spent the last years of his life in search of it.⁷⁶² *Arlequin Traitant* is one of his earlier works (his first recorded work, *Arlequin Baron Allemand* is from 1712, and his last, *La Fille Sauvage* is from

⁷⁶⁰ Dancourt, *Agoteurs*, 2.5, p. 138.

⁷⁶¹ Dorneval, *Arlequin Traitant*, in *Théâtre de la foire*, ed. Eugène D'Auriac (Paris: Garnier, 1878).

1732). It was first performed at the Foire Saint-Germain. *Arlequin Traitant* was, in 1716, contemporaneous with the last of the Chambers of Justice which were ostensibly intended to prosecute corrupt royal financiers (the Chamber itself, argues Erik Goldner, was a sort of theatrical performance).⁷⁶³ The play's portrayal of a financier who has sold his soul to the devil in exchange for material success elicits several possible lines of questioning concerning the newly rich financial class and their role in French society. The title character's rigorous inspections of his staff's handwriting show a new step in representations of money in French theater, which are here no longer in the realm of personally issued paper notes, but are part of a large-scale delegated operation.

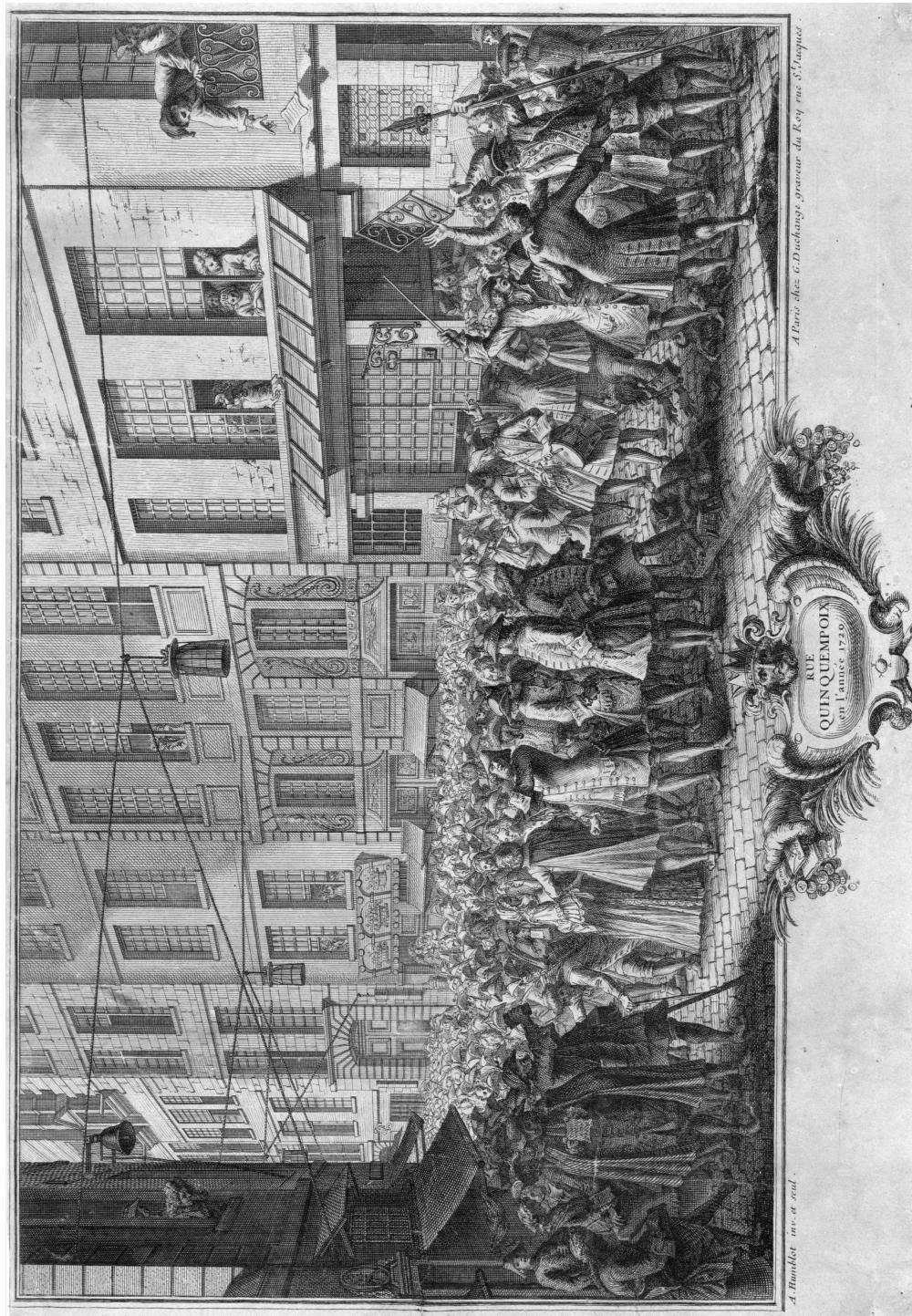
By the time Carolet's *Aventures de la rue Quincampoix*, its title referring to the street that had become an impromptu stock exchange, was performed in November 1719 at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, the paper money imaginary—that is, the collection of dramatic representations of uses of paper money—was already fully in place. With the collapse of Law's system came a series of plays detailing this crash in all of its spectacular chaos. Plays like Legrand's *Belphégor* (1721) resuscitate Turcaret and his wife as rich and detestable *agioteurs* in the aftermath of the collapse of Law's bank.⁷⁶⁴ The subsequent dramatic representations are numerous, vivid, and beyond the scope of this project, which mainly has had the goal of asking how it was all conceivable in the

⁷⁶² Joseph de La Porte, Chamfort. *Dictionnaire dramatique, contenant l'histoire des théâtres, les règles du genre dramatique, les observations des maîtres les plus célèbres et des réflexions nouvelles sur les spectacles....* (Paris: Lacombe, 1776), 3.546.

⁷⁶³ Erik Goldner, "Public Thieves: French Financiers, Corruption, and the Public in the Chamber of Justice of 1716–17," (doctoral dissertation, 2008), 357.

⁷⁶⁴ See critical edition by Loïc Chahine, Mémoire de master 2, Université de Nantes 2010.

first place. By the end of the 1710s, theater had contributed to the construction of a monetary imaginary that made it possible to think of paper as money.



Rue Quincampoix, 1720.

Antoine Humblot

CONCLUSION

In more than one way, the seventeenth century in France was a time of crisis in value. The story of money during this time was one of dematerialization, as exchange relationships which had been characterized concretely in gold, silver, or copper, began to take on other forms. The century saw an increasing abstraction in value: precious metals became token coins, their value determined by the state; money of account became a primary form of holding value (such as in *rentes*), and words written on pieces of paper made them into objects that circulated as cash. Theater's particular role in showing paper on the stage drew attention to the dual identity of money, as both a material object and an abstraction. Just like money today is moving in large part from paper to electronic forms, in seventeenth-century France, the much slower transition to paper was a subject that concerned everyone. This study has examined how comedic theater in seventeenth-century France portrayed and helped problematize these new kinds of money.

Money was always an important subject in theater, starting from the comedies of Aristophanes and Plautus. These, along with farces, provided many models for seventeenth-century comedy writers. In the Middle Ages, French farces often featured money, but it was particularly in comedy of the seventeenth century that coin and paper alike took to the stage as never before. Although advanced examinations of credit were portrayed in Renaissance English theater, it was only decades later that credit began to be interrogated in a complex way on the French stage, mirroring a delay in real-world financial development. A third of all comedies produced in the reign of Louis XIV

showed money in one form or another, at a time when paper money was increasingly in use in the real world.

The topic of money in seventeenth-century France can be approached in many different ways: financially, as the story of how the king was able to raise money to pay for war and expansion; monetarily, in terms of how the crown managed the varying availability and exchange rates of gold and silver; and numismatically, in the specific forms those coins took. From an accounting perspective, the century saw innovations and abstractions of money in merchant accounts. From a banking perspective, there was an evolution of those who learned how to trade paper and send and receive money in expansive networks. Theater showed advances in all of these areas, but most visibly in the transition from gold to paper. If plays like Rotrou's 1629 *Bague de l'oubli* showed a world where paper was not yet a reliable way of replacing gold, by 1704 *Le Galant jardinier* was already inscribed in a context where paper money was common. By 1720, paper money had been portrayed in a way that paralleled and even anticipated real-world events such as John Law's introduction of fiat money.

In addition to showing the tools of finance, comedies showed the people who wielded them as well. Just as paper could, with the stroke of a pen, become money, so could commoners become noble, with the right titles signed over to them. The changing role of nobility and value was another way in which money took shape on the stage. Titles of nobility functioned as a currency to be bought, sold, and transferred. As Jeffrey Ravel's recent study of Louis de la Pivardière has suggested, there is a compelling case for a fin-de-siècle where ideas of what it meant to be noble, and the importance attached

thereto, were in flux.⁷⁶⁵ Economic ascent provided ways to fill that social vacuum, and just as theater showed the transformation of paper into currency, so it showed the monetization of nobility.

The theater was a vital part of seventeenth-century Parisian life. Yet theater represents but one part of the question of how money is imagined in fictional literature. As the eighteenth century went on, texts like Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* contributed to a vivid creation of a monetary imaginary in prose fiction. The aftermath of the Mississippi Bubble gave rise to an extensive dramatic and literary production, as did the collapse of the South Sea bubble in England.⁷⁶⁶ This study has aimed primarily to examine the precedents to such collapses. But money and literature would be intertwined throughout the eighteenth century and beyond. This project could be extended temporally into the heritages of these treatments, in the rich literary evocations of debt and money in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (such as Balzac's *La Maison Nucingen*, or Zola's *L'Argent*).

Much work still remains to be done to examine the imaginary of money. In particular, future work could more closely examine the connections between writing and money. A comprehensive examination of fictional literature could provide one venue for doing so, examining the inscriptions of value that are paper money. This dissertation has shown how theater reflected, and provided a space for thinking about, the evolution of money. From the passage of coins from precious metal to fiat or token status, to

⁷⁶⁵ Jeffrey Ravel, *The Would-Be Commoner: A Tale of Deception, Murder, and Justice in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008).

⁷⁶⁶ Examined by Catherine Labio in *'The Great Mirror of Folly': Finance, Culture, and the Crash of 1720*, co-ed. with W. Goetzmann, K. Rouwenhorst, and T. Young (Yale Univ. Press, forthcoming).

devaluations, to private paper and bills, theater was a place to play with money and think about its materiality and dematerialization. A better understanding of the history of such subjects brings us a richer appreciation for those dramatic works.

APPENDIX

Glossary of monetary terms

List of abbreviations:

RDF - *Recueil de farces*, ed. André Tissier (Geneva: Droz, 1986-2000).

Note: This is not an exhaustive listing of the hundreds of different kinds of coins that circulated in Renaissance and early modern France, but it does reflect many which are present in theater from the time.

Annel. “pièce d’or à l’effigie de l’agneau pascal” (RDF 1:500).

Blanc. “petite pièce valant cinq deniers” (RDF 1:500).

Couronne. “pièce d’or portant une couronne” (RDF 7:582)

Croix. “monnaie sur laquelle était frappée une croix” (RDF 1:500).

Denier. “douzième partie du *sol*” (RDF 1:500).

Debasement. Replacing the precious metal content of a coin with a less precious alloy.

Devaluation. The act of setting a different exchange value for a currency (for example, when a louis d’or goes, from royal decree, from being worth ten livres in 1640 to being worth twelve in 1652, the livre is said to be devalued).⁷⁶⁷

Dragme. “monnaie prise au figuré pour désigner une ‘petite quantité’” (RDF 1:500).

Ducat. “monnaie d’or qui valait dix à douze francs” (RDF 2:382).

Escu. “pièce d’or ou d’argent” (RDF 1:500).

Fiat money. Money whose value is determined by the state.

Flipus. also *filipus*, *phlipus*. “monnaie d’or” (RDF 1:500).

⁷⁶⁷ See on this point, for example, A.B. McCullough, *Money and Exchange in Canada to 1900* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008), 41.

Franc. “monnaie d’or valant vingt sous” (RDF 4:362).

Fungible. Having the characteristic of being mutually replaceable (such as banknotes today, which are said to be fungible because if someone lends out a five-dollar bill, for example, they do not care if they receive a different five-dollar bill in exchange).

Gros. “petite monnaie de valeur variable” (RDF 1:500).

Karolus. “ou grand blanc, pièce valant dix deniers” (RDF 5:329).

Liard. “pièce de cuivre valant trois deniers” (RDF 1:362).

Livre. Tissier's glossary explains that “la livre tournois valait vingt sous et la livre parisis vingt-cinq,” (RDF 3:346) but the reality is more complicated. The livre was a unit of account, and the livre tournois was broken up into 20 *sols tournois*, just as the **livre parisis** was broken up into 20 *sols parisis*. 25 sols tournois were equivalent to 20 sols parisis.

Louis d’or. A French gold coin first minted in 1640.

Maille. “petite pièce en cuivre valant un demi-denier” (RDF 1:500).

Money of account. Money as an idea - the livre for example, existed as an accounting unit but not in coins.

Money of exchange. The actual, physical objects such as coins used as money.

Mouton d’or. Gold coin minted from 1355 to 1436.

Nicquet. “petite monnaie qui valait un denier et demi” (RDF 3:346).

Noble. “pièce d’or d’Angleterre” (RDF 1:500).

Par value. The face value of a bond, not counting interest.

Partisan. A financier who made short-term loans (*parties*) to the king.

Patard. “petite monnaie en cuivre valant un sol et qui était surtout en usage dans le nord de la France” (RDF 3:346).

Patin. Also *patain*. “petite pièce de monnaie” (RDF 2:382).

Pistole. A Spanish gold coin, also used to refer to louis d’or.

Royal. “monnaie royale en or” (RDF 11:368).

Seraphin. “monnaie d’or orientale” (RDF 1:500).

Sol. Also *soubz*, *soublz*. “pièce de monnaie valant douze deniers [...] la vingtième partie de la livre” (RDF 4:362).

Teston. “petite monnaie d’argent valant à l’origine dix sous” (RDF 1:500).

Tournois. “monnaie royale de France frappée à Tours” (RDF 1:500).

Treizain. “monnaie valant treize deniers” (RDF 5:329).

Unzain. “monnaie valant onze deniers” (RDF 5:329).

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