1943

The Plays of Moliere Viewed as Commentary on Women and Their Place in Society

Helen A. Jones

Loyola University Chicago

Recommended Citation

https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/631
THE PLAYS OF MOLIERE VIEWED AS

COMMENTARY ON WOMEN AND

THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY

By

HELEN A. JONES

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

October
1943
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>MOLIERE AND HIS TIMES</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>RIGHTS OF WOMEN</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF WOMEN</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>CRITICAL DISCUSSION</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to consider views on rights and responsibilities of women as revealed in the comedies of Molière. In discussing these views, the writer will attempt to show that, on the whole, these plays present a unified, consistent body of commentary on women and their place in society.

The question as to whether the comedies are a deliberate vehicle of Molière's views is suggested by criticism in La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes; here, Dorante, who defends Molière's play, declares that in comedy the rule of all rules is to please ... that a play which delights its audience accomplishes its purpose.¹ However, Molière himself has stated in his introduction to Tartuffe that it is the obligation of the comic theater to teach by satirizing. A critic interested in the moral aspects of comedy declares that plays of this type should be studied because, whether or not they are intended to teach, their influence upon customs is very considerable.² This view seems sensible, particularly when it has reference to the works of a writer such as Molière, whose popularity continues from generation to generation.

While moral criticism in the plays of Molière has importance for any age, the reader is aware that the comedies were in some measure responses

¹ Molière, La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, Act I, Scene 1.
² C. J. Jeannel, La Morale de Molière (Paris, 1867), p. 5: "On peut à première vue douter que le but de la comédie soit purement artistique. D'abord, si elle n'a pas d'intention morale, elle a certainement une influence sensible sur les mœurs."
to conditions peculiar to the writer's own age, and for this reason, a
study of any social and moral implications should include consideration
of the poet's own life and times. With some study of the playwright and
his period as a background, an effort will be made in this essay to
present and discuss the following themes as observed in the comedies of
Molière:

1. Views on rights and responsibilities of women.
2. Views on the family and on family relationships.
3. The degree of individualism\(^1\) entering into views
   concerning women and their place in society.

---

\(^1\) Note. The word individualism is here used as a term to name a social
theory which advocates a high degree of individual initiative and
freedom of action and opposes the subjection of individual interests
to the fixed demands of society.
principles in art. 1 This objective of Richelieu's was exemplified by his founding of the Académie Française in 1635--the incorporation of a group of distinguished men of letters who originally met informally out of their own desire to discuss matters pertaining to literature. 2 Richelieu, believing that there was value in having a responsible body authorized to regulate the language and pass judgment upon new writings, caused the society to be chartered by parliament. Thus rule and order in the field of letters were to become not only matters of popular taste but also canons of government approval.

Cardinal Mazarin continued the work begun by Richelieu so that in 1648, when Louis XIV was in a position to assume absolute authority, both government and society were so thoroughly centralized that the young King was able to exert an enormous influence over every phase of French life. It was under Louis that the French classical genius bore its finest fruits, particularly in the literary works of the most illustrious writers of the century--Corneille, Racine, Molière, LaFontaine, Bossuet. The King patronized the arts and had an especial liking for the comic writings of Molière.

The influence of the monarch upon Molière seems to have been twofold. The more positive criticism stresses the fact that Louis provided invaluable aid and support. 3 Without royal protection and financial help, the playwright would have found it hard if not impossible to produce some of


3 Brande Matthews, Molière, His Life and Works (New York, 1910), p. 140.
his works in the face of the opposition of influential groups. Also the prestige of Louis's approval increased Molière's popularity with the general public. On the other hand, the will of the monarch affected Molière in a way which was not so fortunate. At various times the King commanded that the poet prepare ballets and comédie-ballets for the elaborate festivals in which Louis took so much delight; the preparation of these works took much time and energy, but few of them represent Molière at his best.

The extent to which the classical ideal influenced Molière's artistic contribution is an interesting subject for consideration. Certain of the plays contain hints as to what he might have produced if he had written in another nation or period. Had he lived in sixteenth century England, he might have developed somewhat in the manner of the great Elizabethan dramatists. The creation of the play Don Juan (1665) could be cited in support of this conclusion; certain devices in this drama strongly suggest the techniques of Christopher Marlowe—for example, the appearance of the ghost which warns Don Juan, and the theatrical device of allowing the earth to swallow him amid thunder, lightning, and fire. Then, too, the conception of the diabolical central character in this Molière play has a breadth and intensity which puts one in mind of an Iago or a Gloucester.

---

1 Lanson et Tuffreau, op. cit., p. 255.
2 Matthews, op. cit., p. 148.
3 Molière, Don Juan, Act V, Scene 5.
In these ways, Don Juan seems to be looking back toward the Renaissance for inspiration but when one considers other aspects of the play, there appears to be cause for thinking that this seventeenth century drama has anticipated the romantic movement by more than a century and a half. The supernatural touch—the introduction of a statue which moves and speaks—is a romantic element. Probably no other role which Molière has created possesses such romantic appeal as Elvira, the unhappy nun who was seduced by Don Juan only to be cast aside. All within the space of five acts, Donna Elvira presents a grand sweep of emotion including love, resentment, desire for revenge, repentance, forgiveness, religious ardor, and solicitude for the salvation of the man who has wronged her.

But this drama was not well received and we find nothing else like it among Molière's writings. It is not to be wondered that a production with romantic qualities was not favored by the French audience of the author's day. Never again did Molière attempt a play of this melodramatic type; his subsequent works of a more serious nature make fewer demands upon the willingness of the audience to accept highly colored, bizarre plot motifs and theatrical devices. Other plays of Molière show greater tendency to stay close to classical patterns. It is quite possible that the tastes of the age may have influenced the author towards the exercise of classical restraint in choice of subjects, character types, and dramatic techniques.

---

1 Ibid., Act III, Scene 7, and Act IV, Scene 12.

2 Chatfield-Taylor, Molière, a Biography (New York, 1906), p. xx; Chatfield-Taylor notes that the limitations of French classical tragedy applied also to the comedies of the period, though not with the same strictness. In this connection he states that, while the writer of comedy might abandon verse form, he ran the risk of offending his audience if he used prose for anything but farce.
Because Molière's characters possess the universality which made them so well-suited to a classical age, they are likewise timeless. The hypocrisy incarnated in Tartuffe can be observed in pious frauds of all ages. The egoism of the hypochondriac Argan would be real and true if portrayed in Ancient Greece or modern America. People of every century deplore the blind fatuousness of Georges Dandin because every spectator observes the shortcomings of this character either in himself or in his contemporaries. In the creation of such roles, the classical tastes of the audiences must have been a support to the dramatist, for with Molière, writing, acting, and producing were not only arts but means of making a living.

The second historical factor, scarcely less important than the classical influence, was the birth and growth of social life in seventeenth century France. The most important personality to give impetus to this development was a lady who before coming to Paris had spent much of her life in Italy. Daughter of a French diplomat and an Italian noblewoman, Madame de Rambouillet found the social life at the court of Henry IV too crude for her taste; she pled ill-health, begged leave to retire to her home—recently redesigned so that it would be suitable for social gatherings—and proceeded to make this house a center of social life, a meeting-place for the intelligent and polite people of her day. Thus Madame de Rambouillet created the first of the salons. Here plays and poems were read for appreciation and criticism; the art of conversation was nurtured; polite manners and social graces were considered matters of utmost importance. Salons sprang up elsewhere both in Paris and in the provinces;

---


2 Lanson et Tuffreau, op. cit., p. 171.
French social life, language, and letters have never ceased showing the results of their influence.

This newly born social life had a plainly observable effect upon the writings of Molière. The most obvious of these was his selection of the ladies of the salons as subjects for two of his best-known satires—Les Précieuses Ridicules and Les Femmes Savantes. It is quite likely also that the importance of social life in France had a deal to do with determining the very structure and dialog of Molière's dramas. The interest in his plays lies not so much in action, incident, or event as in conversation between characters—the interplay of thoughts and ideas, the revelation of personal reactions through an interchange of speeches, often of considerable length. Molière's comedies are primarily conversational plays. 1

A third factor which may have had some bearing upon the direction of the poet's dramatic gifts, was an intense interest in moral values, that interest which seemed to pervade the most important works produced during the age. The greatest literary personalities of the century selected for the themes of their masterpieces moral issues, treating these subjects with a penetration which stimulates the reader to reflect on human problems of right and wrong. The sermons of Bossuet, notable illustrations of the preoccupation just noted, boldly conveyed to King and court the divine command to abandon worldliness which destroys the life of the soul. The fables of LaFontaine, written as a means of teaching the dauphin, are

1 Chatfield-Taylor, op.cit., pp. xviii and xix. The lengthiness of speeches in plays of this period Chatfield-Taylor ascribes in part to the French fondness for declamation and in part to an observance of the classical unities. The rule of one locality, he notes, necessitates the narration of action which cannot be represented; consequently, monologues abound in seventeenth century plays.
filled with examples of the foolishness and weakness of human beings, while the morals attached are intended to direct the reader away from folly and wrong-doing. Preoccupation with moral questions is also evident in the dramas of Racine, whose Jansenist training doubtless gave him a pessimistic view of human behavior, for in the struggle between right and wrong, his characters usually succumb to their worse impulses; therein lies the tragedy of his dramas. Corneille, on the other hand, creates men and women of such heroic stature that they champion the right at whatever cost to their own personal happiness. Molière through the medium of satire aims to focus attention upon the need for correcting faults in the individual and in the social order.

Molière's works show the imprint of his age, of the thought and artistic expression of other great minds who made the period outstanding in French cultural history. Still he holds a place apart from other writers of his age—a place above all comic writers of any age. This singular artistic achievement seems the more impressive when one reflects that his career was filled with discouraging obstacles, and that during middle and later life his health was frail. However, the circumstances of his life provided him with one advantage of inestimable value to a dramatist; from his earliest days he was given unusual opportunity to gain knowledge of human nature, to observe social behavior.

Jean Baptiste Poquelin was born the twelfth of January, 1622, eldest son of a substantial bourgeois family. His father, Jean Poquelin, a master upholsterer, attained the distinction of being appointed upholsterer to the

Matthews, op. cit., p. 149. Racine's son recorded the anecdote that Louis asked Boileau to name the rarest of the great writers who had given glory to France during his reign; Boileau's reply was "Molière, Sire."
King, thus earning the title of valet de chambre, tapissier du roi. Since Jean Poquelin planned to have his eldest son carry on as master upholsterer, the boy had considerable business experience which brought him into contact with people of the polite world. Through observing lords and ladies and their servants, the future playwright was, perhaps, storing up knowledge which might later bear fruit in the creation of some count such as Dorante, or some servant such as Nicole, Dorine, or Martine.

The young upholsterer's son had a better education than most middle-class youths of his period. After elementary study at the parish school, he was sent to the Collège de Clermont, a school conducted by the Jesuits. The curriculum included French, Latin, and a little Greek; in administering the course of study, the teachers sometimes gave the pupils opportunities of acting out Latin plays. This intimate study of the classical drama seems to have been of great value; plots, situations, and dramatic techniques found in the Latin plays appear again, with modifications, in the original comedies of Molière. Nearly all the students at this school were of the nobility and it was here that Molière made the acquaintance of the Prince de Condé whose influence was later helpful to the future playwright, producer, and actor. Some biographers state that during Molière's college days he probably attended lectures by Gassendi, whose philosophical ideas challenged the Cartesian trend of the times. This experience may have helped to develop an epicurean element in the poet's thinking and

1 Chatfield-Taylor, op. cit., p. xxi.
2 Lanson et Tuffrau, op. cit., p. 263.
3 S. A. Alexander, Molière and Life (Manchester, 1926), p. 296.
attitude towards life. According to some authorities Molière's training also included legal studies which he pursued at Orléans after leaving Clermont.

His formal education finished, Jean Baptiste began devoting his entire energies to his father's business. As tapissier du roi, he accompanied the King to Narbonne; tradition has it that on this journey he met the beautiful actress Madeleine Béjart who for the rest of her life was associated with him in theatrical ventures. As Madeleine Béjart belonged to a family which was very active in the theater, her influence may have played some part in determining Molière to leave his father's trade and devote his life to the stage. He renounced his position as tapissier royale and, in 1643, founded the Illustre Théâtre under the patronage of the Duke of Orléans; of the eleven actors in the group, three belonged to the family of Béjart. Young Poquelin adopted the stage name of Molière, supposedly out of consideration for his father. Presenting plays in unused tennis courts, the actors hopefully launched their project, but met with so little success that in the following year Molière was imprisoned for debt. He was released through the help of his father, but met another set-back when the Duke of Orléans went to war leaving the company without a patron. Undaunted by the failure of his plans for playing

1 Nitze and Dargan, op. cit., p. 292.

2 Chatfield-Taylor, op. cit., p. xxii. The use of the name Poquelin in connection with the theater might have caused embarrassment to the father of the young actor as the acting profession was during that period under a social ban. Chatfield-Taylor notes that contemporaries of Grimarest criticised the biographer for calling Molière "Monsieur"—"a title which did not at all belong to him as he was an actor, that is to say, a man of ignoble profession."

3 Ibid., p. 34.
to Parisian audiences, the director started the Illustre Théâtre on a tour of the provinces. Playing at fairs, weddings, and meetings of the États-Provinciaux, the actors travelled for thirteen years—years rich in experience for Molière as he was garnering knowledge of provincial life and manners, and gaining practice in his arts as actor, producer, playwright. Producing Italian comedies, creating original plays much in the spirit of the commedia dell'arte, Molière was laying the foundations of that artistry which was later to exert such tonic influence upon the taste and intelligence of Paris. Vedel gives great credit to the Italian comedies, because these farces with their childlike wit, their bourgeois humor, their realism, and satirical spirit provided the spark which lighted the fire in the soul of Molière. Only four of the plays originating in the provinces have been preserved. The characters and subjects in two of these early comedies reappear later in more finished plays produced for the Parisian public.

The group returned to Paris in 1658 and on October 24 of that year, Molière presented before the king the tragedy of Nicomède. Vedel records that the connaisseurs were displeased with the performance because it lacked the pompous, declamatory style then considered essential for tragedy. But immediately after the play, the director begged and received

2 Chatfield-Taylor, op. cit., p. 58.
3 Le Médecin Volant later became L'Amour Médecin and La Jalousie de Barbeuillé seems to be an early sketch of Le Mariage Forcé or Georges Dandin. Vedel, op. cit., p. 255.
4 Ibid., p. 239.
permission to give one of the farces he had acted in the provinces. This
comedy, *Le Docteur Amoureux*, delighted the king and the troupe was given
permission to establish itself in the Petit-Bourbon, alternating with the
Italian actors who were presenting plays there. As they were acting under
the protection of the king's brother, the company was known as "the troupe
of Monsieur." Their earliest attempts included such tragedies as Cinna
and *Le Cid* but these presentations were hissed. However, in 1659 appeared
Molière's original satire *Les Précieuses Ridicules*; the widespread interest
which greeted this timely production brought instant success. Many of the
meticulous ladies and dandies expressed disapproval, but the general public
acclaimed Molière's witty denunciation of the romantic imitators of Madame
de Rambouillet. The controversy which accompanied this production was
only the forerunner of a series of conflicts. Repeatedly the poet was
assailed by groups who felt the sting of his satire. *L'Ecole des Maris*
(1661) proved to be a storm center because it presented debatable views
on the subject of liberties and privileges of women.

In this same year, the poet married Armande Béjart, younger sister of
Madeleine Béjart. Molière was deeply in love with his wife and for a time
the marriage was happy. Since Armande was a very attractive young woman
as well as leading lady of the company, other men were attentive to her
and Molière suffered intensely from jealousy. In time he and his wife
drifted apart.

---

1 Louis Emile D. Moland, *Molière, Sa Vie et Ses Ouvrages* (Paris, 1887),
p. 101. Verses by Boulanger de Chalussay provide a record of audience
reactions to the tragedies which Molière at first persisted in producing:
*Après Heracleus, on siffla Rodogune;*
*Cinna le fut de même, et le Cid, tout charmant*
Reçut avec Pompée un pareil traitement.
The "lutte" being waged over L'Ecole des Maris continued and gained force through the following year when Molière brought out L'Ecole des Femmes, a comedy containing liberal educational ideas and certain passages which shocked the prudes. Those who had taken offense at Les Précieuses Ridicules remembered their grudge and added volume to the protest. Rival actors of l'Hotel de Bourgogne joined the cabal. So great was the furore that the poet was moved to answer his critics by writing and producing La Critique de L'Ecole des Femmes, a sprightly dialog through which he struck back at the prudes and the literary folk who condemned him for not following set rules. 1 L'Impromptu de Versailles, even shorter and more informal than the Critique, contained a reply to his rival actors. 2

During the years that followed, Molière wrote much at the command of the King. When there was to be a great spectacle or celebration at Versailles, St. Germain en Laye or the Tuileries, Louis generally turned to Molière for a new comedy or comédie-ballet.

Among Molière's more serious efforts, Tartuffe stands out not only for its worth but for the circumstances surrounding its production. The first three acts of the drama were submitted to the King in 1664. Louis approved, but permission for public presentation was not granted as it was feared that the play might seem to be striking at religion. 3 This was a blow to the author-director who needed the financial returns from this play to keep his theater going. There followed Don Juan (1665),

1 Molière, La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, Scenes 3, 6, 7.
2 Molière, L'Impromptu de Versailles, Scene 3.
3 Nitze and Dargan, op. cit., pp. 258, 259.
La Misanthrope (1666), and L'Avare (1668), but the poet did not give up struggling for the right to present Tartuffe and finally, in 1669, full permission was granted. The public thronged to see the play.

The last years of Molière's life, though marked by unqualified success in his chosen work, were hampered by weakening strength and failing health. The unbroken popular demand for his plays must have been gratifying to him as he always had the greatest respect for the judgment of the general play-going public. Reconciliation with his estranged wife no doubt brought some welcome peace of mind. But his health was broken; the lung trouble from which he had long suffered was growing decidedly worse; he was frequently racked with coughing. His last play, Le Malade Imaginaire (1673), was probably inspired by his illness for he must have realized it would be difficult for him to play anything more strenuous than an armchair role. On February 17, 1673, he was stricken during the play but managed to go through with the performance. After the play, he was carried home and died within an hour.

In his last moments, the only persons to offer religious comfort were two Sisters of Charity who had come to Paris to beg for the poor; Molière had kindly given them shelter in his home. Two priests had refused to come to the bedside of the dying actor; a third was summoned, but before he arrived Molière had died. Chapman records that from the fourth century, actors had been under ban of minor excommunication—that is, they were forbidden the sacraments but were not excluded from the society of the faithful. The same author states that the Gallican Church was most severe in continuing this rule, as in Italy and elsewhere the ban had been lifted.

2 Ibid., p. 68.
Several times Molière had stoutly refused to renounce his calling as an actor in order to meet the requirements of the church. Sainte-Beuve recounts that after the rector of the parish church had refused Christian burial, the widow appealed to the King, who wrote to the Archbishop of Paris. Finally, a permission with reservations was granted to the relatives, and on the night of February 21 two priests accompanied the body to the cemetery. No funeral anthem was allowed.

It is not unnatural that so powerful and fearless a satirist should have some bitter enemies, but even in his lifetime, he was far from being a man unappreciated and unloved. Such brilliant men of letters as Boileau and LaFontaine were friends who always remained staunch supporters when powerful opponents denounced him. During much of his life, Molière enjoyed the companionship of the distinguished portraitist Mignard, whose devotion brought the warmth of kindness and understanding into a life which had its full share of sadness, in spite of the laughter and enjoyment which it had brought to others. For Molière was fundamentally of a melancholy and thoughtful disposition. It was Boileau who gave him the name "le contemplateur." He could converse entertainingly but was much more prone to listen and observe than to enter into discussion. Larroumet reports the tradition that when he was on tour it was his habit to station himself in a barber shop to listen and look, as workmen, gentlemen, country-folk, and small-town dandies chattered around him. In Paris he frequented


2 Moland, op. cit., p. 230.

the shops just to watch the people as they made their purchases. Greatest comic actor of his day, greatest creator of character in all comic literature, he selected subjects from life, then created the roles which were to come down through the ages.
CHAPTER II

RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Views on rights for women expressed in L'Ecole des Maris seem to give evidence that Molière had rather liberal opinions on this issue. Meredith believed that the equality of sexes in Molière's plays is not identity of privilege but rather equality of opportunity as members of society in their respective spheres. Evidently considering Molière more as dramatic artist than as social satirist, Meredith stressed the importance of equality as a situation wherein comedy can flourish.

Where women are on the road to an equal footing with men in attainments and liberty—in what they have won for themselves and what has been granted them by a fair civilization—there, and only waiting to be translated from life to the stage, or the novel, or the poem, pure comedy flourishes and is, as it would help them to be, the sweetest of diversions, the wisest of delightful companions.

Meredith may be right in placing this emphasis upon the artistic values gained through striving to achieve equality of the sexes. Viewed from either the purely artistic angle or from a moral standpoint, the "schools" present important commentary on contemporary social conditions, and this fact leads one to consider the position of women in seventeenth century France. Writings by certain outstanding personalities of the period help the modern reader to get some knowledge of the rights and privileges of women in Molière's day. Jacqueline Pascal's "Règlement pour les Enfants de

1 Alexander, op. cit., p. 296.
Port Royal" is a document which suggests that opportunities for girls' formal education were extremely limited; the "Règlement" contains only a short list of books and these were primarily of a religious nature.¹ M. Compayré is quoted as writing the following about the convent system of the seventeenth century: "Partout on n'élevait la femme que pour le ciel ou pour la vie dévote; les exercices de spiritualité faisaient la seule occupation des élèves et il n'était guère question d'études."² Constitutions of the monastery of Port Royal indicated that the curriculum included only reading, writing, working in linen, and "d'autres ouvrages utiles."³ Since only a portion of the girls received training in convent schools, the greater number getting their education from their mothers or in any other way they could, it is not to be wondered that Molière recognized in this social condition a subject for satire.

Unlike many people of his day, Fénélon considered the education of girls to be a matter of utmost importance for human society. Reasoning that women make or mar homes through regulating every detail of domestic life, this influential bishop maintained that they bear the principal responsibility for the good or bad conduct of almost the whole world.⁴ In his Traité de l'Éducation des Filles, Fénélon advocated rigorous restriction of the freedom of girls as an essential in the educational

---

¹ Geraldine Hodgson, Studies in French Education from Rabelais to Rousseau (Cambridge, 1908), p. 89.

² Ibid. (Miss Hodgson has taken this quotation from "Histoire de la Pédagogie" by M. Compayré, p. 177.)

³ Ibid.

program. He believed they should not be permitted the company of boys—nor of girls whose temperaments were not disciplined and "sur." Frequent "sorties" from the house should, according to Fenelon, be avoided—as well as conversations which could arouse the desire to go out.\(^2\)

Quand on ne s'est encore gâté par aucun grand divertissement et qu'on n'a fait naître en soi aucune passion ardente, on trouve aisément la joie; la santé et l'innocence sont les vrais sources; mais les gens qui ont eu le malheur de s'accoutumer aux plaisirs violents, perdent le goût des plaisirs modérés, et s'ennuient toujours dans une recherche inquiète des joies.\(^3\)

These ideas of Fenelon are in striking contrast with those expressed in the two plays of Molière which will be considered later in this chapter.

According to Longuemare, young noblewomen of this century were badly educated and obliged to marry in accordance with their parents' wishes or enter convents—practices which were too commonly followed by evil results. Bossuet protested against this parental custom of "marrying off" daughters to advance the family fortunes.

L'honneur du monde gâte tout...et les parents n'apportent que des vues d'égoïsme dans le mariage de leurs filles. Nul souci de savoir si elles seront heureuses et si le bonheur garantira mieux leur fidélité, mais si leur mariage agrandira l'avenir de leur famille.\(^4\)

In the bitter satire of Georges Dandin, Molière gives dramatic presentation of the social evil which Bossuet has denounced in the passage just quoted.

---

1 Ibid., p. 496.
2 Ibid.
4 Ibid., p. 134.
In the matter of choosing husbands, Longuemare observes that young noblewomen were less fortunate than girls of the bourgeois class or of the petite noblesse of the provinces, for the latter, he states, received a solid education under the supervision of their mothers and married men whom they loved. If Longuemare is right in this conclusion, one wonders why in so many of Molière's plays concerning life among the bourgeoisie, the author represents the selfish parent or guardian seeking to force upon the child a marriage of interest which is contrary to the young person's desires.

Some of the comedies of Molière satirize the placing of extreme limitations upon the freedom of girls and women. These plays picture and criticize the narrowness of education, the subservience to husbands, the restrictions on freedom of action, and the denial of the right to choose husbands which, one may infer, were often imposed upon girls in the author's day. Two plays deal in particular with the problem of education for girls—L'Ecole des Maris (1661) and L'Ecole des Femmes (1662). The ideas found in these plays were very favorable to women and aroused much adverse criticism because many of the author's contemporaries considered them extreme or even revolutionary. In this connection, it is worthy of note that since the two "schools" were written during the period of Molière's courtship and marriage there has been speculation as to whether at this time of his life Molière was more than usually liberal in his views concerning the rights of women.

1 Ibid., p. 151.

2 Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, Le Médecin Malgré Lui, L'Avare, and Le Malade Imaginaire are only a few of the plays which could be cited.
In L'Ecole des Maris, Sganarelle, the ridiculous figure, keeps constant vigilance over Isabelle, his ward, whom he intends to marry. He would use compulsion and restriction to keep the girl in the path he has chosen. Ariste, the man of sense, argues with Sganarelle, advising liberty instead of compulsion. It is the belief of Ariste that girls can never be taught virtue by severity, austerity and excessive restraint:

(Ariste)—

Leur sexe aime à jouir d'un peu de liberté; On le retient fort mal par tant d'austérité; Et les soins défiants, les verrous et les grilles Ne font pas la vertu des femmes ni des filles, C'est l'honneur qui les doit tenir dans le devoir Non la sévérité que nous leur faisons voir; C'est une étrange chose, à vous parler sans feinte Qu'une femme qui n'est sage que par contrainte.

Ariste maintains that we must win their hearts if we would prepare them to resist temptation:

En vain sur tous ses pas nous prétendons régner. Je trouve que le coeur est ce qu'il faut gagner.

He suggests that habits of conduct which lack the foundation of an educated will do not stand the stress of unforeseen situations:

(Ariste)—

Et je ne tiendrai, moi, quelque soin qu'on se donne Mon honneur guère sur aux mains d'une personne A qui, dans les désirs qui pourraient l'assaillir, Il ne manquerait rien qu'un moyen de faillir.

Since Sganarelle remains unconvinced by these arguments against imposing strict discipline upon wives, Ariste persists, stressing the importance of using kindness and gentleness in teaching young people:

1 Molière, L'Ecole des Maris, Act I, Scene 2.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.
Ariste believes that young girls should see plays and satisfy their desire for social gaiety. These activities, he declares, are beneficial in forming the minds of the young, for a girl can learn from the world better than from a book.

(Ariste)--

Mes soins pour Léonor ont suivi ces maximes:
Des moindres libertés je n'ai point fait des crimes,
À ces jeunes désirs j'ai toujours consenti,
Et je ne m'en suis point, grâce au Ciel, repenti.
J'ai souffert qu'elle ait vu les belles compagnies,
Les divertissements, les bals, les comédies;
Ce sont choses, pour moi, que je tiens de tous temps
Fort propres à former l'esprit des jeunes gens;
Et l'école du monde, en l'air dont il faut vivre
Instruit mieux, à mon gré, que ne fait aucun livre.

Ariste favors spending on clothes and new fashions if one has ample means:

(Ariste)

Elle aime à dépenser en habits, linge et noeuds;
Que voulez-vous? Je tâche à contenter ses vœux;
Et ce sont des plaisirs qu'on peut dans nos familles,
Lorsque l'on a du bien, permettre aux jeunes filles.

The character portrayals of the young girls support Ariste's contention that restraint which contradicts nature is futile and that young people when granted freedom are likely to think wisely and act well.

Léonor, the ward of Ariste, is frivolous and fond of fun but grateful for the kindness and generosity of her guardian, and from this thankful

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
appreciation springs a love which overcomes the handicap of difference in ages. Left to her own choice, she chooses to marry Ariste. Isabelle, whom Sganarelle would compel to marry him, is shrewd and resourceful in evading watchfulness and restrictions. Determined to marry Valère, whom she loves, she resorts to duplicity and succeeds in avoiding the hated marriage to her guardian.

The educational ideas in L'Ecole des Mariés might be summarized as follows:

1. Good habits cannot be developed by restrictions which contradict nature.

2. Freedom of action and freedom of choice help to promote morality, social good, and happiness. ¹

L'Ecole des Femmes (1662) also deals with educational philosophy. This bright, sparkling comedy, though similar in theme to the play just considered, goes somewhat more deeply into ethical aspects of the problem. L'Ecole des Femmes seems to stress the thesis that enlightenment is necessary for moral action. In order to dispel the notion that innocence must be linked with ignorance, Molière here presents the ludicrous Arnolphe rearing Agnès with the intention of making her his wife, and that Agnès may be perfectly virtuous, striving to keep her in complete ignorance of the meaning of love or marriage. He has brought her up in such seclusion

¹ Katherine Wheatley, Molière and Terence (Austin, 1951), p. 56.
In discussing L'Ecole des Mariés, Wheatley comments that this play shows Molière's trust in freedom for the individual: "Ariste...does not believe in the efficacy of outward force to bend one individual to another's will. He trusts the loyalty and affection of the free individual."
that she has been unable to learn from people of the outside world. Her
teachers in the convent have had special instructions to limit her infor-
mation; members of the household have taken care that she should learn
nothing more than housewifery. Arnolphe's friend, Chrysalde, deplores
this procedure and wonders why Arnolphe wishes to marry a fool. Arnolphe
rejoins that he prefers a stupid wife, because a witty woman would receive
too much attention from other men:

(Arnolphe)---
Mais une femme habile est un mauvais présage;
Et je sais ce qu'il coûte à certaines gens
Pour avoir pris les leurs avec trop de talents
Moi, j'irais me charger d'une spirituelle
Qui ne parlerait rien que cercele et ruelle,
Qui de prose et de vers ferait de doux écrits
Et que visiteraient marquis et beaux esprits,
Tandis que sous le nom de mari de Madame
Je serais comme un saint que pas un ne réclame?
Non, non, je ne veux point d'un esprit qui soit haut
Et femme qui compose en sait plus qu'il ne faut.¹

Arnolphe would have his wife limit her attentions to religion, husband and
household tasks.

Et c'est assez pour elle, à vous en bien parler,
De savoir prier Dieu, m'aimer, coudre et filer.

Chrysalde's rebuttal to this reasoning includes the argument that a fool
may fall into error through ignorance.

*(Chrysalde)---
Mais comment voulez-vous, après tout, qu'une
bête
Puissé jamais savoir ce que c'est qu'être honnête?
Une femme d'esprit peut trahir son devoir;
Mai il faut pour le moins qu'elle ose le vouloir;
Et la stupide au sien peut manquer d'ordinaire;
Sans en avoir l'envie et sans penser le faire.²

------
¹ Molière, L'Ecole des Femmes, Act I, Scene 1.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
Another reason this same wise character offers against the plan of keeping a wife in ignorance is that a fool makes a tiresome companion.

(Chrysalde)--
    Outre qu'il est assez ennuyeux, que je crois,
    D'avoir toute sa vie une bête avec soi.

When Agnès speaks with her guardian, she discusses only such subjects as shirts, or caps, or the fleas that disturbed her at night. Her conversation reveals emptiness of mind and provides an indirect argument in favor of developing the intelligence of women. After she falls in love with Horace, whom she happens to see from a balcony, Agnès blossoms out. Despite Arnolphe's pathetic efforts to alienate the two young lovers, he discovers her contriving one device after another to see the young man who so attracts her. Arnolphe, in despair, bursts out, "Qui diantre tout d'un coup vous

1 Ibid.

2 One bit of conversation which shows the vacancy of mind resulting from Arnolphe's educational program is found in Act II, Scene 5:

(Arnolphe)--...La promenade est belle
(Agnès)--Fort belle.
(Arnolphe)--Le beau jour!
(Agnès)--Fort beau.
(Arnolphe)--Quelle nouvelle?
(Agnès)--Le petit chat est mort
(Arnolphe)--C'est dommage, mais quoi?
    Nous sommes tous mortels, et chacun est pour soi.
    Lorsque j'étais aux champs, n'a-t-il point fait de pluie?

(Agnès)--Non.
(Arnolphe)--Vous ennuyait-il?
(Agnès)--Jamais je ne m'ennuie.
(Arnolphe)--Qu'avez-vous fait encore ces neuf ou dix jours-ci?
(Agnès)--Six chemises, je pense, et six coiffes aussi.
en a tant appris? Ignorant as she is, love has inspired her with a few ideas. Agnès' remarks are now so cogent that her guardian is hard put to find sufficient reason for persuading her that she should not love Horace.

(Arnolphe)--
Voyez comme raisonne et réponde la vilaine!
Peste! une précieuse en dirait-elle plus?
Ah, je l'ai mal connue; ou maïsoi! là-dessus
Une sotte en sait plus que le plus habile homme. 2

When Agnès comes to realize that she has been reared in ignorance, her reproach of Arnolphe presents a woman's view, an individualistic view suggesting a feeling that wider education would bring greater self-fulfillment. However, throughout the two plays most of the arguments favoring freedom and enriched education for girls are made by masculine characters, Ariste and Chrysalde. It is worth noting that they approach the question from various angles. Ariste adopts the girls' standpoint when he advises satisfying their desire for social life and their love of pretty clothes. 4 But both men seem to show quite as much concern for the happiness and well-being of the men—for example, Chrysalde points out the advantage of having wives who are interesting and companions, 5 and Ariste stresses the benefit of feeling security in marriage—a security which, he believes, is found when wives are faithful and loyal of their own free choice.

The importance of seeking to secure wifely loyalty and faithfulness

---
1 Ibid., Act V, Scene 4.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 See above, p. 21.
5 See above, p. 24.
is also brought out by Molière through advocating another privilege for women—the privilege of deciding for themselves whom they shall or shall not marry. In championing the girls' right to freedom of choice in marriage, the poet repeatedly uses the plot motif of the parent or guardian who would force an unwelcome marriage upon a child—usually without success. This motif appears in many other plays besides the two which have just been discussed. A representative list of such plays might include the following:

_Le Médecin Malgré Lui_. Lucinde feigns dumbness to avoid marrying the young man her parents have selected for her. Through the mock-doctor she is enabled to marry her lover, Léandre.

_Le Malade Imaginaire_. For his own convenience, the hypochondriac, Argan, would marry his daughter to a doctor whom she abhors. Acting upon the suggestion of the servant, Toinette, Argan pretends that he is dead. Through carrying out this pretense, Argan finds out how loyal his daughter is to him. Touched by this loyalty he yields to Angélique's petitions and gives permission for her marriage to Cléante, whom she loves.

_L'Avare_. The miser, Harpagon, insists on marrying his daughter, Elise, to an old man who would take her without a marriage portion. Harpagon himself plans to marry a young girl, Marianne, who is in love with Harpagon's son. Both of Harpagon's plans are frustrated. Elise marries Valère, the young man she loves, and Marianne marries Cléante.

_L'Amour Médecin_. The father, wishing to keep his daughter, Lucinde, as his own possession, plans to deny her any opportunity to marry. Taking the part of a physician, Lucinde's lover gains entrance to the house, and thwarts her father's plans. The lovers are united.
Les Femmes Savantes. Philaminte, the domineering mother, rules that her daughter, Henriette, shall marry her pet précieux, Trissotin. Henriette and Clitandre love each other. The father, supported by his brother and a servant, asserts himself; Trissotin's mercenary motives are unmasked, and the lovers are united.

In these comedies, the whole-hearted sympathy of the audience is with the young people and Molière's lesson to their elders seems clear. To quote Brander Matthews, "The attraction of a man for a maid and a maid for a man, if sincere, had better be obeyed, whatever older heads and colder hearts may object. That way at least happiness may lie. Who knows? And all other ways lead to disappointment."¹

Molière also shows that a parent who disregards nature and denies the child the privilege of marrying the one he loves opens the door to a train of social evils. In dismay at the prospect of a hated marriage, Marianne, the young heroine of Tartuffe, contemplates suicide. But the stouter hearted young folk rebel or connive to frustrate the parent's will and wholesome family relationship is thus destroyed. In place of the proper sense of deference and gratitude to parents, the son or daughter shows a spirit of disrespect, and often resorts to trickery or dishonesty.²

In the battle which raged over the presentation of the two "schools," Molière was accused of spreading revolutionary doctrine, of encouraging the young to rebel against lawful authority. In weighing this criticism,

1 Matthews, op. cit., p. 119.
2 Cléante in L'Ave makes efforts to circumvent the will of his father whom he despises; he even attempts to rob the miserly old man. In Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Lucinde carries out a pretense of dumbness until her marriage with Léandre is assured.
it is well to note that Molière seems to justify a child's refusal to obey parents only when the young person is struggling to avoid an undesired and unnatural marriage. Under all other circumstances the young people seem very willing to recognize the duty of respecting father and mother. Sometimes in these plays, the girl is torn between love and a deep misery at disregarding a father's will—an authority which, it would seem, she has always been very happy to recognize.

One might say that Molière presents this rebellion against an unwelcome marriage as nature's provision for correcting the mistake of a blindly selfish parent. Perhaps he feels that without this corrective the social order would be seriously harmed, as the lack of natural affection in the married state lessens the likelihood of wholesome family life. There is also some cause for thinking that the poet is protesting against personal unhappiness for the individual which is likely to follow a marriage against the child's wishes. In Le Médecin Malgré Lui, this protest appears in the homely but common-sense speech of the servant Jacqueline, objecting to the parents' design of marrying Lucinde to a rich man she doesn't want. With wisdom arising from her observation of the lives of others, Jacqueline protests that a marriage in opposition to a girl's choice is an unhappy one:

(Jacqueline)—

Enfin j'ai toujours eu dire qu'en mariage, comme ailleurs, contentement passe richesse. Les pères et les mères ont cette mauvaise coutume de demander toujours: "Qu'a-t-il?" et "Qu'a-t-elle?" et le compère Pierre a marié sa fille Simonette au gros Thomas pour un quarquié de vaigne qu'il avait davantage que le jeune Robin, où elle avait bouté son amifié; et v'là la pauv're criature en est devenu jaune comme un coing, et n'a point profité tout depuis ce
temps-là. C'est un bel exemple pour vous, Monsieur. On n'a que son plaisir en ce monde; et j'aimerais mieux bailler à ma fille un bon mari qui lui fut agréable, que toutes les rentes de la Biausse.¹

The most powerful denunciation of marriage which disregards natural inclination is to be found in Georges Dandin. Molière has many times shown a young heroine saved from an unwelcome marriage; here he shows the unhappy results of a marriage which is not founded on mutual regard. Angélique leads her husband Georges Dandin a miserable life, constantly tricking and deceiving him, arranging meetings with gallants who are more to her liking. She is a most unwholesome character, but her improper actions can be partly condoned since she has been the victim of the unworthy acts of others. Georges Dandin, middle-aged wealthy bourgeois, has been foolish and snobbish enough to bargain for a wife of noble family, and Angélique has been the price paid by her parents for money to liquidate their debts. Angélique, cynical and resentful, contemptuous of her husband's middle class manners, feels not the slightest obligation to him. When he protests against her unwifely acts, she argues with him cruelly and bitterly that he had never asked her consent to their marriage.

(Dandin)—
C'est ainsi que vous satisfaites aux engagements de la foi que vous m'avez donnée publiquement?

(Angélique)—
Je ne vous l'ai pas donnée de bon coeur, et vous me l'avez arrachée. M'avez-vous avant le mariage, demandé mon consentement, et si je le voulais bien de vous?²

¹ Le Ménage Malgré Lui, Act II, Scene 2.

² Molière, Georges Dandin, Act II, Scene 4.

Note: The edition of Molière's works published by Garnier Frères shows a different spelling for the dialect in this speech. This quotation follows the spelling used in the edition by Firmin-Didot.
Angelique further declares that Dandin had asked not her but her parents, that it was they not she who had married him:

(Angélique)—

Vous n'avez consulté, pour cela, que mon père et ma mère; ce sont eux proprement qui vous ont épousé, et c'est pourquoi vous ferez bien de vous plaindre toujours à eux des torts que l'on pourra vous faire. 1  

Angélique's statements are, in effect, a denunciation of the parental practice of giving in marriage without the child's approval, and a demonstration of the evils which can be traced to this custom:

(Angélique)—

...Pour moi, qui ne vous ai point dit de vous marier avec moi, et que vous avez prise sans consulter mes sentiments, je prétends n'être point obligée à me soumettre en esclave, à vos volontés; et je veux jouir, s'il vous plaît, de quelque nombre de beaux jours que m'offre la jeunesse, prendre les douces libertés que l'âge me permet, voir un peu le beau monde, et goûter le plaisir de m'ouvrir dire des douceurs. Préparez-vous-y, pour votre punition, et rendez grâces au Ciel de ce que je ne suis pas capable de quelque chose de pis. 2  

However unfavorably Angélique appears in this play, there seems to be a certain justice in her reproof of parents and husband. The actions of the latter have been a denial of the principle that in the matter of choosing a husband, a girl should be consulted and should have freedom of decision. To the disregard of this principle, Angélique ascribes her misconduct—misconduct which has resulted in an unhappy home and distorted family relationship.

A summary of those rights for women which Molière seems to favor in the two "schools" and in Georges Dandin might be stated as follows:

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
1. Girls should have a certain amount of liberal education. Such education should include a degree of freedom so that the young person may learn from the world. Rules restricting girls' activities to home life should be abolished.

2. In the selection of a husband, a girl should have freedom of decision. Choice should not be imposed upon her by parents, guardians, or the proposed husband.

If the above summary correctly states the views advocated in the plays just considered, Molière takes a place among those leaders of his times who sought to strengthen society by breaking with certain traditions restricting women. On the question of freedom of choice in marriage, he is in harmony with Bossuet whose denunciation of the loveless, mercenary marriage has been quoted earlier in this chapter. In these plays, Molière seems to be in the vanguard of a movement for liberalizing the education of women. *L'Ecole des Femmes* ridicules the practice of keeping girls empty headed, and *L'Ecole des Maris* seems to advocate freedom of activity and an opportunity to observe and learn from the world. These plays appeared some quarter of a century before Mme. de Maintenon established at St. Cyr her school for girls—a school which was marked by significant innovations in

1 See above, p. 18.

2 See above, p. 23. Agnes' conversations early in the play are uninteresting and unintelligent; yet she is portrayed as an individual with a normally active mind. Later in the play (Act V, Scene 4), she expresses regret over the poverty of her education and resentment toward the limitations that have been placed upon her.

3 Hodgson, op. cit., p. 99.
tional procedure. At St. Cyr, activity, energy, gaiety, simplicity, genuineness were stressed;¹ M. Gréard was of the opinion that "in
main respects Madame de Maintenon was among those who have struck off
letters from women's education,"² yet she has been criticised for
sufficiently to broaden and enrich the curriculum, for sacrificing
struction" to "education."³ In proposing the idea that young women
have the opportunity to learn from the world, Molière's plays seem
e all implied view in advance of most of his contemporaries.

¹ pp: 107, 108.
CHAPTER III
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF WOMEN

While women's rights figure prominently in the plays just discussed, the various responsibilities of women are presented for consideration in a greater number of the comedies. Through caricatures of the criticised women—the précieuses, the flirts, the prudes, and the blue-stockings—the author makes evident how some extreme faults distort lives and personalities, upset families, prevent marriages, and corrupt social life. These satires contain the implied teaching that women have the social responsibility of avoiding these faults and of maintaining wholesome social behavior.

As Les Précieuses Ridicules was the first of Molière's comedies to gain widespread attention in Paris, first place in the gallery of caricatured women goes to the romantic, fastidious young ladies portrayed in that play. The précieuses took themselves seriously in their efforts to raise standards of elegance, and indeed, these efforts had some importance.

1 Produced in 1659, the first of Molière's original plays to be presented to the Parisian public, Les Précieuses Ridicules aroused a spirited controversy—the first in that long series of conflicts initiated by groups who felt the sting of the poet's satire. Molière declared that his play was directed not towards the précieuses themselves, but towards their extravagant imitators, especially among the women of the provinces. According to Matthews, the followers of Madame de Rambouillet were no longer frequenting her house when the play was presented, but many of the members were still active and allied with people of influence. Some of the more sensible members, such as Ménage, recognized in the play some justifiable criticism of their group. Others, however, voiced their resentment. The storm aroused did not lessen the King's appreciation of the comedy. According to the record, Louis was so pleased that he granted the company a gift of 3,000 livres.
in the development of the language. The movement which radiated from the Salon de Rambouillet originated as an attempt to purify and beautify the French tongue—to rid it of some of its grosser and less refined expressions. Brander Matthews ascribes the refinement of modern French partly to the effects of this movement. In speaking of the précieuses, he says:

The desire for more delicate expression did not begin with them nor did it disappear when they ceased to be. It is a constant force in French literature, an ever present reaction against that other French relish for frankness of speech, girding humor, and Gallic salt.

the same writer ascribes the précieuses' tendency towards devious expressions and strained figures of speech to Madame de Rambouillet's Italian lineage, noting that among Italians "the simple word is too simple, lacking, as Stendhal asserted 'the ingredient of pleasure which comes from difficulty conquered.'" According to Clarke, the précieuses were seriously regarded as especially gifted women, "exquisite in taste, refined in idea, delicate in sentiment, fastidious in judgment, consummate in critical discrimination.

But however much credit may be due to the early followers of Madame de Rambouillet, the movement soon deteriorated so that when Molière wrote his satire, the outstanding characteristics of the imitators of the group appear to have been affectation, pretentiousness, snobbery, and pedantry. The later précieuses advocated sickly romanticism in place of normal family

1 Matthews, op. cit., p. 70.
2 Ibid., p. 71.
3 Ibid., p. 72.
4 Charles Cowden Clarke, Molière Characters (Edinburgh, 1865), p. 207.
relationships. Their professed interest in learning was both distorted and insincere. In *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, Madelon and Cathos reject La Grange and Du Croisy as suitors because their proposals have not followed the complicated pattern of romantic courtship prescribed by the précieuses. Madelon, who has evidently been reading the popular romances of the day, insists that marriage should come only after a series of adventures. The young man should first see the object of his affections at a temple or some public ceremony. After the first meeting, he must come away in a dreamy, melancholy state. He must hide his passion for a time, then pay her several visits during which he displays his wit and intellectuality. The proposal, which must be made in a bower or a garden, at first arouses the anger of his beloved and he must be banished for a time. He must contrive to appease her. There must also be rivals, persecutions, jealousies, desairs. These and many more romantic situations, Madelon contends, are indispensable.

Unmindful of the fundamentals of human worth, these young women based their judgment upon externals. Dress was a most important factor in their appraisal of the suitors. Because the young men did not dress like the dandies in court society, the girls felt them to be beneath consideration.

1 In Act I, Scene 4, Madelon expresses her disdain of marriage and for this attitude she is scolded by her father who stresses the sacredness of matrimony. Here the playwright touches on the précieuses' tendency to reject marriage entirely—a tendency which he satirizes with vigor in *Les Femmes Savantes* (1672).


d'ajustement, et quelle sécheresse de conversation! On n'y dure point, on n'y tient pas. J'ai remarqué encore que leurs rabats ne sont pas de la bonne faiseuse, et qu'il s'en faut plus d'un grand demi-pied que leurs hauts-de-chausses ne soient assez larges.¹

The précieuses whom Molière pictures spurn simple straightforward language. They fancy that wordiness and unnatural expressions show superior refinement. Yet there is no genuine refinement in Madelon's ill-tempered speech to the servant:

(Marotte)—
Voilà un laquais qui demande si vous êtes au logis, et dit que son maître vous veut venir voir.

(Madelon)—
Apprenez, sotte, à vous énoncer moins vulgairement. Dites: Voilà un nécessaire qui demande si vous êtes en commodité d'être visibles!²

Molière presents the précieuse as an individual badly adjusted to society, a young woman who nourishes romantic notions among which is an unrealistic attitude towards marriage—an attitude dangerous to the institution of the home. Most of her affectations and foolish ambitions are symptoms of self-centered vanity.

Another type of young woman whose vanity results in an unwholesome attitude towards her suitors is the flirt; a classic example of this type is Célimène, whose coquettishness contributes so much towards driving Alcèste to extreme misanthropy. In the play Le Misanthrope, Célimène is revealed as past mistress in the art of attracting and holding more than one suitor without intention of accepting any one. Pitiless, deceitful,

¹ Ibid.
² Ibid., Scene 7.
she toys with the affections of two men, unwilling to make a frank avowal for either because she wishes to have both in her train—seemingly to satisfy her conceit and her love of social life.

Alceste, whom she says she prefers to all others, cannot induce her to give up the other man; she uses her wit and attractiveness to keep her hold on both admirers. Alceste sees through her but does not wish to forego her charm in favor of the much more kind and sincere Eliante. His rebuke to Célimène accuses her of giving just enough encouragement to fasten her admirers to her, of leading them on, without ever coming to the point of accepting any of them. His charges give a clear-cut picture of the flirt as a character type. When Alceste rebukes her for encouraging other admirers, she asks if he would have her drive them away with a stick. He replies that what she needs is "un cœur à leurs voeux moins facile et moins tendre." Arraigning her for luring these suitors on, he says

Le trop riant espoir que vous leur présentez
Attache autour de vous leurs assiduités.

Throughout the play, Célimène persists in toying with the affections of Alceste. Finally the despair to which her insincerity drives him causes him to flee from the world and become a recluse. Thus the flirtatiousness of Célimène destroys the prospect of a marriage and bears part of the responsibility for the antisocial behavior of the misanthrope.

In the same play, Le Misanthrope, the poet satirizes the jealous prude, Arsinoé, who, unable to attract admirers herself, assumes a "holier-than-thou" attitude and, in reproving Célimène, discloses the envy and malice beneath her prudishness. Arsinoé declares that she has heard virtu-

1 Molière, Le Misanthrope, Act II, Scene 1.

2 Ibid.
ous people voice their disapproval of Célimène's flirtatiousness. The prude pretends that she has tried to excuse the flirt's "galanterie" but she has found it impossible to do so.

(Arsinooe)--
Je vous excuserai fort sur votre intention,
Et voulus de votre âme être là caution.
Mais vous savez qu'il est des choses dans la vie
Qu'on ne peut excuser, quoiqu'on en ait envie;¹

The nimble-witted Célimène gives a reply which is keenly analytical. With mocking sarcasm she pretends that she has tried unavailingly to defend Arsinoé against those who criticise the prude's manners. In recounting these pretended efforts of hers, Célimène slashes at her opponent, laying bare the affectation and mock-modesty of the prude:

Cette affectation d'un grave extérieur,
Vos discours éternels de sagesse et d'honneur,
Vos mines et vos cris aux ombres d'indécence
Que d'un not ambigu peut avoir l'innocence,

Célimène assaults the prude's self-righteousness and haughtiness and her harshness in judging others:

Cette hauteur d'estime où vous êtes de vous,
Et ces yeux de pitié que vous jetez sur tous,
Vos fréquentes leçons, et vos aigres censures
Sur des choses qui sont innocentes et purs,
Tout cela, si je puis vous parler franchement,
Madame, fut blâmé d'un commun sentiment.³

Continuing the analysis with references to the prude's lack of kindness and of fairness, Célimène states the critics' protest that "elle bat ses gens, et ne les paye point."⁴ With maddening thoroughness, the flirt includes a reference to the prudish characteristic of vanity:

---
¹ Ibid., Act III, Scene 4.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
Gélimène ruthlessly completes the picture with her indirect accusation that Arsinoé's prudishness conceals an unwholesome mind:

*Elle fait des tableaux couvrir les nudités, mais elle a de l'amour pour les réalités.*

The prude is a type of hypocrite whom Molière characterizes often. In *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, he directs Madame Béjart to impersonate a prude as a woman who feels that refraining from love-making gives her license to do anything she wishes: (Molière, à Mademoiselle Béjart)

"Vous, vous représentez une de ces femmes qui, pourvu qu'elles ne fassent point l'amour, croient que tout le reste leur est permis." He points out that the prude places little value upon the good qualities of others while she exalts her own honor—an honor for which no one cares. (Molière):

"Ces femmes qui...veulent que toutes les belles qualités que possèdent les autres ne soient rien en comparaison d'un misérable honneur dont personne ne soucie."

Orante in *Tartuffe* is a prude who has been flirtatious in youth and who, now that beauty has left her "renounces the world which quits her."

(Dorine)—

*Mais l'âge dans son âme a mis ce zèle ardent
Et l'on sait qu'elle est prude à son corps défendant.
Tant qu'elle a pu des coeurs attirer les hommages
Elle a fêté bien joui de tous ces avantages;
Mais voyant de ses yeux tous les brillants baisser
Au monde qui la quitte elle veut renoncer.*

---

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 *Tartuffe*, Act I, Scene 1.
6 Ibid.
Dorine characterizes Orante as a woman who is enviiously harsh in her judgment of others:

(Dorine)--
Et la sévérité de ces femmes de bien
Censure toute chose, et ne pardonne rien
Hautement d'un chacun elles blâment la vie
Non point par charité, mais par un trait d'envie.
Qui ne saurait souffrir qu'une autre ait les plaisirs
Dont le penchant de l'âge a sévère leurs désirs.¹

In the same play, Tartuffe, appears Madame Pernelle, a sanctimonious prude who upsets the home. This older woman disapproves of light-hearted diversions and rails against the visits and social gatherings in her son's household because, she declares, they lack godliness:

(Madame Pernelle)--
Ces visites, ces bals, ces conversations
Sont du malin esprit toutes inventions.
 Là jamais on n'entend de pieuses paroles;
Bien souvent le prochain'en a sa bonne part, ²
Et l'on y sait médire et du tiers et du quart.

With her scolding and her efforts to interfere in Orgon's household, she presents a caricature of the narrow-minded, meddlesome busybody.

Prudishness is one component of that rather complex character type, the blue-stocking, the woman who wishes to shine because of her intellectuality. Her ambitions are based upon false pride rather than upon honest intellectual interest. Through satirizing the blue-stocking in Les Femmes Savantes, Molière raises the delicate problem of women's intellectual activities and, in particular, the question of conflict between intellectual life and home life. Molière here seems to take the uncompromising stand that nothing should interfere with women's fulfillment of

¹ Ibid.
² Ibid.
such important natural duties as care of children, husband and home.
Chrysale has suffered much because his wife prefers philosophy to household duties and his protest against the pursuit of false learning which has so injured his home, wins our sympathy.

(Chrysale)--
Vos livres éternels ne me contentent pas,
Et hors un gros Plutarch à mettre mes rebats,
Vous devriez brûler tout ce meuble inutile,
Et laisser la science aux docteurs de la ville;

... Il n'est pas bien honnête, et pour beaucoup de causes
Qu'une femme étudie, et sache tant de choses.

But the injustice of diverting time away from important duties is not the only charge to be brought against the learned ladies. The devotion to learning which these women display shows neither understanding nor sincerity. Speeches made by the leader of the group show that her intellectual strivings have a false aim. Impelled by a resentment against the low opinion some men hold of a woman's intelligence, she is attempting to appear erudite:

(Béline)--
Car enfin je me sens un étrange dépit
Du tort que l'on nous fait du côté de l'esprit.

1 Les Femmes Savantes, Act II, Scene 7.

2 Conversations of the Femmes Savantes recall some of the affected speeches in Les Précieuses Ridicules. The following bit from Act II, Scene 7, shows the learned ladies uttering exclamations of delight over Trissotin's trifling verses:

(Philaminte)--On ne peut plus.
(Béline)--On pâme.
(Armande)--On se meurt de plaisir.
(Philaminte)--De mille deu frissons vous vous sentez saisir.
(Armande)--Chaque pas dans vos vers rencontre un trait charmant.
(Béline)--Partout on s'y promène avec ravissement.
(Philaminte)--On n'y saurait marcher que sur de belles choses.
(Armande)--Ce sont petits chemins tout parsemés de roses.
(Belise) --
Et je veux nous venger, toutes tant que
nous sommes,
De cette indigne classe ou nous rangent
les hommes,
De borner nos talents a des futilités,
Et nous fermer la porte aux sublimes clarités.

Philaminte says that the ladies aim to shine intellectually, to show that
they know everything. Certainly they give no evidence that they want to
find the truth or follow it:

(Philaminte) --
Mais nous voulons montrer à de certains
esprits,
Dont l'orgueilleux savoir nous traite
avec mépris,
Que de science aussi les femmes sont
meublées;
Qu'on peut faire comme eux de doctes
assemblées,
Conduites en cela par des ordres meilleurs,
Qu'on y veut réunir ce qu'on sépare ailleurs,
Mêler le beau langage et les hautes sciences,
Découvrir la nature en mille expériences,
Et sur les questions qu'on pourra proposer
Faire entrer chaque secte, et n'en point
épouser. 2

While Molière satirizes women who pretend a love of learning, he
infers that he has no opposition to a woman's possessing genuine intel-
lectual interest. In Les Femmes Savantes, Clitandre expresses this idea:
"Je consens qu'une femme ait des clartés de tout." 3 Other plays suggest
that Molière likes to see a woman intellectually active. In La Critique
de L'Ecole des Femmes, Uranie has a major share in expressing the author's
own ideas about comedy, and Elise makes use of her gift for irony in up-
holding Molière's side of the controversy.

1 Ibid., Act III, Scene 2.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., Act I, Scene 3.
The satirical portraits of the flirts, the prudes and the bluestockings show the obligation of women to observe fairness, charity, and common sense in their dealings with other people. It is a significant note that the faults in these satirized types are usually shown as detrimental to marriage --tending either to prevent marriages or cause trouble in homes already established.

Insistence upon the responsibility of upholding proper ideals of marriage--an outstanding theme in Molière's comedies--is exemplified in the blows the poet delivered against the cult of courtship without marriage. This cult was one of the fruits of preciosity; it was lightly satirized in *Les Précieuses Ridicules* (1659) and again much more forcefully and seriously in *Les Femmes Savantes* (1672), a play which critical opinion has judged to be one of the most perfect ever to come from the pen of Molière.¹ In this later satire, the author presents the positive as well as the negative side through the juxtaposition of two sisters--Henriette and Armande. Henriette, the heroine whom Brander Matthews considers the author's picture of an ideal French girl,² is forthright, frank, and sensible. In the first scene of the play, her sister Armande speaks at length disparaging marriage, asking "Et pouvez-vous, ma soeur, aux suites de ce mot réscoudre votre coeur?" Henriette replies that in her eyes the things which follow marriage are husband, children, household--and these, she continues, do not wound the thought or make one shiver.³ Armande, who has a suitor, Clitandre, wishes

---

1 Considering the display of dramatic skill, the gift of humor, and insight into character, Matthews judges *Les Femmes Savantes* and *Tartuffe* to be the two most perfect comedies written by Molière. Matthews, op. cit., p. 287.

2 Matthews, op. cit., p. 297.


4 Ibid.
the relationship between them to be one of life-long courtship. When Armande expresses contempt for the marriage relationship, Henriette counters with an appealing picture of the happiness which a girl may hope to experience in married life:

(Henriette)---
Et qu'est-ce qu'à mon âge on a de mieux à faire
Que d'attacher à soi, par le titre d'époux,
Un homme qui vous aime et soit aimé de vous
Et de cette union, de tendresse suivie,
Se faire les douceurs d'une innocente vie?
Ce nœud, bien assorti, n'a-t-il pas des appas?¹

An interesting comparison can be made between Le Misanthrope, in which the coquette Célimène ruins the life of Alceste, and Les Femmes Savantes in which Armande fails in her attempt to victimize Clitandre. Clitandre loves misguided Armande, who, disdaining marriage, seeks to hold him as a perrenial lover; but he realizes that the girl he loves is outrageously unfair and that she is not worth loving. So he turns from her and cultivates the friendship of Armande's wise and wholesome sister, Henriette. The two fall in love and the play ends happily in their marriage.

Armande was on the road to ruining the life of her suitor, but the young man had sense and stamina enough to cut short her pursuit of a harmful ideal.

Molière rebukes women who prey on society by seeking courtship while rejecting marriage; he also satirizes those who harm society by entering marriage with unscrupulous or selfish motives. A most unpleasant portrait of this type of wife is found in Le Malade Imaginaire, last play that Molière wrote. Béline, wife of the imaginary invalid, pretends that she is devoted to her aged husband, but her honeyed declarations of love change

¹ Ibid.
to expressions of revulsion the moment she believes he is dead. She appears as an incarnation of hypocrisy—a sort of feminine Tartuffe. Her mercenary dishonesty is in striking contrast with the conscientiousness and straightforwardness of her step-daughter, Angélique. This young woman, in conversation with her step-mother, makes the following observation about girls who marry to obtain money or to escape parental restraint:

(Angelique)—
Il y en a d'aucunes qui prennent des maris seulement pour se tirer de la contrainte de leurs parents, et se mettre en état de faire tout ce qu'elles voudront. Il y en a d'autres, Madame, qui font du mariage un commerce de pur intérêt, qui ne se marient que pour gagner des douaires, que pour s'enrichir par la mort de ceux qu'elles épousent, et courent sans scrupule de mari en mari, pour s'approprier leurs dépouilles.

Angelique's own standards reflect her honesty and intention of remaining married for life:

(Angelique)—
Pour moi, qui ne veux un mari que pour l'aimer véritablement, et qui prétends en faire tout l'attachement de ma vie, je vous avoue que j'y cherche quelque précaution.

Doctrine on duties of wives and mothers is probably most forcefully stated in Les Femmes Savantes. While Henriette here speaks with view to obtaining human happiness through marriage, Chrysale, concerned with women's attitudes from the sterner standpoint of duty, insists that the ideal wife should avoid learned pursuits and devote herself to the education of her children.

1 Molière, Le Malade Imaginaire, Act I, Scene 9, and Act III, Scene xvii.
2 Ibid., Act II, Scene 7.
3 Ibid.
of her children and the practical management of her household. The following four lines contain his convictions about wifely duties:

Former aux bonnes moeurs l'esprit des ses enfants,
Faire aller son ménage, avoir l'œil sur ses gens,
Et régler la dépense avec économie,
Doit être son étude et sa philosophie. 1

The household presented in this play gives an effective picture of the results of a woman's neglect of her duties as a mother. In the portraits of the two girls, Faguet suggests, the poet wishes to show how Philaminte failed in rearing her daughters. Armande owes her warped and distorted views to her mother's teachings. Henriette, this critic maintains, is fundamentally a character of outstanding goodness and common sense, but her manners are imperfect; she has a certain tartness of speech, an excessive freedom of demeanor, and these flaws are the result of improper training—an evidence of the mother's failure in her duties. 2

Philaminte's neglect and mismanagement of the household have been one cause of her husband's misery, but the wifely fault which stands out most glaringly is her determination to dominate. She not only heartlessly sweeps away what her husband most desires but also deprives him of any voice in making decisions. Without consulting Chrysale, she discharges his favorite servant, Martine. In selecting a husband for her daughter she decides alone. When Henriette urges her suitor to seek the mother's consent to their marriage, she indicates how completely her mother rules the whole household:

1 Les Femmes Savantes, Act II, Scene 7.
(Henriette)--
...Le plus sur est de gagner ma mère.
Mon père est d'une humeur à consentir à tout;
Il a reçu du ciel certaine bonté d'âme
Qui le soumet d'abord à ce que veut sa femme.
C'est elle qui gouverne, et d'un ton absolu,
Elle dicte pour lui ce qu'elle a résolu. 1

After considerable prodding, the husband, Chrysale, finally decides to
over-rule Philaminte in her determination to wed Henriette to the fortune-
seeking fop, Trissotin. He declares his intention of so doing:

...Et je lui veux faire aujourd'hui connaître
Que ma fille est ma fille, et que j'en suis
le maître
Pour lui prendre un mari qui soit selon mes
voeux. 2

However, to hold Chrysale to his purpose it takes not only the persuasions
of Ariste but also the moral support of Martine, the servant, who maintains
stoutly that the husband should have the authority:

Ce n'est point à la femme à prescrire, et je
sommes
Pour céder le dessus en toute chose aux hommes. 3

On the question of the duty of wifely obedience, there appears to be
a contrast between Les Femmes Savantes and the two "schools." In L'Ecole
des Femmes, pronouncements favoring the authority of the husband over the
wife are put in the mouth of the satirized character Arnolphe. To ridicule
the latter's views, Molière uses the device of exaggeration, showing this
unwittingly comic character pile one extreme statement upon another to the
point of absurdity. Arnolphe attaches omnipotence to the wearer of the

1 Les Femmes Savantes, Act I, Scene 3.
2 Ibid., Act II, Scene 9.
3 Ibid., Act V, Scene 3.
beard: "Du côté de la barbe est la toute-puissance." He instructs the
girl whom he wishes to marry, striving to stamp into her mind the doctrine
that a wife should be completely submissive to her husband. In trying to
explain the subordination of the wife, he is at a loss to find comparisons
because, he declares, neither soldier, valet, nor religious owes such
obedience, docility, and humility as a wife should show towards her husband.

(Arnolphe)—
(...ce que le soldat dans son devoir instruit,
Montre d'obéissance au chef qui le conduit,
Le valet à son maître, un enfant à son père,
A son supérieur le moindre petit frère,
N'approche point encor de la docilité,
Et de l'obéissance, et de l'humilité,
Et du profond respect où la femme doit être
Pour son mari, son chef, son seigneur et
son maître.)

Arnolphe declares that the wife should drop her eyes when her husband looks
at her:

(Arnolphe)—
Lorsqu'il jette sur elle un regard sérieux
Son devoir aussitôt est de baisser les yeux
Et de n'oser jamais le regarder en face
Que dans d'un doux regard il lui veut faire
grâce.

In some of the earlier plays, the consideration of wifely obedience
is linked with the question of freedom for married women. Sganarelle, the
ridiculous character in L'Ecole des Maris, lays down strict rules for wifely
conduct. He would require his wife to live according to his desires rather
than her own:

1 Molière, L'Ecole des Femmes, Act III, Scene 2.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
The home life of his wife would be hardly less secluded and austere than that of a nun. She would be obliged to dress in "serge honnête" and remain soberly at home giving all her attention to household duties:

(Sganarelle) --
...j'entends que la mienne Vive à ma fantaisie, et non pas à la sienne.

(Sganarelle) --
...enfermée au logis, en personne bien sage,
Elle s'applique toute aux choses du ménage.

In leisure time she might mend his clothes or knit some socks:

(Sganarelle) --
A recoudre mon linge aux heures de loisir.
Ou bien à tricoter quelque bas par plaisir.

He put a ban on "discours des muguets" and insisted that she never stir abroad without someone to watch her:

Et ne sorte jamais sans avoir qui la veille.

The maid Lisette warns against restricting the freedom of married women, declaring that the safest way is to have confidence in a wife. She implies that Sganarelle's rules for restriction of freedom are pagan and points out that those who hold others in slavery are accursed of God:

(Lisette) --
En effet, tous ces soins sont des choses infâmes.
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.

1 Molière, L'Ecole des Maris, Act I, Scene 2.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
Lisette questions the value of an honor which must constantly be guarded:

(Lisette)--
Notre honneur est, Monsieur, bien sujet à faiblesse
S'il faut qu'il ait besoin qu'on le garde sans cesse.¹

In her next lines, this outspoken servant reveals her practical knowledge of human nature by implying that guards are not serious obstacles if a woman has made up her mind to evade them:

(Lisette)--
Pensez-vous, après tout, que ces précautions servent de quelque obstacle à nos intentions
Et quand nous les mettons quelque chose à la tête
Que l'homme le plus fin ne soit pas une bête?²

The safest method, maintains Lisette, is to place confidence in wives, for elaborate efforts to prevent them from doing wrong inspire almost a desire to do that which is forbidden:

(Lisette)--
C'est nous inspirer presque un désir de pécher,
Que montrer tant de soins de nous en empêcher;
Et si par un mari je me voyais contrainte,
J'aurais fort grande pente à confirmer sa crainte.³

Ariste, seconding Lisette's view, disapproves of austere restrictions and favors liberty:

(Ariste)--
Leur sexe aime à jouir d'un peu de liberté;⁴
On le retient fort mal par tant d'austerité.

He maintains that it is honor, not severity, which keeps women dutiful:

¹ Ibid.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
It is Ariste's belief that one must win the heart rather than circumscribe the actions:

In advocating freedom, Lisette and Ariste add practical reasons to their logical arguments. They both maintain that compulsion which opposes the will and denies natural desires simply does not work; that kindness and trust in the free will of the individual are more likely to yield satisfactory results. Seeking to show the unreasonableness of Sganarelle's position, Lisette argues that his rules exacting wifely submission are unchristian because they would establish a kind of slavery. Ariste continues with the philosophical appeal that without movement of the will there is no real morality; consequently he insists upon the necessity of winning the heart. Neither of the wise characters in this play gives any support to the doctrine of enforced obedience.

On the question of wifely obedience there appears at first glance to be a conflict between L'Ecole des Maris and Les Femmes Savantes; this apparent conflict will be more fully discussed in the succeeding chapter.

---

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
A summary of this chapter on responsibilities might be as follows: Molière in directing attention towards the need of maintaining wholesome attitudes and behavior in all social relationships, has laid particular stress upon the importance of upholding proper ideals of marriage. To accomplish his objective, the poet has used satire to portray the neglect or denial of responsibilities and through this means reveals unfortunate or evil results upon the characters of the women themselves and upon the society of which they are a part. In picturing the flirt, the satirist indirectly states women's responsibility for observing honesty, fairness and charity towards men and women of their acquaintance. When the playwright portrays the précieuxes, he teaches that women must have due sense of the high importance of marriage. In picturing the blue-stocking and the domineering wife, he shows that a married woman's first obligations are fairness to her husband, devotion to her family and care of her home. The flirt and précieuse frustrate marriages or try to do so. The jealous, narrow-minded prudes place obstacles which tend to hinder marriages. The blue-stockings mar the home which has been already established. In the plays discussed, plot, character portrayal, and direct pronouncement combine to stress the importance of building homes wisely and safeguarding family relationships. One might say that the doctrine of the importance of sound family life is the theme in Molière's social philosophy around which centers his teaching on responsibilities of women.  

1 Note. In "Molière et Bossuet"--a critique reminiscent of the "luttes" of the poet's own day--La Pommeraye maintains that concern for the safety of the family was foremost among Molière's preoccupations: "La défense de l'amour pur, le salut de la famille furent la première préoccupation de Molière dès son entrée sur la scène parisienne." Pierre Henri Victor Berdelle de la Pommeraye, Molière et Bossuet (Paris, 1877), p. 159.
CHAPTER IV
CRITICAL DISCUSSION

The previous chapter has stressed one phase of what seems to be Molière's doctrine as regards the family—namely, that body of teaching on attitudes of women towards their suitors or husbands. Discussion of the topic of the family would not be complete without more consideration of the poet's teaching on relationships between children and parents.

Jeannel, a critic who gives special attention to Molière's social doctrine, combines praise and blame of the playwright's moral influence; he commends Molière for the creation of such wholesome examples of womanhood as Elmire in Tartuffe and Henriette in Les Femmes Savantes; he acknowledges our debt for the great comic writer's staunch support of the institution of marriage, for his masterly defense of that institution against dangerous cults and harmful acts of individuals; but he condemns the poet for what he considers false teaching in regard to the family. Jeannel's reason for protest is that while there are many fine young people in the plays, good mothers are few, and nowhere do we find an example of a father who is wise and just. This, declares the writer, is false teaching, because how can young people be upright if they have not inherited good character and if they have not been molded in virtue by wise and virtuous parents? ¹

----

¹ Jeannel, op. cit., p. 203: "À ce point de vue le théâtre de Molière présente un perpétuel contresens; il est impossible que des parents si dépourvus d'intelligence et d'élevation produisent toujours des enfants si admirables. La nature peut faire une fois par hasard un tel prodige, mais ici le prodige passe à l'état de loi. C'est un mensonge moral, de prétendre que des fils puissent être pleins d'honneur et de raison, des filles pleines de délicatesse, de pudeur et de grâce, sans que père ni mère leur aient rien donné de ces qualités, ni par éducation, ni par héritage."
In another chapter this same author refers to the two authorities which provide guidance for moral action—revealed religion and natural morality. He declares that Molière stands high among teachers of the latter—that morality which is in our very constitution, in our instincts, our desires, our conscience. Stating that this natural morality is a divine creation, like ourselves, the same author calls it a universal light, more or less enfeebled here or there but never extinguished. In Jeannel’s words, "La morale naturelle est celle que chacun peut tirer de soi: morale de création divine comme nous-mêmes, qui existe essentiellement en nous tous..." It is difficult to reconcile the belief expressed in the statement just quoted with the following criticism of the same author: "C’est un mensonge moral de prétendre que des fils puissent être pleins d’honneur et de raison, des filles pleines de délicatesse, de pudeur, et

1 Ibid., p. 236: "Il faut bien reconnaître qu’en fait de morale effective, qui ne soit point une règle des moeurs fixe et universelle, il n’y a que deux morales: l’une est celle de la religion, qui impose au nom d’une révélation divine des préceptes formels; l’autre, qui au fond donne les mêmes préceptes, est la morale naturelle, que nous trouvons dans notre nature même, c’est-à-dire, dans nos instincts, nos désirs, et nos passions, dans notre conscience. Celle-ci, vague, fugitive, souvent même obscure aux yeux vulgaires, a pu être précisée et illuminée par le génie de quelques hommes; c’est ce qu’a fait Platon dans sa République, qui est réellement et surtout un livre de morale; c’est ce qu’a fait Cicéron dans son traité des Devoirs; c’est ce qu’a fait aussi Molière dans son théâtre.

2 Ibid.: "La morale naturelle est celle que chacun peut tirer de soi: morale de création divine comme nous-mêmes, qui existe essentiellement en nous tous, qui dit secrètement au cœur de chacun ce qui est bien ou mal; lumière universelle, plus ou moins affaiblie ça et là, mais jamais éteinte dont les préceptes sont appuyés en chacun par le sentiment, par la raison morale, par l’opinion commune, par l’idée plus ou moins prochaine de Dieu en un mot naturelle, c’est-à-dire fondée sur la nature que Dieu créateur nous a imposée formellement; dont les règles immuables sont connues par l’observation de nous-même, dont la pratique est commandée par le sens moral et la conscience, et dont l’éternelle valeur, en dehors de toute révélation, est corroborée, chez les peuples chrétiens, par l’influence latente et générale du Christianisme même sur les esprits qui lui sont en apparence rebelles."
de grâce, sans que père ni mère leur aient rien donné de ces qualités, ni par éducation, ni par héritage.\footnote{1} The first sentence quoted stresses the universality of moral light, the second implies that without good inheritance and good family training, moral action is hardly natural. Perhaps this author gives too little consideration to the free will of the individual—will which can act in opposition to parental influence either for better or worse. In frequently portraying virtuous children of unworthy parents, Molière may have chosen to stress individual will as the dominant factor in human action, or he may have been basing his portrayals upon his observations of real life. Molière does indeed portray a number of young people who show independence of action, many whose good qualities are in striking contrast \footnote{2} with the vices of their parents. In so doing, does the playwright then teach that the influence of fathers and mothers is unimportant? It would be unjust to conclude that he does without considering the many young characters whose conduct is far from perfect. Among these latter, moral lapses or imperfections such as dishonesty, trickery, and impudence seem to be occasioned by, if not caused by, the unwise or unjust acts of their parents.\footnote{3} In this way, Molière seems to say that foolishness or perversion in parents often bears evil fruits in the children they rear; thus does Molière seem to affirm the importance of parents' protecting and cultivating the natural morality of which Jeannel has spoken. Such an affirmation is

\footnote{1}{See footnote, p. 55.}

\footnote{2}{One example of such contrast appears in \textit{Le Malade Imaginaire} where the integrity and sense of Angélique stands out against the selfishness of her hypochondriac father.}

\footnote{3}{Cléanthe in \textit{L'Avarre}, Isabelle in \textit{L'Ecole des Maris}, Lucinde in \textit{Le Médecin Malgré Lui}, Aminthe in \textit{L'Amour Médecin} are a few examples which can be cited.}
not contradicted by revealing that the young can resist bad influence and grow up to be better people than their parents were. Through such a revelation the poet merely presents a fact which one can verify by observing real life, a truth which one can deduce from the doctrine of free will.

Thus it seems justifiable to conclude that Molière's plays imply no disparagement of the value of parental influence— that, in fact, throughout his comedies he has aimed consistently to stress the importance of maintaining wholesome family relationships.

In considering other aspects of Molière's teaching which may appear to be inconsistent, one comes upon the question of the poet's views on individualism, especially as shown in the plays which most concern women. Does he consistently present a doctrine favoring intellectual development for women? Does he propose that women be subjected to a social demand strictly limiting learned or thoughtful activities—a demand that they devote all of their time and energies to the care of home and children? Does he affirm or deny that women should have a high degree of individual initiative and freedom of action? Does he present opposing doctrines on these questions? In discussing these points it is necessary to examine what seem to be contrasting aspects of the author's teaching as shown in different plays.

If one compares the two "schools" (1661, 1662), with Les Femmes Savantes (1672), there appears to be a divergence in doctrine as regards the education of women and the obedience of wives, but it is a difference which upon more careful examination may prove to be more apparent than real.

In L'Ecole des Mari and L'Ecole des Femmes, as Faguet notes, it is Ariste and Chrysalde who are evidently presented by the author as the
reasonable or wise men of the plays, and, on the other hand, it is Sganarelle and Arnolphe who are shown as "imbéciles" and "grotesques." Arnolphe, the ridiculous character, wants a wife with no learning; he says that it is sufficient for him if his wife knows enough to say her prayers, love him, sew, and spin. Chrysalè, the reasonable man, maintains that an uneducated wife is a liability because it is such a bore to have to live all one's life with a stupid creature. Thus L'Ecole des Maris (1661) seems to carry a strong case in behalf of cultural education for women.

At first thought, Les Femmes Savantes (1672) seem to be in striking contrast with the earlier plays on this subject of learning for women. Here Chrysalè is the abused husband with whom, as Faguet notes, the audience sympathizes. Chrysalè recommends that the women burn all their books excepting a big Plutarch in which to press his ties. Crying out that the women of his household should leave knowledge to the city doctors, he maintains that for many reasons it isn't good for a woman to study and know so many things.

Upon first consideration, there also seems to be a contradiction between the earlier and later plays in views on wifely obedience. In the "schools," Sganarelle and Arnolphe, the extreme characters, whose ideas and

2 Ibid., p. 245.
3 See quotation, p. 23.
4 See quotation, p. 24.
5 Faguet, Propos de Théâtre (Paris, 1903), pp. 165-166.
6 Les Femmes Savantes, Act II, Scene 5.
plans do not work out successfully, make absurd statements as to how wives should obey their husbands. Sganarelle would have his wife live completely according to his will. 1 Arnolphe makes himself ridiculous with such extreme pronouncements as the following: "Omnipotence goes with the beard"; "the duty of valet to master does not nearly approach the docility, obedience and humility, the profound respect which a woman should have for her husband, leader, lord, and master"; "When he looks at her, she should lower her eyes and not dare to look him in the face until with a gentle glance he deigns to give her permission." 2 Arnolphe and Sganarelle are not admirable figures. They and their views are repudiated by the arguments of the reasonable characters, and they are humiliated by the failure of their plans.

The point of view advanced in these plays is in contrast with one shown in Les Femmes Savantes. In the later play, the servant Martine, who does battle for the hen-pecked Chrysale, comes out strongly for submission of the wife to the rule of the husband. The wronged husband, Chrysale, also finally gets up courage and proclaims the right of the husband to have his way in the household. 3

Since the wise characters in the earlier and later plays seem to have opposing views on this question, it is of interest to consider whether Molière presented opposing doctrines at different times, and if so, for what reason. Did the author's views change through the passage of the

1 See quotation, p. 49.
2 See quotation, p. 48.
3 See quotation, p. 47.
years? It has been suggested by some that Molière's own unhappy marriage led him to place less trust in womankind in his later life, and that, therefore, the views stressed in Les Femmes Savantes show a revision or complete change in his judgment as to the status of women. This does not seem to be a valid conclusion because the ideas in Les Femmes Savantes appeared, though in less developed form, in Les Précieuses Ridicules, written in 1659, before the poet's marriage.

A similar case is to be found in the argument as to whether the flirt, Célimène, is a characterization of the playwright's own wife, written as a result of his unhappy experience with Armande. But Jeannel has called attention to the fact that this famous scene between the jealous Arsinoé and the flirt, Célimène,² had been written and played with almost identically the same wording in Le Prince Jalous (Act II, Scene v) in 1661, before the marriage of Molière.

In 1661, not long after the production of L'Ecole des Maris, the poet married Armande Béjart, younger sister of Madeleine Béjart, who had been for so many years the leading actress of Molière's group. Some critics have felt that the outcome of this marriage offers an explanation for certain of Molière's views as regards women.

Molière was twenty-one years older than his young wife. He was deeply in love with her, and for a time the marriage seemed to be happy. Certain roles Molière has included in his plays were written, it is believed, with Armande's acting abilities in mind. Under her husband's guidance and protection, Armande became the leading lady of the troupe. Molière suffered because she received attentions from other men. In time they separated and were reunited only in the last years of the poet's life.

² Le Misanthrope, Act II, Scene 2.
³ Jeannel, op. cit., p. 123.
Even if the chronology of the plays were not enough to discount the theory that personal disillusionment dictated the poet's choice of doctrine, many would be inclined to reject the idea that an artist of Molière's stature would be distorted in his views by his own personal griefs. Molière learned of human nature through observation of himself and others. Even where he depicts the mental tortures of jealousy as he does in Alceste and Georges Dandin, he satirizes the jealous man as well as the woman who has occasioned the jealousy.

Faguet holds that the difference in view reflects Molière's adjustment of his doctrine to the demands of his public. This critic maintains that during the ten years between L'Ecole des Femmes and Les Femmes Savantes, Molière grew more and more to give the general public what it wanted—that his need of success led him to mold his ideas to suit the prejudices of audiences: "...il va de plus en plus dans le sens des idées générales de son temps et des préjugés de son temps, et cela s'explique par le besoin de réussir." Faguet does not seem to have taken note of the fact that the same conservative views appearing in Les Femmes Savantes were advanced in Les Précieuses Ridicules two years before the first of the "schools."

If neither the influence exerted by the poet's audiences nor his own family experiences provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of contrasting views, a possible explanation for the seemingly contradictory doctrine may be found in Molière's philosophy of life. Some of the observations very commonly made by critics are, briefly stated, as follows: Molière advances the doctrine that common sense should be our guide; he wishes to influence us away from extremes towards "le moyen juste"; he

1 Faguet, Rousseau Contre Molière, p. 249.
believes that we should, to a considerable extent, be guided by experience. Pagan sums up these views in his statement that Molière has no other philosophy than that of common sense. "...le bon sens, le sens commun, le sens expérimetal, et nous voilà à cette idée peu neuve et peu ambitieuse que Molière n'a pas d'autre philosophie que celle du bon sens."¹

The poet's belief in moderation might explain seeming contradictions if, indeed, what seem to be contradictions present only an apparent not a real conflict in teaching. An examination of the plays, of the characters, and the circumstances under which they acted may reveal that there is no conflict, that what seems to be contradiction is no more than a difference in emphasis. An apostle of the golden mean would naturally rebuke any excess which was harmful to human well-being; in the plays contrasted, Molière has reproved contrasting excesses in human behavior. In the "schools" he rebuked those who advocated extreme suppression of the individual; in Les Femmes Savantes and Les Précieuses Ridicules he chastised those whose excessive and foolish individualism harmed or endangered family life. Both these pronouncements if made by an apostle of the golden mean could be offered with perfect consistency.

Thinking back over the plays to see whether there is any real contradiction, one recalls that the schools say nothing to advocate any exaggerated independence, or freedom for women; they merely denounce subjugation and the denial of opportunities to learn. Les Femmes Savantes, in censuring any unwise devotion to learning which draws women away from their primary duties of home and children, gives some readers the opinion that the author had completely repudiated the more liberal views in the "schools." In

¹ Ibid., p. 326.
Les Femmes Savantes, the good husband Chrysale, with whom one sympathizes, goes to extremes in condemning learning for women,⁠-extremes approaching those of the foolish Sganarelle² in the earlier play. Faguet discounts Chrysale's statements, declining to accept them as the author's views, offering as an explanation, the fact that Chrysale's is an impassioned speech, the expression of a harassed man, driven to extremes by injustice.

This critic holds also that in Les Femmes Savantes, the poet's real porte-voix is Clitandre who is more moderate in his views than either Chrysale or Martine. On the subject of the intellectual activities of women, Clitandre expresses himself as follows:

Et les femmes docteurs ne sont point de mon goût.
Je consens qu'une femme ait des clartés de tout:
Mais je ne lui veux point la passion choquante
De se rendre savante afin d'être savante;
Et j'aime que souvent, aux questions qu'on fait,
Elle sache ignorer les choses qu'elle sait:
De son étude enfin je veux qu'elle se cache;
Et qu'elle ait du savoir sans vouloir qu'on le sache
Sans citer les auteurs, sans dire de grands mots
Et clore de l'esprit à ses moindres propos.⁴

If, as Faguet believes, Clitandre is the author's porte-voix, the above speech may be accepted as an expression of Molière's views as to limiting women's intellectual activities. Clitandre would place no limits on women's learning and understanding but he dislikes learning just for the

---

1 Les Femmes Savantes, Act II, Scene 7.
2 See quotation, p. 23.
3 Faguet, Propos de Théâtre, p. 172.
4 Les Femmes Savantes, Act I, Scene 3.
sake of being learned. He would have women hide their learning to a certain degree—they should know but often appear ignorant. This would imply that Molière feels women should themselves place limitations upon their desires for self-expression.

On the subject of submission of wives to husbands, Clitandre does not express himself. The principal speakers on this subject are the husband, Chrysale, and the servant, Martine, who has been discharged by the whim of the dominating wife, and whom Chrysale wishes to reinstate in the household. Martine proclaims that the man should have the upper hand in all things. Faguet believes that Martine speaks as a representative of the common people who know only the primitive household where the man commands and the woman keeps still. Moreover, one might take into consideration the fact that Martine is a very comic character. The passage where she proclaims that the man should rule goes to such extremes that it hardly seems advisable to rely upon it as a presentation of the author's view:

...Si j'avais un mari, je le dis,
Je voudrais qu'il se fit le maître du logis;
Je ne l'aimerais point, s'il faisait le jocrisse;
Et si je contestais contre lui par caprice,
Si je parlais trop haut, je trouverais fort ben
Qu'avec quelques soufflets il rabaisssat mon ton.2

There is also humor, mingled with pathos, in the pronouncements of the tortured husband who is constantly over-ruled by his wife:

(Chrysale)—
...Me croit-on incapable
Des fermes sentiments d'un homme raisonnable?

1 Faguet, Propos de Théâtre, p. 172
2 L'Ecole des Femmes, Act V, Scene 3.
(Henriette) --
Non, mon père.

(Chrysale) --
Est-ce donc qu'à l'âge où je me vois
Je n'aurais pas l'esprit d'être maître chez moi?

(Henriette) --
Si fait!

(Chrysale) --
Et que j'aurais cette faiblesse d'âme
De me laisser mener par le nez à ma femme?

(Henriette) --
Et non, mon père!

On this question of obedience of wives, Molière does not introduce a speech by any character who is moderate as well as wise—a speech which might serve as the author's pronouncement on the subject. L'Ecole des Maris plainly ridicules the extreme doctrine of wifely obedience; on the other hand, Les Femmes Savantes vigorously denounces domination by wives. Probably the most one can say is that Molière's "golden mean" lies somewhere between these two extremes. Perhaps the poet considers it wise to be indefinite on this point. A man of practical philosophy might well believe that in this matter no one rule would serve—because the particular circumstances and personalities involved are factors which must be weighed in determining the prudent course of action.

Brander Matthews is among those who stress the practical side of Molière's thinking. Speaking of Molière's philosophy he says: "It is not nourished on abstractions; it clings to the concrete facts, interpreting them no doubt, but also controlled by them." Vedel states an equally definite opinion that Molière relies more upon experience and practice than upon logic. "Le bon sens, selon Molière, n'est pas autant la logique pure, "

1 Les Femmes Savantes, Act V, Scene 2.

2 Matthews, op. cit., p. 325.
a l'arrière-gout scolastique...que le bon sens pratique, instinct d'une intelligence éveillée, ou la voix d'une expérience solide. ¹

After weighing the contrasting views in the plays just discussed, one can better attempt to decide to what extent the author favors individualism for women. Molière does not seem to place women’s individual rights above the needs of society. The education and freedom advocated for women in the two "schools" were not in conflict with the well-being of society as a whole. On the contrary the wise characters advance these views partly because they are socially advisable. The plays do not seem to advocate that women should maintain independent, individual initiative, action or interests. Molière's interest in the fulfillment of women as individuals seems to be consistently integrated with his consideration of the needs of society.

¹ Vedel, op. cit., p. 498.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The following is a summary of my interpretation of the comedies of Molière considered as commentary on women and their place in society.

In presenting views on women's social rights and social responsibilities, the author makes two different approaches to the problems of human behavior—-one stressing individual needs, the other emphasizing social requirements. When this apostle of the "juste milieu" saw that people with warped ideas about women's duties were placing excessive limitations upon women, seriously hampering their possibilities as human beings, he ridiculed those excesses and advocated more liberal education for women, more social freedom, more liberty of action so that they might learn from the world. When he observed women forgetting their duties and making unwise, unjust use of their liberties, he denounced their misuse of freedom and spoke out powerfully, recalling them to their primary obligations to home and family.

These two seemingly opposite aspects of Molière's social criticism may be explained by the author's conviction that extremes are harmful to human society and personality—that there is danger both in overemphasis and in underemphasis the importance of individual development and expression. He seems to hold that a moderate degree of individualism is a social benefit, for while it is important to a woman personally that she have a chance to know and learn, this opportunity is also important to her
family--and while it is important for a girl's individual happiness that she be allowed to choose the man she shall marry, that privilege is highly important to society because well-suited marriage is less likely to end in such wreckage as Molière has shown in Georges Dandin.

Through frequent treatment of questions of marriage and family problems, Molière seems to be stressing that the home is the fundamental unit of a sound social order and that social health depends first of all on wholesome family life, for almost every play centers around a problem of establishing or maintaining a good home. The author uses his heaviest ammunition against every type of self-centered individual who would injure an established home or prevent a marriage which gives promise of being successful.

Molière's concept of good family life stresses the interdependence of all members of the household, and the need for faithfulness and justice one towards the other. The comedies seem to show that faithfulness to family duties is the best road to individual fulfillment as well as social good. Anti-social women are presented as not only unjustly robbing others of their rights but also defeating their own opportunities to live good lives, to develop their most important gifts of mind and heart. Women characters with well-balanced personalities are those who, like Henriette, choose to marry and seek happiness through devotion to their families.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


The thesis submitted by Miss Helen A. Jones has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Modern Languages.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 23/44

Joseph LeBlanc
Signature of Adviser