Molière's Language: Perspectives and Approaches

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ABSTRACT

In spite of over three hundred years of commentary on Molière's plays, one area of research has been neglected by scholars, namely the role of language in the creation of comedy. Of those critics who have analysed Molière's use of language, the majority have limited their focus to a small number of plays and do not consider what makes his discourse comic. Even more surprising is the fact that virtually no *Moliériste* has attempted to view Molière's language from the perspective of modern literary and linguistic theory. Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to explore the extent to which contemporary theory elucidates, or perhaps even obscures, our understanding of Molière's language. While critics in the past have tended to apply a single theory to his plays, we will consider whether a multi-theoretical approach can best account for the range of Molière's linguistic humour. The analysis of the comedies will be informed by post-Saussurean theories of language, many of which have never been applied to Molière's work before.

The first part of the thesis, entitled 'Language and Society' will address a long-standing debate which continues to divide *Moliéristes* as to the nature of his comedy. Whereas W. G. Moore and René Bray have portrayed Molière as an actor and director, whose primary aim was to amuse his audience, this theatricalist position has been challenged in recent years by the socio-critical theories of James Gaines, Paul Bénichou, Larry Riggs and Ralph Albanese. We will consider whether it is possible to reconcile these two opposing approaches through an examination of parody.

The second part of the thesis moves from the notion of language as representational to the focus on the ludic function of language games, and discusses whether these represent a retreat into a fantasy world or whether they have a subversive role. Finally, we will turn from the conscious humour of language games to the comedy of the unconscious, in which characters accidentally reveal more than they intend in their speech.

The thesis concludes with a recognition of the extent to which recent critical theories may help inform our reading of the comic dramatist.

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Most of all, I would like to thank my Mother, Veronica and my brother David for their constant support and encouragement.

Last, but not least, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my father, Professor John G. Clark, who, himself, had the highest admiration for Molière.

CONTENTS

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Introduction

With the wealth of studies devoted to the interpretation of Molière's plays, it may seem that little remains to be investigated, particularly when we contemplate the impressive production of Patrick Dandrey and Roger Duchêne who have contributed over five thousand pages to our understanding of the comedies.[1] Following the seminal studies of W. G. Moore and René Bray, which prompted a move away from the image of Molière as a moralist and thinker and led to a reassessment of his role as a dramatist, there has been a growing appreciation of Molière's comic theory, most notably with Dandrey's *Molière, ou l'esthétique du ridicule* and Brice Parent's investigation into the dramatist's reworking of his earlier plays in *Variations comiques*.[2] Meanwhile, Robert McBride's work on *The Triumph of Ballet in Molière's Theatre* has encouraged a reappraisal of the significance of the *comédies-ballets*, and Larry Norman has developed W. D. Howarth's examination of the playwright's complex relationship with his audience in *The Public Mirror*.[3]

Nevertheless, one area of Molière research continues to be largely ignored by scholars, namely the role of language in his creation of comedy. Throughout his plays, Molière displays an astonishing diversity of linguistic humour, from stylistic incongruity when characters adopt an inappropriate register, to language games and verbal misunderstandings.[4] Not only is language instrumental in the development of comic characters, as even minor figures such as Martine, Monsieur Harpin or Pierrot and Charlotte are individualised through their speech, but it is also a central topic of

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[1] Patrick Dandrey, *Molière ou l'esthétique du ridicule* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1992); *Dom Juan ou la critique de la raison comique* (Paris: H. Champion, 1993); *Sganarelle et la médecine, ou, De la mélancolie érotique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1998); *Molière et la maladie imaginaire: ou, De la mélancolie hypocondriaque* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1998); R. Duchêne, *Molière* (Paris : Fayard, 1998) ; *Les Précieuses ou comment l'esprit vint aux femmes* (Paris : Fayard, 2001).

[2] W. G. Moore, *Molière: A New Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949, 1962); René Bray, *Molière: homme de théâtre* (Mayenne: Mercure de France, 1954); Dandrey, *L'Esthétique... op. cit.*; Brice Parent, *Variations comiques ou les réécritures de Molière par lui-même* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2000).

[3] Robert M^{c}Bride, *The Triumph of Ballet in Molière's Theatre* (Lewiston, N. Y., Lampeter: E. Mellen Press, 1992); Larry Norman, *The Public Mirror: Molière and the Social Commerce of Depiction* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999); W. D. Howarth, *Molière: a Playwright and his Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[4] Molière's 'tragic' heroes, including Alceste, George Dandin and Arnolphe, are notable examples of characters who adopt inappropriate speech. Their language is analysed in chapter Six. See Chapter Eight for a discussion of language games and verbal misunderstandings.

debate in many of the comedies, especially *Sganarelle, ou le Cocu imaginare*, *Le Misanthrope* and *Le Mariage forcé*. Surprisingly, however, while studies by Michael Hawcroft and David Maskell have focused on the poetic language of Racine, and Keir Elam has discussed language games in Shakespeare, this has not been the case for Molière.[5] Instead, the examination of his seemingly more prosaic style has been limited to a small number of works. Gaston Hall and Jean Emelina have devoted fascinating articles to comic images and word play in the comedies, but their discussions of the dramatist's linguistic humour are limited in scope because they are restricted to a small number of plays.[6] Similarly, the excellent studies of socio-linguistic variation in seventeenth-century France by Anthony Lodge and Wendy Ayres-Bennett evaluate the language of only a small proportion of the comedies.[7]

Of those studies which have been devoted to a sustained analysis of Molière's use of language, the majority have been confined to tracing the development of his style. Hubert de Phalèse offers a lexical and statistical analysis of the various discourses in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, *Les Femmes savantes* and *Le Malade imaginaire*.[8] While the book is very helpful in plotting the recurring use of certain themes, such as the differing attitudes to love in the four plays, its focus is limited to a fraction of Molière's work.[9] Even more problematic is Phalèse's own admission that it is difficult to judge the quality of a play by relying on a quantitative analysis, the results of which are often self-evident. Similar problems are raised by Britt-Marie Kylander's book *Le Vocabulaire de Molière dans les comédies en alexandrins*.[10] She concentrates only on those plays written in alexandrines in order to

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[5] Michael Hawcroft, *Word as Action: Racine, Rhetoric and Theatrical Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Henry Philips, *Racine: Language and Theatre* (Durham: University of Durham, 1994); Keir Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse: Language-games in the Comedies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[6] Gaston H. Hall, *Comedy in Context : Essays on Molière* (Jackson: University Press of Mississipi, 1984); J. Emelina, 'Molière et le jeu des mots' in *Littératures classiques : Molière, des Fourberies de Scapin au Malade imaginaire* (1993), pp. 73-86 ; 'Les Comiques de Molière' in *Littératures classiques*, 38 (Toulouse, 2000), pp. 103-15.

[7] Lodge, R. Anthony, *French: from Dialect to Standard* (London: Routledge, 1993); *A Sociolinguistic History of Parisian French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); W. Ayres-Bennett, *Sociolinguistic Variation in Seventeenth-Century France: Methodology and Case Studies* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[8] Hubert de Phalèse, *Les Mots de Molière; les quatre dernières pièces à travers les nouvelles technologies* (Paris: Nizet, 1992): Hubert de Phalèse is the collective name for Pierre Fiala, Jean-Michel Montet, Pierre Muller and Michèle Sarrazin.

[9] Phalèse, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-8.

[10] Britt-Marie Kylander, *Le Vocabulaire de Molière dans les comédies en alexandrins* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1995).

compare them to the tragedies of Corneille, yet this choice means that the language of two of the greatest plays, *L'Avare* and *Le Malade imaginaire* is not considered. Such an omission threatens to undermine her conclusion that Molière developed a more natural and realistic vocabulary as his career progressed.[11] Gabriel Conesa too traces the evolution of Molière's dramatic language in *Le Dialogue moliéresque, étude stylistique et dramaturgique.* Rejecting Daniel Mornet's assertion that 'la grandeur, l'étonnante puissance du style de Molière, c'est qu'il n'a pas de style', Conesa evaluates the development of the dramatist's language, from the artificial narrative speeches of *L'Étourdi* and *Le Dépit amoureux* towards the more natural style of *L'École des femmes* and *Dom Juan.*[12] His focus is, however, limited to an analysis of the dramatic nature of language and he does not consider what makes it comic.

Above all, the major gap in the bibliography of Molière's language is the absence of any significant attempt to view it from the perspective of modern linguistic and literary theory. Whereas Racine's plays were the subject of constant re-readings and reinterpretations during the Picard-Barthes debate, no-one, to my knowledge, has looked at the uses and limitations of critical theory in an understanding of comic language. Indeed, there remains a great deal of resistance amongst *Moliéristes* to contemporary theory, with many scholars raising the valid objection that it is anachronistic and possibly unhelpful to apply modern theories of language and literature to a seventeenth century playwright.[13] Whilst it would certainly be misleading to imply that Molière was in fact a proto-Marxist, Lacanian or Bakhtinian theoretician *avant la lettre*, this does not preclude the fact that modern theory can illuminate and enrich our understanding of Molière's verbal humour. The psychoanalytic approaches of Freud, Lacan and Kristeva, for example, can offer a new perspective on the comedy of the unconscious as characters accidentally reveal more than they intend about themselves, while the post-colonial theories of Edward Said and Tzvetan Todorov can add a further dimension to the dramatist's depiction of other nations, and, in particular, of the Ottoman Empire.

Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to examine the extent to which contemporary

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[11] Kylander, *op. cit.* p 58

[12] Gabriel Conesa, *Le Dialogue moliéresque, étude stylistique et dramaturgique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), p. 12.

[13] See Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 369-70.

theory elucidates, or perhaps even obscures, our perception of Molière's linguistic humour. Whereas critics in the past have tended to apply a single theory to his plays, we will discuss the possibility that a multi-theoretical approach can best account for the range of Molière's linguistic diversity.[14] Above all, the thesis will focus on the apparent contradiction between Molière's professed moral intentions and his role as a comic dramatist, and ask whether his language has a corrective function or whether it is simply a reflection of an anarchic and subversive fantasy world, or both and neither.

Methodology

The analysis of Molière's comedies will be informed by post-Saussurean theories of language, including those of Bakhtin, Lacan, and Wittgenstein, and by the pre-Saussurean theory of Lewis Carroll. To date, their attitudes to language have rarely been explored, yet each of the theoreticians can deepen our appreciation of a different aspect of the playwright's linguistic comedy. The thesis will also focus on Molière's own commentary on his dramatic art, as found in comparatively neglected plays such as *La Critique de L'École des femmes* and *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, whilst also situating the playwright in his dramatic and literary context, a dimension which has been neglected by many socio-critical scholars who investigate the author's social rather than his literary targets.[15]

Part One, entitled 'Language and Society' will address a long-standing debate which continues to divide scholars about the nature of Molière's comedy. The fact that so much critical attention has been dedicated to this debate requires that this should be

[14] For a Bakhtinian approach to the comedies, see Richard E. Goodkin, 'Molière and Bakhtin: Discourse and the Dialogic in *L'École des femmes*' in *Papers on French Seventeenth Century* Literature, 40 (1994), pp. 145-56; Thérèse Malachy, *Molière: les Métamorphoses du carnaval* (Paris: Nizet, 1987); Edith Kern, *The Absolute Comic* (New York, Guildford : Columbia University Press, 1980); Claude Abraham, 'Teaching Fête: *Le Malade imaginaire*' in James Gaines, Michael Koppisch, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Molière's Tartuffe and Other Plays* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1995), pp. 110-116; 'Molière and the Reality of Fête' in Martine Debaisieux, ed., *Le Labyrinthe de Versailles: Parcours critique de Molière à La Fontaine* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 63-71; for a Lacanian interpretation of Molière's theatre, see Richard Sörman, *Savoir et économie dans l'œuvre de Molière* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2001); Christopher Braider, *Indiscernible Counterparts: the Invention of the Text in French Classical Drama* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Department of Romance Languages, 2002).

[15] See Claude Bourqui, *Les Sources de Molière: répertoire critique des sources littéraires et dramatiques* (Paris: Sedes, 1999); Parent, *op. cit.*,: although Parent and Bourqui in particular have conducted extensive research into Molière's literary sources, they do not reflect upon the dramatist's comic intention in recycling contemporary literature and his own comedies. See chapters six and seven for a discussion of his intertextual references.

the most substantial section of the thesis. On the one hand, critics such as W.G. Moore and René Bray have questioned the traditional notion of Molière as a satirical playwright. Although Molière himself claimed, in the preface to *Tartuffe*, to be depicting the faults of contemporary society on stage ('Rien ne reprend mieux la plupart des hommes que la peinture de leurs défauts'), Moore and Bray insist that he was primarily a dramatist and actor whose plays were designed to amuse rather than correct human vices through ridicule: '*castigare ridendo mores*'.[16] According to Bray:

> L'intention de Molière, la pensée qui donne à son œuvre la force et l'unité, ce n'est pas une pensée de moraliste, c'est une intention d'artiste. [...] En vérité, il ne pense qu'à nous faire rire.[17]

On the other hand, this theatricalist position has given way in recent years to the socio-critical approaches of Paul Bénichou, Ralph Albanese Jnr., James Gaines, John Cairncross and Larry Riggs, all of whom portray Molière as a socially active writer. While Bénichou perceives Molière as a champion of the aristocracy, this interpretation has been challenged by Cairncross, Riggs and Albanese, who believe that the comedies constitute a critique of the Church (*Tartuffe*, *Dom Juan*) or the power of the aristocracy (*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, *Amphitryon*).[18] Indeed, following the 1968 student uprising, Patrice Chéreau and Roger Planchon interpreted the comedies as *pièces à thèse*, depicting the confrontation between the subversive titular heroes and the repressive forces of the State.

Whereas these two views of Molière as a disinterested man of the theatre or as a social commentator have often been seen as mutually exclusive in the past, we will consider whether they can be reconciled through a study of his language. At first sight, Gérard Defaux seems to offer such a solution in *Les Métamorphoses du comique*. While he accepts that Molière originally had a corrective vision of comedy, he maintains that the playwright abandoned satire as a result of the 'querelle de Tartuffe' and instead embraced a world of verbal fantasy, as exemplified by the

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[16] Molière, *Tartuffe* in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Maurice Rat (Bruges : Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1947), p. 678. (All subsequent references to Molière's plays will be taken from this edition unless otherwise stated.)
[17] Bray, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
[18] Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).

conclusions of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and *Le Malade imaginaire*.[19] Tempting as this theory may sound, it does, however, prove to be problematic. Far from abandoning social comment in his later plays, Molière actually develops and refines his mockery of medical incompetence and the credulity of patients in *Le Malade imaginaire,* while *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, *George Dandin*, *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* reflect contemporary attitudes towards social mobility. This is hardly a sign of a playwright who has retreated into an imaginary world.

Rather, Patrick Dandrey offers a more subtle view of Molière's comic vision in his study *Molière, ou l'esthétique du ridicule*. Even if Molière accepts the principle of moral correction through laughter, Dandrey suggests that he reinterprets it by inviting us to contemplate human nature 'dans l'optique du ridicule':

> Il ne s'agit plus donc de *castigare ridendo mores*, de châtier les moeurs en les caricaturant de manière à les faire paraître risibles, mais de *speculari ridendo mores*, de contempler d'un oeil railleur leur ridicule naturel, de les mettre en spectacle sous le feu de la dérision, parce que les moeurs humaines, de soi, sont comiques.[20]

It is this focus on depicting, without necessarily reforming, human nature which points to a more comprehensive understanding of Molière's aesthetic. Rather than view the playwright as a satirist, seeking to castigate and reform vices, it may be possible to reconcile Molière's dual aims of 'peindre d'après nature [...] et [...] faire rire les honnêtes gens' (*La Critique de L'École des femmes*: scene vi) through an examination of a particular aspect of satire: parody. Derived from the Greek *parodia*, parody is a form of comic imitation which involves the mimicry, and subtle distortion, of a text or a style of speech.[21] Whilst it is related to satire as a form of mockery, parody lacks the corrective intention of satirical texts. Richelet emphasises this distinction in his *Dictionnaire* of 1680. He defines parody as 'une sorte de poëme, où pour joüer quelque personne, on tourne avec esprit & avec un sens railleur & agréable les vers de quelque grand Poète.' Satire, on the other hand, is defined as 'un poëme

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[19] Gérard Defaux, *Molière ou les métamorphoses du comique: de la comédie morale au triomphe de la folie* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum publishers, 1980), p. 178.
[20] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.
[21] See Margaret Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 5-53.

qui corrige agréablement les hommes de leurs vices, de leurs erreurs & de leurs folies.'[22]

In the first part of the thesis, we will challenge the widely accepted notion of Molière as a social commentator by analysing the extent to which his linguistic humour may be viewed as parodic rather than satirical. Throughout his plays, Molière displays his flair for reproducing linguistic styles and idiosyncrasies, mimicking the discourse of particular literary texts such as Corneille's *Sertorius* in *L'École des femmes* (II, v), whilst also extending his parody to general modes of speech, including regional dialects and the linguistic excesses of *préciosité*, as exemplified by Magdelon and Cathos: 'on est touché délicieusement', 'effroyablement belles', 'j'ai une délicatesse furieuse pour tout ce que je porte.' (*Les Précieuses ridicules* : scene ix)

This raises the question of whether Molière's humour is aimed as much at literary as at social targets and whether the artist rather than the social reformer is at work here. Is his parody simply designed to amuse, or does it have a more disruptive role as part of a carnivalesque challenge to authority, as Bakhtin would suggest?[23] After refining our definition of parody in the first chapter, the remaining chapters of part one will reappraise the language of those comedies traditionally seen as social satires. Applying the theories of parody formulated by critics including Jameson, Bakhtin and Linda Hutcheon, we will consider whether Molière's linguistic humour is actually far more complex than has previously been assumed by socio-critical scholars, embracing the whole of human nature rather than single social targets.

Chapters two and three will begin by examining Molière's portrayal of social class and the geographical divide between Paris and the provinces, or France and the Orient. Whereas it has generally been assumed that the dramatist ridicules the speech of outsiders, whether they be bourgeois social-climbers or rustic provincials, we will explore whether his comedy is also aimed at the supposedly normative speech of aristocrats and Parisians. The following two chapters will further investigate the

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[22] Richelet, *Dictionnaire français, contenant les mots et les choses, plusieurs nouvelles remarques sur la langue française* (Geneva: Jean Herman Widerhold, 1680), pp. 24, 346.

[23] Gary Saul Morson, 'Parody, History and Metaparody' in *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*, ed., by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989), p. 66.

double-edged nature of Molière's linguistic humour by focusing on his depiction of authoritarian preachers and pedagogues from the perspective of Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and heteroglossia. Finally, we will re-evaluate Molière's literary parody and self-parody. Is his mimicry of tragic and *romanesque* discourse merely designed to mock the extravagant language of characters such as Alceste and Arnolphe, or is the dramatist also laughing at the language of his literary models?

After considering the mimetic role of language as a means of representing literary and social discourse, the second part of the thesis will move on to discuss the ludic role of language games. In the light of the theories of Lewis Carroll, Wittgenstein and Bakhtin, we will question traditional notions of the utilitarian function of language as a means of communication, whilst challenging Garapon's notion that *la fantaisie verbale* is nothing more than 'gaspillage'.[24] We will also investigate the extent to which Bakhtin's concept of carnival can shed new light on language games. Drawing on medieval and renaissance festivals in which the laughter of the people subverted established political and religious hierarchies, Bakhtin regarded playful discourse as a means of turning the world upside down and of showing life as essentially ridiculous. As he argues in *Rabelais and his World*: 'The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity.'[25] This leads to the question of whether the artificial language of the theatre mimetically represents or distorts reality, of whether the theatre truly is a mirror of the world. While Bakhtin's subversive and anarchic view of language illuminates many aspects of Molière's farces, it is, however, doubtful whether this approach can account for the more sophisticated debates of *Le Misanthrope.*

The third part of the thesis will challenge the Cartesian notion that language represents conscious ideas by studying the extent to which the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva can shed new light on the comedy of the unconscious, where characters inadvertently reveal more than they intend in their speech. After analysing the comic potential of linguistic slips in Molière's theatre, the following chapter will discuss the Lacanian theory that we have an infinite capacity for self-deception or *méconnaissance*, particularly when we make

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[24] Robert Garapon, *La Fantaisie verbale et le comique dans le théâtre français du moyen-âge à la fin du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Colin, 1957).
[25] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 11.

judgements about ourselves. This theory of *méconnaissance* can be used to interpret the language of the *imaginaires*, including that of Alceste, Arnolphe and Bélise. All three characters construct an idealised self-image through language, and refuse to recognise themselves in the less than flattering portraits painted by others. Finally, we will apply Kristeva's theory of the conflict between rational discourse and unconscious desires to the language of Molière's would-be philosophers, whose apparently elevated discourse constantly betrays their very earthly preoccupation with sexuality. This is central to our understanding of comic incongruity and offers a new approach to the overarching theme of deception in Molière's plays.

Nevertheless, some critics, including Patrick Dandrey, object that it is anachronistic and unhelpful to offer a psychoanalytic reading of a classical text.[26] While it is certainly true that Freud, Lacan and Kristeva were not the first to recognise the importance of irrational desires, we aim to show that their investigations into the workings of the unconscious can deepen our appreciation of the psychological depth of Molière's characters, many of whom have previously been dismissed as one-dimensional.

[26] See Dandrey, *L'Esthétique…*, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

Part One: Language and Society

Chapter One: Satire and Parody

> 'The satirist is a stern moralist, castigating the vices of his time and place.' (T. S. Eliot)[1]

It has been widely accepted by critics that Molière was essentially a satirical dramatist, whose primary aim was to correct vices through laughter: *castigare ridendo mores.*[2] Molière himself defended *Tartuffe* by emphasising the function of comedy as a moral corrective, arguing that it was frequently more effective in reforming iniquity than didactic tracts:

> [...] nous avons vu que le théâtre a une grande vertu pour la correction. Les plus beaux traits d'une sérieuse morale sont moins puissants, le plus souvent, que ceux de la satire; et rien ne reprend mieux la plupart des hommes que la peinture de leurs défauts. C'est une grande atteinte aux vices que de les exposer à la risée de tout le monde. (*Préface* to *Le Tartuffe*)

In spite of Molière's self-designation as a satirist, however, it is vital to underline the fact that 'satire' was rarely as precise a term in the seventeenth century as it is in modern criticism, and was often indistinguishable from comedy. Molière may claim to correct vice through his satire of hypocrisy in *Tartuffe*, but he also refers to Arnolphe's ridiculous declaration of love to Agnès as 'la satire des amants' in *La Critique de L'École des femmes.* (scene vi) As Howarth observes, Molière's notion of satire is therefore far

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[1] Howarth, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

[2] See Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 209: 'No representation, not even Molière's, can be free from spite, nor as "faithful" as it claims. Just as Célimène's irony draws attention to the malice lurking behind her own depictions, so too the comic artist cannot be fully acquitted of the charge of delighting in cruel ridicule.'; see also Peter H. Nurse, 'Molière and Satire' in *Toronto University Quarterly*, XXXVI, No. 2 (1967), pp. 113-28 (pp. 115-7): 'In Molière, the aggressiveness of the comedy is seldom in question: the laughter is almost uniformly a vehicle of ridicule and its target is normally closely identified with a clearly defined moral context.' Nurse's perception of Molière as a satirist echoes that of Donneau de Visé in *Zélinde* (1663): 'C'est un dangereux personnage [...] On commence à se défier partout de lui et je sais des personnes qui ne veulent plus qu'il vienne chez elles.'

broader than modern definitions and does not necessarily involve the reform of character, particularly as Dorante notes that 'les honnêtes gens même et les plus sérieux' can be ludicrous when they are in love. (scene vi) [3]

Nor should the playwright's definition of comedy as a form of moral corrective be taken at face value. While he may indeed have accepted the principle of moral correction through laughter, Norman has highlighted the fact that the dramatist was only too aware of the limitations of comedy in reforming those whom it targets.[4] The two marquis in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* illustrate the reluctance of spectators to recognise themselves in the portraits painted on stage, with each *petit marquis* adamant that he is not the object of Molière's comedy:

> La Grange – Je pense, pourtant, Marquis, que c'est toi qu'il joue dans *La Critique*.
>
> Molière – Moi? Je suis ton valet: c'est toi-même en propre personne. (scene iii)

Even if spectators do acknowledge their comic portraits, they are frequently delighted to be depicted on stage or react with outrage, both responses being equally counter-productive.[5] Magdelon and Cathos, for example, are intent on vengeance after their humiliation and have no intention of modifying their behaviour: 'Magdelon – Ah! je jure que nous en serons vengées, ou que je mourrai en la peine.' (scene xvi) The same is true of Alceste, Oronte and Clitandre, all of whom are furious to have been ridiculed by Célimène. (V, iv) Consequently, the concept of comedy as a moral reformer is shown to be little more than an ideal.[6]

Most importantly, by portraying Molière as an aggressive satirist who delights in 'cruel ridicule', Nurse and Norman distort the nature of his comedy. Whereas a satirist attacks his victims from an exalted position of moral superiority, condemning vice and social corruption, Molière's humour is far more humane, and is closer to that of Erasmus in his

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[3] Howarth, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

[4] Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 1: 'By calling his comedies 'public mirrors', Molière conceives of comic representation as a site of audience self-recognition. But the self-recognitions generated by his theater [sic.] are necessarily volatile: spectators want a satire of their contemporaries, yet recoil from a satire of themselves.'

[5] Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 125

[6] See also Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 30.

recognition of the universal folly of mankind.[7] As Dandrey argues, rather than attempt to correct faults, the playwright exposes them and encourages us to see all human nature, 'dans l'optique du ridicule':

> À l'idéal illusoire de la sanction par la *satire ad hominem*, il préfère la réalité d'une méditation intime et joyeuse sur ce peu que nous sommes, comparé à ce tout que nous croyons être.[8]

It is this good-natured mockery of human flaws, including those of the dramatist himself ('entrer comme il faut dans le ridicule des hommes, et [...] rendre agréablement sur le théâtre les défauts de tout le monde') (*La Critique de L'École des femmes*, scene vi), which Molière may call satire, but which is closer to the modern concept of parody.[9] Although many scholars have regarded parody as largely interchangeable with the related concepts of satire, burlesque and pastiche, it is vital to recognise that parody lacks the corrective intention of satire and is instead concerned with imitating, whilst also distorting, the language of literary texts and general modes of speech in order to amuse an audience.[10] Nor should parody be confused with the more neutral mimicry of pastiche which reproduces a work of art or form of speech but which lacks parody's comic effect.[11] As Rose notes, parody is also a wider term than either burlesque or travesty, combining their comic contrast between linguistic registers and literary genres:

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[7] Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly and Other Writings*, edited and translated by Robert M. Adams (New York, London: Norton & Company, 1989), p. 30: 'But I think I hear the philosophers raising objections. It's utter misery, they say, to be in the clutches of folly, to be bewildered, to blunder, never to know anything for sure. On the contrary, I say, that's what it is to be a man.'; see also Arthur Pollard, *Satire* (London: Methuen, 1970), pp. 1-3: Dr Johnson defined satire as 'a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured', while Dryden argued that 'the true end of satire is the amendment of vices.' Pollard underlines the corrective intention of satire: 'Satire is always acutely conscious of the difference between what things are and what they ought to be.'

[8] Dandrey, *op. cit.* p.30.

[9] See Chapter seven on Molière's willingness to include himself in the comic mirror.

[10] See Rose, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-6; Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: the Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 16, 25: Hutcheon underlines the distinction between parody and satire: 'unlike parody, [satire] is both moral and social in its focus and ameliorative in its intention.'; for a discussion of Aristotle's definition of *parôdia*, derived from the Greek words, *ôdè* (song) and *para* (beside), see Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), pp. 17-19.

[11] See Rose, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-3: the term pastiche is derived from the Italian word, *pasticcio*, and refers to a medley of different ingredients; see also Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 41: both burlesque and travesty render a subject ridiculous by treating it in an incongruous style, either presenting a lofty subject in vulgar terms, or magnifying a trivial subject using heroic language.

> In parody the comic incongruity created in the parody may contrast the original text with its new form or context by the comic means of contrasting the serious with the absurd as well as the 'high' with the 'low', or the ancient with the modern [...] The sudden destruction of expectations which accompanies the perception of such incongruities has long been recognised as a basic ingredient of humour.[12]

This comic transformation of literary texts and styles of speech can shed new light on Molière's comedies which have largely been perceived as social satires. In the following chapter, we will examine whether Molière's reproduction of the language of various social groups is simply a form of blank imitation (pastiche) or whether it is also designed to mock linguistic idiosyncrasies.[13] A further point to be considered is the extent to which parody can have a conservative or subversive function, either mocking deviations from a linguistic norm or undermining official seriousness. According to Bakhtin, parody is the double-voiced utterance of two speakers, with the second utterance imitating the first in order to discredit it.[14] This notion of parody as part of the carnivalesque challenge to authority can offer a further perspective on the language of Molière's dictatorial preachers and pedagogues who present their speech as irrefutable. Whilst analysing Molière's mockery of the authoritarian language of Arnolphe, Madame Pernelle and the femmes savantes, we will also discuss whether this in turn implies that the dramatist prefigures Bakhtin in regarding all forms of speaking as relative.

The final two chapters of Part One will focus on Linda Hutcheon's theory that parody is not synonymous with ridicule or comedy, and need not mock the targeted text. Rather, she argues that a parodist generally admires earlier authors and holds their work up as a model with which to criticise contemporary society.[15] Hutcheon's theory is of particular relevance to Molière's imitation of literary texts. Does he mimic the high-flown rhetoric of writers such as Corneille or Honoré d'Urfé in order underline the incongruity between

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[12] Rose, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-4.
[13] Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-98* (London: Verso, 1998) p.4
[14] Gary Saul Morson, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
[15] Hutcheon, *op. cit.* p. 32.

Corneille's tragic heroes and his own heroes, or does he also poke fun at the imitated texts themselves?

Chapter Two: Language and Social Class

The Comedy of Social Climbing

> You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, Sir, in three months, I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party.[16]

Henry Higgins' boast that he can transform Eliza Dolittle into a lady by improving her speech reflects one of the principle concerns of Molière's theatre: the inextricable link between language and social class. While the précieuses ridicules and Monsieur Jourdain aspire to join the ranks of the nobility by imitating their discourse and manners, Gorgibus and Madame Jourdain are equally vociferous in their defence of 'plain speech'. Even the provincial nobles, the Sotenville, are ridiculous with their obsessive determination to mark their social distinction through their language, and they too become figures of fun for the more sophisticated Clitandre. Language is thus shown to be a means of elevating oneself and of excluding others who fail to conform to a specific linguistic norm. In this chapter, we will focus on plays which have traditionally been perceived as social satires by the majority of *Moliéristes*, including *Les Précieuses ridicules*, *George Dandin*, *L'Avare* and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, and consider the extent to which Molière's humour is directed solely at those inept social climbers who aspire, but fail, to conform to a linguistic norm. Alternatively, is it possible to go beyond the traditional portrait of the playwright as a polemical satirist and recognise that Molière's treatment of the social hierarchy is part of a far wider aesthetic than has previously been assumed, encompassing the snobbery and affectations of all social groups?

The question of Molière's attitude towards social class remains one of the most contentious issues in Molière studies. Whereas the theatricalist approach of Moore and Bray portrayed him as an apolitical dramatist, whose primary concern was to entertain his audience, this position has been contested by sociocritical scholars, including Bénichou,

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[16] George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion* (London: Penguin, 1941), Act I.

Albanese, Gaines and Riggs.[17] The latter underline the importance of social context in understanding Molière's plays and present him as a politically active author, concerned with satirising institutions and fashions of the day. Although this is no longer designated as Marxist scholarship, socio-criticism nevertheless reflects the Marxist concern with literature as essentially ideological – either legitimising or challenging the ruling social order.[18] Bénichou, Grossperrin, Albanese and Riggs reflect the Marxist theory, expressed by Terry Eagleton, that literature is never ahistorical or universal but is intrinsically linked to the exercise of power: 'The most efficient oppressor is the one who persuades his underlings to love, desire and identify with his power. [...] A mode of domination is generally legitimated when those subjected to it come to judge their own behaviour by the criteria of their rulers.'[19]

Nonetheless, even socio-critical scholars are divided when it comes to Molière's treatment of social climbing. While Grossperrin and Bénichou claim that the dramatist champions the values of the nobility and mocks the upstart and uncouth bourgeois who are identified with purely mercenary concerns, he is an altogether more subversive figure for Cairncross, Albanese and Riggs.[20] The latter goes so far as to assert that the

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[17] Ralph Albanese Jnr., *Le Dynamisme de la peur chez Molière: une analyse socio-culturelle de Dom Juan, Tartuffe et L'École des femmes* (Mississippi: Romance Monographs, 1976), 'Solipsisme et parole dans *George Dandin*' in *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, Vol. 27 (1980), pp. 421-34, 'Dynamisme social et jeu individuel dans *Dom Juan'* in *L'Esprit* Créateur, 36, No. 1 (1996), p. 50-61; Bénichou, *op. cit.*; James Gaines, *Social Structures in Molière's Theater* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 'Molière and Marx: Prospects for a New Century' in *L'Esprit Créateur*, 36, No. 1 (1996), pp. 21-30; Harold Knutson, 'A Prolegomenon for a Marxist Study of Molière' in *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature* (1991), pp. 19-27; Larry Riggs, *Molière and Plurality: Decomposition of the Classicist Self* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 'Mythic Figures in the *Theatrum Mundi: the Limits of Self-Fashioning*' in John D. Lyons (ed.) & Cara Welch, (ed.), *Le Savoir au XVII^e siècle*, Biblio 17, No. 147 (Tübingen: Narr, 2003), pp. 375-83.

[18] Althusser argues that people rarely realise that they are being exploited and he defines ideology as the 'imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.' See Moyra Haslett, *Marxist Literary and Cultural Studies* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 62.

[19] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: an Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. xiii, 55: Eagleton notes that ideology originally had a positive connotation when it was first defined by Destutt de Tracy during the Terror. He regarded ideology as a means of freeing people from their belief in superstitions and of encouraging them to embrace rationality.

[20] See Jean-Philippe Grossperrin, 'Variations sur le «style des nobles» dans quelques comédies de Molière' in *Littératures classiques*, 41 (1999), p. 48: 'la dramaturgie déployée par Molière, quoique fort variable, se réfère à l'univers aristocratique contemporain, envisagé d'un point de vue à la fois sociologique et esthétique.' See also Bénichou, p. 203: 'Les figures, et plus généralement la manière d'être, auxquelles Molière a attaché l'agrément at la sympathie répondent sans conteste à une vue noble de la vie [....] le ridicule ou l'odieux sont presque toujours mêlés à quelque vulgarité bourgeoise.' Cairncross, on the other

playwright was challenging the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV by creating comic figures such as Argan, Orgon or Arnolphe who seek to impose a monologic viewpoint on others. As a result, we are confronted by a playwright who is at once a conservative and an iconoclast, preserving the status quo whilst striving to undermine the authority of his greatest patron and defender, the King.

Although it is certainly true that socio-criticism has been invaluable in redressing the balance after theatricalism divorced the comedies from their social context, it could be argued that it has gone to the other extreme by ignoring the literary and theatrical background to the plays, thereby reducing Molière to the level of a satirical polemicist.[21] Rather than examine the plays from the Marxist perspective of a playwright engaged in a class struggle to preserve or undermine the social order, it is far more productive to go beyond socio-critical interpretations, and recognise that Molière uses the pretensions and ridiculous obsessions of all classes as a source of humour. In particular, Fredric Jameson's theory of parody and pastiche can offer a more constructive approach to Molière's linguistic comedy. While he too is influenced by Marxist criticism, Jameson focuses on the imitation and parodic exaggeration of various styles of speech in the context of postmodernism. According to Jameson, pastiche can be defined as the 'blank imitation' of a particular style, whereas parody implies the existence of a linguistic norm:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, [...] But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists.[22]

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hand, portrays Molière as an ardent opponent of the aristocracy and a *libertin*, intent on attacking all forms of authority. He bases this conclusion on the questionable argument that Molière's friendship with the *libertins*, Bernier and Chapelle, proves that he too was a free-thinker. See *Molière: bourgeois et libertin* (Paris: Nizet, 1963) and *L'Humanité de Molière* (Paris: Nizet, 1988), pp. 20-1.

[21] *George Dandin*, for example, is an elaboration of the early farce *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, while its theme of cuckoldry is derived as much from Old French Farce and *commedia dell'arte* as it is from social reality. Meanwhile, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* also develops a popular literary *topos* of the inept *parvenu* and the first two acts bear striking similarities to Francisco Manuel de Melo's 1665 play, *O Fidalgo aprendiz*. See Claude Bourqui, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[22] Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 17.

Jameson's focus on the mimicry of individual styles can shed new light on Molière's depiction of social climbing. Rather than attempt to reform society by satirising a single group, he offers an imitation or pastiche of the discourse associated with the nobility and the *Tiers Etat*, but this mimicry also has a comic, parodic intention. On the one hand, the dramatist reflects contemporary linguistic stereotypes, which associated the aristocracy with the best speech and identified the language of the bourgeoisie with the *style bas* of mercantilism. Vaugelas, for example, defined *le bon usage* as 'la façon de parler de la plus saine partie de la Cour' while Sorel was typical of those who assumed that there was a direct correlation between speaking well and good social breeding:

> On prend aujourd'huy pour des Hommes de basse condition & de peu d'esprit, ceux qui parlent mal François; au moins on les tient pour des Provinciaux qui n'ont jamais veu la Cour & le grand Monde, ou pour des gens mal instruits. [23]

Yet, Molière also plays with these stereotypes and parodies the language of each social stratum, including that of the court elite, thereby challenging the assumption that the nobility represents a linguistic norm of correct speech.

The Bourgeois social climbers

> Ah! qu'une femme demoiselle est une étrange affaire, et que mon mariage est une leçon bien parlante à tous les paysans qui veulent s'élever au-dessus de leur condition, et s'allier à la maison d'un gentilhomme. (I, i)

George Dandin's lament that he has been punished for his temerity in seeking to marry into the nobility has led many scholars to regard Molière as a profoundly conservative dramatist, ridiculing the misguided attempts of wealthy *roturiers* to rise above their station. For Roger Chartier, the courtiers present at the *Grand Divertissement Royal* of 1668 would have been particularly amused to witness Dandin's punishment because they were well aware that his social aspirations were no longer possible under Louis XIV.[24]

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[23] Vaugelas, *Remarques sur la langue française* (Paris: Larousse, 1969); Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

[24] R. Chartier, 'George Dandin, ou le social en représentation' in Dandrey, ed., *Molière, trois comédies 'morales': Le Misanthrope, George Dandin et le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1999), pp. 141-71 (p. 167).

Spielmann, meanwhile, identifies Angélique and Clitandre as the true heroes of *George Dandin* because they restore the social hierarchy which had been threatened by the paysan's presumption in marrying a *demoiselle*: 'C'est avec eux que le public s'identifie, puisque l'union qu'ils recherchent est conforme à l'ordre naturel tel que le conçoit la noblesse.'[25] Voltaire was equally scathing in his assessment of Monsieur Jourdain's ambitions, arguing that he was only a ridiculous figure because of his bourgeois background: 'Cette espèce de ridicule ne se trouve point dans des princes ou dans des hommes élevés à la cour.'[26] More recently, Grossperrin has supported such a view, arguing, as does Bénichou, that Molière can be seen as a representative of the noble values of *galanterie*.[27]

To some extent, Molière does invite his audience to laugh at the ineptitude of bourgeois *parvenus* who believe that they need only acquire the outward accoutrements of nobility in order to transform their social standing.[28] Firstly, Magdelon and Cathos's efforts to emulate the language of aristocratic *salonnières* ('cela sera du dernier beau', Il faut avouer que cela a un tour spirituel et galant') (scene ix) are prompted purely by their desire to join the social élite, and they display their social snobbery through their disdain for their bourgeois origins:

> Magdelon - Ce que vous dites là est du dernier bourgeois [...] vous devriez vous faire apprendre le bel air des choses. (scene iv)

Similarly, Monsieur Jourdain is obsessed with the appearance rather than the essence of nobility, and is convinced that he can effect the miracle of becoming a *gentilhomme* by aping the manners and particularly the discourse of 'les gens de qualité': 'je voudrais que cela fût mis d'une manière galante, que ce fût tourné gentiment.' (II, iv) This desire to emulate the language of nobility reflects the importance of speech in determining social

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[25] Guy Spielmann, 'Farce, satire, pastorale et politique: le spectacle total de *George Dandin*' in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (March 1993), pp. 850-62 (p. 859).
[26] Voltaire, *Vie de Molière, avec de petits sommaires de ses pièces* (1765). Cited in Grossperrin, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[27] Grossperrin, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
[28] In the introduction to the *Grand Divertissement Royal*, Molière describes *George Dandin* as the story of 'un Paysan qui s'est marié à la fille d'un gentilhomme, et qui, dans tout le cours de la comédie, se trouve puni de son ambition.' (p. 923.)

standing. As Lodge argues, the codification of French in the seventeenth century was largely provoked by the aristocracy who wished to distinguish themselves from lower echelons of society through the development of a linguistic *sur-norme*.[29] While wealthy *roturiers* could gain access to the *noblesse de robe* through the purchase of offices, it was imperative that they learn 'correct' speech in order to avoid ridicule.[30] Vaugelas even went so far as to suggest that a single *mot bas* could condemn a speaker to social derision: 'Il ne faut qu'un mauvais mot pour faire mépriser une personne dans une compagnie.'[31]

George Dandin is even more presumptuous than the 'précieuses' and Monsieur Jourdain. Whereas they seek to imitate the language of the ruling elite, he is convinced that he has already blurred the boundaries between *États* through his marriage to a *demoiselle*, and may consequently address his aristocratic relatives as equals: 'Parbleu! Si vous m'appelez votre gendre, il me semble que je puis vous appeler ma belle-mère!' (I, iv)

Yet, the attempts of these ambitious social climbers to overturn the social hierarchy by imitating the language of nobility are constantly deflated by the refusal of their social superiors to acknowledge their equality. George Dandin may have acquired the pompous title of Monsieur de la Dandinière, but his delusion that he has been able to buy his way into the nobility is undermined by Monsieur and Madame de Sotenville who never fail to reiterate their superiority through their speech: 'Madame de Sotenville – Encore! Est-il possible, notre gendre, que vous sachiez si peu votre monde, et qu'il n'y ait pas moyen de vous instruire de la manière qu'il faut vivre parmi les personnes de qualité?' (I, iv) Language is thus shown to be a vital means of demarcating speakers according to their status, and this is further demonstrated by La Grange and Du Croisy who denigrate Magdelon and Cathos as 'pecques provinciales' and 'nos donzelles ridicules': 'nous leur

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[29] Lodge, *French: from Dialect...*, *op. cit*, p. 173.
[30] See Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 61. See also Anne-Marie Cocula, 'Regards d'historiens sur le temps de Molière' in *Littératures classiques: Molière, Le Misanthrope, George Dandin, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, No. 38 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), p. 43: In 1573, 19 500 French *officiers* had purchased their positions, but this figure had risen to 46 000 by 1665.
[31] Vaugelas, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

jouerons tous deux une pièce qui [...] pourra leur apprendre à connaître un peu mieux leur monde.' (scene i)

Moreover, Monsieur Jourdain's attempts to model himself on 'les gens de qualité' are derided by the *maîtres* who reflect the stereotypical portrayal of the bourgeoisie as uncultivated philistines with their descriptions of their eager pupil: 'la barbarie d'un stupide', 'un homme dont les lumières sont petites, qui parle à tort et à travers de toutes choses, et n'applaudit qu'à contresens.' (I, i) The implication is that only a nobleman can be truly enlightened and capable of appreciating art while the members of the bourgeoisie are purely concerned with money and profit. Such disdain for their mercantile interests is demonstrated by the *Maître à danser* who is, however, not averse to accepting his pupil's money, in spite of his protestations:

> L'intérêt est quelque chose de si bas qu'il ne faut jamais qu'un honnête homme montre pour lui de l'attachement. (I, i)

Meanwhile, Dorante's professions of equality are, in fact, designed to emphasise his superiority. He may claim that Monsieur Jourdain is a 'homme d'esprit [...] [qui] sait son monde', but his true opinion of his wealthy benefactor is revealed when the merchant hopes to impress Dorimène with his elaborate bow: 'Dorante (*Bas à Dorimène*) – C'est un bon bourgeois assez ridicule, comme vous voyez, dans toutes ses manières [...] (*Haut.*) – Madame, voilà le meilleur de mes amis.' (III, xvi)

Above all, Molière parodies the inability of the social climbers to sustain their imitation of noble discourse. Jameson emphasises parody's role in mocking expressions which 'ostentatiously deviate from a norm which then reasserts iteslf, in a not necessarily unfriendly way, by a systematic mimicry of their wilful eccentricities.'[32] This mockery of eccentric speech is shown by the depiction of Magdelon and Cathos, who take their emulation of the language of *galanterie* to absurd extremes, and deviate from the aristocratic norm of *le bon usage* with their ridiculous circumlocutions and hyperbolic exclamations: 'venez nous tendre ici dedans le conseiller des graces. [...] Vite, voiturez-nous ici les commodités de la conversation!' (scenes vi, ix)

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[32] Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

Molière's humour is also aimed at Monsieur Jourdain's excessive deference towards Dorante and Dorimène. He too is over-zealous in his application of the rules of polite conversation, as set out in myriad *Traités de civilité*, and commits the social *faux-pas* of refusing to comply with Dorante's request that he replace his hat: 'J'aime mieux être incivil qu'importun.' (III, iv) As Grossperrin notes, this expression was rejected as 'du mauvais air et du langage de la bourgeoisie' by François de la Callières who complained that it typified the discourse of 'ces gens riches dont l'amitié est quelquefois utile aux gens de qualité pour leur prêter de l'argent.'[33] Whilst striving to comply with the noble code of polite speech, Monsieur Jourdain succeeds only in betraying his lowly origins, most notably when he endeavours to impress Dorimène with his elaborate bow and even more convoluted greeting:

> Un peu plus loin, Madame. [...] Reculez un peu pour la troisième. [...] Madame, ce m'est une gloire bien grande de me voir assez fortune, pour être si heureux que d'avoir le bonheur que vous ayez eu la bonté de m'accorder la grace, de me faire l'honneur de m'honorer de la faveur de votre présence. (III, xvi)

The bourgeois social climbers not only reveal their true social status through their excessive mimicry of noble discourse. They also prove incapable of sustaining their mask of gentility, and continually resort to bathetic expressions. Magdelon and Cathos insult Marotte for her perfectly reasonable failure to understand their convoluted request for a mirror ('Apprenez, sotte, à vous énoncer moins vulgairement'), while Monsieur Jourdain also discloses his bourgeois origins with his frequent linguistic slips. He proves himself a philistine when he is incapable of appreciating courtly entertainment: 'votre petite drôlerie [...] 'votre affaire' [...] 'pourquoi toujours des bergers? On ne voit que cela partout.' Moreover, Monsieur Jourdain confirms the aristocratic audience in their conviction that it is impossible to purchase true nobility by contravening the rules of polite society. Like the 'précieuses', he often employs *mots bas*, including 'coquine',

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[33] Callières, *Du bon et du mauvais usage dans les manières de s'exprimer. Des façons de parler bourgeoises.* (1693) Cited in Grossperrin, *op. cit.*, p. 52. The would-be gentleman also highlights his inferior social status by admonishing Dorante's claim that they are equals: 'vous vous moquez.' According to Courtin in the *Nouveau traité de la civilité qui se pratique en France parmi les honnêtes gens* (1671): 'Il ne faut point de tout se servir de cette façon de parler, mais tourner la phrase autrement, & dire, vous me donnerez de la confusion.' See Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, p. 247.

'friponne', and 'voilà qui n'est point sot, et ces gens-là se trémoussent bien', while he also belies his image as a *gentilhomme* through his business acumen. (III, iv) Monsieur Jourdain's ability to calculate the exact amount of money that he has lent Dorante would have amused Molière's noble spectators who disparaged all forms of commerce, despite efforts by Richelieu and Colbert to promote trade as a socially acceptable means of bolstering the French economy.[34]

Finally, George Dandin's assurance that he has become a nobleman is contradicted by his distinctly bourgeois preoccupation with money and his complaints that he has not been able to purchase his wife: 'qu'avec tout mon bien je n'ai pas acheté la qualité de son mari.' In fact, his apparent lucidity in recognising that he is being ridiculed by his new family ('l'on vous accommode de toutes pièces') (I, iii) is coupled with his presumption in believing that his superior wealth means that he should exercise complete control over Angélique: 'Si c'était une paysanne, vous auriez maintenant toutes vos coudées franches à vous en faire la justice à bons coups de bâton.' (1, iii)

Moreover, his lack of cultivation is contrasted with Clitandre and Angélique's *style élevé*.[35] Lubin refers to Clitandre as 'le plus honnête homme que vous ayez jamais vu' whereas Dandin insults his wife as 'une pendarde de femme' and resembles Alceste in his recurrent use of oaths: 'morbleu!, parbleu!' Both Dandin and Arnolphe are also ridiculous because of their misappropriation of the language of tragedy. According to Aristotle in the *Poetics*, tragic heroes were invariably of royal or noble birth and a courtly audience would therefore have been entertained by the delusions of grandeur displayed by Arnolphe and Dandin who exaggerate the magnitude of their suffering to absurd proportions.[36] Arnolphe deflates his exclamation, 'Éloignement fatal! Voyage malheureux!' (II, i) by juxtaposing it with the popular expression 'gober le morceau', an exclamation which was condemned by the *remarqueurs*. George Dandin is equally comic through his fusion of tragic and bathetic vocabulary. His lament, 'ma maison m'est

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[34] Helen L. Harrison, *Pistoles/Paroles: Money and Language in Seventeenth-Century French Comedy* (Charlottesville V.A.: Rookwood Press, 1996), p. 10.
[35] There is a similar comic contrast in linguistic registers in *L'École des maris* when Sganarelle confronts Valère (II, ii).
[36] Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by John Warrington (London: Dent, 1963), p. 11.

effroyable maintenant', is immediately subverted by his outbursts of fury and his complaints that he cannot punish his wife:

> Ah! j'enrage de tout mon coeur, et je me donnerais volontiers des soufflets. (I, iii)

Nevertheless, the fact that Molière parodies the language of bourgeois social climbers does not mean that he is a conservative apologist for social stasis, as Chartier and Spielmann claim. On the contrary, the bourgeois opponents of social climbing are also comic and reflect the stereotypical assumption that wealthy members of the *Tiers Etat* are cultural philistines who are purely concerned with questions of finance. In *Les Précieuses ridicules*, Gorgibus betrays his mercantilism by reducing everything to its base components: 'Il est bien nécessaire, vraiment, de faire tant de dépense pour vous graisser le museau'. Although he compares marriage to 'une chose sainte et sacrée', his true concern is purely financial: 'je connais leurs familles et leurs biens, et je veux résolument que vous vous disposiez à les recevoir pour maris. Je me lasse de vous avoir sur les bras.' (scene iv)

His complaint that the girls' extravagance has made their family the object of ridicule is echoed by the equally vehement critic of social climbing, Madame Jourdain. She may ridicule her husband as 'fou' and 'aussi sot par derrière que par devant' but she too is a comic figure. (III, iv) Her hostility towards Monsieur Jourdain's perfectly reasonable desire to cultivate his mind is as narrow-minded and extreme as her husband's longing to 'hanter la noblesse': 'Est-ce que vous voulez apprendre à danser pour quand vous n'aurez plus de jambes?' (III, iii) Meanwhile, she resembles Gorgibus in her frequent use of *mots bas* ('équipage', 'enharnacher'), and her distinctly bourgeois preoccupation with money when choosing a future son-in-law: 'Il faut à votre fille un mari qui lui soit propre, et il vaut mieux pour elle un honnête homme riche et bien fait qu'un gentilhomme gueux et mal bâti.' (III, xii)

Harpagon represents the ultimate example of the parsimonious bourgeois with his substitution of 'je vous prête le bonjour' for 'je vous donne le bonjour' and his opposition to Cléante's imitation of noble fashion: 'Est-il rien de plus scandaleux que ce somptueux équipage que vous promenez par la ville? [...] vous donnez furieusement dans le

marquis.' (I, iv) He can see no profit in wearing a wig when one's own hair costs nothing and is also determined that Élise should marry Seigneur Anselme, 'un homme aussi riche que sage', because he is prepared to accept her 'sans dot'.[37] (I, v) To some extent this association of the bourgeoisie with avarice reflects seventeenth-century social reality, yet it is a fallacy to assume that Molière intended to ridicule bourgeois society as acquisitive because aristocrats and even royalty were also known to be notoriously avaricious, among them Cardinal Richelieu and Louis XIII.[38] Meanwhile, it should also be stressed that *L'Avare* is derived as much from literary sources as it is from social comment, most notably Plautus' *Aulularia*, Boisrobert's *La Belle Plaideuse* and Rotrou's *La Soeur*.[39]

The parody of nobility

Nevertheless, it does not follow from Molière's parody of social climbing and its bourgeois opponents that he was a champion of the ruling hegemony, as Grossperrin, Bénichou, Chartier and Spielmann argue.[40] Whilst scholars agree that the provincial nobility is mocked by Molière in the guise of the Sotenville and La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, he is often viewed as an apologist for the supremacy of court nobility.[41] In reality, the dramatist also parodies the excessive language of courtiers, such as Dorante and Clitandre, and therefore challenges the conventional assumption, promulgated by the *remarqueurs*, that the discourse of court nobility constitutes a linguistic norm.

Firstly, Molière mocks the provincial nobility's preoccupation with status, and takes their desire to mark their social position through speech to absurd extremes.[42] In *George*

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[37] See Plautus, *Aulalaria* (II, ii) and Rotrou, *La Soeur* (II, ii): 'Ergaste – Épargnez sa vertu bien plutôt que sa dot.'

[38] *L'Avare*, ed., P. J. Yarrow (London: University of London Press, 1959), p. 11: Louis XIII only permitted Corneille to dedicate *Polyeucte* to him once he had been assured that the playwright expected no financial reward.

[39] See Plautus, *Aulularia*, Boisrobert, *La Belle Plaideuse*, Rabelais, *Tiers Livre*.

[40] Gramsci was the first to formulate a theory of hegemony which he defined as a technique employed by the ruling classes to ensure that their subordinates agreed to be governed. See Terry Eagleton, *The Eagleton Reader*, ed. Stephen Regan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 239.

[41] Grossperrin, *op. cit.*, p. 62; Bénichou, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

[42] Furetière defined a provincial as 'un homme qui n'a pas l'air et les manières de vivre qu'on a à la Cour et dans la capitale' and he also claimed that 'les nobles de provinces sont de petits tyrans.' See Grossperrin, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

Dandin, the condescending Sotenville are as much figures of fun as their son-in-law, not least because of their absurd names, and they resemble the garrulous Docteur in *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* with their obsessive desire to intimate their pre-eminence. Their lesson in civility, intended to educate George Dandin in the manners and discourse of polite society, alludes to the myriad *Traités de la bienséance et de la politesse mondaine* which stipulated that it was 'une effronterie' to address a social superior as an equal: 'tout gendre que vous soyez, il y a grande différence de vous à nous, et que vous devez vous connaître.' (I, iv)[43]

Paradoxically, however, the Sotenville themselves contravene the linguistic norm of *le bon usage* with their archaic discourse, derived from feudalism ('forligner', forfaire'), and their outmoded obsession with the code of chivalry: 'Jour de Dieu! je l'étranglerais de mes propres mains, s'il fallait qu'elle forlignât de l'honnêteté de sa mère.' (I, iv)[44] Indeed, Dandin actually offers an ironic commentary on their pompous allusions to genealogy and the supposedly illustrious exploits of their ancestors with his forthright speech:

> Monsieur de Sotenville – Il y a eu une Mathurine de Sotenville qui refusa vingt mille écus d'un favori du Roi, qui ne lui demandait seulement que la faveur de lui parler.
>
> George Dandin – Ho bien! votre fille n'est pas si difficile que cela. (I, iv)

Thus, it is the Sotenville rather than Dandin who are ridiculous during these *leçons de civilité*, and their self-importance is even more evident in their encounter with the refined courtier Clitandre, who is amused by Monsieur de Sotenville's elaborate introduction:

> Monsieur de Sonteville – Je m'appelle le baron de Sotenville.
>
> Clitandre – Je m'en réjouis fort. (I, v)

Likewise, a courtly audience would be amused by La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas' preoccupation with her 'qualité', and her delusions of grandeur in believing that her

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[43] Antoine de Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilté...*, see Dandrey, *L'Esthétique*, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

[44] Vaugelas stipulated that an *honnête homme* should always avoid archaic and technical vocabulary along with popular expressions. See chapter five for a discussion of Molière's depiction of *honnêteté*.

husband's 'meute de chiens courants' ensured his status as a true noble. (scene ii). [45] Julie's allusions to la Comtesse d'Escarbagnas' 'perpétuel entêtement de qualité' and her 'ridicule' in imitating the discourse and manners of the court, echo the descriptions of Monsieur Jourdain's 'visions de noblesse', and demonstrate that the nobility can be as absurd and pretentious as any bourgeois social climber. (scene i) Just as the Sotenville undermine their claim to embody *le bon usage*, so la Comtesse constantly betrays her lack of breeding through her bathetic speech: 'vous sablouez', 'butorde', 'ce fripon-là', 'la bouvière', 'Hé bien! petit coquin, voilà encore de vos âneries.' (scenes ii, iii) Meanwhile, she too is parodied by her subordinates as her servants constantly deflate her endeavours to dress up linguistically:

> Andrée – Est-ce, Madame, qu'à la cour une armoire s'appelle une garde-robe?
> La Comtesse – Oui, butorde, on appelle ainsi le lieu où l'on met les habits. (scene ii)

Nor is it merely provincial nobles who are the objects of comedy. Molière's depiction of courtiers is equally comic as they share the pretensions and snobbery of the *Tiers État* and rustic *hobereaux*. While much research has been devoted to the comic portrayal of the self-satisfied *petits marquis* such as Acaste and Clitandre in *Le Misanthrope*, Clitandre and Dorante have often been depicted as representatives of the linguistic and social norm, elegant courtiers with whom the aristocratic audience would naturally identify.[46] Yet, even their language is ridiculous and is disparaged by their social inferiors. Clitandre may ridicule George Dandin and the Sotenville but he is hardly heroic when he and Angélique are about to be discovered ('Ah Ciel!'), and it is Angélique rather than her suitor who proves resourceful in allaying her parents' suspicions. (II, viii) She also mocks his inappropriate use of tragic discourse with her matter-of-fact retorts:

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[45] See Helen Harrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-4: La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas' determination to distinguish herself from the presumptuous *noblesse de robe* reflects the fears of provincial aristocrats during the 1666 investigations into all claims of nobility. Whereas earlier inquiries had accepted the assurances of acquaintances that a family had 'lived nobly' for several generations, aristocrats were now required to prove their status with legal documentation and were forced to rely on the King rather than the deeds of their ancestors in order to ratify their titles.

[46] See Alain Couprie, 'Les marquis dans le théâtre de Molière' in Cairncross, ed. *L'Humanité de..., op. cit.*, Julia Prest, 'Molière et le phénomène du marquis ridicule' in *Le Nouveau Moliériste* IV-V (1998-9), pp. 135-42. See also Spielmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 857-9; Grossperrin, *op. cit.*, p. 62; Bénichou, *op. cit.*, p. 299: Bénichou claims that Dorante represents the 'courtisan honnête homme et porte-parole de Molière.'

> Clitandre – Hélas! de quel coup me percez-vous l'âme lorsque vous parlez de vous retirer [...] Cette pensée m'assassine. [...]
>
> Angélique – Nous trouverons moyen de nous revoir. (III, v)

Finally, Clitandre's manipulation of the code of honour, ('vous êtres homme qui savez les maximes du point d'honneur, et je vous demande raison de l'affront qui m'a été fait'), not only demonstrates Monsieur de Sotenville's credulity in automatically believing the word of a *gentilhomme*, but also suggests that courtiers are rarely models of *honnêteté* to be emulated. (I, vi)

Clitandre is not alone in exploiting his position in order to dupe his social inferiors. The impecunious *gentilhomme*, Dorante in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, takes advantage of his subordinates by repaying his debts in rhetoric rather than in money, and his polished speech forms a comic contrast with Monsieur Jourdain's clumsy efforts to emulate the language of nobility. Nevertheless, he is as ludicrous as the would-be gentleman during his hyperbolic praise of the feast as 'un repas fort savant' with 'des incongruités de bonne chère' and 'des barbarismes de bon goût'. (IV, i) Moreover, it is a mistake to claim that his bourgeois creditors are utterly ridiculous. On the contrary, Monsieur Jourdain unconsciously belittles noble pursuits by questioning the value of pastoral conventions: 'Cette chanson me semble un peu lugubre, elle endort [...] pourquoi toujours des bergers?' (I, ii)[47] Similarly, Madame Jourdain deflates Dorante's linguistic prowess. She has often been dismissed as a dull and humourless figure, but such assessments ignore her comic wit and her ability to subvert Dorante's attempts at flattery, particularly when he claims that she must have been very beautiful in her youth: 'Tredame! Monsieur, est-ce que Madame Jourdain est décrépite, et la tête lui grouille-t-elle déjà?' (III, v)[48] Consequently, Molière's humour is not simply aimed at the excessive speech of the bourgeois social climbers and their materialistic families, but is also directed at the supposedly elevated discourse of the court nobility who use language as a social weapon in order to exploit their inferiors.

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[47] See Chapter Six for a discussion of Molière's depiction of the pastoral tradition.

[48] See Roxanne Decker-Lalande, *Intruders in the Play World: the Dynamics of Gender in Molière's Theatre* (Madison, London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Associated University Presses, 1996), p. 111.

The same can be said of Dom Juan who resembles Clitandre and Dorante through his exploitation of his social status in order to avoid repaying his debts with anything other than rhetoric. He has often been portrayed as a heroic figure by critics, with Bénichou characterising him as the personification of aristocratic supremacy, and Albanese and Cairncross viewing the 'grand seigneur méchant homme' as a *libertin* rebel.[49] Yet, these judgements fail to account for the fact that Molière also parodies Dom Juan's pompous discourse. The Dom may transgress the values and linguistic conventions of the feudal aristocracy by ridiculing his father's preoccupation with the Cornelian language of *gloire* and *honneur*, and by using the elevated discourse of nobility in order to seduce peasant girls, but the audience is also invited to laugh at his speech.[50] As Kathryn Willis Wolfe argues, Dom Juan resembles the Sotenville and the loquacious pedants of *commedia dell'arte* with his verbose and arrogant self-portrait during which he compares himself to Alexander the Great, while Sganarelle also punctures his master's rhetorical verbosity through his retort: 'Vertu de ma vie, comme vous débitez! Il semble que vous avez appris cela par coeur, et vous parlez tout comme un livre.'(1, ii)[51]

To sum up, our analysis has shown that socio-critical theories of Molière as a supporter or opponent of the ruling ideology are too limited. Rather than favour the speech of a single Estate, Molière imitates and parodies the linguistic excesses and prejudices of each social group in order to entertain his audience. Whilst his humour is directed at those who deviate from the linguistic norm of *le bon usage*, he also overturns the stereotype of the nobility as the sole representatives of correct speech by showing that their language can be equally ridiculous.

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[49] Albanese, *Le Dynamisme...*, *op. cit.*, p. 203; Cairncross, *Molière: bourgeois...*,, *op. cit.*, p. 29; Bénichou, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

[50] 'Dom Louis – Croyez-vous qu'il suffit d'en porter le nom et les armes, et que ce nous soit une gloire d'être sorti d'un sang noble lorsque nous vivons en infâmes?' (IV, iv)
'Dom Juan – Je serais assez lâche pour vous déshonorer? Non, non: j'ai trop de conscience pour cela. Je vous aime, Charlotte, en tout bien et en tout honneur.' (II, ii)

[51] K. Willis Wolfe, 'Discours pédantesque et spectateur: Structures de la *Commedia dell'Arte* dans le *Dom Juan* de Molière' in *Francographies*, 2 (1993), p. 33.

Masters and servants

Sosie – Tous les discours sont des sottises,
Partant d'un homme sans éclat.
Ce serait paroles exquises
Si c'était un grand qui parlât. (*Amphitryon*: II, I)

Sosie's exclamation that the significance of an utterance is determined by the rank of the speaker points to a further key aspect of the linguistic relationship between the Second and Third Estates in Molière's theatre: the language of masters and their servants. Surprisingly, few *Moliéristes*, with the exception of Jean Emelina and Mollie Gerard Davies, have devoted studies to the role of servants in Molière's comedies. Emelina has, however, shown that valets and maids are rarely dramatic 'window-dressing' but are often fully rounded individuals who are central to the comic nature of the plays.[52] This raises questions about whether the servants in Molière's theatre are merely the *fourbes* and *lourdauds* of theatrical tradition, or whether they have a more political function in justifying or undermining the social hierarchy, as Eagleton would suggest.[53] While the bourgeoisie was associated with unsophisticated *mots techniques* in the seventeenth century, it was assumed that servants represented the *style bas* condemned by Vaugelas: 'Selon nous le peuple n'est le maître que du mauvais usage.'[54] To what extent does Molière share this disparagement of the discourse of 'le menu peuple'? Does he support the hegemony of the ruling classes by ridiculing the language of servants as inferior and comic, or does he champion the rights of the lower classes in their struggle against oppressive employers? Conversely, can Jameson's theory of the imitation and comic

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[52] Emelina, *Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre comique en France de 1610 à 1700* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1975) p. 9; M. Gerard Davies, 'Masters and Servants in the Plays of Molière' in W. D. Howarth and Merlin Thomas, ed., *Molière, Stage and Study: Esssays in Honour of W. G. Moore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

[53] Eagleton, *Ideology*, *op., cit.*, pp. 55-6. See also Stephan Regan, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 234: The Marxist notion of ideology as a means of persuading people to acquiesce in their political coercion is encapsulated in Marx's assertion that 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.'

[54] Vaugelas, *op. cit.*, Préface, p. 20. See also Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 62: Furetière defined a *mot bas* as a word 'qui ne se dit que par le peuple.'

exaggeration of linguistic styles reconcile the opposing theories of Molière's servants as political or purely theatrical creations?

At first sight, it could be argued that the valets and *servantes* in Molière's theatre are direct descendants of the cowardly or ingenious servants found in Old French Farce and *commedia dell'arte*, who had themselves evolved from the various slaves created by Menander, Aristophanes, Plautus and Terence.[55] Sganarelle in *Le Médecin volant*, Mascarille in *L'Étourdi* and Scapin follow a long line of cunning *fourbes* who must devise ingenious ruses in order to serve their masters' romantic and pecuniary interests, and who often prove to be the intellectual superiors of their employers.[56] Mascarille exemplifies the farcical inversion of the social hierarchy, with the scheming valet expressing his frustration at the misguided interference of his 'enragé de maître!': 'Il nous va faire encor quelque nouveau bissêtre.' (V, v). Scapin has recently been characterised as a dark figure by scholars because of his deception and beating of Géronte, yet he too is a purely farcical creation who proves more resourceful than his timid master in duping Argante: 'Vous voilà bien embarrassés tous deux pour une bagatelle!' (I, ii) Like Mascarille and Sbrigani in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, Scapin is by no means a social commentator, but rather amuses the audience with his linguistic and intellectual prowess, boasting that his *fourberies* are without parallel:

> J'ai sans doute reçu du Ciel un génie assez beau pour toutes les fabriques [...] à qui le vulgaire ignorant donne le nom de fourberies, et je puis dire sans vanité qu'on n'a guère vu d'homme [...] qui ait acquis plus de gloire que moi dans ce noble métier. (I, ii)[57]

Meanwhile, in *Les Précieuses ridicules*, which is generally perceived to be a social satire by critics, Jodelet's *visage enfariné* and Mascarille's mask would be instantly

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[55] Emelina, *op. cit*, p. 7.

[56] See McBride, *The Triumph of Ballet...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-19; Philip Wadsworth, *Molière and the Italian Theatrical Tradition* (Columbia: French Literature Publications, 1977) on the role of Italian farce and *commedia sostenuta* in shaping Molière's depiction of servants.

[57] In *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, Nérine also praises Sbrigani's considerable prowess as a *fourbe*: 'voilà un illustre; votre affaire ne pouvait être mise en de meilleures mains, et c'est le héros de notre siècle pour les exploits dont il s'agit.' (I, ii).

recognisable to a contemporary audience and identify the valets as much with figures from Old French Farce and the Italian *commedia* tradition as with contemporary *marquis*. Yet, Molière does not simply offer an imitation or pastiche of his literary sources. He also transcends this theatrical heritage and develops the role of servants as parodic counterpoints to their social superiors. On the one hand, they imitate the elevated discourse of their employers (Gros-René in *Le Dépit amoureux*, Mascarille and Jodelet in *Les Précieuses*), whilst on the other hand, deflating their masters' grandiloquent speech, particularly during the *dépit amoureux* in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*. As Jameson argues, parody focuses on 'the uniqueness of styles and seizes on their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities to produce an imitation which mocks the original.'[58] One of the most problematic relationships is that of Dom Juan and Sganarelle and we will consider whether it constitutes a critique of abusive masters, along with Harpagon's treatment of Maître Jacques in *L'Avare*. Finally, by comparing Molière's servants with those created by Beaumarchais in *Le Mariage de Figaro*, we will discuss the extent to which Molière may be considered a politically active dramatist who prefigures the Marxist affiliation with the working class by championing the rights of 'le menu peuple' in the Third Estate.[59]

Firstly, if Molière is a champion of noble values, as Bénichou argues, does he invite his audience to laugh at the 'inferior' language of the valets and maidservants? To some extent, the servants are certainly a source of humour for their stupidity and incompetence. In *George Dandin*, Lubin congratulates himself on his success at helping Clitandre to visit Angélique, yet boasts to the very person he is trying to dupe, her husband: 'Pour moi, je vais faire semblant de rien; je suis un fin matois, et l'on ne dirait pas que j'y touche.' (I, ii) Alain and Georgette appear to be equally stupid as they constantly ruin Arnolphe's plans to prevent Horace from courting Agnès, yet this ostensible denseness enables them to outwit their master and undermine his authority in a carnivalesque reversal of the master/servant hierarchy. They argue about who should open the door, thereby leaving Arnolphe locked outside his own house, while the two servants also

[58] Jameson, *The Cultural Turn...*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[59] Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

succeed in insulting their master when he hopes that Agnès was saddened by his departure:

> Georgette – Triste? Non. [....] Oui, je meure,
> Elle vous croyait voir de retour à toute heure;
> Et nous n'oyions jamais passer devant chez nous
> Cheval, âne ou mulet, qu'elle ne prît pour vous. (I, ii)

Albanese and Riggs have described Arnolphe as a domestic tyrant who is intent on dominating both Agnès and his domestics with his constant use of imperatives.[60] Significantly, he employs even more commands than Corneille's heroes in *Sertorius* of which the famous line in *L'École des femmes*, 'je suis maître, je parle; allez, obéissez', is a parody.[61] Nevertheless, Arnolphe's 'despotism' is very different from that of the Count in *Le Mariage de Figaro* whom Beaumarchais accuses of abusing his 'toute-puissance' over his social inferiors.[62] Whereas the Count seeks to cuckold Figaro and purchase Suzanna as if she were a piece of merchandise, Alain and Georgette consistently undermine Arnolphe's authority, and it is the master, rather than his servants, who becomes ridiculous. He is forced to appeal to them as allies, and even temporary equals, in his increasingly desperate attempts to thwart Horace: 'Mes amis, c'est ici que j'implore votre aide.' (IV, ix) The apparently guileless servants also succeed in insulting ('Vous êtes un sot [...] Vous êtes un nigaud'), robbing and even physically abusing their master whilst safeguarding themselves under the guise of play-acting:

> Georgette – Fais-je pas comme il faut? [...]
> Arnolphe – Oui, fort bien, hors l'argent qu'il ne fallait pas prendre.
> Georgette – Nous ne nous sommes pas souvenus de ce point. (IV, iv)

Therefore, Eagleton's theory that literature supports the ruling ideology does not account for the farcical tradition of inverting authority. While Molière may encourage his

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[60] Albanese, *Le Dynamisme...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 147, Riggs, 'Pedagogy, Power, and Pluralism in Molière' in J. Gaines, M. Koppisch ed. *Approaches to Teaching Molière's Tartuffe and other plays* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1995), p. 76: '[Arnolphe's] "regime" is a would-be domestic absolutism whereby others must be creatures of his control.'

[61] *L'École des femmes* (II, v: l. 642); See Corneille, *Sertorius*: ll. 1867-8; see also Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-7.

[62] Beaumarchais, *Le Mariage de Figaro* (Paris: Larousse, 2001), p. 299: In his preface, Beaumarchais compares Count Almaviva to a tyrant, referring to him as 'un maître absolu, que son rang, sa fortune et sa prodigalité rendent tout-puissant pour accomplir son dessein.'

spectators to laugh at the 'ineptitude' of the servants, they frequently gain the upper hand over their social superiors.

Not only do servants reverse the social hierarchy and outwit their masters whilst hiding behind a veneer of ignorance and innocence, but they also parody the language of their employers by aping their speech. In *Les Précieuses ridicules*, Mascarille resembles the bourgeois social climbers through his social snobbery ('Comment, coquin, demander de l'argent à une personne de ma qualité?') and his clumsy imitation of the language of nobility:

> Voudriez-vous, faquins, que j'exposasse l'embonpoint de mes plumes aux inclémences de la saison pluvieuse, et que j'allasse imprimer mes souliers en boue? (scene vii)[63]

Like Magdelon and Cathos, Mascarille proves incapable of sustaining his linguistic mask, and constantly deviates from the norm of *le bon usage* through his excessive use of *précieux* jargon and his frequent recourse to popular expressions, both of which were condemned by Vaugelas. His inflated imperfect subjunctives, 'j'exposasse' and 'j'allasse' are immediately undermined by his concrete images, 'l'embonpoint' and 'boue', while he further deflates his image as a cultivated courtier by juxtaposing his assertion that Paris is 'le centre du bon goût, du bel esprit et de la galanterie' with the bathetic admission 'il y fait un peu crotté.' (scene ix)

Although Molière undoubtedly directs his comedy at the vanity and blindness of both the précieuses and their incompetent suitors, he also uses the language of the valets to parody the fashionable pursuits and affected speech of the aristocracy.[64] Mascarille offers a comic reflection of the noble boast that they are able to do things 'naturellement' and 'sans étude', along with their arrogant assumption that they alone can judge the merit of theatrical works: 'et je vous laisse à penser si, quand nous disons quelque chose, le

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[63] La Grange mocks his valet as 'un extravagant qui s'est mis dans la tête de vouloir faire l'homme de condition.' Mascarille's ambition is such that he is full of disdain for other valets, whom he denigrates as 'des brutaux', while he also insults the porters as 'ces marauds-là' and refuses to pay them. (scenes i, vii)

[64] Ironically, even when he and Jodelet are unmasked by La Grange and Du Croisy, and the status quo appears to have been restored, Mascarille remains convinced that he is indeed a marquis, a delusion which will be further explored in Chapter Twelve: 'voilà le marquisat et la vicomté à bas [...] Ô Fortune! Quelle est ton inconstance! [...] Traiter comme cela un marquis!'(scenes xv & xvi)

parterre ose nous contredire.' (scene ix)[65] Jodelet and Mascarille's efforts to mimic the elegant discourse of their masters also caricature the circumlocution and euphemisms typical of noble, and especially of *précieux* speech: 'La brutalité de la saison a furieusement outragé la délicatesse de la voix; [...] je me trouve incommodé de la veine poétique' (scenes ix, xi)

This caricature of elevated discourse is also evident in *Le Dépit amoureux*, a play which has rarely been studied by *Moliéristes* but which offers a comic insight into the linguistic relationship of masters and servants.[66] On one level, Éraste's threats to commit suicide represent a burlesque echo of Rodrigue's tragic appeal to Chimène in *Le Cid* (III, iv): 'Éraste – ajoute que ma mort/ Est prête d'expier l'erreur de ce transport.' (*Le Dépit amoureux*: I, ii). Yet, they are themselves put into comic relief by Gros-René's incongruous appropriation of *romanesque* language:

> Gros-René – Adieu, mon astre.
>
> Marinette – Adieu, beau tison de ma flamme.
>
> Gros-René – Adieu, chère comète, arc-en-ciel de mon âme. (I, ii)

Sosie proves even more adroit at imitating noble speech. Although he has links to the cowardly and boastful slaves of Latin comedy, Molière's Sosie is by no means the simple *lourdaud* of farcical tradition as Emelina suggests.[67] In fact, he is a skilful rhetorician who differs significantly from his previous incarnation in Rotrou's *Les Sosies*.[68] While he does echo Rotrou's character in bemoaning his fate as a slave, Sosie develops his predecessor's brief report of the battle by casting himself in the role of a director and actor rehearsing his future dialogue with Alcmène:

> Mais comment diantre le faire,

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[65] In *La Critique de L'École des femmes*, Dorante also mocks the snobbery of marquis who refuse to laugh with the *parterre*: 'Il écouta toute la pièce avec un sérieux le plus sombre du monde; et tout ce qui égayait les autres ridait son front. [...] Ce fut une seconde comédie, que le chagrin de notre ami.' (scene v)

[66] Notable exceptions include Molière, *Le Dépit amoureux* ed. by Noël Peacock (Durham: University of Durham, 1989); Joseph Harris, 'Engendering Female Subjectivity in Molière's *Dépit amoureux*' in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 23 (2001), pp. 107-16.

[67] Emelina, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

[68] Rotrou, *Les Sosies*, ed. Damien Charron (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1980): 'Chaque coup mettait bas un de nos ennemis.' (l. 148).

Si je ne m'y trouvai pas?
N'importe, parlons-en et d'estoc et de taille,
Comme oculaire témoin. (I, i)[69]

Sosie reveals his linguistic dexterity by mastering three distinct parts: his narration of the conflict, Alcmène's delighted response and his own frequent asides to congratulate himself on his eloquence: 'Bon! beau début! [...] Bien répondu [...] Peste! où prend mon esprit toutes ces gentillesses?' (ll. 206, 214, 226) Moreover, Sosie parodies the hyperbolic language of heroic epics with his evocation of Amphitryon's glorious victory: 'ce m'est trop d'honneur', 'la gloire l'engage', 'sans m'enfler de gloire':

«*Que font les révoltes? dis-moi, quel est leur sort?*»
«Ils n'ont pu résister, Madame, à notre effort: [...]
[...] et déjà dans le port
Tout retentit de nos prouesses.» (I, i)

Indeed, Sosie's use of 'nous' implies that he too takes on the mantle of a noble hero and regards himself as the equal of Amphitryon, despite the fact that he was not even present at the battle.

On the other hand, the playwright also uses servants to deflate the pretensions of their employers by echoing their speech in a lower register. Alain's culinary image of 'la femme' as 'le potage de l'homme' caricatures Arnolphe's self-perception that he is a learned philosopher with a privileged insight into female psychology ('En sage philosophe on m'a vu vingt années/ Contempler des maris les tristes destinées' (IV, vii), while Covielle's familiar speech also forms a comic contrast with that of his master in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*:

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[69] In *Les Sosies*, Sosie complains that his master can endanger his life by forcing him to walk alone at night:
Quelque mal qui m'arrive, il croit tout raisonnable
Á qui semble être né pour être misérable. (ll. 131-2).
Sosie does, however, remain grateful to Amphitryon for protecting him. (l. 146) In contrast, Molière's Sosie does not repent after attacking the oppression of slaves by their owners:
Notre sort est beaucoup plus rude
Chez les grands que chez les petits. (I, i)
Instead, he castigates himself, and other slaves, for remaining loyal to their masters despite their poor treatment. (I, i)

> Cléonte – Après tant de sacrifices ardents, de soupirs et de voeux que j'ai faits à ses charmes. [...]
>
> Covielle – Tant de seaux d'eau que j'ai tirés au puits pour elle.
>
> Cléonte – Tant d'ardeur que j'ai fait paraître à la chérir plus que moi-même!
>
> Covielle – Tant de chaleur que j'ai soufferte à tourner la broche à sa place! (III, ix)

Emelina regards the *dépit amoureux* scenes as purely aesthetic comic devices, during which the servants offer a clichéd echo of their masters' decisions.[70] Yet, the scene is far more than a simple imitation, amusing by its repetition. Covielle's prosaic speech also serves to deflate Cléonte's idealised image of himself as a gallant lover by focusing the audience's attention on the valet's more practical demonstrations of love along with his equally pragmatic plans for punishing Nicole's apparent disdain:

> Cléonte – C'est une perfidie digne des plus grands châtiments.
>
> Covielle – C'est une trahison à mériter mille soufflets. (III, ix)

Molière develops the disparity between the registers of masters and servants when the two men confront Lucile and Nicole. Whereas Cléonte vents his fury in an immoderate accusation of infidelity ('je me percerai plutôt le coeur que d'avoir la faiblesse de retourner à vous'), Covielle's retort in Picard dialect is far more direct: 'Queussi, queumi.' (III, x) Thus, Covielle's matter-of-fact speech constitutes a burlesque echo of the noble register adopted by the young lovers. The same is true of Cléanthis and Sosie whose *dépit amoureux* mirrors the dispute between Amphitryon and Alcmène. Cléanthis mimics the elevated *niveau de langue* of her mistress in her outrage at Sosie's apparent lack of affection, ('traître', 'infâme', 'me flamme', 'sa chaste ardeur', 'un si perfide trait') (II, iii), yet her misappropriation of the language of tragedy and adoption of concrete vocabulary also debase the high-flown rhetoric of Amphitryon and Alcmène:

> Et lorsque je fus te baiser,
>
> Tu détournas le nez, et me donnas l'oreille. [...]
>
> Mais à tous mes discours tu fus comme une souche. (ll, iii)[71]

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[70] Emelina, *Les Valets...*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[71] 'Amphitryon – Perfide! [...] Et mon coeur ne respire, en ce fatal moment,

Consequently, far from being stock *commedia* characters, the servants frequently offer an ironic perspective on the language of their social superiors. This is particularly true of the maids such as Martine, Nicole, Toinette and Dorine who personify the voice of reason and represent a development of the *fourbe* with their intrigues designed to aid the young lovers. In *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Nicole's uncontrollable mirth at Monsieur Jourdain's outrageous appearance immediately undermines his authoritarian tone:

> Nicole – Hi, hi, hi! Comme vous voilà bâti! Hi, hi, hi!...
>
> Monsieur Jourdain – Je te baillerai sur le nez si tu ris davantage.[...] Mais voyez quelle insolence. (III, ii)

While Nicole is not meant to depict the reality of a maid's influence within a household, her lack of deference towards both her master and the nobility overturns the domestic and the social hierarchy when she lectures Monsieur Jourdain as if he were a child:

> Nicole – Je ne saurais plus voir mon ménage avec cet attirail de gens que vous faites venir chez vous. [...]
>
> Monsieur Jourdain – Ouais, notre servante Nicole, vous avez le caquet bien affilé pour une paysanne. (III, iii)

Similarly, Martine's plain speech offers a comic perspective on the convoluted jargon of the 'femmes savantes'. To some extent, Molière parodies Martine's lower-class register which deviates from the linguistic norm through its lexical and syntactic errors and epitomises the stereotypical perception of dialect as inherently comical:

> Martine – Mon Dieu! je n'avons pas étugué comme vous,
>
> Et je parlons tout droit comme on parle cheux nous. (II, vi)[72]

Martine's deformation of vocabulary ('biaux' 'étugué', 'cheux') and first person plurals ('je parlons', 'je n'avons') play on contemporary sociolinguistic stereotypes of lower-class speakers as uncultivated and ridiculous, but Molière also challenges this preconception by using Martine's unaffected speech to parody the obscure technical

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Et que fureur et que vengeance.
Alcmène – Allez, indigne époux, [...] l'imposture est effroyable.' (II, ii)

[72] See Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31 and Lodge, 'Molière's Peasants and the Norms of Spoken French' in *Neophilologische Mitteilungen*, 92 (1991), pp. 485-99 on lower-class usage in seventeenth-century comedy.

vocabulary of her mistresses who refuse to adapt their discourse in order to communicate: 'la récidive', 'Quel solécisme horrible!', 'la grammaire, du verbe et du nominatif':

> Martine – Quand on se fait entendre on parle toujours bien,
> Et tous vos biaux dictons ne servent pas de rien. (II, vi)

Nonetheless, these commonsensical servants are not designed to attack or justify the ruling social order, as Riggs and Bénichou have claimed. Rather, Molière develops the theatrical tradition of intelligent servants by using the lower-class usage of his maids and valets to caricature the extravagant linguistic styles of their employers. As Jameson argues:

> A good or great parodist has to have some secret sympathy for the original [...] Still, the general effect of parody is – whether in sympathy or with malice – to cast ridicule on the private nature of these stylistic mannerisms and their excessiveness and eccentricity with respect to the way people normally speak or write.[73]

Dom Juan's valet, Sganarelle, combines these features of servants who dress up linguistically in order to imitate their masters or who mimic the language of their social superiors in a lower register. He has frequently been portrayed as a shocking character, particularly by the Sieur de Rochement who was scandalised by the valet's incompetent defence of Christianity and superstitious belief in *Le Moine-Bourru*.[74] In actual fact, this perception of Sganarelle as a sacrilegious figure is extremely misleading as it disregards his close ties to the *lourdaud* and the philosophising pedants of *commedia* tradition.[75] Sganarelle constitutes an ineffectual imitation of Dom Juan whom he professes to condemn but secretly emulates, most notably when he too urges the mendicant to swear and follows his master in duping Monsieur Dimanche.[76] Sganarelle resembles Mascarille, Gros-René and Sosie through his efforts to mimic the rhetorical prowess of his master by posing as a learned philosopher:

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[73] Jameson, *The Cultural Turn...*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[74] See *Dom Juan*, ed. Guy Leclerc (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1968), p. 14: 'Le Maître porte son insolence jusqu'au trône de Dieu, et le valet donne du nez en terre et devient camus avec son raisonnement; le maître ne croit rien, et le valet ne croit que le Moine-Bourru.'
[75] See McBride, *The Triumph of Ballet...*, *op. cit.*, p. 72-6 for Sganarelle's theatrical heritage.
[76] 'Tu vois en Dom Juan, mon maître, le plus grand scélérat que la terre ait jamais porté.' (I, i)

> Quoi que puisse dire Aristote et toute la Philosophie, il n'est rien d'égal au tabac; [...] je comprends fort bien que ce monde que nous voyons n'est pas un champignon. (I, i; III, i)

Yet, Sganarelle's absurd attempts to ape his master's discourse ('*inter nos*') are constantly discomfited by Dom Juan's derision ('Bon! Voilà ton raisonnement qui a le nez cassé') and by the valet's own linguistic incompetence, as he fails to sustain his arguments and becomes a figure of fun for the audience: 'Oh! dame, interrompez-moi donc si vous voulez: je ne saurais disputer si l'on ne m'interrompt.' (III, i)[77]

On the other hand, it is a misconception to argue that Sganarelle is nothing more than an inferior imitation of his master. In reality, Dom Juan is as much the object of comedy as his boastful servant, and McBride has emphasised the valet's comic role in exposing, and mocking, the nobleman's pomposity.[78] When Dom Juan ruthlessly exploits his power over his servant by proposing that they exchange clothes, Sganarelle derides his master, ironically thanking Dom Juan for his 'generosity' in risking his servant's life: 'Je vous remercie d'un tel honneur.' (II, v) Nor is he impressed by the Dom's pedantic discourse, which he ridicules for its artificiality: 'Il semble que vous avez appris cela par coeur, et vous parlez tout comme un livre.'[79] Most significantly, Sganarelle's mercenary cry, 'mes gages', parodies the *dénouements* of morality tales by subverting the conventional punishment of impiety and restoration of order. Whereas Dom Juan's demise ensures that his opponents are satisfied in their demands for justice, Sganarelle deflates the apparently tragic conclusion with his bathetic exclamation, thereby preventing the audience from pitying his master: 'Voilà par sa mort un chacun satisfait: [...] il n'y a que moi seul de malheureux. [...] Mes gages, mes gages, mes gages!' (V, v)

Does this subversion of the traditional master/servant hierarchy entail that Molière was a spokesman for social change? It is certainly true that his servants have evolved from their *commedia* forbears and that they succeed in challenging the authority of their masters

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[77] See also Sganarelle's convoluted 'proof' that Dom Juan will be damned. (V, ii)
[78] McBride, *The Sceptical...*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
[79] 'Dom Juan – Allons vite. C'est trop d'honneur que je vous fais, et bien heureux est le valet qui peut avoir la gloire de mourir pour son maître.' (II, v)

within the artificial domain of the theatre. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether they are pre-revolutionary figures who question the status quo in the same way as Beaumarchais' Figaro. To some extent, Molière's plays do reflect the social reality of seventeenth-century France as the comic beatings inflicted on his domestics were only too familiar to real servants. Fénelon was appalled to hear of some mistresses who treated their maids 'à peu près comme des chevaux' while the Princesse d'Harcourt routinely subjected her maidservants to beatings until one brave chambermaid fought back.[80]

Likewise, Harpagon's preparations for a frugal dinner party offer an insight into the treatment of domestic servants in a bourgeois household. In spite of the fact that valets were a necessary status symbol for any aspiring household, Harpagon refuses to waste any money on his servants' uniforms, instead instructing La Merluche to conceal the large hole in his trousers by standing with his back to the wall. (III, i) While this is an exaggeration of Harpagon's avarice, it was common for families to maintain the pretence of wealth by employing a small number of servants and by forcing them to do several jobs. Maître Jacques is both cook and coachman, while La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas' employees are frequently confused by their mistress's tendency to give them more impressive titles when in company: 'Andrée – Qu'est ce que c'est, Madame, que votre écuyer? Est-ce maître Charles que vous appelez comme cela?' (scene ii)

This comic reflection of the precarious position of servants should not, however, be interpreted as a call for social reform. Mascarille and Jodelet are soundly beaten for their audacity in enjoying their new status as minor nobles, while Maître Jacques regards a beating from Harpagon as perfectly acceptable behaviour from a master. Indeed, his sole attempt to challenge Valère's authority by implicating him in the theft of the *cassette* is soon quashed with Harpagon threatening to have his hapless cook hanged. The same is true of Sosie whose complaints at his servitude are never converted into a call for revolutionary action:

Non! je suis le valet, et vous êtes le maître;

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[80] Wendy Gibson, *Women in Seventeenth-century France* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) p. 114; see also Boileau, *Satire X*: 'Deux servantes déjà largement souffletées,/ Avaient à coups de pied descendu les montées.' (ll. 289-90)

> Il n'en sera, Monsieur, que ce que vous voulez. (II, i)

This is in direct contrast to Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* in the following century. Figaro may have links to the cunning *fourbe*, but he is above all a spokesman for the rights of the *Tiers État.* While Scapin's countless intrigues were motivated by his delight in outwitting others, Figaro insists that it was only his social circumstances which prevented him from pursuing an honest career, and, unlike Molière's servants, he directly challenges the social hierarchy which allows masters to oppress their subordinates with impunity because of an accident of birth: 'Monsieur le Comte [...] vous vous êtes donné la peine de naître et rien de plus. Du reste, homme assez ordinaire comme moi.' (V, iii)

Consequently, Molière's depiction of masters and servants is not intended as a realistic reflection of social conditions but rather develops, and frequently plays with, theatrical conventions. Far from justifying the hegemony of masters by ridiculing the non-standard discourse of servants, Molière uses his valets and maids to parody the linguistic affectations of their employers, but this does not mean that he prefigures Beaumarchais in his struggle against the abuse of power.

Molière and Royal Authority

> Mercure – Un tel emploi n'est bassesse
> Que chez les petites gens.
> Lorsque dans un haut rang on a l'heur de paraître,
> Tout ce qu'on fait est toujours bel, et bon. (*Amphitryon*, prologue)

After considering the linguistic relationship of masters and servants, we will now examine Molière's own status as a servant to Louis XIV, a role which continues to provoke heated debate amongst *Moliéristes.* Whereas Bénichou and Mornet portray Molière as an apologue for unlimited royal power in *Amphityron* and the *comédies-ballets*, *La Princesse d'Élide* and *Les Amants magnifiques*, this theory has been disputed

by Hubert and Riggs.[81] Hubert views the *comédies-ballets* as social satires designed to mock court spectacle, while Riggs depicts the dramatist as a political radical, claiming that Molière seeks to challenge absolutism in *Amphitryon* by ridiculing Jupiter, and therefore Louis himself.[82]

These socio-critical interpretations of Molière as a political activist are, however, too narrow and fail to represent the subtlety of his comedy. Firstly, by asserting that Molière was an opponent of royal absolutism, Riggs underestimates the dangerous position of any royal servant who sought to criticise or subvert the power of his master. Molière would have been only too aware of the fate of Nicolas Fouquet, whose magnificent palace, Vaux-le-Vicomte, aroused Louis' jealousy to such an extent that he had his *surintendant des finances* imprisoned shortly after the first performance of *Les Fâcheux* (1661).[83] For a playwright whose plays were frequently commissioned by and performed before the Monarch, it would have been extremely foolhardy for Molière to risk his liberty and possibly his life by seeking to attack the King's might.

Moreover, Riggs has ignored the extent to which Molière depended on the King's support for his plays, particularly as Louis was intent on increasing his power over the Arts through patronage and the foundation of the *Petite Académie* in 1663. Samuel Chappuzeau underlined the importance of royal patronage for artists in 1674:

> Le soin principal des comédiens est de bien faire leur cour chez le Roi, de qui ils dépendent, non seulement comme sujets, mais aussi comme étant particulièrement à sa majesté, qui les entretient à son service, et leur paye régulièrement leurs pensions.[84]

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[81] Bénichou, *op. cit.*, p. 267: 'On cherchait volontiers dans ces spectacles l'image d'un monde plus brillant, plus irresponsable, plus libre d'entraves que le monde réel, et qui amplifiait encore l'idée que pouvaient se faire de leur propre condition les courtisans de Louis XIV.'; Mornet, *Molière collection* «livre d'étudiant», cited in René Pommier, 'Sur une clef d'*Amphitryon*' in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 96 (1996), pp. 212-28: Mornet describes *Amphitryon* as 'une pièce de courtesan.' (p. 215)

[82] J. Hubert, 'Theoretical Aspects of Fête and Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century France' in David Lee Rubin, ed., *Sun King: The Ascendancy of French Culture during the Reign of Louis XIV* (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library: 1992), p. 36; Riggs, 'Mythic Figures...', *op. cit.*, p. 380.

[83] Richard Wilkinson, *Louis XIV, France and Europe 1661-1715* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), p. 56.

[84] H. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

Thus, it was in Molière's interests as a playwright and actor to retain his monarch's support, not least because it guaranteed him an aristocratic audience at court performances. More significantly, Louis was the only person who could ensure that *Tartuffe* was finally performed in 1669 after the bitter campaign mounted by the *Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement*, and supported by the Queen Mother, the Archbishop of Paris and the leader of the *parlement*, Lamoignon. Although Molière is following a theatrical tradition in flattering the King as 'le plus grand roi du monde et du plus éclairé' in the *Premier Placet au Roi*, he was also in desperate need of royal support, particularly as Louis was not offended by the perceived impiety of *Tartuffe*:

> [...] mon malheur, pourtant, était adouci par la manière dont Votre Majesté s'était expliqué sur ce sujet; et j'ai cru, Sire, qu'Elle m'ôtait tout lieu de me plaindre, ayant eu la bonté de déclarer qu'Elle ne trouvait rien à dire dans cette Comédie qu'Elle me défendait de produire en public. (*Premier Placet au Roi*)

In fact, Louis' failure to ensure the survival of the second version of *Tartuffe* in 1667, *Panulphe ou l'imposteur*, was, according to Grimarest, little short of a 'coup de foudre' for the playwright who begged the King to protect him from the 'rage envenimée' of his enemies: 'qui puis-je solliciter, contre l'autorité de la puissance qui m'accable, que la source de la puissance et de l'autorité?' (*Second Placet au Roi*) *Amphitryon* was composed immediately after Lamoignon ensured that the second version of *Tartuffe* was banned, and it would have been most unwise of Molière to mock Louis' adulterous affairs on stage when he desperately needed the good offices of the King. This implies that the dramatist's praise of Louis XIV in the *Placets* is not simply empty flattery but is rather a sincere plea for support, hence his use of the language of resurrection to describe the King's role in ensuring *Tartuffe's* survival in 1669: 'ressuscité par vos bontés.' (*Troisième Placet au Roi*) In this context, the intervention of L'Exempt, which has often been criticised as a clumsy *rex ex machina*, is also designed to secure the King's favour by elaborating his image as an instrument of divine justice on earth:

> Un Prince dont les yeux se font jour dans les coeurs,
> Et que ne peut tromper tout l'art des imposteurs. [...]
> Il donne aux gens de bien une gloire immortelle. (V, vii)

Nonetheless, even if Molière would not have dared to challenge absolutism as Riggs argues, Bénichou's claim that he glorifies royalty and uses *Amphitryon* to exemplify the gulf between man and the gods is also flawed.[85] Rather than offer an unquestioning celebration of royal power in *Amphitryon*, *La Princesse d'Élide* and *Les Amants magnifiques*, Molière actually plays with the carefully constructed image of royal magnificence by parodying the linguistic excesses and obsequious flattery which characterise Louis' court.[86]

La Princesse d'Élide (1664) and *Les Amants magnifiques* (1670) may initially appear to be propaganda for the splendour of the royal court, but they actually represent a burlesque counterpoint to the elaborate festivities of which they form a part.[87] In his roles as the court *plaisants*, Lyciscas, Moron and Clitidas, Molière is free to observe but also mock what Jameson describes as 'the mannerisms and stylistic twitches' of the courtiers surrounding him, whilst protecting himself under the guise of the fool[88]:

> Clitidas – Vous savez que je suis auprès de [la princesse] en quelque espèce de faveur, que j'y ai les accès ouverts, et [...]je me suis acquis le privilège de me mêler à la conversation et parler à tort et à travers de toutes choses. (*Les Amants magnifiques*: I, i)

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[85] Bénichou, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

[86] Through court fêtes such as *Les Plaisirs de L'Ile enchantée* (1664) or the *Fête de Versailles* (1668), at which *George Dandin* was first performed, Louis was at pains to develop his own mythical status as *Le Roi Soleil*, and he compelled artists to embellish his persona as 'le plus nécessaire et le plus beau des Dieux' in a clear equation of France with the glories of the Classical world. In the *sixième intermède* of *Les Amants magnifiques*, Louis is described as 'la source des clartés' who controls 'la nature entière' and brings light and happiness to all. Similarly, the ballet preceding *Le Malade imaginaire* exalts the King's rather mediocre military achievements:

> Tircis – Et tous ces fameux demi-dieux
> Que vante histoire passée
> Ne sont point à notre pensée
> Ce que Louis est à nos yeux. (Prologue)

[87] *La Princesse d'Élide* was composed for *Les Plaisirs de l'Ile enchantée* in 1664 and the King commissioned *Les Amants magnifiques* for the *Grand Divertissement* of 1670.

[88] Jameson, *The Cultural Turn op. cit.*, p. 4; see also Nicholas Cronk, 'The Celebration of Carnival in Molière-Lully's *Les Amants magnifiques*' in Elizabeth Moles & Noël Peacock, ed., *The Seventeenth Century: Directions Old and New* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1992), pp. 74-87 (p. 84). In *Twelfth Night*, Feste also draws attention to the privileged position of the fool: 'there is no slander in an allow'd fool, though he do nothing but rail.' (I, v: l. 93).

According to Marie-Claude Canova-Green, Louis resembles the two princes, Iphicrate and Timoclès, in his role as a theatrical director responsible for inventing the subject of *Les Amants magnifiques*.[89] Yet, by suggesting that the princes are intended to represent the King, Canova-Green does not consider the possibility that Molière may be parodying the empty flattery of Louis' ambitious courtiers who vie with one another to impress their Royal master, a caricature which the King himself would enjoy. In both *La Princesse d'Élide* and *Les Amants magnifiques*, the rival princes make themselves ridiculous through their extravagant eulogies and *galant* declarations of love, which singularly fail to impress the princesses or the plain-speaking *bouffons*. La Princesse d'Élide mocks Aristomène and Théocle for their effusive praise, while the *plaisant de la cour*, Moron, also offers an ironic commentary on the propensity of courtiers to say only what they believe the monarch wishes to hear:

> Moron – Seigneur, je serai meilleur courtisan une autre fois, et je me garderai bien de dire ce que je pense. (V, ii)[90]

Similarly, in *Les Amants magnifiques*, Molière exaggerates the ingratiating discourse of the two princes who are anything but noble in their scheme to win Aristione's favour and Ériphile's hand in marriage. Aristione may praise Iphicrate's spectacle as 'si noble, de si grand, et de si majestueux, que le Ciel même ne saurait aller au delà!', but she is unmoved by his sycophantic claim that her daughter could be her sister: 'Vous avez entendu qu'il fallait cajoler les mères pour obtenir les filles [...] Mon Dieu! Prince, je ne donne point dans tous ces galimatias où donnent la plupart des femmes.' (I, ii) Nor is she swayed by the 'tragic' discourse of Iphicrate's rival, Timoclès, who exaggerates the depth of his despair in his self-portrait as a plaintive lover: 'Je me suis plaint de mon martyre en des termes passionnés', 'le désespoir de mon amour', 'des soupirs languissants.' (I, ii)

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[89] Canova-Green, 'Le Roi, l'astrologue, le bouffon et le poète, figures de la création dans *Les Amants magnifiques* de Molière' in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 18 (1996); See Molière, *Avant-Propos* to *Les Amants magnifiques*: 'Le Roi, qui ne veut que des choses extraordinaires dans tout ce qu'il entreprend, s'est proposé de donner à sa cour un divertissement qui fût composé de tous ceux que le théâtre peut fournir.'

[90] 'Aristomène – je n'aspire maintenant à remporter l'honneur de cette course, que pour obtenir un degré de gloire qui m'approche de votre coeur.' (II, vi).

Molière's humour is not only directed at the language of fawning courtiers. The Princesses are equally ridiculous owing to their extravagant *précieux* jargon ('la gloire de notre sexe', 'ces soupirs, ces hommages', 'des flammes de l'amour') and inappropriate tragic laments. (II, i & iv) La Princesse d'Élide presents herself as a Cornelian heroine whose primary concern is her 'gloire' and 'honneur', but her heroism is undermined by her outburst when she discovers she is in love ('Ô Ciel! quelle est mon infortune!'), and her petulance in demanding that Euryale worship her, whilst refusing to return his affection: 'Il me devait aimer comme les autres, et me laisser au moins la gloire de le refuser.' (V, ii)[91] The same is true of Ériphile who is equally melodramatic in her outrage that Sostrate could dare to love her: 'Quelle témérité est la sienne! C'est un extravagant que je ne verrai de ma vie. [...] Avoir l'audace de m'aimer, et de plus avoir l'audace de le dire!' (*Les Amants magnifiques*: II, ii)

Whilst offering a mirror-image and pastiche of the court and its lavish entertainment, Molière also offers a wry glimpse of the artificiality and monotony of courtly spectacles in *Les Amants magnifiques.* Aristione complains that the vast number of *divertissements* means that she does not have sufficient time to enjoy them, while Ériphile prefers solitude to the *éclat* of the *spectacles.*[92] (II, v) As McBride notes, the very splendour of the *régales* actually serves to bore rather than entertain the spectators.[93] This ironic attitude towards courtly pursuits is also evident in *La Princesse d'Élide* where both Lyciscas and the carnivalesque Moron, ridicule the aristocracy's obsession with hunting, an activity which the latter disparages as 'un sot passe-temps que je ne puis souffrir'. (I, ii)

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[91] 'La Princesse d'Élide – sans vouloir aimer, on est toujours bien aisé d'être aimée.' (III, iv).

[92] 'Aristione – On enchaîne pour nous ici tant de divertissements les uns aux autres, que toutes nos heures sont retenues, et nous n'avons aucun moment à perdre, si nous voulons les goûter tous.' (II, v). In fragment 136 of *Les Pensées*, Pascal goes further than Molière in presenting our love of *divertissements* as a desperate attempt to escape the tragedy of 'notre malheureuse condition': 'la royauté est le plus beau poste du monde et cependant, [...] s'il est sans divertissement et qu'on le laisse considérer et faire réflexion sur ce qu'il est [...] le voilà malheureux, et plus malheureux que le moindre de ses sujets qui joue et qui se divertit.'

[93] McBride, *The Triumph...*, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

Finally, it is significant that Molière modified the King's stipulations for *Les Amants magnifiques* by adding the character of Sostrate, whose humble origins are outweighed by his valour as a general. Canova-Green argues that Ériphile's decision to marry Sostrate instead of the two illustrious princes challenges the social hierarchy: 'Si, [...] Ériphile préfère le mérite à la magnificence, est-ce à dire que la magnificence n'a aucune valeur?'[94] Although Molière does indeed offer a carnivalesque subversion of the social order, this is only a temporary reversal which should not be interpreted as a political challenge on the part of the author. Aristione and Ériphile's perspicacity in recognising Sostrate's merit despite his lower rank ('le mérite auprès de moi tient un rang si considérable que je l'égale à tout') (IV, i) emphasises their superior Royal discernment, just as l'Exempt praised Louis XIV for his supernatural ability to see beyond appearances in *Tartuffe*:

> D'un fin discernement sa grande âme pourvue
> Sur les choses toujours jette une droite vue. (V, vii)

The treatment of royalty in *Amphitryon* is, however, more ambiguous. Many scholars have judged the play to be a *pièce à clef*, either sanctioning or castigating the King's adulterous affairs through the figure of Jupiter.[95] Bénichou, for example, argues that Jupiter is the hero of the play and a model of 'la loi toute-puissante du plaisir' which the French aristocracy would wish to emulate.[96] In actual fact, Jupiter is a figure of fun who is anything but the omnipotent hero portrayed by Bénichou. Molière punctures the magnificence of the gods during the prologue, which differs significantly from that of Rotrou's *Les Sosies* in which Junon bitterly laments that she has lost her husband because of his adultery:

> Honteuse, je descends de la voûte céleste

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[94] Canova-Green, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

[95] See Le comte Roederer, *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de la société polie en France*, ch. xxii, cited in René Pommier, *op. cit.*, p. 213; J. Truchet, 'À propos de l'*Amphitryon* de Molière: Alcmène et La Vallière' in *Mélanges d'histoire offerts à Raymond Lebègue* (Paris: Nizet, 1969), pp. 241-8. Riggs joins Le Comte de Roederer and Truchet in interpreting *Amphitryon* as *une pièce à clef* which purportedly alludes to the King's affairs with Madame de Montespan and Louise de la Vallière.

[96] Bénichou, *op. cit.*, p. 271: 'Toute l'action procède bien en effet de Jupiter, séducteur et mystificateur souverain, et elle aboutit à Jupiter. [...] Tout ce qui limite ordinairement le désir, c'est-à-dire la réalité et les interdictions morales, cesse pour lui d'exister.'

Et, veuve d'un époux qui ne mourra jamais,
Le fuis, puisqu'il me fuit, et lui laisse la paix. (ll. 2-4)

Molière's prologue on the other hand is very different. Junon's tragic monologue and Mercure's lofty appeal to the night as 'Vierge, reine des mois et des feux inconstants' (scene i) have been replaced by Mercure's rather irreverent dialogue with La Nuit. Instead of glorifying his father as his counterpart in *Les Sosies* had done ('C'est éloquence à moi que de servir ses feux' I, i: l.105), Molière's Mercure undermines the exalted tone appropriate to the gods through his colloquial expressions ('une chaise roulante', 'avoir de quoi me voiturer', 'en dame nonchalante') and flippant attitude towards his position as 'le fameux messager du souverain des dieux':

Ma foi, me trouvant las, pour ne pouvoir fournir
Aux différents emplois où Jupiter m'engage. (Prologue)

In contrast to La Nuit who insists on the need to uphold 'le *decorum* de la divinité', Mercure bears a closer resemblance to the malcontent valet of *commedia* tradition, and subverts the tragic register of 'mon destin fatal' by juxtaposing it with the peevish complaint that he is obliged to walk everywhere:

Et je ne puis vouloir, dans mon destin fatal
Aux poètes assez de mal [...]
Et de me laisser à pied, moi,
Comme un messager de village. (Prologue)

Meanwhile, Jupiter himself is a parody of a gallant hero, whose melodramatic speech is constantly mocked.[97] He may be a master of rhetoric as Bénichou claims, but his mimicry of the *précieux* style of Cornelian heroes such as Rodrigue in *Le Cid* ('mon feu', 'un Coeur bien enflammé', 'ardeur', 'la plus vive flamme') (l. 565, 1361), and his hyperbolic self-recriminations during the *dépit amoureux* ('je dois vous être un objet odieux' [...] 'c'est un crime à blesser les hommes et les dieux') (l. 1351, 1355) are bathetic rather than tragic because he magnifies the gravity of his plight: 'des atteintes mortelles', 'les blessures cruelles', 'ma vive douleur.' In particular, the immortal Jupiter's empty threat

[97] See Jameson, *The Cultural Turn...*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

to commit suicide is absurd and represents a comic distortion of Rodrigue's offer to sacrifice his life in order to expiate his crime: 'Fais-en un sacrifice à ce noble intérêt.' (III, iv)

Jupiter also deviates from the heroic and self-assured King of the gods portrayed by Plautus and Rotrou.[98] While Jupiter remains distant from his human subjects whom he delights in duping in *Les Sosies*, he is himself drawn into the comedy in Molière's version, and reduced to the level of his victims. As Mallinson notes, Jupiter is not depicted as an idealised echo of Amphitryon, but instead shares his suspicious and jealous nature. He is discomfited by Alcmène's passion for her husband ('un scrupule me gêne.') (I, iii) and even envies the man whom he has just cuckolded:

> Mais l'amant seul me touche, à parler franchement;
> Et je sens, près de vous, que le mari le gêne. (I, iii)[99]

Furthermore, Alcmène repeatedly undermines his rhetorical prowess as she refuses to differentiate the figures of her husband and lover: 'Je ne sépare point ce qu'unissent les Dieux.' (I, iii) Nor is Jupiter successful in appeasing her rage after Amphitryon has accused her of infidelity. Whereas he had little difficulty in mollifying Alcmène in *Les Sosies* by pretending he had merely devised 'un divertissement' to test her fidelity (l. 962), Molière's Jupiter proves singularly inept at transferring blame from himself to her husband:

> Alcmène – Ah! toutes ces subtilités
> N'ont que des excuses frivoles. (II, vi)[100]

Most importantly, Molière mocks rather than exalts Jupiter in the final scene. In contrast to Plautus' version of the legend, in which Amphitryon accepts his cuckoldry and exalts

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[98] See Jonathan Mallinson, 'Molière's *Amphitryon*: Re-reading a Comedy' in *Nottingham French Studies*, 33 vol. 1 (spring 1994), pp. 43-52 (p. 47).
[99] Mallinson, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
[100] Jupiter – C'est l'époux qu'il vous faut regarder en coupable.
L'amant n'a point de part à ce transport brutal. (II, vi)

the King of the gods, Molière's Amphitryon is utterly silent.[101] Even more significant is the fact that it is now Jupiter rather than his victim who offers an encomium of divine power:

> Un partage avec Jupiter
> N'a rien du tout qui déshonore;
> Et sans doute il ne peut être que glorieux
> De s'y voir le rival du souverain des Dieux. (III, x)

Amphitryon's silence signals the defeat of Jupiter's eloquence, and his magnificence is further undermined by Sosie who interrupts Naucratès' obsequious attempt to praise the King of the gods ('je suis ravi de ces marques brillantes...') (III, x), and deflates Jupiter's exalted register with his sarcastic comment that 'le Seigneur Jupiter sait dorer la pilule.' (III, x) Moreover, it is Sosie rather than Jupiter who closes the play with his tongue-in-cheek tribute to Jupiter's 'bonté [...] sans seconde', and his ironic reassurance that when the gods misbehave: 'le meilleur est de ne rien dire.'

Nonetheless, this does not mean that Jupiter is intended to be a model of Louis XIV as Riggs has alleged: 'If the play is taken to associate the monarch with divinity, then it must also be taken to associate the former with imposture and with the deployment of rhetoric whose only guarantee is the threat of force.'[102] As we have already seen, it would have been extremely dangerous for a playwright to question absolutism or mock the King's private life on stage. Rather than interpret the play as a political challenge to absolutism or as a personal comment on the dramatist's own relationship with Louis XIV, it is more plausible that Molière was reflecting Montaigne's humanist focus on human frailty.[103] Through his parody of Jupiter's lofty register, Molière plays with the audience's expectation of the superiority of the gods, and reminds us that even the

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[101] See Plautus, *Amphitryon* (V, i) ll. 1124-5: 'Pol me haud paenitet, / Si licet boni dimidium mihi dividere cum Iove.' In *Les Sosies*, Amphitryon also rationalises and accepts his disgrace:

> Amphitryon – Ma couche est partagée, Alcmène est infidèle,
> Mais l'affront en est doux et la honte en est belle,
> L'outrage est obligeant, le rang du suborneur
> Avecque mon injure accorde mon honneur. (V, v: ll. 1763-6)

[102] Riggs, 'Mythic Figures...' *op. cit.*, p. 380.

[103] See Riggs, *ibid*, p. 382: 'Both Sosie and Mercure are doubles of Molière, here, since the playwright is both a master of illusions and a servant who must feign reverence.'

mightiest King is still human. As Montaigne argues: 'au plus eslevé throsne du monde, si ne sommes nous assis que sur nostre cul.'[104]

[104] Michel de Montaigne, *Essais* III (Paris: Nelson, 1935), chapter XIII, 'De l'expérience', pp. 479-80.

Chapter Three: Molière and the Other Provincials

> À l'intérieur d'une norme nationale comme le français, les parlers diffèrent de groupe à groupe, et chaque homme est prisonnier de son langage; hors de sa classe, le premier mot le signale, le situe entièrement et l'affiche avec toute son histoire. L'homme est offert, livré par son langage, trahi par une vérité formelle qui échappe à ses mensonges intéressés ou généreux.[105]

As Roland Barthes argues in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, language is not simply a means of communicating but also serves to judge and exclude anyone whose speech fails to conform to a perceived norm. This applies not only to members of the lower classes but also to those with regional accents or to speakers of dialect. Thus, geography is as important as social class in defining identity. Throughout his career, Molière exploited the comic potential of an obsession with class and social status, as well as attitudes towards linguistic variations. From Mascarille's disguise as a Swiss innkeeper in *L'Étourdi* to Lucette's imitation of the dialect of Pézenas in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, regional dialects and foreign accents are a central source of comic interest.

Consequently, in this chapter, we will examine the ridicule of 'la province' from a Parisian perspective and then consider whether the minority also calls into question what is normative in Paris. The focus will be on two of Molière's plays which have been largely neglected by scholars, *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* and *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*. Although these *comédies-ballets* have often been dismissed as insubstantial farces in the past, they offer fascinating insights into Molière's linguistic skill and into the prevalent attitudes of Parisian audiences towards the regions.

The first section will investigate Molière's depiction of provincials in the light of the theories of Tzvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva, both of whom have analysed the position

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[105] Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Éditions Gonthier, 1965), p. 70.

of the foreigner and outsider, but not with regard to Molière. Using Todorov's discussion of the ethnocentric view that the 'other' is automatically inferior and therefore a source of comedy, we will explore the charge that Molière is an elitist dramatist, mocking any regional variation. The second part of the chapter will use Kristeva's notion of the stranger within and Homi Bhabha's concept of minority discourse to suggest that Molière is not only caricaturing *campagnards*. On the contrary, we shall see that the dramatist also turns the comic mirror on his Parisian spectators and parodies their fashions and pretensions, thereby subverting and decentring the norm. Finally, we will widen the Paris/province antithesis to include the relationship depicted in Molière's plays between France and other countries, particularly the Ottoman Empire.

Paris and *la province*

Critical opinion remains divided as far as Molière's attitude towards provincials is concerned. Gaines argues that *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* constitutes the culmination of a tradition of 'bumpkin satire as a vehicle for the ideology of social closure' which includes Scarron's *Le Marquis ridicule* (1655), and Raymond Poisson's *Le Baron de la Crasse*.[106] According to Gaines, the attitude towards the rustic Monsieur de Pourceaugnac is 'one of unrestrained aggression' and the lawyer deserves to be punished for his presumption in daring to infiltrate Parisian society.[107] Fausta Garavani has, however, questioned the notion that Molière is satirising provincials, asserting that he supports *les Méridionaux* and that any attack is directed at the arrogance of the Parisians.[108]

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[106] Gaines, 'The Violation of the Bumpkin: Satire, Wealth, and Class in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*' in *Theatrum Mundi: Studies in Honor of Ronald W. Tobin* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Rookwood Press, 2003), p. 157.

[107] Gaines, *Theatrum Mundi*, p. 161: 'It is no mistake that *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* coincides with the completion of the first phase of Versailles, marking the royal invasion of the French countryside [...] The body of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac becomes a symbolic target for the persecution of the rural enemy.'

[108] Fausta Garavani, 'La Fantaisie verbale et le mimétisme dialectal dans le théâtre de Molière', in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 1, (Paris: jan-fév 1972), p. 817: 'le pauvre Pourceaugnac, finalement plus pathétique que ridicule, n'est pas plus grotesque parce qu'il vient de Limoges que s'il venait d'ailleurs, et la satire de Molière, si satire il y a, vise aussi bien le chauvinisme parisien que la balourdise provinciale.'

Conversely, McBride has dismissed such satirical interpretations and emphasises the euphoric spirit of the two *comédie-ballets*:

> If satire of an individual or a social group was the principal reason behind the comedy-ballet, it might be thought that Molière was singularly inept in choosing the artistic form least conducive to incisive comment and sharp delineation.[109]

Robert Kenny also denies that the play is a 'theatre of cruelty' or a 'black comedy' and links it to the *folle journée* of carnival during which all morality and conventions are suspended: 'It is, as Eraste told Julie, a 'divertissement' from the moments of *noirceur* in the real world of Molière's comedy.'[110] In the same vein, Charles Mazouer underlines the fantastic nature of *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*: 'En fin de compte, tout dans la comédie-ballet, comme dans l'ensemble de l'oeuvre de Molière, converge vers le rire et l'épanouissement de la joie.'[111]

In order to reconcile these apparent contradictions, it is vital to go beyond the hypothesis that Molière either attacks or champions provincials and their language. Nor are the comedies simply carnivalesque celebrations of *la fantaisie verbale*, divorced from reality. Instead, the dramatist parodies regional dialects and foreign accents, using them as a source of comedy in order to entertain his metropolitan audience. As Lodge argues, it is no coincidence that *campagnards* were increasingly the object of comedy in the seventeenth century. This phenomenon is closely bound to the development of a French linguistic norm, a movement which began in the Middle Ages but which reached its zenith during the absolutist reign of Louis XIV when the aristocracy became increasingly centred at the court and provincial nobles were compelled to move to Paris if they hoped to exercise any influence.[112] Whilst the increasing codification of French was

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[109] McBride, *The Triumph...*, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

[110] Robert Kenny, 'Molière's Tower of Babel: *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* and the Confusion of Tongues' in *Nottingham French Studies*, 33, No. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 59-70. (p. 68).

[111] Charles Mazouer, '*La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* et *Le Malade imaginaire*: deux comédies-ballets' in *Littératures classiques: Molière, des Fourberies de Scapin au Malade imaginaire* (janvier 1993), pp. 25-44, (p. 36).

[112] Lodge, *French: from Dialect...*, *op. cit.*, p. 178: the creation of a norm was based on the assumptions that a) there can only be one legitimate form of language, and any deviations from the standard are automatically improper; b) the standard constitutes an ideal to be emulated and the written language is superior to the spoken one; c) the standard is inherently superior to other forms; see also Richard Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 78 and La Bruyère, 'De la Cour' in *Caractères* (Paris: Nelson, 1952), p. 279:

undoubtedly prompted by the desire to improve communication, it was also a means of distinguishing the language of the social elite as intrinsically superior and more prestigious.[113] Accordingly, any deviation from the *sur-norme* was rejected by Vaugelas in favour of the discourse of 'la plus saine partie de la cour' and that of the *honnête homme* who would automatically avoid *mots bas*, *mots techniques*, *mots vieux* and *mots de province*.[114] As Lodge stresses:

> Since the prestige of one variety triggers the disparagement of others, rustic and popular varieties automatically became joke-languages, the simplistic babbling of uncultivated buffoons and clodhoppers.[115]

These included the *patois* of the Parisian populace and that of *la province*, especially regions *au dela Loire* such as Poitou, Gascony and Normandy.

Such disparagement of provincials appears in *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* and *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*. The two plays form an antithetical view of the relationship between the metropolis and the regions. While the Comtesse worships Paris as the source of all culture and refinement, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac is full of disdain for the inhabitants of the capital. Yet, both are comical for a Parisian audience: La Comtesse, because she believes that she can join their elite society, and Léonard de Pourceaugnac for his arrogant conviction that he is superior to them. This juxtaposition of the capital and the regions reflects the ethnocentric view of Parisians that their values were necessarily superior. As Todorov writes in *Nous et les autres*:

> Dans l'ethnocentrisme, le sujet identifie, naïvement ou perfidement, ses valeurs à lui avec *les* valeurs, il projette les caractéristiques propres à son groupe sur un instrument destiné à l'universalité.[116]

'Un noble, s'il vit chez lui dans sa province, il vit libre, mais sans appui; s'il vit, à la cour, il est protégé, mais il est esclave: cela se compense.'

[113] Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 173. See also Lodge, *A Sociolinguistic History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 156: by 1650, the population of Paris had dramatically increased as a result of increasing migration from the countryside and this strengthened the movement to develop a linguistic *sur-norme*.

[114] See Vaugelas, 'La chasse aux provincialismes' in *Remarques...* ; Lodge, *A Sociolinguistic History...* op. *cit.*, p. 152; see also chapter five for an analysis of Molière's depiction of *le bon usage*.

[115] Lodge, 'Molière's Peasants...', *op. cit.*, p. 496.

[116] Todorov, *Nous et les autres: la réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), p. 511.

La Bruyère exemplifies the preconception of Parisian ascendancy, according to which the taste of the French court was applied to everyone: 'la ville dégoûte da la province; la cour détrompe de la ville et guérit de la cour.'[117]

Conversely, ethnocentrism entailed that 'the other' was regarded as inferior, and became less sophisticated the further one travelled from the centre, a judgement defined as la *règle d'Hérodote* by Todorov. When describing the Persians, Herodotus argued that 'parmi les autres peuples ils estiment d'abord, après eux-mêmes toutefois, leurs voisins immédiats [...] les peuples situés le plus loin de chez eux sont à leurs yeux les moins estimables.'[118] Montaigne, for example, vilified those compatriots who presumed that the values of 'the other' were necessarily barbarian: 'Chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage.'[119]

La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas embodies this idealisation of the capital and disdain for the peripheral provinces. She echoes the précieuses ridicules and Mascarille ('Hors de Paris, il n y a point de salut pour les honnetes gens' scene ix) in her worship of Paris and her contempt for her own home in Angoulême. Not only does the capital represent the centre of culture and good taste, but it is also the only place where she is shown the respect which she merits: 'Vive Paris pour être bien servie!' (scene ii) In contrast, she shares the Parisian conviction that the provinces symbolise everything that is rustic and backward, particularly when it comes to etiquette and refined speech: 'c'est une chose étrange que les petites villes, on n'y sait point du tout son monde.' (scene ii)

Nonetheless, la Comtesse is a figure of fun, both for the Parisians and for her aristocratic neighbours, because of her determination to equate herself with the Parisian elite rather than accept that she too is a provincial: 'Me prenez-vous pour une provinciale, Madame?' (scene ii) La Comtesse resembles Molière's ambitious bourgeois social climbers, such as

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[117] La Bruyère, 'De la Cour' *op. cit.*, p. 289.
[118] Todorov, *op. cit.*, p. 239.
[119] Montaigne, 'Des cannibales' in *Essais* I, ed. Pierre Villey (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), p. 205; see also 'De la vanité' in *Essais* III, p. 53: 'chaque usage a sa raison. [...] J'ai honte de voir nos hommes enivrés de cette sotte humeur, de s'effaroucher des formes contraires aux leurs: il leur semble être hors de leur élément quand ils sont hors de leur village. Où qu'ils aillent, ils se tiennent à leurs façons et abominent les étrangers.'

Monsieur Jourdain, in her belief that she need only imitate the elegant language of the capital in order to transform herself into a sophisticated courtier: 'le mal que j'y trouve, c'est qu'ils veulent en savoir autant que moi, qui ait été deux mois à Paris. Et vu toute la cour.' (scene ii) She mimics the Parisian elite by giving her servants more impressive titles ('laquais', 'fille de chambre'), and also attempts to emulate Parisian culture by rechristening her attic with the more imposing title of 'garde-meuble.' (scene ii)

Furthermore, she continually betrays her provincial roots and lack of cultivation. Andrée and Criquet inadvertently destroy any illusion of refinement with their inability to dress up linguistically and their utter ignorance of Parisian etiquette: Andrée reveals that the écuyer is merely maître Charles, while Criquet further embarrasses his mistress by misinterpreting 'dehors' as the street outside: 'Vous êtes un petit impertinent, mon ami, et vous devez savoir que là dehors, en termes de personnes de qualité, veut dire l'antichambre.' (scene ii)

La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas' admirers prove equally adept at deflating her veneer of gentility with their archaic and rustic language. Monsieur Tibaudier's ineffectual imitation of *le style galant* ('vos cruautés', 'l'avocat de ma flamme', 'ma tendresse') and his absurd horticultural images derived from Pellison ('je vous présente des poires de bon-chrétien pour des poires d'angoisse') only serve to emphasise his lack of sophistication, especially when he compares la Comtesse to a tree trunk in a far from flattering epithet. (scene iv)[120] Similarly, Monsieur Bobinet deviates from the linguistic norm with his antiquated greeting which no Parisian would employ ('je donne le bon vêpres à toute l'honorable compagnie'), while Monsieur Harpin contravenes the linguistic standards of *honnêteté* with his constant swearing: 'Parbleu! La chose est belle [...] Si fait morbleu! je le sais bien". (scenes vi, viii)

Finally, la Comtesse would entertain a metropolitan audience through her failure to sustain her elevated register and her repeated use of *mots du terroir* and *mots bas*,

[120] Canova Green, 'Feinte et comédie dans '*La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*' de Molière' in Derek Connon & George Evans, ed., *Essays on French Comic Drama from the 1640s to the 1780s* (Oxford, Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 71-86, (p. 81).

including 'sablouer', 'butorde', and 'grouiller'.[121] She further belies her self-image as a cultivated Parisian lady by resorting to vulgar expressions and oaths when insulting her servants, in spite of the fact that she reprimands Monsieur Harpin for the same transgression: 'Ah! mon Dieu! L'impertinente', 'tête de boeuf', 'oison bridé', 'la bouvière', 'grosse bête.' (scene ii)

Monsieur de Pourceaugnac represents the antithesis of the Comtesse with his utter disdain for the capital. Yet even before he first appears on stage, he is portrayed as a provincial of the worst order because of his presumptuous intention to marry into their social order. His greatest crime is to originate from Limoges, and according to Nérine, he is therefore a barbarian who must be expelled from Paris:

> S'il a envie de se marier, que ne prend-il une Limosine et ne laisse t-il en repos les chrétiens? [...] Pourceaugnac est une chose que je ne saurais supporter; et nous lui jouerons tant de pièces, [...] que nous renverrons à Limoges Monsieur de Pourceaugnac. (I, i)

Such hostility towards outsiders is illuminated by Julia Kristeva's theory of the foreigner as abject. According to Kriseva, the abject is something repulsive which both attracts and repels us, and which disturbs order by threatening the distinctions between subject and object, the self and the 'other': 'Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de proprété ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles. L'entre-deux, l'ambigu, le mixte.'[122] In the same way, the foreigner constitutes a threat to identity by occupying the space of difference: 'Face à l'étranger que je refuse et auquel je m'identifie à la fois, je perds mes limites, je n'ai plus de contenant, [...] je perds contenance. Je me sens «perdue».'[123] This challenge can be widened to comprise a perceived threat to national identity. As Noëlle McAfee explains, the concept of abjection enables us to understand the fascination and hostility exhibited by nations towards foreigners:

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[121] 'Sablouer' and 'butorde' were regarded as vulgar, and 'grouiller' was dismissed as 'bas' by the *Dictionnaire de L'Académie* in 1694.
[122] Kriseva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980), p. 12.
[123] Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), p. 276.

> A nation-state constitutes its own boundaries by excluding what is other. But insofar as the other (someone who constitutes/threatens identity) resides *within* the nation state, the foreign *object* becomes the foreign *abject*.'[124]

Paradoxically, the abject in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* is not a foreigner, but someone from their own country, yet he is still persecuted by his hosts and banished from the metropolis. Not only is the hapless lawyer incarcerated by doctors and hounded by his supposed children, he is also threatened with execution for bigamy and forced to dress as a noblewoman, and his consternation at the hostility of Parisians is evident: 'Ah! je suis assommé. Quelle peine! Quelle maudite ville! Assassiné de tous côtés! [...] Il pleut en ce pays de femmes et des lavements.'(II, x) As a result, there has been a tendency of late to regard the Limousin as an almost tragic figure who is ruthlessly duped by the Parisian *fourbes*. Garavani, for example, insists that it is the Parisians who are the object of Molière's attack rather than the Southerner because of their cruel deception: 'la répétition du mot Pourceaugnac, procède nettement, chez Nérine, d'un parti-pris anti-provincial que Molière, loin de le partager, semble au contraire vouloir dénoncer.'[125]

Nevertheless, it is no coincidence that Monsieur de Pourceaugnac comes from Limoges. The Limousin was thought to be the personification of the bucolic provincial, as is seen in Rabelais' *Pantagruel* in which the equally pompous *écolier* comes from Limoges.[126] Throughout the comedy, Molière plays on popular stereotypes with which his spectators were undoubtedly familiar, such as the Limousin's renowned love of bread which recalls the proverb 'manger du pain comme un Limousin'. (I, iii) Meanwhile, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac's very name evokes the farmyard and the unfashionable Southern towns whose names ended in 'ac'.[127] He is the archetypal country bumpkin who betrays his

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[124] Noëlle McAffee, 'Abject Strangers: Toward an Ethics of Respect' in Kelly Oliver, ed., *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), p.124.
[125] Garavini, *op.cit.*, p. 810.
[126] Rabelais, *Pantagruel* in *Œuvres completes* ed. by Jacques Boulanger (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1941), chapter vi, p. 215: Pantagruel derides the *écolier* for his affected imitation of Parisian speech: 'A quoy dist l'escholier: « L'origine primeves de mes aves et ataves fut indigène des regions Lemovicques, où requiesce le corpore de l'agiotate sainct Martial »
– J'entens bien, dist Pantagruel; tu es Lymosin pour tout potaige, et tu veulx icy contrefaire le Parisian.'
[127] G. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

rustic origins with his frequent use of popular and provincial expressions such as 'bailler', 'badaud', and 'acheter chat en poche.' (I, iii; II, vi). He further exemplifies the stereotype of the naïve *hobereau* when he is easily duped by Éraste's profession to recognise him, and the gullible lawyer dare not admit that he has no memory of 'le meilleur ami de toute la famille des Pourceaugnac.[128] His credulity is such that he is easily persuaded to give Éraste all the information he needs and fails to notice the latter's mistakes:

> Éraste – Et Monsieur votre oncle? Le…?
> Monsieur de Pourceaugnac – Je n'ai point d'oncle.
> Éraste – Vous aviez pourtant en ce temps là…
> Monsieur de Pourceaugnac – Non, rien qu'une tante.
> Éraste – C'est ce que je voulais dire. (I, iv)

Nor is Monsieur de Pourceaugnac the innocent victim of Parisian malevolence as Garavani has suggested. He too is a figure of fun because of his certainty that he is superior to those in the metropolis. When he first arrives, for example, he is highly indignant that passers-by would deign to laugh at his appearance and can only conclude that it must be due to their lack of breeding: 'Au diantre soit la sotte ville, et les sottes gens qui y sont! Ne pouvoir faire un pas sans trouver des nigauds qui vous regardent et se mettent à rire!' (I, iii) His pretension is further underlined by his determination to impress the residents of the capital with his fashion sense ('l'habit est propre et il fera du bruit ici') and his arrogant conviction that the King himself will be eager to meet him. (I, iii)

It is not simply Léonard de Pourceaugnac who is the centre of comic interest in the play. Molière also reproduces both meridional and northern dialects to amuse his audience, and this raises the question of the playwright's attitude towards regional dialects. According to Robert Lafont, Molière uses them to satirise provincials, especially Southerners: 'revenu à Paris [Molière] n'a cure d'oublier que le comique est provincial et surtout

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[128] 'Éraste – Vous ne vous remettez pas tout cela?'
'Monsieur de Pourceaugnac – Excusez-moi, je me le remets. (À Sbrigani.) Diable emporte si je m'en souviens!' (I, iv)

méridional.'[129] Garavani, on the other hand, believes that Molière's reproduction of regional dialects demonstrates his skill at pastiche and his desire to support linguistic diversity, although she does admit that it was more important for the dialects to be understandable than it was for them to be authentic.[130] Yet, as Jameson argues, pastiche is parody without a sense of humour and fails to account for the playwright's dictum in *La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes*: 'je voudrais savoir si la grande règle de toutes les règles n'est pas de plaire.' (scene vi)

Rather than attack or simply reproduce these dialects, Molière parodies them by exaggerating certain aspects. Sbrigani for example mimics a Flemish accent by replacing 'g' with 'ch' and 'd' with 't' e.g 'je suisse un trancher marchand flamane, qui voudrait bienne vous temantair un petit nouvel', when he poses as a merchant, and also plays with morphology: 'Moi le dire rien, Montsir, si vous le mettre pas le chapeau sur le tête.' (II, iii)

Lucette's disguise as a Languedocienne deviates even further from a linguistic norm and reflects popular stereotypes of occitan dialects as much as the actual speech, particularly as the occitan forms such as *saquos bous* and *valisquos*, are interspersed with Parisian terms including *infame*, *trayte*, *impudent*, *misérable*, *scélérat.* (II, vii)[131] The use of dialects reaches a climax when Nérine's Picard accent is interwoven with that of Lucette. Nérine also echoes the Picard accent: *ches*, *chette*, *justiche*, *chertain*, *impudainche*, although this has been exaggerated to include 'des formes hyperpatoises' such as '*méchaint.*'[132] As Lodge notes, the language of Picardy was seen as particularly comic in the seventeenth century: 'Northern dialectal speech seems to have been regarded by upper-class people less as a separate linguistic system than as a comic deviation from high-status norms, produced by people who did not know any better.'[133]

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[129] Garavani, *op. cit.*, p. 808.
[130] *Ibid*, p. 812.
[131] *Ibid*, p. 812.
[132] *Ibid*, p. 813.
[133] Lodge, *French: from Dialect... op. cit.*, p. 195.

Minority discourse

On the other hand, it is too simplistic to argue that it is only the provincial minority or outsider who is to be regarded as the object of parody. Molière also turns his comic mirror on his metropolitan spectators and views the majority from a humorous perspective, thereby calling their secure norms and their sense of superiority into question. Bhabha describes this challenge to the hegemony of the majority as 'minority discourse': '[Minority discourse] contests genealogies of 'origin' that lead to claims for cultural supremacy and historical priority. Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture – and the people – as a contentious, performative space.'[134] Rather than present society as a unified whole with identical cultural experiences, Bhabha emphasises the need to overturn the traditional disparagement of the margins: 'It is only by understanding the ambivalence and the antagonism of the desire of the Other that we can avoid the increasingly facile adoption of the notion of a homogenized Other, for a celebratory, oppositional politics of the margins or minorities.'[135]

Indeed, as Kristeva argues in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, what we assume to be other and inferior can actually prove to be familiar:

> Vivre avec l'autre, avec l'étranger, nous confronte à la possibilité ou non *d'être un autre*. [...] Étrangement, l'étranger nous habite: il est la face cachée de notre identité, l'espace qui ruine notre demeure, le temps où s'abîment l'entente et la sympathie. [...] l'étranger commence lorsque surgit la conscience de ma différence et s'achève lorsque nous nous reconnaissons tous étrangers.[136]

For Kristeva, the foreigner represents *das Unheimliche* or the uncanny, defined by Freud as something which is secretly familiar because it has returned after being repressed.[137] Similarly, Kristeva argues that alterity is central to identity and that we are all strangers:

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[134] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 157.
[135] Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
[136] Kristeva, *Étrangers...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 9.
[137] Freud, 'Das Unheimliche' in *Gesammelte Werke* 12 (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1940), p. 231: 'Es mag zutreffen, daß das Unheimliche das Heimliche-Heimische ist, das eine Verdrängung erfahren hat und aus ihr wiedergekehrt ist.' ('It may be the case that the uncanny is something secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and returned from it.') (my translation).

'l'étranger est en nous. Et, lorsque nous fuyons ou combattons l'étranger, nous luttons contre notre inconscient.'[138]

Therefore, it is vital to blur the boundaries between majority and minority and recognise that the purportedly inferior speech of provincials more closely resembles the normative speech of seventeenth-century Paris than has previously been assumed. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the peasant dialect spoken by Pierrot and Charlotte in *Dom Juan*. As with the southern dialects found in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, their comic *patois* does not faithfully represent the genuine speech of peasants but rather exaggerates the conventional linguistic markers associated with rustic dialects in the minds of the audience.[139] These include their predilection for oaths ('Nostre-dinse – Notre-dame', 'Parguenne – Par Dieu', 'Morguenne – Mort de Dieu'), first person plurals ('je nous amusions', 'je sommes', 'j'étions') and lexical deformations ('stanpandant – cependant', 'par ma fique – par ma foi', 'nous jesquions – nous jetions')[140] Paradoxically, however, the very features which are believed to identify their speech with the rural populace were in fact associated with the language of lower class Parisians by contemporary grammarians.[141] As Lodge stresses, this implies that Molière was not merely parodying the non-standard dialect of provincials, but was also directing his comedy at the ostensibly superior language of Parisians.[142]

Yet, this does not entail that it is only the *patois* of lower class Parisians which is comic. The snobbery and artificial discourse of the Parisian elite are as much the object of the playwright's humour as the uncultivated language of their provincial neighbours. In *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, the heroine's obsession with Parisian etiquette may mock her inability to emulate court society, but it also casts a wry glance at the pretentiousness of

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[138] Kristeva, Étrangers..., *op. cit.*, p. 283-4.
[139] Lodge, 'Molière's Peasants...' *op. cit.*, p. 489.
[140] For an analysis of the lexical, morphological and phonetic variations used by Pierrot and Charlotte, see Lodge, 'Molière's Peasants...' *op. cit.* and Hans Lagerquist, 'Comment faut-il prononcer jesquions? Interprétation phonétique d'une forme du patois de la comédie de Molière: *Dom Juan*' in *Studia Neophilologica*, 66 (1994), pp. 231-6.
[141] Lodge, 'Molière's Peasants...' *op. cit.*, p. 494; Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-1.
[142] Lodge, 'Molière's Peasants...' *op. cit.*, p. 494; see also Ayres-Bennet, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

the Parisian nobility and their propensity to ornament language. Such mockery of Parisian affectation is demonstrated by Andrée's apparent ineptitude in misunderstanding her mistress's request for 'un verre d'eau':

> La Comtesse – Allez, impertinente, je bois avec une soucoupe. Je vous dis que vous m'alliez quérir une soucoupe pour boire. [...]
>
> Andrée – Nous ne savons tous deux, Madame, ce que c'est qu'une soucoupe.
>
> La Comtesse – Apprenez que c'est une assiette sur laquelle on met le verre. (scene ii)

It is not so much that la Comtesse's servants are ignorant, but that Parisian manners are ridiculous.

Throughout the play, Julie questions the alleged superiority of the capital and the Parisian assumption that civilisation is confined to the metropolis, with her ironic insistence that provincials must be forgiven for lacking deference towards la Comtesse: 'où auraient-ils appris à vivre? Ils n'ont point fait de voyage à Paris.' (scene ii) By challenging the Comtesse's idealisation of Parisian manners, Julie serves to decentre the norm through her mockery of the literary fashions and hyper-correct language of court society, as exemplified by the *style galant* of le Vicomte. He seeks to impress Julie with his *précieux* sonnet, but she deflates his hyperbolic lament and exaggerated declarations of love ('me mettre à la torture', 'un tourment', 'mes tristes soupirs', 'ce double martyre', 'pareille cruauté'), thereby suggesting that the elegant style of courtiers is as comical as the language of provincials:

> Je vois que vous vous faites là bien plus maltraité que vous n'êtes; mais c'est une licence que prennent Messieurs les poètes de mentir de gaieté de coeur, et de donner à leurs maîtresses des cruautés qu'elles n'ont pas. (scene i)

Molière's parody of the Parisian majority is also evident in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, where the humour is directed as much at the credulity and pomposity of the Parisian patriarch, Oronte, as it is at the arrogance of the 'gentilhomme limousin': 'Sbrigani – Tous deux également sont propres à gober les hameçons qu'on leur veut tendre.' (II, iii) While the 'country bumpkin' may not be a tragic figure, he is far from being the object of

ridicule that characterises some *imaginaries*. As Molière himself writes in *La Critique de L'École des femmes*: 'il n'est pas incompatible qu'une personne soit ridicule en de certaines choses et honnête homme en d'autres.' (scene vi) Although Monsieur de Pourceaugnac shares Comtesse d'Escarbagnas' farcical illusions of grandeur, the punishment meted out to him seems disproportionate to his 'crime' of posing as a nobleman and attempting to marry into a bourgeois Parisian family, particularly when he is threatened with execution: 'Voilà une justice bien injuste.' (III, i) Indeed, he is often shown to be a sympathetic character, especially when he is unimpressed by the garrulous doctors and their ludicrous diagnosis: 'Messieurs, il y a une heure que je vous écoute. Est-ce que nous jouons une comédie? [...] et que voulez-vous dire avec votre galimatias et vos sottises?' (I, viii) Ironically, it is not the patient but the doctors who are mad, with their refusal to accept that he is not ill: 'Nous savons mieux que vous comment vous vous portez, et nous sommes médecins, qui voyons clair dans votre constitution.' (I, viii)

Finally, it should be stressed that it is in fact Sbrigani, an outsider and a foreigner, who is largely responsible for 'defending' Paris from Monsieur de Pourceaugnac's incursion. Although Éraste also devises various 'machines' and 'stratagèmes' to expel Monsieur de Pourceaugnac from the capital, it is principally the Neapolitan, Sbrigani who amuses the audience with his cunning deception of both Oronte and the provincial lawyer. Paradoxically, therefore, the Parisian ridicule of the margins is itself led by the 'other', who represents Kristeva's stranger within. Can this notion of the stranger within also be applied to Molière's representation of French attitudes towards other nations?

Molière and the Orient: the Language of Otherness

'Tout vous dis-je est égal, Turquie ou Barbarie.' (*L'Étourdi*: IV, i)

Mascarille's assertion in *L'Étourdi* that Turks are synonymous with barbarians reflects a central preoccupation of seventeenth-century France, the nature of the relationship between France and the foreign 'Other'. From alluring 'Egyptian' slaves in *L'Étourdi* and Scapin's fable of marauding pirates to the *turquerie* of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, the

foreigner is depicted as a source of fear and fascination. After analysing Molière's depiction of comical provincials and regional dialects, this section will focus on French attitudes towards the exotic 'Other' in his comedies, and will consider the extent to which Molière stereotypes other nations, parodying their customs from the perspective of the Parisian audience. Conversely, we will also discuss whether Molière actually turns the critical spotlight on the French themselves.

Since the publication in 1978 of Edward Said's groundbreaking study, *Orientalism*, there has been a surge of interest in Western conceptions of the Orient and the exotic, and postcolonial scholars such as Bhabha and Spivak have followed Said in challenging many of the accepted ethnocentric ideas of European supremacy.[143] Yet, surprisingly, few scholars have explored Molière's representation of the Orient in his comedies. With the exception of articles by Jean Serroy and Elizabeth Woodrough, only Michèle Longingo has, to my knowledge, devoted a full-scale study to orientalism in French Classical theatre, but she analyses only one comedy by Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.[144] In contrast, *L'Étourdi* (1658), *Le Sicilien* (1667) and *Les Fourberies du Scapin* (1671) have largely been dismissed as insubstantial farces by *Moliéristes*, possibly as a result of Boileau's well-known complaint about the latter play:

> Dans ce sac ridicule où Scapin s'enveloppe,
> Je ne reconnais plus l'auteur du *Misanthrope*.[145]

Nevertheless, it is in these plays that we discover Molière's concept of otherness.

At this point, it is vital to establish that Molière's notion of the Orient is very different from the modern conception. Whereas we generally identify China and the Far East with the Orient today, it is by no means a stable and unchanging entity. Not only does its geographical definition vary from country to country, but it has also evolved over time

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[143] Homi Bhabha, *op. cit.*,; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[144] Jean Serroy, 'Molière méditerranéen' in Gionvanni Dotoli, (ed.), *Les Méditerranées du XVII^e siècle: Actes du VI^e colloque du Centre International de Rencontres sur le XVII^e siècle*, Biblio 17, No. 137 (Tübingen: Narr, 2002), pp. 219-230; Elizabeth Woodrough, '*Cantate, Ballate, Ridete*: Molière's response to the threat of ceremonial overkill in the age of Louis XIV' in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies* 25 (2003), pp. 169-82; Michèle Longingo, *Orientalism in French Classical Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[145] Boileau, *Art poétique,* III, ll. 399-400.

and it was actually the Ottoman Empire rather than China which represented the Orient for seventeenth-century audiences.[146] While the Turks were regarded as hostile enemies of Christianity at the beginning of the seventeenth century, they were often viewed more positively during the reign of Louis XIV, a paradox highlighted by Dotoli: 'D'un côté, 'Europe combat l'Islam, de l'autre elle cherche et réalise des rapports commerciaux et diplomatiques solides avec lui.'[147] For example, the French renewed agreements with the Ottoman Empire in 1604, 1671 and 1673, while the Turkish embassy was founded in Paris in 1669, the same year that Louis XIV welcomed Soliman Aga to the French court.[148]

As Said argues, however, words such as Orient and Occident do not actually correspond to a geographical reality, but are derived from an artificial binary opposition of us/them, West/East or Christian/Muslim, with the underlying assumption of Western superiority.[149] Indeed early European interest in Islam was not the result of curiosity about other religions but proceeded from a fear of a powerful challenger to Christianity which was felt to belong to 'a part of the world – the Orient – counterposed imaginatively, geographically, and historically *against* Europe and the West'.[150] Orientalism, meanwhile, is far from being a disinterested study of the languages and history of the East. On the contrary, Said defines it as a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.'[151] According to Said: 'in the case of the Orient as a notion in currency in Britain, France and America, the idea derives to a great extent from the impulse not simply to describe, but also to dominate and somehow defend against it.' [152]

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[146] Longingo, *op. cit.*, p. 6; As Lisa Lowe notes, the Orient was believed to comprise Turkey, the Levant and the Arabian peninsula occupied by the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, while it also included North Africa in the nineteenth century and Central and South East Asia in the twentieth century. *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 7.
[147] G. Dotoli, 'La fin du centre' in *Les Méditerranées du XVII^e siècle...*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
[148] Dotoli, op. cit., p. 10; Alia Baccar, 'De Grenade à Tunis' in *Les Méditerranées du XVII^e siècle...*, *op. cit.*, p. 293.
[149] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 7.
[150] Said, *Afterward to the 1995 Printing, Orientalism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 344.
[151] *Ibid*, p. 3.
[152] *Ibid*, p. 331.

Nevertheless, the majority of theoreticians, including Said, trace the development of exoticism and orientalism to the expansion of colonialism in the late eighteenth century.[153] Whilst it is undoubtedly true that French colonialism flourished in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, its origins reach much further back to the establishment of the first French colonies in the seventeenth century.[154] These included Quebec (1608), Guyana (1609), Senegal (1626) and several Caribbean islands, among them St Christophe, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Barbados and Saint Domingue.[155] This territorial expansion was coupled with the growth of French diplomacy and commerce with the founding of La *Compagnie de la Chine* in 1660, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales* in 1665 and of *La Compagnie du Levant* in 1670, a phenomenon which was reflected by the popularity of exotic settings and characters amongst metropolitan writers and dramatists.[156] As Longingo stresses, early modern orientalism was more than a mere fashion. Rather, it was a method of understanding and controlling the 'Other' which prepared for the burgeoning orientalist movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: 'It provided the ideological underpinning necessary to justify eventual French hegemony and dominion over its colonial territories'.[157]

Even exoticism, which appears to be the antithesis of ethnocentric hostility towards the 'Other', is founded on misconceptions. Whilst it too is a means of describing regions and peoples which do not belong to Western civilisations or climates, it is generally regarded as a more positive form of orientalism.[158] Whereas nationalists regard their own country as superior to all others, proponents of exoticism prize other countries above their own. According to Todorov, exoticism dates from Homer's praise of the distant Abioi, whom he described as 'les plus justes des hommes' in the Iliad:

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[153] Said, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[154] Marie-Paule Ha, *Figuring the East: Segalen, Malraux, Duras and Barthes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 6.
[155] Longingo, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[156] Louise Dufrenoy, *L'Orient romanesque en France: 1704-1789* (Montreal: Editions Beauchemin, 1975), p. 18; see also Pierre Corneille, *Médée* (1635); Scarron, *Don Japhet d'Arménie* (1653); Tristan L'Hermite, *Osman* (1656); Racine, *Bajazet* (1672) for works inspired by exoticism.
[157] Longingo, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[158] Roger Mathé, *L'Exotisme* (Paris: Bordas, 1985), p. 13.

> Pour Homère, le pays le plus éloigné est le meilleur: telle est la «règle d'Homère», inversion exacte de celle d'Hérodote. Ici on chérit le lointain parce qu'il est lointain: il ne viendrait à l'esprit de personne d'idéaliser des voisins bien connus.[159]

Such fascination with an unknown and exciting 'ailleurs' was reflected by Montaigne's praise of cannibals as more noble than his own compatriots and Rabelais' allusion to 'diverses tapisseries, divers animaulx, poissons, oizeaulx et aultres marchandises exotiques et pérégrines' in the *Quart Livre* of 1548.[160]

Yet, this valorisation of other countries, simply because they are distant and different, is as much a cultural construct as orientalism. As Todorov argues, Montaigne's admiration for foreigners was not founded on his knowledge of other civilisations but rather represented an extension of his own beliefs: 'l'autre n'est en fait jamais perçu ni connu. Ce dont Montaigne fait l'éloge, ce ne sont pas des cannibales, mais de ses propres valeurs.'[161] It should also be emphasised that exoticism is not a neutral concept, but is closely bound to European colonial expansion, a link demonstrated by the fact that the development of literary exoticism coincided with the growth of French colonialism.[162]

To what extent can Molière's comedies be viewed, in the light of the above criteria, as early examples of orientalism or exoticism? His representation of the 'other' and particularly the Muslim Turk remains a subject of controversy amongst scholars. On the one hand, Jean Serroy claims that the Mediterranean world of *Le Sicilien* has little relation to reality, and instead forms part of a theatrical tradition in which ancient mythology is fused with the elaborate adventures of *romanesque* fiction and the joyful *mascarades* of *commedia dell'arte*.'[163] Similarly, Defaux emphasises the fantastic nature

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[159] Todorov, *op. cit.*, p. 356.
[160] Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre* in *Œuvres completes*, *op. cit.*, chapter II, p. 565, Montaigne, 'Des Cannibales' in *Essais*, *Livre I* , *op. cit.*, Chapter XXXI, p. 209: 'Nous les pouvons donc bien appeller barbares, eu esgard aux regles de la raison, mais non pas eu esgard à nous, qui les surpassons en toute sorte de barbarie. [...] Ils ne sont pas en debat de la conqueste de nouvelles terres: car ils jouyssent encore de cette uberté naturelle, qui les fournit sans travail et san peine, de toutes choses necessaries.'
[161] Todorov, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
[162] See M. Ha, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[163] Serroy, *op. cit.*, pp. 227, 229.

of Molière's representation of the exotic 'other', describing the Turkish ceremony as the triumph of fantasy over bourgeois reality.[164]

On the other hand, Longingo perceives *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* as an attempt to ridicule the Ottoman Empire following the disastrous visit to the French court of Soliman Aga, when a minor Turkish envoy was wrongly assumed to be an ambassador and was welcomed with a magnificent oriental reception. While Elizabeth Woodrough also disputes the idea that *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* is a harmless celebration of a fantasy world, she believes that it is Louis XIV rather than the Turks who are the objects of the dramatist's satire, arguing that Molière aims to ridicule the extravagant reception prepared for Soliman Aga:

> *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* can be seen as a fascinating example of early cross culturalism, which uses Muslim ceremonial dance to undermine French ceremonial practice.[165]

It is, however, doubtful whether Molière would have intended to ridicule his greatest protector and patron, the King.

Rather than view the plays as harmless fantasies or as subversive satires of the French crown, we would suggest that Molière actually parodies other nations, using stereotypes with which his audience would be familiar. In *L'Étourdi* and *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, the so-called 'Egyptians' or Bohemians are portrayed as shadowy and avaricious slave traders, and both Mascarille and Scapin must devise ingenious subterfuges in order to raise the funds needed to buy Célie and Zerbinette from their captors.[166] Their slaves too are viewed with suspicion and disdain owing to their origin. As Robert Kenny notes, Bohemians were considered to be dissolute travellers and thieves, a fear highlighted by Anselme in *L'Étourdi*.[167] He is adamant that Léandre should not marry Célie as her apparent origin as a Romanian means that she must be:

> un rebut de l'Égypte, une fille coureuse,

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[164] Defaux, *op. cit.*, p. 274.
[165] See Woodrough, *Cantate, Ballate...*, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
[166] *L'Étourdi ou les contretemps* (I, ii), *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (II, iv).
[167] Robert Kenny, 'Molière et ses Égyptiens' in *Le Nouveau Moliériste* II (1995), pp. 189-209, (p. 190).

De qui le noble emploi n'est qu'un métier de gueuse. (IV, iii)

Géronte is equally vociferous in his contempt for 'Egyptians' in *Les Fourberies de Scapin* when he attacks Zerbinette as 'une malavisée, une impertinente, de dire des injures à un homme d'honneur, qui saura lui apprendre à venir ici débaucher les enfants de famille' and refuses to accept his son's marriage to 'une fille inconnue, qui fait le métier de coureuse.' (III, iii & x)

Even Célie's suitors, Lélie and Léandre degrade her by describing her in monetary terms as an object of exchange. Lélie's main concern is to buy 'his' slave before his rival in love, while Léandre boasts that he is:

enflammé d'un objet qui n'a point de défaut,
Je viens de l'acheter moins encor qu'il ne vaut. (II, vii)[168]

Meanwhile, the only genuine Bohemians who speak are ridiculous fortune tellers in *Le Mariage forcé*, and they infuriate Sganarelle with their equivocal predictions that his wife will make him famous and their refusals to tell him whether he will be cuckolded: 'La peste soit des carognes, qui me laissent dans l'inquiétude.' (scene vi)

Having confirmed popular prejudices about 'Egyptians', Molière also exploits traditional stereotypes of the Ottoman 'Other' as uncivilised barbarians or sumptuously rich rulers, thereby reflecting and even contributing to anti-Turkish sentiment. As we have seen, Mascarille equates Turks with barbarity in *L'Étourdi*, while Sganarelle condemns his master as 'un enragé, un chien, un diable, un Turc' in *Dom Juan*. (I, i) Meanwhile, Lisette claims that the French should not treat women as badly as the Turks in *L'École des maris*:

Sommes-nous chez les Turcs pour renfermer les femmes?
Car on dit qu'on les tient esclaves en ce lieu,
Et que c'est pour cela qu'ils sont maudits de Dieu. (I, ii)

[168] 'Lélie – Enfin si tu ne mets Célie entre mes mains, songe au moins de Léandre à rompre les desseins, Qu'il ne puisse acheter avant moi cette belle.' (II, vii).

Finally, Molière also plays on conventional images of Turks as ruthless pirates in *Les Fourberies de Scapin* when Scapin claims that 'un jeune Turc de bonne mine' is threatening to kidnap his master unless he receives a huge ransom from Géronte:

Géronte – Ah! le pendard de Turc! M'assassiner de la façon! Mais que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère-là? [...]
Cinq cent écus! N'a-t-il point de conscience?
Scapin – Vraiment oui, de la conscience à un Turc! (II, vii)

The extent of the playwright's influence on contemporary attitudes is shown by Furetière's *Dictionnaire Universel* of 1690 which defines the word '*Turc*' by quoting from Molière's comedy: 'On dit [...] en voulant injurier un homme, le taxer de barbarie, de cruauté, d'irréligion, que c'est un *Turc*, un vrai *Turc*, un homme inexorable, qu'il voudrait autant avoir à faire à un *Turc*: il est Turc là-dessus.' (*L'Avare*: II, iv) Furetière went on to define a turquerie as a 'manière d'agir cruelle et barbare, comme celle dont usent les Turcs.'[169]

On the other hand, Molière also shows the fascination with Turkey as the land of elaborate luxury and splendour. Monsieur Jourdain, in particular, is overjoyed at the prospect of becoming a member of the Turkish nobility, and is enamoured with their exotic language: 'Voilà une langue admirable que ce turc! [...] voilà qui est merveilleux! *Cacaracamouchen*, «Ma chère âme». Dirait-on jamais cela? Voilà qui me confond.' (IV, iii) The Turk is no longer the enemy, but a representative of a rival culture, capable of matching France in magnificence. As Longingo argues, such splendour aroused an ambivalent response from the French who both admired and resented the opulence of the Ottoman Empire. Their response to this sense of insecurity was to mock and exaggerate Turkish customs.[170] In *Le Sicilien*, for example, Molière parodies excessive Turkish courtesy when Hali poses as a Turk and immediately begins bowing: 'Signor (avec la permission de la Signore), je vous dirai (avec la permission de la Signore), que je viens vous trouver (avec la permission de la Signore)'. He is himself ridiculed by Dom Pèdre

[169] Longingo, *op. cit.*, pp. 14 -15.
[170] *Ibid*, p. 143.

who is unimpressed by his '*cérémonies*' and deliberately stands between Hali and Isidore: 'Avec la permission de la Signore, passez un peu de ce côté.' (scene vii)

The dramatist develops his mockery of ceremonial greetings in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* where Covielle instructs Monsieur Jourdain in the intricacies of Turkish civility. Despite the fact that the valet has no more knowledge of genuine greetings than his eager pupil, he simply invents phrases which sound suitably mysterious and enticing:

> Cléonte – *Ambousahim oqui boraf, Iordina, salamalequi.*
>
> Covielle à M. Jourdain – C'est-à-dire: «Monsieur Jourdain, que votre coeur soit toute l'année comme un rosier fleuri.» Ce sont façons de parler obligeantes de ces pays-là. (IV, iv)

This caricature of Turkish customs culminates in the Turkish ceremony itself which is a burlesque fusion of various Christian and Muslim ceremonies, including coronation rituals and the Muslim holy dance, the Sema ceremony, during which the whirling dervishes represent the human being's spiritual ascent from the ego to Perfection.[171] It is not merely Monsieur Jourdain who is ridiculous because he is duped by Covielle's ruse. The Frenchmen disguised as dervishes are also designed to lampoon the religious ceremonies of the Ottoman Empire. During the *Première Entrée du ballet*, the Mufti is a figure of fun with his comic invocation of Mohammed: 'en faisant beaucoup de contorsions et de grimaces sans proférer une seule parole'. His costume is equally absurd with an elaborate turban 'd'une grosseur démesurée, et garni de bougies allumées à cinq ou six rangs', and even the Koran becomes an object of ridicule when it is placed on Monsieur Jourdain's back: 'le Mufti fait une seconde invocation burlesque, fronçant les sourcils et ouvrant la bouche, sans dire mot, puis parlant avec véhémence, tantôt radoucissant sa voix, tantôt le poussant d'un enthousiasme à faire trembler.' The dignity of religious ceremonies is further undermined by the Mufti's tendency to slap the Koran and turn the pages rapidly, while his cry of 'Hou' resembles the noise made by a gorilla. (IV, v)

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[171] See Woodrough, *Cantate...*, *op. cit*, pp. 177-8; see also Dr. Celalettin Celebi, *Sema, The Universal Movement*, www.sufism.org/society/sema1.html.

Above all, Molière parodies the Turkish language in *Le Sicilien* and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* by mixing genuine Arabic words with French, Italian and Spanish in a lingua franca known as 'sabir'.[172] According to Pierre Lerat, this caricature of Turkish is simply a nonsensical example of *fantaisie verbale*.[173] Yet, Molière does not invent a ridiculous language. Rather, he uses 'sabir', one of the earliest pidgin languages, which flourished from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries and which provided a practical means of communication for sailors and merchants owing to its simplified grammar and limited vocabulary.[174] Molière's Parisian audience may well have recognised this informal Mediterranean *esperanto*, thereby adding another level to the comedy of representing the language of the Ottoman Empire with a pidgin language. In *Le Sicilien*, Hali disguises Adraste's declaration of love for Isidore by concealing it in a mock-Turkish song which not only pokes fun at Dom Pèdre but also implies that the Turkish language itself is a source of comedy. Dom Pèdre, however, understands the underlying message of the song and parodies Hali's 'Turkish', threatening the slave with a beating:

> Mi ti non compara,
> Ma ti bastonnara,
> Si ti non andara. (scene viii)

Covielle develops Hali's linguistic ability in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* by posing as an interpreter for the Grand Turk's son:

> Cléonte – Bel-men.
> Covielle – Il dit que vous alliez vite avec lui vous préparer pour la cérémonie, afin de voir ensuite votre fille et de conclure le mariage.
> Monsieur Jourdain – Tant de choses en deux mots?
> Covielle – Oui la langue turque est comme cela, elle dit beaucoup en peu de paroles. (IV, iv)

Covielle is, however, no more skilled in the Turkish language than his eager pupil, particularly when he invents his own translation of the Turkish 'bil men', which literally

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[172] Longingo, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
[173] Pierre Lerat, *Le Ridicule et son expression dans les comédies françaises de Scarron à Molière* (Lille: Université de Lille III, 1980), p. 286.
[174] Alan D. Corré, *A Glossary of Lingua franca*, www.uwm.edu/~corre/franca/go.html.

means 'je ne sais pas'. By combining some genuine Arabic phonetic sounds and Ottoman words such as 'mustaph' and 'salamalequi', Covielle adds credibility to the rest of his speech which Longingo dismisses as 'Ottomanish-sounding gibberish': 'The sounds he produces (e.g Acciam croc soler [...]) make no more sense to him than to anyone else. But they sound authentic, and, since he is also the translator of these sounds, he enjoys complete control over the communication situation.'[175]

Significantly, this mockery of foreigners points to French envy of the opulence and military might of the Islamic Ottoman Empire, on which France was also dependent for trade. As Longingo notes, the French caricature of Ottoman culture should be seen as a defensive reaction to the Turkish 'colonization' of the 'French imaginary'. By emphasising their command but also their disparagement of the Turkish language, the French could combat the perceived threat represented by Turkish civilisation:

> But this same display of bravado, in this comedy, betrayed their uneasiness with, even their fear of, this formidable 'Other'.[176]

Yet, Molière's parody is not aimed solely at the foreign 'Other'. While the French audience identifies with what appears to be an attack on other nations using metropolitan France as a norm, Molière also turns his parody on the norm itself by directing his laughter at those who judge foreigners as inferior. In all four plays, the French too are a source of humour and Molière plays on national characteristics with Adraste's insistance in *Le Sicilien* that he does not conform to the usual image of French nobility: 'Tu sais que de tout temps je me suis plu à la peinture, et que parfois je manie le pinceau, contre la coutume de France, qui ne veut pas qu'un gentilhomme sache rien faire.' (scene ix) Similarly, the French love of *galanterie* is viewed in a comic light from the perspective of foreigners. Isidore immediately sees through Adraste's excessive flattery, claiming 'Tout cela sent la nation; et toujours Messieurs les Français ont un fonds de galanterie qui se répand partout', while Dom Pèdre is unimpressed by her praise of Frenchmen as the model of good manners:

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[175] Longingo, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
[176] *Ibid*, p. 141.

> Isidore – Et l'on doit demeurer d'accord que les Français ont quelque chose en eux de poli, de galant, que n'ont point les autres nations.
> Dom Pèdre – Oui, mais ils ont cela de mauvais qu'ils [...] s'attachent, en étourdis, à conter des fleurettes à tout ce qu'ils rencontrent. (scene xiii)

The French desire for superiority over other nations is also represented in a comic light when Adraste boasts that his compatriots can always surpass foreigners, even when it comes to the worst faults. Dom Pèdre, for example, is shocked by Adraste's apparent jealousy of his 'wife', Climène:

> Dom Pèdre – Tant de jalousie pour un Français? Je pensais qu'il n'y eût que nous qui en fussions capables.
> Adraste – Les Français excellent toujours dans toutes les choses qu'ils font; et quand nous nous mêlons d'être jaloux, nous le sommes vingt fois plus qu'un Sicilien. (scene xv)

Molière frequently subverts his audience's expectations by playing with familiar stereotypes. Far from conforming to traditional perceptions of Bohemians as immoral vagrants ('quoiqu'à leur nation bien peu de foi soit due'), Andrès is not dark-skinned 'et sent assez son bien', while the elevated language of the supposed 'Egyptians' in *L'Étourdi* betrays their nobility:

> Vous le savez, Célie, il n'est rien que mon coeur
> N'ait fait pour vous prouvez l'excès de son ardeur. (V, ii) [177]

By undermining such stereotypes, Molière challenges the hostility towards 'Egyptian' women who are suddenly welcomed as acceptable wives once their true origins are revealed.[178]

In fact, *L'Étourdi* and *Les Fourberies de Scapin* parody French and Italian literary conventions as much as the Turks or Bohemians. Mascarille is amused by Lélie's '*romanesque*' conviction that Célie must be a noblewoman, and ridicules the couple's

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[177] R. Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
[178] *L'Étourdi* (V, ix), *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (III, xi); see also Chapter Six, Part Three on Molière's young lovers.

excessive declarations of love when Lélie claims to have been wounded by Célie's 'célestes attraits':

> Lélie – Je mets toute ma gloire à chérir ma blessure, Et…
> Mascarille - Vous le prenez là d'un ton un peu trop haut:
> Ce style maintenant n'est pas ce qu'il nous faut. (I, iii)

Mascarille also pokes fun at the popularity of contemporary adventure stories by concocting a story about Turkish pirates, insisting that such tales are so common, Trufaldin will soon be convinced:

> C'est qu'en fait d'aventure il est très ordinaire
> De voir gens pris sur mer par quelque Turc corsaire,
> Puis être à leur famille à point nommé rendus, […]
> Pour moi, j'ai vu déjà cent contes de la sorte. (IV, i)

Molière also plays with the elaborate plots and improbable *dénouements* of *romanesque* fiction, during which long-lost children are miraculously reunited with their parents.[179] After lamenting his inability to perform miracles, but nevertheless promising to 'remuer terre et ciel', Mascarille gives an ironic commentary on the role of chance in overcoming their 'fâcheux obstacles':

> Mascarille – Grande, grande nouvelle, et succès surprenant, […]
> La fin d'une vraie et pure comédie […]
> Par un coup imprévu des destins les plus doux,
> Vos voeux sont couronnés, et Célie est à vous. (V, ix & xi)

Moreover, the dramatist parodies the elevated language of tragedy when Mascarille refers to Célie as 'l'esclave idolâtrée' and Pandolfe is impressed by the valet's scheme 'pour avoir cette esclave funeste.' (I, vii) The language of the young lovers in both plays is equally extravagant. In *L'Étourdi*, Mascarille's deliberate attempt to cast doubt on Célie's virtuous character leads Léandre to claim 'd'un coup étonnant ce discours m'assassine', while Lélie insists that it is an 'atteinte mortelle […] D'entendre mal parler de ma divinité.' (III, ii) Similarly, Octave portrays himself as a tragic victim in *Les Fourberies*

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[179] *L'Étourdi* (V, x); *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (III, vii), (III, xi).

de Scapin: 'Ah! mon pauvre Scapin, je suis perdu, je suis désespéré, je suis le plus malheureux de tous les hommes.' (I, ii)

It must also be stressed that in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, the metropolitan audience complicitly laughs with the hero, Scapin, who proves himself the intellectual superior of his master and who dupes the overbearing fathers Argante and Géronte. Yet, this hero of French farce actually represents the 'other', both socially through his status as a valet and ethnically as a development of a *zanni* from *commedia dell'arte*. Even more significant is the fact that the oppressive fathers in all four plays bear a striking resemblance to French bourgeois fathers in Molière's other comedies, in spite of their supposed origins as Italians or Sicilians. Thus, what seems to be foreign and 'other' proves to be familiar. Dom Pèdre may appear to conform to popular caricatures of Sicilians ('jaloux comme un tigre et, si vous voulez, comme un diable'), yet his choleric jealousy and his efforts to sequester Isidore are reminiscent of Arnolphe:

> Dom Pèdre - Mon amour vous veut toute à moi; [...] et tous les soins qu'on me voit prendre ne sont que pour fermer tout accès aux galants, et m'assurer la possession d'un coeur dont je ne puis souffrir qu'on me vole la moindre chose. (scene vi)[180]

Argante, meanwhile, resembles Argan in his determination to ignore his better nature when Scapin is certain that he will never disinherit his son:

> Scapin – Mon Dieu, je vous connais, vous êtes bon naturellement.
>
> Argante – Je ne suis point bon, et je suis méchant, quand je veux. (I, iv)[181]

Above all, the Italian Géronte proves himself to be the miserly double of Harpagon. In an echo of the famous scene from Cyrano de Bergerac's *Le Pédant joué*, he is vociferous in

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[180] See also *L'Ecole des femmes:*

> Arnolphe – Je l'ai mise à l'écart, comme il faut tout prévoir;
> Dans cette autre maison où nul ne me vient voir. (I, i); [...]
> Mais il est bien fâcheux de perdre ce qu'on aime (III, v).

[181] In *Le Malade imaginaire*, Toinette also tries in vain to appeal to Argan's conscience when he threatens to force Angélique to join a nunnery:

> Toinette – La tendresse paternelle vous prendra.
> Argan – Elle ne me prendra point. [...]
> Tointette – Mon Dieu! Je vous connais, vous êtes bon naturellement.
> Argan, *avec emportement.* – Je ne suis pas bon, et je suis méchant quand je veux. (I, v).

his curses of the Turkish pirate as 'un scélérat, [...] un infâme...un homme sans foi, un voleur.'[182] Nevertheless, he proves his own inhumanity as his immediate reaction on hearing that his son has been kidnapped is not concern for his son's fate but fury at the size of the ransom: 'Comment! Diantre, cinq cent écus!' By constantly appealing to a father's natural affection for his son, Scapin emphasises that it is the heartless Géronte rather than the Turkish pirate who is the true barbarian: 'Hélas! mon pauvre maître, peut-être que je ne te verrai de ma vie, et qu'à l'heure que je parle, on t'emmène esclave en Alger! Mais le Ciel sera témoin que j'ai fait pour toi tout ce que j'ai pu, et que si tu manques à être racheté, il n'en faut accuser que le peu d'amitié d'un père.' (II, vii)

Nor is *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* purely designed to mock the Ottoman Turks. It also highlights the comic potential of language barriers with Monsieur Jourdain's doomed attempt to communicate with a 'foreigner' by simply repeating the same phrases, the comic response being provoked by the audience's perception of the so-called foreigners being Frenchmen in disguise:

> *(À Cléonte) Strouf, strif, strof, straf.* Monsieur est un *grande Segnore*, *grande Segnore*, *grande Segnore*; et Madame une *granda Dama*, *granda Dama.* (*Voyant qu'il ne se fait point entendre.) Ahi*! *(À Cléonte, montrant Dorante.)* Lui, Monsieur, lui, *Mamamouchi* français, et madame, *Mamamouchie* française. Je ne puis pas parler plus clairement. (V, iv)

Finally, even Covielle is absurd with his inventive translations. While Michele Longingo argues that the playwright is mocking the Turkish language, his comedy is also aimed at French interpreters, such as Laurent d'Arvieux, who may not always have provided accurate translations, especially as they were often working for their own interests.[183] Covielle very nearly overreaches himself with his translation of Cléonte's bel-men, and even Monsieur Jourdain's suspicions are aroused: 'Tant de choses en deux mots?' (IV, iv) Consequently, Molière is not merely suggesting that the Turkish language is nothing

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[182] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Le Pédant joué* in *Œuvre completes* ed. André Blanc (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), (II, iv) pp. 96-102.
[183] Longingo, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-1.

more than gibberish but is also showing how easy it is to impress, and deceive others with the sound of a foreign language.

Molière offers, then, a more nuanced form of orientalism than has often been supposed. While he undoubtedly parodies the Bohemians and Turks, he also challenges and undermines the very prejudices which he reflects in his comedies, thereby destabilising the fixed images of otherness which Homi Bhabha stresses are essential for the formation of stereotypes about the Orient: 'An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological constuction of otherness. [...] Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.'[184] Therefore, Molière's parody is double-edged and is also aimed at the French themselves. Far from being a xenophobic defender of French superiority, Molière blurs the distinctions between self/other or centre/periphery which are central to orientalism.

[184] Bhabha, *op. cit.* p. 70.

Chapter Four: Molière and Religion

As we have seen in the previous chapters, Molière's humour is never one-sided or unitary. On the contrary, he not only parodies the language of 'outsiders', whether they be comical provincials or ambitious *parvenus*, but he also challenges the concept of a single linguistic norm by inviting his audience to laugh at the speech of supposedly superior Parisians and aristocrats. Far from representing a single viewpoint, Molière's language is infinitely more complex; reflecting but also overturning stereotypes. In the following chapters, we will further explore the double-edged nature of Molière's parody by focusing on his treatment of religious and educational language in the light of Bakhtin's theory of monologic and dialogic discourse. While Molière's would-be preachers and pedagogues such as Orgon, Arnolphe and Philaminte attempt to impose a sole voice of authority on their interlocutors, their monologism is continually undermined, both by the other characters and by the dramatist, who anticipates Bakhtin's exploration of the comic ambiguity of all utterances.[185]

The aim of this chapter is to re-appraise Molière's representation of sacred language in three of his most controversial comedies: *L'École des femmes* (1662), *Dom Juan* (1665) and *Tartuffe* (1669). The majority of *Moliéristes* have interpreted the latter two plays as savage satires of the established Church, and, above all, of the *Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement*. Christopher Braider regards Tartuffe as *une pièce à clef*, in which the figure of Tartuffe is designed to mock the *Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement*, Madame Pernelle the pious Anne d'Autriche, and Orgon the King himself.[186] Kathleen Wine shares this perception of *Tartuffe* as political, describing the play as an 'acrid satire' but she believes that Molière used the original version of *Le Tartuffe* to celebrate the 'courtly hedonism' of which the comedy formed a part during *Les Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée*.[187] Meanwhile,

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[185] See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 202: 'For the word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice.'

[186] Braider, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

[187] Kathleen Wine, '*Le Tartuffe* and *Les Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée*' in *Theatrum Mundi ...., op. cit.*, pp. 139-45, (pp. 142-44): 'If *La Princesse d'Élide* affirmed courtly values through imitation, *Le Tartuffe* did so

Grimm, Albanese and Cairncross regard Dom Juan as a sympathetic and intelligent atheist to be admired rather than abhorred, a view echoed by Catherine Spencer who presents the 'épouseur à toutes mains' as a hero of modernity.[188]

It is certainly true that such assessments of the plays as satires of Christianity reflect the judgements of many of Molière's contemporaries, despite the fact that the playwright denied any accusation that he was attempting to undermine the Church, and insisted that he aimed only to entertain his audience with 'des peintures ridicules' of hypocrisy.[189] Nonetheless, *Tartuffe* was perceived to be a threat to the Catholic Church, even before its first performance, when the *Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement* ensured that it was banned. In 1664, *La Gazette* also claimed the play was 'absolument injurieuse à la religion et capable de produire de très dangereux effets', a conclusion shared by the curé, Pierre Roulès, who held Molière responsible for undermining the authority of *directeurs de conscience*.[190] Not only was the playwright accused of failing to distinguish true and false piety with sufficient clarity but he was also reprimanded for daring to discuss religious devotion on stage.[191] The following year, *Dom Juan* too was vilified for its perceived impiety, above all by the Sieur de Rochemont who accused the dramatist of being a 'diable incarné' in his role as Sganarelle:

> Qui peut supporter la hardiesse d'un farceur qui a fait plaisanterie de la religion, qui tient école du libertinage et qui rend la majesté de Dieu le jouet [...] d'un

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through denunciation. [...] For the repressive elders of the bourgeois comedy are nightmare versions of their wish-fulfilling counterparts in the *comédie galante*.'

[188] Albanese, 'Hypocrisie et dramaturgie dans *Dom Juan*' in *Le Nouveau Moliériste*, II (1995), p. 131, 'Dynamisme social...', *op. cit.*, pp. 50-61; Cairncross, *Molière: bourgeois...*, op. cit., pp. 16, 23, 29; J. Grimm, *Molière Zweite Auflage* (Stuttgart, Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2002), p. 155; C. Spencer, '*Dom Juan*: le rendez-vous de Samarkande' in *Le Labyrinthe de Versailles: parcours critique de Molière à la Fontaine*, ed. Martine Debaisieux (Amsterdam, Atlanta GA: Éditions Rodopi, 1998), p. 102.

[189] See the *Premier Placet au Roi* of 1664: 'Le devoir de la comédie étant de corriger les hommes en les divertissant, j'ai cru que, dans l'emploi où je me trouve, je n'avais rien de mieux à faire que d'attaquer par des peintures ridicules les vices de mon siècle.'

[190] See La Mothe Le Vayer, *Lettre sur la comédie de l'imposteur*, ed. R. McBride (Durham: University of Durham, 1994), p. 3; P. F Butler, '*Tartuffe* et la direction spirituelle au XVII^{e} siècle' in Cairncross, *L'Humanité... op. cit.*, pp. 57-69 (p. 59).

[191] Braider, *op. cit.*, p. 270: In his *Traité de la comédie*, Pierre Nicole reflected the traditional Christian belief that the theatre was immoral: 'Ainsi la comédie par sa nature est une école & un exercice de vice, puisqu'elle oblige necessairement à exciter en soi-même des passions vicieuses.' His view was shared by Lamoignon who claimed 'ce n'est pas au théâtre à se mêler de prêcher l'Évangile.'; See Dandrey, *L'Esthéthique... op. cit.*, p. 77.

> athée qui s'en rit et d'un valet, plus impie que son maître, qui en fait rire les autres?[192]

Nevertheless, these polemical readings fail to grasp the comic depth of the plays, which are drawn as much from literary and farce tradition as they are from contemporary events.[193] *Tartuffe* may allude to the fashion for *directeurs de conscience* and the charitable work of the *Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement*, but it also forms part of a popular theatrical *topos* of cunning hypocrites who dupe their credulous hosts. Indeed, there are striking similarities between the language of *Tartuffe* and that of Flaminio Scala's *Pedante* (1611) and Scarron's *Les Hypocrites* (1655). Dom Juan is equally indebted to theatrical models, and draws on Dorimon's *Le Festin de pierre* (1659) for many of its dialogues, including Dom Juan's encomium of infidelity and his dispute with Dom Louis. This suggests that Molière was not simply reacting to corruption in his own society, as many scholars have claimed, but was also continuing a literary convention.[194]

By viewing *Dom Juan*, *Tartuffe* and *L'École des femmes* as satirical attacks on Christianity and the Church, critics have largely ignored the multiple layers of parodic language in all three plays. On the one hand, Tartuffe and Dom Juan themselves may be regarded as parodists who imitate but also ridicule religious language in order to discredit it. By doing so, their speech acts as a mirror which serves to expose the hypocrisy and comic blindness of those around them. Yet, this does not entail that they act as the author's representatives, as Albanese and Cairncross have asserted. By identifying the author with the viewpoint of a single character, *Moliéristes* run the risk of underestimating the breadth of Molière's comic vision. Far from using Tartuffe and Dom Juan to attack sacred language and Christianity, the dramatist mocks their misappropriation of the language of devotion and emphasises that they are as arrogant

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[192] Sieur de Rochement, 'Observations sur une comédie de Molière intitulée Le Festin de pierre' in Molière, *Dom Juan ou le Festin de Pierre,* ed. Guy Leclerc, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[193] See K. Willis Wolfe, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-5 for an analysis of *Dom Juan*'s links to *commedia* tradition.

[194] See Bourqui, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-8, 254-62, 376. In *Les Hypocrites*, Montafur is also a noted glutton, while his mock-confession is very similar to that of Tartuffe (III, vi):

> Je suis le méchant, je suis le pêcheur, je suis celui qui n'ai jamais rien fait d'agréable aux yeux de Dieu. Pensez-vous, parce que vous me voyez vêtu en homme de bien, que je n'aie pas été toute ma vie un larron, le scandale des autres et la perdition de moi-même?

and ridiculous as those whom they criticise, with Dom Juan in particular resembling the authoritarian *dévots* whom he ridicules.

Bakhtin's theory of parody as 'double-voiced discourse' gives valuable insight into an analysis of this double-edged linguistic humour. Although he has often been characterised as a Marxist critic, Bakhtin actually opposes all forms of unitary and absolute language, including that of Marxist theory, and instead favours the multiple voices of parody which he defines as 'one of the most ancient and widespread forms for representing the direct word of another'. Bakhtin stresses that a parodist arouses expectation in his audience through the imitation of a familiar text or speech style, an expectation which he then subverts by producing an incongruous and comic contrast with the original.[195] As he argues in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*:

> The author may make use of someone else's discourse for his own purposes, by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own. Such a discourse, in keeping with its task, must be perceived as belonging to someone else. In one discourse, two semantic intentions appear, two voices.

In marked contrast to pastiche, in which the two voices are designed to merge completely and become one, Bakhtin stresses that parody is inherently dialogic or 'double-directed', and the audience is always intended to decipher two distinct and opposing voices within a single utterance:

> The second voice, once having made its home in the other's discourse, clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims.[196]

Discourse thus becomes 'an arena of battle between two voices' and the audience is well aware that the second voice constitutes a higher semantic authority.[197]

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[195] Bakhtin, 'The Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 51.
[196] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's... op. cit.*, pp. 189, 193.
[197] Gary Saul Morson, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

Nonetheless, Bakhtin himself claimed that his theory of language as internally dialogic could not be applied to drama, which he dismissed as essentially monolithic:

> Pure drama strives toward a unitary language [...] Dramatic dialogue is determined by a collision between individuals who exist within the limits of a single world and a single unitary language. [...] Everywhere there is only one face – the linguistic face of the author, answering for every word as if it were his own.[198]

Although he did acknowledge that 'to a certain extent comedy is an exception to this', Bakhtin favoured the novel rather than drama as the site of dialogic language.[199] We will attempt to challenge his rejection of theatrical discourse as monologic and demonstrate that his theory of parody as double-voiced discourse can shed new light on Molière's imitation of sacred speech. By mimicking but also distorting the language of familiar Biblical passages and contemporary theological texts, the playwright engages his audience in a dialogue, and arouses laughter through the comic incongruity between the original texts and his parody.

Tartuffe, Dom Juan and the Parody of Sacred Language

Firstly, both Tartuffe and Dom Juan can be regarded as parodists because they imitate, but also mock, the language of devotion, by adding a second subversive subtext. Tartuffe has frequently been perceived as a ridiculous buffoon by critics, most notably by Auerbach who insists that the hypocrite has little flair for dissimulation:

> [Tartuffe] has not the slightest talent for piety, not even for a feigned piety. [...] Tartuffe is not at all the embodiment of an intelligent self-disciplined hypocrite, but a coarse-grained fellow with strong crude instincts.[200]

Auerbach has, however, underestimated Tartuffe's linguistic virtuosity. Whilst there is certainly a comic contrast between his professions of asceticism and the physical reality ('gros et gras, le teint frais, la bouche vermeille'), he is far more than a simple fool who finds his mask of piety slipping unconsciously as soon as his passions are enflamed. In

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[198] Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 405, 297; see also *Problems of Dostoevsky's... op. cit.*, p. 286; Richard Goodkin, 'Molière and Bakhtin...', *op. cit.*, pp. 145-156: Goodkin provides an excellent analysis of the dialogic nature of language in *L'École des femmes*.

reality, Tartuffe is a skilled orator and rhetorician who misappropriates religious imagery in order to couch his sexual advances to Elmire in apparently innocent language:

> L'amour qui nous attache aux beautés éternelles
> N'étouffe pas en nous l'amour des temporelles. [...]
> Ce m'est, je le confesse, une audace bien grande
> Que d'oser de ce coeur vous adresser l'offrande. (III, iii)

Cloonan argues that Tartuffe's passion for Elmire is merely an artifice designed 'to alleviate a deep-seated sense of life's futility.'[201] Nevertheless, this pessimistic depiction of Tartuffe as a tragic victim of *ennui* is belied by the hypocrite's comical parody of the Christian confessional during which Molière highlights the *disconvenance* between Tartuffe's image as a *dévot* and his overriding desire for Elmire. Tartuffe fuses the language of *galanterie* ('ferveur', 'l'amour des temporelles'), and spiritual devotion ('zèle', l. 914) in order to declare his very earthly passion for Elmire in the most pious terms: 'je le confesse', 'l'offrande', 'En vous est mon espoir, mon bien, ma quiétude.'[202] By employing religious language in a secular context instead of declaring his lust directly, Tartuffe is able to create a dual message within a single speech. On one level, he can ensure his safety by pretending to appeal to Heaven, whilst on a deeper level adding an underlying request for sexual favours which both Elmire and the audience are intended to decipher. As Bakhtin argues, parody always has a two-fold direction, and Tartuffe succeeds in conveying two apparently conflicting messages within the same utterance:

> It frequently happens that even one and the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction and, consequently, the word has two contradictory meanings, two accents.[203]

Tartuffe's insistence to Elmire that he is no saint highlights these multiple meanings within an apparently univocal utterance:

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[199] Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', *op. cit.*, p. 405.
[200] Auerbach, *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1957), pp. 317-8.
[201] Cloonan, *op. cit.*, p. 314.
[202] See Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-58 (p. 150-1).
[203] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination... op. cit.*, p. 305.

Ah! pour être dévot, je n'en suis pas moins homme [...]

Après tout, je ne suis pas un ange.

Tartuffe mimics the Christian image of man as a fallen sinner, but he also misapplies the language of devotion in order to communicate his sexual passion for Elmire. Ironically, Tartuffe's claim that he is not an angel adds a third layer of comedy on the part of the dramatist, as the hypocrite unconsciously reveals his true nature by admitting that he is anything but a heavenly messenger.

Above all, Tartuffe exemplifies Bakhtin's notion of parody as double-voiced discourse during his mock-confession to Orgon. Rather than conceal his true nature with deceit, Tartuffe uses honesty to deceive Orgon and conceal his iniquity:

Oui, mon frère, je suis un méchant, un coupable,

Un malheureux pécheur, tout plein d'iniquité,

Le plus grand scélérat qui jamais ait été. (III, vi)

Paradoxically, by adopting such hyperbolic language to condemn himself as a sinner, ('chaque instant de ma vie est chargé de souillures', 'un amas de crimes et d'ordures', 'mortifier', 'pour ma punition'), Tartuffe actually constructs a masterful self-defence. Whilst ostensibly designed to persuade Orgon to banish his *directeur* as a criminal, Tartuffe's candid 'confession' subverts the audience's expectations by using the language of sin and divine punishment to portray himself as a humble ascetic:

Tout le monde me prend pour un homme de bien;

Mais la vérité pure est que je ne vaux rien. (III, vi)[204]

Dom Juan proves to be an equally skilled orator and parodist, but he is even more extreme than Tartuffe in his subversion of religious language. Whereas Tartuffe simply uses it as a convenient tool with which to deceive Orgon and Madame Pernelle, Dom Juan aims to discredit spiritual language itself by exposing it as a hypocritical mask. As Dandrey argues, Dom Juan derides the religious beliefs of his adversaries but he does not

[204] See Michael Hawcroft, *Rhetoric: Readings in French Literature* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 93.

seek to replace their faith with any coherent rational *credo*.[205] Rather, his linguistic skill is such that he introduces doubt and a second conflicting meaning into every apparently unified utterance, thereby challenging his opponents' notion of language as essentially monologic and incontestable.[206] This 'défi linguistique' is exemplified by Dom Juan's initial encounter with Done Elvire during which he mocks her piety by assuming the linguistic mask of a penitent.[207] Instead of accepting Elvire's request that he excuse his desertion with a lie, Dom Juan feigns remorse in a mock-confession of his 'contrition' at luring her from the nunnery:

> Je vous avoue, Madame, que je n'ai point le talent de dissimuler, et que je porte un coeur sincère. [...] Le repentir m'a pris, et j'ai craint le courroux céleste. [...] Voudriez-vous, Madame, vous opposer à une si sainte pensée, et que j'allasse, en vous retenant, me mettre le Ciel sur les bras, que par... (I, iii)

As Braider notes, Dom Juan has no intention of deceiving Elvire with his performance of piety.[208] Rather, he misuses the language of contrition and divine punishment ('un coeur sincère', 'le repentir', 'le courroux céleste') in order to justify his insatiable lust, and, more importantly, to mock what he perceives to be his principal opponent: *le Ciel*:

> Elvire – le même Ciel dont tu te joues me saura venger de ta perfidie.
>
> Dom Juan – Sganarelle, le Ciel! (I, iii)

Dom Juan presents himself as Heaven's greatest adversary, and his hostility towards the language of religion is even more evident during his encounter with *Le Pauvre*. While the mendicant emphasises his spiritual role in praying for others, the Dom perverts his seemingly straightforward declarations with the addition of a subversive subtext designed to expose the poor man's self-interest:

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[205] Dandrey, *Dom Juan, ou la critique...*, p. 111.

[206] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic...*, *op. cit.*, p. 55; see also Shoshana Felman, *Le scandale du corps parlant: Don Juan avec Austin ou la séduction en deux langues* (Paris: Seuil, 1980): as Felman stresses, Elvire, Dom Louis and Le Pauvre all regard language as constative, and as a means of transmitting and confirming truth. Dom Juan, on the other hand, perceives speech as purely performative and his chief concern is his ability to manipulate his interlocutors through language.

[207] Giovanni Dotoli, 'La langue du «Dom Juan» de Molière' in *Studi di letteratura francese*, 26 (2001), pp. 127-42 (p. 128).

[208] Braider, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

> Le Pauvre – [...] je ne manquerai pas de prier le Ciel qu'il vous donne toute sorte de biens.
>
> Dom Juan – Eh! prie-le qu'il te donne un habit, sans te mettre en peine des affaires des autres. (III, ii)

Dom Juan's assertion that he is giving le Pauvre alms 'pour l'amour de l'humanité' has often been interpreted as a sign of his compassion, most notably by Grimm and Pommier.[209] The latter views Dom Juan's request that le Pauvre swear in exchange for a *louis d'or* as an act of charity and maintains that the *grand seigneur* hopes to free the poor man from his misguided faith in God: 's'il veut faire jurer le Pauvre, c'est pour l'amener à réagir, à secouer les préjugés qui l'asservissent. Le Pauvre n'est pas pour lui une âme pure qu'il a envie de pervertir, c'est un pauvre bougre, victime de sa crédulité, qu'il essaie d'éclairer.'[210]

In fact, these portrayals of Dom Juan as a humanitarian are deeply flawed as he has no intention of benefiting those less fortunate than himself and merely wishes to exert his power over the wretched beggar by compelling him to swear. In converting the devotional phrase 'pour l'amour de Dieu' into 'pour l'amour de l'humanité', Dom Juan seeks to undermine Le Pauvre's faith in Christian charity and the efficacy of prayer, whilst also implying that he is more generous than Heaven.[211]

Dom Juan's hypocritical conversion for the benefit of his father represents the culmination of his double-voiced discourse. His purported dismay at his past iniquity ('je regarde avec horreur le long aveuglement où j'ai été et les désordres criminels de la vie que j'ai menée') echoes Dom Louis' own attack on his son's wickedness ('cette suite continuelle de méchantes affaires' IV, iv), and adds a second subversive layer of meaning to his father's seemingly unitary speech. While Dom Louis is convinced by his wayward

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[209] Grimm, *op. cit.*, p. 115: 'Wenn Dom Juan dem Armen schließlich 'pour l'amour de l'humanité' ein Almosen gibt, verbirgt sich hinter dieser Formel eine nicht christlich begründete Mitmenschlichkeit, die bereits ein aufklärerisches Humanitätsideal antizipiert.' ('When Dom Juan finally gives the poor man alms 'pour l'amour de l'humanité', this phrase conceals a humanitarian concern which is not founded on Christian principles and which already anticipates an Enlightenment humanitarian ideal.') (my translation).

[210] Pommier, 'La 'scène du Pauvre': scène sacrilège ou scène édifiante?' in *Le Nouveau Moliériste*, IV-V (1998-9), pp. 301-21 (p. 316).

[211] See Pommier, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

son's promise that he has indeed repented, Dom Juan communicates an underlying and contrary message to the audience through his decidedly ambiguous profession of faith: 'je prétends en profiter comme je dois, faire éclater aux yeux du monde un soudain changement de vie.' (V, i) By alluding to the language of appearances and profit, Dom Juan intimates to the audience that his conversion is nothing more than an accomplished performance, whilst simultaneously persuading Dom Louis that his speech is utterly sincere.

Even more significant is Dom Juan's claim that he is not alone in perverting religious language. Rather, he insists that he is merely conforming to the rest of society by adopting the mask of a penitent, and his imagery of theatrical performance and disguise ('le personage d'homme de bien est le meilleur de tous les personages qu'on puisse jouer aujourd'hui', 'cet habit respecté', 'le manteau de la religion', 'cet abri favorable') imply that the religious devotion of others is little more than a convenient façade: 'c'est là le vrai moyen de faire impunément tout ce que je voudrai.' (V, i) Ironically, he portrays himself as a moralist whose duplicity is more sincere than the language of the 'faiseurs de remontrances' because he alone admits to wearing a mask of hypocrisy.

Parody as subversive?

This parody of religious language has often been construed as an attack on genuine religious faith. Henry Phillips, for example, argues that Sganarelle's incompetent defence of Christianity makes 'belief untenable' in *Dom Juan*, while religion acts as a disruptive force in *Tartuffe*, as much because of Orgon's 'reprehensible' credulity as because of Tartuffe's hypocrisy: 'After all, as Raymond Picard has convincingly demonstrated, many of the aspects of moral teaching ridiculed in the play are very close to the real thing and only slight exaggerations of what may be found in a number of authentic sources.'[212] In actual fact, Molière does not ridicule religious faith itself, but only the distortion of sacred language by those characters who seek to justify their domination of others by

[212] H. Phillips, 'Authority and Order in Molière's Comedy' in *Nottingham French Studies*, 33 vol. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 12-19 (pp. 14 -15).

claiming to represent the voice of Heaven. Madame Pernelle, Orgon and Dom Juan's adversaries can be regarded as exponents of Bakhtinian monologism *avant la lettre* because they present their speech as incontestable and beyond reproach. Bakhtin emphasises the dictatorial nature of such monologic language:

> Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities. [...] Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force. [...] Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate* word.[213]

In both plays, it is the double-voiced discourse of Tartuffe and Dom Juan which acts as a mirror, revealing the comic disparity between the ostensibly disinterested language and the true intentions of their interlocutors.[214]

Firstly, Tartuffe's fusion of sacred and profane language sheds light on the supposedly pious speech of Madame Pernelle and Orgon. They are by no means intended to represent genuine *dévots* as Phillips suggests, but are instead caricatures of religious zealots who delight in finding fault with others, but fail to recognise their own shortcomings.[215] Madame Pernelle may echo contemporary moralists such as St Francois de Sales and Du Bosc in her concerns about the dangers of *divertissements*, but she distorts and exaggerates their teaching by condemning all pleasure as inherently sinful:

> Ces visites, ces bals, ces conversations
> Sont du malin esprit toutes inventions. (I, i)[216]

Consequently, it is misleading to argue that Molière aimed to attack sincere *dévots*. Madame Pernelle's refusal to listen to any other viewpoint and her constant use of imperatives ('Taisez-vous et songez aux choses que vous dites') and verbs of volition

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[213] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-3.
[214] See J. Serroy, 'Tartuffe, ou l'autre' in *L'Autre au dix-septième siècle* (Paris: Biblio 17, 1999), pp. 153-161 (p. 159): 'L'altérité est un miroir réfléchissant, où chacun se découvre par ses propres réactions.'
[215] Madame Pernelle castigates Cléante for preaching 'des maximes de vivre' and also accuses Dorine of talking too much, in spite of the fact that she is guilty of exactly the same faults.
[216] See Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 147: De Sales regarded pastimes as 'indifférentes de leur nature' and Du Bosc insisted that 'j'attaque ni les jeux ni les autres divertissements permis, mais seulement l'excès et le désordre qui s'y rencontrent.'

('vous le devez entendre') demonstrate that her ostensibly selfless defence of Christian morality is in fact an attempt to exert her power over the household:

> Damis – Mais…
> Madame Pernelle – Vous êtes un sot en trois letters, mon fils; […]
> Elmire – Mais, ma mère…
> Madame Pernelle – Ma bru, qu'il ne vous en déplaise,
> Votre conduite en tout est tout à fait mauvaise. (I, i)

Orgon goes even further in his perversion of the language of devotion. His assertions that Tartuffe has taught him to regard everyone else as 'fumier' and that he would happily witness the death of his family, are reminiscent of the Gospel command to 'haïr son père' in order to follow Christ (Luc, 14: 26) and St Paul's declaration that 'j'estime tout comme du fumier afin de gagner le Christ.' (Philippiens, 3:8) Yet, by misinterpreting the Biblical exhortation to love Christ above all else as an order to despise others, Orgon introduces a second, contradictory message into his profession of piety:

> Qui suit bien ses leçons goûte une paix profonde,
> Et comme du fumier regarde tout le monde. […]
> Et je verrais mourir frère, enfants, mère et femme,
> Que je m'en soucierais autant que de cela. (I, v)

Orgon also misappropriates spiritual language by using it to sanction his linguistic absolutism: 'Qu'il faut qu'on m'obéisse et que je suis le maître.' (III, vi) He equates God's will with his own desire for domination, claiming that his endeavour to control Mariane's speech through imperatives and verbs of volition merely reflects his longing 'de faire ce que le Ciel voudra' (I, v): 'vous devez', 'je veux que cela soit une vérité', 'je prétends', 'il sera votre époux, j'ai résolu cela.' (II, i) Indeed, he interprets any opposition to his authority as proof of atheism: 'Mon frère, ce discours sent le libertinage.' (I, v) Ironically, Orgon's apparently univocal speech is as 'internally dialogic' as that of

Tartuffe as he inadvertently communicates his verbal despotism to the audience whilst professing to be a model of Christian charity.[217]

The same is true of Arnolphe who misuses the language of sin and eternal damnation to sanction his imposition of a single, incontrovertible voice of authority on Agnès. Not only does he distort the Ten Commandments with his *Maximes du Mariage* in order to secure Agnès' unquestioning obedience ('vous devez du coeur dévorer ces leçons'), but he also evokes the threat of divine punishment in his guise as a *directeur de conscience*, ostensibly to protect Agnès' virtue, but in reality because he hopes to safeguard himself from cuckoldry: 'un péché mortel', 'aux enfers des chaudières bouillantes', 'vrai partage du diable', 'bouillir dans les enfers à toute éternité.' (III, ii)[218]

Dom Juan's opponents are also comic because they present their dictatorial speech as divinely inspired.[219] In contrast to Tartuffe, whose parody of Biblical language unintentionally echoes Madame Pernelle's and Orgon's own distortion of spiritual vocabulary, Dom Juan deliberately aims to expose the multiple layers of meaning within his adversaries' purportedly unitary utterances. While both Elvire and Dom Louis portray themselves as Heaven's representatives on earth and threaten Dom Juan with divine punishment for his crimes against them ('le Ciel te punira, perfide, de l'outrage que tu me fais. [...] Mais sache, fils indigne, que [...] je saurai [...] prévenir sur toi le courroux du Ciel.') (I, iii; IV, iv), their claim to be selfless defenders of Christianity is belied by their authoritarian language. As Kathryn Willis Wolfe notes, Elvire may regard herself as a tragic heroine ('ma tendresse', 'me désespérer', 'vous brûlez de me rejoindre'), but she is in fact a comic figure who resembles both Madame Pernelle and the pedants of *commedia dell'arte* through her refusal to engage in any dialogue with Dom Juan:

> Elvire – Laissez-moi vite aller, [...] et songez seulement à profiter de mon avis. [...] (IV, vi)[220]

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[217] See Bakhtin, '*The Dialogic...*', *op. cit.*, p. 324: 'Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized.'
[218] See Noël Peacock, *Molière: L'École des femmes* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1996), p. 36.
[219] See Albanese, 'Dynamisme social...' *op. cit.*, pp. 51- 2.
[220] K. Willis Wolfe, 'Discours pédantesque...' *op. cit.*, pp. 35, 39.

Elvire is as intent on lecturing her interlocutors as Madame Pernelle, and she further undermines her role as an angel of mercy by resorting to angry threats, which contradict her insistence that she is purely concerned with her wayward husband's salvation: 'Le Ciel a banni de mon âme toutes ces indignes ardeurs que je sentais pour vous.' (IV, vi)[221] Dom Louis' use of sacred language is equally suspect as his fury at his son's exploitation of his noble status and his financial allusions ('mérite', 'crédit') suggest that his principal concern is to protect his reputation from scandal rather than save his son from damnation: 'cette suite continuelle de méchantes affaires, qui nous réduisent [...] à lasser les bontés du Souverain, et qui ont épuisé auprès de lui le mérite de mes services et le crédit de mes amis?' (IV, iv) Therefore, Molière's parody is not aimed at religious faith itself but only at the language of those who disguise their own personal motives, albeit unconsciously, behind a mask of holiness.

Nor should Sganarelle's incompetent defence of Christianity be regarded as proof of Molière's atheism. He too assumes the linguistic mask of a *dévot* and resembles Elvire and Dom Louis in his *penchant* for moralising: 'il faut que le courroux du Ciel l'accable quelque jour [...] je vous dirai franchement que je n'approuve point votre méthode.' (I, i & ii) Sganarelle does not, however, serve to 'make belief untenable' or ridicule theology, as Phillips argues.[222] Rather, he is a comic version of the philosophising servant from *commmedia dell'arte* who delights in lecturing others in order to display his 'superior' learning ('vous avez l'âme bien mécréante', 'je t'apprends *inter nos*'), but who undermines his pedantic reasoning with his absurd juxtaposition of Christian faith and superstitious beliefs: 'Voilà un homme que j'aurais bien de la peine à convertir. [...] il n'y a rien de plus vrai que le moine-bourru, et je me ferais pendre pour celui-là.' (III, i) Meanwhile, his 'proof' of Biblical truth is not designed to attack faith or religious language. Instead, his parodic distortion of the language of Genesis and of the Psalms ('Mon raisonnement est qu'il y a quelque chose d'admirable dans l'homme') simply demonstrates the *disconvenance* between Sganarelle's persona as a learned authority ('disputer', 'raisonnement') and the reality of his convoluted reasoning:

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[221] K. Willis Wolfe, *ibid.*, p. 39: 'C'est ainsi que Done Elvire revient, prête à rejouer sa condemnation sur tous les tons, car elle est toujours pleine de colère, bien qu'elle proteste du contraire.'
[222] Phillips, 'Authority and order...', *op. cit.*, p. 14.

> Sganarelle – je vois les choses mieux que tous les livres, et je comprends que ce monde que nous voyons n'est pas un champignon, qui soit venu tout seul en une nuit.' [...] *Il se laisse tomber en tournant.*
>
> Dom Juan – Bon! Voilà ton raisonnement qui a le nez cassé. (III, i)[223]

Nevertheless, it is a fallacy to claim that Dom Juan and Tartuffe express the dramatist's own attitude towards religion, or that Dom Juan's attack on hypocrisy constitutes the author's polemical 'machine de guerre contre les dévots.'[224] In reality, Tartuffe and Dom Juan are as much the object of Molière's ridicule as those whom they mock, and they too resemble the pedants of *commedia* tradition through their linguistic verbosity. Tartuffe is by no means the 'frighteningly consistent' figure evoked by Cloonan, whose 'carefully controlled language' prevents the audience from distinguishing between true and false piety.[225] In fact, from his initial request that Laurent bring his hair shirt, Tartuffe goes too far in his imitation of sacred speech and he exemplifies the Biblical image of a religious hypocrite in his ostentatious portrayal of piety:

> Orgon – Chaque jour à l'église il venait, d'un air doux,
> Tous vis-à-vis de moi se mettre à deux genoux.
> Il attirait les yeux de l'assemblée entière [...]
> Il faisait des soupirs, de grands élancements. (I, v)

Whilst believing that he is demonstrating Tartuffe's holiness to Cléante, Orgon's use of the language of sight ('vis-à-vis de moi', 'il attirait les yeux', 'aux pauvres, à mes yeux, il allait le répandre') indicates that Tartuffe's fervent prayer and conspicuous distribution of alms are nothing more than an exaggerated theatrical performance. Indeed, his description of Tartuffe's religious zeal echoes Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees in Matthew's Gospel.[226] Far from confusing true and false piety, as the dramatist's

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[223] 'Quand je vois le ciel, ton ouvrage, la lune et les étoiles, que tu y as placées, je me demande: L'homme a-t-il tant d'importance pour que tu penses à lui? [...] Or tu l'as fait presque l'égal des anges.' (Psaume, 8: 4-6)

[224] Albanese, 'Hypocrisie et dramaturgie...' *op. cit.*, p. 132: 'Comme son héros, Molière joue un rôle pour provoquer ses adversaries et il va, à son tour, s'ériger en 'faiseur de remontrances' suprême.'

[225] Cloonan, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

[226] 'Quand donc tu donnes quelque chose à un pauvre, n'attire pas bruyamment l'attention sur toi, comme le font les hypocrites dans les synagogues et dans la rue: ils agissent pour être loués par les hommes [...] Quand vous priez, ne soyez pas comme les hypocrites: ils aiment à prier debout dans les synagogues [....] pour que tout le monde les voie.' (Matthieu, 6: 2, 5)

detractors asserted, Molière leaves the audience in absolutely no doubt as to Tartuffe's true nature by modelling his portrayal of hypocrisy on the Bible.[227]

Furthermore, Tartuffe's language is itself ridiculed by Dorine, Elmire and Cléante, all of whom expose the duplicity of his pious disguise. Dorine undermines Tartuffe's professed rejection of the temptations of the flesh by emphasising his obsession with sexuality: 'Vous êtes bien tendre à la tentation, / Et la chair sur vos sens fait grande impression?' (III, ii) Elmire also sees through Tartuffe's rhetorical disguise and points to the comic incongruity between his dual roles as a hypocrite and a *galant*:

> La déclaration est tout à fait galante;
> Mais elle est, à vrai dire, un peu bien surprenante.
> Vous deviez, ce me semble, armer mieux votre sein, [...]
> Un dévot comme vous. (III, iii)[228]

Most importantly, both Elmire and Cléante are shown to be as skilled as Tartuffe in manipulating language, and they parody his misapplication of sacred language ('mon coeur de vos voeux fait sa béatitude') by creating their own double-voiced discourse. Elmire in particular masters Tartuffe's ability to communicate a dual message within a single utterance. Whilst appearing to be swayed by Tartuffe's assurances that 'ce n'est pas pécher que pécher en silence' (IV, iv), Elmire's ambiguous use of pronouns and possessive adjectives ('l'on ne peut aller jusqu'à vous satisfaire', 'Mon Dieu, que votre amour en vrai tyran agit') indicates that her speech is simultaneously designed to warn the concealed Orgon that he is forcing her to commit adultery:

> Puisqu'on ne veut point croire à tout ce qu'on peut dire,
> Et qu'on veut des témoins qui soient plus convaincants,
> Il faut bien s'y résoudre, et contenter les gens. (IV, v)

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[227] See McBride, 'L'Imposteur bipolaire' in *Nottingham French Studies*, 33 No. 1 (spring 1994), pp. 92-100 (p. 99). McBride emphasises the contrast between Tartuffe's ridiculous performance of piety and the far more sinister hypocrisy of Onuphre in La Bruyère's *Caractères*: 'Chez ce faux dévot par excellence, tout se place sous le signe du contrôle de soi, [...] Il ne vante pas sa haire, [...] il n'emploie non plus le langage dévot à séduire, sait dissimuler son appétit sexuel, histoire de ne pas se rendre ridicule.'

[228] See Le Mothe Le Vayer, *Lettre sur la comédie... op. cit.*, p. 10.

Similarly, Cléante exploits Tartuffe's rhetorical technique in order to disclose the self-interest lurking behind the hypocrite's ostensive religious devotion: 'N'est-il pas d'un Chrétien de pardonner l'offense / Et d'éteindre en son coeur tout désir de vengeance?' (IV, i) McBride has argued that Cléante is, to some extent, a ridiculous character in this scene because he attempts to appeal to Tartuffe's humanity in order to persuade him to return Damis' inheritance.[229] Yet, this assessment does not fully account for Cléante's verbal skill. He is well aware that Tartuffe will not be swayed by moral arguments, but by emphasising how a true Christian should behave, he mocks Tartuffe's claim that his only concern is 'la gloire du Ciel.'

It is not only Tartuffe who is the object of the author's humour. Dom Juan is an equally comic figure who does not represent the viewpoint of the dramatist in his attack on religion. By regarding the *libertin* as a 'hero of modernity' who is beyond ridicule, Pommier, Spencer, Grimm and Albanese fail to acknowledge the fact that his double-voiced discourse is itself parodied by both Sganarelle and the dramatist.[230] Dom Juan may claim to be morally superior to those he mocks because he alone admits his dissimulation, but his apparent lucidity is counterbalanced by his comic blindness when it comes to his own speech.[231] Paradoxically, Dom Juan's dialogic language is as pedantic and dogmatic as that of the 'faiseurs de remontrances' with his refusal to accept any challenge to his authority ('Si tu m'importunes advantage de tes sottes moralités, [...] je vais [...] te rouler de mille coups') (IV, i) and his pompous self-portrait: 'je me sens un coeur à aimer toute la terre; et comme Alexandre, je souhaiterais qu'il y eût d'autres mondes pour y pouvoir étendre mes conquêtes amoureuses.' (I, ii) The Dom's inflated image as a heroic conqueror ('j'ai sur ce sujet l'ambition des conquérents, qui volent

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[229] McBride, *The Sceptical Vision of Molière: a Study in Paradox* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 42.

[230] See Albanese, 'Hypocrisie et dramaturgie...' *op. cit.*, p. 125: 'force est de constater que Dom Juan est doué d'un individualisme supérieur lui permettant de rester invulnérable au ridicule: alors qu'il a, selon la formule percutante de Jules Brody, moralement tort, il a néanmoins esthétiquement raison.'

[231] See Georges Forestier, 'Langage dramatique et langage symbolique dans le *Dom Juan* de Molière' in *Dramaturgies, langages dramatiques: mélanges pour Jacques Scherer* (Paris: Nizet, 1986), pp. 293-305 (p. 297): Forestier emphasises that Dom Juan's blindness in refusing to heed Heaven's warnings echoes the cecity of Molière's other monomaniacs such as Argan and Orgon: 'Aussi pouvons-nous affirmer que ce personnage, dans les paroles duquel des générations d'exégètes se sont ingéniées à rechercher un discours organisé de libertin en révolte contre Dieu, est, avant tout, un personnage typiquement moliéresque par son *aveuglement*.'

perpétuellement de victoire en victoire') is contradicted by his perpetual flight from his pursuers, while he also resembles the farcical pedants, Pancrace and le Docteur, through his long-winded boasting.[232]

Dom Juan is even more ridiculous in his bathetic attempts to woo Charlotte by addressing her as if she were a horse to be examined ('Que je voie un peu vos dents, je vous prie. Ah! qu'elles sont amoureuses, et ces lèvres appétisantes!') (II, ii), and in his profession of his supposedly revolutionary *credo*: 'je crois que deux et deux sont quatre, Sganarelle, et que quatre et quatre sont huit.' (III, i) Rather than representing the author's own attack on religious faith, Dom Juan's self-evident 'philosophy' is merely comical in its banality.

As McBride stresses, Dom Juan's claim to superiority is further deflated throughout the play by Sganarelle.[233] Whereas the valet has often been depicted as Dom Juan's inferior double, he plays a fundamental role in mocking Dom Juan's arrogant pretensions and efforts to dominate others. As we have seen, Sganarelle is unmoved by his master's rhetorical skill ('comme vous débitez! [...] vous parlez tout comme un livre'), while he is equally adept at puncturing his master's pre-eminence by equating the *grand seigneur* with farmyard animals: 'en pourceau d'Épicure', il aurait épousé toi, son chien et son chat', 'c'est un épouseur à toutes mains'. (I, i)[234] Moreover, Sganarelle parodies his master's attack on Christianity by developing his own double-voiced discourse. Whilst pretending to berate a fictional master for his misdeeds ('ce n'est pas à vous que je parle, c'est à l'autre'), Sganarelle actually derides Dom Juan's intellectual arrogance by

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[232] See Forestier, *op. cit.*, p. 294: Dom Juan is forced to flee from the outraged Elvire and her brothers (I, iii; II, v), while he also has great difficulty in extricating himself from his promises to Charlotte and Mathurine. (II, iv) Although he is certainly valiant in rescuing Dom Carlos from robbers, his over-riding concern is his self-preservation, as is shown when he conceals his identity from his pursuer:

> Dom Juan – Le connaissez-vous, Monsieur, ce Dom Juan dont vous parlez?
> Dom Carlos – Non, quant à moi...
> Dom Juan – Arrêtez, Monsieur, s'il vous plait. Il est un peu de mes amis, et ce serait à moi une espèce de lâcheté que d'en ouïr dire du mal. (III, iv).

In *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* and *Le Mariage forcé*, le Docteur and Pancrace share Dom Juan's inflated self-perception: 'Le Docteur – quand on m'a trouvé, on a trouvé le docteur universel: je contiens en moi tous les autres docteurs.' (scene ii) [...] 'Pancrace – homme savant, savantissime *per omnes modos et casus.*' (scene vi).

[233] McBride, *The Sceptical...*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

[234] 'À toutes mains' is a term normally associated with horses. Dom Juan's examination of Charlotte's teeth suggests that Sganarelle's description of his master is not entirely inappropriate.

reducing him to the level of a tiny worm: 'C'est bien à vous, petit ver de terre, [...] c'est bien à vous à vouloir vous mêler de tourner en raillerie ce que tous les hommes révèrent!' (I, ii) Therefore, Molière's comic vision is never unitary as Albanese has asserted. Rather than uphold the voice of a single character as a norm, Molière's parody is also directed at the language of his arch-ironists, Tartuffe and Dom Juan, who are as blind and pompous as their credulous victims.

Nor should the *dénouements* of *Tartuffe* and *Dom Juan* be regarded as proof of the dramatist's impiety. According to Phillips, the intervention of the King in *Tartuffe* implies that 'the Church has been unable to control its own domain. [...] In other words, the king succeeds where God fails.'[235] Yet, this suggestion that Molière intended to replace divine authority with royal power overlooks the fact that such an insinuation would have placed the dramatist in a potentially perilous position with Louis XIV, who regarded himself as 'God's Most Christian King'.[236] Far from constituting a political challenge to the Church, the miraculous intercession of the King not only serves as a royal encomium, but the contrived exclamations of Dorine and Madame Pernelle also parody the artificial *deus ex machina* of the *commedia erudita*: 'Que le Ciel soit loué! [...] Favorable succès!' (V, vii) Albanese's insitance that Dom Juan's demise constitutes the triumph of rationality over illogical faith is equally flawed.[237] In fact, Sganarelle's final outburst ('ah! mes gages, mes gages!), ensures that the audience views Dom Juan as a comic rather than tragic character, while it also plays with dramatic convention by caricaturing the traditional conclusions of morality tales, in which recalcitrant sinners are automatically punished and the good rewarded.[238]

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[235] Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[236] See Philip F. Riley, *A Lust for Virtue: Louis XIV's Attack on Sin in Seventeenth-Century France* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 8.
[237] Albanese, 'Dynamisme social...', *op. cit.*, p. 60: 'sa mort constitue paradoxalement une victoire de l'ordre de la pensée.'
[238] See M. J. Muratore, 'Theatrical Conversion in Molière's *Dom Juan*' in *Nottingham French Studies*, 34, No. 2 (Autumn 1995), pp. 1-9 (p. 8).

Chapter Five: Language in Molière's Theatrical Curriculum

Mais une femme habile est un mauvais présage, [...]
Et c'est assez pour elle, à vous en bien parler,
De savoir prier Dieu, m'aimer, coudre et filer. (I, i)

Arnolphe's ridiculous curriculum, which is designed to ensure the ignorance rather than the enlightenment of his reluctant pupil, reflects a central preoccupation of Molière's theatre and, indeed, of seventeenth-century French society: the growing significance of education and, in particular, the education of women. Throughout Molière's comedies, the language of erudition is a major source of humour as he repeatedly brings his audience into seventeenth-century classrooms. Whether it be the self-appointed pedagogues, Arnolphe and Sganarelle, who go to extraordinary lengths to protect themselves from cuckoldry or the imperious 'femmes savantes' who hope to rival men in their learning, Molière portrays both professional and amateur teachers, all of whom resemble his authoritarian preachers and moralists through their attempts to present their monologic speech as incontestable and beyond reproach.[239] As Bakhtin argues, such absolute language is opposed to the multiple dialects and linguistic codes of society, forces which Bakhtin characterises as heteroglossia:

> A common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms. But these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative: they are rather the generative forces of linguistic life, forces that struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language, forces that unite and centralize verbal ideological thought, creating within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognised literary language.[240]

Yet, this endeavour to impose a single language of authority on others is constantly subverted, not only by Henriette, Agnès, Isabelle and Martine who parody the didactic

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[239] Magdelon – Il faut qu'un amant, pour être agréable, sache débiter les beaux sentiments [...] et que sa recherche soit dans les formes. (*Les Précieuses ridicules*, scene iv); Sganarelle – j'ai pour tout conseil ma fantaisie à suivre. (*L'École des maris*: I, i); Arnolphe – voici dans ma poche un écrit important [...] Et je veux que ce soit votre unique entretien. (*L'École des femmes*: III, ii); Armande – Par nos lois, prose et vers, tout nous sera soumis. (*Les Femmes savantes*: III, ii)

[240] Bahktin, *The Dialogic...*, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

discourse of their tutors but also by the failure of the teachers themselves to put their educational theories into practice.

Surprisingly, however, few critics have examined the comic potential of the use and misappropriation of pedagogical language in Molière's theatre. *L'École des maris* has been largely ignored by the majority of scholars, possibly as a result of Donneau de Visé's accusation that it was nothing more than a farcical and inferior forerunner to the more popular *L'École des femmes*.[241] Meanwhile, Gaines and Dandrey devote little analysis to the playwright's treatment of education in *L'École des femmes*, with Gaines interpreting the play as a satire of presumptuous social climbers and Dandrey focussing rather on Arnolphe's psychological disintegration.[242] Of those critics who have analysed Molière's portrayal of contemporary educational debates, their assessments often underestimate the comic nature of his ridiculous pedagogues. Karolyn Waterson considers *Les Femmes savantes* to be Molière's 'comédie la moins comique et la plus racinienne' while Albanese argues that '*L'École des femmes* met en valeur [...] une atmosphère [...] menaçante.'[243] His view is echoed by Riggs who regards *L'École des femmes*, *Tartuffe* and *Les Femmes savantes* as polemical satires of absolutism.[244] On the other hand, Faith Beasley and Elizabeth Lapeyre have questioned this notion of the dramatist as a political activist, instead viewing Molière as a conservative opponent of female erudition.[245]

Nevertheless, these judgements offer only a partial view of Molière's supposed vision in assuming that he presents a unitary view of his subjects and a single comic target with

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[241] See *La Critique de L'Ecole des femmes*, *op.cit.*, p. 164: In *Nouvelles nouvelles* (1663), Straton considers *L'École des femmes* to be a copy of the earlier play: 'Tous ceux qui l'ont vue sont demeurés d'accord qu'elle est mal nommée, et que c'est plutôt *L'École des maris* que *L'École des femmes*; mais comme il en a déjà fait une sous ce titre, il n'a pu lui donner le même nom.' Donneau de Visé also asserts that Agnès is simply a less intelligent version of Isabelle in *L'École des maris*.

[242] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-19; Gaines, '*L'École des femmes*: Usurpation, Dominance and Social Closure' in *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, IX No. 17 (1982), pp. 607-25, (p. 622.)

[243] K. Waterson, 'Savoir et se connaître dans *Les Femmes savantes* de Molière' in *Le Savoir au XVII^e siècle* (Biblio 17, 147, 2003), pp. 185-194, (p. 185) ; Albanese, *Le Dynamisme...*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

[244] Riggs, 'Pedagogy, Power...', *op. cit.*, pp. 74-5.

[245] Elizabeth Lapeyre, '*Les Femmes savantes*: une lecture aliénée' in *French Forum*, 6 No. 2 (May 1981), pp. 137-8; F. Beasley, 'Molière's Precious Women in Context' in Gaines, Koppisch, ed., *Approaches to Teaching...*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

which to amuse his audience. Whereas his 'educational' plays, most notably *Les Précieuses ridicules*, *L'École des maris*, *L'École des femmes* and *Les Femmes savantes*, have generally been regarded as social satires, either defending or attacking contemporary educational theories, such evaluations fail to account for the playwright's ability to convey more than one meaning through his drama.

Rather, Bakhtin's theory of parody as double-voiced discourse can offer a far more dynamic perspective on Molière's theatrical curriculum. While the previous chapter explored the comic incongruity between the apparently altruistic speech of *dévots*, such as Madame Pernelle and Elvire, and the reality of their underlying desire to control those around them, this chapter will develop the conflict between monologic and dialogic speech in the comedies by focussing on the abortive attempts of Molière's pedagogues to impose a single normative discourse on their pupils. Whereas Molière's moralists justify their autocratic language by claiming to serve the interests of Heaven, his dictatorial teachers are even more extreme in their efforts to direct the speech of others by censuring any deviations from their linguistic norms. Yet, this apparently monologic speech is itself undermined, not only by on-stage spectators such as Isabelle, Henriette, Chrysalde and Ariste who mock the pretentious language of the supposed *savants*, but also by the dramatist himself who foreshadows Bakhtin in his parody of 'the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word'.[246] As Bakhtin stresses:

> For the word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another.[247]

The first part of the chapter will explore this parody of the intellectual snobbery and excessive language of Molière's self-styled pedagogues by focussing on his portrayal of female learning in *Les Précieuses ridicules*, *L'École des maris*, *L'École des femmes* and

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[246] Bakhtin, 'The Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' in *The Dialogic...*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
[247] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's...*, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

Les Femmes savantes. Whilst examining the conflicting theories of Molière as an ardent opponent of salon culture or a champion of *la culture féminine*, we will consider Dandrey's thesis that the dramatist is only mocking the hyperbolic language and extreme educational theories of his *savants*. Are the alternative schools of Ariste, Horace and Chrysalde an educational ideal with which the audience is invited to identify, as Dandrey argues, or does Molière also parody Horace's school of love and Ariste's 'l'école du monde'?[248] The second section of the chapter will develop Bakhtin's theory of the opposition between the centripetal discourses of authority and the multiple social and regional dialects of heteroglossia by analysing the teaching of the French language in Molière's comedies. According to Bakhtin, the development of a linguistic norm and the increasing centralisation of the national language are not neutral or accidental phenomena, but always have an underlying political dimension.[249] We will consider whether Molière upholds the linguistic norm, personified by Vaugelas' *bon usage* and the social code of *honnêteté* or whether he also parodies and subverts this normative speech, suggesting, as does Bakhtin, that all languages are in fact relative.

Finally, we will broaden the discussion to include Molière's professional academics and doctors. Following Austin Gill's seminal article on doctors in Molière's comedy, *Moliéristes* remain divided as to the role of his pedants.[250] While Moore and Bray depicted them as a continuation of the *commedia dell'arte* masks, other critics including Andrew Calder and Cairncross believe that they are satirical figures with which the playwright attacks both the medical profession and traditional learning in the form of scholasticism.[251] Can Molière be viewed as a virulent opponent of medical doctors and Aristotelian pedants, as Cairncross and Calder assert, or is his depiction of professionals founded as much on a theatrical tradition as it is on social comment?

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[248] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
[249] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic...*, *op. cit.*, p. 312.
[250] Austin Gill, 'The Doctor in the Farce and Molière' in *French Studies* I No. 2 (1948), pp. 101-28.
[251] Calder, 'Molière's Aristotelian Pedants' in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 12 (1990), pp. 65-75; Cairncross, *L'Humanité...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

La Querelle des femmes and the School for Teachers

> Higgins – You have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her.[252]

Firstly, the question of Molière's attitude towards education, and in particular to the education of women, has long been a source of debate amongst scholars, especially when it comes to the apparent contradiction between the messages of *Les Précieuses ridicules*, *Les Femmes savantes* and the two *École* plays. Whereas Agnès' education in Horace's school of love is presented as an emancipation from Arnolphe's tyrannical regime, the playwright's treatment of female learning in *Les Précieuses* and *Les Femmes savantes* seems positively hostile. Although Molière himself challenged accusations that he was fundamentally opposed to the education of women by contending that his comedy was not directed at all *précieuses*, but only at their inferior imitators ('les véritables précieuses auraient tort de se piquer lorsqu'on joue les ridicules qui les imitent mal'), he has frequently been characterised as a misogynist by both contemporaries and by later critics.[253] Tallement des Réaux was certain that *Les Précieuses ridicules* was intended to deride *la chambre bleue* of Madame de Rambouillet, and Boileau regarded his friend as the scourge of all would-be intellectual women.[254] More recently, this perception has been shared by a variety of *Moliéristes*, including Adam, Beasley and Maya Slater.[255] The latter suggests that the playwright regarded women as subordinate to men, and

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[252] Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*, *op. cit.*, Act III, pp. 81-2.

[253] Preface to *Les Précieuses ridicules*, *op. cit.*, p. 20 : 'les plus excellentes choses sont sujettes à être copiées par de mauvais singes, [...] que ces vicieuses imitations de ce qu'il y a de plus parfait ont été de tout temps la matière de la comédie.'

[254] Despois & Mesnard, *op. cit.*, p. 4 ; Boileau, 'Satire X' in *Œuvres complètes* I (Paris: A. Pougin, 1837), p. 89: 'c'est une précieuse,/ Reste de ces esprits jadis si renommés/ Que d'un coup de son art Molière a diffamés. [...] C'est chez elle toujours que les fades auteurs/ S'en vont se consoler du mépris des lecteurs.' ; see also Myriam Maître, *Les Précieuses : Naissance des femmes de lettres en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris : Honoré Champion, 1999), p. 110 : Maître counters des Réaux's claim by noting that the entire Hôtel de Rambouillet was reputed to have enjoyed the première of *Les Précieuses ridicules*.

[255] A. Adam, *Histoire de la littérature française au XVII^e siècle* Tome III (Paris: Domat, 1948-56), p. 392; Slater, 'Molière's Women – a Matter of Focus' in J. Redmond, ed., *Themes in Drama: Women in Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 75-85 (p. 79); Beasley, *op. cit.*, p. 65: 'The power of the female intellectual is shown to be in conflict with stable society. The play [*Les Femmes savantes*] is a search for a return to order, a re-establishing of power that makes women intellectuals social outcasts.'

concludes that Molière must have been in at least partial agreement with Arnolphe's assertion 'la femme n'est là que pour la dépendance.'[256] On the other hand, Baumal has challenged this view, characterising Molière as 'un auteur précieux', while Grimm echoes Carlo François' perception of the dramatist as 'l'avocat des femmes.'[257]

To what extent is Molière mocking *préciosité* and the development of *la culture mondaine*? According to Roger Duchêne, Molière could not possibly have mocked genuine *précieuses*, or even satirised their inept imitators, because both he and l'Abbé de Pure were responsible for inventing the movement in their farces, *La Prétieuse* (1656-8) and *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659).[258] While it is undoubtedly true that comic writers such as de Pure, Somaize and Molière exaggerated and fabricated much of the jargon ascribed to *salonnières*, it is too extreme to conclude from this caricature that these authors were fabricating a fictional social movement. In fact, Magdelon's and Cathos' literary salon represents a burlesque distortion of the *ruelles* established by an increasing number of erudite aristocratic and bourgeois women, amongst them la Marquise de Rambouillet, Mlle de Montpensier, Madame de Lafayette and Mlle de Scudéry.[259] Not only does their preoccupation with *la littérature galante* reflect the vogue for literary criticism in contemporary salons where authors such as Voiture, Ménage and Chapelain were regular visitors, but the desire of the two *pecques provinciales* to promote *le bel esprit* and censure *le style bas* of those around them also mirrors a genuine movement to purify speech by banishing all vulgar and archaic terms. As Ayres-Bennett stresses, Cathos' and Magdelon's penchant for abstract periphrases ('voiturez-nous', 'ne soyez pas inexorable à ce fauteuil qui vous tend les bras') and hyperbolic expressions ('j'ai un

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[256] Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

[257] See Howarth, *op. cit.*, p. 56 ; Grimm, *op. cit.*, p. 75; C. François, *Précieuses et autres indociles: aspects du féminisme dans la littérature française du XVIIe siècle* (Birmingham, Ala : Summa Publications, 1987), p. 88.

[258] R. Duchêne, *Les Précieuses ou comment l'esprit vint aux femmes* (Paris : Fayard, 2001), pp. 211-3 : Duchêne founds his argument on Loret's poem in which the gazetteer asserts that 'cette pièce si bouffonne et si comique' was actually based on 'un sujet chimérique': 'Pour Loret, qui se veut le porte-parole de l'opinion générale, les spectateurs de la pièce de Molière n'y ont pas ri d'une satire des moeurs contemporaines, [...] mais d'une invention plaisante, d'une bouffonnerie dont les personnages et les façons de faire sont trop éloignés de la réalité pour qu'il puisse s'agir d'autre chose que d'un jeu.'

[259] See Linda Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture (1598-1715) : un débat d'idées de St. François de Sales à la Marquise de Lambert* (Paris : Champion, 1993), p. 96; Philippe Sellier, '«Se tirer du commun des femmes» : La constellation précieuse' in *L'Autre au XVIIe sècle* (Biblio 17 : 117, 1999), pp. 313-29 for an analysis of the various aristocratic and bourgeois salons.

furieux tendre', 'nous avons été [...] dans un jeûne effroyable de divertissements') recalls the language of Madeleine de Scudéry in particular, while Balzac, Sorel, d'Urfé and Pascal all shared the girls' fondness for the term 'terriblement': 'Cathos – j'aime terriblement les énigmes.' (scene ix)[260]

While their longing to emulate other *beaux esprits* is laudable in itself, Magdelon and Cathos become ridiculous through their determination to force their unitary speech upon those around them, firm in the conviction that their opinions and discourse are the only correct ones. Rather than educate their unwilling 'pupils' by explaining their linguistic precepts, the two cousins denigrate anyone who fails to conform to their idealised vision of the world. They insult Gorgibus and Marotte ('une sotte', 'ignorante que vous êtes', 'ce que vous dites là est du dernier bourgeois', scenes iv, vi) because they are incapable of understanding the girls' obscure jargon ('les commodités de la conversation', 'le conseiller des grâces'), while the 'précieuses' also vilify their aristocratic suitors, La Grange and Du Croisy, purely because the two men fail to couch their declarations of love in the correct terms as dictated by Mlle de Scudéry in *Clélie*: 'Il faut qu'un amant [...] sache débiter les beaux sentiments', 'ce sont des règles dont, en bonne galanterie, on ne saurait se dispenser.' (scene iv) As Bakhtin stresses, such a monologic view of language ('il doit', il faut') seeks to preclude any form of interactive conversation:

> In an environment of philosophical monologism the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well. [...] someone who knows the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error; that is, it is the interaction of a teacher and a pupil, which it follows, can only be a pedagogical dialogue.[261]

In *Les Femmes savantes*, Armande, Bélise and Philaminte are even more absurd with their extreme educational theories and linguistic absolutism. Like Magdelon and Cathos, they are unwavering in their resolution to instruct their family and servants in the rules of correct linguistic usage, and regard their own normative language as the sole model of

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[260] Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-9; Timmermans, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
[261] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's...*, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

correct speech, founded as it is upon 'la raison' and 'le bon usage.' (ll. 476) They exaggerate the importance of grammar to such an extent that they automatically disparage anyone who deviates from their monologic discourse as 'un esprit bas.' Chrysale is censured for his 'bassesse [...] et d'âme et de langage', while Martine's discourse is condemned as 'un barbare amas de vices d'oraison', simply because she dares to contravene the rules of *le bon usage*: 'Quoi! vous ne trouvez pas ce crime impardonnable?' (II, v & vii) Far from seeking to enlighten their pupils, however, the femmes' allusions to images of power ('l'empire souverain', 'Par nos lois, prose et vers, tout nous sera soumis', 'vous verrez nos statuts') and their continual use of imperatives and verbs of volition reveal their underlying desire to dominate both their own household and the nation as a whole through the prohibition of any equivocal 'syllabes sales': 'Contre eux nous préparons de mortelles sentences.'(III, ii: ll. 905)

Riggs has interpreted this longing to ordain correct speech as a sinister parallel with the increasing centralisation of political power in seventeenth-century France: 'Molière attacks the univocalism of French absolutism and of modern epistemology and pedagogy. [...] Like the absolutist state, the *ridicules* try to impose fear as if fear could do the work of respect and loyalty.'[262] Yet, such an interpretation does not reflect the comic nature of the pedagogical methods employed by the 'femmes savantes'. Molière's audience would have been particularly amused by Philaminte's determination to educate her servants in *le bon usage*, a linguistic code which was only intended for the upper classes.[263] Moreover, Riggs has ignored the fact that Philaminte, Armande and Bélise fail in their efforts to enforce their linguistic precepts. By neglecting to explain their incomprehensible grammatical and scientific terminology ('la récidive', 'du nominatif', 'l'équilibre des choses'), the learned ladies succeed only in baffling their pupils, Martine and Chrysale, both of whom rebel against their lessons by refusing to abandon their 'uncultivated' and dialogic speech in favour of what Bakhtin refers to as the 'sacred word' of authority: 'in

[262] Riggs, 'Pedagogy...', *op. cit.*, pp. 74-5.
[263] See N. Peacock, *Les Femmes savantes* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1990), p. 38.

this way any monologic truth claims made by one social language will be relativized by the existence of other views of the world.'[264]:

> Martine – je ne saurais, moi, parler votre jargon. [...]
> Et tous vos biaux dictons ne servent pas de rien.
> Chrysale – Qu'importe qu'elle manque aux lois de Vaugelas ? [...]
> Je vis de bonne soupe et non de beau langage. (II, v & vii)[265]

Moreover, the 'précieuses' and the 'femmes savantes' are amusing in their determination to dictate the language of others because their own learning is shown to be utterly superficial. In a bathetic echo of the vogue for literary debates and improvisations in salon society, Molière parodies Magdelon's and Cathos' lack of judgement as they are utterly enamoured with Mascarille's inane *impromptu* ('Avez-vous remarqué ce commencement? *Oh! Oh!* Voilà qui est extraordinaire'), and are incapable of perceiving the valet's frequent linguistic lapses : 'je m'en vais gagner au pied', 'comment diable.' (scene ix) The femmes savantes' claims to intellectual supremacy are equally incongruous as they too offer vacuous and uncritical comments on Trissotin's sonnet ('Oh, oh [...] Quoi qu'on die'), while their professed mastery of the domains of science and philosophy is confined to citing increasingly abstruse jargon in an effort to impress others with their understanding of such learned authorities as Plato, Descartes and Epicurus: 'Pour les abstractions, j'aime le platonisme', 'la matière subtile', 'des petits corps', 'j'aime ses tourbillons.' (III, ii)[266] Ironically, the supposedly monologic speech of both the précieuses and the femmes savantes is itself shown to be dialogic as they contravene their own linguistic decrees by resorting to insults and *mots bas*:[267]

> Magdelon – Apprenez, sotte, à vous énoncer moins vulgairement. [...]

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[264] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic...*, *op. cit.*, p. 369.
[265] Peacock, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-6: As Peacock argues, the sudden transformation in Martine's speech, from regional *patois*, characterised by grammatical errors ('cheux', 'biaux', 'je sommes', 'ne servent pas de rien') to the more elevated register evident in her mockery of pedantry ('les savants ne sont bons que pour prêcher en chaise') suggests that Martine's extreme deformation of language may well be a deliberate parody of her mistress's affected speech: 'Quand on se fait entendre on parle toujours bien.' (II, vi).
[266] See Timmermans, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-32 for a discussion of the increasing popularity of science amongst educated women. Madame de Bonneveaux and Madame d'Hannecourt shared the femmes savantes' passion for Cartesian philosophy, while Madame de Sablé and Madame de Sévigné were enthusiastic astronomers like Bélise and Philaminte: 'j'ai vu clairement des hommes dans la lune.' (II, v)
[267] Peacock, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-9.

Et vous, marauds, osez-vous vous tenir ici après votre insolence? (scenes vi, xvi)

Philaminte – Quoi! Je vous vois, maraude!

Vite, sortez, friponne ; [...] vous avez peur d'offenser la coquine ? (II, v)[268]

It is, however, a mistake to conclude from this parody of intellectual snobbery that Molière is indeed a misogynist who agrees with Gorgibus and Chrysale that female ambition should not extend beyond the domestic sphere as the pretentious language of the male pedants, Mascarille, Trissotin and Vadius, is also the object of comedy. Mascarille's *précieux* jargon is even more extreme than that of Magdelon and Cathos ('la brutalité de la saison a furieusement outragé la délicatesse de ma voix') (scene ix), while Vadius and Trissotin are equally absurd with their disproportionate eulogies ('Vadius – Vos odes ont un air noble, galant, et doux,/ Qui laisse de bien loin votre Horace après vous') and their sudden descent into histrionic insults:

Trissotin – Allez, petit grimaud, barbouilleur de papier.

Vadius – Allez, rimeur de balle, opprobre du métier. (III, iii)

Nor should the conservative Gorgibus and Chrysale be perceived as the dramatist's representatives in their philistine rejection of all intellectual pursuits as 'sottes billevesées, pernicieux amusements des esprits oisifs' (*Les Précieuses ridicules*: scene xvii) and 'ce vain savoir.' (*Les Femmes savantes*: II, vii)[269] In fact, Gorgibus' authoritarian speech is as dogmatic as that of Magdelon and Cathos ('je veux être maître absolu') (scene iv). Similarly, Chrysale's preoccupation with his own material comfort is as extreme as his wife's obsession with the realm of 'les spirituels': 'on ne sait comme va mon pot, dont j'ai besoin.' (II, vii) Even Clitandre's apparently more balanced view of 'les femmes docteurs' is patronising because of his contention that female pedants are necessarily more reprehensible than male pedants.[270]

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[268] It is particularly ironic that Philaminte should condemn Martine for uttering 'un mot sauvage et bas' when she is guilty of exactly the same 'crime'. (II, v)

[269] See Peacock, *op. cit.*, p. 55: Faguet regarded Chrysale as Molière's representative in the play.

[270] See Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 121: Clitandre's demand that a woman should not display her learning echoes Madelaine de Scudéry's stipulation in *Le Grand Cyrus* that a woman must avoid 'qu'on puisse dire d'elle, c'est une femme sçavante.' Her view was shared by Balzac who maintained in a letter to Jean Chapelain that a female pedant was far more objectionable than a male one: 'Il y a longtemps que je me suis déclaré contre cette pedanterie de l'autre sexe, et que j'ay dit que je souffrirais plus volontiers une

It should also be stressed that Molière's comedy is not aimed at all educated women as Henriette proves adept at parodying the pretentious speech of Armande, Trissotin and Philaminte by creating her own double-voiced discourse. Although she has often been attacked by critics as an unsympathetic character whose speech is 'mechanical and mundane', such assessments fail to account for the comic nature of her ironic wit which exposes the contradictions within the supposedly unitary discourse of others.[271] She points to the inconsistency between Armande's professed *sang-froid* and her fury at Clitandre's rejection ('Hé! Doucement, ma soeur, où donc est la morale/ qui sait régenter la partie animale?'), whilst also puncturing Trissotin's *précieux* imagery ('trésors', 'tendresses', 'biens', 'vos célestes appas') by revealing its artificiality : 'Eh ! monsieur, laissons là ce galimatias.' (V, i) Thus, Molière's dialogic humour is not designed to satirise the intellectual aspirations of all educated women, as Beasley has argued. Rather, his parody is aimed as much at the pompous speech and blinkered educational theories of the male conservatives as it is at the linguistic affectations of his *salonnières*.

The traditional opposition to female learning, as personified by the educational theories of Sganarelle and Arnolphe, is shown to be equally absurd. Like the 'précieuses' and the 'femmes savantes', the two teachers regard themselves as absolute authorities on female education and they seek to dominate their pupils, Isabelle and Agnès, by presenting their dictatorial speech and pedagogical theories as incontestable:

> Sganarelle – j'entends que la mienne/ Vive à ma fantaisie et non pas à la sienne. (I, ii) [...]
>
> Arnolphe – En femme, comme en tout, je veux suivre ma mode. (I, i)

By echoing the outdated views of conservative moralists, such as Jacques Olivier and Artus Thomas, in his ridicule of the more liberal educational programme proposed by Ariste ('Vous souffrez que la vôtre aille leste et pimpante: [...] Voilà, beau précepteur, votre éducation'), Sganarelle portrays himself as a selfless moral guardian, purely concerned with protecting Isabelle's virtue from worldly temptation: 'enfin, la chair est

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femme qui a de la barbe, qu'une femme qui fait la sçavante.' ; see also Jocelyn Royé, 'La figure de la «pédante» dans la littérature comique du XVII[e] siècle' in *Le Savoir au...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 215-25 (p. 219).

[271] Adam, *op. cit.* vol. III, p. 311: Adam characterises Henriette as 'une fille haïssable' and 'une petite vipère.'; see also Victor Wortley, 'Molière's Henriette: an Imbalance between *Raison* and *Coeur*' in *Romance Notes*, 19 (Chapel Hill, NC: 1979), pp. 358-65 (pp. 360-2).

faible, et j'entends tous les bruits.'(I, ii)[272] Nonetheless, his repeated imperatives and his use of political and legal terminology ('gouvernez', 'pleine puissance', 'régir') reveal his overriding desire to control Isabelle: 'Taisez-vous ! Je vous apprendrai bien s'il faut sortir sans nous.' (I, ii)

Arnolphe is even more extravagant in his determination to impose a single voice of authority on Agnès. Prohibiting any form of dialogue ('Point de bruit davantage. [...] Je suis maître, je parle: allez, obéissez') (l. 642), he misuses the language of religious worship and divine retribution by claiming to be a 'sage directeur' (l. 646) whose autocratic 'instruction' (l. 649) is the only means of protecting Agnès from 'le grand chemin d'enfer et de perdition.' (l. 650)[273] As Bakhtin notes, such unitary discourse presents itself as the ultimate word which must not to be questioned:

> The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it [...] It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal. [...] It is akin to taboo, i.e., a name that must not be taken in vain.[274]

Riggs, Albanese and Virginia Krause have all interpreted Arnolphe's attempts to control Agnès' speech and, in particular, his desire to rival God in His role as creator ('comme un morceau de cire entre mes mains elle est' l. 810) as a political comment on the repressive regime of Louis XIV. [275] Yet, these interpretations of the play as a satire of absolutism and the divine right of Kings fail to consider the comic nature of Arnolphe's

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[272]See Ian McLean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminisim in French Literature 1610-52* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 54: According to Artus Thomas in 1600 : 'La science et la sagesse se rencontrent rarement en une fille: elle ne doit avoir autre escole que le mesnage, autres livres que ses ouvrages.'; see also Timmermans, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-5, 312: Jacques Olivier published the anti-feminist pamphlet, *Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice des femmes* in 1617.

[273] The extent of Arnolphe's verbal domination is shown by his initial conversation with Agnès who simply mimics his facile comments: 'Arnolphe – La promenade est belle./ Agnès – Fort belle./ Arnolphe –Le beau jour!/ Agnès – Fort beau !' (II, v); see also Goodkin, 'Discourse and the...', *op. cit.*, pp. 147-8.

[274] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic...*, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

[275] Albanese, *Le Dynamisme...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 148; Riggs, 'Pedagogy...', *op. cit.*, pp. 76-7; V. Krause, 'Bâtardise et cocuage dans *L'École des femmes*' in *L'Esprit Créateur*, XXXVI, No. I (1996), pp. 73-81 (p. 78): 'Arnolphe n'est qu'un bourgeois ridicule. Cependant, il fonde son discours sur une logique divine. C'est là une leçon importante: tout discours, même un discours à la fois ridicule et diabolique comme celui d'Arnolphe peut s'ériger en absolu en se fondant sur le *Logos*.'

'école.'Whereas Magdelon, Philaminte and Bélise endeavour to instruct those around them, Sganarelle and Arnolphe are even more ridiculous as they misappropriate pedagogical and religious language ('instruire', 'méthode', 'apprendre') simply in order to protect themselves from the trivial fate of being cuckolded. Meanwhile, far from seeking to enlighten their pupils, the two men prescribe a curriculum of ignorance. Sganarelle's 'education' is founded on little more than claustration and a programme of domestic tasks designed for his own comfort (I, ii), while Arnolphe's 'lessons' consist of nothing other than rote-learning and mindless repetition ('jusqu'au moindre mot imprimez-le-vous bien'), and are purely intended to increase Agnès' naivety: 'Pour la rendre idiote autant qu'il se pourrait' (I, i)[276]

Moreover, the efforts of the two teachers to establish monologic discourse are constantly undermined by Isabelle and Agnès, both of whom rebel against their dictatorial lessons by developing their own double-voiced discourse. Whilst congratulating himself on the success of his educational programme to secure Isabelle's fidelity ('je vois que mes leçons ont germé dans ton âme') (II, iii), Sganarelle is himself duped by Isabelle and Valère into acting as their match-maker:

> Valère – je vous prie au moins [...] d'assurer Isabelle
> Que, si depuis trois mois mon coeur brûle pour elle,
> Cette amour est sans tache. (II, vi)

Ironically, it is the dogmatic Sganarelle who unwittingly parrots the dialogic speech of the young lovers as he reproduces Valère's declaration of love exactly ('ses désirs étaient de t'obtenir pour femme', 'cette juste ardeur'), thereby ensuring the failure of his own pedagogical system: 'Je le trouve honnête homme et le plains de t'aimer.' (II, vii) Similarly, Arnolphe is incapable of putting his draconian educational theories into practice because Agnès learns to think and speak for herself. Her letter to Horace demonstrates that her experience of love has taught her to question Arnolphe's supposedly irrefutable pronouncements ('on me dit fort que tous les jeunes hommes sont

[276] Montaigne, *Essais I*, *op. cit.*, Chapter XXVI, pp. 52, 54: 'C'est témoignage de crudité et indigestion que de régorger la viande comme on l'a avalée. [...] Savoir par coeur n'est pas savoir.'

des trompeurs [...] mais je vous assure que je n'ai pu encore me figurer cela de vous') (III, iv), while she also proves to be a skilled parodist, mocking her tutor's demands for gratitude:

> Arnolphe – N'est ce rien que les soins d'élever votre enfance?
>
> Agnès – Vous avez là dedans bien opéré vraiment,
>
> Et m'avez fait en tout instruire joliment! (V, iv)

In fact, Agnès is far more adept at combating Arnolphe's tyrannical threats than Horace (V, ix), and it is her resistance which forces Arnolphe to imitate the *romanesque* language of his opponent: 'tendresse de coeur', 'écoute seulement ce soupir amoureux', 'vois ce regard mourant.' (V, iv)[277] Consequently, even Arnolphe is compelled to abandon both his educational theories and his unitary language and engage in a dialogue with his pupil: 'Tout comme tu voudras tu pourras te conduire.' (V, iv)

This parody of the traditional opposition to female education does not, however, mean that the dramatist is inviting his audience to adopt a single viewpoint and automatically identify with the alternative schools offered by Ariste, Horace and Chrysalde, as Dandrey has claimed.[278] Ariste and Horace may join the audience in ridiculing the ludicrous pedagogical theories of Sganarelle and Arnolphe, but they too are the objects of the author's parody. Ariste's *laissez-faire* philosophy towards child-rearing and his absolute faith in the 'les douceurs de la société' are as extreme as Sganarelle's mistrust of the corrupting influence of society:

> Et l'école du monde, en l'air dont il fait vivre
>
> Instruit mieux, à mon gré, que ne fait aucun livre. (I, ii)

Ariste also resembles his younger brother through his constant use of imperatives and his stubborn conviction that his educational method is the only correct one: 'Soit; mais je tiens sans cesse/ Qu'il nous faut en riant instruire la jeunesse.' (l, ii) Meanwhile, Goodkin and Peacock have shown that Horace's apparently dialogic school of love (III, iv) is itself

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[277] Goodkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-3; see Chapter 13 for a further analysis of Agnès' linguistic development.

[278] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, pp. 190, 201, 226: 'une sorte de fil continu de lucidité raisonnée [...] relie Ariste [...] à Chrysalde. [...] la stratégie de Chrysalde, [...] pourrait bien être, [...] emblématique des modes d'émergence de la norme dans le théâtre de Molière. [...] *L'École des femmes* nous confirme que l'école de l'amour délivre de meilleures leçons que les «Maximes du marriage» et toutes les civilités puériles et chrétiennes du monde.'

as artificial and monologic as Arnolphe's educational system because Horace has simply memorized a series of conventional images from the language of chivalry and *galanterie*: 'ma flamme amoureuse', 'mon amour extreme.' (V, iii)[279] Even Chrysalde's rational defence of female education (I, i) is made comic by his fatalistic acceptance of cuckoldry as if it were nothing more than a minor irritation ('Cet accident de soi doit être indifférent' IV, viii), and by his own extreme language. Rather than voicing the dramatist's own views on education, Chrysalde's insistence on the need to 'fuir les extrémités' by avoiding any immoderate expressions ('ce me semble', 'mais l'autre extrémité n'est pas moins condamnable', 'quoi qu'on puisse dire') is in fact almost as excessive as Arnolphe's speech.

Thus, Molière should not be perceived as a didactic pedagogue, in the guise of Arnolphe and Sganarelle, aiming to persuade his audience to identify with the educational programme of a single character. Rather, in his ironic treatment of each school, Molière foreshadows Bakhtin in caricaturing any speaker, male or female, who presents their own language as the ultimate voice of authority. We will now discuss whether this caricature of didactic teachers includes the advocates of linguistic unification.

Education and Vaugelas

> Philaminte – Quoi! toujours, malgré nos remontrances,
> Heurter le fondement de toutes les sciences,
> La grammaire, qui sait régenter jusqu'aux rois,
> Et les fait la main haute obéir à ses lois ! (II, vi)

Learning the correct way to speak and express oneself is of fundamental importance for Molière's theatrical curriculum, most notably for Philaminte and Bélise who slavishly follow Vaugelas' *Remarques sur la langue française*, and for Monsieur Jourdain, who strives to impress Dorimène with his eloquence. In this curriculum, the form of an expression becomes as significant as the content, and language is transformed from a

[279] Goodkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-1; Peacock, *L'École des...„ op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

means of communication into a social weapon which can either elevate the speaker or exclude those who fail to acquire the correct vocabulary. Yet, there has been very little critical focus on the significance of correct speech in Molière's theatre. While Howarth and Dandrey discuss the influence of *honnêteté* on the playwright's comic vision, they devote little attention to the language of the *honnête homme*.[280] Wendy Ayres-Bennett and Lodge, on the other hand, largely discount Molière's comic language in their analysis of sociolinguistic change in the seventeenth century, arguing that literary texts can be an unreliable tool when investigating the authentic speech of the period.[281]

Although it is certainly true that Molière exaggerates linguistic features of his day, such as regional dialects or *précieux* jargon, in order to amuse his audience, his comedies still offer fascinating insights into the contentious process of linguistic unification. Indeed, his characters' fixation with speaking well mirrors the growing emphasis on elegant discourse in seventeenth-century French society as a whole, where a proliferation of grammars, dictionaries and *remarques* were designed to establish a normative speech and eliminate any linguistic variation.[282] Monsieur Jourdain's delight in his language lessons offers a humorous reflection of this new-found fascination with the spoken word. While the audience is encouraged to laugh at his comic letter to Dorimène and his enthusiastic imitation of vowel sounds, which bears a closer resemblance to simian noises rather than the speech of a cultivated nobleman ('A, E; A, E. [...] Ah! que cela est beau! [...] Vive la science'), Monsieur Jourdain's entertaining grammar lesson also points to the increasing need to groom speech according to the norms of polite society: 'Monsieur Jourdain – je veux que cela fût mis d'une manière galante (II, iv) [...] Je veux avoir de l'esprit et savoir raisonner des choses parmi les honnêtes gens.' (III, iii)[283]

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[280] Howarth, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-62; Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-58: In the 1694 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, the *honnête homme* was defined as: 'un homme en qui on ne considère alors que les qualités agréables et les manières du monde. Et en ce sens, *honnête homme* ne veut dire autre chose que galant homme, homme de bonne conversation, de bonne compagnie.'

[281] Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 109, 137; Lodge, *A Sociolinguistic History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

[282] Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 144: in addition to Vaugelas' *Remarques* (1647), metalinguistic texts were also published by Antoine Oudin (*Grammaire française*, 1632), Scipion Dupleix (*Liberté de la langue française dans sa pureté*, 1651) and Marguerite Buffet (*Nouvelles observations sur la langue française*, 1668).

[283] Monsieur Jourdain's lesson also parodies the new system of phonetics, popularised by Cordemoy's *Traité de la parole*. (II, iv)

Monsieur Jourdain's preoccupation with learning how to speak well also raises the wider question of Molière's attitude towards the increasing standardisation of the French language. Does he uphold the *honnête homme* as a model of correct speech and direct his comedy at the extravagant language of those speakers who deviate from the norm, as Howarth, Grimm, Bury and Pierre Force have suggested?[284] Alternatively, does he also subvert this notion of a single '*bon usage*', as Riggs argues, favouring instead the multiplicity of voices characterised by Bakhtin as heteroglossia?[285]

Towards a Linguistic Standard: Vaugelas and the Norms of Spoken French

Although the codification of French had already begun during the Renaissance in an attempt to challenge the pre-eminence of Latin and enhance the prestige of the French language abroad, it was only during the seventeenth century that politicians and grammarians alike emphasised the role of language as an instrument of social conformity, founded on the twin ideals of *le bon usage* and *honnêteté.*[286] Vaugelas, in particular, was instrumental in promoting this linguistic uniformity, and it was the elegant speech of *les honnêtes gens* rather than the learned discourse of academics or earlier authors which was regarded as the model of *le bon usage*: 'C'est la façon de parler de la plus saine partie de la cour, j'y comprens les femmes commes les hommes & plusieurs personnes de la ville où le Prince réside.'[287] Consequently, Vaugelas' ideal of correct usage was profoundly elitist, centered as it was on the elegant language of courtiers and les *honnêtes gens* who were to avoid any archaic, vulgar or technical expressions in their speech.[288] As le Père Bouhours argued: 'le beau langage ressemble à une eau pure et nette qui n'a point de

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[284] Emmanuel Bury, *Littérature et politesse: l'invention de l'honnête homme 1580-1750* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), p. 123; Howarth, *op. cit.* pp. 66-7; Pierre Force, *Molière ou le prix des choses* (Paris: Nathan, 1994), p. 123; Grimm, '*Le Misanthrope*, portrait du siècle' in *Littératures classiques*, 38 (2000), pp. 51-61, (pp. 59-60).

[285] Riggs, 'Pedagogy, Power...' *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[286] *Ibid*, pp. 4 -5; see also Lodge, *A Sociolinguistic History...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 151, 159: Richelieu in particular was aware of the political implications of the standardisation of French and was responsible for founding the *Académie Française* in 1635, whose role was to: 'nettoyer la langue des ordures qu'elle avoit contractées ou dans la bouche du peuple ou dans la foule du Palais, ou dans les impuretez de la chicane, ou par le mauvais usage des courtisans ignorants.'

[287] Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

[288] Vaugelas, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 43: 'jamais les honnêtes gens ne doivent en parlant user d'un mot bas, ou d'une phrase basse.' Vaugelas also opposed the use of neologisms: 'Il n'est permis à qui que ce soit de faire de nouveaux mots, non même pas au souverain.'

goût.'[289] Burlesque and comic language was, however, confined by Vaugelas to the category of *le mauvais usage* along with 'le parler du peuple': 'Selon nous le peuple n'est le maître que du mauvais usage, et le bon usage est le maître de notre langue.'[290]

For Bakhtin, this process of linguistic unification always has an underlying political motive to control the populace by establishing a normative and authoritarian language which may not be questioned:

> Within language there is always at work a centripetal force which aims at centralizing and unifying meaning. Without this impulse the shared basis for understanding necessary for social life would disintegrate. This centripetal force in discourse is put to use by any dominant social group to impose its own monologic, unitary perceptions of truth. However, always working against that centralising process is a centrifugal force [...] of heteroglossia – which stratifies and fragments ideological thought into multiple views of the world.[291]

Although Vaugelas himself was at pains to stress that his *Remarques* were not prescriptive but were simply designed to describe the language adopted by the court and *les honnêtes gens*, his inclusion of certain phrases in *le bon usage* and his rejection of other terms as 'bas' necessarily entailed a hierarchy of linguistic superiority. In fact, Vaugelas even admitted his intention to unify language by proscribing linguistic variation: 'mon dessein dans cette oeuvre est de condamner tout ce qui n'est pas du bon et du bel usage.'[292]

While such unitary or centripetal language is portrayed as fixed and stable, however, Bakhtin contends that it is in fact engaged in a struggle to overcome linguistic variation or heteroglossia. According to Bakhtin, language never has a single meaning or voice but is always stratified into various dialects and into the regional discourse of different groups within society, including the speech of professionals or varying age groups:

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[289] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[290] Vaugelas, *op. cit.*, préface No. VIII, p. 20; see also Zygmunt Marzys, *La Variation et la norme: essais de dialectologie galloromane et d'histoire de la langue française* (Neuchâtel : Université de Neuchâtel, 1998), pp. 40, 70.
[291] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-2.
[292] Vaugelas, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

> Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work, alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward.[293]

To what extent does Molière support or oppose this process of linguistic centralisation? Firstly, it is undoubtedly true that his humour is directed at the speech of those who deviate from the linguistic norm by using archaic or professional vocabulary, both of which were condemned by Vaugelas as examples of *mauvais usage*.[294] In direct contrast to the *honnête homme*, who did not display his erudition in his speech, Molière's pedants and lawyers are ridiculous figures because they insist on employing learned speech in everyday situations, thereby contravening Vaugelas' stipulation that language should always be comprehensible and unambiguous: 'Bref, il n'est pas une phrase d'un honnête homme qui ne doive pouvoir être immédiatement et parfaitement comprise d'un autre honnête homme.'[295] Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, in particular, belies his claim to be a Limousin gentleman by inadvertantly revealing his familiarity with legal jargon ('ajournement', 'décret', 'jurisdiction', 'pour temporiser et venir aux moyens de nullité qui seront dans les procédures'): 'Sbrigani – Voilà en parler dans tous les termes; et l'on voit bien, Monsieur, que vous êtes de métier.' (II, x) As the Chevalier de Méré stressed, a true nobleman would have been ignorant of such professional terms : 'C'est un malheur aux honnêtes gens d'être pris à leur mine pour des gens de métier, et quand on a cette disgrâce, il s'en faut défaire à quelque prix que ce soit.'[296] In *La Critique de L'École des femmes*, Dorante also mocks Lysidas because of his determination to impress his

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[293] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[294] Vaugelas, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-4: 'Règle de méthode': Vaugelas favoured consulting those people who had not studied Latin and Greek, believing that they were more reliable authorities on correct usage than *les savants*; see also Marzys, *op. cit.*, pp. 55, 9.

[295] Vaugelas, *op. cit*, pp. 13-14; see also La Rochefoucauld, *op. cit.*, *Maximes* 203: According to La Rochefoucauld, an *honnête homme* did not specialise in a single discipline: 'le vrai honnête homme est celui qui ne se pique de rien.'; Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 124: Vaugelas himself deliberately avoided technical terms to avoid appearing pedantic to a *mondain* audience, and Mlle de Scudéry shared his belief that speech should always be comprehensible and unambiguous: 'quiconque parle est obligé de se faire entendre.'

[296] Howarth, *op. cit.*, p. 57. Nonetheless, even Vaugelas would have been amused by Philaminte's condemnation of her notaire's 'style sauvage', as professionals were not expected to conform to *le bon usage* when performing their duties: 'le plus habile notaire de Paris se rendrait ridicule, [...] s'il mettait dans l'esprit de changer son stile et ses phrases, pour prendre celles de nos meilleurs auteurs.' See also Charles Marty-Laveaux, *Études de langue française (XVI^e^ & XVII^e^ siècles)* (Paris : Alphonse Lemerre, 1901), p. 278.

audience with specialised theatrical terms ('la protase, l'épitase, et la péripatie') rather than communicate with them: 'Ne parraissez pas si savant, de grâce. Humanisez votre discours, et parlez pour être entendu.' (scene vi)

It is not only the contrived speech of *doctes* or professional jargon which is comical. Molière's self-appointed arbiters of good taste also mock 'plain speakers' who persist in using archaic vocabulary and expressions. Whilst ostensibly defending 'l'ancienne honnêteté' (l. 270) from the corruption of modern society, Sganarelle's repudiation of polite discourse in favour of coarse and antiquated expressions ('donzelle', 'm'amie', 'taxer votre office', 'vos jeunes muguets'), makes him an object of ridicule, not only for Ariste but also for Molière's spectators.[297] Alceste is equally absurd because of his refusal to adopt *le bon usage*. In contrast to Philinte and Célimène who promote the need for 'la complaisance' (ll.120, 498) and 'la bienséance' rather than 'la pleine franchise' in language ('quand on est du monde, il faut bien que l'on rende/ Quelques dehors civils que l'usage demande.' I, i), Alceste's deliberate use of offensive oaths ('Morbleu! faut-il que je vous aime!' l. 514) and 'mots fâcheux' mean that he is the antithesis of the *honnête* suitor. As Célimène notes with sarcasm:

> Certes, pour un amant, la fleurette est mignonne,
> Et vous me traitez là de gentille personne. (II, i)

Molière's parody is not aimed solely at characters who refuse to conform to *le bon usage*. He also mocks those speakers who inadvertently contravene the very rules of polite usage which they seek to impose on others. Magdelon and Cathos' mission to purify speech resembles that of the *remarqueurs*, but ironically enough, their excessive use of periphrases ('Voilà un nécessaire qui demande si vous êtes en commodité d'être visibles'), neologisms ('j'ai un furieux tendre') and figurative terms entails that they

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[297] Ariste echoes Vaugelas' demand that speech should always conform to 'usage' – Toujours au plus grand nombre on doit s'accommoder/ Et jamais il ne faut se faire regarder. (I, ii) ; see also *L'École des maris*, ed. Peter Nurse (London : Harrap : 1959), pp. 63, 74, 76: According to Richelet, 'muguet' was 'un mot un peu vieux' which was restricted to 'le burlesque, le satirique ou comique.' Similarly, 'donzelle' was confined to *le mauvais usage*: 'mot de mépris pour dire demoiselle, le mot de donzelle est burlesque et offensant.' Furetière also noted that 'taxer' (l. 936) was 'un mot...qui est rarement reçu aujourd'hui dans le beau langage pour dire 'blâmer, reprendre.' Both terms were condemned by Vaugelas. Finally, 'm'amie' (l. 717) was an obsolete contraction of 'mon amie.'

deviate as much from the norm as the plain-speakers whom they disparage.[298] The same is true of the disciples of Vaugelas, the femmes savantes. However closely they may claim to follow his precepts, their insistence on using technical grammatical terms to explain Martine's linguistic errors ('De *pas* mis avec *rien* tu fais la récidive,/ Et c'est, comme on t'a dit, trop d'une négative') leads them to flout Vaugelas' own demand that language should always be comprehensible. In fact, it is actually Martine rather than her mistresses who represents Vaugelas' belief that the most important role of language is to communicate clearly:

> Quand on se fait entendre on parle toujours bien,
> Et tous vos biaux dictons ne servent pas de rien. (II, v)

Finally, la Comtesse d'Escarbagnas provokes the audience's laughter with her misplaced outrage at her son's apparently vulgar Latin: 'Mon Dieu! ce Jean Despautère-là est un insolent, et je vous prie de lui enseigner du latin plus honnête que celui-là.' (scene vii) Far from exemplifying the popular notion that a lack of formal education meant that women should be seen as arbiters of good taste, La Comtesse merely commits a social *faux-pas* by revealing her own ignorance of Latin.[299]

Nevertheless, it is not only deviations from the linguistic norm which are amusing. By perceiving Molière as an uncritical exponent of *le bon usage* and *honnêteté*, Force, Howarth, Bury and Grimm ignore the fact that the playwright also subverts the notion of the *honnête homme* as the sole model of correct speech. In fact, Molière was himself criticised by Fénelon, La Bruyère and Pierre Bayle for failing to adhere to *le bon usage* in his plays, with Fénelon going so far as to claim: 'En pensant bien il parle souvent mal. Il se sert des phrases les plus forcées et les moins nouvelles. Térence dit en quatre mots avec la plus élégante simplicité ce que celui-ci ne dit qu'avec une multitude de

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[298] See Vaugelas, *op. cit.*, p. 20; see also Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-66 for an excellent analysis of *précieux* jargon and attitudes towards the language of women.

[299] See Ayres-Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-2, 126, 140: It was assumed that female speech was more 'naturel' and 'agréable' than the discourse of men. Vaugelas' praise of female speech was not, however, echoed by all *remarqueurs*. Dupleix and La Mothe le Vayer questioned the ability of women to pronounce on doubtful usage, precisely because they had undergone no formal education in Latin and Greek.

métaphores, qui s'approchent du galimatias.'[300] Yet, whereas *le bon usage* was promoted as a more natural form of speech, devoid of the linguistic excesses of professional jargon, *mots bas* or neologisms, Molière was well aware that it is actually the multiple regional and social dialects of society which are truly natural, rather than an artificial linguistic norm. As Bakhtin argues: 'it is precisely the diversity of speech, and not the unity of a normative shared langauge, that is the ground of style.'[301]

Even the supposedly colourless speech of *les honnêtes gens* is shown to be amusing. Howarth argues that 'there can be no doubt that the function of Molière's honnêtes gens is to illustrate a norm of civilised behaviour against which the behaviour of the comic characters can be measured,' but this judgment does not account for the fact that they too are parodied by the dramatist.[302] Henriette and Clitandre have traditionally been regarded as the representatives of *le bon usage*, but they also transgress the linguistic norm as Clitandre proves to be as verbose as Trissotin or Vadius in his attack on pedants (ll. 1363-82), while he resembles the femmes savantes with his use of *précieux* jargon: 'tendres soupirs', 'l'ardeur', 'désirs.' (I, ii) The same is true of Henriette who misapplies the stereotypical discourse of a romanesque heroine to a far from romantic discussion about money: 'les destins si contraires', 'transport', 'l'ardeur de ce noeud', 'tous les noirs chagrins qui suivent de tels feux.' (V, iv)[303] Nor do Célimène and Philinte represent the author's voice.[304] Alceste may be ridiculous for condemning all human nature as utterly corrupt, but Philinte's speech is almost as extreme with his absolute demand for perfect equanimity and his refusal to be outraged by anything: 'Il faut, parmi le monde, une vertu traitable. [...] la parfaite raison fuit toute extrémité.' (I, i) Above all, Molière highlights the incongruity of *honnête* discourse which is purely concerned with pleasing and flattering others. The verbal duel of Célimène and Arsinoé may embody the rules of polite discourse ('Célimène – Madame, j'ai beaucoup de grâces à vous rendre') (III, iv), but their underlying hostility ('dans tous les lieux dévots elle étale un grand zèle, / Mais

[300] Marzys, *op. cit.*, pp. 50, 202-4: Molière also contravened Vaugelas' precepts through his omission of personal pronouns and articles in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* ('et bois encore mieux') (I, viii) and *Tartuffe*: 'si je vous faisais voir qu'on vous dit vérité?' (IIV, iii)
[301] See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 273, 308, 369.
[302] Howarth, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
[303] See Peacock, *Les Femmes...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-9.
[304] Grimm, '*Le Misanthrope*, portrait...', *op. cit.*, p. 59.

elle met du blanc et veut paraître belle') (III, iv) reveals the language of *honnêteté* to be little more than a veneer.

Yet, this does not mean that Molière was a revolutionary who was utterly opposed to linguistic unification, as Riggs argues.[305] Rather, he laughs at the idiosyncrasies of all speakers, including the linguistic excesses of *honnêtes gens*, along with the archaic speech of Sganarelle and Alceste or the unintelligible jargon of lawyers and pedants, and it is the language of Molière's professionals which will now be analysed.

Molière and the Pedants

The role of Molière's pedants and medical doctors continues to provoke controversy amongst scholars. Whereas Austin Gill argues that Molière's philosophers are essentially farcical figures, derived from the *docteur* of the *commedia dell'arte* and the more learned figure of the *commedia erudita*, his theory has been challenged by Andrew Calder, who believes that they are used to satirise scholasticism and to champion the new philosophy of Cartesianism.[306] Molière's representation of the medical profession is even more contentious. David Shaw has suggested Monsieur Purgon, Monsieur Tomès and Thomas Diafoirus are simply more elaborate versions of the loquacious and ignorant doctor of the farce tradition, but this view has been opposed by Dandrey, Calder, Cairncross and Hall, all of whom argue that the dramatist waged a vitriolic campaign against contemporary physicians.[307] Was Molière truly satirising traditional learning in favour of empirical philosophical and medical theories, or was he simply exploiting the traditional figure of the garrulous doctor for comic effect?

Aristotelian Pedants

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[305] Riggs, 'Pedagogy...', *op. cit.*, p. 76.
[306] A. Gill, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-9; A. Calder, *Molière: The Theory and Practice of Comedy* (London & Atlantic Highlands: The Athlone Press, 1993), p. 115; 'Molière's Aristotelian...', *op. cit.*, p. 72.
[307] Cairncross, *L'Humanité...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-15; Dandrey, *Sganarelle et la médecine...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 366-7; *Molière et la maladie imaginaire...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-80.

To some extent, Le Docteur in *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, Métaphraste and Pancrace form part of a literary and theatrical tradition of 'learned' doctors who are purely concerned with demonstrating their own greatness by citing irrelevant Latin quotations at every opportunity: 'Le Docteur – Quoi! débuter d'abord par un discours mal digéré, au lieu de dire: *Salve, vel Salvus sis, Doctor, Doctorum eruditissime*!' (scene ii)[308] As Lerat notes, Le Docteurs's salacious puns in *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* ('tu n'aimes que le dactyle, *quia constat ex una longa et duabus brevibus*') resemble Granger's grammatical jokes in *Le Pédant joué* (I, ii; V, v), while Pancrace's assertion that 'je suis et serai toujours, in utroque jure, le docteur Pancrace' (scene iv) echoes a similar claim in Gillet de la Tessonerie's *Le Déniaisé.* (1649)[309] Similarly, Gill has demonstrated that the pedants' long-winded praise of brevity is derived from the farcical tradition of *Tabarin* literature and Bruscambille's *Prologue du Silence*:

> Le Docteur – *Virtutem primam esse puta compescere linguam.* Oui, la plus belle qualité d'un honnête homme, c'est de parler peu.' (scene vi) [...]
>
> Métaphraste – Oh! que les grands parleurs sont par moi détestés! (II, vi)[310]

Nevertheless, the pedants' precise allusions to Aristotelian terms mean that they are far more than incompetent buffoons. The refusal of Le Docteur, Métaphraste and Pancrace to accept any opposition to their absurd teaching parodies the monologism of scholastic philosophers who presented their own learning as irrefutable and sought to pressurise the *Parlement de Paris* to ban the teaching of any philosophy other than Aristotelian Thomism.[311] Le Docteur's ludicrous proof of his own brilliance caricatures the reliance of scholastic philosophy on the syllogistic method of reasoning, which appears to form a rational argument but which is often used to 'prove' a nonsensical conclusion: 'Ainsi tu vois par des raison plausibles, vraies, démonstratives, que je suis [...] 10 fois docteur.'

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[308] Calder, *Molière: the Theory...*, *op. cit.*, p. 114; Gill, *op. cit.*, p. 106: Pascal defines the *commedia* doctor as 'le Docteur, qui parle un quart d'heure après avoir tout dit, tant il est plein de désir de dire.'

[309] Pierre Lerat, *Le Ridicule et son expression dans les comédies françaises de Scarron à Molière* (Lille: Université de Lille, 1980), pp. 234-8, 333; see also Cyrano de Bergerac, *Le Pédant joué*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

[310] Gill, *op. cit.*, p. 115; see also Despois & Mesnard, *Les Grands Écrivains...*, Vol 1, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

[311] 'Pancrace – Une licence épouvantable règne partout; et les magistrats, qui sont établis pour maintenir l'ordre dans cet État, devraient rougir de honte en souffrant un scandale aussi intolérable que celui dont je veux parler.' (scene iv); see also Edward John Kearns, *Ideas in Seventeenth-century France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), pp. 10-11: The Sorbonne was still pressurising the *Parlement de Paris* to forbid the teaching of any philosophy other than Aristotelianism as late as 1671.

(scene ii) Similarly, Pancrace's abstruse distinctions between 'la forme' and 'la figure d'un chapeau' mock both the obscure terminology and the often trivial debates of Aristotelian Thomism: 'un corps inanimé: c'est comme il faut parler. [...] Je crèverais plutôt que d'avouer ce que tu dis, et je soutiendrai mon opinion jusqu'à la dernière goutte de mon encre.'[312]

While Molière follows Montaigne and Descartes in mocking the sophistry of scholastic philosophers, this does not mean, however, that he shares Descartes' desire to overthrow traditional education.[313] Indeed, Molière's humour is in fact directed as much at Descartes' technical jargon and claims of intellectual supremacy as it is at the *galimatias* of the Aristotelian pedants.[314] Ironically, the advocates of Cartesian dualism, the 'femmes savantes', are shown to be as ludicrous as Pancrace and Métaphraste with their dogmatism ('Tout nous sera soumis' III, ii) and indiscriminate use of philosophical terms, designed purely to impress rather than instruct others: 'j'aime ses tourbillons', 'Moi, ses mondes tombants.' (III, ii) Rather than represent a single philosophy, therefore, Molière parodies the extremes of all philosophical positions and the attempts to impose them on everyday language. As Bakhtin notes:

> Parodic-travestying literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter, of a critique of the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word, the corrective of reality that is always richer, more fundamental and most importantly too contradictory and heteroglot to be fit into a high and straightforward genre.[315]

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[312] See Despois & Ménard, *Les Grands Écrivains...*, *op. cit.*, p. 35: Pancrace's distinction between 'la forme' and 'la figure' recalls Aristotle's discussion of 'forma' and 'figura' in *The Categories*; see also Olivier Bloch, *Molière: philosophie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000), p. 97.

[313] Montaigne, *Essais*, I, *op. cit.*, Chapter XXV: *Du Pédantisme*: According to Montaigne, pedants were only concerned about winning arguments rather than discovering the truth, much like the sophists whom Socrates criticised: 'Nous n'aprenons à disputer que pour contredire. [...] il en advient que le fruit de disputer, c'est perdre et anéantir la vérité.'; see also Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* (Paris: Bordas, 1996), p. 51: Descartes was equally scathing in his attack on scholastic education: 'La philosophie donne moyen de parler vraisemblabement de toutes choses et de se faire admirer des moins savants. [...] L'obscurité des distinctions et des principes dont ils se servent est cause qu'ils peuvent parler de toutes choses aussi hardiment que s'ils les savaient.'

[314] Descartes, *op. cit.*, p. 74; Calder, 'Molière's Aristotelian...', *op. cit.*, pp. 72-3; see also Kearns, *op. cit.*, p. 42: the original title of *Le Discours* was *Le Projet d'une Science universelle qui puisse élever notre nature à son plus haut degré de perfection.*

[315] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic...*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

Molière and the Doctors

Can the same be said of Molière's depiction of medical doctors? While Dandrey, Calder and Hall regard the pseudo doctors, such as Sganarelle in *Le Médecin volant* and *Le Médecin malgré lui*, as little more than farcical figures, they all perceive the later medical comedies as the dramatist's most savage satire, designed to attack the incompetence and cupidity of the medical profession.[316] Cairncross argues that Molière's alleged hostility towards physicians was prompted by his own ill health and the death of his son, while Hall suggests that *Le Malade imaginaire* is intended to satirise the conservative opposition of the Paris Faculty to Harvey's discovery of the circulation of blood.[317]

At first sight, Molière's ridicule of doctors does appear to be far more pointed than his mockery of other comic types, particularly as they have little compunction in killing their patients, as long as the universal treatments of 'saigner' and 'purger' are carried out in accordance with 'les règles' prescribed by Galen:

> Éraste – un malade ne doit point vouloir guérir que la Faculté n'y consente.
>
> L'Apothicaire – [...] j'aimerais mieux mourir de ses remèdes que de guérir de ceux d'un autre. [...] Assurément; on est bien aise au moins d'être mort méthodiquement. (*Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*: I, v)[318]

In fact, the genuine doctors prove to be as incompetent as their charlatan impersonators, as they too resort to incomprehensible technical and Latinised jargon ('*ignoti nulla est curatio morbi*', 'signes pathognomoniques', 'en phthisie', 'cette cacochymie luxuriante', *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*: I, viii) in order to impress their patients with the illusion of learning: 'Thomas Diafoirus – *Dico*, que le pouls de Monsieur est le pouls d'un homme qui ne se porte pas bien. [...] Qu'il est duriuscule, pour ne pas dire dur.' (*Le Malade imaginiare*: II, vi)[319] Indeed, Thomas Diafoirus' ludicrous diagnosis of Argan's imaginary ailment recalls Sganarelle's farcical attempt to diagnose Lucile's illness by

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[316] Dandrey, *Sganarelle et la...*, op. cit., pp. 4, 11; Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 104, 109, Calder, *Molière, the Theory...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-7.

[317] Cairncross, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

[318] See also *L'Amour médecin*: Monsieur Bahys – Il vaut mieux mourir selon les règles que de réchapper contre les règles. (II, v)

[319] Thomas' diagnosis recalls those of Sganarelle in *Le Médecin volant*: 'Hippocrate dit, et Galien, par vives raisons, persuade qu'une personne ne se porte pas bien quand elle est malade.' (scene iv)

examining her father. (*Le Médecin volant*: scene iv)[320] As Emelina notes: 'la médecine n'est que rhétorique. Il suffit de savoir non pas guérir, mais «discourir sur les maladies».[321]

This caricature of the medical profession should not, however, be regarded as a satire of genuine doctors, as Molière's depiction of doctors bears very little relation to the reality of contemporary medical practice, and is derived rather from literary and farce traditions of inept physicians portrayed by Montaigne, Rabelais and Chaucer.[322] As Shaw has demonstrated, much of Molière's supposed attack on current medical practice is in fact based on an essay written by Montaigne in the previous century: 'De la resemblance des enfants aux pères.'[323] While the knowledge of most physicians was undoubtedly theoretical rather than practical in the mid-seventeenth century, this does not entail that they were the greedy or callous doctors personified by Monsieur Purgon. On the contrary, Brockliss and Jones have shown that the vast majority of doctors genuinely sought to heal their patients, with many providing free consultations and medicine for the poor.[324] Meanwhile, Thomas Diafoirus' vociferous opposition to Harvey's theory of the circulation of blood (II, v) does not constitute an accurate reflection of medical opinion in the 1670s:

> The accusation might have made sense in the 1640s and 1650s, but even then faculty physicians, such as Riolan, were engaging with the new anatomical

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> Thomas Diafoirus – Ce qui marque une intempérie dans le parenchyme splénique, c'est-à-dire la rate.
> Argan – Non; Monsieur Purgon dit que c'est mon foie qui est malade.
> Monsieur Diafoirus – Eh! Oui; qui dit *parenchyme*, dit l'un et l'autre. (II, vi)

[321] Emelina, 'Molière et le jeu des mots', *op. cit.*, p. 84.

[322] Laurence Brockliss & Colin Jones, *Beneath the Shadow of Plague: The Medical World of Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 339; David Shaw, 'Molière and the Doctors' in *Nottingham French Studies*, 33, No. 1 (1994), pp. 133-42 (p. 134); Montaigne, *Essais*, *II*, *op. cit.*, 'La Médecine et les médecins', p. 89; see also Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 30: the physician described in the Prologue is typically fond of gold, and relies on astronomy, astrology and ancient authorities to treat his patients; see also Bakhtin, *Rabelais...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-80: Bakhtin emphasises the striking similarities between the 'gay physician' of the carnival tradition and Molière's doctors.

[323] Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

[324] Brockliss & Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 339; see also Andrew Wear, 'Aspects of Seventeenth-century French Medicine' in *Seventeenth-century French Studies*, 4 (1982), p. 127: Wear cites the case of Théophraste Renaudot who offered free medical advice and treatment to the poor in Paris, while Paul Daubé's *Le Médecin et chirurgien des pauvres* (1669) suggested a variety of inexpensive remedies which were easily accessible to poorer patients.

> discoveries, however critically. By the 1670s it made no sense at all; every faculty of note had seen students sustain Harveian physiology in the preceding decade.[325]

Therefore, far from satirising contemporary medicine, Molière is actually refining a recognisable literary type, whilst also parodying the ceremonies and ritualised Latin terms ('Bene', 'optime', 'salus, honor et argentums,/ Atque bonum appetitum': *Le Malade imaginaire* II, iv, troisième intermède), employed by the medical faculties. Argan's initiation into the medical profession constitutes a comical distortion of the speeches and oaths from actual medical ceremonies in Paris and Montpellier with its *latin macaronique* and transformation of the authentic authorisation to practice medicine ('Do tibi licentiam, legendi, interpretandi et faciendi medicinam, hic et ubique terrarum') into the burlesque permission to: 'Seignandi,/ Perçandi,/ Taillandi,/ Coupandi.' (Troisième intermède.)[326] Moreover, Thomas Diafoirus is a farcical version of the pastoral lover with his incongruous fusion of scientific and précieux imagery: 'doux transport', 'la fleur nommée héliotrope', 'l'offrande de ce coeur', 'son pôle unique.' (II, v)[327] Even Molière's specific mockery of the royal physicians in *L'Amour Médecin* is designed to poke fun at their obfuscation and linguistic mannerisms ('Monsieur Macroton – Mon-si-eur. dans. ces. matières-là. il. faut. pro-cé-der. a-vec-que. cir-con-spec-tion. II, iv) rather than condemn them as medical practitioners, particularly as they recall the pedants of *commedia* tradition with their dispute over who will speak first and their refusal to listen to any other opinions:

> Monsieur Tomès – C'est bien à vous de faire l'habile homme.
>
> Monsieur des Fonandrès – Oui, c'est à moi; et je vous prêterai le collet en tout genre d'érudition. (II, iv)[328]

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[325] Brockliss & Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 337-9: the final thesis attacking Harvey's discovery was defended in 1672.

[326] See Chapter Eight for an analysis of the language games within the medical ceremony; see *Le Malade imaginaire*, ed., Peter Nurse (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 161-2 for an account of the similarities between Argan's medical initiation and actual medical ceremonies; see also Shaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-40.

[327] See also Emelina, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-3.

[328] Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 137: the four doctors were reputed to represent the Court doctors, Guénaut, Esprit, Yvelin and d'Aquin.

Nor does Béralde speaks for the dramatist in his opposition to all forms of medical intervention, as Brockliss and Jones have argued.[329] By concluding that he was a sceptic who favoured the experimental methods of Descartes and Gassendi, they ignore the comic nature of Béralde's language which is as immoderate in its absolute scepticism as Argan's complete faith in the abilities of doctors. (III, iii) This double-edged parody of medical professionals and of their sceptical opponents shows that Molière does not seek to reform the university system or the medical profession in his mockery of Aristotelian pedants and doctors. Rather, they are figures of fun who are designed to parody the linguistic absolutism and affected speech of all authoritarian intellectuals. After examining Molière's representation of the language of various social groups, we will now turn to another fundamental aspect of his parody: his metatheatrical allusions to contemporary literature. Does his mimicry of heroic, tragic or *romanesque* language constitute an attempt to emulate the elevated style of celebrated authors or can it also be viewed as a deliberate comic device with which to entertain an audience?

[329] Brockliss & Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 340-1.

Chapter Six: Molière and Literary parody

While much critical attention has been devoted to identifying the wide variety of literary and theatrical works from which Molière drew source material for his comedies, there has been a surprising lack of interest in the playwright's motivation in borrowing lines, plot developments and situations from as diverse a range of authors as Pierre Corneille, Rabelais, Madeleine de Scudéry and Honoré d'Urfé.[330] With the exception of Gaston Hall, few scholars have explored the comic potential of Molière's supposedly tragic heroes and heroines, while the language of his young lovers has often been dismissed as uninspired and formulaic. Indeed, his alleged dictum of 'je prends mon bien là où je le trouve' has led to frequent charges of plagiarism, particularly on the part of La Croix and Donneau de Visé.[331] Yet, these accusations fail to account for the comic nature of Molière's allusions to tragedies, pastorals and *romans précieux*. Far from revealing a lack of originality in recycling language from other literary works, Molière's inter-textual references are fundamental to his comedy and form part of a complex dialogue with his spectators, who would undoubtedly enjoy recognising his imitation of the elevated language of contemporary literature.

Nevertheless, the majority of socio-critics have accepted Molière's own claim in *La Critique de L'École des femmes* that his comedies are essentially 'miroirs publics' of seventeenth-century society, which reproduce the manners and conversations of his public: 'lorsque vous peignez les hommes, il faut peindre d'après nature; on veut que ces

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[330] See Bourqui, *op. cit.*

[331] See Norman, *Molière and the Public Mirror... op. cit.*, pp. 30, 32; 'Molière, rhapsode et espion: fictions d'auteur dans la querelle de *L'École des femmes*' in Sandrine Dubel and Sophie Rabou, ed., *Fiction d'auteur? Le discours biographique sur l'auteur de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), pp. 185-200 (p. 187-8): In *La Guerre comique* (1664), La Croix accused Molière of plagiarising Spanish and Italian drama: 'Molière Autheur! Il n'y a que de la superficie et du jeu; sa présomption est insupportable, il se méconnoist depuis qu'on court à quatre ou cinq Farces qu'il a dérobées de tous costés. [...] il lit tous les livres satiriques, il pille dans l'Italien, il pille dans l'Espagnol, et il n'y a point de bouqin qui se sauve de ses mains.' Similarly, Robinet described *L'École des femmes* as 'un mélange de larcins que l'Autheur a faits de tous costez' and referred to Molière as 'un Bassin qui reçoit ses eaux d'ailleurs.' Norman has, however, noted that the modern notion that an artist should produce original work was an entirely alien concept to seventeenth-century authors who were prized for their ability to adapt rather than invent material. Even Corneille vaunted the fact that *Le Menteur* was 'une copie d'un excellent original.'

portraits ressemblent.' (scene vi)[332] Norman, for example, argues that Molière's audiences not only observed but also contributed to his comedies by providing the material for his dialogues and comic situations.[333] *Le Misanthrope*, in particular, has been perceived as a perfect representation of salon society by many scholars, with Donnay, Mornet and Grimm suggesting that the comedy is not based on any literary sources, but is rather an original invention, derived from the playwright's own observations of *les gens de qualité*.[334] Although Norman has pointed to the illusory nature of this portrait of Molière as a scribe who merely observed *les honnêtes gens* and recorded their conversations, he still depicts Molière as a social satirist and largely ignores the fact that the dramatist's linguistic humour is derived as much from his imitation and remodelling of other literary works as it is from any social comment. In fact, Hall has already challenged the theory that *Le Misanthrope* is a purely original invention and has demonstrated that it is in fact based on a wide variety of theatrical sources, including Corneille's *Mélite* and *Le Menteur*, Scarron's *L'Héritier ridicule* and Rotrou's *La Soeur*.[335] Consequently, the aim of this chapter is to re-evaluate the significance of Molière's literary allusions and explore whether he is merely emulating the language of well-known authors, or whether his recycling of other literary works also has a parodic intention.

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[332] 'Uranie – Toutes les peintures ridicules qu'on expose sur les théâtres doivent être regardées sans chagrin de tout le monde. Ce sont miroir publics, où il ne faut jamais témoigner qu'on se voie.' (scene vi); see also Norman, 'Molière, rhapsode...' *op. cit.*, p. 189: in *Nouvelles nouvelles* (1663), De Visé asserted that Molière was little more than a secretary who edited the portraits and *mémoires* provided by *les gens de qualité* in order to produce his comedies: 'Ils donnèrent eux-mêmes, avec beaucoup d'empressement, à l'auteur [...] des mémoires de tout ce qui se passait dans le monde, et des portraits de leurs propres défauts, et de ceux de leurs meilleurs amis, croyant qu'il y avait de la gloire pour eux que l'on reconnût leurs impertinences dans ses ouvrages.'

[333] Norman, *The Public Mirror...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-3.

[334] Grimm supports the theory that Molière drew largely on his own experiences when writing *Le Misanthrope*: 'Dass *Le misanthrope* als Ganzes ein getreuer Spiegel des gesellschaftlichen Verhaltens zur Zeit Molières ist, hat bereits Donneau de Visé erkannt. [...] Doch hat eine sorgfältige Analyse ergeben [...] dass Molières wahre Qeullen in diesem Stück nicht primär literarischer, sondern biographischer Art sind'. ('Donneau de Visé has already recognised that *Le Misanthrope* is a faithful mirror image of social behaviour in Molière's day. [...] Careful analysis has shown that Molière's true sources for this play are primarily biographical rather than literary.') (my translation), Grimm, *op. cit.*, pp. 130, 132; Donnay and Mornet cited in G. Hall, 'The Literary Context of *Le Misanthrope*' in *Comedy in Context... op. cit.*, p. 178; Norman, 'Molière, rhapsode...' *op. cit.*, p. 199: the anonymous preface to the 1682 edition of Molière's *Œuvres completes* also suggests that the dramatist used his own spectators as source material for his plays: 'il observait les manières et les moeurs de tout le monde; il trouvait moyen ensuite d'en faire des applications admirables dans les comédies, où l'on peut dire qu'il a joué tout le monde.'

[335] Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-222.

According to Linda Hutcheon, parody is a form of 'repetition with critical distance', which serves to expose the gulf between the original literary source and society but which is rarely designed to mock the parodied text itself. Rather, she believes that the literary model is usually admired by the parodist, and suggests that an audience derives pleasure from the 'degree of engagement [...] in the intertextual "bouncing" between complicity and distance.' [336] In contrast to Lanson and Leavis, who characterise parody as parasitic and derivative, Hutcheon stresses its creative role in reinvigorating literary genres, but she also denies that this 'imitation characterized by ironic inversion' is inevitably comic: 'There is nothing in *parodia* that necessitates the inclusion of a concept of ridicule, as there is, for instance, in the joke or burla or burlesque.'[337] Her view is shared by Philip Robinson who argues that eighteenth century parodies of Corneille and Racine by Fuzelier and Subligny were not designed to mock the original tragedies: 'one feels that the originals have become more or less immune from censure [...] and [...] the pleasure afforded is in the recognition of the famous original and in the wit of the transformation.'[338]

To what extent is this true of Molière's recycling of tragic and *romanesque* language? Does he simply imitate the elevated register of Cornelian tragedy or *commedia erudita* in order to highlight the comic contrast between the lofty discourse of Corneille's heroes and the rather more prosaic speech of his own characters? Or, on the other hand, does Molière also turn the comic mirror on the language of his illustrious models by fusing exalted and bathetic speech, thereby subverting the traditional hierarchy of genres which regarded comedy as inferior to the noble art of tragedy? The first part of the chapter will focus on the language of Molière's so-called 'tragic' heroes and consider whether the dramatist asks us to sympathise with their plight or whether he merely invites audiences to laugh at the exaggerated laments of Arnolphe, Alceste and George Dandin. Secondly, we will analyse the language of Molière's pastoral comedies, including *Mélicerte* (1666) and *La Princesse d'Élide* (1664), both of which have been overlooked by the majority of

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[336] L. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 50, 103.
[337] *Ibid*, pp. 6, 32.
[338] P. Robinson, 'Reflexions on Early Eighteenth-Century French Theatrical Parody' in Derek Connon and George Evans, ed., *Essays in French Comic Drama from the 1640s to the 1780s* (Oxford, Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 139-52, (p. 141).

Moliéristes. Are they insignificant *intermèdes* or do they also caricature pastoral conventions? Finally, we will discuss whether the language of Molière's young lovers is one-dimensional and uninspired as has often been supposed by critics, or whether it too serves to parody the *précieux* style of *romanesque* literature.

Molière's tragic heroes

> Trahi de toutes parts et accablé d'injustices,
> Je vais sortir d'un goufre où triomphent les vices. (*Le Misanthrope*: V, iv)

From Le Barbouillé's exclamation that he is 'le plus malheureux de tous les hommes' to Alceste's lament that he has been betrayed and 'assassinated' by Célimène ('Ah! tout est ruiné,/ Je suis, je suis trahi, je suis assassiné') (IV, ii), many of Molière's characters consider themselves to be tragic heroes and the innocent victims of fate. Indeed, their self-perceptions have often been shared by scholars. *Dom Garcie de Navarre* is frequently regarded as Molière's failed attempt to write a serious play, while Michelet and Mazouer view *George Dandin* as a bleak and far from comic drama owing to the eponymous hero's threat to drown himself.[339] Albanese has also questioned interpretations of Arnolphe as an amusing character, and critics including de Visé and Bray have pitied Alceste's futile stand against the corruption of society.[340] The appropriation of tragic language has even led to theories that Molière did not actually write these plays, but was in fact Corneille.

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[339] Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 271; R. Bray, *op. cit.*, p. 313: Adam describes *Dom Garcie* as 'une tragédie familière', while Bray believes that the play is intended to be serious, referring to it as 'une belle étude de jalousie, dépouillée de ridicule, mais aussi de tragique.'; see also Charles Mazouer, *Trois comédies de Molière: étude sur Le Misanthrope, George Dandin, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (Paris: Sedes, 1999), p. 28 and N. Peacock, 'The Comic Ending of *George Dandin*' in *French Studies* XXXVI (1982), pp. 144-53 (p. 144): Mazouer calls *George Dandin* 'une comédie rosse', while Michelet characterises the play as 'douloureux' and '[une] comédie noire.'

[340] Albanese, *Le Dynamisme…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1; see also Hubert, *op. cit.*, p. 66: he describes *L'École des femmes* as 'une tragédie burlesque.'; René Jasinski, *Molière et le Misanthrope* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1951), p. 123: In his *Lettre à Monsieur d'Alembert*, Rousseau declared Alceste to be a 'véritable homme de bien', a perception shared by Goethe who characterised the misanthrope as an 'âme vraie et pure qui est restée naturelle.'

Since Pierre Louÿs' assertion that a stylistic analysis of Molière's comedies proves that they were composed by Pierre Corneille rather than Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, his theories have been elaborated by a variety of scholars, amongst them Henri Poulaille, François Vergnaud, and Cyril and Dominique Labbé.[341] By comparing the lexis of the two playwrights in a statistical analysis, Cyril and Dominique Labbé conclude that similar vocabulary in Corneille's *Le Menteur* and Molière's comedies prove that the elder dramatist was probably responsible for most of Molière's plays, a view shared by Vergnaud who asserts that the profusion of neologisms and archaic terms employed by both dramatists proves that they were one and the same person.[342] He even asserts that Molière was incapable of writing many of his plays because he was not sufficiently versed in the classical and religious texts to which he frequently alludes, such as Godeau's *Poésies chrétiennes* or Saint Augustine's *Consensus Evangelistorum*:

> Nous estimons donc que la vraie figure de «Molière» a été occultée. Jean-Baptiste Poquelin – qui attire la sympathie – n'était pas un «intellectuel», ni un écrivain selon nous. Il n'a rien écrit de son oeuvre; encore une fois, l'eût-il pu, il n'en aurait pas eu le temps. [...] Il n'avait rien d'un créateur. [343]

While Hippolyte Wouters and Christine de Ville de Goyet do not support Vergnaud's supposition that Corneille alone created the comedies, they ascertain that two different authors must have been responsible for Molière's plays, founding their argument on the 'evidence' that his writing oscillates between 'le néant et le parfait': 'Dans *L'École des femmes*, *Le Misanthrope*, *Tartuffe*, *Dom Juan*, deux styles coexistent, et qui plus est, deux styles radicalement incompatibles.'[344]

How plausible are these arguments? It seems strange to contend that Corneille, one of the greatest authors of tragedy, was responsible for writing *Dom Garcie* when it was a singular failure. The allegation that there are two incompatible styles in the comedies is

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[341] See H. Wouters and C. de Ville de Goyet, *Molière ou l'auteur imaginaire?* (Paris: Éditions complexe, 1990).

[342] Cyril and Dominique Labbé, 'Inter-Textual Distance and Authorship Attribution: Corneille and Molière' in *Journal of Quantitative Linguistics*, 8, No. 3 (2001), pp. 213-31 (p. 226); see also Wouters and de Goyet, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

[343] Wouters and de Goyet, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-9, 144-6.

[344] *Ibid*, pp. 76, 105: 'les grands passages, ceux qui procurent le «rire de l'âme» ont une résonance infiniment plus cornélienne que moliéresque.'

equally unconvincing. Rather than prove that Molière collaborated with Corneille, as Wouters and de Goyet claim, the fusion of elevated and lower registers is central to the creation of comedy, and emphasises the disparity between the tragic personas assumed by Alceste, Arnolphe and Dom Garcie, and the reality perceived by the audience. Even more surprising is the fact that none of these critics consider the far more plausible explanation that Molière's familiarity with Corneille's dramas enabled him to parody them successfully in his own comedy.[345]

Nowhere is this more evident than in the language of his so-called tragic heroes. Le Barbouillé, George Dandin and Arnolphe all model their speech on the elevated register of Cornelian heroes, and are convinced that they are cursed by the vicissitudes of fate. Le Barbouillé's lament that he is 'misérable' and 'le plus infortuné de tous les hommes' is echoed by George Dandin's opening soliloquy in which he appropriates the tragic vocabulary, 'effroyable' and 'chagrin', to bewail his hubris in seeking to rise above his station: 'Ma maison m'est effroyable maintenant, et je n'y rentre point sans y trouver quelque chagrin.' (I, i) Dandin further imitates the heroes of tragedy through his linguistic isolation ('je ne dis mot, car je ne gagnerais rien à parler') and his anguish that, like Cassandra, he is doomed to be disbelieved by his interlocutors: 'Est-il possible [...] que les apparences toujours tourneront contre moi, et que je ne parviendrai point à convaincre mon effrontée? O Ciel! seconde mes desseins, et m'accorde la grâce de faire voir aux gens que l'on me déshonore.' (II, viii) Above all, his threat to commit suicide has led many critics to view him as a pitiful rather than a comic figure: 'Je désespère [...] Lorsqu'on a, comme moi, épousé une méchante femme, le meilleur parti qu'on puisse prendre, c'est de s'aller jeter dans l'eau la tête la première.' (III, vii-viii)

Arnolphe's mimicry of tragic discourse is even more excessive. He echoes the abstract imagery of Cornelian heroes with his impassioned outbursts ('Éloignement fatal! Voyage malheureux', 'Comme il faut devant lui que je me mortifie', 'mon déplaisir cuisant', 'Ô fâcheux examen d'un mystère fatal') (II, i; II, v; III, v) and also resembles Rodrigue and

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[345] See Mongrédien, *op.cit.*, pp. 86, 102: Molière performed several of Corneille's plays, including *Andromède*, *Nicomède*, *Héraclius*, *Rodogune*, *Cinna*, *Pompée*, *Attila* and *Tite et Bérénice*.

Pauline in *Polyeucte* through his conviction that he is at the mercy of 'le bourreau du destin':

> Quoi! l'astre qui s'obstine à me désespérer
> Ne me donnera pas le temps de respirer! [...]
> Ciel! dans quel accident me jette ici le sort! (IV, vii)[346]

Yet, this appropriation of the language is designed to amuse an audience rather than arouse pity as Molière constantly underlines the comic contrast between the lofty style of Cornelian protagonists and the disproportionate language of his own characters. Firstly, the lowly status of le Barbouillé, Dandin and Arnolphe as *roturiers* contravenes Corneille's own stipulation that only a member of the aristocracy or royalty could be truly tragic, while they also exaggerate the gravity of their 'plight' by portraying their efforts to avoid cuckoldry as a noble endeavour.[347] Their self-depictions as the innocent victims of fate are also contradicted by the portraits painted by others. Angélique challenges le Barbouillé's professions of blameless virtue ('que l'innocence est opprimée aujourd'hui') through her unflattering description of him as 'mon gros coquin, mon sac à vin de mari' who is 'si mal bâti, si débauché, si ivrogne.' (scene vi) In *George Dandin*, Angélique is equally dismissive of her husband's 'charms', disparaging him as 'un bon pendard' and 'un mari à qui le vin et la jalousie ont troublé de telle sorte la cervelle.' (III, vi-vii) Meanwhile, Arnolphe's tragic image is belied by Chrysalde and Horace who show him to be an object of ribaldry: 'l'on m'en a parlé comme d'un ridicule [...] Jaloux à faire rire [...] cet homme bizarre [...] C'est un fou fieffé.'[348]

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[346] See *Le Cid:* 'Rodrigue – Suivre le triste cours de mon sort deplorable.' (l. 742); *Polyeucte*: 'Pauline – Suis cet agent fatal de tes mauvais destins, [...] le destin, aux grands coeurs si souvent mal propice.' (I, iii: l. 127); *Don Sanche d'Aragon*: 'Done Isabelle – l'injustice du ciel.' (l. 1087); *Pompée*: 'Ptolomée – la Fortune ennemie/ M'offre bien des périls ou beaucoup d'infamie.' (l. 41-2)

[347] 'Arnolphe – Pour ce noble dessein j'ai cru mettre en pratique/ Tout ce que peut trouver l'humaine politique.' (IV, vii: l. 1196-7); Corneille, 'Discours: de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique' in H. T. Barnwell, ed., *Pierre Corneille: Writings on the Theatre* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 8-10: Corneille argued that tragedy should depict 'quelque grand intérêt d'État, ou quelque passion plus noble et plus mâle que l'amour, telles que sont l'ambition ou la vengeance, et veut donner à craindre des malheurs plus grands que la perte d'une maîtresse. [...] la comédie diffère donc en cela de la tragédie, que celle-ci veut pour son sujet une action illustre, extraordinaire, sérieuse: celle-là s'arrête à une action commune et enjouée; celle-ci demande de grands perils pour ses héros; celle-là se contente de l'inquiétude et des déplaisirs de ceux à qui elle donne le premier rang parmi ses acteurs.'

[348] See also *La Critique de l'École des femmes*: 'Uranie – Ne voyez-vous pas que c'est un ridicule qui parle?' (scene vi)

Most importantly, Molière highlights the disparity between the speech of his characters and the noble register of tragedy. In contrast to Cornelian heroes, Molière's protagonists constantly undermine their tragic roles through their use of familiar expressions and bathetic insults. Le Barbouillé's self-pitying lament at his 'chagrin' ('Ah! pauvre Barbouillé, que tu es misérable!') is immediately deflated by his far from noble anger ('j'ai une femme qui me fait enrager') and his frequent linguistic lapses: 'la carogne', 'elle me fait donner au diable' (scene i), 'cette coquine-là' (scene v), 'je lui aurais apostrophé cinq ou six clystères de coups de pied dans le cul, pour lui apprendre à faire la bête.' (scene xi) George Dandin is equally incapable of sustaining his lofty register: 'Ah! j'enrage de tout mon coeur', 'je me donnerais volontiers des soufflets. [...] Morbleu!' (I, iii) [...] 'Ah! pendarde de femme!' (I, ii) Finally, Arnolphe's typically Cornelian concern for his reputation ('pour mon honneur', 'sans me couvrir de honte') and his abstract rhetoric ('l'ennui qui me dévore') are persistently undermined by his penchant for *mots bas* and vulgar oaths: 'je ne suis pas homme à gober le morceau' (II, i), 'je suffoque et voudrais me mettre nu', 'ô canaille maudite'. (II, ii)[349] Consequently, Molière's juxtaposition of conflicting styles of speech is anything but accidental or a sign of poor writing as Wouters and de Goyet argue. On the contrary, it is designed to parody the exaggerated language of his comic heroes who attempt in vain to emulate the exalted speech of their Cornelian models.

The same is true of Angélique in *George Dandin* whose claim to be a subjugated and pitiful wife should not be taken at face value. While she is justified in her complaint that her parents effectively sold her as a chattel, she has no intention of suffering in her arranged marriage ('mon dessein n'est pas de renoncer au monde, et de m'enterrer toute vive dans un mari!') and is determined to punish her husband: 'Préparez-vous-y, pour votre punition, et rendez grâces au Ciel de ce que je ne suis pas quelque chose de pis.' (II, ii) Moreover, like her namesake in *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, she contradicts her performance as a tragic heroine ('de grâce', 'reproches fâcheux', 'chagrins perpétuels', 'Fasse le Ciel que ma mort soit vengée comme je le souhaite') (III, vi) by juxtaposing her figurative discourse with concrete expressions and vulgar insults: 'bon pendard', 'Va, va,

[349] See N. Peacock, *L'École des...*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

traître, je suis lasse de tes déportements, et je m'en vais plaindre sans plus tarder à mon père et à ma mère.' (III, vi)

Nor should the apparently sombre *dénouements* of *George Dandin* and *L'École des femmes* be perceived as tragic. Arnolphe may indeed bewail his loss of Agnès, but his isolation is hardly pitiful as he has just sought to impose enforced marriages on both Agnès and Horace, while his final exclamation, 'Oh!' (l. 1764), represents a comic contrast with his earlier eloquence. Even the *dénouement* of *George Dandin* is far from pessimistic because Dandin's wish to drown himself is immediately counteracted by the joyful celebration of the pastoral in which the *paysan* is urged to 'noyer dans le vin toutes ses inquiétudes': 'c'est mourir que de vivre et de ne boire pas.' (troisième intermède) Even though the pastoral was originally omitted during performances in Paris, Dandin's threat to commit suicide may still be interpreted as an empty one, reminiscent of Alceste's retreat to a *désert* or Angélique's supposed suicide. As Peacock stresses, Dandin's excessive reaction to his humiliation and his concrete imagery ('s'aller jeter dans l'eau, la tête la première') are at variance with the abstract discourse of tragedy and hardly evoke a heroic *trépas*.[350]

Molière's aristocratic heroes, Alceste, Amphitryon and Dom Garcie, are, however, less obviously amusing. *Dom Garcie de Navarre* in particular has generally been perceived as a failed attempt on the part of Molière to create a *comédie-héroïque* in the vein of Corneille's *Don Sanche d'Aragon*, with Vedel suggesting that 'l'acteur ambitionnait encore les lauriers tragiques.'[351] Nonetheless, these interpretations of the play as 'une tragédie manquée' misconstrue the profoundly comic nature of Dom Garcie's disproportionate language.[352] In contrast to tragic heroes, such as Macbeth or Othello, who are tortured by a fatal flaw over which they have no control, Dom Garcie's hyperbolic descriptions of his jealous suspicions as 'ce monstre' and 'un aveugle caprice' (II, iv) are utterly absurd as he repeatedly declares that he will rid himself of all jealous

[350] Peacock, 'The Comic Ending...', *op. cit.*, pp. 149-50.
[351] Howarth, '*Dom Garcie de Navarre* or *Le Prince jaloux*?' in *French Studies* 5 (1951), pp. 140-8, (pp. 140).
[352] Howarth, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

thoughts ('Que le Ciel me déclare une éternelle guerre,/ Que je tombe à vos pieds d'un éclat de tonnerre' I, iii), before promptly contradicting himself by suspecting Elvire's fidelity. (I, iii)[353] His use of tragic language is even more ridiculous because his suspicions are entirely unfounded. In a burlesque echo of Mairet's tragedy, *Sophonisbe*, in which Syphax confronts Sophonisbe with an incriminating letter, Dom Garcie's exaggerated allusions to Elvire's innocuous letter as 'cet écrit funeste' and 'le poison qui me tue' are comic rather than piteous. (II, v)[354] Moreover, his melodramatic promises to kill himself in order to expiate his 'crime' of doubting Elvire ('Il n'est pas pour moi d'assez cruel supplice', 'hélas', 'Il faut qu'un coup heureux, en me faisant mourir, /M'arrache à des tourments que je ne puis souffrir' II, vi) would entertain spectators who were undoubtedly familiar with Rodrigue's similar offer to Chimène after the death of her father:

> C'est pour t'offrir mon sang qu'en ce lieu tu me vois. [...]
> Fais-en un sacrifice à ce noble intérêt:
> Le coup m'en sera doux, aussi bien que l'arrêt. (*Le Cid*: III, vi: ll. 899, 935-6)

Alceste's self-portrayal as a tragic hero is equally humorous. Although he is justified in suspecting Célimène of infidelity (IV, ii), his excessive demands for vengeance and his histrionic allusions to her 'trahison' and 'perfidie' ('j'ai ce que sans mourir je ne puis concevoir', 'le déchaînement de toute la nature') (IV, ii) recall Pancrace's farcical outrage at the misuse of Aristotelian terms rather than the despair of a tragic hero.[355] Alceste further belies his image as a noble victim with his distinctly unheroic demand that Éliante marry him in order to spite Célimène ('Vengez-moi d'une ingrate et perfide parente/ Qui trahit lâchement une ardeur si constante') and his own descent into bathetic insults: 'Ah! morbleu! mêlez-vous, monsieur, de vos affaires.' (l. 1234) Furthermore,

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[353] See Hélène Baby-Litot, 'Réflexions sur l'esthétique de la comédie héroïque de Corneille à Molière' in *Littératures classiques*, 27 (1996), pp. 25-34, (p. 34): 'au moi héroïque [...] des personnages cornéliens, le héros moliéresque substitute un défaut de caractère. [...] les refus de Dom Garcie, conséquence d'un vice moral, ne sont plus renonciations «noble et mâles» mais aveuglément ridicule.'

[354] See Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 186: 'Syphax – Desaduoüras-tu point ces honteux caracteres,
Complices & tesmoins de tes feux adultères? (l. 55-6)'
'Dom Garcie – Jetez ici les yeux, et connaissez vos traits: [...] Vous ne rougissez pas en voyant cet écrit?' (II, v)

[355] 'Pancrace – tout est renversé aujourd'hui et le monde est tombé dans une corruption générale.' (scene iv)

Hall has shown that Alceste's threat to retreat to a 'désert' should not be perceived as a piteous act of despair, but rather constitutes a comic reversal of the gallant lover's willingness to sacrifice everything for his beloved.[356]

Even Amphitryon is an absurd figure whose heroic language and demands for vengeance ('laver mon affront au sang d'un scélérat', 'mon martyre') are undermined by his cowardly hope that he will not be forced to fight Jupiter alone: 'Assembler des amis qui suivent mon courroux,/ Et chez moi venons à main-forte,/ Pour le percer de mille coups.' III, v) Amphitryon further contradicts his image as a noble warrior in the vein of Rodrigue or Horace by alternating between the lofty register of tragedy and *le style bas*: 'pendard', 'Quels orages de coups vont fondre sur ton dos!') (III, ii) Finally, his claim to be the most unfortunate of men ('Il n'est point de destin plus cruel, que je sache') is subverted by his incongruous expressions of anger at the supposed 'persécutions' and 'tuante amitié' of 'mille fâcheux cruels', a sense of outrage which recalls the equally choleric impatience of Éraste in *Les Fâcheux*: 'me faire enrager', 'je leur donne tout bas cent malédictions.' (III, i)[357]

On the other hand, Molière's imitation of Cornelian discourse does not simply uphold the lofty style of his sources as a model to be emulated, as Hutcheon argues.[358] In actual fact, Molière's heroes also parody the excesses of Corneille's dramatic language. Firstly, Molière challenges the denigration of comedy as an inferior genre, an opinion voiced by the poet Lysidas who regards comedies as 'des sottises' in *La Critique de L'École des femmes*: 'Il y a une grande différence de toutes ces bagatelles à la beauté des pièces sérieuses.' (scene vi)[359] Far from accepting the traditional assumption that tragedy was

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[356] Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-3, 191: Hall points to the amusing contrast between Aurélie's offer in Rotrou's *La Soeur* (II, i) to follow Lélie 'au bord des précipices' even if she were 'sans aucun bien, sans nom, sans connaissance', and Alceste's demand that Célimène sacrifice everything for him. (ll. 1761-6)

[357] 'Éraste – Sous quel astre, bon Dieu, faut-il que je sois né,/ Pour être de fâcheux toujours assassiné!' (I, i)

[358] Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, pp .5, 50: Hutcheon cites the example of James Joyce's *Ulysses* to prove her argument that the parodied text is rarely the object of comedy: 'While the *Odyssey* is clearly the formally backgrounded or parodied text here, it is not one to be mocked or ridiculed; if anything, it is to be seen, as in the mock epic, as an ideal or at least as a norm from which the modern departs.'

[359] See G. Mongrédien (ed.), *Molière, Œuvres complètes*, Vol. IV (Paris, 1979), pp. 104, 114: Thomas Corneille dismissed *Les Précieuses ridicules* as 'une bagatelle' while Molière was given the title of 'le

more difficult to compose, Dorante derides both the fantastic subject matter ('Lorsque vous peignez des héros, vous faites ce que vous voulez; ce sont des portraits à plaisir') and the grandiose style of tragedy which has little relation to real life:

> Je trouve qu'il est plus aisé de se guinder sur de grands sentiments, de braver en vers la Fortune, accuser les Destins et dire des injures aux Dieux, que d'entrer comme il faut dans le ridicule des hommes. (scene vi)

On a deeper level, Molière also parodies the inflated heroic style of Cornelian drama by transposing the lofty dialogue of tragedy to a trivial and comic situation. It has been well documented that Arnolphe misappropriates the language of Pompée in *Sertorius* when he condemns an assassin to his death (ll. 1867-8), but his *transport amoureux* can also be viewed as a burlesque echo of the torment expressed by Cornelian figures such as L'Infante in *Le Cid* ('je souffre cependant un tourment incroyable', 'cet hymen m'est fatal') (*Le Cid*: I, ii) and Camille in *Horace* ('un astre injurieux', 'aux rigueurs de mon sort', 'le coup mortel', 'mes douleurs') (*Horace*: IV, iv). Whilst Molière's mockery is indeed aimed at Arnolphe's inability to sustain his high-flown rhetoric ('une action infâme', 'j'étais [...] désespéré contre elle', 'elle me met à deux doigts du trépas', 'mon triste sort', 'Jusqu'où la passion peut-elle faire aller?', 'ce regard mourant') (IV, I; V, iv), his descent into bathetic imagery and infantile threats ('Je te bouchonnerai, baiserai, mangerai', 'Me veux-tu voir pleurer?', 'Veux-tu que je me batte?'), also debases the *style galant* of noble lovers.[360]

Similarly, Harpagon's soliloquy travesties the laments of tragic heroes with his invocation of the gods to avenge his wrongs ('Justice, juste Ciel'), his mock-tragic *égarement* ('je suis perdu, je suis assassiné [...] où courir? où ne pas courir?') and his progressively more extreme outbursts of despair as he recalls Shylock through his incongruous use of tragic language to bewail the theft of his *écus*: 'Au voleur, au voleur,

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premier farceur de France' by Somaize, thereby implying that he was incapable of creating anything other than a light-hearted farce. Molière's ability to perform tragic roles was also derided in *Élomire hypocondre*:

> Après *Heraclius*, on siffla *Rodogune*
> *Cinna* le fut de même et *le Cid*, tout charmant, [...]
> Dans ce sensible affront ne sachant où m'en prendre,
> Je me vis mille fois sur le point de me pendre.

[360] See Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

à l'assassin, au meurtrier', 'Hélas, mon pauvre argent, [...] sans toi, il m'est impossible de vivre','je me meurs, je suis mort, je suis enterré.' (IV, vii)[361]

From this examination of Molière's literary parody, we can see that he offers a far richer form of comedy than has previously been assumed by critics, a comedy operating on various levels which invites audiences to recognise and laugh at the pomposity of his literary models along with the exaggerated speech of his comic heroes such as Arnolphe and Alceste.

Molière and Pastoral

> Monsieur Jourdain – Pourquoi toujours des bergers? On ne voit que cela partout. (*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*: I, ii)

Molière not only parodies the tragic discourse of Corneille, he also turns his comic mirror on the pastoral tradition. Little critical attention has been focused on his pastorals, with *Mélicerte* and *Les Amants magnifiques* in particular being dismissed as insignificant *intermèdes*, written purely to comply with a royal commandment.[362] Simone Ackerman echoes Voltaire's assertion that Molière did not complete *Mélicerte* because he was aware of his inability to emulate the noble language of pastoral authors such as Honoré d'Urfé and Mairet.[363] Yet, such interpretations neglect the comic nature of plays such as *Mélicerte* and *La Princesse d'Élide*. Far from simply continuing a fading literary genre in

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[361] Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), p. 97: Shylock also magnifies the importance of his duckets, equating their theft with the loss of his daughter: 'I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear.' (III, i)

[362] See Mongrédien, *op. cit.*, p. 18: Mongrédien asserts that Molière 'n'attacha d'ailleurs guère d'importance à cette petite oeuvre de circonstance *[Les Amants magnifiques]*; il ne la reprit pas au Palais-Royal et ne la livra pas à l'impression'; see also Henry Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, III, Vol. 2 (New York: Gordian Press, 1966), p. 364: Lancaster claims that '*Mélicerte* is remembered only because Molière wrote it.'

[363] Simone Ackerman, 'Les Comédies sans comique mais avec des ballets' in Francis Assaf & Andrew H. Wallis, ed., *Car demeure l'amitié: Mélanges offerts à Claude Abraham* (Paris, Seattle, Tübingen: *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 1997), pp. 39-49 (p. 43): 'Car si Molière aimait l'héroïque, la pastorale genre Scudéry ne semblait guère l'inspirer.'; E. Despois & P. Mesnard, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI (1881), pp. 137, 149: in his *sommaire* of *Mélicerte*, Voltaire's judgement that Molière was unable to master the pastoral genre was echoed by Despois and Mesnard: 'On ne peut beaucoup s'étonner qu'il se fût dégoûté du roman héroïque de *Mélicerte*.'

order to amuse a court audience, the playwright also plays with pastoral conventions, ironically breathing new life into the genre at the same time. According to Hutcheon, such 'imitation with critical distance' is not designed to mock the original texts, but rather presents them as models to be admired.[364] To what extent is this true of Molière's pastoral plays? Does he develop pastoral themes in order to display the comic incongruity between the earthy language of his own characters and the more refined discourse of the shepherds and shepherdesses, or does he also target the pastoral models themselves?

On the one hand, Molière's spectators would derive pleasure from his reproduction of the noble language and idealised rural settings of the pastoral tradition, popularised in the first half of the seventeenth century by Racan's *Les Bergeries* (1625), Jean Mairet's *La Sylvie* (1628) and, above all, by Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée*. (1647) According to Fanny Népote-Desmarres, this mimicry of the elegiac discourse of the aristocratic *bergers* and *bergères* of the pastoral tradition is designed to confirm the social hierarchy by exalting noble rather than bourgeois values.[365] On the other hand, Van Eslande suggests that the playwright subverts and criticises the supremacy of the court through the figure of Moron in *La Princesse d'Élide*.[366] Nonetheless, these perceptions of the plays as political comments on the court overlook Molière's travesty of the stylised language and romanticised vision of country life portrayed by pastoral authors such as d'Urfé and Mairet.[367] While Molière does indeed invite us to laugh at Monsieur Jourdain's inability to appreciate the noble art of *bergeries* in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* ('Cette chanson me semble un peu lugubre, elle endort' I, ii), the bourgeois' preference for a comical song about Jeanneton who is 'plus douce qu'un mouton' also pokes fun at the artificiality of the pastoral convention:

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[364] Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

[365] F. Népote-Desmarres, 'Molière, auteur pastoral? Aperçu sur quelques rapports avec la politique de Louis XIV' in Georges Forestier, ed., *Littératures classiques: la littérature et le réel*, XI (Paris: Aux amateurs de livres, 1989), pp. 245-57 (pp. 254-5): 'Autant dire que l'univers bourgeois est reconnu imparfait, quand l'univers quotidien de la Cour tend à être perçu comme parfait. Nous assistons, donc, par delà les propositions égalitaires, à une confirmation de l'ordre social, dont l'aristocracie de Cour devient le modèle de référence.'

[366] Jean-Pierre Van Eslande, 'Molière ou le moraliste à la fête' in *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, XXVII, 53 (2000), pp. 363-73 (p. 368).

[367] See J. P. Van Eslande, 'L'Altérité arcadienne' in *L'Autre au XVII^e siècle*, Biblio 17, 117 (Tübingen: Narr, 1999), pp. 393-401.

> Maître à danser – Lorsqu'on a des personnes à faire parler en musique il faut bien que, pour la vraisemblance, on donne dans la bergerie. (I, ii)

Similarly, Moron's misuse of the exalted language of pastoral to extol the virtues of a milkmaid in *La Princesse* d'Élide ('Philis est l'objet charmant/ Qui tient mon coeur à l'attache') (deuxième intermède, scene i) does not simply mock his inelegant imitation of Tircis' more refined discourse: 'Tu m'écoutes, hélas! dans ma triste langueur.' (quatrième intermède, scene i) On the contrary, the bouffon's burlesque allusions to Philis' manual labour ('la voyant traire une vache./ Ses doigts tout pleins de lait [...] Pressaient les bouts du pis d'une grâce admirable/ Ouf! Cette idée est capable/ De me réduire aux abois'), also graphically contradict d'Urfé's stipulation in his address to Astrée that the noble *bergers* and *bergères* of pastoral should have no connection to genuine peasants:

> Que si l'on te reproche que tu ne parles pas le langage des villageois, et que toy ny ta troupe ne sentez guères les brebis ny les chèvres, responds leur, [...] tu n'es pas, [...] de ces bergères nécessiteuses, qui pour gagner leur vie conduisent leurs troupeaux aux pasturages, mais que vous n'avez toutes pris cette condition que pour vivre plus doucement et sans contrainte.[368]

Molière also parodies the pastoral tradition of plaintive lovers, such as Céladon in *L'Astrée* (I, iv), who continually exaggerate their despair. In *George Dandin*, the melodramatic threats of Tircis and Philène to commit suicide, simply because they have been spurned by Cloris and Climène ('Mettons fin en mourant à nos tristes soupirs') are immediately undermined by the author's wry comment: 'Ces deux bergers s'en vont désespérés, suivant la coutume des anciens amants, qui se désespéraient de peu de chose.' Moron further caricatures the tragic language of pastoral lovers ('une peine cruelle', 'si de tant de tourments il accable les coeurs', 'les douceurs') by ridiculing Philis' demand that he kill himself in order to prove his love:

> Tircis – Courage, Moron! Meurs promptement/ En généreux amant.

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[368] Honoré d'Urfé, *L'Astrée* ed. H. Vaganay (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1966), p. 7; see also Jacques Morel, 'Pastorale et tragédie' in Alain Niderst, ed., *La Pastorale française de Rémi Belleau à Victor Hugo* (Paris: Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature, 1991), pp. 47-50.

> Moron, *à Tircis* – Je vous prie de vous mêler de vos affaires, et de me laisser tuer à ma fantaisie. [...] (*Se riant de Tircis.*) Je suis votre serviteur; quelque niais! (*La Princesse d'Élide*: quatrième intermède, scene ii)[369]

In contrast, the high-flown language of the *comédie pastorale héroïque*, Mélicerte initially appears to be more poignant, and Duchêne, in particular, believes that it was intended to be a largely serious play:

> Molière ne se résigne pas à se cantonner dans le comique. Il veut réussir aussi dans un autre registre [...] celui du sérieux sans tragique. Et il invente une écriture appropriée. Les beaux vers foisonnent dans sa pièce [...] qui montrent un Molière différent, [...] un Molière poète de [...] l'amour naissant.[370]

Yet, this interpretation disregards the dramatist's comic treatment of the *chagrins amoureux* of Mélicerte and Myrtil, both of whom resemble Arnolphe, Alceste and Dom Garcie in their misappropriation of tragic language. Mélicerte is absurd rather than pathetic in her self-pity and her outrage that Corinne does not share her despair ('Ah! tu me fais mourir par ton indifférence', 'C'est ce que tu n'entres point dans tous les mouvements/ D'un coeur hélas! rempli de tendres sentiments') (II, i), while Myrtil is equally extreme in his self-portrayal as a tragic hero, threatening to commit suicide if his father utters 'le moindre mot fâcheux': 'Je vois avec ce fer, qui m'en fera justice,/ Au milieu de mon sein vous cherchez un supplice.' (II, iv)

Clearly, the traditional readings of *Mélicerte* or *La Princesse d'Élide* as trivial *intermèdes* or examples of poor writing do not account for Molière's ability to parody not only the inflated language of his own characters but also the contrived discourse of pastoral heroes. We will now conisder whether this double-edged parody is of equal relevance when analysing the language of Molière's *jeunes amoureux*.

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[369] Moron's sensible reaction is echoed by Filène and Lycas in *La Pastorale comique*: 'Ah! quelle folie/ De quitter la vie/ Pour une beauté/ Dont on est rebuté!' (scene xiv)

[370] R. Duchêne, *Molière* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), pp. 474-5.

Molière and the Young Lovers

> Anselme – O Ciel! quels sont les traits de ta puissance! et que tu fais bien voir qu'il n'appartient qu'à toi de faire des miracles! (*L'Avare*: V, v)

Molière has frequently been accused of poor writing in the past because of the florid language of his young lovers, and the artificial nature of several of his opening scenes and *dénouements*, particularly those of *L'École des femmes* and *L'Avare*.[371] According to Voltaire in *Le Temple du Goût*, (1784) Molière was forced to devise lacklustre and inferior endings because of time constraints, while Daniel Mornet was equally dismissive of Molière's skills as a writer: 'ses dénouements sont rarement vraisemblables. [...] Molière assurément imagine n'importe quoi. Son indifférence s'explique par celle de ses contemporains.'[372] Meanwhile, Wadsworth believes that 'little needs to be said about the young lovers':

> They have a basic structural function, since comedy nearly always shows the victory of youth over age, but as personalities they obviously did not interest Molière so much as the great figures to whom he gave central roles.[373]

In reality, these charges of flawed writing fail to consider the possibility that the language of the young lovers and the elaborate reconciliations of long-lost relatives are in fact deliberate devices with which to amuse an audience. Whereas characters such as Horace and Élise have often been dismissed as one-dimensional and of little comic interest, they may, as we shall see, be considered as objects of the author's humour. If we apply Hutcheon's notion of parody, is their mimicry of *romanesque* discourse simply designed to emulate the polished language of *commedia erudita*, as Hutcheon might suggest, or is it also intended to parody the language and intricate plots of literary comedy?[374]

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[371] See Hubert, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-7.
[372] See David Shaw, 'Molière's Temporary Happy Endings' in *French Studies*, XLV, No. 2 (1991), pp. 129-41 (p. 129).
[373] Philip A. Wadsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
[374] Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

Firstly, by viewing the *jeunes amoureux* as purely functional figures, Wadsworth ignores the fact that they too arouse comedy through their misappropriation of tragic and *romanesque* discourse. Élise and Valère in particular over-estimate the gravity of their situation with their excessive laments ('hélas!' 'froideur criminelle', 'd'une fâcheuse prévoyance') and their histrionic accusations: 'Ne m'assassinez point' 'les sensibles coups d'un soupçon outrageux.' (I, i) There is, however, a comic reversal in their language as soon as they encounter Harpagon, as their elevated *style galant*, characterised by their use of imperfect subjunctives ('je n'ai même pas la force de souhaiter que les choses ne fussent pas') is replaced by prosaic expressions and the more direct present and future tenses: 'ne vous mettez point en colère', 'nous marchandons', 'je ne veux point me marier', 'c'est une chose où vous ne me réduirez point.' (I, iv)[375] Far from revealing a lapse in Molière's writing ability, the young lovers' failure to sustain their high-flown rhetoric proves its inadequacy in real life and parodies the flowery style of *commedia* lovers.

Horace, likewise, represents a comic distortion of the gallant lover from *commedia sostenuta.* While he pictures himself as a a knight errant ('un doux accès', 'ravir', 'ce jeune astre', 'ce coup fatal', trépas'), his persona is undermined by his descent into mercenary and military images, hardly the mark of an idealistic lover: 'l'argent est la clef de tous les grands ressorts', 'ce doux métal, qui frappe tant de têtes,/ En amour, comme en guerre, avance les conquêtes.' (I, iv) Meanwhile, Horace's tragic mask ('accablé de douleur', 'mon malheur', 'par un trait fatal d'une injustice extrême') is as incongruous as that of Arnolphe because he too belies his image with his earthy vocabulary ('pris le frais', 'mettait pied à terre') and his cowardice: 'J'ai dès leurs premiers mots pensé m'évanouir.' (V, vi)[376]

It is not only the melodramatic language of the young lovers which is designed to mock their *romanesque* models. The unrealistic opening scene of *L'Avare*, and the

[375] See N. Peacock, 'Opening Lines in Molière' in *Seventeenth Century French Studies*, Vol. II (1989), pp. 95-105 (p. 101).
[376] See N. Peacock, *L'École des..., op. cit.*, pp. 39-40; in *Le Dépit amoureux*, Éraste's language is equally extreme: 'belle inhumaine', 'cruelle', 'la tristesse mortelle', 'douleur.' (I, iv)

dénouements of both *L'Avare* and *L'École des femmes*, also parody the convoluted intrigues of literary comedies by Rotrou, Larivey, Corneille and Quinault with their tales of shipwreck ('Élise – cette générosité surprenante, qui vous fit risquer votre vie, pour dérober la mienne à la fureur des ondes') (I, i), pirate attacks and miraculous reunions of long-lost relatives: 'Valère – apprenez pour vous confondre [...] une aventure par le Ciel concertée.' (V, v)[377] As we have already seen in Chapter Three on Molière and the Orient, the characters' formulaic exclamations ('Oronte – ce mystère éclairci') (*L'École des femmes*: V, ix) and allusions to the role of Heaven draw attention to the artificial nature of *romanesque* language: 'Mariane – Le Ciel ne nous fit point aussi périr dans ce triste naufrage', 'Après dix ans d'esclavage, une heureuse fortune nous rendit notre liberté.' (*L'Avare*: V, v) Yet, this elevated register is itself deflated by Arnolphe's bathetic 'Oh!' and Harpagon's mercenary concerns:

> Harpagon – Vous payerez donc le commissaire?
>
> Anselme – Soit. Allons vite faire part de notre joie à votre mère.
>
> Harpagon – Et moi, voir ma chère cassette. (V, vi)

From this analysis of Molière's meta-theatrical allusions, we can see that the extensive range of literary borrowing from tragedy, pastoral and *commedia erudita* has a dual function. The parodied text serves both as a means of topical humour, casting an ironic glance at the traditions within which Molière worked, and as a device for exposing the linguistic failings of his characters. In the following chapter, we will discuss whether the dramatist's recycling of his own work is simply a matter of expediency or whether it too shares this comic intention.

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[377] See *L'Avare*, ed. P. J. Yarrow, (London: University of London Press, 1959), p. 17: Larivey's *Le Laquais* and *Les Esprits* (1579), d'Ouville's *Aimer sans savoir qui* (1646), Rotrou's *La Soeur* (1647) and Corneille's *Héraclius* (1647) and *Don Sanche* (1650) all feature implausible recognition scenes. Meanwhile, Larivey's *La Veuve* (1579) and *Les Tromperies* (1611) and de Visé's *La Mère coquette* (1666) also depict the unexpected return of characters presumed to be dead.

Chapter Seven: Molière and self-parody

> Argan – C'est un bon impertinent que votre Molière avec ses comédies, et je le trouve bien plaisant d'aller jouer d'honnêtes gens comme les médecins. (*Le Malade imaginaire*: III, iii)

In contrast to the characterisation of Molière as an irascible misanthrope by recent biographers, Argan's invective against his own creator points to a key element of Molière's comedy: his willingness to laugh at himself as much as at others.[378] While Norman equates Molière with Célimène, claiming that both the dramatist and his comic creation aim to correct the vices of their spectators through their satires, such a perception of Molière as a satirist misrepresents the nature of his comedy. Rather than ridicule and judge his targets from a position of superiority, Molière always includes himself in the comic mirror.[379] Not only does he cast a wry glance at his professional and private life in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, but he also parodies his plays through his transformation of the failed comedy, *Dom Garcie de Navarre,* into the later plays, *Tartuffe*, *Les Femmes savantes*, *Amphitryon* and, above all, *Le Misanthrope.*

Surprisingly, however, while much work has been devoted to analysing Molière's recycling of his early plays, virtually no critics have approached the dramatist's *réécritures* from the perspective of parody.[380] Instead, the majority of scholars have demonstrated the increasing complexity of Molière's linguistic humour as he reproduces both dramatic structures and comic dialogues from his early farces, *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, *Le Médecin volant* and *Les Précieuses ridicules*, in his more sophisticated later comedies. Conesa, for example, emphasises the refinement of Molière's style from the abstract language of *Dom Garcie de Navarre*, to the more personal dialogues of *Le*

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[378] See Jasinski, *op. cit.*, p. 120: Jasinski regards Alceste and Philinte as the author's representatives: 'La source essentielle du *Misanthrope*, il faut la chercher dans la vie de Molière, [...] *Le Misanthrope* constituerait, [...] un des chefs-d'œuvre de la littérature personnelle.'; see also Defaux, op. cit., p. 179: 'Molière n'a pas seulement nourri Alceste de ses propres tourments d'homme privé, il a aussi [...] projeté en lui ses dilemmes et ses doutes d'artiste et de poète comique.'

[379] Norman, *The Public...*, *op. cit.*, p. 208: 'Molière is a master ventriloquist speaking through Célimène.'

[380] See Parent, *op. cit.*, p. 113: Parent briefly mentions the fact that Molière mocks himself in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, but he does not extend this self-parody to include the author's mockery of his own plays.

Misanthrope, while Brice Parent investigates the playwright's use of recurring motifs and his tendency to remodel plays, the most notable examples being the transformation of *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* into the more complex comedy, *George Dandin.*[381] David Shaw, on the other hand, highlights the entertaining contrast created by transferring Dom Garcie's sincere pleas to Elvire to the far from heroic contexts of *Tarfuffe*, *Les Femmes savantes*, *Amphitryon* and *Le Misanthrope.*[382] Yet, none of these scholars has contemplated the possibility that the playwright's recycling of his earlier work was also an intentional device to entertain his spectators, many of whom would have derived pleasure from identifying allusions to his other plays.[383] This raises the question of the extent to which Molière includes himself in his comic mirror. Does he merely invite his audience to enjoy recognising his 'repetition with critical difference' of scenes and lines from earlier comedies, as Hutcheon would suggest, or does the dramatist also laugh at himself and his own writing, particularly the failed comedy, *Dom Garcie de Navarre*?[384]

On one level, Molière arouses laughter through his comic references to himself and his other plays. In *Le Misanthrope*, for example, Philinte would amuse an audience with his suggestion that he and Alceste resemble the two brothers in *L'École des maris*, a comparison which only serves to infuriate his friend: 'Mon Dieu! Laissons là vos comparaisons fades.' (1, i) The dramatist's ironic self-mockery is even more apparent in *Le Malade imaginaire* when Argan is horrified by Béralde's proposal that they watch one of Molière's comedies: 'Voilà un bon nigaud, un bon impertinent, de se moquer des consultations et des ordonnances.' (III, iii) Above all, Molière offers a humorous representation of his own professional and personal life in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*. It has generally been assumed that the comedy is essentially a satirical attack on his

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[381] Conesa, 'Étude stylistique et dramaturgique des emprunts du *Misanthrope* à *Dom Garcie de Navarre*' in Dandrey, ed., *Molière, trois comédies 'morales'..., op.* cit., pp. 59-68; Parent, op. cit., pp. 178-9;

[382] D. Shaw, 'Molière and the Art of Recycling' in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 15 (1993), pp. 165-80.

[383] See Parent, *op. cit.*, p. 150: Parent has argued that Molière's rewriting of his earlier plays creates a complicity with his spectators, but one which they were not intended to recognise. Although it is extremely doubtful that Parisian spectators would have been familiar with such early farces as *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* and *Le Médecin volant*, we would suggest that they may well have recognised the similarities between *Les Précieuses ridicules* and *Les Femmes savantes* or even the comic parallels between *Dom Garcie de Navarre* and *Le Misanthrope*.

[384] Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 20, 32, 50, 103.

enemies, with Voltaire dismissing *L'Impromptu* as 'une satire cruelle et outrée' and Mikhail Boulgakov arguing that the subject of *L'Impromptu* was nothing more than a pretext to attack the dramatist's rivals at the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*.[385] Although Molière certainly parodies the declamatory style of acting at the *Hôtel de Bourgogne* ('voilà ce qui attire l'approbation et fait faire le brouhaha' scene i) along with Boursault's satire, *Le Portrait du Peintre*, these judgements do not consider the dramatist's willingness to caricature himself in the play.

In fact, Molière's self-depiction bears a striking similarity to many of his monomaniacs, including Arnolphe, Éraste in *Les Fâcheux* and Alceste. Firstly, the dramatist offers a comic portrayal of his marriage by staging his own *dépit amoureux* with Armande Béjart. Ironically, the character of Molière deviates as much from the idealised image of a gallant lover as do Arnolphe, Sganarelle in *Le Cocu imaginaire* or Alceste as he too insults his wife and is threatened with the farcical fate of cuckoldry:

> Molière – Taisez-vous, ma femme, vous êtes une bête.
>
> Mademoiselle Molière – Ma foi, si je faisais une comédie [...] je ferais craindre aux maris la différence qu'il y a de leurs manières brusques aux civilités des galants. (scene i)

Molière elaborates his self-mockery in his guise as a *petit marquis*. Whilst the *mise en abyme* is certainly designed to mock the author's detractors, it also highlights his sense of humour in insulting himself: 'Par le sang-bleu! Le railleur sera raillé; il aura sur les doigts, ma foi.' (scene iii) Indeed, the playwright's frustration with his actors and with La Thorillière displays a marked affinity with the choleric language of Alceste during the sonnet scene: 'La peste soit des gens!', 'Je crois que je deviendrai fou avec tous ces gens-ci.' 'Eh! Tête-bleu! Messieurs, me voulez-vous faire enrager aujourd'hui?' Que le diable t'emporte', 'Au diantre le questionneur!' (scene ii)

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[385] According to Voltaire: 'Il eût été de la bienséance et de l'honnêteté publique de supprimer la satire de Boursault et celle de Molière. Il est honteux que les hommes de génie et de talent s'exposent par cette petite guerre à être la risée des sots.' *La Critique de L'École des femmes et L'Impromptu de Versailles* (Larousse, 1994), p. 104.

On a deeper level, Molière also parodies his own work through his recycling of earlier comedies, most notably *Dom Garcie de Navarre* which is reproduced in *Les Femmes savantes*, *Tartuffe*, *Amphitryon* and *Le Misanthrope*. A common explanation for this tendency to recycle is that Molière was running out of ideas, an accusation which he refutes, however, in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*: 'Crois-tu qu'on ait épuisé dans ses comédies tout le ridicule des hommes? Et, sans sortir de la cour, n'a t-il pas encore vingt caractères de gens où il n'a point touché?' (scene iv)[386] Alternatively, it has also been suggested that Molière's reworking of scenes and thematic ideas can be explained as an expedient measure to salvage his earlier work when he was under considerable pressure to produce new plays for the King. This theory has certainly been given credence by Molière's own claims in the *Avertissement* to *Les Fâcheux*: 'Jamais entreprise au théâtre ne fut si précipitée que celle-ci, et c'est une chose, je crois, toute nouvelle, qu'une comédie ait été conçue, faite, apprise et représentée en quinze jours.' Nevertheless, as Parent points out, this hypothesis cannot account for the fact that the dramatist chose to reproduce a large number of lines from *Dom Garcie* in *Le Misanthrope*, a comedy which he was able to write at leisure. Therefore it is misleading to suggest that he was always forced to return to his earlier plays owing to a lack of time.[387]

Alternatively, George Couton proposes the theory that Molière decided to re-use *Dom Garcie* because of his affection for the play which he was reluctant to abandon, especially as he was eager to prove that he was capable of producing more than farces: 'Mais pour sa pièce malheureuse, l'auteur devait garder quelque faiblesse secrète; il essaiera d'en sauver au moins des épaves dans son *Misanthrope.*'[388] While Molière unquestionably wished to rehabilitate his *comédie-héroïque*, for which he had attempted to secure a *privilège* before the first performance, it is unlikely that his sole motivation was nostalgia. By transposing the serious speeches of Dom Garcie into comic contexts, Molière achieves a double effect: on the one hand, he parodies the far from heroic

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[386] As we have seen in the previous chapter, Donneau de Visé accused Molière of plagiarising his own work, claiming that Climène in *La Critique* was simply a female version of Mascarille in *Les Précieuses ridicules* ('travesti en femme').
[387] Brice Parent, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-5.
[388] See Parent, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

characters who appropriate the language of Dom Garcie and Elvire, whilst on the other hand laughing at the language of his own failed creation.

Tartuffe, Jupiter and Armande all pervert the meaning of Dom Garcie's speech. Firstly, Tartuffe misappropriates Dom Garcie's desperate plea that Elvire forgive his jealous suspicions. Where Dom Garcie defends his jealousy by stressing his own feelings of unworthiness ('Moins on mérite un bien qu'on nous fait espérer,/ Plus notre âme a de peine à pouvoir s'assurer/ Un sort trop plein de gloire à nos yeux est fragile,/ Et nous laisse aux soupçons une pente facile.') (II, vi), Tartuffe undermines the prince's sincere apology by altering the words slightly, and transforming them into a subversive demand that Elmire prove her affection:

> Tartuffe – Moins on mérite un bien, moins on l'ose espérer,
> Nos voeux sur des discours ont peine à s'assurer.
> On soupçonne aisément un sort tout plein de gloire.
> Et l'on veut en jouir avant que de le croire. (IV, v)[389]

Armande and Jupiter also employ the abstract language of *Dom Garcie* to justify their own hypocrisy. Elvire's noble declaration that 'les premières flammes/ Ont des droits si sacrés sur les illustres âmes' (III, ii), becomes Armande's selfish demand that Clitandre abandon Henriette, in spite of the fact that she had once rejected him: 'Il faut perdre fortune et renoncer au jour/ Plutôt que de brûler des feux d'un autre amour.' This distortion of Elvire's high-flown sentiments highlights the hypocrisy of the 'femme savante' in attempting to blackmail Clitandre, whilst also casting a humorous light on Elvire's *précieux* discourse which is as exaggerated as that of Armande or Bélise: 'La gloire sur mon coeur aurait si peu d'empire!' (II, vi)

Jupiter's mimicry of Dom Garcie's heartfelt language is equally comic. By echoing the latter's threat to commit suicide in order to redress his 'crime' of jealousy ('atteintes mortelles', 'cet état me désespère', 'les blessures cruelles', *Amphitryon*: II, vi), the

[389] Shaw, *op. cit.*, p.173.

immortal Jupiter reveals his own hypocrisy, whilst also caricaturing the prince's histrionic despair:

> Si mon crime est trop grand pour se voir excusé, [...]
> Il faut qu'un coup heureux, en me faisant mourir,
> M'arrache à des tourments que je ne puis souffrir. (*Dom Garcie*: II, vi)

This echo would be even more amusing for an audience because Dom Garcie's torment already parodies the passage in *Le Cid* where Rodrigue offers his own life to expiate his murder of Chimène's father, Don Gomès. (III, iv: ll. 899, 934-5)

Above all, *Le Misanthrope* parodies the melodramatic language of *Dom Garcie*. On the one hand, Alceste's wish that Célimène should be deprived of all status and reduced to 'un sort misérable' proves his far from heroic concern as a lover. In contrast to the prince who is willing to sacrifice himself in order to be worthy of Elvire's 'divins appas' (I, iii), Alceste merely wishes to exercise complete control over Célimène, hardly a noble enterprise:

> Afin que de mon coeur l'éclatant sacrifice
> Vous pût d'un pareil sort réparer l'injustice. (IV, iii)

Yet, on the other hand, both Alceste and Dom Garcie are ridiculous in their overreaction to apparent infidelity. Alceste goes to absurd extremes in his outrage at Célimène's compromising letter ('J'ai ce que sans mourir je ne puis concevoir;/ Et le déchaînement de toute la nature/ Ne m'accablerait pas comme cette aventure [...] je suis trahi, je suis assassiné') (IV, ii), but Dom Garcie's outrage is even more incongruous because his suspicions are entirely unfounded: 'Je suis, je suis trahi, je suis assassiné: [...] Que toutes les horreurs dont une âme est capable/ À vos déloyautés n'ont rien de comparable.' (*Dom Garcie*: III, i)

Therefore, through his wide-ranging parodies of various social groups, professional jargon and literary genres, Molière demonstrates the universality of ridicule, including all speakers, even himself, in the comic mirror. Contrary to Norman's portrayal of the dramatist as a satirist, attacking vice from a position of moral and intellectual superiority, we have seen that Molière's parody is in fact more good-natured and he echoes both

Erasmus and Rabelais by including himself in the folly of man, most notably in his guise as a choleric *jaloux*, reminiscent of Arnolphe. As Rabelais notes:

> Mieulx est de ris que de larmes escripre,
> Pour ce que rire est le propre de l'homme.[390]

After exploring the dramatist's relationship with his spectators as he invites them to recognise and compare his representation of literary and linguistic styles, the next part of the thesis will move from Molière's linguistic game with his audience to an investigation of his characters who themselves play with language.

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[390] Rabelais, *Gargantua*, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

Part Two: Language games: mimetic or ludic?

Chapter Eight: Lewis Carroll

In *Les Bâtisseurs d'empire*, Boris Vian wondered whether words existed specifically to be played with.[1] Language games play a central role in Molière's theatre, not simply as a means to amuse an audience with the profusion of neologisms ('cocufier', *Sganarelle ou le Cocu imaginaire*: scene xvi) or 'se désattrister', *L'Étourdi*: II, iii), or the wonderful mixture of genuine and invented languages in Argan's medical initiation ('De non jamais te servire/ De remediis aucunis'), but also because they offer us insights into the nature of language itself. Yet, with the exception of Garapon, Hall, Emelina and Conesa, few *Moliéristes* have explored their significance.[2] Even more surprising is the fact that they have not been analysed in the light of modern literary and linguistic theory. Although Thérèse Malachy and Edith Kern have already applied Bakhtin's concepts of play and carnival to Molière's comedy, neither has considered them in relation to language.[3] Nevertheless, all forms of linguistic games highlight Molière's creative spirit.

Consequently, the aim of this part of the thesis is to examine the extent to which modern theory can elucidate our understanding of Molière's use of language games. In order to do this, we will focus on plays which could be described as metalinguistic because of their concern with questions of language. Using the theories of Lewis Carroll, Mikhail Bakhtin and Ludwig Wittgenstein, it is possible to question traditional notions of the utilitarian function of language as a means of communication and instead focus on what Garapon has described as 'la fantaisie verbale'.[4] These include the *ballets de paroles* in *Tartuffe* and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, and the jargon of the doctors and lawyers who often attempt to mystify rather than enlighten others.

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[1] Marina Yaguello, *Alice au pays du langage: pour comprendre la linguistique* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1981), p. 32

[2] Garapon, *op. cit.* ; Jean Emelina, 'Molière et le jeu...', *op. cit.*,; Gabriel Conesa, *Le Dialogue moliéresque...*, *op. cit.*, ; . Hall, *op. cit.*

[3] Kern, *op. cit.*, ; Malachy, *op. cit.*

[4] Garapon, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11: Garapon defines 'fantaisie verbale' as linguistic comedy where meaning is no longer paramount: 'la fantaisie verbale est essentiellement gaspillage.'

Nevertheless, the nature of Molière's language remains an object of contention which continues to divide *Moliéristes*. While Garapon has interpreted dramatic language as purely ludic, this view has been modified by Dandrey who argues that the later plays are both mimetic and satirical.[5] As a result, it seems necessary to examine the extent to which the artificial language of the theatre represents or deforms reality and whether the 'nonsense' of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and *Le Malade imaginaire* is truly devoid of sense.

We will attempt to resolve this apparent contradiction by suggesting that Molière's comedies actually play with the idea of language as a means of mimetically representing and transmitting our thoughts to others by depicting conversations which fail to communicate. As Noam Chomsky writes: 'Il est faux de penser que l'usage du langage humain se caractérise par la volonté ou le fait d'apporter de l'information.'[6] In the light of Carroll's language games, we will also question Garapon's claim that 'la fantaisie verbale est essentiellement gaspillage' and ask whether the 'nonsense' of the Turkish and Medical ceremonies is truly devoid of meaning.

The second part of the chapter will explore the paradox that the language of nonsense does indeed seem to have a sense, and it will ask whether verbal games actually challenge all rational meaning. Using Bakhtin's theory of carnival, we will discuss the possibility that language games represent a subversive challenge to the voice of authority. While this anarchic approach can illuminate many aspects of the humour in the farces and comédies-ballets, it remains to be seen whether it can elucidate the more sophisticated verbal games in *Le Misanthrope*. Finally, can the linguistic theories of Ludwig Wittgenstein offer a possible solution to this problem of the limitations of carnival when applied to *Le Misanthrope*? After stressing the mimetic function of language in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein later rejected this theory in favour of a ludic interpretation of language in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and it is this evolution of his thought which can illuminate the conflicting linguistic theories of Alceste and Célimène. Alceste's claim that language should truthfully represent our thoughts and the world is constantly undermined, both by his failure to put his mimetic view of language into practice, and by the opposition of other characters who

[5] Dandrey, 'La Comédie du ridicule' in *Molière, des Fourberies de Scapin au Malade imaginaire*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
[6] Yaguello, *op. cit.*, p. 19

regard language as a game to be played. Célimène in particular opposes Alceste's demand for sincere speech. As far as she is concerned, language exists as a means of flattering, manipulating and deceiving others. Whereas the failure of communication in the farces plays with the concept of language as mimetic, we would suggest that *Le Misanthrope* goes further by showing that such discourse is merely an ideal which is unattainable in society.

Language as a Mirror of the World?

Firstly, what is the function of language games in Molière's comedy? Are they mimetic or ludic, imitative or creative? On the one hand, Robert Garapon distinguishes language games, or verbal fantasy, from 'jeux de mots' where the meaning of the words is paramount. For Garapon: 'la fantaisie verbale est essentiellement gaspillage' or 'un jeu gratuit' which is not designed to communicate.[7] Thus, he interprets Molière's imitation of legal and medical jargon as part of a farce tradition, and does not believe that it is related to the actual figures in society. By reproducing their speech, and exaggerating it to absurdity, the playwright is simply playing with the sound of words:

> Bene, bene, bene, bene respondere.
> Dignus, dignus est entrare
> In nostro doctro corpore. (*Le Malade imaginaire*, Troisième intermède)

While Defaux regards Molière's early comedies as satirical, he suggests that the attacks on *Tartuffe* and *L'École des femmes* prompted the dramatist to recognise the 'folie inhérente à tout idéalisme réformateur' and regards the *comédies-ballets* in particular as the triumph of 'folie' and 'déraison.'[8]

On the other hand, Dandrey has modified this ludic interpretation in *L'Esthétique du ridicule* and *Sganarelle, ou la médecine*. He posits the theory that the playwright fuses the antithetical models of 'comédie-bouffonne' and 'comédie-miroir', thereby creating a new form of comedy: 'le rire du vraisemblable' which offers a realistic portrayal of human faults.[9] While he agrees that the early farces such as *Le Médecin*

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[7] Garapon, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11
[8] Defaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 67, 72, 118.
[9] Dandrey, 'la Comédie…', *op. cit*, p. 8.

volant and *Le Médecin malgré lui* continue the literary tradition of 'Médecin par force', and that it is not the medical profession itself but rather Sganarelle's deformation of its jargon which is comic, he insists that the later medical plays target actual doctors. According to Dandrey, Molière's mimicry of genuine medical discourse shows that a comic playwright does not need to exaggerate what people say. The reality itself is ridiculous and can simply be reproduced on stage, thereby reconciling comedy's dual aims of 'peindre d'après nature' and 'faire rire les honnêtes gens.'[10]

How can we resolve this apparent contradiction? The first point to make is that the dividing line between mimetic and ludic language is far more fluid than has previously been assumed. The majority of *Moliéristes*, including Britt-Marie Kylander, have traced an evolution in his language towards a more natural style which reflects everyday speech, in contrast to that of Corneille or Racine.[11] Nevertheless, we will modify this assertion by suggesting that Molière plays with the Aristotelian notion of dramatic language as a mirror of the world.

According to Aristotle in the *Poetics*, both tragedy and comedy are rooted in imitation, and he defines literature as 'an art which imitates by language alone.' Whereas tragedy portrays characters who are nobler than average men and women, comedy is concerned with the imitation of those of inferior morality.[12] This Aristotelian model of theatre as an imitation of reality was particularly influential during the seventeenth century with Chapelain and d'Aubignac emphasising the importance of *vraisemblance*. It was not only dramatic discourse which was regarded as mimetic. Language in general was believed to be a system of signs, the sole purpose of which was to disseminate thoughts to others, a theory expressed by Thomas Hobbes:

> The most noble and profitable invention of all other, was that of *speech*, consisting of *names* or *appellations*, and their connection; whereby men register their thoughts, recall them when they are past, and also declare them to one another for mutual utility and conversation. [...] The general use of

[10] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, p. 29
[11] Kylander, *op. cit.*, p. 201
[12] Aristotle, *Poetics*, *op. cit.*, p. 11: According to Aristotle, 'the ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity which produces no pain or harm to others.'

> speech is to transfer our mental discourse into verbal, or the train of thoughts into a train of words.[13]

While Molière himself underlines the mimetic function of comedy in *La Critique de L'École des femmes*, ('lorsque vous peignez les hommes, il faut peindre d'après nature; on veut que ces portraits ressemblent') (scene vi), he also challenges the dominant view of language as imitative by focusing on its ludic dimension.[14] Nicholas Hammond suggests that Molière satirises Port-Royal in *Le Mariage forcé* by targeting Arnauld and Nicole's work, *La Logique ou l'art de bien penser* (1662) and Arnauld and Lancelot's *La Grammaire Générale et Raisonnée* (1660), both of which stipulated the need for clear speech.[15] Such an interpretation of Molière's comedy is, however, too limited. If the dramatist's sole intention was to ridicule a contemporary work of grammar, his language games would hardly be of interest today. In fact, his manipulation of discourse is of universal significance because it questions the traditional assumption that language is little more than a vehicle designed to express our private thoughts.

Firstly, Molière constantly undermines the belief that language is a means of mimetically representing and of communicating our thoughts to others. This theory is exemplified by the Aristotelian philosopher, Pancrace, in *Le Mariage forcé*:

> La parole a été donnée a l'homme pour expliquer sa pensée, et tout ainsi que les pensées sont les portraits des choses, de même nos paroles sont-elles les portraits de nos pensées; [...] Oui, la parole est *animi index et speculum*; c'est le truchement du coeur, c'est l'image de l'âme. [...] C'est un miroir qui vous représente naïvement les secrets les plus arcanes de nos individus. (scene iv.)

Nevertheless, Pancrace contradicts his own argument ('la parole est le plus intelligible de tous les signes') by speaking at the same time as Sganarelle in a 'dialogue de

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[13] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* chapter iv, quoted in G. P. Baker & P. M. S. Hacker, *Language, Sense and Nonsense: A Critical Investigation into Modern Theories of Language* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 17.

[14] In contrast to comedy, Dorante underlines that tragedy need not be realistic: 'Lorsque vous peignez des héros, vous faites ce que vous voulez; ce sont des portraits à plaisir, où l'on ne cherche point de ressemblance.' *La Critique de L'École des femmes* scene vi. This reflects Corneille's exposition of tragedy in *Le Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique*: 'les grands sujets qui remuent fortement les passions [...] doivent toujours aller au-delà du vraisemblable.' Corneille, *Trois discours...*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[15] Nicholas Hammond, '*Quel diable de babillard! Le Mariage forcé and the Fall from Language*' in *Nottingham French Studies* (1994), p. 39.

sourds'. Moreover, he continues to hurl insults at an absent opponent and is only prepared to discuss obscure philosophical questions in an absurd conversation which breaks every rule of communication: 'Si la conclusion est l'essence du syllogisme? [...] si la logique est un art ou une science [...] s'il y a dix catégories ou s'il n'y en a qu'une?' Far from wishing to communicate, Pancrace proves utterly incapable of adapting his speech to his interlocutor, and Sganarelle is unable to even begin his consultation. Alice encounters a similar problem in *Through the Looking Glass* when she reflects on the difficulty of communicating with kittens who always purr, no matter what is said to them:

> "If they would only purr for 'yes' and mew for 'no', or any rule of that sort," she had said, "so that one could keep up a conversation! But how can you talk with a person if they *always* say the same thing?"[16]

At first sight, it may seem anachronistic to apply a nineteenth century work of children's literature, yet the link between Molière and Lewis Carroll is far from tenuous. Closer inspection reveals a shared interest in linguistic games. Although neither writer offers a systematic philosophy of language, both Carroll and Molière delight in the creative potential of wordplay and their humorous presentation of important linguistic questions offers a vivid insight into the nature of communication, and of language itself.[17] Incredibly, Carroll's contribution to philosophy and language has often been disparaged in the past, with Bertrand Russell asserting:

> none of his work was important. [...] there is nothing in *Alice in Wonderland* or *Through the Looking-Glass* that could conceivably be thought a contribution. They offer only pleasant illustrations for those who don't want to be thought too heavy.[18]

Whatever Carroll's significance in the domain of mathematics or formal logic, Russell's belittlement of his fictional works underrates the author's profound achievements in challenging our assumptions about discourse through the use of language games. Even if Carroll himself did not produce a theoretical work on language, his fictional characters can be regarded as theoreticians of language who

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[16] Lewis Carroll, *The Complete Illustrated Works of Lewis Carroll* (London: Chancellor Press, 1982), Chapter 12, p. 231.
[17] Robert Sutherland *Language and Lewis Carroll* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1970), p.28
[18] Mark Van Doren, Katherine Anne Porter, Bertrand Russell, 'Lewis Carroll: *Alice in Wonderland*' in *The New Invitation to Learning* (New York, Random House, 1942), p. 218; cited in Sutherland, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

echo many of Molière's protagonists by questioning basic rules of communication. As Marina Yaguello notes:

> Alice se trouve dans un monde déconcertant; dans lequel les différents personnages manifestent le plus grand mépris pour les règles de la communication phatique. Les règles de la communication telles qu'elles sont en usage dans le monde d'Alice sont constamment ridiculisées et l'aspect stéréotypé en est souligné.[19]

As Lewis Carroll would do some two hundred years later, Molière constantly exploits the comic potential of the break-down of communication, and indeed of language itself, by depicting characters who play with language and retreat into their own worlds. This frequently results in comic misunderstandings as characters strive to communicate but only succeed in talking at cross-purposes. Le notaire in *L'Ecole des femmes* is convinced that he is conducting a perfectly logical conversation with Arnolphe about a marriage contract, but is in fact engaged in a 'dialogue de sourds' because Arnolphe is utterly unaware of his presence:

> Arnolphe, *sans le voir.* – Comment faire?
>
> Le Notaire – Il le faut dans la forme ordinaire.
>
> Arnolphe, *sans le voir.* – A mes précautions je veux songer de près.
>
> Le Notaire – Je ne passerai rien contre vos intérêts. (IV, ii)

Yet, Arnolphe is not alone in his absorption. Even when he expresses his amazement at seeing the notaire, the lawyer is incapable of reacting to his interlocutor's confusion and simply continues his speech, much in the vein of Pancrace:

> Le Notaire – Pourquoi hausser le dos? Est-ce qu'on parle en fat,
> Et que l'on ne sait pas les formes d'un contrat? [...]
>
> Arnolphe – Vous savez tout cela; mais qui vous en dit mot? (IV, ii)

Molière also highlights the potential of language itself to prevent communication, often as a result of homophones or the multiple meanings which words acquire in conventional usage. One of the most hilarious of these unwitting language games comes in *Les Femmes savantes* during Martine's disastrous grammar lesson when she

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[19] Yaguello, *op. cit.*, p. 26

inadvertently infuriates her pedantic teachers by confusing the unfamiliar word, 'grammaire', with a person:

> Bélise – Veux-tu toute ta vie offenser la grammaire?
>
> Martine – Qui parle d'offenser grand'mère ni grand-père? [...]
>
> Bélise – Grammaire est prise à contre-sens par toi,
>
> Et je t'ai déjà dit d'où vient ce mot.
>
> Martine – [...] Qu'il vienne de Chaillot, d'Auteuil ou de Pontoise,
>
> Cela ne me fait rien. (II, vi)

These possibilities for comic misunderstandings are echoed in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* during the mouse's tale. He too becomes increasingly frustrated when Alice highlights the difficulties inherent in attempts to establish communication through her confusion of the homophones 'tail' and 'tale':

> "Mine is a long and sad tale!" said the Mouse turning to Alice, and sighing.
>
> "It *is* a long tail, certainly," said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail: "but why do you call it sad? [...] you had got to the fifth bend, I think?"
>
> "I had *not*!" cried the Mouse, sharply and very angrily.
>
> "A knot!" said Alice, always ready to make herself useful, and looking anxiously about her. "Oh, do let me help to undo it!"[20]

It is not only the similar sounds of words which can cause communication to fail. The potential ambiguity of words can also result in *quiproquos*, and Molière frequently plays on the disparity between the literal import of utterances and their abstract meaning in elevated discourse.[21] After Maître Jacques has falsely accused Valère of stealing his master's *cassette* in *L'Avare*, Harpagon's cross-examination of his valet only succeeds in deepening the misunderstanding because both he and Valère are entirely preoccupied with their own train of thought and fail to elucidate their speech. Rather than specify what has been stolen, Harpagon's declaration 'l'affaire est découverte [...] comment abuser ainsi de ma bonté', coupled with his incongruous allusions to the theft as 'un assassinat' of 'mon sang' and 'mes entrailles' convince Valère that he is talking about Elise. Valère further compounds the confusion through

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[20] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures...*, *op. cit.*, Chapter 3, pp. 34-6.
[21] See Sutherland, *op. cit.*, p. 66, Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

his figurative use of the word 'trésor' to refer to Élise, a word which Harpagon naturally interprets quite literally:

> Harpagon – Mais voyez quelle insolence de vouloir retenir le vol qu'il m'a fait!
>
> Valère – Appelez-vous cela un vol?
>
> Harpagon –Si je l'appelle un vol! un trésor comme celui-là!
>
> Valère – C'est un trésor, il est vrai, et le plus précieux que vous ayez sans doute, mais ce ne sera pas le perdre que de me le laisser. (V, iii)

Therefore, even when speakers are endeavouring to communicate, the equivocal nature of words ensures that they speak at cross-purposes. Pronouns in particular are shown to be ambiguous as Harpagon's reference to his cassette as 'elle' is misconstrued by Valère who is convinced that he is being accused of dishonourable behaviour:

> Harpagon, *à part.* – Ô ma chère cassette! *(Haut.)* Elle n'est point sortie de ma maison? [...] Hé! dis-moi donc un peu: tu n'y as point touché?
>
> Valère – Moi, y toucher! Ah! vous lui faites tort, aussi bien qu'à moi; et c'est d'une ardeur toute pure et respectueuse que j'ai brûlé pour elle.
>
> Harpagon, *à part.* – Brûlé pour ma cassette! (V, iii)[22]

Whereas Valère's discourse of love is exemplified by abstract terms, Harpagon's concrete use of language entails that even he is eventually struck by the absurdity of his conviction that Valère has fallen in love with his treasure chest: 'Les beaux yeux de ma cassette! Il parle d'elle comme un amant d'une maîtresse.'

Lewis Carroll was also fully aware of the vagueness of pronouns in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* During the mouse's tale, designed to dry the animals after their swim in Alice's pool of tears, the duck insists on interrupting the story to clarify the meaning of the non-referential pronoun, 'it', assuming that all words must have a sense and refer to something concrete:

> "Even Stigand, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable____"
>
> "Found *what*?" said the Duck.

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[22] Molière also plays on the comic ambivalence of pronouns in *L'École des femmes* during Arnolphe's interrogation of Agnès when he misconstrues her use of the definite pronoun, 'le', assuming that she is referring to her 'pucelage' rather than her 'ruban.' (II, v); see Chapter Eleven for an analysis of Agnès' unconscious humour.

> "Found *it*," the mouse replied rather crossly: "of course you know what 'it' means."
>
> "I know what 'it' means well enough, when *I* find a thing," said the Duck: "it's generally a frog or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?"[23]

While many instances of communication failure occur by accident, both Carroll and Molière also depicts characters who have no intention of participating in an exchange of views, but merely view language as a means of impressing others. Le Docteur in *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, for example, is so preoccupied with his own linguistic brilliance that he is incapable of listening to others, especially in his long-winded praise of brevity:

> Il faut avouer, Monsieur Gorgibus, que c'est une belle qualité que de dire les choses en peu de paroles, et que les grands parleurs, au lieu de se faire écouter, se rendent le plus souvent si importuns, qu'on ne les entend point: *Virtutem primam esse puta compescere linguam.* (scene vi)

It is the Docteur's inability to listen to others which causes the conversation to descend into chaos as all of the characters speak at once, with le Docteur continuing to praise peace until he is summarily removed from the stage by Barbouillé. This is echoed by George Dandin's encounter with his pedantic parents-in-law, the Sotenville, who resemble le Docteur with their refusal to listen to Dandin's complaints about his wife and their constant interruptions to correct his speech:

> George Dandin – Puisqu'il faut parler catégoriquement, je vous dirai, Monsieur de Sotenville, que j'ai lieu de…
>
> Monsieur de Sotenville – Doucement, mon gendre. Apprenez qu'il n'est pas respectueux d'appeler les gens par leur nom. (I, vi)

Thus, it becomes clear that apparent dialogues are merely monologues. Métaphraste is equally uncooperative in *Le Dépit amoureux*. While Albert initially dominates the dialogue and is at least able to voice his concern about his son, he receives no more enlightenment than le Barbouillé or Sganarelle in *Le Mariage forcé* because Métaphraste is purely concerned with discussing linguistic questions: 'Virgile est

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[23] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures…*, *op. cit.*, Chapter 3, p. 32.

nommé là comme un auteur fameux/ D'un terme plus choisi que le mot que vous dites.' (II, vi) Similarly, the Frog Footman in *Alice in Wonderland* is so engrossed with his own reflections that he fails to answer Alice's questions when she knocks at the Duchess's door:

> "There's no sort of use in knocking [...] and that for two reasons. First, because I'm on the same side of the door as you are: secondly, because they're making such a noise inside, no one could possibly hear you."
>
> "Please then" said Alice, "how am I to get in?"
>
> "There might be some sense in your knocking," the Footman went on, without attending to her, "if we had the door between us. For instance, if you were inside, you might knock, and I could let you out, you know..."

Rather than answer her queries, the footman merely continues his deliberations and poses his own questions, pondering whether Alice should be allowed to enter at all.[24] As in *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* and *George Dandin*, any attempts at communication seem doomed to failure, and Alice is compelled to replace speech with direct action by entering the house herself.

It is not simply verbosity and 'dialogues de sourds' which cause communication to disintegrate. Molière also depicts characters who disrupt any endeavour to conduct a conversation by transposing a specialist vocabulary into an everyday situation. Marphurius, in particular, is far more anxious to impress Sganarelle with his superior linguistic knowledge than he is to participate in a consultation, and he takes his philosophical scepticism about language to extremes:

> Notre philosophie ordonne de ne point énoncer de proposition decisive; de parler de tout avec incertitude; [...] et, par cette raison, vous ne devez pas dire: «je suis venu»; mais: «Il me semble que je suis venu.» [...] Il m'apparaît que vous êtes là, et il me semble que je vous parle; mais il n'est pas assuré que cela soit. (scene v)

Once again, it is the philosopher's refusal to communicate which causes the conversation to degenerate into violence as Sganarelle beats the philosopher for his 'galimatias.' The comedy is heightened by the fact that Sganarelle now turns Marphurius' game against him by parodying the latter's scepticism:

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[24] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures...*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

Marphurius – Comment? Quelle insolence! M'outrager de la sorte!

Avoir eu l'audace de battre un philosophe comme moi!

Sganarelle – Corrigez, s'il vous plaît, cette manière de parler. Il faut douter de toutes choses, et vous ne devez pas dire que je vous ai battu mais qu'il vous semble que je vous ai battu. (scene v)

Interestingly enough, Marphurius is no longer plagued by doubt as to whether he has indeed been beaten by Sganarelle.

Similar linguistic games occur in *Through the Looking Glass* where characters insist on subjecting everyday language to the rules of formal logic. As Sutherland notes, Carroll was 'fascinated by the frequent illogicality of statements in conventional usage and saw that the habitual vagueness and metaphorical expression of ordinary language could be humorously exploited by subjecting it to the rules of logical usage.'[25] For example, the Red Queen takes Alice's plea that she has lost her way literally: 'I don't know what you mean by *your way*," said the Queen: "all the ways about here belong to *me*.'[26] Meanwhile, during the Knave of Heart's trial in *Alice in Wonderland*, the Mad Hatter is discomfited by the King's order to remove his hat because of his strict interpretation of possessive adjectives:

"It isn't mine," said the Hatter.

"*Stolen*!" the King exclaimed, turning to the jury, who instantly made a memorandum of the fact.

"I keep them to sell," the Hatter added as an explanation.

The Mad Hatter creates even more confusion by interpreting the King's instruction to 'stand down' *au pied de la lettre*, insisting that he is already on the floor.[27]

In *Le Médecin malgré lui*, Sganarelle also rigorously applies the rules of logic to everyday speech, and purposefully takes Martine's marital grievances literally:

Martine – Un homme [...] qui me mange tout ce que j'ai?...

Sganarelle – Tu as menti; j'en bois une partie.

Martine – Qui me vend, pièce à pièce, tout ce qui est dans le logis.

Sganarelle – C'est vivre de ménage. (I, i)

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[25] Sutherland, *op. cit.* p. 65.
[26] Carroll, Looking Glass..., *op. cit.*, p. 140.
[27] Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

The latter expression plays on the dual meaning of 'vivre de ménage' which can either signify living frugally or living by selling furniture to pay expenses. Sganarelle is equally intransigent in his verbatim application of logic when Martine complains about his failure to help her at home:

> Martine – Et que veux-tu, pendant ce temps, que je fasse avec ma famille?
> Sganarelle – Tout ce qu'il te plaira.
> Martine – J'ai quatre pauvres petits enfants sur les bras…
> Sganarelle – Mets-les à terre. (I, i)

Language is thus shown to have a ludic function, as a means of impressing or frustrating others. It is a source of power, something which Sganarelle learns by imitating Marphurius' game. Far from representing our thoughts to others in a dialogue, *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, *Le Médecin malgré lui* and *Le Mariage forcé* show speech which does not impart information but which only reaches impasses. In all three plays, language fails only to be replaced by physical violence.

Yet, in *Le Mariage forcé*, it is not simply the two philosophers who make any communication impossible. Sganarelle too plays with the phatic function of words. As Anthony Ciccone has noted, Sganarelle proves that he is no more inclined than Pancrace to listen to the opinion of an interlocutor.[28] In the first scene, he asks to be fetched if anyone brings him money. If, however, somebody wants money from him, he is unavailable. Thus, Sganarelle regards language as something that can be controlled for personal gain. (I, i) His attempt to control speech is further illuminated by his consultation of Géronimo, during which he exhorts his friend to be frank:

> Je vous conjure de ne me point flatter du tout et de me dire nettement votre pensée. […] Je ne vois rien de plus condamnable qu'un ami qui ne nous parle pas franchement. (scene i)

In reality, however, Sganarelle's apparent search for advice is nothing more than a quest for confirmation that he has made the correct decision: 'Et moi je vous dis que je suis résolu de me marier.' As Ciccone argues, Sganarelle is convinced that he can ensure a favourable reply as long as he knows the other person's wishes before they begin talking: 'This type of conversational exchange, anterior to any verbal exchange,

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[28] Anthony A. Ciccone, *Structures of Communication and the Comic in Molière's Le Mariage forcé* (Neophilologus 66, 1982) pp. 46-7.

implies the belief that communication can and should be limited to serving personal interests.'[29]

Nevertheless, Sganarelle's linguistic theory is undermined when he meets Dorimène and Pancrace, both of whom share an identical view of language. Whereas Sganarelle hopes to control his future bride and confidently sets out his plans for marriage, ('vous ne serez plus en droit de me rien refuser; et je pourrai faire avec vous tout ce qu'il me plaira'), Dorimène is equally reluctant to engage in a dialogue, and her use of the future tense indicates that she too views speech as a means of affirming her own intentions:

> Nous n'aurons jamais aucun démêlé ensemble, et je ne vous contraindrai point dans vos actions, comme j'espère que, de votre côté, vous ne me contraindrez point dans les miennes. (scene ii)[30]

Ludic as these language games are, they are not without meaning as Garapon would suggest, but offer us insights into the difficulties of communicating. While Garpapon suggests that 'la fantaisie verbale' is purely concerned with comic repetition or *ballets de parole*, Molière's language games are by no means divorced from reality. In particular, the use of philosophical and grammatical terms ('la majeure', 'raisons démonstratives') shows that these conversations do not simply play with the sound of words. Rather, Pancrace's absurd application of Aristotle's distinction between 'la figure' and 'la forme' to a hat, and his preposterous Latinate declensions ('je te soutiendrai par vives raisons que tu es un ignorant, ignorantissime, ignorantifiant et ignorantifié par tous les cas et modes imaginables') (scene iv) parody philosophical and learned discourse, which is often designed to impress or confuse others rather than communicate.

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[29] Ciccone, *op. cit.*, p. 44; The same is true of Sganarelle in *L'Amour médecin* who consults his neighbours and family in an effort to discover the cause of Lucinde's illness, only to ignore their advice: 'quoique tous vos conseils soient les meilleurs du monde, vous trouverez bon, s'il vous plait, que je n'en suive aucun.' (I, i)

[30] See Ciccone, *op. cit.*, p. 45: 'By contrasting these two instances of a language which affirms only the self, Molière exposes to the spectator the inherent incongruity of Sganarelle's first premise. Seeking communication only for self-affirmation is an impossible course of action for it assumes universal agreement. When such agreement is not forthcoming, the intransigent speaker finds himself in the untenable position of accepting the will of another. The comic arises here from the clash between two identical uses of communication which, by their very identity, render themselves mutually exclusive.'

The breakdown of language

Molière does not simply play with the logic and structure of sentences. He also shows the disintegration of language itself into apparent nonsense. On one level, he prefigures Saussure by emphasising the arbitrary relation between a word and what it designates, *le signifiant* and *le signifié*. In *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, for example, le docteur is nothing if not creative in his ridiculous etymologies of 'galant homme' and 'bonnet': 'Cela vient de bonum est (bon est, voilà qui est bon), parce qu'il garantit des catarrhes et fluxions.' (scene ii) In an 1872 pamphlet entitled *The New Belfry*, Carroll also proved adept at inventing whimsical etymologies. Arguing that the word 'belfry' was derived from the French 'bel', meaning 'beautiful' or 'meet', and that 'fry' could be traced to the German word 'frei', meaning 'free', 'secure' or 'safe', Carroll concluded that belfry must mean 'meatsafe.'[31] Consequently, words have a creative as well as a representative function, and this joyful play with meaning is further shown by Covielle's ingenious translations of Turkish in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* when he merely invents his own definitions for Cléonte's pseudo-Turkish utterances:

> Cléonte - Bel-men.
>
> Covielle - Il dit que vous alliez vite avec lui vous préparer pour la cérémonie, afin de voir ensuite votre fille et de conclure le mariage.
>
> M Jourdain – Tant de choses en deux mots?' (IV, vi)

This play with the meaning of words was reflected by Lewis Carroll almost two hundred years later in *Alice through the Looking Glass*. Like le Docteur and Covielle, Humpty Dumpty makes words mean whatever he wants:

> "There's glory for you!"
>
> "I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.
>
> Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"
>
> "But 'glory' doesn't mean a 'nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.
>
> "When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."

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[31] Sutherland, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."
>
> "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all."[32]

Humpty Dumpty's insistence on the arbitrary nature of word definition is of great significance. Whereas Pancrace, Marphurius and the femmes savantes follow Malherbe and Vaugelas in insisting that words must always be used in the same way in order to avoid confusion, both Molière and Carroll depict characters who rebel against these linguistic stipulations by inventing their own definitions and words. Carroll himself was adamant that no word has an intrinsic meaning and argued that its sense depends on conventional usage, a theory also adopted by Lacan in his model of language as an endless chain of *signifiants*.[33] Carroll specified his view in an article published in *The Theatre* magazine:

> No word has a meaning inseparably attached to it, a word means what the speaker intends by it, and what the hearer intends by it, and that is all.[34]

This ability to decide meaning also highlights the extent to which language becomes a source of power over others, particularly for the femmes savantes who intend to control all language ('Par nos lois, prose et vers, tout nous sera soumis' III, ii), and for M. Purgon who terrifies Argan with his mysterious Latin terms:

> Monsieur Purgon – Que vous tombiez dans la bradypepsie. [...] De la bradypepsie dans la dyspepsie. [...] De la dyspepsie dans l'apepsie. [...] Et de l'hydropisie dans la privation de la vie, où vous aura conduit votre folie.
>
> Argan – Ah, mon Dieu! je suis mort. Mon frère, vous m'avez perdu. (III, v-vi)

Indeed, it is often the fact that a foreign or technical word is unfamiliar which makes it sound so impressive or even terrifying. In *Le Médecin malgré lui*, Sganarelle only resorts to *le latin macaronique* once he has ascertained that his interlocutors do not understand Latin, and will therefore be impressed by his 'erudition':

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[32] Carroll, *Looking Glass...*, *op. cit.*, Chapter 6, pp. 184.

[33] 'Philaminte – Mais le plus beau projet de notre académie [...] C'est le retranchement de ces syllabes sales [...] Ces sources d'un amas d'équivoques infâmes.' (III, ii); see also Lacan, *Le Séminaire I*, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

[34] Sutherland, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

> Sganarelle, (*en faisant diverses plaisantes postures.*)– *Cabricias, arci thuram, catalamus, singulariter, nominativo hœc Musa,* «la Muse», *bonus, bona,* bonum. (II, iv)

In spite of the fact that it is nonsense, Sganarelle's 'learned' speech, which consists of a mixture of genuine and invented Latin terms, sounds imposing to his uninitiated listeners:

> Géronte – Ah! que n'ai-je étudié! [...]
>
> Lucas – Oui, ça est si biau, que je n'y entends goutte. (II, iv)

In *A Tangled Tale*, Carroll further illustrates the excessive deference paid to Latin phrases, simply because they *sound* distinguished. When a cab driver complains that two rather stout ladies are too wide for his cab-door, one of the women threatens to sue him for a 'Habeas Corpus', in spite of the fact that she does not know what the phrase means:

> "Nothing like a little law to cow the ruffians, my dear!" she remarked confidentially to Clara. "You see how he quailed when I mentioned the *Habeas Corpus*? Not that I've any idea what it means, but it sounds very grand, doesn't it?"[35]

On another level, Molière also shows the breakdown of words themselves into apparent nonsense. This is particularly evident in the language of Turkish and medical ceremonies. For Defaux, both *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and *Le Malade imaginaire* represent the triumph of fantasy as Molière abandons social criticism in favour of an euphoric world of illusion.[36] At first sight, the language of the two ceremonies seems to support such a view as it blends French, Italian, Spanish, Arabic and genuine nonsense such as 'Hou, la ba ba la chou, ba, la, ba, ba, la, da', after which M. Jourdain falls over, thereby convincing his wife that he must have gone mad. (V, i)

Yet, the ballets also parody ceremonial language which may sound impressive but which is often ridiculous and devoid of content. As we have seen in chapter two, Covielle's extravagant translations of 'Turkish' phrases parody the excessive politeness of Eastern greetings ('il dit que le ciel vous donne la force des lions et la prudence des serpents'), while the *fantaisie verbale* of the ceremony ('ha, la, ba, la,

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[35] Carroll, 'Knot VII: Petty Cash' in *A Tangled Tale*, *op. cit.*, p. 670.
[36] Defaux, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

chou') also serves to mock the religious ceremonies of the Ottoman Empire.[37] Consequently, by parodying the vogue for anything Turkish, and by alluding to the visit of Soliman Aga, Molière shows that so-called 'nonsense' often has a sense. When questioned about the meaning of his most famous nonsense-poem, *The Hunting of the Snark*, Carroll too stressed that even apparent gibberish can mean something:

> As to the meaning of the Snark? I'm very much afraid I didn't mean anything but nonsense! Still, you know, words mean more than we mean to express when we use them: so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer meant.[38]

This paradox is even more evident in *Le Malade imaginaire* when Argan is initiated into the medical profession. Not only does the playwright create 'le latin de fantaisie ou macaronique', in which Latin words are either given French endings or are mixed with French words ('lequel, in choisis omnibus', v.44), but he also deflates the pretentious salutations with bathos: 'Salus, honor et argentum, Atque bonum appetitum.'(*troisième intermède*) Yet, whereas Garapon regarded language games as purely comic, Molière uses the *intermède* as the culmination of his mockery of doctors, rather than as a spectacle which is simply designed to amuse. The scene mirrors the structure and terminology of genuine medical ceremonies with its opening encomium in praise of the medical profession ('Totus mundus, currens ad nostras remedias, Nos regardat sicut deos'), praise of the Paris faculty and mock-examination of the prospective doctor, Argan, who prescribes identical cures for any ailment[39]:

> Clysterium donare,
> Postea seignare,
> Ensuita purgare.

Whilst this *ballet de paroles* is undeniably designed to amuse an audience, it also points to the narrow-minded theories of doctors and apothecaries, such as Monsieur Purgon and Monsieur Fleurant, who will treat every illness with the same 'remedy'.

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[37] See 'Molière and the Orient' for an analysis of Molière's parody of the Ottoman Empire.
[38] Quoted in Sutherland, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
[39] See Eugène Despos and Paul Mesnard, *Œuvres de Molière* vol. 9 (Paris: Hachette, 1923), pp. 226-9, (p. 226): According to Maurice Raynaud in *Les Médecins au temps de Molière*: 'Ce morceau doit être considéré comme un abrégé, non seulement des cérémonies du doctorat, mais de toutes celles par où devait passer un candidat, depuis le commencement de ses études jusqu'au jour où il recevait le bonnet. Tout s'y trouve...'; see also *Le Malade imaginare*, ed. Nurse, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-2 and, *Le Malade imaginare*, ed. Maurice Pellisson (Paris: Delagrave, 1893), p. 140, for a discussion of the similarities between genuine medical ceremonies and Argan's initiation ceremony.

(I, i) By replicating, but also distorting, the Latin formulae of such ceremonies, especially with the addition of the subversive 'Seignandi, /Perçandi, /Taillandi, /Coupandi, /Et occidendi /Impune per totam terram', Molière ridicules the language of doctors who obfuscate and use jargon to impress others and conceal their ignorance. Béralde in particular is certain that: 'toute l'excellence de leur art consiste en un pompeux galimatias, en un spécieux babil, qui vous donne des mots pour des raisons et des promesses pour des effets.' (III, iii)

Therefore, although these scenes are farcical and full of absurd language, they do more than show Molière's ability to create words. They also point to the performative function of language by parodying the Latin and jargon of real ceremonies which are designed to impress the uninitiated. Like Molière, Lewis Carroll emphasised the paradox that nonsensical language often has a meaning. Although he is usually classed as a children's author and a master of writing nonsense poetry such as *Jabberwocky* or *The Hunting of the Snark*, he would not have agreed with Saussure and the Structuralists who saw form as more important than meaning. In a famous word game which played with the proverb 'Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves', Carroll wrote 'Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves', thereby demonstrating that ludic language need not be free of meaning or divorced from reality, something of which Molière was also well aware.

Chapter Nine: Turning the world upside down with language games?

But, if these apparently nonsensical language games do indeed have a meaning, to what extent do they have a subversive function? Can they be seen as a challenge to the social hierarchy through their ridicule of learned and official discourse? Whereas Carroll emphasises the metalinguistic import of language games, and underlines their ability to shed new light on communication attempts and failures, Bakhtin offers a very different interpretation of playful discourse, regarding it as far from innocent. Drawing on Medieval and Renaissance festivals, in which the laughter of the people challenged political and religious hierarchies, Bakhtin views carnivalesque language as a means of turning the world upside down and of showing life as essentially ridiculous. While official feasts could be regarded as a 'consecration of inequality' through their display of marks of hierarchy and social rank, carnival represented 'the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter.'[40] As Bakhtin writes in *Rabelais and his World*:

> As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. [...] the whole world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity.[41]

It has often been assumed that Molière's comedies have little relation to this world of carnival subversion, and the majority of scholars have depicted him as a moralist, intent on correcting vices, a sentiment expressed by Boileau, Bossuet and, subsequently, by Le Noble in 1700: 'Ce sage correcteur de nos folies ne s'émancipait point à ces impertinentes équivoques qui ne font rire que des âmes basses: il entrait délicatement dans le naturel, sans chercher à désopiler la rate par ces fades mots à double entente.'[42] More recently, W. G. Moore has argued that apart from 'the famous

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[40] Bakhtin, *Rabelais...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 10.
[41] *Ibid*, p. 10.
[42] See Richard Maber, 'Molière's Bawdy' in *Nottingham French Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (1994), pp. 124-5: as we have seen in chapter five, Boileau was outraged by Molière's apparent betrayal of his poetic achievements in *Le Misanthrope* when he returned to farce in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. Boileau

'le' in *L'Ecole des femmes*' and Sganarelle's suggestive remarks to Jacqueline in Le *Médecin malgré lui*, 'the purification of dramatic diction by Molière is an unusual feature of his work.'[43] Dandrey has also stressed the moral dimension of Molière's theatre, suggesting that he favours 'une éthique de la lucidité rationnelle et raisonnable', while Van Eslande refers to the playwright as a 'moraliste à la fête', who resembles La Rochefoucauld and Pascal in his denunciation of 'les travers de la vie de Cour.'[44]

Nevertheless, these judgements ignore the strong link to carnival inversion and Rabelaisian humour throughout Molière's comedies, even in the *comédies-ballets* presented to a court audience such as *La Princesse d'Élide* and *Les Amants magnifiques*. Rather than abandoning farcical and bawdy humour as his career progressed, Molière developed linguistic innuendo and burlesque to a high degree.[45] Moreover, the significance of carnival to Molière's theatre is further demonstrated by the fact that many of his plays, including *Les Amants magnifiques*, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and *Le Malade imaginaire*, were actually written to be performed at carnival time, while the ceremonies in the latter plays are also described as carnivalesque. Mme Jourdain believes that her husband's Mamamouchi costume is in fact a carnival disguise: 'Quelle figure! Est-ce un momon que vous allez porter et est-il temps d'aller en masque?' (V, i) Similarly, Béralde justifies his deception of Argan by saying it is part of the carnival: 'ce n'est pas tant le jouer que s'accommoder à ses

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insisted that Molière should have continued to portray figures from 'la cour et la ville' rather than embrace popular comedy:

> C'est par là que Molière, [...]
> Peut-être de son art eût remporté le prix,
> Si, moins ami du peuple, en ses doctes peintures,
> Il n'eût point fait souvent grimacer ses figures,
> Quitter, pour le bouffon, l'agréable et le fin,
> Et, sans honte, à Térence allié Tabarin. *Art poétique*, III (v. 393-400).

[43] Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 100; Sganarelle – Mais comme je m'intéresse à toute votre famille, il faut que j'essaye un peu le lait de votre nourrice, et que je visite son sein. (*Le Médecin malgré lui*: II, iii)

[44] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, p. 185; J. P. Van Eslande, 'Molière ou le moraliste...', *op. cit.*, pp. 364, 372.

[45] See Emelina, 'Molière et le jeu des...', *op. cit.*, p. 81; Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 88, 93-7: The scatological references in *Le Malade imaginaire* ('Argan – Ai-je bien fait de la bile?/ Toinette – Ma foi! Je ne me mêle point de ces affaires-là. C'est à Monsieur Fleurant à y mettre le nez, puisqu'il en a le profit.') (I, ii), and the suggestive puns in *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* ('Le comte – Omne viri.../ La Comtesse – Fi! Monsieur Bobinet, quelles sottises est-ce que vous lui apprenez là?', scene vii), and even *Le Misanthrope* highlight Molière's continued interest in equivocal language in the later comedies. As Hall notes, Alceste's assertion that Oronte's sonnet 'est bon à mettre au cabinet' is deliberately ambiguous as it can refer to both a study or a *garde-robe*, and it is the latter meaning which Furetière understood in his misquotation of the line in his *Dictionnaire* of 1690.

fantaisies. [...] Nous y pouvons aussi prendre chacun un personnage, et nous donner ainsi la comédie les uns aux autres. Le carnaval autorise cela.' (III, xiv)

In view of these links, it is strange that carnival has not specifically been applied to Molière's comic language before now. Although Edith Kern and Thérèse Malachy have analysed Molière's plays in the light of Bakhtin's theory, neither has considered the role of language games in challenging the social order, even though Bakhtin himself stresses the significance of carnivalesque language, with its focus on parodies and Billingsgate or market-place speech.[46] Consequently, the objective of this section is to re-evaluate the role of language games in Molière's comedies, and examine whether they exemplify what Kern describes as 'absolute comedy', serving no particular end, or whether they constitute a political challenge to the social order, as claimed by Riggs.[47]

Overturning hierarchies through language games?

Firstly, many of Molière's characters can be seen as Bakhtinian figures *avant la lettre* because of their carnivalesque subversion of the social order. The language games of the farces in particular serve to turn the world upside down by inverting the master/servant hierarchy and establishing what Bakhtin describes as the 'free and familiar contact' of carnivalesque *mésalliances*:

> Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival, everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act. [...] All distance between people is suspended [...] people who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square.[48]

In *Les Précieuses ridicules*, for example, the 'crowning' of Mascarille and Jodelet as marquis exemplifies this 'joyful relativity' as the boundaries between social classes are temporarily dissolved.[49] Mascarille's imitation of the elevated language of the nobility transforms his lowly position whilst also parodying and therefore degrades

[46] Kern, *op. cit.,;* Malachy, *op. cit.*
[47] Kern, *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 27, 43; Malachy, *op. cit.*, p. 74: both Kern and Malachy regard Molière's comedies as essentially amoral. According to Malachy: 'la morale est absente du monde moliéresque comme de toute comédie traditionnelle.'; Riggs, *Molière and Plurality...*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[48] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky...*, *op. cit.,* p.123.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 123

the discourse of his social superiors by fusing low and high registers, most notably during his encounter with the porters:

> Mascarille, *lui donnant un soufflet*. Commment, coquin demander de l'argent à une personnes de ma qualité! [...] Ah! ah! ah! je vous apprendrai à vous connaître! Ces canailles-là s'osent jouer à moi! (scene vii)[50]

Scapin and Toinette also embody the 'free and familiar contact' of carnival, which recognises no social boundaries, as they are presumptuous enough to reason with their masters as equals. Whilst appearing to agree with Argante's outrage over Octave's secret marriage, Scapin undermines the older man's authority by contradicting his resolve to disinherit Octave:

> Scapin – Vous ne le déshériterez point.
>
> Argante – Je ne le déshériterai point?
>
> Scapin – Non. (I, iv)

Toinette goes even further in her carnivalesque reversal of the domestic hierarchy because she castigates Argan as if he were a recalcitrant child ('Diantre soit fait de votre impatience!') (I, ii), and also challenges her master's authority by appropriating his position as head of the household:

> Argan – Je lui commande absolument de se préparer à prendre le mari que je dis.
>
> Toinette – Et moi, je lui défends absolument d'en faire rien.
>
> Argan – [...] Et quelle audace est-ce là à une coquine de servante de parler de la sorte devant un maître? (I, v)

On a deeper level, Toinette also mocks the authoritative language of the doctors through her linguistic disguise as 'un médecin de la médecine.' (III, vii) By bringing the doctors' euphemistic allusions to the body ('nettoyer votre corps', 'vuider le fond du sac') (III, v) down to earth with her concrete and earthy language, Toinette deflates the pretentiousness of medical jargon: '*Ignorantus*, *ignoranta*, *ignorantum.* [...] Il faut [...] manger de bon gros boeuf, de bon gros porc [...] pour coller et conglutiner. Votre médecin est une bête.' (III, x)[51]

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[50] *Ibid*, p. 125.
[51] See Emelina, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

Yet, this carnivalesque subversion is only a temporary one. Mascarille and Jodelet are both unmasked and beaten by their masters for their temerity in 'vouloir faire l'homme d'importance', while Scapin is also 'decrowned' and threatened with hanging following his beating of the hapless Géronte. (III, xii) Even more important is the fact that Géronte turns the tables on his valet by pretending that his forgiveness is dependent on Scapin's demise:

> Géronte –Oui; mais je te pardonne à la charge que tu mourras.
>
> Scapin – Comment, Monsieur?
>
> Géronte – Je me dédis de ma parole, si tu réchappes. (III, xii)

Therefore, Scapin is not alone in his ability to play with language and even he becomes the object of comedy.

As Bakhtin stresses, the profanation of the sacred and the elevation of the lowly is always an ambivalent act, as witnessed in the mock crowning and decrowning of carnival Kings:

> Crowning/decrowning is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, the joyful relativity of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position. Crowning already contains the idea of immanent decrowning: it is ambivalent from the start.[52]

Nor is Toinette's mockery of both Argan and medical authority designed to overthrow the ruling hierarchy. Rather, it is a form of carnival laughter, degrading the mystique of official discourse, as personified by Monsieur Purgon's terrifying curse (III, v), whilst also celebrating the triumph of life over Argan's cosmic fear of death and disease.[53] As Bakhtin argues:

> Carnivalistic laughter likewise is directed toward something higher - toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders [...] Combined in the act

[52] Bakhtin, *Problems of* Dostoevsky's..., *op. cit.*, p. 124.

[53] Bakhtin, *Rabelais...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21: 'In grotesque realism [...] the bodily element is deeply positive. [...] The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level. [...]To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistance, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and new birth take place.'

> of carnival laughter are death and rebirth, negation (a smirk) and affirmation (rejoicing laughter). This is a profoundly universal laughter.[54]

This playful inversion of social positions through language games is not confined to the farces, but is also found in the ballets performed during the court ceremonies, *Les Plaisirs de L'Ile enchantée* and *Le Grand Divertissement Royal*. Ostensibly a *comédie-ballet* designed to glorify the monarch and his court, *La Princesse d'Élide* also parodies the magnificence of the aristocracy through the language of Lyciscas and Moron. Descendants of the medieval jester or court fool, the two *bouffons* ridicule the noble pursuit of hunting, while Moron resembles Scapin and Toinette through his mischievous equation of himself with his royal master, Euryale:

> Ma mère, dans son temps, passait pour assez belle,
> Et naturellement n'était pas fort cruelle;
> Feu votre père alors, ce prince généreux,
> Sur la galanterie était fort dangereux. (I, ii)[55]

In addition, the 'wise fool' Moron resmbles Falstaff in his disparagement of the aristocratic code of knightly honour, preferring the joys of carousing and merrymaking to the prestige of a 'glorious' death which will bring him no benefit:

> Oui, j'aime mieux, n'en déplaise à la gloire,
> Vivre au monde deux jours, que mille ans dans l'histoire. (I, ii)[56]

In *Les Amants magnifiques*, meanwhile, the *plaisant de cour*, Clitidas, parodies the *style galant* of Sostrate ('je tremble avec raison', 'sur quelles chimères', 'l'affreuse longueur d'une vie malheureuse') (I, i) with his prosaic comments ('allez, allez, vous vous moquez'), while he also subverts the authority of the the astrologer, Anaxarque, by ridiculing his affected speech: 'le métier de plaisant n'est pas comme celui d'astrologue. Bien mentir et bien plaisanter sont deux choses fort différentes, et il est

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[54] Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky*, *op. cit.*, p. 126; Bakhtin, *Rabelais op. cit.*, p. 11.

[55] See Bakhtin, Rabelais..., op. cit., p. 382: Bakhtin notes the link between the medieval clown and the wise fool described by Erasmus: 'One of the main attributes of the medieval clown was precisely the transfer of every high ceremonial gesture or ritual to the material sphere; such was the clown's role during tournaments.'

[56] In *Henry IV, Part One*, Falstaff displays an equally irreverent attitude towards the aristocratic values of heroism and self sacrifice: 'What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? [...] Air. A trim reckoning. Who hath it? He that died a' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. [...] Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon, and so ends my catechism.' (V, i)

bien plus facile de tromper les gens que de les faire rire.' (I, ii)[57] Yet, this mockery of aristocratic values and official discourse is no more political than the language games of Toinette and Mascarille. Rather than subvert royal or aristocratic authority, Moron and Clitidas merely play with the boundaries between farce and high comedy, between the wisdom of the fool and the foolishness of the wise man, thereby offering a ludic distortion of the refined language of the court.

Finally, it is possible to regard Monsieur Jourdain, Argan and the 'femmes savantes' as Bakhtinian characters *avant la lettre* because they all attempt to reverse the social hierarchy through language. Monsieur Jourdain believes that he is capable of transgressing the barriers between social classes, simply by imitating the language of 'les gens de qualité', and he is convinced that the carnivalesque beatings and incantations of the Turkish ceremony have transformed him into a venerable *Mamamouchi*: 'Voyez l'impertinente, de parler de la sorte à un *Mamamouchi*! [...] Il me faut porter du respect maintenant.' (V, i) Similarly, Argan allows himself to be persuaded that he need only wear the correct hat and master some impressive Latin phrases in order to become a doctor:

> Argan – Quoi! L'on sait discourir sur les maladies quand on a cet habit-là?
> Béralde – Oui. L'on n'a que parler, avec une robe et un bonnet, tout galimatias devient savant, et toute sottise devient raison.' (III, xiv)

Above all, Philaminte, Bélise and Armande attempt to reverse the inferior position of women in society through their imitation of the traditionally masculine discourse of philosophy and science: 'Vous devez, en raisonnable époux', 'La substance qui pense', 'nous en bannissons la substance étendue', 'les droits de la raison.' As we have seen in chapter five, Philaminte not only challenges masculine authority in a domestic setting by portraying herself as the voice of reason ('je lui montrerai [...] qui doit gouverner, ou sa mère ou son père,/ Ou l'esprit ou le corps'), but she also hopes to revolutionise society and avenge the intellectual subjugation of women:

> Et je veux nous venger, toutes tant que nous sommes,
> De cette indigne classe où nous rangent les hommes. (III, ii)

[57] See also Nicholas Cronk, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

This subversion is, however, merely an illusion because none of the linguistic players succeed in maintaining their elevated register. Monsieur Jourdain repeatedly belies his linguistic mask as a nobleman through his use of colloquial expressions: 'Quelle friponne est-ce là ? [...] je te baillerai sur le nez si tu ris davantage'. He also struggles to master so-called philosophical language: 'Tout ce qui est prose n'est point vers; et tout ce qui n'est point vers n'est point prose.' Just as Argan is only a doctor in his own imagination, so Monsieur Jourdain would never pass for a nobleman in real life.

Molière also mocks the linguistic absolutism of the 'femmes savantes' who hope to impose a monologic language on everyone, but who actually resort to polysemantic expressions themselves during Trissotin's poetry reading, when their allusions to 'des petits corps', 'le vide' and 'la matière subtile' highlights their underlying preoccupation with sexuality.[58] Indeed, their frequent use of sexual and romantic images reveals that their apparent rationality is little more than an illusion: 'Bélise – Ah! tout doux, laissez-moi, de grâce, respirer. [...] Philaminte – On se sent, à ces vers, jusques au fond de l'âme,/ Couler je ne sais quoi qui fait que l'on se pâme.' (III, ii)

Consequently, Molière's language games do not extend beyond the boundaries of the theatre and constitute a political challenge to official discourse. In fact, Bakhtin himself insisted that carnival was not designed to transform society. Rather, it was simply a celebration of a 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order.'[59] As Dentith stresses: 'It is not that carnival looks forward to some distant prospect of social perfection, but that the space of carnival has already realized it.'[60] By depicting the dramatist as a revolutionary, intent on subverting the authority of the aristocracy and even the of the absolute monarchy, Riggs misconstrues the nature of Molière's linguistic play, and of carnival itself. Rather than attempt to subvert the social hierarchy, Molière mocks social and linguistic pretensions, and highlights the gap between theory and practice.

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[58] Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
[59] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[60] Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 76.

Chapter Ten: *Le Misanthrope* and Wittgenstein's solution?

Alceste – Je veux qu'on soit sincère, et qu'en homme d'honneur
On ne lâche aucun mot qui ne parte du coeur. (I, i)

Whilst recognising the value of this carnivalesque approach to the *comédies-ballets* and even to some of the so-called 'hautes comédies' such as *Les Femmes savantes*, it nevertheless proves to be problematic when applied to the sophisticated language games of *Le Misanthrope*. Far from turning social hierarchies upside down, *Le Misanthrope* has generally been perceived as a mirror of seventeenth-century court society, reflecting the refined manners of contemporary salons.[61] Even more problematic is the fact that the elevated discourse of the courtiers hardly conforms to the vulgarity of carnivalesque or Billingsgate language, with the possible exception of Alceste's penchant for coarse oaths: 'Tant mieux, morbleu!' (I, i) Even more problematic is the fact that the pessimistic *dénouement*, with Alceste's threatened retreat to a 'désert' and Éliante's second-best marriage to Philinte, hardly conforms to the euphoric spirit of carnival celebrations, described by Bakhtin as 'the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance.'[62]

Rather, Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of language games can offer us insights into the more complex verbal games of *Le Misanthrope*, and show that this comedy, widely perceived as mimetic, actually examines the difficulties of such a view of language. Wittgenstein's theories have not been applied to Molière's comedy before, yet the evolution of his thought, from the mimetic picture theory of the *Tractatus* to his discussion of language games in the *Philosophical Investigations*, can deepen our understanding of the conflicting linguistic theories of Alceste, Philinte and Célimène which are central to the creation of comedy in the play.

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[61] See Chapter 6 on literary parody; see also E. Despois & P. Mesnard, *op. cit.*, Vol. V (1880), p. 431: In *La Lettre sur la comédie du Misanthrope*, Donneau de Visé praised Molière for his faithful representation of society: 'Le Misanthrope seul n'aurait pu parler contre tous les hommes; mais en trouvant le moyen de le faire aider d'une médisante, c'est avoir trouvé, en même temps, celui de mettre, dans une seule pièce, la dernière main au portrait du siècle.'; Grimm, '*Le Misanthrope*, «portrait...', *op. cit.*, p. 53: 'La constellation des principaux personages, dans *le Misanthrope*, est donc le reflet immédiat de la réalité sociale telle que Molière le percevait.'

[62] Bakhtin, *Rabelais...*, *op. cit.*, p. 9; see also Dentith, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

Alceste and the Language of Sincerity

Firstly, Wittgenstein's insistence on the mimetic function of language in his early philosophical work, the *Tractatus* (1922), corresponds to Alceste's belief that speech represents and mirrors our innermost thoughts.[63] In an endeavour to investigate both the underlying structures and the limits of language, Wittgenstein argues that speech can be reduced to a series of logical propositions, the function of which is to picture the world:[64]

> Der Satz ist ein Bild der Wirklichkeit; [...] Ein Name steht fuer ein Ding, ein anderer fuer ein anderes Ding, und untereinander sind sie verbunden, so stellt das Ganze – wie ein lebendes Bild – den Sachverhalt vor.[65]

Alceste's shares this Aristotelian view of language as a mirror of reality, but the misanthrope's linguistic theory is more extreme than that of Wittgenstein because he accords language an ethical dimension. As far as Alceste is concerned, we should never conceal our true feelings with deceitful flattery ('Ce commerce honteux de semblants d'amitié'), even if this entails that we are liable to offend the sensibilities of others:

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[63] Wittgenstein, Philosophische Untersuchungen, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p. 1, fragment 1: Wittgenstein later characterised this theory as 'Augustine's picture of language', which is centred on the belief that all sentences are descriptions: 'In diesem Bild von der Sprache finden wir die Wurzeln der Idee: Jedes Wort hat eine Bedeutung. Diese Bedeutung ist dem Wort zugeordnet. Sie ist der Gegenstand, für welchen das Wort steht.' ('In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.')

[64] See Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 26-7: in the preface to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein defined the scope of his philosophical project as an investigation into the limits of what can be expressed by language: 'Das Buch will also dem Denken eine Grenze ziehen, oder vielmehr – nicht dem Denken, sondern dem Ausdruck der Gedanken.' ('The book will, therefore, draw a limit to thinking, or rather – not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts.'; see also Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 33; David Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) , pp. 7-8, 17.

[65] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus...*, *op. cit.*, fragments 4.01, 4.0311: 'The proposition is a picture of reality [...] One name stands for one thing, and another for another thing, and they are connected together. And so the whole, like a living picture, presents the atomic fact.' Wittgenstein also counters any possible objections that words on a page do not literally represent objects in reality by comparing language to other systems of notation: 'Aber auch die Notschrift scheint auf den ersten Blick kein Bild der Musik zu sein, und unsere Lautzeichen- (Buchstaben-) Schrift kein Bild unserer Lautsprache. Und doch erweisen sich diese Zeichensprachen auch im gewöhnlichen Sinne als Bilder dessen, was sie darstellen.' ('But nor does the musical score appear at first sight to be a picture of a musical piece; nor does our phonetic spelling (letters) seem to be a picture of our spoken language. And yet these symbolisms prove to be pictures – even in the ordinary sense of the word – of what they represent.') (fragment 4. 011)

Je veux que l'on soit homme, et qu'en toute rencontre
Le fond de notre coeur dans nos discours se montre. (I, i) [66]

In particular, Alceste is adamant that a lover must never conceal his true feelings about his beloved but should always be open about her faults:

Plus on aime quelqu'un, moins il faut qu'on le flatte:
À ne rien pardonner le pur amour éclate. (II, iv)

As McBride stresses, Alceste's uncompromising demand for absolute sincerity is prompted by his laudable desire to 'supprimer toute disparité entre les dehors et la pensée intime, les apparences et la vie', and his determination that language should mirror our thoughts is exemplified by his reaction to Oronte's sonnet.[67] Whereas Oronte aims to please an audience with his 'style figuré' and *précieux* expressions ('nous berce un temps notre ennui', 'le trépas sera mon recours', 'on désespère'), Alceste opposes any endeavour to embellish discourse with 'ces colifichets dont le bon sens murmure', and insists that a work of art should only be judged by its ability to convey the truth rather than any aesthetic beauty:

Ce n'est que jeu des mots, qu'affectation pure,
Et ce n'est point ainsi que parle la nature. (I, ii)

Putting theory into practice?

Nevertheless, Alceste is incapable of sustaining his own linguistic ideal. Whilst he presents himself as a moral campaigner who must struggle against the hypocrisy of 'la nouvelle éthique du bien vivre', his apparently altruistic love of truth becomes somewhat suspect when he reveals the true reasons for his condemnation of all obsequious language:

Quel avantage a-t-on qu'un homme vous caresse [...]
Lorsqu'au premier faquin il court en faire autant? [...]
Je veux qu'on me distingue (I, i) [68]

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[66] Alceste's view of language is shared by Pancrace in *Le Mariage forcé*: 'Oui, la parole est *animi index* et *speculum*; c'est le truchement du cœur, c'est l'image de l'âme.' (scene iv)
[67] R. McBride, '*Le Misanthrope* ou les mobiles humains mis à nu' in *Littératures classiques*, 38 (2000), pp. 79-89 (p. 82).
[68] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique..., op. cit.*, p. 233.

Thus, Alceste's 'honourable' fight against 'la lâche flatterie [...] injustice, intérêt, trahison, fourberie' of contemporary society is motivated as much by a desire to be praised above all others as it is by any moral scruples. (I, i)

Alceste's mimetic view of language is further undermined by his failure to put his theory into practice. While he presents his speech as distinctive because he alone refuses to adhere to the hypocritical rules of polite discourse, he too resorts to the deceptive language games for which he had castigated Célimène and Philinte.[69] When asked to be absolutely honest in his judgement of Oronte's sonnet, Alceste proves to be as deceitful as Philinte as he only gives his true opinion in furious asides to Philinte ('Morbleu! vil complaisant, vous louez des sottises?'), and instead criticises the sonnet indirectly by alluding to an imaginary acquaintance:

> Mais, un jour, à quelqu'un, dont je tairai le nom,
> Je disais, en voyant des vers de sa façon,
> Qu'il faut qu'un galant homme ait toujours empire
> Sur les démangeaisons qui nous prennent d'écrire. (I, ii)

Ironically, in spite of the fact that he has contravened his own stipulation that our speech should always represent our most intimate thoughts, Alceste still believes in his own sincerity, asserting that the only reason why other people have praised Oronte's poetry is because 'ils ont l'art de feindre ; et moi, je ne l'ai pas.' (I, iii)

In fact, Alceste proves himself to be as skilled as Célimène at attacking others verbally with his biting portrait of Clitandre. By juxtaposing the language of passionate love ('gagné votre âme' 'en faisant votre esclave ?') with bathetic allusions to Clitandre's fashion sense ('les appas de sa vaste rhingrave', 'sa façon de rire et son ton de fausset'), Alceste further contradicts his persona as a champion of honesty by ridiculing Clitandre behind his back, the very fault for which he criticises the other courtiers:

> Vous n'en épargnez point, [...]
> Cependant aucun d'eux à vos yeux ne se montre
> Qu'on ne vous voie en hâte aller à sa rencontre, [...] et d'un baiser flatteur

[69] Alceste censures Philinte for daring to flatter a man with whom he is barely acquainted ('Une telle action ne saurait s'excuser [...] Morbleu! c'est une chose indigne, lâche, infâme/ De s'abaisser ainsi jusqu'à trahir son âme') (I, i), while he also condemns Célimène for her 'médisance': 'Alceste – vos ris complaisants/ Tirent de son esprit ces traits médisants.' (II, iv)

Appuyer les serments d'être son serviteur. (II, iv)[70]

Most importantly, the misanthrope contravenes his theory that language should never be embellished by dressing up linguistically. As we have seen in Chapter six, his immoderate expressions of outrage at the iniquity of society ('je verrai, dans cette plaiderie,/ Si les hommes [...] Seront assez méchants, scélérats et pervers,/ Pour me faire injustice aux yeux de l'univers') (I, i), and his self-aggrandisement as a *galant* lover ('Mon amour ne se peut concevoir et jamais/ Personne n'a, madame, aimé comme je fais') (II, i) and tragic hero ('l'attachement terrible', 'l'offense est trop mortelle') (II, I; IV, ii) prove that his ostensibly unadorned speech is in reality as affected as that of Oronte or the *petits marquis* whom he derides.[71] Indeed, he even abandons his great moral project by asking Célimène to lie to him:

Défendez-vous au moins d'un crime qui m'accable
Et cessez d'affecter d'être envers moi coupable [...]
Efforcez-vous ici de paraître fidèle
Et je m'efforcerai, moi, de vous croire telle. (IV, iii)

Significantly, Alceste now chooses appearance over reality, and this reversal in his linguistic philosophy prefigures Wittgenstein's realisation that the picture theory of language was untenable.[72] In the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* or *Philosophical Investigations*, he abandons the idea that language is simply a system of signs which represents the world. Instead, he insists that language is far more complex, and can never be understood when extracted from its context and treated as an abstract concept. Instead, it must be viewed as a public and social phenomenon, founded on rules. As Wittgenstein notes, the meaning of a word is never fixed but always depends on how it is used in practice:

Was *bezeichnen* nun die Wörter dieser Sprache? – Was sie bezeichnen, wie soll sich das zeigen, es sei denn in der Art ihres Gebrauchs?[73]

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[70] Alceste conveniently ignores the fact that he is as much a fashion victim as Clitandre: 'pour l'homme aux rubans verts.' (V, iv); see also McBride, '*Le Misanthrope* ou les mobiles...', *op. cit.*, p. 88: McBride emphasises the fact that Alceste only condemns Célimène's verbal portraits when her ridicule is directed at Damis, a courtier who resembles Alceste in his longing to distinguish himself from others.

[71] See Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-5.

[72] See McGinn, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-5, 44.

[73] Wittgenstein, *Philosophische...*, op. cit., p. 6, fragment 10: 'Now what do the words of this language *signify*? What is supposed to shew [sic.[what they signify, if not the kind of use they have?'; see also

Wittgenstein describes these rules as a 'language game'. At this point, it is vital to define what he means by the term, a task which has been complicated by the fact that he never defines it fully, even though he uses the expression throughout the *Philosophical Investigations*.[74] According to Wittgenstein, a language game is not simply a word game, used to play tricks on others, although it can include jokes and riddles. Rather, it is a much wider concept, which describes both the way in which we use language to affect others, and the fact that our language use is governed by a system of rules:

> Ich werde auch das Ganze: der Sprache und der Tätigkeiten, mit denen sie verwoben ist, das "Sprachspiel" nennen. [...] Das Wort "Sprach*spiel*" soll hier hervorheben, daß das *Sprechen* der Sprache ein Teil ist einer Tätigkeit, oder einer Lebensform.[75]

Using a chess analogy, he maintains that understanding words is like understanding the moves of a chess piece. We cannot simply name a knight or a pawn but must understand how it moves within the rules of the game:

> Wenn man jemandem die Königsfigur im Schachspiel zeigt und sagt "Das ist der Schachkönig", so erklärt man ihm dadurch nicht den Gebrauch dieser Figur, – es sei denn, daß er die Regeln des Spiels schon kennt, bis auf diese letzte Bestimmung: [...] Man kann sich denken, er habe die Regeln des Spiels gelernt, ohne daß ihm je eine wirkliche Spielfigur gezeigt wurde.[76]

Similarly, we can only understand the meaning of a word by analysing its use in a particular context:

> Wenn die Philosophen ein Wort gebrauchen – "Wissen", "Sein" [...] "Ich" [...] und das *Wesen* des Dings zu erfassen trachten, muß man sich immer fragen: Wird denn dieses Wort in der Sprache, in der es seine Heimat hat, je

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Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 40, 44: ''Instead of approaching language as a system of signs with meaning, we are prompted to think about it *in situ*, embedded in the lives of those who speak it.'

[74] Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1996), p. 60.

[75] Wittgenstein, *Philosophische...*, pp. 5-6, fragments 7, 23: 'I shall also call the whole (of language), consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the language game. [...] Here the term 'language game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the 'speaking' of language is part of an activity, or form of life.' According to Wittgenstein, a language game can refer to questions, the giving and obeying of orders and the reporting of events.

[76] Wittgenstein, *Philosophische...*, *op. cit.*, p. 15, fragment 31: 'When one shews [sic.] someone the King in chess and says: "This is the king", this does not tell him the use of this piece – unless he already knows the rules of the game up to this last point: [....] you could imagine him having learnt the rules of the game without ever having been shewn [sic.] an actual piece.'

> tatsächlich so gebraucht? – *Wir* führen die Wörter von ihrer metaphysischen, wieder auf ihre alltägliche Verwendung zurück.[77]

This evolution in Wittgenstein's philosophy can illuminate the linguistic conflict between Alceste and the other characters in *Le Misanthrope*. While Wittgenstein's picture theory corresponds to Alceste's perception of language as mimetic, his later comparison of language to a game reflects the ludic speech of Célimène, Arsinoé and Philinte. In contrast to Alceste who wishes to overturn society, his companions have absolutely no intention of reforming the social order and instead exemplify what Bénichou describes as 'la philosophie de l'agrément.' (I, i; I, iii)[78] Philinte and Célimène, in particular, have both mastered the 'game' of polite conversation, according to which discourse is a means of flattering and manipulating others. As Mazouer notes, salon society is governed by: 'l'art de plaire – cette sorte de comédie où chacun fait montre de civilité et fait assaut de flatteries à l'égard d'autrui, dans l'attente de la réciproque et afin de rendre agréable la rencontre en société.'[79]

Firstly, Philinte regards discourse as a social game in which it is necessary to replicate the moves of other players. If someone flatters him, he insists that it is vital to repay them with similar praise, and views the relationship in terms of a financial exchange:

> Lorsqu'un homme vous vient embrasser avec joie,
> Il faut bien le payer de la même monnoie [...]
> Et rendre offre pour offre, et serments pour serments. (I, i)[80]

In fact, Philinte stresses both the limitations of a mimetic concept of language and the danger of following such a policy in society: 'Mais quand on est du monde, il faut bien que l'on rende quelques dehors civils que l'usage demande.' (I, i) Not only does it contravene the rules of 'la bienséance' to tell others exactly what we think of them, but Alceste's frankness has also made him an object of ridicule:

> [...] un si grand courroux contre les moeurs du temps

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[77] Wittgenstein, *Philosophische...*, *op. cit.*, p. 48, fragment 116: 'When philosophers use a word – "knowledge", "being" [...] "I" [...] and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? – What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.'

[78] Bénichou, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

[79] Mazouer, 'L'Espace de la parole dans *Le Misanthrope*, *George Dandin* et *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*' in *Le Nouveau Moliériste*, IV-V (1998-9), pp. 191-202 (p. 192).

[80] See Hubert, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-50: Hubert notes that Philinte, Alceste, Acaste and Arsinoé all view human relationships in terms of a financial exchange.

Vous tourne en ridicule auprès de bien des gens. (I, i)[81]

Philinte's philosophy of language is, however, almost as limited as that of Alceste. While Philinte delights in mocking his friend's 'chagrin philosophe' and 'pleine franchise', his own demand that language must always please an interlocutor and conform to 'les communs usages' of society is as prescriptive ('Il faut, parmi le monde, une vertu traitable') and ridiculous as Alceste's call for absolute sincerity:

Il faut fléchir au temps sans obstination,
Et c'est une folie à nulle autre seconde
De vouloir se mêler de corriger tout le monde. (I, i)

Indeed, Philinte's apparent lucidity in recognising the shortcomings of Alceste's mimetic view of language is contradicted by his own blindness when it comes to perceiving the flaws in his linguistic theory. By concealing his true feelings behind a mask of civility, Philinte's *honnête* discourse is frequently far from honest: 'Ah! qu'en termes galants ces choses-là sont mises!' (I, ii)

Finally, Célimène represents the ultimate example of a gamester. In contrast to Philinte who aims to please others with his polite discourse, Célimène goes even further in her linguistic games by using language as a social weapon, with which to manipulate her suitors. Jasinski has dismissed Célimène as little more than a coquette who personifies 'la légèreté féminine':

> Surtout, presque par définition, elle manque justement de profondeur et si l'on peut dire, de substance. Elle offre un caractère tout en surface, *à priori* pauvre, ingrate, dépouillé, semble-t-il, de ce minimum de cordialité nécessaire au climat comique.[82]

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[81] Molière also highlights the danger of absolute honesty in *L'Avare*. Whereas Maître Jacques' candour in revealing Harpagon's reputation as 'la fable et la risée de tout le monde' results only in a painful beating (III, i), La Flèche and Valère demonstrate the value of being economical with the truth. Rather than admit to insulting Harpagon ('La peste soit de l'avarice et des avaricieux!'), La Flèche deflects the miser's accusations by countering them with his own questions: 'Est-ce que vous croyez que je veux parler de vous?' (I, iii) Valère is equally adept at manipulating Harpagon with his language games. Whilst appearing to support Harpagon's enforced marriage to Élise to Seigneur Anselme ('vous avez raison'), Valère covertly voices his true opinion of the match (I, v), thereby demonstrating that he has grasped the lesson which Maître Jacques has failed to learn: namely, that we all love flattery and recoil from any unpleasant truth about ourselves: 'il n'y a rien de si impertinent et de si ridicule qu'on ne fasse avaler lorsqu'on l'assaisonne en louange.' (I, i)

[82] Jasinski, *op. cit.*, pp. 165, 186.

Yet, this judgement of Célimène as a one-dimensional character misconstrues both the complexity and the comic nature of Célimène's language games. On one level, she prefigures Wittgenstein's fascination with language use by demonstrating the impossibility of any attempt to accord words an absolute meaning.[83] Rather than comply with her suitors' requests for a sincere and unequivocal declaration of her true feelings, Célimène constantly plays them against one another by exploiting the potential ambiguity of speech.[84] Not only does she refuse to answer Alceste's accusations directly, instead countering them with her own questions and allegations ('Puis-je empêcher les gens de me trouver aimable?', 'vous perdez le sens') (II, i & iv), but she also entices him further by retracting all of her former assurances of love:

> Hé bien! pour vous ôter d'un semblable souci,
> De tout ce que j'ai dit, je me dédis ici. (II, i)

On a deeper level, Célimène also resembles Dom Juan by using her duplicitous language games to expose the hypocritical linguistic masks of others. As Hall notes, her parody of Alceste's brusque speech ('Certes, pour un amant, la fleurette est mignonne', 'la méthode en est tout à fait nouvelle,/ Car vous aimez les gens pour leur faire querelle') (II, i), reveals the comic *disconvenance* between Alceste's self-depiction as a *romanesque* lover, and the reality of his selfish demands that she sacrifice everything for him:

> Alceste – Ah! rien n'est comparable à mon amour extrême, [...]
> Il va jusqu'à former des souhaits contre vous.
> Oui, je voudrais qu'aucun ne vous trouvât aimable,
> Que vous fussiez réduite en un sort misérable, [...]
> Célimène – C'est me vouloir du bien d'une étrange manière! (IV, iii)[85]

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[83] Wittgenstein, *Philosophische...*, *op. cit.*, p. 20, fragment 43: 'Man kann für eine *große* Klasse von Fällen der Benützung des Wortes "Bedeutung" – wenn auch nicht für *alle* Fälle seiner Benutzung – dieses Wort so erklären: Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist sein Gebrauch in der Sprache.' ('For a *large* class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.'

[84] Alceste – Parlons à coeur ouvert. [...] Aujourd'hui vous vous expliquerez. (II, i & iv) [...] Oronte – Il me faut de votre âme une pleine assurance. Un amant là-dessus n'aime point qu'on balance. (V, ii)

[85] Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-5: Alceste inverts the traditional attitudes of pastoral and *galant* lovers in Corneille's *Rodogune* (III, iv) and Rotrou's *La Soeur* (II, i), who would willingly sacrifice everything for those whom they love.

Moreover, Célimène's biting verbal portraits of the other courtiers are not simply designed to amuse and therefore gain the support of her audience ('Acaste – Dieu me damne! Voilà son portrait véritable./ Clitandre – Pour bien peindre les gens vous êtes admirable!'), but they also underline the self-deception of those whom she derides. Damon may regard himself as a 'raisonneur', but he is caricatured as un 'parleur étrange, et qui trouve toujours/ L'art de ne vous rien dire avec de grands discours', while Damis' apparently noble disdain for the conversation of others is nothing more than *amour-propre*: 'Il se met au-dessus de tous les autres gens.' (II, iv)

Above all, Célimène exposes the duplicity of Arsinoé's professed altruism ('d'un zèle qui m'attache à tous vos intérêts') in censuring the behaviour of others:

> Je fis ce que je pus pour vous pouvoir défendre, [...]
> Mais vous savez qu'il est des choses dans la vie
> Qu'on ne peut excuser, [...] Et je me vis contrainte à demeurer d'accord
> Que l'air dont vous viviez vous faisait un peu tort. (III, iv)

By echoing, but also deforming, her opponent's speech ('contre chacun je pris votre défense', 'Mais tous les sentiments combattirent le mien'), Célimène uncovers the rules governing Arsinoé's language game and uses the same rhetorical device of indirect discourse ('des gens de vertu singulière') to attack the *médisance* of the prude:

> Là, votre pruderie et vos éclats de zèle
> Ne furent pas cités comme un fort bon modèle.[86]

Nonetheless, this does not mean that Célimène represents the voice of the author in her use of double-voiced discourse to uncover the multiple layers of meaning within the speech of others. By claiming that 'Molière is a master ventriloquist speaking through Célimène', Norman overlooks the fact that Célimène's theory of language as nothing more than a game to be played for her own advantage is as limited and extreme as Alceste's belief that speech should always communicate an unequivocal message.[87] Célimène may be able to see through the linguistic games of Alceste and Arsinoé, but ironically, her view of language as a game also breaks down when she

[86] See Norman, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-205.
[87] Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

too avoids ambiguity in speech and resorts to direct criticism, thereby alienating her once appreciative admirers:

> Clitandre – Il suffit, nous allons l'un et l'autre en tous lieux
> Montrer de votre coeur le portrait glorieux. [...]
> Oronte – Vous me faites un bien, me faisant vous connaître. (V, iv)

After playing with the idea of mimetic language in the farces, *La Jalousie du barbouillé* and *Le Mariage forcé*, Molière underlines the difficulty of applying the notion to seventeenth-century society. Alceste is incapable of putting his linguistic theory into practice, but paradoxically, the same can be said for Célimène who is abandoned by her public, with the exception of Alceste. Yet, she could never accept a marriage isolated from civilised society, as she tells Alceste:

> Moi, renoncer au monde avant que de vieillir,
> Et dans votre désert aller m'ensevelir! [...]
> La solitude effraye une âme de vingt ans. (V, iv)

Molière not only shows the contradictions between Alceste's linguistic theory and its implementation, but he also underlines the limitations of any systematic theory of language. While the modern theories examined in these three chapters can undoubtedly enrich and inform our understanding of language games in the comedies, the pyschological depths which have given some of his characters legendary status need to be explored through another theoretical framework, which will be the focus of our next part.

Part Three: Language and the Self

> 'Il ne peut y avoir en nous aucune pensée de laquelle, dans le même moment qu'elle est en nous, nous n'ayons une actuelle connaissance.'[1]

While the wide variety of language games in Molière's comedy challenges the notion that the primary function of speech is to communicate our thoughts to others, this part of the thesis will move on to question the Cartesian theory that language serves to represent conscious thoughts by focusing on the role of the unconscious in creating humour.[2] Whereas characters such as Dom Juan, Tartuffe or Célimène consciously aim to deceive others through language, Armande, Monsieur Jourdain and Argan are equally adept at deceiving themselves. It is this *disconvenance* between the conscious message communicated by characters and the meaning received by the audience which points to a central aspect of Molière's linguistic humour: the comedy of characters who accidentally express more than they intend in their speech.[3] Using the theories of Freud, Lacan and Kristeva, we will contest the traditional Cartesian model of the self as a conscious and rational being by exploring the comic potential of irrational speech in Molière's theatre, from naïve humour to parapraxes or Freudian slips.

There have, however, been objections that it is anachronistic and unhelpful to apply such an approach to a classical play. Dandrey in particular has dismissed the value of a Lacanian or Freudian reading in his discussion of *déraison* and *folie*, insisting it is 'inutile en effet de convoquer Freud et Lacan pour rendre compte de la guérison du désir d'Orgon par la révélation qui lui est faite du véritable désir de Tartuffe.'[4] Yet, as Sörman has shown, Dandrey's examination of *folie* in Molière's theatre is itself

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[1] Descartes, *Réponses aux quatrièmes objections N° 485* in *Méditations Métaphysiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956), p. 219.

[2] One of the problems in deciphering Descartes' theories is the infrequent reference to language itself. In the *Méditations*, he does, however, state that language is unique to man and it is the power of speech which distinguishes humans from animals, linked as it is to the rational soul. See John Cottingham, *Descartes* (Oxford U.K and Cambridge U.S.A: Blackwell, 1995), p. 110.

[3] See McBride, 'Une philosophie du rire' in *Le Nouveau Moliériste* I (1994), pp. 95–117, (p. 115): *La Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur* defines *disconvenance* as the essence of 'le ridicule': 'Le Ridicule est donc la forme extérieure et sensible que la providence de la Nature a attachée à tout ce qui est déraisonnable. [...] ce qui sied bien est toujours fondé sur quelque raison de convenance, comme l'indécence sur quelque disconvenance, c'estadire le Ridicule sur quelque manque de Raison.'

[4] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique*..., *op. cit.*, p. 384.

heavily indebted to modern psychoanalytic theory, despite his assertion that his analysis is founded purely on seventeenth-century notions of melancholia and desire.[5] In fact, Dandrey's discussion of 'le délire de l'imagination', and his allusions to 'la structure triangulaire du désir' and 'l'invention du moi' closely resemble Lacan's theory of desire and idealised self-perception.[6]

A further challenge to a psychoanalytical interpretation is that it is no longer relevant as a theory, with Freud's writings in particular being discredited as outdated. Instead, psychoanalysis has often been replaced by the far more fashionable areas of gender and cultural studies. Nevertheless, we may deduce that Molière himself was not unaware of the role of the unconscious and the irrational in motivating behaviour. Freud and Lacan may have been the first to formulate a full-scale theory of the unconscious but their insight into the workings of the mind were certainly not unique and Molière constantly highlights the comic effects of linguistic slips and inflated self-images in his plays.

It is even more curious that the challenge is directed at would-be Lacanians as virtually no *Moliériste* has taken up Lacan's references in his Seminars to *L'École des femmes*, *Le Misanthrope* and *Amphitryon*. Following Charles Mauron's *Psychocritique du genre comique*, only Henri Rey-Flaud, Constant Venesoen, Richard Sörman and Larry Riggs have applied Lacanian theory to the comedies, but they do not focus on Molière's use of language, even though Lacan emphasised its significance for psychoanalysis.[7] Meanwhile, only Frances Gray has, to my knowledge, applied Julia Kristeva's theories to Molière's plays. She discusses Molière's female characters in the light of Kristeva's theory of female development during the mirror stage, but this feminist interpretation also ignores the comic

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[5] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique... op. cit.*, pp. 371-8.

[6] See Sörman, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Dandrey, *L'Esthétique... op. cit.*, pp. 263, 278, 369, 389.

[7] See Lacan, 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage' in *Écrits I* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), p. 123: ''Qu'elle se veuille agent de guérison, de formation ou de sondage, la psychanalyse n'a qu'un medium: la parole du patient.'; 'L'Inconscient freudien' in *Séminaire XI: Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (1973), p. 23: Lacan also asserted that 'l'inconscient est structuré comme un langage.'; Riggs, 'Reason's Text as Palimpsest: Sensuality subverts "Sense" in Molière's *Les Femmes savantes*' in *Papers on French Seventeenth Century* Litearture, 30 (2003), pp. 423-33; Henri Rey Flaud, *L'Éloge du rien: pourquoi l'obsessionnel et le pervers échouent là où l'hystérique réussit* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996); C. Venesoen, *Quand Jean-Baptiste joue du Molière* (Paris, Seattle, Tübingen: Biblio 17, 1996): Venesoen's largely biographical study portrays Molière as a misogynistic dramatist, whose female characters such as Agnès and Isabelle are sinister 'ingénues libertines', but he provides little textual evidence to support this reading. (p. 18)

potential of language in Molière's comedy.[8] Nevertheless, Kristeva's writings on language and subjectivity are particularly helpful in analysing the discourse of the précieuses ridicules and the 'femmes savantes' who try in vain to impose the rational discourse of what Kristeva describes as the symbolic on the semiotic realm of physical desires and passions.

The greatest lacuna, however, is that the majority of critics who do apply a Freudian or Lacanian reading to Molière's work perceive them as dark plays focusing on an oedipal struggle between tyrannical fathers and their rebellious children (Mauron, Venesoen) or between overbearing doctors and their hapless patients. (Sörman). What these studies fail to acknowledge is that by transforming Molière's theatre into a bleak depiction of human greed and malice, they betray the fundamental aim of his work: to entertain.[9] Moreover, they ignore the fact that Freud himself was at pains to emphasise the close relationship between comedy and the unconscious, not only in his engaging study on *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten* (1905) but also in his work on *Fehlleistungen* or parapraxes in *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens.* (1901)[10] Consequently, the goal of this chapter is to rehabilitate psychoanalytic theory as a means of adding a further dimension to Molière's linguistic comedy. Through its exploration of the multiple layers of meaning within speech, which the audience enjoys recognising but of which the characters on stage are frequently unaware, psychoanalysis can increase our understanding of the psychological depth of Molière's characters, even those who have previously been perceived as one-dimensional.

The following chapter will apply Freud's discussions of naïve humour and linguistic mistakes to Molière's plays. According to Freud, parapraxes, such as forgetting or substituting words, are by no means accidental mistakes but actually disclose unconscious feelings which have been repressed but which resurface in speech. Chapter twelve will develop the discussion of linguistic slips to focus on the language

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[8] Frances Gray, *Women and Laughter* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), p. 35.

[9] See *La Critique de L'École des femmes*: 'Dorante – je voudrais bien savoir si la grande règle de toutes les règles n'est pas de plaire.' (scene vi)

[10] Freud, *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens: über Vergessen, Versprechen, Vregreifen, Aberglaube und Irrtum* in *Gessamelte Werke*, Vierter Band (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1990); *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* in *Gesammelte Werke*, Sechster Band (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1987).

of Molière's *imaginaires*. In the light of Lacan's theories of the mirror stage and *méconnaissance* or misrecognition, we will examine Patrick Dandrey's argument that the delusions of the *imaginaires* constitute a perversion of the natural order and ask whether the playwright merely ridicules the fantasies of *visionnaires* such as Arnolphe and Bélise. While investigating further Dandrey's thesis, we shall question whether even supposedly rational *raisonneurs*, including Ariste, Philinte and Béralde, who are generally regarded as the voice of Cartesian reason, are also deluded to some extent and are equally prone to obsessions.[11] The final chapter of the thesis will move from Molière's *imaginaires* to his would-be philosophers, Arnolphe and the 'femmes savantes.' They emulate Cartesian dualism in their attempt to suppress the physical realm of passions with the voice of reason, but their constant allusions to the language of love and sexuality betray their distinctly earthly preoccupations.

[11] Dandrey, *op. cit.*, p. 185: '[Molière] condamne aussi fermement l'erreur et l'aveuglément de qui s'y laisse prendre, au nom, cette fois, d'une éthique de la lucidité rationnelle et raisonnable.'

Chapter Eleven: The Cartesian Self meets the Freudian Unconscious

> 'Le langage n'est jamais innocent: les mots ont une mémoire seconde qui se prolonge mystérieusement au milieu des significations nouvelles.'[12]

According to René Descartes, man is defined by his rationality. Not only does he deny the existence of unconscious thoughts, but he also argues in the *Méditation seconde* that: 'Je vois clairement qu'il n'y a rien qui me soit plus facile à connaître que mon esprit.'[13] Indeed, he argues that man is in essence a *res cogitans*, and emphasises the supremacy of the rational mind over the needs of the body in the preface to *Les Principes*:

> Les bêtes brutes, qui n'ont que leur corps à conserver, s'occupent continuellement à chercher de quoi le nourrir; mais les hommes, dont la principale partie est l'esprit, devraient employer leurs principaux soins à la recherche de la sagesse, qui en est la vraie nourriture.[14]

Many of Molière's characters espouse this Cartesian theory of the supremacy of the mind, most notably Arnolphe and the 'femmes savantes', who all believe that they have a privileged insight into the workings of the mind and follow Descartes in attempting to control their desires through the imposition of rational language. Arnolphe regards himself as a 'sage philosophe' whose scientific 'méthode' and 'suretés' (I, i) will enable him to mould Agnès to his own design, thereby protecting him from the humiliating fate of every other husband:[15]

> Ainsi que je voudrai, je tournerai cette âme:
> Comme un morceau de cire entre mes mains elle est,
> Et je lui puis donner la forme qui me plait. (III, iii)[16]

The 'femmes savantes' go even further in their worship of Cartesian rationalism. Armande and Bélise echo Descartes in their disparagement of base desires and

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[12] Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro...*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[13] René Descartes, *Méditations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 81- 2.
[14] Descartes, *Les Principes de la philosophie*, première partie, ed. Guy Durandin (Paris: Librairie philosophique J, Vrin, 1965), p. 31.
[15] See Descartes, *Méditations*, *op. cit.*, p. 47: Arnolphe's description of Agnès as a piece of wax recalls Descartes' *Méditation seconde*, during which he melts 'un morceau de cire' in order to prove the unreliability of our senses: 'il faut donc que je tombe d'accord, que je ne saurais pas même concevoir par l'imagination ce que c'est que cette cire, et qu'il n'y a que mon entendement seul qui le conçoive.'
[16] See Sörman, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

exaltation of the intellect ('À de plus hauts objets élevez vos désirs./ Et traitant de mépris les sens et la matière/ À l'esprit, comme nous, donnez-vous tout entière') (I, i), while Philaminte views herself as the epitome of a Cartesian *res cogitans*: 'Me voit-on femme déraisonnable?' (II, vi) On a deeper level, the 'femmes savantes' not only believe that they can control their own emotions, but they also seek to regulate the French language by purging it of all ambiguous 'syllabes sales' in favour of the unequivocal voice of reason: 'Appeler un jargon le langage /Fondé sur la raison et sur le bel usage!' (II, vi; III, ii)

This Cartesian approach to the self as a rational being has also been adopted by many *Moliéristes* who argue that the plays ridicule the *déraison* of the *imaginaires* and counterbalance their *folie* with the lucidity of the *raisonneurs*. Gossip suggests that Molière's monomaniacs are comic because they deviate from 'a standard of normality, dictated by custom, nature and reason', while Andrew Calder also offers a Cartesian interpretation of *folie* in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.[17] Applying the Socratic definition of a wise man as someone who knows himself and a ridiculous man as someone who is unaware of his own motivations, Calder defines the Maître de philosophie as 'un sot' who knows nothing because he does not know himself.[18] Above all, Dandrey argues that ridicule can be defined in terms of a deviation from an aesthetic, rational or social norm, insisting that 'le ridicule se définit toujours en termes d'écart, de déviance, par rapport à une harmonie réelle ou idéale.'[19] Consequently, the majority of critics regard irrational language as a deformity and an aberration to be eradicated or tolerated, as in the case of Monsieur Jourdain or Argan whose families encourage their fantasies with the elaborate Turkish and medical ceremonies. Béralde in particular justifies his deception of Argan by explaining 'ce n'est pas tant le jouer que s'accommoder à ses fantaisies.' (III, xiv)

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[17] C. J. Gossip, '"Je veux qu'on me distingue": Normality and Abnormality in Molière' in *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 33 No. 1 (1996), pp. 403-413 (p. 412); see also W. G. Moore, *op. cit*, pp. 44, 52: 'A similar vision of normality, disturbed by the cunning of an imposter [...] is found in [...] *Tartuffe*. [...] [Molière's] vision of normality includes instinct as a corrective.'

[18] Andrew Calder, '*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*: abondance et équilibre' in *Le Nouveau Moliériste*, IV-V (1998-9), pp. 75-92 (p. 76).

[19] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, p. 133: 'Il s'ensuit que l'esthétique de Molière présente deux pôles inégalement intéressants sans doute, mais placés dans une relation de nécessaire réciprocité: celui de la difformité risible et celui de la norme esthétique, rationnelle, morale et sociale que déforment folies, impostures et extravagances.'

Yet, this view of the self as a unified and rational whole has been challenged by the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, Lacan and Kristeva. Whereas many psychologists follow Descartes in regarding the self as aware of his or her thoughts, Freud overturns the assumption that all mental acts are necessarily conscious ones and that being conscious is the defining feature of a mental process. Instead, he maintains that there is an area of our own being to which we have no direct access: the unconscious:

> Die bequemste Selbstbeobachtung lehrt, daß man Einfälle haben kann, die nicht ohne Vorbereitung zustande gekommen sein können. Aber von diesen Vorstufen Ihres Gedankens, die doch wirklich auch seelischer Natur gewesen sein müssen, erfahren Sie nichts, in Ihr Bewußtsein tritt nur das fertige Resultat.[20]

According to Freud, it is the unconscious which governs us, and he insists that unconscious thought processes are not confined to the delusions and obsessions of so-called 'neurotic' or 'hysterical' patients. On the contrary, the irrational unconscious is an integral feature of normal psychic life and makes itself felt through dreams, jokes and linguistic lapses, all of which allow unconscious desires to outwit the censor of repression and come to the surface in our speech. Thus, far from regarding language as a simple tool with which we represent reality and our thoughts to others, Freud and Lacan argue that language often escapes us and communicates more than we intend. As Lacan stresses:

> La parole n'a jamais un seul sens, le mot un seul emploi. Toute parole a toujours un au-delà, soutient plusieurs fonctions, enveloppe plusieurs sens. Derrière ce que dit un discours, il y a ce qu'il veut dire, et derrière ce qu'il veut dire, il y a encore un autre vouloir-dire, et rien n'en sera jamais épuisé.[21]

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[20] Freud, 'Die Frage der Laienanalyse' in *Gesammelte Werke* Vierzehnter Band (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1948), p. 224; 'The Question of Lay Analysis' in The *Essentials of Psychoanalysis* translated by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1986) p. 11: 'The idlest self-observation shows that ideas may occur to us which cannot have come about without preparation. But you experience nothing of these preliminaries of your thought, though they too must certainly have been of a mental nature; all that enters your consciousness is the ready-made result.'; Freud also underlined that the concept of the unified self is an illusion and we often conceal unpleasant thoughts from ourselves: 'Das ist ja, als ob sein Selbst nicht mehr die Einheit wäre, für die er es immer hält, als ob es noch etwas anderes in ihm gäbe, was sich diesem Selbst entgegenstellen kann. Etwas wie ein Gegensatz zwischen dem Selbst une einem Seelenleben im weiteren Sinne mag sich ihm dunkel anzeigen.' (p. 215) 'It looks as though his own self were no longer the unity which he had always considered it to be, as though there were something else as well in him that could confront that self. He may become obscurely aware of a contrast between a self and a mental life in the wider sense.' (p. 11)

[21] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire I*, *op. cit.*, pp. 262, 267: In contrast to Jung's model of language as a group of fixed archetypes, Lacan adopts Saussure's theory of the arbitrary relationship between the

Over two hundred years before Freud and Lacan formulated their theory of the language of the unconscious, Molière was well aware of the ambiguious nature of language and its ability to express an underlying meaning which we do not expect or wish to convey. Indeed, as Braider argues, meaning is never confined to the sense that we consciously give words, but is equally dependent on how interlocutors interpret them, a phenomenon described by Austin as 'uptake':

> Insofar as the effect that our words produce is ultimately a function of how others take them, their most decisive meanings are often those we least notice or intend. [22]

This unconscious comedy is exemplified by Agnès' unsuspecting allusions to 'tarte à la crème' (l.99) and 'enfants par l'oreille' (l.164), a linguistic slip which Freud characterises as naïve humour.[23] While Agnès believes that she is communicating a serious and unambiguous message, she unwittingly makes a sexual joke which is only perceived by her audience, both on and off stage:

> Mit dem Witz stimmt das Naïve (der Rede) im Wortlaut und im Inhalt überein, es bringt einen Wortmißbrauch, einen Unsinn oder eine Zote zustande. [...] Die naive Person vermeint sich ihrer Ausdrucksmittel und Denkwege in normaler und einfacher Weise bedient zu haben und weiß nichts von einer Nebenabsicht; sie zieht aus der Produktion des Naiven auch keinen Lustgewinn.[24]

Agnès is equally oblivious to the double meaning of Arnolphe's promise that someone will soon protect her from the fleas in her bedroom, and it is only her interlocutor who adds a second, erotic meaning, although even Arnolphe is less eager to grasp the *double-entendre* of Agnès' remark that she is sewing 'des cornettes', the symbol of cuckolded husbands (l.239):

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signifier and the signified to argue that there is no direct correspondence between a word and its referent. Instead, he compares language to a signifying chain in which the meaning of one word can only be discerned by referring to other words: 'Chaque fois que nous avons dans l'analyse du langage à chercher la signification d'un mot, la seule méthode correcte est de faire la somme de ses emplois.'

[22] Braider, 'Image and *Imaginaire* in Molière's *Sganarelle, ou le cocu imaginaire*' in *Modern Language Association of America* (Oct 2002), pp. 1142-57 (pp. 1143, 1152).

[23] See Hall, *op. cit*, p. 140: Hall notes that Agnès' reference to auricular conception parodies contemporary accounts of the annunciation, and also recalls Gargantua's birth from his mother's ear: Rabelais, *Gargantua*, *op. cit.*, chapter vi, p. 45.

[24] Freud, *Der Witz* p. 211: 'As far as wording and contents are concerned, the naïve speech is identical with wit: it produces a misuse of words, a bit of nonsense, or an obscenity. [...] The naïve person imagines that he is using his thoughts and expressions in a simple and normal mannner: he has no other purpose in view and receives no pleasure from his naïve production.' (pp. 194-5).

Arnolphe – Vous aurez dans peu quelqu'un pour les chasser.

Agnès – Vous me ferez plaisir.

Arnolphe – Je le puis bien penser. (l. 237-8)[25]

As with *lapsus linguae*, the overriding factor which distinguishes Agnès' naïve utterances from jokes is the question of intention: 'Es handelt sich nur darum, ob wir annehmen, daß der Sprecher einen Witz beabsichtigt habe, oder daß er – das Kind – im guten Glauben auf Grund seiner unkorrigierten Unwissenheit einen ernsthaften Schluß habe ziehen wollen. Nur der letztere Fall ist einer der Naivität.'[26] The listener, whether it be Arnolphe or the audience, feels in a position of superiority to the guileless young woman who is blissfully unaware that she has made a suggestive remark, and this is further demonstrated by the undeclared *équivoque* on 'le…' when it is Arnolphe rather than his ward who adds the sexual subtext of 'pucelage':

Agnès – Il m'a pris le ruban que vous m'aviez donné. […]

Arnolphe – Passe pour le ruban. Mais je voulais apprendre

S'il ne vous a rien fait que vous baiser les bras.

Agnès – Comment? est-ce qu'on fait d'autres choses? (II, v)[27]

Freud's theory of unconscious humour can also shed light on the humorous effet of linguistic mistakes in Molière's theatre. Although Moore has already discussed the comedy of verbal masks and the 'antagonism of the wits and the instinct', his analysis does not acknowledge the role of the unconscious in provoking slips of the tongue.[28] According to Freud, linguistic lapses, such as forgetting a name or substituting the wrong word, are not accidental errors. Rather, these mistakes express unconscious wishes or desires which we did not consciously intend to reveal and they follow a similar pattern to dreams by condensing or displacing elements: 'Die Bildung von

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[25] See Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 94: fleas were associated with sexual desire.

[26] Freud, *Der Witz…*, *op. cit.*, p. 209: 'It is simply a question whether we assume that the speakers had the intention of making a witticism or whether we assume that they – the children – wished to draw an earnest conclusion, a conclusion held in good faith though based on uncorrected knowledge, only the latter case is one of naiveté.' (p. 293)

[27] See Freud, *Der Witz…*, *op. cit.*, p. 208: Freud notes that naïve humour is typically found in the language of children: 'Nach den Einblicken in die Genese der Hemmungen […] wird es uns nicht wundern, daß das Naïve zu allermeist am Kind gefunden wird, in weiterer Übertragung dannn beim ungebildeten Erwachsenen, den wir als kindlich betreffs seiner intellektuellen Ausbildung auffassen können.'; 'It will not surprise us to learn that the naïve is mostly found in children, although it may also be observed in uneducated adults, whom we look on as children as far as their intellectual development is concerned.' (p. 291).

[28] Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

Substitutionen und Kontaminationen beim Versprechen ist somit ein Beginn jener Verdichtungsarbeit, die wir in eifrigster Tätigkeit am Aufbau des Traumes beteiligt finden.'[29] In particular, he argues that instances of temporary amnesia, when we forget a word or someone's name with which we are familiar, are not arbitrary, but rather reveal an unconscious process of repression. Molière develops the comedy of these memory lapses by making the speakers unaware that they have actually forgotten the names of their interlocutors. In *L'École des femmes*, for example, Horace's inability to recall the name, Monsieur de la Souche, betrays his antipathy towards his new rival in love, whilst it also adds a deeper level of humour for the audience as it deflates Arnolphe's pretension in acquiring a ridiculous aristocratic title:

> Horace – C'est je crois, de la Zousse, ou Source, qu'on le nomme;
> Je ne me suis pas fort arrêté sur le nom [...]
> L'on m'en a parlé comme d'un ridicule. (I, iv)

Similarly, Zerbinette unwittingly ridicules Géronte in *Les Fourberies de Scapin* when she forgets the name of the father in her story, and attempts to recall Géronte's name through a chain of distinctly unflattering associations:

> Zerbinette – Ne pouvez-vous me nommer quelqu'un de cette ville qui soit connu pour être avare au dernier point? [...] Gé...Géronte. Oui, Géronte, justement; voilà mon vilain, [...] c'est ce ladre-là que je dis. (III, iii)

It is not only memory lapses which cause mirth. Molière foreshadows Freud's emphasis on the role of the unconscious in producing amusing linguistic slips or parapraxes. According to Freud, such mistakes are not unintentional but actually fulfil unconscious desires, of which even the speaker is frequently unaware:

> Jeder, der sich die Wahrheit so in einem unbewachten Moment entschlüpfen läßt, ist eigentlich froh darüber, daß er der Verstellung ledig wird. [...] Ohne solche innerliche Zustimmung läßt sich niemand von dem Automatismus, der hier die Wahrheit an den Tag bringt, übermannen.[30]

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[29]Freud, *Zur Psychopathologie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 67; *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, translated by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1960) p. 59: 'The formation of substitutions and contaminations which occurs in slips of the tongue is accordingly a beginning of the work of condensation which we find taking a most vigorous share in the construction of dreams.'

[30] Freud, *Der Witz...*, *op. cit.*, p. 116: 'Every one who allows the truth to escape his lips in an unguarded moment is really pleased to have rid himself of this thought [...] Without the inner assent no

Freud demonstrates the extent to which language can disguise, but also betray, our innermost feelings by citing the example of the president of the Austrian House of Deputies who opened a session of parliament with the announcement: 'Hohes Haus! Ich konstatiere die Anwesenheit von soundsoviel Herren und erkläre somit die Sitzung für geschlossen!'[31] Freud analyses his mistake by concluding that the President wished that he were indeed about to close the session and 'der Nebengedanke setzte sich wenigstens teilweise durch und das Resultat war ‚geschlossen' für ‚eröffnet', also das Gegenteil dessen, was zu sprechen beabsichtigt war.'[32] Molière's characters are equally inclined to reveal their true feelings in their speech. As we have seen in Chapter Three, Orgon intends to convince his family of his Christian piety and devotion, but insteads amuses the audience through his verbal slips which inadvertently disclose his disdain for others:

> Qui suit ses leçons goûte une paix profonde
> Et comme du fumier regarde tout le monde. [...]
> Faire enrager le monde est ma plus grande joie. (I, v; III, vii)

Thus, Orgon belies his saintly image through the very words with which he hopes to affirm it, a verbal slip which Freud characterises as 'self-betrayal':

> In anderen [...] Fällen ist es Selbstkritik, innere Widerspruch gegen die eigene Äußerung, was zum Versprechen, ja zum Ersatz des Intendierten durch seinen Gegensatz nötigt. Man merkt dann mit Erstaunen, wie der Wortlaut einer Beteuerung die Absicht derselben aufhebt, und wie der Sprechfehler die innere Unaufrichtigkeit bloßgelegt hat. [...] Das Versprechen wird hier zu einem mimischen Ausdrucksmittel, freilich oftmals für den Ausdruck dessen, was man nicht sagen wollte, zu einem Mittel des Selbstverrats.[33]

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one would allow himself to be overpowered by the automatism which here brings the truth to light.' (p. 156).

[31]Freud, *Zur Psychopathologie... op. cit.*, p. 67. 'Gentlemen: I take notice that a full quorum of members is present and herewith declare the sitting *closed*! (p. 59).

[32] *Ibid*: 'But this accompanying idea, as frequently happens, broke through, at least partially, and the result was "closed" instead of "open" – the opposite, that is, of what was intended to be expressed.' (p. 59)

[33] Freud, *Zur Psychopathologie* p. 96: 'It is self-criticism, internal opposition to one's own utterance, that obliges one to make a slip of the tongue and even to substitute the opposite of what one had intended. One then observes in astonishment how the wording of an assertion cancels out its own intention, and how the slip has exposed an inner insincerity. The slip of the tongue has become a mode of mimetic expression – often, indeed, for the expression of something one did not wish to say: it becomes a mode of self-betrayal.' (p. 86).

Orgon is not alone in communicating the opposite message to the one which he intends. In *Le Malade imaginaire*, Argan unconsciously undermines his conviction that he is at death's door by admitting that his 'illness' is an act of volition: 'Ah! Monsieur Fleurant, tout doux, s'il vous plaît: si vous en usez comme cela, on ne voudra plus être malade.' (I, i) Similarly, Béline unintentionally exposes her cupidity whilst attempting to prove her selfless devotion to Argan:

> Béline – Ne me parlez pas de bien, je vous prie. Ah! de combien sont les deux billets? (I, vii)

In the same way, Harpagon's repeated *lapsus linguae* counteract his own efforts to conceal his buried treasure from his children and servants. Paradoxically, his obsession with the *cassette* entails that the very subject which he wishes to avoid is the only topic which he is capable of discussing. Freud traces such self-betrayal to an automatism of habit, when a person proves incapable of adapting their speech to the given situation, and consequently contradicts his or her professed intentions.[34] By accusing La Flèche of spying on his 'affaires' with a view to 'dévorer ce que je possède', Harpagon only succeeds in arousing the valet's suspicions rather than deflecting him:

> Harpagon – Ne serais-tu point homme à aller faire courir le bruit que j'ai chez moi de l'argent caché?
>
> La Flèche – Vous avez de l'argent caché?
>
> Harpagon – Non, coquin, je ne dis pas cela. (*À part*) J'enrage. (I, iii)

Moreover, Harpagon's compulsive allusions to the precise sum of money which he has just received confound his conscious aim to divert all interest from the ten thousand *écus*: 'je disais qu'il est bien heureux qui peut avoir dix mille écus chez soi. [....] afin que vous n'alliez pas prendre les choses de travers et vous imaginer que je dise que c'est moi qui ai dix mille écus. [...] Plût à Dieu que je les eusse, dix mille

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[34] Freud, *Der Witz*, *op. cit.*, p. 69: Freud cites the example of a marriage agent who was employed to extol the virtues of a prospective bride. The future bride-groom was, however, unpleasantly surprised when he met the lady in question because he complained that she was old, ugly and had bad teeth and bleary eyes. The marriage agent interrupted the young man to assure him that he need not lower his voice: 'taub ist sie auch.' ('She is deaf as well.') Far from persuading the bride-groom to marry the lady, the agent accidentally achieved the opposite effect: 'Der Vermittler der zweiten Geschichte wird von der Aufzählung der Mängel und Gebrechen der Braut so fasziniert, daß er die Liste derselben aus seiner eigenen Kenntnis vervollständigt, wiewohl das gewiß nicht sein Amt und seine Absicht ist.'; 'The marriage agent in the second story is fascinated by the failings and infirmities of the bride that he completes the list from his own knowledge, which it was certainly neither his business nor his intention to do.' (p. 87)

écus!' (I, iv) Freud stresses that such constant denials are generally an unconscious admission that the original suspicion was true: 'Die Verneinung ist eine Art, das Verdrängte zur Kenntnis zu nehmen.'[35] As Gertrude retorts after watching Hamlet's dramatic representation of his father's murder: 'The lady doth protest too much methinks.' (III, ii)

Contrary to Descartes' contention that we are always conscious of our thoughts, such parapraxes demonstrate that we do not possess a unique insight into our desires and motivations. Nor are we in complete control of our speech. Rather, language often speaks through us, revealing more than we intend, and it is this lack of self-knowledge which is further elaborated by Lacan's theory of *méconnaissance*.

[35] Freud, 'Die Verneinung' in *Gesammelte Werke: Werke aus den Jahren 1925-1931*, Vierzehnter Band (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1948), p. 13: 'to deny something is a means of making the repressed known.' (my translation)

Chapter Twelve: Madness and Imagination

> O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
> To see oursels as others see us!
> It wad frae monie a blunder free us
> An' foolish notion.[36]

The comedy of the unconscious is not simply derived from parapraxes when characters accidentally reveal their unconscious desires in their speech. Molière's humour also stems from the *disconvenance* between self-perception and how others view us, a gulf which Dandrey describes as 'la réalité d'une méditation intime et joyeuse sur ce peu que nous sommes, comparé à ce que nous croyons être.'[37] Whether it be Alceste's conviction that he is a noble victim of social corruption or Bélise's fervent belief that every man whom she meets is desperately in love with her, Molière's *imaginaires* prove adept at constructing an idealised self-image through language, a process which Stephen Greenblatt defines as 'self-fashioning'. In his seminal work on *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt underlines the role of language in constructing a new, and more illustrious, identity and he emphasises Thomas More's insight into the willingness of men and women to deceive themselves and retreat into a world of fantasy:

> Far more often in More's works the theatrical metaphor turns inward, expressing his tragicomic perception of life lived at a perpetual remove from reality. All men are caught up in receding layers of fantasy: the spectator laughs or is angry to see another pride himself on a mere fiction, while he himself is no less a player, no less entrameled in fantasy.[38]

Through his work on the imaginary and *le stade du miroir*, Lacan can point to the comic potential of these idealised self-images in Molière's theatre when characters fail to perceive their real inadequacies and refuse to recognise themselves in the speech of others. In contrast to Greenblatt who posits the self as a cultural construct

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[36] Robert Burns, 'To a Louse, on seeing one on a lady's bonnet at church' in *Poems of Robert Burns* selected and edited by Henry W. Meikle and William Beattie (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1958), p. 82.

[37] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, p. 30; see also M^{c}Bride, 'Une philosophie du...', *op. cit.*, p. 115.

[38] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 9, 27.

and the 'ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society', Lacan does not view our capacity for self-deception as a purely social phenomenon.[39] Rather, he suggests that our tendency to identify with an imaginary *alter-ego* is a fundamental aspect of human nature, but an aspect of which we are unconscious. Using Freud's theory that the conscious ego is merely a façade, the function of which is to cover problematic desires and conflicts through false connections, Lacan concludes that the main purpose of the ego or 'le moi' is to deceive us[40]:

> Il est très difficile de définir le moi comme une fonction autonome, tout en continuant de le tenir pour un maître d'erreurs, le siège des illusions, le lieu d'une passion qui lui est propre et va essentiellement à la méconnaissance. [...] Le moi, dans son aspect le plus essentiel, est une fonction imaginaire [...] sans doute le vrai *je* n'est pas moi.[41]

Indeed, Lacan insists, following Pascal in *Les Pensées*, that we have an infinite capacity for self-deception or *méconnaissance*, particularly when we form judgements about ourselves.[42] Whereas Dandrey argues that the *imaginaires* deviate from the norm of 'la parfaite raison' in their delusions, we will challenge his theory by exploring Lacan's assertion that we are all deluded to some extent and unwilling to recognise ourselves in the portraits painted by others, a misrecognition which Norman emphasises in *The Public Mirror*.[43]

Lacan traces our ability to form an imaginary self-image to the development of the ideal ego during the *stade du miroir*: the moment when children aged between six and

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[39] Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, p. 256; see also Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing and Identity during the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

[40] Madan Sarup, *Jacques Lacan* (New York, London, Toronto: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 39-40; Peter Gay, (ed.), *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 636: It is important to note that Freud offered various theories of *das Ich* or the ego. At times, he regarded the ego as essentially narcissistic and it is this model which Lacan adopted for his theory of the ego as the site of delusions. Nonetheless, Freud also linked *das Ich* to reason and common sense, contrasting it with the unbridled passions of the unconscious id. In a celebrated analogy, Freud compared the ego to a man on horseback who must control the superior strength of the horse (or id), and guide it where he wants. It was this interpretation of the ego as a controlling force which was promoted by the movement of ego-psychology and Heinz Hartmann, amongst other practitioners, adopted Freud's dictum that the role of the analyst is to strengthen the weaker ego of the patient in order to counter the forces of the id. Lacan was outraged by the popularity of ego-psychology, regarding it as a perversion of Freud's teaching.

[41] Lacan, 'Le moment de la résistance' in *Le Séminaire I*, *op. cit.*, p. 76; *Le Séminaire II*, *op. cit.*, pp. 50, 60.

[42] Blaise Pascal, *Les Pensées* (Paris: Larousse, 1996), fragment 44.

[43] Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

eighteen months first recognise themselves in a mirror.[44] According to Lacan, the mirror stage is fundamental to the formation of identity, marking as it does the entry of the subject into the symbolic realm of language and representation.[45] While apes soon tire of seeing their reflections, babies are fascinated by their images and experience a moment of jubilation because they can perceive a unified body in the mirror, even though they are not yet capable of controlling their limbs in reality:

> L'assomption jubilatoire de son image speculaire par l'être encore plongé dans l'impuissance motrice [...], nous paraîtra dès lors manifester en une situation exemplaire la matrice symbolique où le *je* se précipite en une forme primordiale, avant qu'il ne s'objective dans la dialectique de l'identification à l'autre et que le langage ne lui restitue dans l'universel sa fonction de sujet. Cette forme serait plutôt au reste à désigner comme *je-idéal*.[46]

Yet, Lacan insists that this sense of unity and coherence is merely a chimera formed in the Imaginary realm as the baby identifies with a deceptive image of him or herself as unified, masterful and in control: 'l'objet réel n'est pas l'objet que vous voyez dans la glace.'[47] The 'prétendu moi autonome' is nothing more than an idealisation of how we would like to see ourselves ('je idéal'), whereas we are, in actual fact, torn between the conscious and the unconscious, and it is this delusion or 'leurre' which forms the basis for the subsequent construction of the self.[48] As a result, Lacan

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[44] See Elisabeth Roudinesco, 'The Mirror Stage: an Obliterated Archive' in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed., Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 25-34 (p. 29): Although Lacan always asserted that he had invented the notion of the mirror stage, he actually used Henri Wallon's article, 'Comment se développe chez l'enfant la notion du corps propre' in order to formulate his concept of the *stade du miroir* in 1936, but never credited Wallon as his principal source.

[45] Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan: an Introduction* (London: Free Association, 1986), p. 53; see also Sarup, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5, 101-119: In the 1953 *Discours de Rome*, Lacan developed his theory that the human psyche is modelled by three interacting orders: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. It is extremely difficult to define the three orders because Lacan's concepts evolved constantly. The Imaginary develops from the infant's specular identification with the mirror image and is responsible for the formation of the ego, but its influence extends into adulthood and forms the basis of our subsequent misidentifications and delusions. The Imaginary is always interwoven with, and ordered by the Symbolic order, which is linked to language and symbolisation. Finally, the Real is 'ce qui résiste absolument à la symbolisation': see *Le Séminaire I*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

[46] Lacan, 'Le stade de miroir' in *Écrits I* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), pp. 89-91.

[47] Lacan, *Le Séminaire II*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

[48] Lacan, *Écrits I*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

concludes that the self is always alienated because it is founded on *méconnaissance* or misrecognition[49]:

> Le *stade du miroir* est un drame dont la poussée interne se précipite de l'insuffisance à l'anticipation – et qui pour le sujet, pris au leurre de l'identification spatiale, machine les fantasmes qui se succèdent d'une image morcelée du corps à une forme que nous appellerons orthopédique de sa totalité, – et à l'armure enfin assumée d'une identité aliénante, qui va marquer de sa structure rigide tout son développement mental.[50]

This gulf between the self and its mirror image offers valuable insights into the comic language of Molière's *imaginaires*, from Sganarelle and Harpagon, to Bélise and Arnolphe, who do not realise that they are assuming an idealised identity but are rather 'captivated' by their *alter-egos*. From his earliest plays, Molière explores the comedy of mirror images and *dédoublement* when characters are confronted with, or construct, another self. Surprisingly, Lacan does not discuss Molière's farces, but they are fundamental to the comedy of idealised images and the boundary between who we are and who we would like to be. *Le Médecin Volant* and *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, for example, are often regarded as insubstantial trifles with amusing *lazzi* as Sganarelle and Scapin are forced into ever more elaborate physical and verbal ruses in order to convince Gorgibus and Géronte of their dual identities.[51] Yet, the two plays also offer a hilarious *reductio ad absurdum* of what for Lacan, three hundred years later, became a significant part of his theory of alienating identity.

Firstly, Molière highlights the extent to which we can be deluded by our imagination, a faculty which Pascal describes as 'cette partie dominante de l'homme, [...] cette

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[49] Lacan, 'La subversion du sujet' in *Écrits II*, p. 168; see also 'La Topique de l'imaginaire' in *Le Séminaire I op. cit.*, p. 88: 'Le stade du miroir, je l'ai souvent souligné, n'est pas simplement un moment de développement. Il a aussi une fonction exemplaire, parce qu'il révèle certaines des relations du sujet à son image en tant qu'Urbild du moi.'

[50] Lacan, *Écrits I*, p. 94; see also Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'The Armour of an Alienating Identity' in *Arthuriana* 6 vol. 4, (1996), pp. 1-24. Cohen applies Lacanian theory to the construction of masculinity in medieval culture: 'We are never fully the single thing we take this armour, amour, armoire to represent; the mirror stage is not a phase we pass through so much as the wooden planks upon which we enact the role of whatever character we have taken to be our essential, singular self. We move then from initial multiplicity to a deceptive integrity, an illusory oneness.'

[51] Hubert, *op. cit.*, p. xii: He describes *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* and *Le Médecin volant* as 'dramatic sketches of considerable merit, but which do not lend themselves to stylistic analysis.'

superbe puissance ennemie de la raison, qui se plaît à la controler et à la dominer.'[52] In *Le Médecin Volant* and *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, what we might call Lacanian delusion is experienced by the onstage spectators, Gorbigus and Géronte, both of whom are easily duped by the verbal masks assumed by the cunning valets. Sganarelle is aware that he need only acquire the outward accoutrements of the medical profession, the gown and a smattering of Latin jargon ('Ficile tantina pota baril cambustibus') (scene viii), in order to persuade the gullible Gorgibus of his dual identity as the fictional doctor and his twin, Narcisse, and even he is amazed by his spectator's credulity: 'c'est un vrai lourdaud de se laisser tromper de la sorte.' (scene x)

Similarly, Géronte needs little persuasion to accept Scapin's multiple verbal masks as the valet pretends to hold conversations with a Spadassin, a Gascon and a group of soldiers: '«Dites-moi en peu fous, Monsir l'homme s'il ve plaît, fous savoir point où l'est sti Gironte que moi cherchair?» Non, Monsieur, je ne sais point où est Geronte.' (III, ii) It is vital to stress that it is only the on-stage spectators who are deceived by their servants' physical and linguistic masks. The performers, on the other hand, are always conscious of the boundary between self and other, between their true identities as valets and their theatrical roles:

> Sganarelle – Merveille sur merveille! J'ai si bien fait que Gorgibus me prend pour un habile médecin. (scene x) [...]
>
> Scapin – J'ai dans la tête certaine petite vengeance, dont je vais goûter le plaisir. (III, i)

In contrast, Mascarille and Jodelet begin to blur the boundaries between their true selves and their roles as aristocrats. *Les Précieuses ridicules* is usually interpreted from the point of view of the foolishness of Magdelon and Cathos, who allow themselves to be duped by the performances of the two valets, despite the fact that Mascarille's and Jodelet's frequent mistakes cause their masks to slip.[53] While the humour is indeed centred on the girls' inability to distinguish between true nobility and its sham imitation, there is also a further layer of comedy as Mascarille in particular convinces himself that his theatrical role is his true self. Although he and

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[52] Pascal, *op. cit.*, fragment 44.

[53] See chapter one: Masters and Servants for an analysis of Mascarille's linguistic mask.

Jodelet have been stripped of their physical disguises, Mascarille's speech betrays his conviction that he is no longer acting, but has in fact been transformed into a member of the aristocracy: 'Voilà le marquisat et la vicomté à bas [...] Ô fortune, quelle est ton inconstance!' (scene xv) The dramatic irony is deepened by his exclamation that the girls are incapable of recognising true quality, a complaint which mimics that of his master: 'Traiter comme cela un marquis! Voilà ce que c'est que du monde! [...] je vois bien qu'on n'aime ici que la vaine apparence, et qu'on n'y considère point la vertu toute nue.'(scene xvi)[54] Consequently, Mascarille is by no means the one-dimensional *fourbe* of *commedia* tradition. Rather, his willingness to identify with his more illustrious persona points to a psychological depth largely overlooked by *Moliéristes.*

The same can be said of Sganarelle in *Le Médecin malgré lui.* While he initially appears to be more rational than his persecutors, Lucas and Valère, who force him to adopt his role as a learned doctor ('Il est fou. [...] De grâce, est-ce pour rire ou si tous deux vous extravaguez, de vouloir que je sois médecin?') (I, v), his exclamation when he is rescued from the gallows ('la médecine l'a échappé belle!') (III, xi) demonstrates his delusional belief that he has merged with his role. In his own mind, Sganarelle is no longer a lowly 'fagotier' but has been ennobled by his imaginary status as a doctor, thereby demonstrating that he too has been captivated by his performance as a physician: 'prepare-toi désormais à vivre dans un grand respect avec un homme de ma conséquence.' (III, xi)

Molière's *Visionnaires* and the Language of Imagination

Sganarelle and Mascarille are not the only characters who dress up linguistically and subsequently confuse the boundaries between self and other. Harpagon, Monsieur Jourdain and Charlotte in *Dom Juan* can all be regarded as *visionnaires* because they are readily persuaded to identify with an exalted likeness as portrayed in the language of others.[55] Firstly, Harpagon not only contradicts his conscious utterances through

[54] 'La Grange – A-t-on jamais vu, dites-moi, deux pecques provinciales faire plus les renchéries que celles-là, et deux hommes traités avec plus de mépris que nous?' (scene i).

[55] Marie-Claude Canova-Green, 'Présentation et représentation dans *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, ou le jeu des images et des rôles' in Dandrey, ed., *Molière: trois* comédies..., *op. cit.*, pp. 131-9 (p. 132): In his Dictionnaire Universel of 1690, Furetière defines a *visionnaire* as someone who is 'sujet à des

linguistic slips, but he is also easily convinced by Frosine to construct a romanticised image of himself as an attractive suitor, an *alter-ego* which he knows to be untrue: 'La fille est jeune, comme tu vois; et les jeunes gens d'ordinaire n'aiment que leurs semblables, [...] J'ai peur qu'un homme de mon âge ne soit de son goût.'(II, v) The extent of Harpagon's delusional belief that his physical frailties are in fact marks of virility ('En effet, si j'avais été femme, je n'aurais point aimé les jeunes hommes') is such that he appropriates the language of *galanterie* ('vos appas', 'ma belle') in his role as an irresistible *soupirant*: 'je maintiens et garantis que vous êtes un astre, mais un astre, le plus bel astre qui soit dans le pays des astres.' (III, v)

Lacan describes this lack of self-knowledge as *méconnaissance*, stressing that it is not simple ignorance but is rather a denial or negation of knowledge and feelings of which the subject was once aware:

> La méconnaissance représente une certaine organisation d'affirmations et de négations, à quoi le sujet est attaché [...] Si le sujet peut méconnaître quelque chose, il faut bien [...] qu'il y ait derrière sa méconnaissance une certaine connaissance de ce qu'il y a à méconnaître. Mais toute l'activité qu'il développe dans son comportement indique qu'il y a quelque chose qu'il ne veut pas reconnaître.[56]

Charlotte is equally susceptible to flattery, and needs little persuasion from Dom Juan to become convinced that she is in fact an elegant lady rather than a peasant girl. Molière has often been criticised for the sudden transformation in Charlotte's speech from *patois* to a more elevated register when she meets the *grand seigneur*:

> Ah, mon quieu, qu'il est gentil, et que ç'auroit été dommage qu'il eût été nayé. (II, i) [...] Monsieur, c'est trop d'honneur que vous me faites, et si j'avais su ça tantôt, je n'aurais pas manqué de les laver avec du son. (II, ii)

Nonetheless, Charlotte's increasingly sophisticated speech offers a comic parallel to her growing conviction that Dom Juan's linguistic portrait of her as a beautiful lady

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visions, à des extravagances, à de mauvais raisonnements.'; see also Lacan, 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage' in *Écrits I*, *op. cit.*, p. 146; see also Lacan, 'Propos sur la causalité psychique: Les effets psychiques du mode imaginaire' in Henry Ey, (ed.), *Le Problème de la psychogenèse des névroses et des psychoses* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1950), pp. 23-54, (p. 45): 'le désir de l'homme trouve son sens dans le désir de l'autre, non pas tant parce que l'autre détient les clefs de l'objet désiré, que parce que son premier objet est d'être reconnu par l'autre.'

[56] Lacan, 'La Bascule du désir' in *Le Séminaire I*, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

reflects her true self. Although Charlotte's reason tells her that her appearance does not match the glorified image portrayed by Dom Juan ('je ne sais pas si c'est pour vous railler de moi'), her allusions to 'honneur' betray her *méconnaissance*:

> Charlotte – Je suis une pauvre paysanne; mais j'ai l'honneur en recommandation, et j'aimerais mieux me voir morte que de me voir déshonorée. (II, ii)

Yet neither Harpagon nor Charlotte is capable of sustaining their linguistic masks. Harpagon's reinvention of himself as a desirable *galant* is contradicted not only by Mariane's failure to accept his glorified image ('Oh! l'homme déplaisant! [...] Quel animal!'), but also by his own use of concrete and bathetic language to insult Élise which exposes his true self behind the veneer of gentility: 'Vous voyez qu'elle est grande; mais mauvaise herbe croît toujours.' (III, vi) Charlotte is equally ridiculous in her certainty that she has been transfigured into a *dame de qualité*, and the audience would be amused by the comic contrast between Charlotte's dishevelled appearance ('Fi! Monsieur, [mes mains] sont noires comme je ne sais quoi') and her disdainful speech to Pierrot: 'Va, va, Piarrot, ne te mets point en peine: si je sis Madame, je te ferai gagner queuque chose, et tu apporteras du beurre et du fromage cheux nous.' (II, iii)

Monsieur Jourdain's self-deception is even more pronounced than that of Charlotte and Harpagon because he hopes to force others to comply with his delusion that he is in fact a nobleman. As Lacan argues, this form of *méconnaissance* constitutes a revolt against reality:

> par où le fou veut imposer la loi de son coeur à ce qui lui apparaît comme le désordre du monde, enterprise "insensée" [...] en ceci [...] que le sujet ne reconnaît pas dans ce désordre du monde la manifestation même de son être actuel, et que ce qu'il ressent comme loi de son coeur, n'est que l'image inverse, autant que virtuelle, de ce même être.[57]

Whereas Monsieur Jourdain had earlier attempted to become a *gentilhomme* by imitating the speech of 'les gens de qualité', Covielle's ability to manipulate language, by claiming that a man who sells cloth is not a merchant, confirms the

[57] Lacan, 'Propos sur la causalité...', *op. cit.*, p. 40.

gullible bourgeois in his erroneous belief that he has always been a member of the aristocracy: 'Je suis ravi de vous connaître, afin que vous rendiez ce témoignage-là, que mon père était gentilhomme.' (IV, v)[58] Indeed, the more that Madame Jourdain or Nicole attempt to enlighten Monsieur Jourdain, the more entrenched he becomes in his chimerical self-perception, insisting that it is his false vision of himself as a nobleman and *Mamamouchi* ('Voyez l'impertinente, de parler de la sorte à un *Mamamouchi*!') (V, i) which is the correct one:

> Madame Jourdain – Et votre père n'était-il pas marchand aussi bien que le mien?
>
> Monsieur Jourdain – Peste soit de la femme! [...] Si votre père a été marchand, tant pis pour lui! Mais pour le mien, ce sont des malavisés qui disent cela. (III, xii)

This delusion has led many critics, including Defaux, Dandrey and Romanowski, to share Madame Jourdain's belief that her husband has been driven insane by his desire for social advancement: 'Hélas! Mon Dieu, mon mari est devenu fou.' (V, i)[59] Francis Assaf has even concluded that the bourgeois gentilhomme is a tragic figure who is isolated by his obsession and is incapable of distinguishing fantasy and reality: 'nous assistons à la désintégration progressive de la personnalité de Monsieur Jourdain. Et c'est en cela que repose le 'tragique' du *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. [...] Il faut, pour que le comique puisse avoir lieu, une mise à mort du roi de carnaval, un événement «tragique.»'[60] While Monsieur Jourdain is undoubtedly deluded in his self-perception as an aristocrat, it is misleading to conclude that the wealthy merchant is utterly mad, or even tragic. In fact, he chooses to embrace his fantasy of nobility because it allows him to fulfil his deepest desires and lead those around him to accept his vision of reality, even if only for a short time: 'Ah! voilà tout le monde raisonnable.' (V, vii)

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[58] 'Covielle – Tout ce qu'il faisait, c'est qu'il était fort obligeant [...] et comme il se connaissait fort bien en étoffes, il en allait choisir de tous les côtés [...] et en donnait à ses amis pour de l'argent.' (IV, v)

[59] See Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, p. 351; see also Defaux, 'Rêve et réalité dans *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme'* in Dandrey, ed., *Trois comédies morales...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-112 (p. 109): En «s'ajustant à ses visions» la comédie fait de Jourdain, euphoriqe et comblé, le roi de la Fête et du Théâtre. Elle assure en ce sens le triomphe de sa folie.'; Sylvie Romanowski, 'Satire and its Context in the Bourgeois gentilhomme' in *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, XVII, No. 32 (1990), pp. 35-47 (p. 43): 'That in the ending he is mad makes it difficult, in my view, to see Monsieur Jourdain as very positive.'

[60] F. Assaf, 'Aspects 'ironiques', aspects 'tragiques' du *Bourgeois gentilhomme*' in *Papers on French Seventeenth Century* Literature, XXXII (1990), pp. 13-22 (p. 14).

Most importantly, Monsieur Jourdain's precise calculation of Dorante's debts (III, iv) and his final, conscious joke that he will willingly give his wife 'à qui le voudra' (V, vii) prove that he has by no means lost the ability to reason.

Narcissism and language

Lacan's theory of the alienated self not only illuminates the language of Molière's *imaginaires* who are encouraged by others to identify with a false self. It can also shed light on his lovers, Alceste, Bélise and Arnolphe, who need no persuasion to embrace their fantasies that they are irresistible to the opposite sex, and who refuse to recognise themselves in the rather less flattering portraits painted in the speech of others. Bélise for example is convinced that she is adored by countless *galants*, and her constant use of *précieux* imagery ('vos flammes secrètes', 'souffrir son hommage', 'transports', 'par l'honneur éclairés', 'N'offrent à mes autels que des voeux épurés'), betrays her delusion that she is a beautiful heroine to be worshipped from afar:

> Aimez-moi, soupirez, brûlez pour mes appas:
> Mais qu'il me soit permis de ne le savoir pas. (I, iv) [61]

This form of misrecognition points to a fundamental aspect of the subject's identification with an illusory specular image in the *stade du miroir*. According to Lacan, the ego is essentially narcissistic: it endows us with delusions of grandeur and prevents us from recognising our own shortcomings: 'Dans la méconnaissance, le refus, le barrage opposé à la réalité par le névrotique, nous constatons un recours à la fantaisie.'[62] Bélise is an outstanding example of this rejection of self-knowledge as she distorts the evidence that her so-called admirers are not in love with her by claiming it proves their passion:

> Ariste – Cléonte et Lycidas ont pris femmes tous deux.
> Bélise – C'est par un désespoir où j'ai réduit leurs feux. (II, iii)

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[61] Even when Clitandre is about to marry Henriette, Béralde is adamant that he remains devoted to her:
> Qu'il prenne garde au moins que je suis dans son coeur,
> Par un prompt désespoir souvent on se marie. (V, iv)

[62] See Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre I*, *op. cit.*, p. 134; *Le Séminaire Livre II*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

Arnolphe also proves adept at deceiving himself when he is confronted with a mirror image which he does not recognise during his encounters with Horace. While he regards himself as a detached observer, who is untouched by the folly of other men ('comme spectateur, ne puis-je pas en rire?') (I, i), he is now offered an image of himself as a ridiculous dupe who is 'jaloux à faire rire':

> Horace – Riche, à ce qu'on m'a dit, mais des plus sensés, non;
> Et l'on m'en a parlé comme d'un ridicule. [...]
> C'est un fou n'est-ce pas? (I, iv)

This contradiction between Arnolphe's self-perception and Horace's portrait is even more comic for the audience because Horace's naivety means that Arnolphe is given more forewarning than any other character about his forthcoming cuckoldry.[63] Arnolphe may denigrate Horace for his stupidity in confiding in his rival, with epithets ranging from 'cet étourdi' (IV, vii) and 'damoiseau' (II, i), to 'godelureau' (IV, i) and 'un jeune fou' (IV, i), but the fact that he is outwitted by 'une sotte' and 'ce blondin funeste' highlights Arnolphe's comic blindness in failing to recognise that he is as inept as his rival in love:

> Après l'expérience et toutes les lumières
> Que j'ai pu m'acquérir sur de telles matières, [...]
> De tant d'autres maris j'aurais quitté la trace,
> Pour me trouver après dans la même disgrace? (IV, vii)[64]

As Lacan argues in his discussion of *L'École des femmes*, it is this contrast between our idealised self-images and our true selves which is central to comedy:

> Le rire touche en effet à tout ce qui est imitation, doublage, sosie, masque, et, si nous regardons de plus près, il ne s'agit pas seulement du masque, mais du démasquage, et cela selon des moments qui méritent qu'on s'y arrête. [...] Si quelqu'un nous faire rire quand il tombe simplement par terre, c'est en fonction de son image plus ou moins pompeuse à laquelle nous me faisions même pas vraiment attention auparavant. [...] Le rire éclate pour autant que le personnage imaginaire continue dans notre imagination sa démarche apprêtée

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[63] Horace – Pour moi, tous mes efforts, tous mes voeux les plus doux
Vont à m'en rendre maître en dépit du jaloux. (I, iv)

[64] See Braider, *Indiscernible...*, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

> alors que ce qui le supporte de réel est là planté et répandu par terre. Il s'agit toujours d'une libération de l'image.[65]

At first sight, Alceste does not seem to conform to this model of *imaginaires*. In contrast to Bélise and Arnolphe who are oblivious to the contrast between their illusory self-portraits and their true selves, Alceste is capable of introspection and is the first to recognise the paradoxical nature of his love for a coquette who delights in manipulating language and who represents the antithesis of his own values:

> Alceste – Il est vrai, ma raison me le dit chaque jour;
> Mais la raison n'est pas ce qui règle l'amour. (I, i)[66]

In spite of his apparent lucidity, however, Alceste is as blind and deluded as the other *imaginaires* because he is adamant that his sole fault lies in loving a coquette whose many vices he is determined to castigate and reform. (I, i) Otherwise, he regards himself as a lone voice of integrity in a dissolute world, taking a stand against 'des coeurs corrompus.' (l i) Alceste's defence of sincerity has led Defaux and Pierre Force to regard him as a heroic figure.[67] Yet, these judgements fail to account for the comic disparity between the misanthrope's self-depiction as a noble victim and the reality of his egotistical desire to prove his pre-eminence: 'je veux qu'on me distingue' (I, i), 'Ah! rien n'est comparable à mon amour extreme.' (IV, iii) Alceste further belies his image as a model of honesty by revealing that his love for Célimène is essentially narcissistic:

> Philinte – Vous croyez être donc aimé d'elle?
> Alceste – Oui, parbleu!/ Je ne l'aimerais pas si je ne croyais l'être. (I, i)

As McBride stresses, Alceste's perspicacity in recognising the faults of others is contradicted by his blindness to his own *amour-propre*: 'Molière rend Alceste comique dans la mesure où il s'abstrait du tableau de l'humanité, inconscient qu'il est aussi imparfait dans ses jugements que le reste des mortels.'[68] Indeed, Alceste

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[65] Lacan, 'Une femme de non-recevoir' in *Le Séminaire Livre V: Les formations de l'inconscient* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), p. 130.

[66] Alceste is outraged by Philinte's acceptance of 'ces vices du temps' (l. 59), while he maintains that society is characterised by 'lâche flatterie [...] injustice, intérêt, trahison, fourberie.' (ll. 93-4)

[67] Defaux, *op. cit.*, p. 161; see also Jasinski, *op. cit.*, p. 123

[68] McBride, '*Le Misanthrope* ou les mobiles...', *op. cit.*, p. 86; see also Lacan, 'Propos sur la causalité...', *op. cit.*, p. 47: '[Alceste] est fou, non pas pour aimer une femme qui soit coquette ou le

resembles Arnolphe in his refusal to recognise the reflection of his own character in the language of those whom he despises, and it is the fact that his own situation is reflected in Oronte's sonnet which so infuriates Alceste, a form of comic blindness which is elaborated by Lacan:

> Car ce qui met Alceste hors de lui à l'audition du sonnet d'Oronte, c'est qu'il y reconnaît sa situation, qui n'y est dépeinte que trop exactement pour son ridicule, et cet imbécile qu'est son rival lui apparaît comme sa propre image en miroir.[69]

It is not only Oronte whom Alceste resembles. Ironically, through his self-aggrandisement ('Personne n'a, madame, aimé comme je fais') (II, i) and his assertion that he would never love someone without being assured of their response (I, i), Alceste inadvertently reveals that he is the mirror image of the self-satisfied *petit marquis*, Acaste:

> Acaste – Parbleu! Je ne vois pas, lorsque je m'examine,
> Où prendre aucun sujet d'avoir l'âme chagrine. [...]
> Mais les gens de mon air, marquis, ne sont pas faits
> Pour aimer à crédit et faire tous les frais. (III, i)

Consequently, Molière's narcissistic lovers not only construct an idealised *alter-ego* in their speech, but, paradoxically, their discourse also contradicts and belies these images by revealing their underlying egotism.

Does this mean that it is only the *imaginaires* who provide comedy through their fantasies and delusions? According to Dandrey, the language of the *raisonneurs* constitutes a norm against which to measure the 'délires extravagants' of the *visionnaires*.[70] Yet, by portraying figures such as Béralde and Ariste as the representatives of 'la norme esthétique, rationnelle, morale et sociale que déforment folies, impostures et extravagences', Dandrey fails to recognise that even the apparently ludic *raisonneurs* may be deluded to some extent. Ariste and Clitandre have often been viewed as the rational counterpoints to the folly of the 'femmes savantes', but Clitandre actually resembles Bélise through his identification with the

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trahisse, [...] mais pour être pris, sous le pavillon de l'Amour, par le sentiment même qui mène le bal de cet art des mirages où triomphe la belle Célimène: à savoir ce narcissisme des oisifs.'

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 134, 190-4.

more exalted persona of the gallant lover: 'mes tendres soupirs', 'l'ardeur de mes désirs', 'brûler', 'amoureux sacrifices','une flamme immortelle', 'en superbes tyrans' (I, ii) Similarly, Ariste may expose the incongruity between Chrysale's conviction that he is in control of the household and the reality of his subjugation, but Ariste's insight into his brother's failings does not extend to an awareness of his own delusions as he exaggerates the importance of his role as a simple messenger:

> Savez-vous ce qui m'amène ici? [...]
> Depuis assez longtempts vous connaissez Clitandre? (II, ii)

Finally, Béralde proves to be as obstinate and deluded as his brother in his utter faith in the healing power of nature and the folly of all medical treatment. Indeed, it is actually Argan who uses the verb 'raisonner' in an effort to discover the reason for Béralde's irrational prejudice against all doctors: 'je ne vois rien de plus ridicule qu'un homme qui se veut mêler d'en guérir un autre.' (III, iii) Although Béralde describes himself as a philosopher, his scientific method is distinctly lacking because he does not provide any proof for his blanket assertions that doctors know absolutely nothing about curing patients and are only capable of 'un pompeux galimatias' and 'un spécieux babil.' Clearly, even Molière's most rational *raisonneur* is as prone to obsessions and exaggeration as the *imaginaire* whom he hopes to 'cure.'

In conclusion, Molière's comic vision is much wider than has previously been assumed, as the language of the supposedly lucid *raisonneurs* is shown to be almost as extreme and comic as that of the *visionnaires* whom they love to ridicule. Far from sharing the Cartesian theory of the self as rational and conscious of his or her every thought, Molière foreshadows Lacanian *méconnaissance* in highlighting our inability to see ourselves as we really are.

Chapter Thirteen: Mind over matter and the Return of the Repressed

> Armande – Mariez-vous, ma soeur, à la philosophie,
> Qui nous monte au-dessus de tout le genre humain,
> Et donne à la raison l'empire souverain,
> Soumettant à ses sois la partie animale. (*Les Femmes savantes*: I, i)

Armande's insistence that Henriette reject the base desires of the body in order to embrace the spiritual realm of the intellect points to a further dimension of the comedy of unconscious speech: characters who seek to deny the role of subconscious desires, yet discover that these break through any veneer of rationality and surface in speech. Although Riggs has already discussed the presence of desire in the discourse of Molière's self-titled philosophers, he focuses purely on their underlying longing to acquire power, and ignores the comic potential of their linguistic slips.[71] Nevertheless, this form of self-betrayal can add a further dimension to the comic delusion of Molière's *imaginaires* who not only identify with idealised self-images but who are also convinced that they are in complete control of their speech. Whether it be Arnolphe's attempts to rationalise and plan his relationship with Agnès, the pompous Maître de Philosophie who believes that he is unaffected by base emotions or the 'femmes savantes' who aim to reject the corporeal in favour of intellectual pursuits, Molière constantly deflates the language of those characters who follow Descartes in attempting to separate the mind and body, denigrating the latter as a corrupting influence and the source of irrational disorder: 'il est certain que moi, c'est-à-dire mon âme, par laquelle je suis ce que je suis, est entièrement et véritablement distincte de mon corps, et qu'elle peut être ou exister sans lui.'[72]

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[71] Riggs, 'Reason's Text...', op. cit., pp. 426, 429: '*Les Femmes savantes* examines the way personal motives and physical desires can be disguised, disfigured, and ultimately, intensified by transforming them into normative language. [...] In any case, the purported mastery of emotion through a process of linguistic *épuration* is part of conventional classicism's effort to disguise the consolidation of power as personal and cultural "refinement."'

[72] Descartes, *Méditations*, *op. cit.*, Méditation sixième, pp. 119, 123-6: although Descartes accepts that the mind and body are interrelated, he always emphasises the role of the mind rather than the deceptive senses in guiding his judgement: 'Car c'est, ce me semble, à l'esprit seul, et non point au composé de l'esprit et du corps qu'il appartient de connaître la vérité de ces choses-là.'; see also C. Braider, 'Image and *Imaginaire*..., *op. cit.*, p. 1142.

This separation of the mind and body reflects a general tendency to marginalise and suppress the corporeal realm in seventeenth-century French society. Whereas Rabelais celebrated the body through his scatological humour, the seventeenth century witnessed a movement to purge language of all obscenities and *mots bas*, a process influenced by *préciosité* and Vaugelas' *Remarques sur le bon usage*.[73] As Jean Serroy notes, any allusions to the body were effectively demonised and relegated to low comedy:

> celui-ci étant assimilé au bas, au sale, voire au mal. [...] Le classicisme et [...] le rationalisme cartésien font tenir toute la dignité de l'homme dans sa pensée, non dans ses sens. [...] Et le corps est laissé aux bouffons, que la morale condamne, ou aux libertins.[74]

Such a transformation in perceptions is reflected by Boileau's outrage that Molière's allusions to physical comedy in *Les Fourberies de Scapin* were unworthy of the author of *Le Misanthrope*.[75] Moreover, many of Molière's characters attempt to dress up linguistically and avoid any direct reference to the body. Argan praises Monsieur Fleurant for his euphemistic references to bodily functions, while the 'précieuses ridicules' and the 'femmes savante' aim not only to purge language of all 'syllabes sales' but also to divorce love from any form of physical passion, modelling themselves on the unattainable ladies of courtly love:

> Cathos – Comment est-ce qu'on peut souffrir la pensée de coucher contre un homme vraiment nu? (scene iv) [...]
>
> Bélise – Et ne m'expliquez point par un autre langage
>
> Des désirs qui chez moi passent pour un outrage. (I, iv)[76]

Nevertheless, Molière constantly demonstrates the limits of Cartesian dualism and any endeavour to divorce language from the physical realm. Although his would-be philosophers, Arnolphe, Armande and Philaminte all believe that they can dominate both their own passions and those of other people by asserting the supremacy of

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[73] See Chapter Five for a discussion of *précieux* language and *le bon usage*.

[74] Jean Serroy, '«*Guenille si l'on veut...*» Le corps dans les dernières comédies de Molière' in *Littératures classiques*: *Molière, des Fourberies de Scapin au Malade imaginaire* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1993) pp. 89-90.

[75] See Boileau: 'Dans ce sac ridicule où Scapin s'enveloppe/ Je ne reconnais plus l'auteur du *Misanthrope*.'; see also Jean Emelina, 'Molière et le jeu...', *op. cit.*, pp. 77, 82.

[76] 'Argan – un petit clystère insinuatif, [...] pour amollir, humecter et rafraîchir les entrailles de Monsieur.» Ce qui me plaît de monsieur Fleurant, mon apothicaire, c'est que ses parties sont toujours fort civiles.' (I, i)

rational discourse, their unconscious desires invariably resurface in their speech. In particular, Julia Kristeva's theory of semiotic and symbolic language can offer a new perspective on the comic breakdown of rationality and the return of the repressed body in Molière's theatre. Whereas Cartesian dualism posits the conscious mind as fundamentally superior to the realm of matter and physical desires, Kristeva aims to bring the speaking body back into language by emphasising the influence exercised by unconscious drives on speech.[77] According to Kristeva, language is never fixed or stable but is rather a signifying process composed of two distinct but interrelated poles of meaning: the symbolic and the semiotic.[78] While the symbolic register refers to grammatical structures and speech which is designed to communicate, such as philosophical, mathematical or scientific discourse, the semiotic register of speech is related to aspects of meaning which can operate outside language. These include the non-verbal signifying systems of unconscious drives, poetic imagery or music:

> le *symbolique* et par conséquent la syntaxe et toute la catégorialité linguistique, est un produit social du rapport à l'autre [...] Par contre, il y a des systèmes signifiants non-verbaux qui se construisent exclusivement à partir du sémiotique (la musique, par exemple.) [...] Le sémiotique serait alors [...] antérieur à la signification, parce qu'il est antérieur à la position du sujet.[79]

In *La Révolution du langage poétique*, Kristeva underlines the fact that symbolic language or the structured communication of the *phéno-texte*, is always being challenged by the semiotic realm of the *géno-texte*.[80] Linked to nature, desire and the unconscious, the semiotic precedes our acquisition of language but continues to make itself felt in the symbolic pole of culture, mind and consciousness.[81] Even when we try to avoid ambiguity in speech, using the apparently objective discourse of science,

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[77] See Kelly Oliver, *The Portable Kristeva* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. xvi; see also Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 9-16.

[78] Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique: l'avant-garde à la fin du XIX siècle: Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), pp. 17, 22, 39; Kelly Oliver, *op. cit.*, p. xiv: Kristeva's notion of the symbolic should be distinguished from Lacan's 'Symbolic Order' which comprises the realm of signification and language. In contrast, Kristeva's concept of symbolic language is far narrower and is confined to 'l'arrivée de la signification.'

[79] Kristeva, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 26, 29, 35: Kristeva distinguishes her concept of *le sémiotique* from the science of signs, *la sémiotique*.

[80] See Kristeva, *op. cit.*, p. 84 on the *géno-texte* and the *phéno-texte*: 'Le géno-texte se présente ainsi comme la base sous-jacente au langage que nous désignerons par le terme de *phéno-texte*. Nous entendrons par là le langage qui dessert la communication.'

[81] Kristeva, *op. cit.*, pp. 26, 40, 84: 'Nous garderons [...] le terme de *sémiotique* pour désigner ce fonctionnement logiquement et chronologiquement préalable à l'instauration du symbolique et de son sujet.'

philosophy or logic, the unconscious semiotic constantly disrupts speech. It is this 'explosion du sémiotique dans le symbolique' which can illuminate the supposedly rational language of Molière's philosophers.[82] Monsieur Jourdain's *Maître de philosophie*, for example, portrays himself as the voice of stoical reason and eagerly lectures the other maîtres on the need to transcend the base emotions of anger and 'la vaine gloire':

> Y a-t-il rien de plus bas et de plus honteux que cette passion, qui fait d'un homme une bête féroce? et la raison ne doit-elle pas être maîtresse de tous nos mouvements? [...]Un homme sage est au-dessus de toutes les injures qu'on lui peut dire. (II, iii)

Such laudable moral virtues are, however, undermined when the *Maître de philosophie*'s own pre-eminence is called into question. Instead of resolving the argument between the three *maîtres*, he simply intensifies it by launching a verbal and physical assault on the other teachers, thereby contradicting his own claims to rationality:

> Maître de Philosophie – Comment! marauds que vous êtes... (*Le philosophe se jette sur eux, et tous trois le chargent de coups et sortent en se battant.*)
>
> Monsieur Jourdain – Monsieur le philosophe!
>
> Maître de Philosophie – Infâmes! coquins! insolents! (II, iii)

Arnolphe also regards himself as a 'sage philosophe' who is capable of controlling both his feelings and circumstances. Whereas other husbands have suffered the humiliation of being cuckolded by their wives, Arnolphe is convinced that he is an objective and omniscient spectator, untouched by the fate of other men: 'Et, comme spectateur, ne puis-je pas en rire?' (I, i) Like Descartes, he prides himself on his infallible philosophical method ('chacun a sa méthode' 'je veux suivre ma mode', 'Contre cet incident, j'ai pris mes sûretés', 'm'instruire avec soin', 'j'ai cherché les moyens') (I, i; IV, vii), and is certain that he has left no stone unturned in his investigation into the 'tours rusés et les subtiles trames' with which women deceive their husbands:

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[82] Kristeva, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 62, 68: Kristeva insists that both the semiotic and the symbolic are essential to 'le procès de la signifiance qui constitue le langage.' Without the symbolic, language dissolves into the delirious babble of psychosis; while the absence of the semiotic would mean that any signification would be empty: 'Le sujet étant toujours sémiotique *et* symbolique, tout système signifiant qu'il produit ne peut être «exclusivement» sémiotique ou «exclusivement» symbolique, mais il est obligatoirement marqué par une dette vis-à-vis de l'autre.'

Pour ce noble dessein, j'ai cru mettre en pratique
Tout ce que peut trouver l'humaine politique. (IV, vii)

Not only does Arnolphe aspire to rationalise his own feelings ('Tâchons de modérer notre ressentiment') (II, ii), but he is also determined to control Agnès' emotions through the imposition of the symbolic language of reason:

Ainsi que je voudrai, je tournerai cette âme:
Comme un morceau de cire entre mes mains elle est,
Et je lui puis donner la forme qui me plaît. (III, iii)[83]

During the reading of *Les Maximes du Mariage* in particular, Arnolphe seeks to reduce Agnès to the level of an inanimate doll by forcing her to parrot his sentiments without question: 'je veux que ce soit votre unique entretien [...] pour l'heure présente, il ne faut rien que lire.' (III, ii) Agnès' inability to think or speak for herself is even more evident when she relates her encounters with Horace and la vieille, repeating their messages verbatim just as she mimicked Horace's bowing:

Tant que, si sur ce point la nuit ne fût venue,
Toujours comme cela je me serais tenue. (II, v)

Yet, both Arnolphe and Agnès experience the return of the repressed body as their unconscious desires surface in their discourse. Arnolphe may present himself as a 'sage philosophe' but his attempts to control his fate and his emotions are constantly undermined by his inability to control his choleric temper:

Quiconque de vous deux n'ouvrira pas la porte
N'aura point à manger de plus de quatre jours. (I, ii)

Most importantly, Arnolphe's rational language disintegrates under the influence of his growing passion for Agnès ('Enfin, à mon amour rien ne peut s'égaler.') (V, iv), and he contradicts his claims to lucidity by oscillating between references to philosophical method ('après l'expérience et toutes les lumières', 'après vingt ans et plus de méditation', 'prudence' IV, vii), and irrational allusions to sexual longing ('mon amoureuse ardeur'), absurd animal imagery ('je te bouchonnerai, baiserai, mangerai', 'mon pauvre petit bec' V, iv) and imprecations to destiny: 'Quoi! l'astre qui s'obstine à me désespérer', 'comme si du sort il était arrêté', 'Ah! bourreau du

[83] Arnolphe – Un certain Grec disait à l'empereur Auguste, [...]
Que lorsqu'une aventure en colère nous met,
Nous devons avant tout, dire notre alphabet,
Afin que dans ce temps la bile se tempère. (II, iv)

destin', 'ce blondin funeste') (IV, i & vii) Indeed, his passion is only intensified by Agnès' apparent lack of emotion:

> Plus en la regardant je la voyais tranquille,
> Plus je sentais en moi s'échauffer une bile; (IV, i)

In direct contrast to Arnolphe, who is dismayed by his incapacity to impose rational (symbolic) discourse on his growing passions, Agnès' positive discovery of sensual pleasure enables her to develop both her own identity and her speech. While she has traditionally been dismissed as a monotonous automaton, who simply mimics the language imparted to her by Arnolphe and Horace, Agnès is in fact far one of the few characters in Molière's theatre to develop, both psychologically and linguistically. As Dandrey notes: 'La manière dont l'amour agit sur Agnès est en effet on ne peut plus naturelle: à la faveur de ce sentiment, elle rentre en possession de sa personnalité, elle épanouit sa nature.'[84] Whereas Bénichou claims that Agnès remains trapped at the level of 'animalité' at the end of the play (V, iv), such a judgement ignores the fact that it is Agnès' experience of love which allows her to gain self-knowledge and subvert Arnolphe's lessons.[85] Ironically, Agnès proves to be more rational than her teacher, as she ridicules his histrionic outbursts ('Petit serpent que j'ai réchauffé dans mon sein', 'Pourquoi ne m'aimer pas, Madame l'impudente?' V, iv) and dismisses his absurd wooing:

> J'ai suivi vos leçons, et vous m'avez prêché
> Qu'il se faut marier pour ôter le péché. [...]
> Tenez, tous vos discours ne me touchent point l'âme;
> Horace avec deux mots en ferait plus que vous. (V, iv)

Consequently, Agnès' speech is not driven solely by instinct, as Bénichou argues.[86] Rather, her allusions to desire ('le moyen de chasser ce qui fait du plaisir?') and her use of logical arguments ('Croit-on que je me flatte, et qu'enfin dans ma tête/ Je ne juge pas bien que je suis une bête?') (V, iv) demonstrate her new-found ability to combine the semiotic register of passion and the symbolic register of coherent

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[84] See Dandrey, *L'Esthétique...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 309, 311.
[85] Bénichou, *op. cit.*, p. 334: 'Dans ses explications finales avec Arnolphe, elle incarne un défi si tranquille de l'instinct à toute contrainte [...] Elle ne s'insurge pas contre la morale, elle l'ignore et la démontre inutile.'; Albanese, *Le Dynamisme...*, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
[86] Bénichou, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

thought. As Kristeva stresses, it is this combination of desire and rational speech which is vital for signification, as speech without any emotion or passion is simply lifeless:

> C'est toujours l'afflux du sémiotique qui remodèle l'ordre symbolique. [...] Le procès de la signifiance comprendra alors le géno-texte comme le phéno-texte, et ne saura faire autrement car c'est dans le langage que se réalise tout fonctionnement signifiant (même lorsque cette réalisation n'utilise pas le matériau du langage.)[87]

Above all, 'the 'femmes savantes' belie their claims to have transcended all base instincts through their obsessive allusions to the language of love and sexuality. While Arnolphe rationalises his love for Agnès, Armande and Philaminte are even more extreme in their determination to purge language of any debasing influence. (III, ii) Philaminte and Armande, in particular, echo the Cartesian dichotomy between the mind and body through their repeated juxtaposition of the base domain of 'les sens et la matière' ('Que ce discours grossier terriblement assomme!') (II, vii), and the elevated pursuits of the intellect:

> Armande – À de plus hauts objets élevez vos désirs, [...] À l'esprit, comme nous, donnez-vous tout entière. (I, i) [...]
> Philaminte – Quelle indignité, pour ce qui s'appelle homme,
> D'être baissé sans cesse aux soins matériels,
> Au lieu de se hausser vers les spirituels. (II, vii)[88]

Nevertheless, the femmes savantes' appropriation of the apparently objective language of science and philosophy is constantly disrupted by their unconscious desires. Philaminte may profess to be a stoic philosopher who is unmoved by any 'revers funeste' (V, iv), but she is anything but philosophical in her ridiculous outrage at Martine's grammatical mistakes: 'Quoi! vous ne trouvez pas ce crime impardonnable?' (II, vi) According to Goodkin, Philaminte speaks for the dramatist in her final exaltation of 'l'appui de la philosophie' as a means of consoling Armande after she has lost Clitandre:

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[87] Kristeva, *op. cit.*, pp. 62, 84; see also Noëlle McAfee, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[88] See Jean Molino, '«Les Nœuds de la matière»: l'unité des *Femmes savantes*' in Cairncross, ed., *L'Humanité..., op. cit.*, pp. 157-77 (pp. 158-9).

> Elle nous fait comprendre, par ce dernier clin d'oeil ironique, qu'elle sait être «spirituelle» dans le meilleur sens du terme, selon Molière: intelligiblement drôle. [...] À la fin du drame Molière ne suggère-t-il pas une certaine solidarité entre Philaminte et lui-même, novateur dans le domaine de la spiritualité mais adepte de toutes les formes comiques.[89]

By presenting Philaminte as a conscious ironist, however, Goodkin misconstrues the comic contradiction within her speech as Philaminte is utterly blind to the disparity between her irrational anger ('maraude', 'quoi! vous la soutenez?') and her claims to personify 'la raison' and 'l'esprit': 'Me voit-on femme déraisonnable?' (II, vi)

Armande is equally blind to the role of unconscious desires in influencing her speech. While she insists that she has transcended the 'étage bas' of 'la partie animale', her underlying preoccupation with love is betrayed by her obsessive use of romantic and sexual imagery: 'N'en frissonnez-vous point?', 'concevez', 'charmantes douceurs', 'l'amour de l'étude', 'mariez-vous', 'les beaux feux', 'les doux attachements.' (I, i) This inability to recognise the return of the repressed body and the 'explosion du sémiotique' into the symbolic register reaches a climax during Trissotin's poetry reading. The 'femmes savantes' contradict their own mission to rid language of its equivocal 'syllabes sales' by echoing Trissotin's sexual and culinary puns ('c'est un enfant tout nouveau né', 'pour cette grande faim', 'le ragoût d'un sonnet') (III, i-ii):

> Armande – Je brûle de les voir.
>
> Bélise – Ce sont repas friands qu'on donne à mon oreille. [...]
>
> Armande – On pâme.
>
> Armande – On se meurt de plaisir. (III, ii)[90]

Consequently, Molière foreshadows Kristeva in highlighting the unfeasibility of any attempt to separate the body from language. Far from being in complete control of our speech, Molière's self-titled philosophers persistently say more than they mean and accidentally reveal their deepest desires in their supposedly logical speech, thereby overturning Descartes' notion of the self as both unified and conscious. As Kristeva argues:

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[89] Goodkin, 'Dévier de soi: l'écart spirituel des *Femmes savantes*' in Martine Debaisieux, *Le Labyrinthe de Versailles* (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 17-30 (p. 30).

[90] See N. Peacock, *Les Femmes...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-1.

Nous verrons que [...] le sujet parlant n'est plus cet ego transcendental phénoménologique ni l'ego cartésien mais un *sujet en procès.*[91]

[91] Kristeva, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Conclusion

Beyond Theory?

From our investigation into three interrelated aspects of Molière's linguistic humour - parody, language games and the comedy of the unconscious – we have sought to demonstrate the fundamental importance of language in the creation of Molière's comedy, and his ability to invest even apparently simple lines with multiple layers of meaning, a feature of his dramatic art which has often been overlooked by scholars in the past. Even in the earliest farces, where the language has often been regarded as of secondary importance to the physical comedy, Molière's linguistic humour is never accidental but is always carefully constructed to entertain his audience with an astonishing range of verbal slips, elaborate verbal games and parodies of various linguistic and literary styles. The same is true of many of his later plays which have frequently been overlooked by critics, most notably the farces, *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* and *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, and the little-studied *comédies-ballets*, *La Princesse d'Élide* and *Les Amants magnifiques*. All four plays reveal a level of linguistic sophistication rarely recognised in the past through their parodies of social snobbery and their exploration of our inability to see ourselves as we really are.

Although Molière has often been described as a satirical author, an epithet which he himself adopted, we have seen in Part One that his comedy is far more subtle and is actually closer to parody than to the moral corrective of satire. It is this focus on parody which allows us to reconcile the conflicting interpretations of Molière as a conservative opponent of social-climbing and female learning (Bénichou, Grossperrin) or as a subversive *libertin*, seeking to undermine the established church and the authority of the medical profession in his polemical *pièces à thèse*. (Cairncross, Riggs, Albanese) While socio-critical scholars have been instrumental in challenging the theatricalist representation of the playwright as an actor and director with little interest in social comment, they provide too narrow a reading of Molière's exuberant comedy in their

portrayal of him as a social satirist, intent on reforming society by exposing vice and corruption.

Far from propounding a single 'philosophy', designed to attack the language of a particular social group, nationality or literary style, we have seen that Molière offers a much wider and more comprehensive comic vision than has previously been supposed by the majority of critics. Through his mockery of the linguistic idiosyncrasies and affectations of all speakers, regardless of race or social status, the dramatist emphasises the universal nature of human folly, including the representatives of normative speech as well as those whose discourse deviates from accepted literary or linguistic norms within his comic mirror. As we have seen, the inclusive nature of Molière's humour is exemplified by his willingness to laugh not only at himself but also at his own writing.

Molière's delight in playing with language sheds light on another central aspect of his linguistic humour, and one which has been disregarded by the majority of *Moliéristes*. Whereas Garapon regards *la fantaisie verbale* in the plays as little more than *gaspillage*, our study has shown that the language games of characters such as Pancrace, Scapin and Célimène are not purely ludic and nor do they constitute a retreat into an anarchic world of fantasy, utterly divorced from reality. Rather, their verbal games offer valuable insights into the nature of language itself and the difficulties inherent in any communication attempts. Through their refusal to listen to their interlocutors or engage in straightforward conversation, Molière's characters challenge the traditional notion of speech as a simple tool with which we represent the world and communicate our thoughts to others, by revealing the multiple functions of language as a means to impress, amuse, manipulate or confuse others.

It is not only the conscious play with words which creates humour, whilst also elucidating our perception of the complex nature of speech. Through his portrayal of linguistic slips, when characters inadvertently reveal their true feelings of which they are frequently unconscious, Molière also highlights the ability of language to escape us and communicate more than we intend. Just as the playwright's verbal games transcend the

limits of the theatre and underline the ability of language to hamper rather than facilitate communication, so his depiction of *lapsus linguae* can illuminate human psychology. By demonstrating our tendency to dress up linguistically and identify with an idealised self, Molière foreshadows Freud, Lacan and Kristeva in challenging the Cartesian notion of man as a *res cogitans*. Contrary to Descartes' assertion that we have a privileged insight into the workings of our own minds, Molière's *imaginaires*, from Bélise and Monsieur Jourdain to Alceste and Armande, emphasise the capacity of speech to contradict our conscious intentions, particularly when we claim to be utterly rational and in control of our emotions.

In conclusion, despite the resistance of some *Moliéristes* who argue that modern linguistic and literary theory can only distort any appreciation of Molière's comedy, we have seen that the theories of modern critics such as Bakhtin, Kristeva, Said, Jameson and Lacan can deepen our understanding of the range of Molière's linguistic comedy and add a new perspective on his linguistic virtuosity. Nonetheless, this does not mean that a single theory can adequately explain Molière's achievement as a comic dramatist. Rather than offer a single viewpoint with which his audience is expected to identify, Molière highlights the limits of all absolute theories and would most probably have been amused by much of the esoteric jargon employed by certain modern theoreticians. Just as Pascal analyses the human condition by pointing to man's *grandeur* and *misère*, concepts which in most philosophers are antithetical but which Pascal makes complementary, so Molière draws on a multiplicity of approaches in his portrayal of human nature, and surpasses all attempts to categorize his writing as ludic or mimetic, subversive or conservative.

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