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The Reasons behind *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes*

Professor Jan Clarke

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Several of Molière's plays led to widespread critical reaction, the first important case being the debate that followed the performance of *L'Ecole des Femmes*, known as the *la querelle de L'Ecole des Femmes*. This has been seen by critics such as Mongrédien and Peacock as merely setting out themes which would be further developed by the later debate concerning *le Tartuffe*.¹ However, *la querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes* should not be passed over as merely an early skirmish in what was to become a larger war. Indeed it is my contention that this debate directly affected the development of theatre in general and Molière's later works in particular. Forman underlines its importance, saying 'although most of the criticism of *l'Ecole des Femmes* is trivial and tedious, and the documents verbose and vindictive, consideration of them provides fascinating insights into attitudes towards drama, and especially comedy held by its practitioners'.² It inspired more polemic documents than any other literary debate of the period apart from the *querelle* that followed *Le Cid* in the late 1630s, and unlike that debate, the special characteristic of this *querelle* was that much of it was carried out in the form of plays.³ Forman notes that 'the resulting controversy lacked the intellectual pretensions of the dispute over Corneille's *Le Cid* but has provided us with a more entertaining and illuminating picture of theatrical activity than the arid theoretical documents of the 1630s'.⁴ However, in spite of its importance, it has not previously been analysed as a linear, evolving debate: most critics concentrate on just one or two of the plays, notably Molière's own *Critique de L'Ecole des Femmes* and *L'Impromptu de Versailles*. Whilst

¹ Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p. xxv; Noel Peacock *Molière: L'Ecole des Femmes* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Press, 1989) p.2.

² Edward Forman 'Authors and their Critics' in William Howarth (ed.) *French theatre in the neo-classical era 1550-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.270-271.

³ Henry Carrington Lancaster *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the seventeenth century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936) p.253.

⁴ Edward Forman 'Authors and their Critics' in William Howarth (ed.) *French theatre in the neo-classical era 1550-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.270.

some have included certain plays from the debate in their analysis of attacks on Molière, most notably Wright-Vogler's analysis of *Zélinde* and *Le Portrait du Peintre*⁵, only Mongrédien has discussed all of the plays in the *querelle*. Although his work represents a valuable study, it does not devote sufficient analysis to the connections between the plays and generally treats them individually. Although such an analysis is useful, it ought to serve as a starting point for a deeper evaluation of the evolving literary debate: this examination is to be the principal aim of this thesis. The social, political and moral context will also be explored in light of the criticisms raised.

Explicit reasons for the querelle

The major criticisms of *L'Ecole des Femmes* can be divided into the categories of theatrical, religious and literary, to which may be added personal, since the criticism by Molière's contemporaries may largely have been the result of jealousy and a desire for self-advancement. All of these reasons will be examined in depth, but before this can be done the debate needs to be set within the context of the theatrical world of seventeenth-century France. Many of the points that were highlighted during the *querelle* would otherwise seem to be either extremely minor criticisms or totally incomprehensible if judged in a modern context. This is particularly true of the debate surrounding acting styles, which differed greatly from modern styles.

Contemporary acting styles will be examined in the chapters dealing with *L'Impromptu de Versailles* and *L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé*. However, it ought to be briefly stated at this point that Molière was seen as one of the finest comic actors of the day. His contemporary and colleague la Grange praised his 'mérite' and 'capacité extraordinaire' as an actor and, in the preface to his *Registre* said that Molière 'a excellé comme Acteur par des talents extraordinaires'.⁶ However, if his opponents in the *guerre comique* are to be believed, he did not have the theatrical skills required for tragedy. As

⁵ Frederick Wright Vogler *Molière Mocked: Three Contemporary Hostile Comedies: Donneau de Visé Zélinde (1663), Boursault Le Portrait du Peintre (1663), Le Boulanger de Chalussay Élomire Hypocondre(1670)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973).

⁶ Bert Edward Young and Grace Philputt Young *Le Registre de la Grange Tome II* (Paris: E Droz, 1947) p.80.

will be seen in the examination of their plays, Donneau de Visé, Boursault and Montfleury all criticise Molière for his acting style in tragedies, especially his stance. Montfleury and de Visé go so far as to have an actor imitate Molière when he is performing tragedies, and de Visé appears to attribute the failure of Molière's tragedy *Dom Garcie de Navarre* to Molière's playing the lead (in *l'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé* scene 3 and *La Vengeance des Marquis* scene 5). The best evidence we have for Molière's acting is a work of 1740, which is attributed to Madame Paul Poisson. As this was written almost a century after Molière's death, it may not be wholly reliable and may have been influenced by the popular view of the time. However, Madame Poisson was the daughter of Du Croisy, one of Molière's actors, which suggests that she was told about him by her father. A further suggestion of her reliability as a witness is that she appears to have acted with Molière's troupe during his lifetime, although she was not formally appointed to the company until after his death in 1673, when she was sixteen.⁷ In the *Lettres au Mercure sur Molière et les comédiens de son temps* which are attributed to her, she particularly highlights his 'voix sourde, des inflexions dures, une volubilité de langue qui précipitoit trop sa déclamation' and concludes that this makes him, at least as a tragic actor, 'fort inférieur aux acteurs de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne'.⁸ As she would have been old enough to watch and act alongside Molière it seems reasonable to accept her view that his acting in tragedies was poorly received.

Claims that *L'Ecole des Femmes* was irreligious require greater explanation of the relationship between religion, or rather the Church, and the theatrical world during this period, which was a complex one. His opponents, especially de Visé in *Zélinde* (scene 3), claimed Molière was attacking the Ten Commandments and mocking the sermons given in church. The involvement of Cardinal Richelieu as 'protecteur' of the theatre from 1624 to 1642 and his desire to use the theatre to glorify the King's authority may point to a certain reconciliation between Church and theatre.⁹ This was symbolised by

⁷ Jan Clarke 'The Du Croisy Daughters.' *French Studies Bulletin* 58 (Spring, 1996) p.7.

⁸ Mme Paul Poisson *Lettres aux Mercure sur Molière* (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1787) p.56.

⁹ Jacques Scherer *Théâtre du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) pp.xvi-xvii.

the Edict of 1641, which removed actors 'from a state of infamy'.¹⁰ However, the polemical relationship between religious doctrine and the theatre remained in evidence throughout the Seventeenth Century. Molière's play *Le Tartuffe* was banned on religious grounds in 1664, and there are works by Jean de Voisin (1674) and Pégurier (1693), both of which condemn acting as irreligious.¹¹

The literary reasons behind the *querelle*, which tended to be the major critical point explicitly raised in the plays, centred on the question of whether Molière adhered to the conventions for writing plays which were common in the seventeenth century. These came in three forms, those set out by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, and contemporary works by the abbé d'Aubignac and Pierre Corneille. Both Corneille and d'Aubignac were interpreting Aristotle's views to support their personal views: Corneille used them to defend his own plays, while d'Aubignac used them to attack Corneille. Their interpretations may, therefore, not be wholly objective. All three of these works centred on tragedy, making them apparently irrelevant to Molière's comedies. However, his opponents used some of these works against him, and therefore it is worth briefly looking at them.

Aristotle's work was, according to Halliwell, not well known in antiquity and it was 'only with the fresh interest of Italian humanists in the sixteenth century that it assumed a central place in current literary theory and criticism'.¹² It was therefore at the height of its influence during the Seventeenth Century when Molière was writing. Dramatists in particular used Aristotle's work as a basis for their own dramatic theory. The abbé d'Aubignac had produced a theory on theatrical performances in 1657, which covers many of the issues discussed by Aristotle and also certain new points. Corneille interpreted this work as an attack by d'Aubignac and wrote his own rules for drama in

¹⁰ Paul Scott *Le Gouvernement Présent, ou éloge de son Eminence, satyre ou la Miliade* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2010) p.76.

¹¹ Henry Phillips *The Theatre and its Critics in Seventeenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) p.177-183.

¹² Stephen Halliwell *The Poetics of Aristotle – translation and commentary* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) p.1.

1657 in response. All three of these overlap in certain areas, but Corneille and d'Aubignac add to Aristotle's original through their interpretations of it.

All three authors had strong views about the *dénouements* of plays. The *dénouement* should be clear, well-prepared and bring an end to the intrigue, which meant that the ending of *L'Ecole des Femmes* was criticised because there was no prior warning that it might happen. Similarly, all three theories urged authors to avoid a true *deus ex machina*.¹³ A *deus ex machina* was an ending which was brought about by the introduction of a character who had previously played no part in the play; in the most literal sense it referred to a god being lowered on to the stage by machines.

The two main rules that de Visé and Boursault accused Molière of flouting were the rules of *bienséance* and *vraisemblance*. The former meant that a play should not shock the audience's sense of propriety. *L'Ecole des Femmes* was to be strongly criticised for ignoring this rule, particularly for its use of suggestive puns, such as the 'le' in line 572 (*L'Ecole des Femmes*). The rule of *vraisemblance* meant that it was more important for the events to be plausible than for them to be true. Aristotle himself wanted plays to speak of events which 'could occur, and are possible by the standards of probability or necessity'.¹⁴ The concept of *vraisemblance* becomes for Corneille the tenet that a play should be *semblable*: 'une chose manifestement possible dans la bienséance et qui n'est ni manifestement vraie, ni manifestement fausse'.¹⁵ Molière's opponents referred to this in their criticism of the setting for his play, a town square, which they viewed as improbable.

De Visé in particular highlights inconsistencies within Arnolphe's character, namely his generosity towards Horace, and cruelty to Agnès. This criticism was based on the idea

¹³ Pierre Corneille *Trois Discours sur le poème dramatique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) p.139.

¹⁴ Stephen Halliwell *The Poetics of Aristotle – translation and commentary* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) p.40-41.

¹⁵ Pierre Corneille *Trois Discours sur le poème dramatique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) p.124-125.

that plays must have consistency of character,¹⁶ which Corneille summarised by saying that an author had to consider ‘l’âge, la dignité, la naissance, l’emploi et le pays de ceux qu’il introduit’.¹⁷ Therefore *L’Ecole des Femmes* was condemned by the literary establishment and the purists, who were keen on enforcing compliance with the rules of the genre.¹⁸

However, there is some evidence that Molière ought not to have been criticised in relation to these rules, as not only were they intended for tragedies, but also there is a suggestion that compliance with these rules may have been exaggerated or even misguided. Indeed Corneille, although he was referring to tragedies, went so far as to claim ‘il est impossible de plaire selon les Règles’.¹⁹ Halliwell criticises the ‘widespread [...] assumption that Aristotle’s principles were timelessly valid and should be enforced on all living writers’.²⁰ The *querelle* surrounding *L’Ecole des Femmes* needs therefore to be viewed in the light of these theories, but also as representing an attempt, not necessarily to break away completely, but certainly to push the boundaries of acceptability.

Halliwell says that the ‘pseudo-Aristotelian trio of Unities was to become a hallmark of the dominant French strain of neo-classicism in the seventeenth century’.²¹ These unities were the unity of time, place and action and their continued relevance was shown by Corneille in his *Trois Discours*: ‘[i]l faut observer l’unité d’action, de lieu et de

¹⁶ Stephen Halliwell *The Poetics of Aristotle – translation and commentary* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) p.47.

¹⁷ Pierre Corneille *Trois Discours sur le poème dramatique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) p.78-81.

¹⁸ Marie-Claude Canova-Green ‘The Career Strategy of an Actor turned Playwright’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière* ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.7.

¹⁹ Pierre Corneille *Trois Discours sur le poème dramatique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) p.66.

²⁰ Marie-Claude Canova-Green ‘The Career Strategy of an Actor turned Playwright’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière* ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.18.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.20.

jour'.²² To show the importance of these unities, Mairet, writing in the 1630s, called the unity of time 'one of the fundamental laws of theatre'.²³ In fact the only actual reference which Aristotle made to the unity of time was to say that 'tragedy strives as far as possible to limit itself to a single day'.²⁴ Even though he was writing a comedy, Molière still appears to adhere to this rule, as all of the action in *L'Ecole des Femmes* takes place within 24 hours.

Aristotle stated that drama required the 'representation of a unitary and complete action' and also says that a plot structure must be singular,²⁵ which appears to have been interpreted as the unity of action. In both tragedy and epic it should, according to Aristotle, 'be possible to perceive the beginning and the end as a unity'.²⁶ Corneille interprets this unity of action in comedy as referring to a unity of intrigue, or obstacle in the designs of the main character,²⁷ which is the key element of all of Molière's plays. Again, Molière obeys this as the sole action in his play is Arnolphe's jealousy, which leads to his battle with Horace.

There is no precedent for the unity of place in Aristotle, but Corneille refers to it, and specifically to the problems it poses. He admits that it is not always feasible to keep the action in one room and therefore suggests that authors try to find as exact a setting as possible, but as this is not always convenient he allows them to class entire cities as one place, as he did in *Le Cid*.²⁸ The unity of place was to lead to claims by de Visé and Boursault that the setting for *l'Ecole des Femmes* was extremely improbable. Molière

²² Pierre Corneille *Trois Discours sur le poème dramatique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) p.63.

²³ Edward Forman 'Authors and their Critics' in William Howarth (ed.) *French theatre in the neo-classical era 1550-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.253.

²⁴ Stephen Halliwell *The Poetics of Aristotle – translation and commentary* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) p.36.

²⁵ Ibid, p.40-44.

²⁶ Ibid, p.59.

²⁷ Pierre Corneille *Trois Discours sur le poème dramatique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) p.133.

²⁸ Ibid, p.148-150.

does not want to set the play in Arnolphe's house, as that would destroy Arnolphe's double identity, which is integral to the plot. However, this means certain scenes cause problems with their setting, such as when Agnès is lectured on morality, apparently in the middle of the street.

There is considerable uncertainty about whether Aristotle wrote about comic theory, but Richard Janko refers to a work known as the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, which he believes was written by Aristotle, or certainly at around the same period. Based on Janko's reconstruction of the work, it appears to act as a companion to Aristotle's work on tragedy, and may be the missing section of *Poetics*. Certainly it provides some useful insights into the theory of comedies in the same way that *Poetics* can be used as a guide to the theory of tragedies. According to this work, '[l]aughter arises from the impossible, or from the possible and inconsequential which might also be called the illogical'.²⁹ This support for illogical situations could be used as a defence against the criticisms that the setting of *L'Ecole des Femmes* is unrealistic or unnatural. This is supported by the later line that 'impossibilities and illogicalities can be used comically'.³⁰ Although no laughter arises directly from the setting, it is crucial to Horace's belief that he can treat Arnolphe as a friend, rather than a rival. It is therefore both humorous and central to the plot.

The *Tractatus* also deals with the use of real people in comedy, for which Molière was also criticised. The *Tractatus* says that 'comic poets use invented names for the characters in their plots, such as to present an appearance of reality, and do not submit individuals to abusive attack'.³¹ This therefore makes the crucial difference between basing characters on reality, which Molière as a satirist certainly did, and basing characters on real figures in order to attack them directly. The *Tractatus* offers complete support to the aim of correcting vices through comedies, since laughter has 'the beneficial effect of reducing the human propensity to excessive buffoonery and

²⁹ Richard Janko *Aristotle on Comedy* (Gerald Duckworth and Company, 1984) p.95.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.96.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.95-96.

impropriety'.³² It also points out that the 'joker aims to expose faults of mind and body in his victims, and this is amusing, provided that the fault is painless and embarrassing rather than destructive'.³³ Although it could be argued that Arnolphe's fault has the potential to be destructive, Molière never allows it to reach that stage, and it remains merely 'embarrassing'.

It is therefore clear that dramatic theory at the time of Molière, adhered to stringently, could be used to attack plays, but that many other notable authors, such as Corneille, were seeking to reinterpret these theories to support their own works. It is also evident that many of the supposed faults with Molière's play were based on guidelines originally intended for tragedy, and are supported by the comparable guidelines laid out for comedies. However, it is not clear how well known the *Tractatus* was in Seventeenth-Century France, but it appears to have been less widely read than the *Poetics*, which may explain why Molière's opponents used the theories expressed in *Poetics* to condemn *L'Ecole des Femmes*.

Implicit jealousy

There is an argument, expressed by Mélése in his description of the critics of the play as 'les envieux', that the criticisms they leveled at Molière and his play were simply malicious and born of jealousy.³⁴ This allegation will be examined, along with the explicit reasons behind the *querelle*, to see whether it is true, and if so, whether it was merely a minor factor, or was in fact the major reason for the *guerre comique*.

The tributes paid to Molière posthumously show that there can be no doubt that Molière was seen by his contemporaries as enormously successful and talented. Indeed two of the authors who attacked Molière during the *querelle* were the most effusive in their praise of him after his death, although such praise should perhaps be treated with a note of caution, as Molière's opponents frequently praised his acting throughout his career in

³² Ibid, p.96.

³³ Ibid, p.96.

³⁴ Pierre Mélése *Un Homme de Lettres au Temps du Grand Roi, Donneau de Visé, Fondateur du Mercure Galant* (Paris: Librairie E Droz, 1936) p.1.

an indirect attempt to criticise his writing.³⁵ Robinet, in his tribute to Molière, praised his writing, calling him the ‘French Terence – a hundred times better than the original’ and de Visé praising him for his ‘knack of displaying the faults of humankind without giving offence, and he depicted them quite naturally in his plays: he was outstanding as author and as actor’³⁶. Given the fierce criticism that de Visé, in particular, directed at Molière during the *querelle* precisely for offending while displaying the faults of humankind, this praise seems somewhat ironic. This may suggest either that Robinet and de Visé felt that it was wisest to praise an enemy while everyone was mourning him, or that they wished to opportunistically promote themselves by attacking someone who was enjoying increasing success.

In order to begin the examination of the implicit reason behind the *guerre comique*, Molière's career up to 1662 must be examined to see how much progress he had made towards becoming the successful and famous author he was to be remembered as. After he had returned to Paris following his time performing in the provinces he enjoyed immediate success, even though his first performance of Corneille's *Nicomède*, which was at the Louvre on 24 October 1658, was not a success. However, the troupe ended the evening with a performance of a farce written by Molière, *Le Docteur Amoureux*, which according to Grimarest was well received, possibly because the Hôtel de Bourgogne had stopped performing such plays and so this piece had an added novelty value.³⁷

Molière's early success was helped by a large amount of royal favour, not only from his patron, who was the King's brother, but also from Louis XIV himself. Although the Hôtel de Bourgogne was usually referred to as the royal troupe, Molière and his troupe were also frequently called upon to perform at the Louvre and at Versailles. Louis was

³⁵ Véronique Lochert ‘La Méditation de la Lecture Contre les Agréments de la Représentation : Lecteurs et Spectateurs dans les Querelles Dramatiques’ in Emmanuelle Hénin *Les Querelles Dramatiques à l'âge Classique* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010) p.121.

³⁶ Edward Forman ‘Actors and Acting’ in William Howarth (ed.) *French theatre in the neo-classical era 1550-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p181-183.

³⁷ Grimarest *La Vie de M. de Molière* (Paris: rue de Saintonge, 1955) p.46.

generous to the theatrical arts and as an early sign of his support for the arts, and Molière in particular, the King gave him 500 *livres* in June 1660 to help pay the fees and expenses which he would encounter in Paris.³⁸ The King also gave Molière 14,000 *livres* in September 1662 as a sign of his gratitude for the entertainment Molière's troupe had provided since July.³⁹ During Easter 1663, the King's minister, Colbert, awarded annual pensions to deserving artists and Molière received 1,000 *livres*.⁴⁰ To show that his support continued after the *querelle*, Molière received a royal pension of 1,000 *livres* in 1664 as an acknowledgement of his 'capacity as a man of wit'.⁴¹ This generosity and the royal support for Molière would have heightened the growing tensions and jealousy between the Hôtel de Bourgogne and Molière.

Molière's first Parisian play, *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659), was a huge success, and represented his first attempt to take contemporary social life as his subject. Molière's only true failure as a playwright came in 1661 with his heroic comedy *Dom Garcie de Navarre*. The play was performed a mere seven times and was not published until after his death.⁴² However, this failure was cancelled out by the success of the two comedies which followed it in 1661, *L'Ecole des Maris* and *Les Fâcheux*. The King gave Molière's troupe a total of 3,000 *livres* in recognition as thanks for performances of both, half of which was to be given to Molière himself as a sign of the King's particular gratitude.⁴³

Molière was also enjoying success in his private life, having married Armande Béjart, apparently the younger sister of Madeleine Béjart, in January 1662. Their marriage led

³⁸ Madeleine Jurgens and Elizabeth Maxfield Miller *Cent Ans de Recherches sur Molière, sur sa famille et sur les comédiens de sa troupe* (Paris, 1963) p.344.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.376.

⁴⁰ Rene Duchêne *Molière* (Paris: Fayard, 1998) p.323-324.

⁴¹ William Howarth 'Documents of control' in William Howarth (ed.) *French theatre in the neo-classical era 1550-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.109.

⁴² Bert Young and Grace Young *Le Registre de La Grange Tome I* (Paris: E. Droz, 1947) p.31-32.

⁴³ Madeleine Jurgens and Elizabeth Maxfield Miller *Cent Ans de Recherches sur Molière, sur sa famille et sur les comédiens de sa troupe* (Paris, 1963) pp.374-375.

to scandalised comment,⁴⁴ some of which was expressed during the *querelle*, for instance the allegation in de Visé's *La Vengeance des Marquis* that he had been cuckolded (scene 3). The scandal was partly a result of the difference in their ages, and the similarity between the ages of Molière and Arnolphe, and Agnès and Armande, which meant that comparisons were drawn between the two couples. Armande was considerably younger than Molière - she was 'vingt ans ou environ' according to the marriage certificate – which led to Molière's opponents claim that Armande was in fact the illegitimate daughter of Molière and Madeleine.⁴⁵ Armande's youth meant that she would have been born around the time when Molière and Madeleine started working together, but there is no evidence to make it anything other than speculation. However, Molière's opponents also suggested that Molière had gone further than Arnolphe since, not content with merely raising his wife, he had fathered her as well. Montfleury senior, an actor with the rival company, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, went so far as to submit a written accusation of Molière's 'incest' to Louis XIV.⁴⁶ The King however ignored this and implicitly showed his public support for Molière by agreeing to act as a godparent to Molière and Armande's son, who was born in January 1664, just as the *querelle* was coming to an end.⁴⁷

In summary therefore, by 1662, Molière had had a great deal of success in his career as a comic writer, probably based on the lessons learnt from the failure of his initial company in Paris, and his time touring the provinces. He had recently married and enjoyed the support of the royal family. Although at an early stage in his career his plays were increasingly forming the centre piece of royal entertainments and he had laid

⁴⁴ Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.xvii.

⁴⁵ Madeleine Jurgens and Elizabeth Maxfield Miller *Cent Ans de Recherches sur Molière, sur sa famille et sur les comédiens de sa troupe* (Paris, 1963) p.366.

⁴⁶ Roxanne Lalonde 'L'Ecole des Femmes: matrimony and the laws of chance' in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière* ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.165.

⁴⁷ Madeleine Jurgens and Elizabeth Maxfield Miller *Cent Ans de Recherches sur Molière, sur sa famille et sur les comédiens de sa troupe* (Paris, 1963) p.385.

the foundations of his future success in the plays he had written. However, his success had gained him a number of enemies among his rivals in other companies. The failure of *Dom Garcie* showed that he was not as dominant a figure as he was to become, and was still vulnerable to criticism from other playwrights; and he had been the subject of rumours about his private morals. He could be seen as being at a crucial point in his career.

Chapter 2 - L'Ecole des Femmes

In order to study the principal reasons behind the debate caused by *L'Ecole des Femmes*, it will first be necessary to examine the play itself. It was first performed on 26 December 1662 and the debate it provoked centered on aesthetic, moral and personal issues. Briefly the main criticisms were: the violation of rules concerning the unities of time and place; inconsistencies within the main character; 'useless' characters; an 'inconsequential dénouement'; plagiarism; licentiousness and obscenity; parody of religion; and the allegation that Molière attacked the role of women in contemporary society.⁴⁸

In spite of the fierce criticism directed against it, the play was a huge popular success, with the mixed emotions it aroused summed up by the review given in the contemporary work, *La Muse Historique*, which described it as 'Pièce qu'en pluzieurs lieux on fronde/ Mais où, pourtant, va tant de monde' (January 1663).⁴⁹ This shows that despite being widely condemned, the play remained hugely popular, no doubt in part because spectators were keen to discover for themselves if the accusations were true. The *succès de scandale* may also explain why much of the *querelle* was carried out in the theatres. Molière and his opponents may have felt they could use the debate to ensure larger audiences and this will be examined particularly in connection with the last two contributions to the *querelle*, both of which were made after Molière had declared that he would not be responding any more.

⁴⁸ Noel Peacock *Molière: L'Ecole des Femmes* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1989) p.2.

⁴⁹ J Loret *La Muze Historique Tome IV* (Paris: P. Daffis, 1878) p.6.

The beginning of the querelle

Molière was to have little support in the debate; however, the play won the approval of the King, as it ‘fit rire Leurs Majestez [Louis XIV and his mother]/ jusqu’à s’en tenir les côtez’ according to *La Muse Historique*.⁵⁰ One of the plays which Molière wrote to defend himself, *L’Impromptu de Versailles*, was, as will be seen in a later chapter, written on the King’s orders. When *l’Ecole des Femmes* was published it had a dedication to Madame, Henriette d’Angleterre, the wife of Monsieur, the King’s brother.

L’Ecole des Femmes was published on 17 March 1663, about a month after the first critical article had appeared in Donneau de Visé’s *Nouvelles nouvelles*, which consisted of three volumes of more than 300 pages, made up of short stories and current literary debate. In the preface Molière mentions the condemnation the play has received, but adds ‘les rieurs ont été pour elle’. He says he will not respond to the criticisms in his preface as he is intending instead to write a play to answer them and to defend the critical judgement of his supporters. He feels ‘assez vengé par la réussite de [la] comédie’, and hopes that the rest of his plays will be condemned as long as they have as much success.

Sources

One of the most recurrent criticisms of *L’Ecole des Femmes* was that Molière used ideas which had originally been used by other authors, or which he himself had used in earlier plays. This allegation of a form of plagiarism appears in *Zélinde*, *Le Panégryique de L’Ecole des Femmes*, *La Vengeance des Marquis* and *La Guerre Comique*. It is certainly true that at the most basic level much of Molière’s work is very formulaic, following the basic pattern of a disagreeable main character with a major vice, which stands in the way of the happiness of the other characters, and the attempts of the other characters to cure the main character of that vice. However, there is no contemporary evidence to suggest that material was expected to be entirely original. Coffin, although writing about a slightly earlier period, suggests that intertextual references were perfectly acceptable as ‘[l]e passage emprunté fait bifurquer la lecture vers son texte-

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.6.

source'.⁵¹ This implies that Molière's direct use of lines from Corneille ought not to be censured, since they were intended to refer the audience back to the original work in order to give a humorous comparison between Corneille's hero and Molière's.

Molière is unlikely to have used lines from Pierre Corneille's plays if this risked offending Corneille as Molière's troupe frequently performed plays by Corneille, and a quarrel between them would have prevented any further co-operation. Between the years 1659 and 1680, Molière's companies performed nine different plays by Corneille, and performed them 115 times in total.⁵² As proof that there was no ill feeling, Molière's company performed *Le menteur* and *Sertorius* with *L'Impromptu de Versailles* a total of five times in 1663-1664, as well as *Cinna* and *Le menteur* with *L'École des Maris* four times during the same period.⁵³ It also seems highly unlikely that Corneille would have allowed Molière to perform his plays at the height of the *querelle* if he had been offended by Molière's use of his lines.

Molière may have used several sources when writing this play: for instance the '*L'École des*' element of the title was probably first used by another author, Dorimond, in his work *L'École des cocus ou la Précaution Inutile* (1659). Indeed, Molière himself had already written another play that used part of this title, *L'École des Maris*. As well as using Dorimond's title, Molière appears to have borrowed much of the plot from Scarron's *Précaution Inutile*. However, there can be some doubt as to how much he borrowed from other authors, and to what extent certain parts were simply common themes, such as the educative power of love and the idea of a lover mistakenly leaving his loved one with her husband or guardian for safety. In Scarron's play, a Spanish nobleman cares for the illegitimate child of his fiancée by sending her to be educated in a convent, while he departs and has various amorous adventures. Upon his return, he

⁵¹ Charlotte Coffin 'Fragments de mythes: emprunt et cliché dans l'écriture élisabéthaine' in Marie Couton, Isabelle Fernandes, Christian Jérémie & Monique Vénaut *Emprunt, Plagiat, Réécriture aux XVIe, XVIIe, XVIIIe Siècles* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2006) p.117.

⁵² Jan Clarke 'Pierre Corneille dans les répertoires des troupes de Molière et de l'Hôtel Guénégaud' in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* Vol. 106 (2006) p.579.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p.581.

surrounds the girl with idiotic servants and marries her, hoping that an ignorant wife will be faithful. Like Arnolphe, he lectures her on her duties as a wife, but, as in *L'Ecole des Femmes*, the girl meets with a young man while the husband (or guardian in Molière's version) is absent. As in *L'Ecole des Femmes*, the young man uses a *femme d'intrigue* to gain access to the girl's chamber and makes her his mistress. However, he grows tired of her and leaves, and when the husband returns the girl naively tells him all, convincing him that his system is flawed. The parallels are striking, but it is also clear how much of the plot Molière altered and how much he added. Lancaster also points out that Molière's characters are more rounded than Scarron's and Molière's emphasis is on the portrayal of the characters, not the incidents.⁵⁴ Much of the action in *L'Ecole des Femmes* occurs off-stage, suggesting that the audience ought not to be focused on what takes place, but rather on the way characters react to it. Molière's great skill is making the account of this action more interesting for the audience than the action itself would have been. An example of this is IV, 6 when Horace tells Arnolphe that he had met Agnès in her room, but hearing the approach of her jealous guardian, she had hidden him in a cupboard. In a conventional farce, this would have been shown on stage with the young lover narrowly avoiding discovery. However, if it had been performed on stage, the audience would have been aware of Horace's presence, but Arnolphe would not. In Molière's variation the audience is deprived of the potentially humorous farce scene, but instead can enjoy Arnolphe's reactions. This scene has the potential to be much more entertaining and revealing of Arnolphe's character. Similarly during the interval between Acts IV and V, the servants, under orders from Arnolphe, have attacked Horace while he was climbing a ladder to Agnès's window and believe they have accidentally killed him. The direct action of Horace's 'death' would not have been suitable for a comedy, but through the use of *récits*, the audience can see Arnolphe's fury that his servants have gone too far, which makes him appear ridiculous, followed by his surprise to discover that Horace is in fact still alive. Therefore the use of *récits* rather than the presentation of the action heightens the comedy.

⁵⁴ Henry Carrington Lancaster *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the seventeenth century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936) p.247.

Dramatic Innovations

L'Ecole des Femmes was an early example of a new type of comedy, which marked the emergence of comedy from a background of farce and which provoked thought as well as laughter. The play also moves away from farce by showing the development of characters throughout the play as they respond to the obstacles placed in front of them.⁵⁵ Thus, according to Lalande, the play represents a questioning of the aesthetic order, as it marks an attempt to consider comedy as the equal of tragedy, and possibly even its superior.⁵⁶ Molière's theory about the relative importance of comedy and tragedy will be examined in more detail in connection with his claim in *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes* that comedy was harder to write than tragedy.

However, this attempt at raising comedy to the same level as tragedy left Molière open to comparisons with that genre, leading to many of the criticisms which were levelled against him. Mention has already been made in the introductory chapter of the rules which governed seventeenth-century tragedy. Since Aristotle's work on comedy had been lost there were fewer rules for comedy to abide by, yet Molière was particularly criticised for the improbability of his play and for the offensive nature of certain scenes. Corneille's *discours* contains one line in particular which Molière's play does not appear to adhere to: '[l]a vraisemblance est une condition nécessaire de la Comédie'.⁵⁷

L'Ecole des Femmes was criticised, especially in *Le Portrait du Peintre*, for mixing the genres. Boursault jokingly claimed that the play was intended as a tragedy because the kitten dies (*Le Portrait du Peintre* scene 8). There are elements of tragedy in *L'Ecole des Femmes*, most notably in the language used, especially the direct quotations from Corneille's plays. However, in between Arnolphe's tragic lines (lines 373-375 & 385) Molière inserts the much more popular speech of lines 377-378 suggesting that Arnolphe wants to be a noble hero, but does not have the dignity to match his lofty

⁵⁵ Jean Butin *L'Ecole des Femmes* (Paris: Hatier, 1984) p.30.

⁵⁶ Roxanne Lalande 'L'Ecole des Femmes: matrimony and the laws of chance' in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière* ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.165.

⁵⁷ Pierre Corneille *Trois Discours sur le poème dramatique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) p.78.

ambitions. Molière is able to derive comedy from the contrast between the situation being described and the register used to describe it. An example of this comedic contrast comes when Arnolphe is attempting to interrogate Agnès about Horace without revealing his true feelings. He expresses his emotions in the almost tragic asides, but then swiftly changes to his calm exterior, changing between eloquence and comic inarticulateness, all in an attempt to hide his rage from a naive child who does not realise that she is supposed to have done something wrong.⁵⁸

Molière makes use of tragic language to describe something banal and ill-suited to such eloquence. Arnolphe's direct quotation of a line from Corneille's play *Sertorius* ('Je suis maître, je parle: allez, obéissez' (line 642)) reveals his great vanity and sense of self-importance, as he is quoting a line originally spoken by the far more powerful and intimidating Pompey, who, in Corneille's play, goes on to apologise for having spoken too imperiously.⁵⁹ The idea of Arnolphe using the same commanding words as a great Roman general would have been comical to an audience who had seen both plays, and so leave Arnolphe looking foolish. This parody of Corneille's line shows that Arnolphe's authoritarian attitude is a masquerade, a parody of the masterful and heroic.⁶⁰

Arnolphe

Arnolphe's chief desire is the avoidance of cuckoldry, and hence he is terrified of women and their ability to betray him, even the poorly-educated Agnès. Adultery could be explained by the woman's desire to escape from her dependency on men: she usually went straight from being her father's property to being her husband's, and it would also represent a form of escape from a marriage which was against her wishes. The prevalence of adultery is shown both by Arnolphe's mockery of the other cuckolds in the town, and then by the audience's lack of sympathy for him at the end of the play.

⁵⁸ Judd Hubert *Molière and the comedy of intellect* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) p.68-69.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.71.

⁶⁰ Gaston Hall *Comedy in Context: Essays on Molière* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984) p. 136-137.

Apart from this fear of cuckoldry, however, Arnolphe is an ‘honnête homme’, who is normal enough in much of his behaviour to be taken seriously as a human being. This is shown by his generous gift of 100 *pistoles* to Horace, which was criticised, particularly by de Visé (*Zélinde* scenes 3 & 6), for being unlikely and uncharacteristic. Molière chose to defend this accusation by claiming that it was not impossible for someone to be ridiculous in one area of his character but reasonable in all others (in scene 6 of *La Critique Dorante* says ‘il n’est pas incompatible qu’une personne soit ridicule en de certaines choses et honnête homme en d’autres’). Therefore, it is purely Arnolphe’s fear of cuckoldry that makes him cruel to people; when there is no direct threat to him he is capable of kindness and generosity. However, an alternative explanation is provided by Arnolphe’s admission that he enjoys seeing other men cuckolded, and therefore his gift to Horace is intended to help him seduce another man’s wife, and thereby, provide Arnolphe with more mischievous pleasure. Both explanations are plausible motives, but the most telling factor is that Molière chose to underline Arnolphe’s more rounded nature. This represented a change from the normal characteristics of farce characters and an attempt to develop a stock farcical character. Arnolphe conforms to Aristotle’s desire that plays should have a character ‘who is not preeminent in virtue and justice, and one who falls into affliction not because of evil and wickedness, but because of a certain fallibility’.⁶¹ Arnolphe is not an inherently evil character, but neither is he virtuous: his defeat is a result of his own weakness and his particular fallibility.

The Action

The play begins with Arnolphe explaining his philosophy to his friend, Chrysalde. De Visé and de la Croix criticised Chrysalde as being a ‘personnage entièrement inutile’ (*Zélinde* scene 3) but he has an extremely important role in the first scene as he effectively takes the role of the audience finding out about Arnolphe’s plan and facilitating the exposition. His speech with Arnolphe at the beginning allows Arnolphe to explain his ambitious plan to the audience and allows Chrysalde to imply that it is doomed to failure. Chrysalde represents an interesting addition which Molière has made

⁶¹ Stephen Halliwell *The Poetics of Aristotle – translation and commentary* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) p.44.

to the plot of Scarron's play. He defends liberal education and stoically accepts the *coups du hazard*.⁶² He has been seen by many scholars as a *raisonneur*, by which they mean someone who speaks on behalf of the author. However, it is also unlikely that Molière would have advocated complete acceptance of a wife's infidelity, and Chrysalde's excessive stoicism on this point would have appeared comical to the audience. In *Chrysalde and Arnolphe*, Molière is mocking two characters, both of whom have equally excessive views, although admittedly, Chrysalde's are less damaging to other characters. Their ludicrous statements simply serve to underline the message that if a wife is treated with respect, and her love has been earned, then she will remain faithful.

To underline her simplicity Arnolphe cites Agnès's question about whether children were conceived through the ear (line 164). However, what he regards as stupidity, Hall sees as being a naive interpretation of the Annunciation and therefore a parody of church education.⁶³ This was a common enough theme: in Rabelais *Gargantua* 'nasquit en façon bien estrange' and 'sortit par l'aureille'.⁶⁴ Molière therefore shows the audience that Agnès has been subjected to a religious education, which he goes on to parody for being extremely limited, and which has left her to ask the sort of question which Arnolphe believes proves her stupidity, when they in fact prove her innocence and naivety, caused by her lack of education.⁶⁵

Having revealed his plans to avoid cuckoldry, Arnolphe then asks Chrysalde not to call him 'Arnolphe' as he has changed his name to M. de la Souche (line 174). Arnolphe's two names serve multiple comedic purposes, not only allowing the plot to develop and cause Horace's misunderstanding about who M. de la Souche is, but also giving Molière the chance to attack those members of the bourgeoisie who try to ennoble themselves

⁶² Peter Nurse 'The role of Chrysalde in *L'Ecole des Femmes*' in *Modern Languages Review* LVI (April, 1961) p.167.

⁶³ Gaston Hall *Comedy in Context: Essays on Molière* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984) p.140-141.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.141.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.141.

unofficially. It led to some controversy because it was perceived as an attack on Thomas Corneille, who had recently given himself a second name, M. de l'Isle, which is the example of an adopted name ridiculed by Chrysalde (line 182). However, in *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes* Molière denied that there was any personal satire.

Hubert notes that the comedy does not come simply from the fact that Arnolphe has two names, but also from what those names are – Saint Arnolphe is associated with cuckolds and *souche* has many unflattering connotations.⁶⁶ It literally means a tree stump, so Molière is suggesting that Arnolphe has no real land to name himself after, not even enough for an island. However, it can also be linked to the idea of a family tree, allowing Arnolphe to suggest that he will have many descendants, but as the play goes on this idea seems increasingly ridiculous. Hubert also notes that in Molière's period the word *souche* could also mean blockhead, clearly indictating that the audience ought to have no sympathy for Arnolphe's attempt at self-aggrandisement.⁶⁷

Arnolphe has hired two ignorant servants, Alain and Georgette, to ensure that there can be no intelligent influences on Agnès. Their simplicity is shown when Georgette asks why Arnolphe is upset that a man has been to see Agnès and Alain compares it to a man dipping his finger into another man's soup (II, 3). This scene was criticised by de Visé as offending the *bienséance* and the servants themselves were criticised for being too afraid of Arnolphe. However, this ignores the fact that the servants were performing a comic role, their constant prostration in apparent fear is merely in keeping with the rest of their exaggerated behaviour which would have been intended to provide some humour. The servants form part of the Italian tradition of *lazzi*, which can be defined as an apparently useless digression, yet one which is linked to the basic intention of the scene. It must be unrealistic and allow the actors to display great skill, both verbal and physical, and above all it must be comic.⁶⁸ The quick exchanging of short lines between

⁶⁶ Judd Hubert 'Molière: the Playwright as Protagonist' *Theatre Journal* Vol. 34 No. 3 (October, 1982) p.72.

⁶⁷ Abel Boyer *Boyer's Royal Dictionary Abridged* (London, 1791) p.373.

⁶⁸ Claude Bourqui 'Qu'est-ce qu'un lazzo?' in *Molière à l'école Italienne* ed. by Claude Bourqui and Claudio Vinti (Turin: L'Harmattan Italia, 2003) p.21-22.

the servants shows verbal dexterity and the farcical violence reveals the actors' physical skill and both contribute to the comedy. The comedy also comes from the servants' sudden switch from refusing to open the door to fighting to open the door, and yet in their eagerness to avoid punishment they are able to make Arnolphe wait outside for even longer. Their reactions also serve to highlight the hopelessness of Arnolphe's attempt to control Agnès: since his servants do not obey him, there seems little chance that a wife would obey him voluntarily either. Alain and Georgette provide two forms of comedy, firstly purely farcical, and secondly making Arnolphe's ambitious plan seem even more ridiculous and doomed to failure. Their observations are amusing and serve to illustrate Arnolphe's folly. However, their simplicity works against Arnolphe when it is revealed that they allowed Horace in to the house to see Agnès despite Arnolphe's orders, as they were deceived by the *femme d'intrigue* (II, 2).

The *femme d'intrigue* also takes advantage of Agnès's naivety, as she is easily deceived by the claim that Agnès has made Horace ill. Naively she interprets this literally and invites Horace into the house. If she had not been made so naive by Arnolphe, she may well have seen through this plan and, although she may still have succumbed to Horace rather than Arnolphe it would not have been accidental, nor a consequence of her lack of education. Arnolphe is already being defeated by his own plans.

Vulgarity

In II, 5 Agnès reveals that Horace took something from her, but as she spends eight lines (lines 572-580) slowly revealing it, this leads to a misunderstanding as Arnolphe believes that she is referring to something other than a ribbon. As Parish notes this 'le' could well refer to 'le pucelage' rather than the more innocent 'ruban' which was in fact taken.⁶⁹ This line was widely condemned as being crude and offensive and despite Molière's protestations in *La Critique* that the line was completely innocent, it is clearly deliberately suggestive. This entire scene is full of potentially vulgar *double entendres*,

⁶⁹ Richard Parish 'How (and why) not to take Molière too seriously' in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière* ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.71.

which were enormously popular on the French stage in the Seventeenth Century.⁷⁰ Hall makes particular reference to the puns on gallant language in lines 512-526, especially 'secours' by which Horace means seeing Agnès again, she naively thinks of first aid and Arnolphe thinks of copulation.⁷¹ Hall also draws attention to the use of 'petit chat' and the suggestive silence which follows Agnès's 'le', both of which could be interpreted as slang for virginity.⁷² There are other puns relating to sex such as Agnès sewing 'des cornettes' (line 239), which is suggestive of the cuckold's horns feared by Arnolphe. Arnolphe asks Agnès how she has been during his absence, and when she replies that she was disturbed by fleas during the night, he says she will soon have someone to chase them away (I, 3). Arnolphe is lecherously implying his intention of marrying her, but his failure to specify who will chase the fleas away creates the *quiproquo* in II, 5 about who will be Agnès's husband. Mistakenly Agnès believes that Arnolphe wants her to marry Horace, and is distraught that Arnolphe wants to marry her himself.

Horace

Horace's discussions with Arnolphe were criticised in *Zélinde* and *La Guerre Comique* for being too naïve and telling his rival too much, but they are important as they appear to hand Arnolphe every advantage he could need, yet Arnolphe is still unable to succeed. Whilst this does not excuse Horace's declarations to Arnolphe from a realistic perspective, it should be noted that Horace does not in fact realise that he is talking to his rival, and it is understandable that he would confide in Arnolphe, particularly as Arnolphe has already given him money to help his cause. Horace's revelations do also have a theatrical explanation, as the audience is able to enjoy the reversal of Arnolphe's plans and watch his suffering as he is forced to conceal his identity in order to learn what his rival's next move will be. However, in order to do this he must listen to Horace replaying every detail of Arnolphe's private life as the amusing idiosyncrasies of a stranger, without being able to respond, as he does not want Horace to realise his true

⁷⁰ Gaston Hall *Comedy in Context: Essays on Molière* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984) p.81.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.85.

⁷² *Ibid*, p.93.

identity.⁷³ He is effectively trapped between needing to hear more from Horace and hating every word he hears.

Religion

In an attempt to ensure the loyalty of his future wife, Arnolphe gives her a lecture on a wife's duties and makes her read a list of *maximes de mariage* (III, 2). This scene led to wide condemnation of the play as irreligious and the role of religion in the play is certainly a delicate question: *L'Ecole des Femmes* could be seen as a precursor to *Le Tartuffe* in its treatment of the use (or abuse) of religious doctrine. Through his sermon and the *maximes* Arnolphe makes himself into a 'spiritual director' for Agnès, and could therefore be seen as trying to assume the role of a priest or clergyman, in much the same way that Tartuffe later does, and for the same reason, to gain control of other people.⁷⁴ During this scene Arnolphe also parodies a conventual relationship with his references to Agnès as a novice in a convent who must learn her prayers (lines 739-740).⁷⁵ The key to this debate is to know what Molière is attacking – is it religion itself, its hold over people, or its abuse by frauds who want to control people? There is no definitive answer to this, as there is no firm evidence of Molière's religious views. However, there seems to be evidence within *L'Ecole des Femmes* to suggest that Molière was not attacking religion itself, but rather those who attempt to use it deceitfully to gain an advantage over other people. Although the play is often accused of attacking religion, there are certainly moral lessons to be learnt from the play which condemns Arnolphe's vanity and pride as well as his warped sense of morality which suggests that the only sin is being cuckolded.⁷⁶ The *maximes* were widely criticised for being a parody of the Ten Commandments, for instance in *Zélinde* (scene 3) and *Le Panégyrique* (scene 5). This criticism could be easily defended by the suggestion that an eleventh was to follow,

⁷³ Ibid, p.79.

⁷⁴ Marcel Gutwirth 'Molière and the Women Question: Les Précieuses Ridicules, L'Ecole des Femmes, Les Femmes Savantes' *Theatre Journal* Vol.34, No.3 (October, 1982) p.354.

⁷⁵ Gaston Hall *Comedy in Context: Essays on Molière* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984) p.139.

⁷⁶ Judd Hubert *Molière and the comedy of intellect* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) p.76.

though it must be admitted that this is not a wholly convincing defence, as it does not preclude the possibility that Molière was attacking the Ten Commandments and merely added the eleventh as an attempted defence. However, it seems unlikely that Molière would have been audacious or foolish enough to actually mock one of the foundations of the Judeo-Christian tradition: it is more likely that he is mocking the ‘preacher’ Arnolphe, whose morals are not influenced by religion, he merely finds it a useful tool to control Agnès with. Molière is satirising anyone who attempts to control people through indoctrination, religious or otherwise, by forcing them to learn commandments without understanding them. There is also a comic element in the irony of seeing Arnolphe, who spent the early part of the play stirring up scandal, turned into a moralist.⁷⁷ A stronger defence is Loret’s remark in *La Muse Historique*, which we have already seen, suggesting that both Louis XIV and his mother, who were serious about religious matters, laughed and enjoyed the play, which ought to be enough to prove Molière’s innocence.

Second half of the play

The beautiful love note that Agnès writes and wraps around a stone she has been ordered to throw at Horace was criticised as it was unlikely that she could have written such a fine love note (*Portrait du Peintre* scene 8). This reveals her initiative, which has not been dented by Arnolphe’s attempts to prevent her learning. Despite her upbringing Agnès is ‘driven by a pure, unmediated instinct and has remained a totally amoral, spontaneous being, the pure incarnation of chance’.⁷⁸ She has left the convent ignorant, but importantly not stupid.⁷⁹ Agnès’s naivety is a result of her upbringing and she is able to recognise her own naive ignorance when she asks ‘Croit-on que je me flatte, et qu’enfin, dans ma tête,/ Je ne juge pas bien que je suis une bête?’ (lines 1556-1557).

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.48.

⁷⁸ Roxanne Lalonde ‘L’Ecole des Femmes: matrimony and the laws of chance’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière* ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.167.

⁷⁹ Gaston Hall *Comedy in Context: Essays on Molière* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984) p.140.

Although Molière was criticised for making Agnès appear to change from complete ignorance to extreme cunning in one day, there are some explanations for this change. For instance, Arnolphe has already admitted that he saw something attractive in her at the age of four (lines 129-130), namely an ‘air doux et posé’ which Hubert feels ‘usually indicates intelligence’:⁸⁰ therefore Agnès is merely undereducated, which does not mean that she does not possess a certain amount of innate intelligence and initiative. Her lack of education has left her without the social grace of tact, and this in fact leads to the source of Arnolphe’s anguish as Agnès makes no attempt to hide her feelings for Horace in the way that a more tactful person might have done.⁸¹

Following this, there is a scene of comic misunderstanding between Arnolphe and the notary, who has come to draw up the marriage contract (IV, 2). However, the scene was regarded as not adding to the play, and was criticised in *Zélinde, le Portrait du Peintre, la Lettre sur les Affaires du Théâtre* and *la Guerre Comique*. Although the scene is unnecessary in the basic sense that it does not advance the plot or the action, both Lancaster and Hubert feel that it serves a valuable purpose of highlighting Arnolphe’s emotional state at a key point in the play, but does so in a humorous way. Through the notary’s interventions, Arnolphe’s quasi-tragic plight is rendered farcical⁸² and the scene in which he appears is therefore fully justified as it is a farcical way of showing Arnolphe’s preoccupation, allowing the main character to reveal his emotions, but without wasting the opportunity for humour.⁸³

The play’s *dénouement* seems weak and was criticised by de Visé and Boursault as an improbable *deus ex machina*. The disproportionate amount of effort that Arnolphe has put in over the past thirteen years and the speed with which Agnès and Horace destroy his effort shows his absurd wasted effort and adds to the comedy.

⁸⁰ Judd Hubert ‘Molière: the Playwright as Protagonist’ *Theatre Journal* Vol. 34 No. 3 (October, 1982) p.74.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.78.

⁸² *Ibid*, p.69.

⁸³ Henry Carrington Lancaster *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929) p.249.

Setting

L'Ecole des Femmes was widely criticised for its setting, outside Arnolphe's house, and the fact that all of the scenes take place in a public square. De Visé felt that it was unlikely that the characters would have been alone in the square all day, and also thought it improbable that Arnolphe would have invited Agnès out into a public place after he has made so much effort to keep her hidden from view. He condemned the argument in the street and Arnolphe's ridiculous posturing when he was teaching the servants how to beat Horace (IV, 4). It also surprised Molière's opponents that Arnolphe would go to so much effort to get his servants to let him in, only to then remain outside and ask Agnès to join him, as well as the fact that the three main characters appear to spend all of their time in the street. Lastly Molière was attacked for his *dénouement*, when all of the major characters come together in the street outside Arnolphe's house, as this was again seen as unlikely. These criticisms were based on a line in *Poetics* that 'events which are impossible but plausible should be preferred to those which are possible but implausible'.⁸⁴ Although it is possible that the characters would have spent all day outside, it is unlikely.

In opposition to these criticisms of the play's improbability it should be noted that Corneille himself acknowledges that 'il y a des occasions où il faut préférer [...] le nécessaire au vraisemblance'.⁸⁵ It could therefore be argued that Molière is forced to set the play outside Arnolphe's house in order to keep Horace in ignorance of the relationship between Arnolphe and Agnès: if Horace realised that they were outside Arnolphe's house – rather than M. de Souche's – he would realise that Arnolphe is his rival. The unlikely scene when Arnolphe brings Agnès out into a very public place to talk about ostensibly private matters might simply be a device for showing Arnolphe's overconfidence as he no longer feels the need to conceal Agnès, as he is certain that they will be married the following day. This overconfidence also helps to explain why he has

⁸⁴ Stephen Halliwell *The Poetics of Aristotle – translation and commentary* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) p.60.

⁸⁵ Pierre Corneille *Trois Discours sur le poème dramatique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) p.120.

invited Chrysalde to dinner: presumably like a proud showman, he is eager to show off all the tricks his 'pet' can perform.

This still does not completely resolve the question of why Arnolphe would demand to be allowed entry to his own house but not go in, rather than simply calling for Agnès to come out. Carmody says that in some performances this has been interpreted as Arnolphe asking to be allowed into his property, and so staging the scene at the garden gate, rather than the door of the house.⁸⁶ This is not a wholly satisfactory solution, as if the scenes take place in Arnolphe's garden, then Horace would still see through Arnolphe's double identity. Perhaps a better solution to why Molière included the scene of the servants opening the door is to be found in the role of the servants. If the roles of Alain and Georgette are as important as has already been suggested, then the scene of opening the door plays a major part in introducing them, and allowing them to serve their comedic functions as well as ridiculing their master. If this scene is viewed as a *lazzo* then the realism of the scene is unimportant.

Contemporary Context

Certain elements of the play which may appear strange to a modern audience can be explained by a brief examination of the contemporary views. According to the traditional attitude women were 'in an eternally submissive posture before the stronger sex'.⁸⁷ This view was supported and defended by reference to the Bible, and by the arguments that man had been created first, women were created later as companions for men and that the Fall of man was Eve's fault. However, in one of his earlier plays, *L'Ecole des Maris*, Molière argues for a more tolerant attitude towards women, suggesting that their love and obedience can be obtained more readily by offering them some, limited, freedom. *L'Ecole des Femmes* is another satire of the traditional view.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.135.

⁸⁷ Wendy Gibson *Women in Seventeenth-Century France* (London: MacMillan, 1989) p.41.

Girls could be married from the age of 12, usually in arranged marriages, and could be beaten, kept under surveillance and have their correspondence examined.⁸⁸ Marriages were usually ‘arranged for them, often in spite of them, and for considerations likely to benefit their progenitors and posterity’.⁸⁹ This is in fact what happens at the end of *L’Ecole des Femmes*: the marriage between Agnès and Horace was arranged without their knowledge or consent, and initially Horace is horrified to learn that a marriage has been arranged for him. The play ends happily, but this shows that Molière was not rejecting or satirising the idea of arranged marriages, he is satirising the behaviour of husbands towards their new brides, or in this instance, their brides-to-be. In *L’Ecole des Maris* and *L’Ecole des Femmes*, Molière is attempting to show that arranged marriages can be happy, provided that the husband is prepared to treat his wife with love, or at the very least, respect. There is no evidence in either play that Molière wanted women to be treated as equals by their husbands, merely that they should not be kept prisoners or treated like caged animals.

In spite of this apparently harsh life, women rarely rebelled and were often excited by the idea of marriage, much as Agnès is when she is first told that she will be getting married, though the excitement at the prospect of marriage may have been because the only choices for young girls were to get married or go into a convent.⁹⁰ Women’s education in the seventeenth century concentrated on preparing them for marriage, and often took place in religious institutions where they could be blinded to reality. In convents ‘[i]nitiation into reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic took second place’ to religious instruction.⁹¹ The limits of the curriculum would have made the convent the ‘ideal prison for the mind as well as the body’ which Molière satirises in *L’Ecole des Femmes*.⁹²

⁸⁸ Jean Butin *L’Ecole des Femmes* (Paris: Hatier, 1984) p.18.

⁸⁹ Wendy Gibson *Women in Seventeenth-Century France* (London: MacMillan, 1989) p.43.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.41.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.27.

⁹² *Ibid*, p.28.

Chapter 3 – Initial Criticisms and Molière’s response

Jean Donneau de Visé

The most outspoken of Molière’s critics, Jean Donneau de Visé, was born in Paris in December 1638. He contributed a journal article and two plays (which were the first plays he wrote) to the debate around *L’Ecole des Femmes*. Lérés says he wrote a total of eighteen plays throughout his career, but as he wrongly attributes *La Vengeance des Marquis* to the actor de Villiers for no clear reason, it is more likely to be nineteen.⁹³ Mélése describes him as a ‘polémiste, romancier, auteur dramatique, historiographe’.⁹⁴ The use of ‘polémiste’ is appropriate, as much of his literary criticism was radical and controversial, and took advantage of current literary debate. He was not simply a playwright, but became a well-rounded man of letters and also went on to establish a famous journal, *Le Mercure Galant*, in 1672, which frequently featured his literary criticisms. De Visé also used this journal to promote his collaborative plays with Thomas Corneille, most notably *La Devineresse* (first staged in November 1679).⁹⁵ He appears to have been extremely ambitious and Mélése, as well as describing him as ‘l’ambitieux’, says that de Visé’s attack in *Nouvelles nouvelles* was ‘poussé par le désir de faire parler de lui’.⁹⁶ This suggests that the fastest way to ensure his notoriety was to become involved in the literary debates of the day. Further evidence that de Visé was using his literary criticism for his own ends can be seen in his views on Pierre Corneille’s play *Sophonisbe* (performed in January 1663). Initially de Visé was extremely critical of the work, but subsequently changed his mind following the publication of an article by the abbé d’Aubignac which criticized *Sophonisbe*. De Visé appears to have realized that as d’Aubignac was a more famous writer, the best chance

⁹³ Antoine de Lérés *Dictionnaire Portatif des Théâtres* (Paris, 1754) p.536-537.

⁹⁴ Pierre Mélése, *Un Homme de Lettres au temps du Grand Roi Donneau de Visé Fondateur du Mercure Galant* (Paris: Librairie E Droz, 1936) p.v.

⁹⁵ Jan Clarke *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris 1673-1680 Volume III* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998) p.49.

⁹⁶ Pierre Mélése, *Un Homme de Lettres au temps du Grand Roi Donneau de Visé Fondateur du Mercure Galant* (Paris: Librairie E Droz, 1936) p.4-16.

for him to make his opinion heard was by contradicting him. This view is supported by Clarke, who says ‘[e]vidently deciding that he would gain more publicity by defending Corneille than attacking him, de Visé then reversed his position to take up Corneille’s defence in the same way he later would for Molière’.⁹⁷ De Visé therefore wrote a second article, contradicting his first work and disagreeing with everything d’Aubignac said. De Visé’s published justification was that the first time he had been to see the play he had been looking for things to criticise, whereas the second time he had been viewing it more positively. The weakness of this explanation is glaringly obvious.

As has already briefly been mentioned in the citation from Clarke, de Visé did not remain Molière’s enemy for long. Molière’s troupe performed de Visé’s *Mère Coquette* in September 1665⁹⁸ and de Visé wrote a letter, a ‘highly sympathetic analysis’⁹⁹ to precede Molière’s play *Le Misanthrope* when it was published in early 1667, neither of which would have happened if there had been a lasting feud. Perhaps the clearest sign of a reconciliation is that, after Molière’s death, de Visé is described, along with the King’s advisor Jacques Baudelot, as ‘amis de Marie-Madeline-Esprit Pocquelin’, Molière’s daughter.¹⁰⁰

De Visé’s entry into the querelle

De Visé first rose to prominence around the time of the *querelle* as a result of his publication *Nouvelles nouvelles*, for which he obtained a *privilège* on 28 February 1662 although it was not printed until 9 February 1663. This delay was to prove providential, as it allowed him to join the growing debate around *L’Ecole des Femmes*. It was in the

⁹⁷ Jan Clarke *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris 1673-1680 Volume III* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998) p.43.

⁹⁸ Bert Edward Young and Grace Philputt Young *Le Registre de la Grange Tome I* (Paris: E Droz, 1947) p.79.

⁹⁹ Frederick Wright Vogler *Molière Mocked: Three Contemporary Hostile Comedies: Donneau de Visé Zélinde (1663), Boursault Le Portrait du Peintre (1663), Le Boulanger de Chalussay Élomire Hypocondre (1670)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973) p.20.

¹⁰⁰ Madeleine Jurgens and Elizabeth Maxfield Miller *Cent Ans de Recherches sur Molière, sur sa famille et sur les comédiens de sa troupe* (Paris, 1963) p.661.

third volume of *Nouvelles nouvelles* that de Visé published the first written attack on *L'Ecole des Femmes*. The article is an imaginary literary discussion concerning Molière's fame and a summary of his career to that point, which Wright Vogler describes as an 'acid mixture of faint praise and energetic fault-finding'.¹⁰¹ De Visé begins by praising Molière, describing him as 'le peintre ingénieux de tant de beaux tableaux' and says that 'il peut passer pour le Terence de notre siècle'.¹⁰² He also says that Molière should be praised

'pour avoir choisi entre tous les sujets que *Straparole* lui fournissent, celui qui venait le mieux au temps [...] pour n'en avoir tiré que ce qu'il fallait, et l'avoir si bien mis en vers [...] pour avoir si bien joué son rôle, pour avoir si judicieusement distribué tous les autres'.¹⁰³

This contains a criticism that will be examined in more detail later, namely that Molière took elements from other plays and incorporated them in his own. De Visé's praise of Molière also contains another veiled criticism, as he says that Molière is a fine actor 'lorsqu'il joue ses pièces'.¹⁰⁴ This refers to the belief that Molière was a poor tragic actor, so de Visé suggests, while praising Molière, that this praise only applies to his comic acting. To reinforce this point, de Visé turns to his criticisms of Molière, beginning by saying '[i]l fut trouvé incapable de jouer aucunes pièces sérieuses'.¹⁰⁵ De Visé then repeats this accusation, and also criticises Molière for copying his acting style from the Italians, by saying 'il jouât fort mal le sérieux, et [...] dans le comique il ne fût qu'une copie de Trivelin, et de Scaramouche'.¹⁰⁶ Although this may seem an innocent

¹⁰¹ Frederick Wright Vogler *Molière Mocked: Three Contemporary Hostile Comedies: Donneau de Visé Zélinde (1663), Boursault Le Portrait du Peintre (1663), Le Boulanger de Chalussay Élomire Hypocondre(1670)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973) p.17.

¹⁰² Jean Donneau de Visé *Nouvelles nouvelles* in Molière *Oeuvres Complètes Texte Etabli, Présenté et Annoté par Georges Couton* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971) p. 1017-1023.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p.1022.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1017.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p.1018.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.1018.

suggestion, it was to be a constant criticism levelled against Molière, particularly the accusation that he had copied the leading actor of the *Comédie Italienne*, Scaramouche. It is also raised by de Visé (*Zélinde* scene 8 (July 1663) and *La Vengeance des Marquis* scene 5 (November 1663)) and Montfleury (*L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé* lines 178-179 (December 1663)), as well as by Somaize in *les Véritables Précieuses* (performed in 1660). Somaize, writing shortly before the *querelle*, says in his preface that Molière imitates the Italians,

‘pas seulement en ce qu’ils ont joué sur leur theatre; mais encore en leur postures, contrefaisant sans cesse sur le sien et Trivelin et Scaramouche’,¹⁰⁷

which is almost identical to de Visé’s criticism. If this criticism is accurate, there remains the question of whether, as with the allegations of plagiarism which were also levelled at Molière during the *querelle*, it is really a criticism. Certainly, Molière was far from unique in using other sources for inspiration, and it therefore seems that this was more widely accepted than the *querelle* suggests.

De Visé also takes this opportunity to make the first suggestion that Molière borrows elements from other plays ‘comme il n’était encore ni assez hardi pour entreprendre une satire, ni assez capable pour en venir à bout, il eut recours aux Italiens’.¹⁰⁸ De Visé also includes the first of several attacks on Molière’s private life, claiming that his portraits of cuckolds and jealous husbands are so accurate because ‘il est du nombre de ces derniers’.¹⁰⁹ De Visé also confirms that he is worried about Molière’s reaction, and so some of the criticisms contain elements of flattery, such as saying that ‘ses ouvrages n’ayant pas tout le mérite de sa personne [...] c’est un fort galant homme’.¹¹⁰ With the notable exception of the unsubstantiated claim that Molière was a jealous husband, the discussion is relatively balanced, praising parts of his acting and writing but also

¹⁰⁷ Somaize *Les Véritables Précieuses* (Paris: Jean Ribou, 1660) p.8.

¹⁰⁸ Jean Donneau de Visé *Nouvelles nouvelles* in Molière *Oeuvres Complètes Texte Etabli, Présenté et Annoté par Georges Couton* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971) p.1018.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.1022.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.1016.

criticising other elements. Often the criticisms are softened by a line praising Molière, while the praise is succeeded by a veiled criticism. De Visé raises two criticisms which were to become a theme throughout the *querelle* by suggesting that Molière's acting and writing was influenced by the Italians. Their influence on his acting has already been briefly discussed, and Seventeenth-Century acting will be examined in more detail in the chapter on *L'Impromptu de Versailles*. As for their influence on his writing, that will be mentioned again later in this chapter, and in more detail in connection with *Zélinde* and *Le Portrait du Peintre*. De Visé does appear to have been concerned by Molière's possible reaction, as he includes the suggestion that Molière ought not to be offended by this article 'puisque'il fait profession ouverte de publier en plein théâtre, les vérités de tout le monde' and therefore must allow other authors to do the same to him.¹¹¹

De Visé then gives his attention to Molière's other works, and again his views are relatively balanced. His fulsome praise of *Le Cocu Imaginaire* ('la meilleure de toutes ses pièces, et la mieux écrite') cancels out his scathing remarks about *Dom Garcie* ('il suffit de vous dire que c'était une pièce sérieuse, et qu'il en avait le premier rôle, pour vous faire connaître que l'on ne s'y devait pas beaucoup divertir').¹¹² His reviews of *L'Ecole des Maris* and *Les Fâcheux* are relatively balanced, with the former predominately praised, while the latter is criticised, but it is pointed out that both have their merits and defects. The lines in *L'Ecole des Maris* are 'moins bons que ceux du *Cocu imaginaire*', but the plot is 'tout à fait bien conduit', and it is only prevented from joining the ranks of Corneille's *Le Menteur* and Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin's *Les Visionnaires* because it is not five acts long.¹¹³ Couton describes these two plays as 'les deux grandes comédies de la première moitié du siècle, qui ont gardé le plus de réputation',¹¹⁴ so de Visé is offering high praise. He is more critical of *Les Fâcheux*, which is 'un amas de portraits détachés' and the plot is 'autant méchant que l'on puisse

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.1017.

¹¹² Ibid, p1019-1020.

¹¹³ Ibid, p.1020.

¹¹⁴ Molière *Oeuvres Complètes Texte Etabli, Présenté et Annoté par Georges Couton* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971) p.1382.

imaginer', leaving him to suggest that it 'ne doit pas être appelée une pièce de théâtre'.¹¹⁵ However, he highlights as a redeeming feature the portraits which are 'si naturellement représentés, si bien touchés, et si bien finis, qu'il en mérité beaucoup de gloire'.¹¹⁶ He is less balanced with regard to *Le Dépit Amoureux*, devoting only one line to the play, which 'valait beaucoup moins que la première [*Les Précieuses Ridicules*]'.¹¹⁷ *Les Précieuses Ridicules* itself receives a more balanced review, beginning with the criticism that the inspiration came from the Italians as '[ils] ne lui plaisant pas seulement dans leur jeu ; mais encore dans leurs comédies, il en fit une [pièce] qu'il tira de plusieurs des leurs'.¹¹⁸ This is therefore the first of many suggestions that Molière relied for his inspiration and success on copying the plays of other people; however, it is frequently acknowledged that if Molière is taking his inspiration from other sources, he does at least improve on the original. This acknowledgement comes in the praise for *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, as de Visé notes that Molière 'les habilla admirablement bien à la française'.¹¹⁹

Having thus reviewed Molière's career and character prior to *L'Ecole des Femmes*, de Visé continues to mix criticism and praise, first attributing Molière's success to fashion, then praising his characters for being true to life. De Visé begins with a general lament that people no longer judge plays according to their worth, 'peu de personnes approuvent aujourd'hui ce qu'elles louent', and says that this is because they 'croiraient passer pour stupides et pour ignorants, s'ils n'approuvaient pas ce que les autres approuvent'.¹²⁰ Then turning specifically to Molière, de Visé says that Molière's early success 'lui fit connaître que l'on aimait la satire, et la bagatelle', and that Molière 'vit

¹¹⁵ Jean Donneau de Visé *Nouvelles nouvelles* in Molière *Oeuvres Complètes Texte Etabli, Présenté et Annoté par Georges Couton* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971) p1020.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.1020.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.1018.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.1018.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.1019.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p.1016.

bien qu'il fallait qu'il s'accommodât au temps'.¹²¹ Molière's plays certainly attract large audiences, but, according to de Visé, 'l'on y venait par coutume, sans dessein d'écouter la comédie, et sans savoir ce que l'on y jouait'.¹²² This is the first suggestion that Molière's success was a result of fashion rather than his own talent, a criticism which was to recur throughout the *querelle*. However, it is difficult to regard this as a true criticism of Molière, as even if he is simply taking advantage of the popular taste, that is hardly a reason to attack him. It is also a criticism which could have been leveled at de Visé, who sought to take advantage of the public's enjoyment of literary debate. In fact, in the preface to one of his plays, *Le Mariage de Bacchus et d'Ariane*, de Visé appears to admit that he is simply following the popular taste, saying '[a]s we are in a century where music and ballet have charms for everyone, so that spectacles full of them are far better attended than others, the author of *Les Amours du Soleil* [de Visé] wanted this year to give a play in which the music and ballet entries would be as special as the machines were in his last work'.¹²³ As this was written almost a decade after the *querelle*, it is possible that de Visé had lost the idealism of his youth which had caused him to criticise Molière for following the public taste, but it is more likely that he originally criticised Molière for following fashion simply out of jealousy and in an attempt to find reasons to attack Molière's career.

However, de Visé again attempts to mix praise and criticism, saying that many nobles go to Molière's plays 'croyant qu'il y avait de la gloire pour eux que l'on reconnût leurs impertinences dans ses ouvrages'.¹²⁴ This is almost certainly intended as praise for Molière's characters, which are supposedly accurate and life-like enough, that people can instantly recognise who he is depicting. Once again though, de Visé switches between praise and criticism, by suggesting that Molière's plays succeed as a result of

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p.1019.

¹²² *Ibid*, p.1018.

¹²³ Jan Clarke *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris 1673-1680 Volume III* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998) p.83.

¹²⁴ Jean Donneau de Visé *Nouvelles nouvelles* in Molière *Oeuvres Complètes Texte Etabli, Présenté et Annoté par Georges Couton* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971) p.1019.

the number of nobles who go to see if they have been depicted, ‘et non pas leur bonté toute seule’.¹²⁵

L’Ecole des Femmes

De Visé then turns to *L’Ecole des Femmes*, which is again praised and criticised. He begins by highlighting the controversy surrounding the play, and its early success, by saying ‘tout le monde l’a trouvée méchante, et tout le monde y a couru [...] elle a réussi sans avoir plu’.¹²⁶ Initially he complains that ‘elle est mal nommée’, and that the only difference between *L’Ecole des Femmes* and *L’Ecole des Maris* ‘c’est que l’Agnès de *L’Ecole des Femmes* est un peu plus sotte et plus ignorante que l’Isabelle de *L’Ecole des Maris*’.¹²⁷ It is certainly true that there is a large degree of overlap between the two plays in terms of plot and moral, but the action differs, and the characters in *L’Ecole des Femmes* are much more developed. De Visé then returns to the criticism that ‘[l]e sujet de ces deux pièces n’est point de son invention, il est tiré de divers endroits’, and cites Boccace, Douville, Scarron and Straparole as the main inspirations. As has been shown in the chapter on *L’Ecole des Femmes*, there is some evidence that Molière used elements of Scarron’s play, but de Visé then weakens his own argument by saying that ‘ce qu’il y a de plus beau dans la dernière [la pièce de Scarron], est tiré d’un livre intitulé *Les Nuits facétieuses du seigneur Straparole*’.¹²⁸ This suggests that it was not uncommon for playwrights to use material written by other authors, so Molière is not doing anything wrong, and the criticism that he uses other people’s work appears to be more an implication that he cannot devise his own plots. The *Lettres au Mercure sur Molière, sa Vie, ses Œuvres*, written between 1735 and 1740, and usually attributed to Mme Paul Poisson, partially concurs with the allegation that Molière borrowed his plots

¹²⁵ Ibid, p.1020.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.1021.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p.1021.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p.1021.

from other plays, calling it ‘vrai dans un sens’.¹²⁹ However, it is swiftly suggested that Molière’s skill and the ‘manière dont il traitoit ses sujets avoit autant de grâce et de nouveauté que les sujets même qui étoient de son invention’.¹³⁰

De Visé sums up his view on *L’Ecole des Femmes* as ‘c’est le sujet le plus mal conduit qui fût jamais, et je suis prêt à soutenir qu’il n’y a point de scène où l’on ne puisse faire voir une infinité de fautes’.¹³¹ However, rather than revealing these faults, he switches tack entirely and begins praising aspects of the play, which he now describes as ‘un monstre qui a de belles parties, et que jamais l’on ne vit tant de si bonnes, et de si méchantes choses ensemble’.¹³² He continues to balance his view by saying

‘[i]l y a des endroits qui sont inimitables, et qui sont si bien exprimés, que je manque de termes assez forts et assez significatifs pour vous les bien faire concevoir [...] ce sont des portraits de la nature qui peuvent passer pour originaux’.¹³³

Lastly he says ‘[j]amais comédie ne fut si bien représentée, ni avec tant d’art’,¹³⁴ so although he is criticising the writing of the play, he is still happy to praise Molière’s acting.

As an acknowledgement of this potential response by Molière, de Visé tells us that he has heard that Molière is preparing a reply and ‘[n]ous errons dans peu [...] une pièce de lui, intitulée *La Critique de L’Ecole des Femmes*, où il dit toutes les fautes que l’on

¹²⁹ Madame Paul Poisson *Lettres au Mercure sur Molière, sa Vie, ses Oeuvres* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969) p.11.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p.11.

¹³¹ Jean Donneau de Visé *Nouvelles nouvelles* in Molière *Oeuvres Complètes Texte Etabli, Présenté et Annoté par Georges Couton* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971) p.1021.

¹³² *Ibid*, p.1021.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p.1021.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p.1021.

reprend dans sa pièce, et les excuse en même temps'.¹³⁵ De Visé claims that the play had originally been written by the abbé du Buisson, which Molière had rejected, 'croyant qu'il était seul capable de se donner des louanges'.¹³⁶ Again he mixes criticism and praise, describing it as 'cette ingénieuse apologie', but saying that it 'ne la [*L'Ecole des Femmes*] fera pas croire meilleure qu'elle est'.¹³⁷ De Visé finishes his article with a military image to show how unjust he thinks it is that Molière is allowed to defend his own play:

'il connaît les ennemis qu'il a à combattre, [...] il sait l'ordre de la bataille, [...] il ne les attaquera que par des endroits dont il sera sûr de sortir à son honneur, [...] il se mettra en état de ne recevoir aucun coup qu'il ne puisse parer. Il sera de plus chef d'un des partis, et juge du combat tout ensemble et ne manquera pas de favoriser les siens'.¹³⁸

Although this is a justifiable criticism, it would have been more justifiable had Molière received more literary support during the debate, but in reality he appears to have had little choice but to defend himself.

De Visé did not therefore confine his literary criticism in *Nouvelles nouvelles* solely to Molière, having already analysed one of Corneille's plays, nor solely to *L'Ecole des Femmes*. His article in *Nouvelles nouvelles* is only a mild attack, certainly by comparison with his later attacks, and contains a predominantly balanced view, praising some aspects of Molière's plays and talent, but also criticising freely. It is regrettable that he includes the suggestion that Molière is a jealous lover, as it lowers the tone of an otherwise balanced article, and unlike his other criticisms, which may be pedantic, there does not seem to be any justification for it. However, the rest of the article seems to confirm the general view of Molière as a talented comic actor, who struggled to be

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p.1022.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p.1022.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p.1022.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p.1022-1023.

successful in tragedies, wrote developed and realistic characters, was popular with the nobility, but, like many authors, took inspiration from other plays and tailored his work to suit contemporary tastes. De Visé's final attack on Molière, for acting as judge and jury in his own 'trial', is a point worth emphasising – Molière is able to determine which areas of his play he feels need defending, and also continues the fight in a battleground of his choosing, namely the theatre.

La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes

La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes was first performed on 1 June 1663, published on 21 July 1663 and dedicated to Louis XIV's mother, Anne of Austria. According to Duchêne, she was very religious, but also enjoyed plays, therefore making her a valuable supporter for Molière when he was accused of impiety in *L'Ecole des Femmes*.¹³⁹ The play is based on a discussion about *L'Ecole des Femmes* featuring three characters who support Molière and three who oppose him. Molière structures his defence by giving the most preposterous objections to the most ridiculous characters, thus making his critics appear stupid. Molière's opponents are mocked by the wittier and more intelligent characters.

It is worth asking why Molière chose to respond to the criticism, both with *La Critique* and later with *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (October 1663). At first glance it appears obvious that he wrote them to defend himself from attacks, but as his contemporary critics, most notably de Visé, noted, *La Critique* does not defend all of the points which were criticised, and *L'Impromptu* mentions very few of them. Also, the plays appeared at interesting times. When *La Critique* was first performed, the only critical material was de Visé's article in *Nouvelles nouvelles*, which contained minor criticisms and quite a lot of praise. It was certainly unlikely to have spurred Molière into responding, especially as de Visé mentions that Molière was already planning to respond before the article appeared. It is worth noting that *La Critique* was only performed straight after performances of *L'Ecole des Femmes*. It could, therefore, be suggested that Molière used the *querelle* as a way of increasing the size of the audience after interest in *L'Ecole*

¹³⁹ Rene Duchêne *Molière* (Paris: Fayard, 1998) p.331.

des Femmes was waning. According to la Grange's *Registre* the final performance of *L'Ecole des Femmes* on 8 April made just 387 *livres*, whereas the first performance with *La Critique* added, on 1 June, made 1357 *livres*, showing the renewed interest it caused.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the performance of both of Molière's plays led to renewed attacks, rather than ending the *querelle*, making it seem more unlikely that he wrote them to defend himself.

The Action

The play is set in the rooms of Uranie, one of Molière's supporters and begins with her and her cousin, Elise, awaiting the arrival of Dorante for dinner. Serroy suggests that the character names may be revealing of their nature, with Uranie having celestial connotations fitting for someone of her position, while Elise is linked to the Latin word meaning 'to choose', showing her selective nature, but also that she chooses the correct side by supporting Molière. His opponents have less flattering names, Climène coming from the Greek for reputation, though her reputation is a negative one, while Lysidas means 'le fils de loup', which suggests he will not be kind-hearted and generous.¹⁴¹

Elise and Uranie give a very unflattering portrait of the *précieuse* Climène as completely ridiculous and say that she is a 'précieuse, à prendre le mot dans sa plus mauvais signification' (scene 2). This description of her is intended to weaken her arguments when she starts condemning the play, as Molière wants to make his critics look as ridiculous as possible, so that the audience will laugh at their arguments. Climène claims that *L'Ecole des Femmes* has given her 'mal de coeur' (scene 3) because of the improprieties in it and ludicrously claims that it will take her a fortnight to recover. She criticises the supposed obscenities of '[l]es enfants par l'oreille' and 'tarte à la crème', although neither of those lines is particularly offensive, certainly not in comparison to other lines. Her arguments also reveal that she is not the elegant character she wishes to appear, and Elise ironically praises her use of the verb 'vomir' (scene 3). Elise

¹⁴⁰ Bert Young & Grace Young *Le Registre de la Grange Tome I* (Paris: Librairie E Droz, 1947) p.55-57.

¹⁴¹ Molière *L'Ecole des Maris, l'Ecole des Femmes, la Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes et l'Impromptu de Versailles*, édition présenté par Jean Serroy (Paris: Gallimard, 1985) p.335.

sarcastically pretends to agree with Climène, claiming to have been won over by her arguments, allowing her to make fun of everything Climène says, without Climène noticing.

Uranie, unlike Elise, continues to argue with Climène and is critical of women who claim to be offended when there is nothing to be offended by. As an example of this ridiculous behaviour, she tells about the women who were watching *L'Ecole des Femmes* in the box opposite her. Their exaggerated expressions and reactions led to one of the laquais claiming that they are 'plus chastes des Oreilles que de tout le reste du corps' (Scene 3), showing that people were criticising the morality of the play even when their own behaviour was not exemplary. Climène criticises the 'obscenity' in the scene where Arnolphe asks Agnès what Horace had taken from her. Uranie claims that this scene was entirely innocent, since Horace had simply taken a ribbon. This leads to the defence that Molière's critics are seeing obscenities where none were intended, but this is not a strong defence as the layout of Agnès's lines clearly indicates that the line was not meant to be interpreted innocently, even if the eventual noun is perfectly innocent. Climène's justified attack of the 'le' is her only sensible speech, and helps to balance the play more evenly.¹⁴² Molière's opponents may, like most of his comic protagonists, appear ridiculous but being ridiculous does not mean that they are incapable of occasionally being right. Similarly the Marquis then gives his only sensible reply at the end of scene 5, saying that Dorante is trying to defend the play by satirising those who attacked it, rather than by highlighting the qualities of the play.¹⁴³

The Marquis sides with Climène, describing *L'Ecole des Femmes* as 'impertinente', though his first criticism of it is that there were so many people there to see it that he was 'étouffé à la porte' and that never have so many people trod on his toes (Scene 4). Not only does this criticism show that the play was successful despite the scandal it caused, it also makes the Marquis appear foolish, especially when Elise sarcastically agrees that '[il] la [condamne] avec justice' (Scene 4). This depiction of a foolish

¹⁴² Bobra Goldsmith 'Molière's 'Défense et Illustration': *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*' in *The French Review* Vol. 50 No. 5 (April, 1977) p.692-693.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p.692-693.

marquis led to claims that Molière was ridiculing the nobility, but marquis were not generally highly regarded amongst the nobility, as many people who were not eligible for the title nevertheless adopted it. As Gaines notes ‘the term *faux marquis* became a synonym for usurper’,¹⁴⁴ making them a safer target than any other members of the nobility.

The chevalier Dorante at last arrives and proceeds to take Molière’s side in a debate with the Marquis. The Marquis is unable to justify his opposition to the play, saying that the play ‘est détestable, parce qu’elle est détestable’ (scene 5), and admitting that he had not listened to the play. This forms a stark contrast with Uranie’s earlier statement that not only had she watched the play but she had also ‘écoutée d’un bout à l’autre’ (scene 2). This is an attempt to show that Molière’s critics had not paid attention to the play, and so have no real basis for their criticisms, whereas anyone who listened throughout will support Molière.

Uranie then says that the play is mocking customs, rather than people and it is simply ‘[une] thèse générale’ (Scene 6), from which they ought to try to learn. According to Norman, Molière’s characters represent a general satire of manners, rather than a specific attack on an identifiable figure.¹⁴⁵ Molière was painting a portrait of an individual character, such as Arnolphe, but using this character to elaborate a general thesis about contemporary society.¹⁴⁶ Climène then criticises Molière for calling women ‘des animaux’ (*EdF* V, 5), but Uranie then asks ‘[ne] voyez-vous pas que c’est un ridicule qu’il fait parler’ (scene 6) so his words ought not to be taken seriously. The Marquis then infuriates Dorante by repeating *tarte à la crème* five times whenever Dorante or Uranie try to ask a question. Elise sarcastically agrees that the Marquis has found the best way to debate the matter. Molière is using the Marquis to show that he is being criticised not simply by people who have failed to understand the play, but in fact

¹⁴⁴ James Gaines *Social Structures in Molière’s Theater* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984) p.27.

¹⁴⁵ Larry Norman ‘Molière as Satirist’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière* ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.63.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.64.

by people who have made no attempt to understand it. They are therefore unable to give even rudimentary arguments to any questions about why they are criticising it.

The discussion then takes the form of Lysidas listing six objections to *L'Ecole des Femmes* and Dorante replying to each of them. Lysidas claims the play ignores the Aristotelian rules, but Dorante says they should not be taken that seriously, describing them as 'observations aisées', and saying it is more important to be entertaining (scene 6). Lysidas then objects that there is not enough action in the play as it consists solely of *récits*. Dorante responds to this by saying that the *récits*, which leave the listener 'dans une confusion à réjouir les spectateurs' (scene 6), give abundant scope for comic mime and grimaces, and are therefore a form of action. They are almost more important for what they allow Arnolphe as a listener to mime than they are for the verbal content. Lysidas then criticises the vulgarity of the play, as well as the scene between Alain and Georgette for being too long. Dorante suggests the servants show Arnolphe being tricked by their innocence as well as Agnès's innocence, and claims that the line about children being born through the ear is funny 'par réflexion à Arnolphe' (Scene 6), and not offensive. Lysidas then criticises Arnolphe for giving away his money too generously and for mocking religion with his sermon and the *maximes*. Dorante feels that the letter from his friend is sufficient to merit Arnolphe's generosity, and also claims that 'il n'est pas incompatible qu'une personne soit ridicule en de certaines choses et honnête homme en d'autres' (scene 6). As has already been suggested, Arnolphe may have had a less than pure motive for lending Horace money, but the debate about it allows Molière to express his view that characters should not be one-dimensional. Dorante defends the attack on religion by saying that 'vrais dévots qui l'ont ouï n'ont pas trouvé qu'il choquât' (scene 6) and that the excessive language is justified by Arnolphe's hyperbolic character. The debate is broken off by the Marquis's refusal to listen and his singing whenever Dorante speaks. The Marquis adds to the farce elements with his constant silly interruptions which prevent the discussion from developing, and his singing reveals the final triumph of nonsense over reason.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Bobra Goldsmith 'Molière's 'Défense et Illustration': *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*' in *The French Review* Vol. 50 No. 5 (April, 1977) p.696.

Comedy compared to Tragedy

Lysidas claims ‘il y a une grande difference de toutes ces bagatelles à la beauté des pièces sérieuses’ (Scene 6). Dorante maintains tragedy is easier to write, because comedy has to make people’s faults amusing, and Molière’s depictions have to be accurate, not imaginary. This claim was supported by Guez de Balzac’s work of 1644 *Discours sixième: Réponse à deux questions, ou du Caractère et de l’Instruction de la Comédie*¹⁴⁸. In this work Balzac protests against the excessive eloquence of tragedies, as Molière does in *L’Impromptu de Versailles*, when he mocks the language and oratorical skills of his rivals at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. There are further similarities between Guez de Balzac’s argument and Dorante’s as both argue that comedy has charm and that tragic heroes are easier to write, as they do not have to be an accurate portrait and details can be left to the imagination.¹⁴⁹ However, according to Molière’s view of comedy, the characters on stage had to mirror real life so that the audience could recognise them and learn from their vices. This explains his claim that it was hard to amuse the ‘honnêtes gens’. His attack may have been motivated by his pride and a desire to make his work appear greater since it was harder to write, but it seems unlikely that this was a deliberate attack on tragic authors, as some critics have suggested.

The Audience

The Marquis also says that it cannot have been amusing because the spectators in the *parterre* were amused by it. Ravel underlines the importance of the *parterre* spectators by pointing out that they usually made up ‘between one-half to two thirds’ of the theatre audience, and so it is clear that Molière would have had to take into account their reaction to a play, as well as trying to entertain the audience at Court.¹⁵⁰ Although it must be noted that Ravel was writing about a slightly later period than the *querelle*, almost no documents relating to the audience in the 1660s survive. However, Clarke

¹⁴⁸ Louis Herland ‘Une source de ‘la Critique de l’Ecole des Femmes’ ou Molière, lecteur de Balzac’ in *Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France* 53 Année No. 2 (1958) p. 154.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.155-156.

¹⁵⁰ Jeffery Ravel *The Contested Parterre: public theater and French political culture* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999) p.8.

and Lough have analysed the documents from the 1670s and 1680s. Both support Ravel's suggestion that the *parterre* represented about two thirds of audiences in that period, as Clarke puts the total figure at sixty-seven percent.¹⁵¹ Lough is less precise, suggesting that the audience varied depending on how new the play was, as ticket prices were higher for new performances, which reduced the size of the *parterre*¹⁵².

Dorante criticises the Marquis' view, saying that the price of the seat does not affect the judgement of the spectator and tells the story of one of their friends, who went to a comedy but refused to laugh when the *parterre* laughed, and his behaviour was almost as amusing as the play on stage. Dorante says that in fact he usually judges a play according to the approval of the *parterre* as mostly they do not judge according to theory but according to whether or not they enjoyed the play, which he thinks is the correct way to judge a play. He also condemns people who claim to have a learned opinion, when they know nothing about plays and applaud at the wrong moments. In his dedication to his play *la Suivante* (1637), Corneille agrees with the importance of public opinion rather than learned criticism, saying 'surtout gagnons la voix publique ; autrement, notre pièce aura beau être régulière, si elle est sifflée au Théâtre, les Savants n'oseront se déclarer en notre faveur'.¹⁵³ Molière is therefore trying to win over a large and influential proportion of his audience by flattering them, and underlining their importance.

Dorante later balances his defence of the *parterre* by defending the judgement of the Court and claims that 'la grande épreuve [des] comedies, c'est le jugement de la cour' (Scene 6). This defence of the Court was a political move, designed to ensure that Molière had the support of the most powerful members of his audience, as well as the

¹⁵¹ Jan Clarke *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris 1673-1680 Volume I* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998) p.294.

¹⁵² John Lough *Paris Theatre Audiences in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) p.99-100.

¹⁵³ Véronique Lochert 'La Méditation de la Lecture Contre les Agréments de la Représentation : Lecteurs et Spectateurs dans les Querelles Dramatiques' in Emmanuelle Hénin *Les Querelles Dramatiques à l'âge Classique* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010) p.120.

support of the most numerous element. However, there was a further reason to appeal to the Court, rather than the *parterre*, as although the *parterre* made up most of Molière's audience, they appear to have only contributed a third of the takings, with the rest coming from the more expensive boxes and seats on stage occupied by the richer nobility.¹⁵⁴ Although this figure again refers to the 1670s and 1680s, there is unlikely to have been much difference to the 1660s, and so Molière's praise of the Court's taste is in reality an attempt to flatter the people who paid his wages, which follows his flattery of the largest proportion of his spectators.

Who judges?

The author Lysidas is initially reluctant to give his opinion, saying that authors must always be circumspect in what they say about other authors. This underlines that authors are usually biased when speaking of their rivals and so should not always be trusted to judge plays. The Marquis tries to end the debate by claiming that the play is terrible and that all the other actors who were there said so as well and Dorante agrees sarcastically that they 'parlent sans intérêt' (Scene 6). Uranie then says that authors are unusual because they criticise 'les pièces où tout le monde court, et ne disiez jamais du bien que de celles où personne ne va' (scene 6). This was to lead to a long-running point of debate throughout the *querelle* about whether it was better to write a play which adhered to the dramatic theory, or one which was successful, and Molière maintained throughout that he would prefer to write popular plays even if other authors criticized them.

Dénouement

Lysdias says he will not list any more criticisms as he does not wish to bore people, which shows that Molière wanted his play to entertain the audience, rather than simply be an expression of his views on dramatic theory. This further shows his view that it was most important to win over the audience, rather than other playwrights. The farcical interjections from the Marquis further underline the point that Molière wanted

¹⁵⁴ Jan Clarke *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris 1673-1680 Volume I* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998) p.294.

his play to be entertaining as they prevent Dorante's replies from becoming too didactic and boring.

The play ends by making fun of the traditional comic *dénouements* of a marriage or family recognition by ending in a very mundane, but true to life, way by having dinner served. This announcement of dinner being served is an attempt by Molière to make fun of his supposedly weak endings as the play does not have a decisive end to the argument.¹⁵⁵

In *La Critique* Molière was not directly attempting to refute the criticisms of his play, but rather to explain his own ideas, such as the importance of pleasing the audience rather than other authors, and the value of appealing both to the *parterre* and to the nobility. Molière had realised that the strength of his defence would depend upon the success of his play, which is why the play is not simply a list of responses, but also contains several comic elements.

Chapter 4 – Major attacks

In this chapter I analyse the criticisms raised by Donneau de Visé in *Zélinde* and also in Edme Boursault's contribution to the *querelle*, *Le Portrait du Peintre*. Chronologically, these two plays followed Molière's *Critique*, and Molière then responded to them in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*. These two plays raise the major criticisms in the *querelle*, which are then repeated in the subsequent works.

Zélinde

Zélinde is a one-act prose comedy published in August 1663, with a *privilège* from 14 July 1663. Although it is presented in the style of a play *Zélinde* appears not to have been performed. The brothers Parfaict, although not a contemporary source, claim that the play 'ne paraît pas avoir été représenté'.¹⁵⁶ Clearly as a play it would not be particularly entertaining, certainly not in comparison to *La Critique*, as it is mostly a

¹⁵⁵ W. G. Moore 'Raison et structure dans la comédie de Molière' in *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 72e Année, No. 5/6 (Sep. - Dec., 1972) p.800.

¹⁵⁶ Claude & François Parfaict, *Histoire du Théâtre François* (Paris, 1746) p.214-215.

long list of faults and there is no comedy to provide light relief. It is difficult to imagine the play being a success independently of the other plays in the *querelle*. This may be because this was the first play de Visé had written, and he was therefore still uncertain of what was required to succeed, or he may not have intended it to be performed. Certainly, the latter explanation would explain the didactic nature of the work, as it would be easier for a reader to absorb the criticisms raised. In performance the lack of action and length of the speeches may have bored the audience. If it was intended to be read, this might also explain why de Visé praises the taste of shop-keepers, rather than referring to them as the *parterre*. Although in a performance, they would have stood in the *parterre*, de Visé is able to appeal to them outside of the theatre in their everyday lives. This praise would therefore have been in opposition to Molière's praise of the *parterre* in his *Critique*.

The Action

Zélinde is set in a *chambre d'un marchand de dentelles* in the rue Saint-Denis. The main characters are Oriane and Mélante, the young lovers; their respective servants, Lucie and Cléon; Cléarque, Oriane's father; *Zélinde*, a *femme savante*; Aristide, a poet; Cléronte, a bourgeois; Argimont, the shop owner and his servants, Damis and Ergiste. The basic plot of the play is a conventional love story, in which the father objects to the proposed marriage. However, the happy ending comes about when Mélante's uncle dies, allowing Mélante to inherit and so removing Cléarque's objection. Oriane is waiting to meet Mélante secretly in Argimont's shop. As Mélante is late, she passes the time by discussing the theatre and specifically Molière's plays with Argimont and his other customers. Throughout the play, Oriane mounts occasional weak and ineffective defences of Molière's plays, rather like the weak attacks raised in *La Critique*, but all of the other characters oppose him. A letter from Licaste, said to be a friend of Molière's, is also read out and Molière – referred to as Elomire – is supposedly in the shop, but never appears on stage. Molière is described as 'un fort mauvais copiste' (scene 10), implying that no one recognises anyone in any of Molière's characters and that he exaggerates them. This is slightly contradictory to the suggestion that the nobility

should be outraged at seeing themselves mocked on stage, as no one would be outraged if they could not recognise themselves.

De Visé also refers to some events that had occurred in Molière's personal life, and are not directly related to the plays. He alleges that Molière had tried to encourage more people to come and watch his play by claiming that he had been sent a note 'par lequel on [le] menaçoit de coups de bastons' if the play were performed (scene 6). Mongrédien notes that de Visé was the only contemporary source to mention this incident, which suggests either that de Visé invented the affair to make Molière's success seem less impressive, or that he was correct and that this was merely an attempt to encourage more people to watch *la Critique*.¹⁵⁷ As most of the audience would have realised straight away if de Visé was inventing this, it seems most likely that Molière had mentioned it in an attempt to gain a larger audience for the initial performances. He also refers to the unspecified 'aventure de Tarte à la cresse arrivée depuis peu à Elomire' (scene 8), which according to La Martinière and Laverdet could be one of two events – either when the duc de La Feuillade cut Molière's face by rubbing it against his buttons and saying 'tarte à la crème' or when M. d'Armagnac had insulted Molière and turned his wig around on his head.¹⁵⁸ It should be noted that neither source is contemporary, and there is no specific contemporary evidence to support either story, with Brossette claiming in 1702 that he had been told that this second anecdote was not true. However, the existence of these stories, even if false, along with de Visé's reference to some unpleasant, but unspecified, incident serve to show the strength of feeling which had been aroused by the controversy. Neither is strictly relevant to the *querelle*, but are worth examining. Firstly, the implied insult, whatever it may have been, shows the strength of feeling caused by the debate, and also show that Molière was not simply being attacked in literary forms. The episode of the letter seems to suggest that Molière was eager to increase his audiences through every possible means, including profiting

¹⁵⁷ Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.43.

¹⁵⁸ La Martinière *Vie de Molière* (Amsterdam 1725) p.xxvii; Laverdet *Correspondance Boileau-Brossette* (Paris, 1858) p.555-556.

from the scandal that surrounded the play. Lastly, these two references mark the beginning of the *querelle* becoming increasingly personal, as the debate is now concerned with matters that are not directly linked to either play.

Criticisms

The titles of both plays are criticised, with Argimont claiming that Molière admits the name *L'Ecole des Femmes* did not suit the play and says that the title was only used 'pour attirer le monde, [...] par un nom specieux' (scene 3). The 'nom specieux' may be a reference to *L'Ecole des Maris* and de Visé may be implying that Molière was using a similar title in order to profit from the success of his previous play, since the audience may have assumed that *L'Ecole des Femmes* was intended as a sequel, or simply been attracted by the similarity of the names. Certainly the title of *L'Ecole des Femmes* does not accurately reflect the content of the play, as although Agnès is briefly given a lesson in how a wife should behave, the play is much more a school for husbands and how they should behave towards their future wives. Argimont also says that *La Critique* is 'mal nommée', as it is really a defence of the play, not a criticism (scene 3). Both Aristide and Zélinde repeat this criticism, with Aristide saying that 'au lieu de la Critique [...] il nous en fait voir l'apologie' (scene 7). Zélinde virtually repeats this line, saying 'Elomire a fait l'Apologie de son Escolle des Femmes, sous le nom de la Critique' before suggesting that Aristide should invert this and write a play called *L'Apologie* but attacking *L'Ecole des Femmes*. This could be the inspiration for Boursault's play which will be examined later in this chapter. Criticism of the title of *La Critique* could be defended either by saying that it was intended ironically or that, although the play itself is not a criticism of *L'Ecole des Femmes*, it is about the criticism of it.

Lysidas in *La Critique* is attacked, as he fails to mention all the play's faults, and according to Argimont his attack is so weak that 'l'on connoist bien que l'Autheur parle par sa bouche' (scene 3). Aristide also attacks Lycidas as he is not 'un bon Advocat' and that if Aristide had been in his place he 'ambarrasseroi[t] bien le Chevalier' (scene 7). Licaste also refers to this point, saying that in *La Critique*, the play is criticised by 'des personnes à qui les gens raisonnables ne doivent point adjoûter foy' (scene 6), which de Visé takes as a sign that Molière was not confident enough of his success to

create stronger opponents. De Visé also says that ‘vostre Chevalier ne doit pas tirer beaucoup de gloire de la victoire qu’il remporte sur de si foibles ennemis’ (scene 6), which is clearly intended to show Molière that he has not won the debate simply because *La Critique* was a popular success, as it was a victory against limited opposition. Molière is criticised by de Visé for not allowing Lysidas to respond to Dorante’s defence, and Aristide remarks that Lysidas ‘devroit demander la replique’. There is also speculation about the inspiration for Lysidas, with Aristide claiming that ‘il représente seul, tous les Auteurs qui travaillent pour le Théâtre’, but Oriane thinks that it ‘est un rôle qu’Elomire a souvent joué d’original’ (scene 7). The speculation about the model for Lysidas is similar to the speculation about whom Molière was targeting with his principal characters, but again it seems more likely that Molière was using traits, in this instance pedantry, rather than targeting any one person in particular, to create a character who represents playwrights in general.

Both Licaste and Argimont claim that Molière has ignored many of the faults in *L’Ecole des Femmes* while writing *La Critique*. Argimont says ‘l’on n’y parle pas de la sixième partie des fautes que l’on pourroit reprendre’ (scene 3), while Licaste says ‘vous [Molière] n’avez repris que des bagatelles, et n’avez point parlé des fautes considerables’ (scene 6). Licaste is also surprised that Molière admits ‘qu’Arnolphe a eu grand tort de prester les cent pistoles à Horace’ as he should either have given reasons for this fault or ignored it ‘comme [il a] fait beaucoup d’autres’ (scene 6). Oriane says Molière should not be criticised for not mentioning all the faults, as ‘il n’avoit peut-estre pas de quoy y repartir’ (scene 3). Although it is true that Molière’s defence would have been stronger if he had included more criticisms and more virulent critics, it would be foolish to expect an author to be excessively critical of his own play or to mention every possible criticism of it. This criticism also presupposes that the main purpose of *La Critique* was to defend Molière, rather than, as was probably the case, an attempt to profit from the *querelle*. As for the admission that Arnolphe should not have lent money to Horace, this is clearly intended sarcastically, as Dorante goes on to say how understandable it is that Arnolphe would give money to the son of an old friend.

Chrysalde is criticised as ‘un personnage entierement inutile’, whose lines do not ‘avancent ou reculent les affaires de la Scene’ and who is ‘bien incivil d’arrester si long-temps Arnolphe’ when he has just returned from a long journey (scene 3). Arnolphe’s invitation to Chrysalde to come to dinner is ‘pas vray semblable’ and a betrayal of Arnolphe’s character, according to Argimont (scene 3). De Visé points out how unlikely it is that a man who is so afraid of being cuckolded would invite another man to dine with his mistress. This would appear to be particularly true in the case of Arnolphe, who has gone to so much trouble to keep Agnès hidden. Oriane again intervenes to defend this, saying that the only reason for Chrysalde to go to dinner is to show the audience that the play is taking place in one day. Certainly there is no obvious dramatic reason for the invitation, the scene is not shown on stage, nor is it referred to again, but it would serve as an opportunity for Arnolphe to boast about his success. The suggestion of Chrysalde’s rudeness in keeping his friend outside is a poor criticism, since it not only ignores the fact that Arnolphe is eager to talk to Chrysalde, but also imposes an unnecessary degree of realism on the play. As for the criticism of Chrysalde’s role in general, this is also weak, since in this scene he plays an important role in the exposition, and throughout the play provides a comic counterpoint to Arnolphe’s views. Argimont moves on to discuss the notary, who is ‘aussi inutile que Chrisalde’ (scene 3) and fails to add anything to the play. His scene with Arnolphe ‘seroit à peine supportable dans la plus méchante de toutes les farces’ (scene 3) as it is impossible that two people could talk for so long without noticing each other, which once again is a strictly accurate criticism, but fails to take into account the comedy inherent in the scene.

De Visé criticises the setting of the play, which has the action taking place in the town square, which would make it improbable for Chrysalde and Arnolphe to be completely alone. Oriane continues her weak defence of Molière by saying ‘il a oublié à vous dire que la Peste estoit peut-estre dans la ville: ce qui l’avoit rendüe presque deserte’ (scene 3). Another fault with this setting, according to Argimont, is that ‘bien qu’il [Arnolphe] arrive d’un voyage, il n’entre pas chez luy, et ne dit point les affaires qui l’empeschent d’y entrer’ (scene 3). All of this is despite the effort he makes to get his servants to open the door initially. Argimont also complains that ‘il fait descendre Agnès, et l’entretient

au milieu d'une place Publique', instead of speaking to her in the privacy of his own house. Zélinde repeats these criticisms that it is unlikely that the characters would spend so much time in the street, highlighting the 'chose ridicule' that the servants are shown how to stop Horace entering in plain view, and asks 'les postures qu'ils font tous trois ne devoient-elles pas faire arrester tous les passans pour les regarder?' (scene 8). As has already been mentioned, the setting may have been forced upon Molière by a desire to obey the unity of place. However, more plausible defences can be raised for each of these criticisms. The servants' bungled attempt to admit Arnolphe and their attempts to learn how to keep Horace out are simply *lazzi*, irrelevant to the rest of the play, but included purely to provide humour. Arnolphe has to meet Horace in the street to keep the latter in ignorance of Arnolphe's double identity and all of the characters would naturally meet in the street at the end, as the two fathers are just arriving in the town from abroad, while the two lovers are attempting to leave and Arnolphe is attempting to prevent them. The only scene which cannot easily be explained is why Arnolphe asks Agnès out into the street to lecture her on morality, but in this scene, as in most of the others, the setting is irrelevant, and much less important than the content of the scene. It is therefore rather pedantic to insist on the potential improbabilities of the setting rather than concentrating on the action taking place.

Both Argimont and Zélinde are critical of the behaviour of the servants, asking if it is 'vray-semblable qu'Alain et Georgette tombent tant de fois à genoux' (scene 8), but Argimont acknowledges the dramatic success of this scene, calling it 'un jeu de Théâtre qui éblouit' (scene 3). Mongrédien points out in his footnotes that this 'jeu de scène n'est pas indiqué dans *L'Ecole des Femmes*' which suggests that de Visé must have attended a performance, which would lend some extra weight to his criticisms if they were based on what he had seen, rather than simply a repetition of other people's views.¹⁵⁹ However, de Visé's criticism appears to overlook the comic nature of this scene and the opportunity it affords for humorous, farcical acting. Molière is unlikely to have been concerned by criticism of the servants, as the brothers Parfaict note that

¹⁵⁹ Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.29.

Brécourt's performance as Alain 'fit dire au Roi qui était charmé de son jeu, cet homme-là ferait rire une pierre'.¹⁶⁰

The scene of the *cent pistolles* is also criticized as being improbable, firstly in that it is unlikely that Arnolphe would have 'cent pistolles toutes prestes' (scene 3), and then that it is even more unlikely that he would give it to a stranger on the basis of a letter from a friend 'après avoir esté si longtemps sans luy escrire' (scene 3). Molière had responded to this in *La Critique* by saying that it was perfectly reasonable for a man to lend money to the son of an old friend, and it could also be argued that Arnolphe has an ulterior motive in encouraging Horace to seduce another man's wife. While it is accurate to say that Arnolphe is unlikely to have had the money ready, this is an extremely pedantic criticism, which again ignores the liberties usually afforded to playwrights in such cases.

Argimont finds fault with 'l'incident du Grez', which he describes as 'forcé' and also says that it shows how hard Molière had to work so that Horace could receive a letter from 'cette niaise prétenduë [Agnès]' (scene 3). Oriane admits that she was so displeased by this scene that she cannot allow Argimont to criticise it alone. She questions the use of the word 'Grez' which is a stone so heavy that 'une femme peut à peine [le] soulever' and which is therefore 'capable d'assommer un homme' (scene 3). She cannot, therefore, understand why Horace, 'qui doit d'abord prendre la fuite', stays, and risks being exposed to more danger, in order to find a letter that he would not have been expecting (scene 3). Molière's attempted defence that he meant a small stone does not convince them as no one would throw a small stone to scare someone away, and Horace speaks of the stone as being 'de taille non petite' (scene 3 and *EdF* III, 4). However, this once again appears to be de Visé taking the text too literally, as the size of the stone is unimportant compared to the note wrapped around it. In *La Critique* Dorante insisted that Horace did not flee as he had been made bold by love, and so knew that he had nothing to fear, and also attributes Agnès's sudden initiative to love.

¹⁶⁰ Claude & François Parfaict *Histoire du Théâtre François depuis son origine jusqu'à présent Tome VIII* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968) p.407.

According to Argimont, there is no need to describe the sermon and *maximes* as shocking since ‘tout le monde en murmure hautement’, and Arnolphe is ‘ridicule de parler en Theologien à la personne du monde qu’il croit la plus innocente’ (scene 3). This seems to be a strange criticism, as Agnès was supposedly educated at a convent and so would not have been totally unaware of the terms Arnolphe uses and would probably have heard similar sermons before. Argimont then attacks the content of the *maximes* as they reveal to Agnès exactly what Arnolphe has been trying to stop her finding out, which is how ‘les femmes Coquettes’ behave (scene 3). Oriane admits that this is an error, but defends it by saying that Molière ‘l’a couverte du brillant’, adding some mild flattery either as genuine recognition of Molière’s talent, or simply as faint praise to appease Molière’s allies by not appearing too damning. It is true that the *maximes* do seem to undo much of the effort Arnolphe has gone to in order to keep Agnès ignorant of such behaviour, but again misses the key point that the content of the *maximes* is less important than the ridiculous, yet sinister, sight of Arnolphe preaching and trying to use religion to control Agnès. *Zélinde* is the only play to criticise the *maximes* greatly: although they are briefly criticised in Robinet’s *Panégryique* (November 1663), far more attention is given to defending them, again in *Le Panégryique* and in de la Croix’s *Guerre Comique* (March 1664). This is particularly surprising, since given the tensions between the theatre and the religious world, the *maximes* would have been a key point to attack if an author was making a serious criticism of Molière’s play. These tensions were still in evidence in 1664 when *Le Tartuffe* was banned for being irreligious, and they may explain why other authors were keen to defend Molière’s use of them. If, as seems likely, the *querelle* was caused by an opportunistic desire for self-promotion, authors may have been reluctant to level serious charges against Molière, and eager to defend a fellow writer against possible censure from the clergy.

Brief reference is made to the improprieties in the play. Argimont says that he will not mention ‘des mots impropres, ny des méchants vers, ny des fautes de construction’, and skips over the comparison between a wife and soup, simply saying that ‘les personnes d’esprit l’ont trouvée trop fort’ and that it reveals ‘plustost l’esprit de l’Auteur que la simplicité du Païsan’ (scene 3). Interestingly, although this line could be seen as being as offensive as the ‘le’, Boursault is the only author to openly criticise it. Argimont then

begins to criticise the 'le' in II, 5, but Oriane says she does not wish to talk about it, and Argimont therefore claims that the way she blushes proves that 'ce le a perdu sa cause' (scene 3), which is a reference to Molière's claim that it was intended innocently. De Visé further attacks Molière's defence of the 'le' through Licaste, who apparently accepts that Molière did not intend to offend people with his use of 'le', but points out the weakness of this defence as Molière cannot deny that he included it 'pour donner lieu d'agir à l'imagination' (scene 6). This certainly appears to be the most valid criticism that de Visé raises, and one which Molière handled poorly, by claiming that it was meant innocently. Zélinde says that Molière was more concerned about the 'jeu que ce 'le' faisoit au Theatre, que la vraysemblance', a further accusation that Molière made the line deliberately suggestive (scene 8). These criticisms appear justified as the line has the potential to offend, but on stage would have been entertaining. Molière was also unable to come up with a successful defence for either line, claiming that the burlesque comparison between soup and wives was intended to be in keeping with the servants' nature and that the 'le' is entirely innocent. It would be more accurate to say that, although the 'le' deliberately leaves room for misinterpretation, both lines are intended humorously, rather than offensively, and Molière certainly would not have been alone in including some bawdy jokes in his plays.

Horace's character comes under attack, firstly for his willingness to tell Arnolphe about his love for Agnès, even though 'la froideur avec laquelle ce jaloux l'écoute, devoit l'empescher d'y revenir' (scene 3). To support this Argimont highlights IV, 6 during which Horace says thirty-eight lines to Arnolphe without receiving any response, which should make him reluctant to confide in Arnolphe. Argimont also wanted Arnolphe to make more of his advantage 'et en feignant de le vouloir server, luy donner des conseils pour le perdre' (scene 3). Oriane ludicrously defends this, by saying that if Arnolphe had spoken as he ought to, Horace would have stopped seeing Agnès and the play would have ended in the first act, but this supposes that the characters are real people with free will, not under the influence of the author. Argimont points out that when Arnolphe is trying to find out if anyone has been to see Agnès, 'il s'y prend d'une maniere qui devoit l'empescher d'avoüer la verité' (scene 3), a criticism which is supported by Oriane, but which appears to ignore Agnès's innocence and naivety. Zélinde describes

Horace as ‘ridicule, de mettre sa Maistresse entre les mains d’Arnolphe’ and also says Agnès should never have been taught to read or write and is astonished by her transformation from ‘la plus niaise personne du monde’ to someone who is ‘tout à fait spirituelle’ (scene 8). Molière’s defence to these criticisms in *La Critique* was that a young man in love naturally wishes to talk about this as much as possible, added to which, Arnolphe’s loan would appear to suggest that he is willing to help Horace, and therefore likely to take an interest in his progress. Argimont also questions whether any lover would see his mistress five or six times in a day, and even if this happened, whether each time there would be some new event which he then has to confide to Arnolphe. Molière again defended this by referring to the strength of Horace’s love, which meant he wanted to spend as much time as possible with Agnès. As for the probability of so many new events occurring, this again would appear to be perfectly acceptable within the framework of a play, even if it may seem implausible in real life. Horace leaves Agnès with Arnolphe because he is still unaware of his dual identity, so from his point of view it is a perfectly sensible thing to do. Only with the benefit of the audience’s wider knowledge does it appear ill-advised.

Argimont raises the criticism that the play ‘se passe toute en recits’ (scene 3). Dorante in *La Critique* responds to this by saying that the characters’ reaction should also be viewed as a form of action, and the importance of *récits* in *L’Ecole des Femmes*, and their use for comedic effect has already been examined. The criticism that there is no action in the play is to some extent justified, as the major events such as the throwing of the stone or the servants making Horace fall off the ladder both occur off-stage and are related through *récits*. As has been seen during the discussion of Molière’s use of sources, this moves away from Scarron’s version, suggesting that it is a conscious change that Molière feels will improve the play, almost certainly because the scenes would be more humorous when reported rather than enacted. According to Carmody, the *récits* themselves involve interaction between the character speaking and the character listening, who then reacts to what he has heard, and therefore this criticism ignores the role of the actor who would be able to add comedic reactions which do not

appear in the text.¹⁶¹ Similarly the farce elements must not be dismissed by a reader, as they would be much more obvious on stage, and would add greatly to the humour. The use of the *récits*, therefore, has the advantage of increasing the humour, and giving the audience a deeper insight into Arnolphe's character by seeing his emotions change dramatically. They also allow the audience to share Arnolphe's position by finding out about Horace's meetings with Agnès after they have happened, but experiencing the opposite emotion, and so lessening the audience's sympathy for him.

Molière is criticised because *L'Ecole des Femmes* is merely 'une imitation de celles [pièces] que [il] nous [a] de-jà fait voir' and most of the characters in it are identical to those who have already appeared in his plays (scene 6). It is claimed that Molière is making fun of de Visé's article as the 'Rolle de Licidas est tiré des *Nouvelles nouvelles*' and that the Chevalier 'se divertit aux despens de Monsieur l'Abbé Daubignac' (scene 6). This is a reference to Dorante's criticism that the rules of the theatre have been designed purely to confuse people (*la Critique* scene 6), which de Visé has interpreted as a direct attack on d'Aubignac, although it could simply have been intended by Molière as a more general criticism. Zélinde repeats much of this criticism by sarcastically praising Molière, who '[sçait] si bien se servir de tout ce qu'il lit de bon' (scene 8) and suggests that Scarron and Straparole were the inspiration for *L'Ecole des Femmes*, which may in part be true. She also suggests Aristide should write a play in which everyone from whom Molière has borrowed something, whether it is a mannerism, their acting style, a plot device, or a line for his play, comes and demands that he should give it back to them, which Aristide comments would leave Molière 'non seulement nud, mais que ses Ouvrages seroient dépouillez de ce qu'ils ont de plus beau' (scene 8). This implication seems to contradict de Visé's statement in *Nouvelles nouvelles*, referring to *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, that although Molière borrowed his plots, he was able to improve on the original.

Molière's plays could indeed be seen as rather formulaic, relying on certain plot devices, and with a limited range of characters, but it must also be acknowledged that there are

¹⁶¹ Jim Carmody *Rereading Molière: Mise en Scène from Antoine to Vitez* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993) p.136.

only a limited number of different plots available, particularly if an author is concentrating on one genre. Molière can also hardly be blamed for reusing a formula which had proved successful in earlier plays, and many comic playwrights struggled to escape from the basic outline plot of the removal of an obstacle to a marriage which leads to the happy ending. Such a plot was frequently used by Shakespeare, writing fifty years before Molière and in a different country, and Beaumarchais, who wrote almost a century after Molière. It even forms the, admittedly limited, plot of *Zélinde*.

Molière is also criticised for attacking nobles and other authors, this time through the anecdote of a page who was waiting outside the theatre and who ‘pestoit en sortant contre Elomire’ and attacked his boldness in mocking ‘les personnes de Naissance, et [...] des Auteurs, qui ont mille fois plus de merite que luy’ (scene 8). This anecdote would have been inserted to show that even the humbler elements of society were outraged by Molière, rather than just the upper classes and playwrights. Molière’s claim that actors and other authors ‘ne savent pas juger d’une Piece de Théâtre’ as they are biased is condemned, as de Visé thinks that Molière is putting himself above all the others. Certainly self-interest would have played a part in the judgments of other authors and troupes who would have been eager to see a rival fail. Zélinde criticises Molière for attacking the marquis and mocking the ‘air de qualité’ that sets them apart from the bourgeoisie (scene 8), as well as claiming Molière is attacking women, based on the line in *L’Ecole des Femmes* ‘femme qui compose en sçait plus qu’il ne faut’ (*EdF* I, 1). While this line does appear to suggest that women should not be educated, it is spoken by Arnolphe, the most ridiculous character in the play whose opinions are being mocked and is therefore unlikely to be Molière’s personal view.

De Visé attributes the success of *La Critique* to Molière’s luck, and Aristide is reluctant to attack Molière as Molière ‘a le vent en poupe’ and he fears that, if he fails, Molière will gain more glory from Aristide’s failure (scene 8). Zélinde, in a series of rhetorical questions, also attacks Molière's luck:

N’est-ce pas estre heureux, que de prendre hardiment par tout, sans qu’on s’en aperçoive ? N’est-ce pas estre heureux que de faire valoir ses Pieces, soy-mesme ? N’est-ce pas estre heureux, que de représenter tousjours les mesmes

choses, sans que l'on s'en lasse ? Et n'est-ce pas enfin estre heureux, que d'avoir rencontré un siècle, où l'on ne se plaist qu'à entendre des Satires? (scene 8)

This acts almost as a summary of *Zélinde*, mentioning Molière's mockery of powerful opponents, his use of other sources, his fortune in judging the quality of his plays himself, and lastly the contemporary fashion for satires. This leads to a satirical attack 'contre la mode et contre Elomire' (scene 9). Cléronte criticises a century 'où l'on juge de l'homme par le soulier' and plays by their author and 'l'on n'approuveroit pas presentement une Comedie, si elle n'esoit pas d'Elomire' (scene 9). Audiences who have never seen a play are praising plays by Molière 'pource qu'elles sont à la mode' (scene 9). However, there is also a warning that 'les gens de qualité ont coustume de quitter les modes qu'ils ont inventées dès qu'ils voyent qu'elles sont trop communes' (scene 9), suggesting that Molière's success will not last much longer. It is interesting that a play attacking Molière should feature, in *Aristide*, a playwright who is afraid to attack Molière, and possibly *Aristide*'s constant refusals to attack Molière may be an attempt to explain why no one else has attacked Molière before now. However, *Zélinde* suggests that now is the perfect time to attack Molière, as she says it is better to attack a powerful enemy when he controls half your provinces than when he controls all of them. This suggests that de Visé recognised that Molière's success was going to continue, and would reach the point where he would be unassailable. The debate about fashion raises an interesting but unsolvable conundrum: was Molière writing satires because they were popular or did they become popular because he was writing excellent satires? This certainly seems to be the view of the author of the *Lettre au Mercure*, who describes Molière's plays as being a genre

que nos auteurs avoient négligé, corrompus par l'exemple des Espagnols et des Italiens, qui donnent beaucoup plus aux intrigues surprenantes et aux plaisanteries forcées qu'à la peinture des mœurs et de la vie civile.¹⁶²

¹⁶²Madame Paul Poisson *Lettres au Mercure sur Molière, sa Vie, ses Oeuvres* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969) p.21.

Further evidence for this is provided by a quote from Saint-Evremond which appears in the *Lettre au Mercure* to the effect that Molière ‘s’*é*toit formé sur les anciens à bien dépeindre les gens et les mœurs de son siècle dans la comédie ce qu’on n’avoit pas vû encore sur nos théâtres’.¹⁶³ The criticism that Molière relied on luck can only really be attributed to jealousy, as there is no apparent basis for it, and, although it cannot be wholly disproved, the success that Molière enjoyed throughout his career would appear to suggest that he was not simply lucky.

In a dramatic and sudden ending, rather similar to Molière’s endings that de Visé criticises, a servant arrives to report the death of Mélite’s uncle, and as Mélite has now inherited a fortune Cléarque has no objection to the marriage, thus signalling the happy ending. This is similar to the ending of *L’Ecole des Femmes*, which is sarcastically described as ‘spirituel’. In both instances the author is seeking to end the play on a happy note, but in Molière’s defence, his oft-stated desire for comedy to correct vices relied on an improbable defeat for the main character, who for most of the play is in the commanding position. De Visé and Molière both appear to have been more concerned with the content of their works, rather than the probability of the ending.

The play criticises Molière’s lack of originality and over use of sources, as well as the defence he mounts of his own play and the improbability of the setting. Unlike in *Nouvelles nouvelles* Donneau de Visé makes only a minor attempt to soften the criticism with flattery. It is, however, worth noting that de Visé concentrates mainly on minor issues such as the titles of the two plays, rather than on the potentially more damaging issues of Arnolphe’s sermon and the religious connotations within the *maximes*, which are only briefly mentioned, and he also fails to specify many of the faults he finds such as ‘des mots impropres, ny des méchants vers, ny des fautes de construction’ (scene 3).

Conclusion

It is certainly true that de Visé’s play would be unlikely to be celebrated as a fine work of art: the plot is almost non-existent and the final two scenes merely serve as an attempt

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p.21.

to introduce a theme other than the attack upon Molière. There is no action in the play and not a great deal of interaction, with each scene usually comprising one character attacking Molière, while the other characters occasionally interject. Scene six in particular is a prime example of this, as it consists simply of the reading of a letter. Mèlèse criticises the minutiae with which Argimont attacks the play, saying that he becomes boring because of the level of detail.¹⁶⁴ The repetitive nature of the criticisms raised first by Argimont, then repeated by Zélinde, also contribute to the impression of tedium.

Even the criticisms the play raises are attacked by Lancaster, who accuses de Visé of failing to understand the demands of comedy. Certainly many of his criticisms do appear to ignore the basic idea that Molière's play was meant to be funny, and insisting on conventionalised characters.¹⁶⁵ It certainly seems that de Visé had either not understood that Molière was attempting to allow his characters to develop throughout the play, rather than presenting the one-dimensional figures usually seen in farces, or that he was simply looking for reasons to attack Molière. He also places far too much emphasis on the suggestiveness of a humble witticism, all of which suggests he may not have been expressing a true opinion, but merely trying to attack Molière. This is an interesting theory, and although it would be impossible to prove or disprove, it certainly ties in with the notion that de Visé was attacking Molière simply to make a name for himself, rather than because he was genuinely offended, and so simply concentrated on the areas which most people disapproved of. Further evidence that de Visé was using the *querelle* for self-promotion can be seen from his swift reconciliation with Molière afterwards, showing that there was no long-lasting feud. A brief examination of his other critical works also suggests that he was more interested in personal gain than accurate criticism: for instance his sudden change of opinion when writing about

¹⁶⁴ Pierre Mèlèse *Un Homme de Lettres au Temps du Grand Roi, Donneau de Visé, Fondateur du Mercure Galant* (Paris: Librairie E Droz, 1936) p.31.

¹⁶⁵ Henry Carrington Lancaster *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the seventeenth century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936) p.258.

Sophonisbe, or his almost unswerving praise of Thomas Corneille, with whom he was to co-author several plays, and so it was probably wise to praise his colleague.

Edme Boursault – Early Life

Edme Boursault, one of the most virulent critics of *L'Ecole des Femmes*, was born in Langres in October 1638 and died in 1701. L ris puts his arrival in Paris as 1651, and says that his first plays were performed when he was 15, which would have been 1653.¹⁶⁶ L ris also says that he was initially secretary to the widow of Charles IX's son and was awarded a *pension* of 2000 *livres* by Louis XIV for writing his *Gazette*, which meant that, by the time of the *querelle* he was not completely unknown and had enjoyed some success.¹⁶⁷ He was later made *sous-precepteur* to the *dauphin*.¹⁶⁸ However, his satirical tendencies led him into trouble, he was imprisoned for his satire of the Capucin order.¹⁶⁹

Boursault is believed to have enjoyed a close relationship with Pierre and Thomas Corneille. Taillandier says that Boursault declared himself a disciple and friend of the Corneilles in 1653, and was referred to by Pierre Corneille as 'mon enfant'.¹⁷⁰ Boursault's first play was entitled *Le M decin Volant*, which followed Moli re's farce of the same name very closely, and Moli re's play may therefore have acted as a direct source for Boursault, and his second play, *Le Mort Vivant*, was taken from an Italian model called *I Morti Vivi*.¹⁷¹ Against this background, the charge of plagiarism that Boursault raised against Moli re during the *querelle* is either disingenuous or hypocritical.

¹⁶⁶ Antoine de L ris *Dictionnaire Portatif des Th  tres* (Paris, 1754) p.398.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.398.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.398-399.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.399.

¹⁷⁰ St R n  Taillandier *Etudes litt raires: un po te comique du temps de Moli re: Boursault, sa vie et ses  uvres* (Paris: E. Plon, 1881) p.31.

¹⁷¹ Georges Mongr dien *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.89-90.

Molière was not the only target of Boursault's criticism; like Donneau de Visé much of his work centred on attacking famous authors of the period, such as Boileau and Racine.¹⁷² He wrote a play in 1666 entitled *La Critique des Satires de M. Boileau*, but in 1669 changed the name to *La Satire des Satires*.¹⁷³ He also criticized Racine's play *Britannicus* in his novel of 1670, *Artémise et Poliante*.¹⁷⁴ Like de Visé, he was clearly, therefore, not averse to controversy and a keen literary critic. There does not seem to have been any ill-feeling between the two as, like de Visé, Boursault later paid tribute to Molière's greatness describing him in his *Lettres nouvelles* as a 'peerless comic dramatist whose death had deprived the French theatre of an irreplaceable ornament'.¹⁷⁵

Authorship

Boursault's contribution to the *querelle* was a play entitled *Le Portrait du Peintre*. However, there seems to have been a slight uncertainty about the play's authorship. Certainly in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (October 1663, very shortly after Boursault's play was first performed) Molière suggests that Boursault was merely a tool of the actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, who were trying to pass off a joint work using the name of a relatively minor author. This may have been because Molière saw Boursault as beneath contempt and wanted to suggest to the audience that he was being attacked by a collaboration of his rivals. However, in the preface to the published edition, Boursault not only maintained his authorship of the play, but said that Molière was paying him a compliment by saying that the play was 'digne de ceux qui sont accusez d'y avoir mis la main'. As far as the authorship is concerned therefore, there is little concrete evidence that the play was written by Boursault, but nothing, apart from the

¹⁷² Henry Carrington Lancaster *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the seventeenth century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936) p.282.

¹⁷³ St René Taillandier *Etudes littéraires: un poète comique du temps de Molière: Boursault, sa vie et ses œuvres* (Paris: E. Plon, 1881) p.47.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.90.

¹⁷⁵ Frederick Wright Vogler *Molière Mocked: Three Contemporary Hostile Comedies: Donneau de Visé Zélinde (1663), Boursault Le Portrait du Peintre (1663), Le Boulanger de Chalussay Élomire Hypocondre(1670)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973) p.61.

biased speculation of Molière, to suggest that it really was written by a group of his opponents. It seems safe to accept that the play was written by Boursault himself, but his motives cannot be seen so easily.

Boursault's daughter, in her introduction to a 1725 edition of his works, claims 'qu'on l'obligea, presque malgré lui, à faire la Critique d'une des plus belles Comedies de Molière, qui est *L'Ecole des Femmes*'. She also says that he was forced into this in order to 'obéir à ceux qui l'y avoient engagé, et à qui il ne pouvoit rien refuser'.¹⁷⁶ She does not specify who is meant by the final remark, but it is not stretching the bounds of possibility to suppose that it was Corneille, with whom Boursault was extremely friendly, and may have wished to express his gratitude for Corneille's friendship. Mélése feels that Pierre Corneille, outraged by Molière's attack on his brother, Thomas (as Monsieur de L'Isle), and Molière's use of a line from his own play *Sertorius* ('C'est assez/ Je suis maître, je parle; allez, obéissez') may have encouraged Boursault to write an attack on Molière and Mongrédien agrees that this was a possibility.¹⁷⁷ Even if there was no direct encouragement, Boursault may have felt so indebted to his protector that he wanted to hasten to respond to the attacks that Molière had made against Thomas Corneille. However, as he does not mention either of these offences in his attack, this does not seem to be a convincing argument. Furthermore, if Pierre Corneille or his brother had been insulted, they could easily have written a play themselves, or prevented Molière from performing any of their plays, which would have been more damaging since Molière frequently performed plays by Pierre Corneille.

However, as Boursault's daughter was writing considerably after the event, and also after Boursault's reconciliation with Molière, her account may place her father in a more favourable light. Boursault had certainly attempted to downplay his role in the *querelle*, for instance refusing to publish *Le Portrait du Peintre* in the collection of his plays published in 1694 and it was likewise omitted from the 1721 edition. The 1725 edition,

¹⁷⁶ Hiacinthe Boursault *Théâtre de feu Monsieur Boursault* (Paris: François le Breton, 1725) p.10.

¹⁷⁷ Pierre Mélése *Un Homme de Lettres au Temps du Grand Roi, Donneau de Visé, Fondateur du Mercure Galant* (Paris: Librairie E Droz, 1936) p.1; Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.87.

which contains his daughter's foreword, would therefore have been the first edition to contain the play, and her foreword may therefore simply be an attempt to exculpate her father from any involvement in the *querelle* at a time when it would not have been fashionable to oppose Molière.

If the claim that he was forced into the debate is not wholly credible, what other options remain? Mèlèse suggests that he had been depicted as Lysidas in *La Critique*.¹⁷⁸ However, Mongrédien refutes the idea that Boursault was the model for Lysidas: since Boursault had had no obvious contact with Molière before *Le Portrait du Peintre* Molière would have had no reason to attack him.¹⁷⁹ Des Granges agrees that there is no reason why Molière would have attacked Boursault initially.¹⁸⁰ It would have required a startling lack of modesty on Boursault's part to view himself as the model for Lysidas, or to feel that Molière was attacking him directly. Lancaster suggests that it is more likely that he was angered by Molière having used a similar subject to one of his plays, but with much greater success.¹⁸¹ This play, *Les Cadenats ou le Jaloux endormy* was published in May 1662, but may have been performed as early as 1660, and certainly well before *L'Ecole des Femmes*. In it, a jealous husband, who resembles Sgnarelle and Arnolphe in age and philosophy, has locked up his younger wife, only for her to be rescued by her young lover. There is a similarity between one of the lines in Boursault's play, and line 750 in III,2 of *L'Ecole des Femmes* 'Que l'homme qui la prend, ne la prend que pour lui' and the moral of Molière's play could be summed up by the lines from Boursault's play:

Quiconque peut avoir un rayon de sagesse

¹⁷⁸ Pierre Mèlèse *Un Homme de Lettres au Temps du Grand Roi, Donneau de Visé, Fondateur du Mercure Galant* (Paris: Librairie E Droz, 1936) p.37.

¹⁷⁹ Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.90.

¹⁸⁰ Rene des Granges *Une question d'histoire littéraire: la Querelle de Molière et de Boursault* (Paris, 1899) p.16-18.

¹⁸¹ Henry Carrington Lancaster *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the seventeenth century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936) p.258.

Dans les maux d'une femme à jamais s'intéresse

Et loin qu'à l'outrager il puisse être contraint

Il s'en veut faire aimer, et n'en pas être craint (scene 2).¹⁸²

Boursault may, therefore, have been pressured into criticising Molière but he may also have been jealous of Molière, and jealousy appears to be the only possible motive for his claim, which will be examined shortly, that Molière's success was a result of luck.

Similarities to *La Critique*

Elements of Boursault's play are a direct reflection of *La Critique*, for instance the use of three characters (in Boursault's play the Count and Dorante are virtually one character parroting each other) on each side, one of whom pretends to be on the opposition – in both cases one of the 'sensible' women sarcastically agrees with everything the Marquise says, so Elise's mockery of Climène in *La Critique* is here echoed directly in Clitie's mockery of Oriane. In another imitation of *La Critique*, Clitie claims to agree with Oriane, only for Amarante to reveal what she is doing by saying 'elle est maligne, au moins; ne vous y fiez pas' (line 248), and Clitie is obliged to claim that she has been won over by Oriane's arguments, and then returns to mocking Oriane. Both plays have the same characters, the sensible hostess and her playful female relation, a gallant young man, a comical Marquis, a ridiculous nobleman and a jealous author, who is initially reluctant to give his views. Although Boursault has added a second ridiculous nobleman, and given him the name of Molière's chief supporter in *La Critique*, Dorante is for most of the play merely repeating the Count; for instance they base their refusal to listen on the fact that the other is not listening ('Moy? Je n'écoute pas si le Comte n'écoute' (line 518)) and sing together to drown out the arguments. Oriane says she has only seen the first two Acts of *L'Ecole des Femmes*, which makes her support of the play similar to the criticisms of the Marquis in *La Critique* who admits he had not listened to the play, in both instances showing that the characters are judging without being fully informed.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p.283.

Both plays also have the same basic plot: while waiting for the arrival of a dinner guest the rest of the characters discuss Molière's play. The play develops with characters arriving throughout and renewing the argument with each arrival until all are on stage for the final scene when the debate is at its fullest. The Count and Dorante's singing is also a direct echo of the Marquis's response to any serious argument which is put to him and serves the same purpose as the farcical responses in *La Critique*, which prevent boredom but also prevent reasoned debate. Dorante and the count describe *L'Ecole des Femmes* by reversing the Marquis's line in *La Critique* and calling it 'Admirable, Morbleu! du dernier admirable' (line 350), which also echoes Oriane's 'Admirabilissime' (scene 7). They also prevent Amarante and Damis from speaking, by constantly interrupting. Both plays contain stupid servants who not only provide comic elements, but are also openly rude and disobedient to the 'ridiculous' characters, showing that if lowly servants will not take them seriously then nor should the audience. The scene in *La Critique* when Galopin claims his mistress is out, even though the Marquis can see her, is echoed by the stubborn ignorance of the servant announcing Dorante. The servant announces Dorante as 'Un Monsieur' to which Amarante replies 'Quel est-il, ce Monsieur?' and the servant answers 'C'est un homme' (scene 5). This echoes the ignorant servant in *La Critique* and adds to the play's humour. Both plays end with the announcement that dinner is ready and in both plays the characters agree that a play should be written about their discussion. In *Le Portrait du Peintre* it is openly suggested that the play should be written by Boursault, allowing him to praise himself through Damis and Amarante. However, it is interesting to note that the Count calls him stupid, which is either an attempt at false modesty by Boursault, or an ambitious attempt to show the Count's stupidity and ignorance of theatrical matters.

Although there is no direct contemporary evidence to support Duchêne's claim that *Le Portrait du Peintre* shows actors 'en train de parodier ceux d'une troupe rivale',¹⁸³ it could be that the actors from the Hôtel de Bourgogne may have used the play as a chance to imitate their rivals in Molière's troupe. Duchêne particularly highlights the Count who, while claiming that a play can only be appreciated when seen on stage,

¹⁸³ Rene Duchêne *Molière* (Paris: Fayard, 1998) p.336.

replicates Arnolphe's 'Ouf' and therefore attempts to copy Molière's acting style.¹⁸⁴ Also the similar lines between *La Critique* and Boursault's play would have been more amusing if the actors in *Le Portrait du Peintre* impersonated the original actors from Molière's troupe. Further slight evidence for this can be found in the title, which could also be seen as an unintentional compliment to Molière's 'skill as an observer and portrayer' and therefore an attempt at appeasement.¹⁸⁵ Scene 1 of *L'Impromptu* also contains the line 'ayant entrepris de vous [Molière] peindre' implying that Molière had been impersonated during the *querelle*, and if *Zélinde* was not performed, then it must have been in *Le Portrait du Peintre*. Certainly there does not seem to have been any other attempt to depict Molière prior to *L'Impromptu*, and the similarities between the two plays would have meant that the audience would easily be able to recognise any attempt to impersonate Molière as the Marquis in *La Critique*.

Scandal

Scott reports that Molière attended a performance of *Le Portrait du Peintre* 'sitting on the stage where all could see him laugh and appear to enjoy himself'. However, she suggests that 'he was no longer amused by the quarrel', and 'was ready to have it over'.¹⁸⁶ Scott makes the point that the published edition of *Le Portrait du Peintre* may not be an accurate version of what was said and done on stage; Molière's plea for his privacy in *L'Impromptu* suggests it must have been more malicious and more personal.¹⁸⁷ De Visé's *Vengeance des Marquis* suggests that there was a crude song about Madeline Béjart, which de Visé claimed had been used in Boursault's play. This would explain why Molière begins his plea for his private life to be left out of the *querelle* by saying that he has no intention to attack Boursault personally – 'le beau sujet à divertir la cour que M. Boursault' (*L'Impromptu* scene 5). However, as there is

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p.337.

¹⁸⁵ Frederick Wright Vogler *Molière Mocked: Three Contemporary Hostile Comedies: Donneau de Visé Zélinde (1663), Boursault Le Portrait du Peintre (1663), Le Boulanger de Chalussay Élomire Hypocondre(1670)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973) p.60.

¹⁸⁶ Virginia Scott *Molière: A Theatrical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.131.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p.130.

nothing particularly malicious in Boursault's play, Duchêne suggests either that Molière was misinformed about the play, or that Boursault edited the play before publication in a response to Molière's plea.¹⁸⁸ The latter seems more likely, as de Visé, Chevalier and Robinet all suggest that Molière had seen Boursault's play so would not have been misinformed, and it also suggests no lasting enmity between Boursault and Molière. Boursault may also have removed any particularly offensive elements from the final version simply because they would be humorous on stage, or could be excused as such, but would not have been entertaining in print. It may have been less a question of deference to Molière's wishes and more a practical realisation that certain elements relied on acting and the theatrical atmosphere to make them acceptable.

Le Portrait du Peintre: Summary

Le Portrait du Peintre was first performed in October 1663, and published on 17 November 1663. The one-act verse play appears to be based on a suggestion in Donneau de Visé's play *Zélinde* that someone should re-write *La Critique* so that the ridiculous characters now supported Molière and the sensible characters attacked him. Boursault therefore reproduces *La Critique* almost exactly getting fools to praise the object of his satire. Much of the criticism that appears in the play is merely a repetition of the criticisms raised in *Zélinde*. However, the play is more than a simple repetition of de Visé's: not only is it more amusing to read, but would also have been far more entertaining for the spectators than de Visé's play.

The play is set in a room in the *logis* of Amarante, in an echo of *La Critique*, and centres on a dinner that she is giving for the Marquise Oriane, who is portrayed as being ridiculous, in much the same way as Climène in *La Critique*. Also in attendance are Amarante's lover, Damis; her cousin, Clitie; the count and his friend the chevalier Dorante, who are both ridiculous courtisans; and the poet Lizidor. Amarante's page, Petit-Jean, and the count's laquais, La Ramée, also appear. The Count is immediately made to appear ridiculous, as he is unable to justify his statements, saying 'On te joüra, morbleu! parce qu'on te joüra' (line 116). Similarly Dorante appears ridiculous by

¹⁸⁸ Rene Duchêne *Molière* (Paris: Fayard, 1998) p.353.

boasting that ‘pour mieux les punir [ses ennemis] d’avoir crû m’outrager/ Je me ruine exprès pour les faire enrager’ (lines 307-308). Once again their inability to provide evidence for their views leaves them looking foolish and suggests that the people who claimed to support Molière’s play had no convincing arguments in favour of it in exactly the same way as the lack of eloquence of the Marquis in *La Critique*.

Criticisms

The initial criticism is that Molière is successful purely because he is fashionable: for instance the count says that he laughs at Molière’s plays but cannot explain why - ‘Pourquoy? Je ne puis te le dire./ On m’a dit seulement que c’est là qu’on va rire’ (lines 133-134), implying that the supporters of the play are judging it merely on Molière’s reputation. Damis says that one should not judge solely by fashion and appearance as ‘Nostre éclat naturel nous doit faire paraître’ (line 106), which refers to de Visé’s claim that Molière’s success was purely a result of fashion. Both plays ignore the possibility that Molière is in fact fashionable because he is a successful playwright, and, as it is virtually impossible to find evidence to determine whether the success or the fashion came first, this criticism appears to be purely the result of jealousy. However, in Boursault’s play, this leads on to an interesting discussion about whether it is better to judge a play by reading it or by watching it and the Count underlines the importance of the ‘plaisantes postures’ (line 150) and recital of the actors. This could be intended as praise for Molière as an actor, however, as it is the ridiculous Count who utters the lines, it is unlikely to be flattery and more likely to be a criticism of Molière’s writing. The two are not mutually exclusive, as Lochert notes ‘l’éloge de la représentation et de l’art des acteurs n’est souvent qu’un anti-éloge, permettant de dénoncer la médiocre qualité littéraire du texte’.¹⁸⁹ It could, therefore, be that Boursault is attributing the success of the play to Molière’s acting, while criticising his writing.

As in *Zélinde* the line ‘femme qui compose en sçait plus qu’il ne faut’ (*EdF* I, 1) is attacked for being too bold and not showing sufficient respect to women. This seems a

¹⁸⁹ Véronique Lochert ‘La Méditation de la Lecture Contre les Agréments de la Représentation : Lecteurs et Spectateurs dans les Querelles Dramatiques’ in Emmanuelle Hénin *Les Querelles Dramatiques à l’âge Classique* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010) p.115.

counter-intuitive claim since *l'Ecole des Femmes* is about a woman escaping oppression and having the freedom to marry the man she loves. It is based on Arnolphe's criticism of women who are too intelligent, which would not have been an uncommon view in the seventeenth century. It would, however, be foolish to attribute such sentiments to him, as he has put them into the mouth of the most unpleasant character in the play, suggesting that the audience ought not to agree with him. Although we do not know Molière's views on female education, it is difficult to find any convincing evidence that *L'Ecole des Femmes* was intended as an attack on women. Indeed the only way to convince people of this is to take one line out of context, which could be done to change the meaning of any play.

The criticisms of the 'le' and the comparison between women and soup are both briefly repeated as examples of the play's offensive nature, with Oriane referring to 'des risible endroits/ Que celui de la soupe où l'on trempe les doigts' (line 224). The Count also says 'Tout exprés/ La Marquise [Oriane] y couroit pour voir le *Le* d'Agnès' and Oriane describes it as 'une chose horriblement touchante' (lines 227-230), but Amarante says that Clitie found it 'detestable' (line 249). This further suggests that the audience was going to see the play because of the scandal, rather than because of its quality. The Count was expecting something less innocent to follow the 'le' ('Je crûs que l'innocente alloit dire autre chose' (line 234)) underlining the fact that, although Molière claimed it was meant innocently, it was open to interpretation. However, Boursault adds to de Visé's criticism by sarcastically praising Molière's 'galant' image of the fleas keeping Agnès awake (line 399). However, this line was obviously not intended gallantly, and certainly would not have been interpreted that way by a contemporary audience as, according to Hall 'fleas' had been associated in literature with sexual desire since the time of Rabelais.¹⁹⁰ Boursault's audience would, therefore, have realised that this praise of Molière's gallantry was in fact intended to highlight his use of bawdy and possibly offensive lines.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.94.

Boursault also repeats de Visé's claim that some people were happy to see themselves being mocked by Molière, but goes further by having the Count try to prove that he is the model for one of Molière's ridiculous marquis ('Je suis le Turlupin de la moindre Maison' (line 336)), thus showing how foolish people must be if they enjoy being mocked. However, although this is a justified criticism, as it is clearly ridiculous to want to be mocked, la Grange suggests that Molière's acting talent was sufficient to ensure that people actually enjoyed being mocked. He notes that Molière's 'raillerie estoit délicate, et il la tournoit d'une manière si fine, que quelque satyre qu'il fist, les intéressés, bien loin de s'en offenser, rioient eux-mêmes du ridicule qu'il leur faisoit remarquer en eux'.¹⁹¹ Although this may have been a biased or exaggerated view, it would explain how he avoided making powerful enemies.

Boursault does raise a new criticism that de Visé did not mention, namely the play's genre. This is mentioned humorously, through Dorante's ridiculous assertion that it is a 'Piece tragique' (line 462) since the kitten dies, but that it must be a brilliant tragedy as it makes everyone laugh. Amarante and Damis are amazed he thinks it is a tragedy, as 'le Tragique est noble, et n'a rien de si bas' (line 472) but do not get the chance to reply. This is, however, more likely to be intended to mock the limited theatrical knowledge of Molière's supporters (in lines 506-507 Dorante is unable to say what makes a satirical play) rather than a serious criticism of tragic elements within *L'Ecole des Femmes*.

Molière is described both by Boursault and de Visé as being dangerous as he notices everything and uses it for inspiration, but Boursault adds some praise for Molière's talent describing him as both 'un homme qui fait mieux des portraits que les Peintres de Rome' and 'ce Peintre en Badins' (lines 118-125). This praise may be genuine, or at least an attempt to appease Molière and his supporters, but as it is given by the ridiculous characters, it has a double-edged appearance, and could well be intended ironically. The fact that the claim that he is the 'Médisant le meilleur du Royaume' (line 314) has such a negative context suggests that it was not meant as a way of appeasing him, rather it shows that his talent is a negative one.

¹⁹¹ Bert Edward Young and Grace Philpott Young *Le Registre de la Grange Tome II* (Paris: E Droz, 1947) p.80.

Agnès' sudden intelligence is attacked, as Lizidor says that no-one would have expected her to know 'ce que c'est qu'une lettre' (line 406) and Molière must have spent more than a day thinking up such a fine letter, yet Agnès writes it in 'une heure' (line 409). He then asks 'Luy void-on dementir son niais caractere?' (line 413) which he hopes will be answered in the negative. Boursault, however, intends his audience to think the opposite as he has just shown how much effort has gone into writing this letter, making it highly unlikely that Agnès could have written it. Lizidor is also used to criticise the notary scene, as he calls it 'cét endroit charmant' and praising the 'adresse extrême' (lines 419-421). Although this appears to be praise, it is again given by a ridiculous character. Lizidor's final line of that speech reveals Boursault's true feelings about the notary as Lizidor says 'L'autre répond sans peine à ce qu'il n'entend pas' (line 428) which is meant to make the scene appear ridiculous, rather than comic as Molière intended.

Boursault also criticises the ending, as Lizidor says it is excellent 'Le voyage d'Orante est-il pas assuré?/ Et le retour d'Enrique est-il pas préparé?' (lines 435-436), which Boursault clearly meant as a sarcastic reference to Molière's defence of his *dénouement*, as the preparation of the ending is only one line in the first Act. Boursault's play's ending imitates the ending of *La Critique*, when the servant enters to announce that dinner is served and Amarante decides that that would be a suitable way to end their play as that is how Molière's *Critique* ends and so would make the perfect satirical ending.

There are also some other brief criticisms, which are repeated from de Visé's work. For instance, Molière is again criticised for having the audacity to mock people high up the social scale. The phrase 'tarte à la crème' is briefly raised in both plays, with the reference to the incident in *Zélinde* and the constant repetition of it by the Count and Dorante in *Le Portrait*, but without being specifically condemned in either, although in another echo of *La Critique* Dorante replies to any opposition from Amarante and Damis by simply repeating 'Tarte à la cresse'. The servants are again criticised for taking too long to allow Arnolphe into the house, but there is no lengthy discussion of

their role, and Boursault's use of stupid, farcical servants appears to suggest that he regarded them as a necessary adjunct to a comic play.

There are also some important differences between the criticisms raised. Boursault does not mention several of the points raised by de Visé, such as the plays' titles, the improbable setting, Molière's use of other sources, the *maximes*, Chrysalde's character or the unspecified construction faults which de Visé has found. In the case of the titles, Chrysalde and the faults in construction, Boursault may have ignored these as he felt they were not important enough, or too easy to defend. Similarly he may have felt that Molière had a solid defence against any criticism of Arnolphe's sermon, hence why this is only briefly mentioned towards the end of the play in lines 510-512. However, it seems unusual that Boursault did not take the opportunity to attack the play's improbable setting, which made up the majority of de Visé's attack or the use of other sources. It is unlikely, though not impossible, that Boursault chose to omit these criticisms to ensure that his play did not become as long and tedious as de Visé's work. It is possible that this was a tacit acknowledgement, firstly that the rules imposed on dramatists were too restrictive and occasionally contradictory, leaving the playwright in a position where he was forced to break one rule in order to obey another. Similarly his refusal to mention Molière's 'borrowing' of plots and lines could be further evidence that this was seen as normal, and not something worth criticising, especially not in a play whose plot was borrowed directly from de Visé and Molière. However, it seems most likely that Boursault omitted to mention these points because they are not discussed in *La Critique*, which he is reversing. Boursault does, however, say that Molière's critics are jealous as the play's main opponent is 'l'Envie' (line 461). Although this line is uttered by the ridiculous Dorante, and was therefore probably meant to make fun of Molière's self-important defence, it does seem the only possible explanation for certain criticisms, such as the claim that Molière's success was based on good fortune.

In conclusion, there is little difference between the criticisms raised in *Zélinde* and *le Portrait du Peintre*. It is also worth noting that neither of the published versions contained any real attacks on Molière's private life, though the suggestion that Boursault

altered his play from performance to publication suggests that the personal attacks would soon follow. Perhaps because it is a reversal of Molière's original, Boursault's play is not devoid of comedy, with Clitie and the ridiculous courtiers providing humour and making the play more diverting than *Zélinde*. There is no doubt, though, that Boursault is merely repeating the criticisms already raised in *Zélinde*, but despite this lack of originality his play is more entertaining than de Visé's and does not give the impression of simply being a list of attacks. Lancaster agrees that *le Portrait du Peintre* has a sprightly style and avoids the tedium of *Zélinde*, and was effective enough to anger Molière and lead to his demand for his private life to be respected.¹⁹² This demand came in his response to these two plays, entitled *l'Impromptu de Versailles*, which will form the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 5

L'Impromptu de Versailles

L'Impromptu de Versailles was first performed before the King at Versailles on 14 October 1663. *L'Impromptu*, like Boursault's *Portrait*, was not published in the author's lifetime, perhaps as a sign that Molière wished to end the *querelle*. A first performance at Versailles, rather than in Paris, may support Canova-Green's suggestion that it was commissioned by the King himself, which gives firm evidence of his support for Molière during the *querelle*.¹⁹³ The evidence that the play was produced on the order of Louis XIV comes in a line by Mlle Béjart when she says 'on vous a commandé de travailler sur le sujet de la critique' (scene 1). The play is supposedly a 'behind the scenes' look at Molière's troupe rehearsing a play which they are due to perform before the King. This well-established theatrical tradition allows Molière to step out of character and explain his theories to the audience. Although the plot of the play is

¹⁹² Henry Carrington Lancaster *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the seventeenth century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936) p.259.

¹⁹³ Marie-Claude Canova-Green 'The Career Strategy of an Actor turned Playwright' in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière* ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.10.

limited, the play itself is more interesting for the scenes of the actors' preparation and their discussion of the *querelle*.

The Action

The play within a play is set in the King's antechamber and features a discussion of the *querelle* by Lysidas, an author; Chevalier, an 'honnête homme' who supports Molière; two Marquis; two prudish women; a *précieuse* and her servant and two female characters, similar to those in *La Critique* (Uranie and Elise). The play itself begins with the other members of the troupe complaining that they are not prepared, whereupon Molière admits that he is also worried about performing at short notice, but says one has no choice 'quand un roi [lui] a commandé' (Scene 1). However, he refuses to ask for more time as 'les rois n'aiment rien tant qu'une prompte obéissance' and even if they fail to satisfy him at least they will have 'la gloire d'avoir obéi vite' (scene 1). All of this flatters the King's importance and is meant to show how willing Molière is to obey him, as he prefers to risk his reputation by performing poorly, than irritate the King by refusing to perform. A brief dialogue between Molière and his wife follows, in which Molière says '[t]aisez-vous ma femme, vous êtes une bête' (scene 1). This seems to indicate that rumours of an unhappy marriage may have been true, but it must be remembered that this play is not an *Impromptu* in the fullest sense – that is, a play in which the characters have no script and must say their lines on the spur of the moment. The 'argument' between Molière and his wife was prepared in advance. It seems unlikely, though not of course impossible, that Molière would wish to act out his marital problems, but it is far more likely that this scene was intended to make fun of the rumours.

The 'play' opens with two Marquis arguing about which of them was the model for the Marquis in *La Critique*. They call upon a Chevalier to judge their dispute, but he says that Molière is not depicting anyone in particular but rather that he wants to 'peindre les mœurs sans vouloir toucher aux personnes' and that his characters are 'des personnages en l'air, et des fantômes' (scene 4). This is clearly intended to refute Boursault's claim in *Le Portrait* that there was a list, detailing who was the basis for each of Molière's characters. As the aim of comedy is to make fun of vices, particularly contemporary

ones, it is impossible for Molière to write about people without there being some similarities to real life, but he is not directly copying anyone. This, therefore, defends Molière from the allegations that his plays were based on his contemporaries, and also allows him to express part of his dramatic theory that comedy should serve a corrective function.

Molière takes the opportunity to attack Boursault by pretending not to know his name – he calls him ‘Broussaut’ – and claiming that other authors have helped write his play, but did not want to put their names to it because Molière’s defeat will be more embarrassing if he is attacked by an unknown. He also suggests that Boursault’s play will be a success because there are so many people who want to see Molière attacked, therefore allowing Molière to denigrate any success Boursault may have had by suggesting that it was not the result of his skill. To underline Boursault’s supposed inadequacies as an author, Molière declares that he and the other authors may re-use Molière’s plays as ‘ils en ont besoin’ and he is ‘bien aise de contribuer à les faire subsister’ (scene 5), implying that he is the only writer capable of entertaining the public.

The Chevalier says that Molière intends to go to watch Boursault’s play, and as ‘tout ce qu’il y a d’agréable sont effectivement les idées qui ont été prises de Molière’ (scene 5), he will doubtless enjoy it, thus accusing Boursault of using other authors’ material in the same way that Molière was accused of re-writing other playwrights’ plays. Molière says that it would be counter-productive to attack Boursault as he simply wants fame, and an attack on him would be an extremely dull play, as it is difficult to see how an author could ‘l’ajuster pour le rendre plaisant’ (scene 5). Although this is intended as an insult to a minor opponent, Molière does suggest that Boursault is using the *querelle* for self-promotion, as ‘il m’attaque de gaieté de coeur, pour se faire connaître de quelque façon que ce soit’ (scene 5).

Acting styles

It is suggested that as Molière has been ordered to defend himself in the *querelle*, he should perform a ‘comédie des comédiens’, imitating his rivals at the Hôtel de

Bourgogne. Molière suggests that he has nothing to lose by being imitated, as his comic acting relies on the exaggerated portrayal of a vice, and therefore his rivals are imitating this vice, rather than himself. Tragic acting, however, depends much more on the actor's interpretation of the part and the actor can include 'des particularités forcément siennes'.¹⁹⁴ Molière would therefore be able to mock his rivals, as they are able to include elements of their own character in their performances.

In Molière's proposed play, an author asks a troupe newly arrived in Paris to show him how they would perform a tragedy and then scorns their style. They have rejected several of the normalities of tragic acting, for instance the actor who is to play the King is not fat, but a King should be 'gros et gras comme quatre' (Scene 1). The actor's reciting is then attacked by the author, as he speaks to the Captain of the Guards 'humainement', rather than in the declamatory style the author wants (Scene 1). Molière, who is playing the author, then shows how it 'ought' to be done by copying the actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne beginning with Montfleury, who the stage directions, possibly ironically, describe as 'excellent acteur'. Molière highlights Montfleury's habit of emphasising the final line, so that the audience know when to applaud. The contemporary source, Lamy, reports that the alexandrines used in tragedies would be made to sound like a circumflex accent in that 'la voix s'élève au commencement [du vers] et se rabaisse à la fin'.¹⁹⁵ Based on this, Gros de Gasquet refers to 'un accent d'intensité (rythmique) [qui] frappe toujours la dernière syllabe du vers' which implies that 'un accent de hauteur (intonatif) [frappe] au même endroit'.¹⁹⁶ In other words the rhythm of the line accenuates the final word, and the actor would also stress the final word when speaking. In the middle of a speech this could be used to emphasise a key word, but when used at the end of a speech, it would give the audience a clue that the speech was about to end. This is the effect that Molière derogatively refers to as how an

¹⁹⁴Hélène Merlin-Kajman 'Indignité Comique et Public en Débat' in Emmanuelle Hénin *Les Querelles Dramatiques à l'âge Classique* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010) p.98-100.

¹⁹⁵ Lamy *L'art de parler avec un discours dans lequel on donne une idée de l'art de persuader* (Paris: A Pralard, 1676) p.171.

¹⁹⁶ Julia Gros de Gasquet *En disant l'alexandrin* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006) p.43.

actor ‘fait faire le brouhaha’ (scene 1), or lets the audience know that they should applaud or laugh, rather than waiting for them to do so naturally. The *Lettre au Mercure* suggests that Molière was criticising ‘le ton emphatique et de démoniaque de Montfleury’.¹⁹⁷

Molière then impersonates Mlle Beauchâteau, and particularly mentions ‘ce visage riant qu’elle conserve dans les plus grandes afflictions’ (scene 1), which shows that she is not tailoring her performance to the text. The *Lettre au Mercure* raises a similar complaint about another actor from Molière’s period, François le Noir de la Torilliere, saying that ‘[o]n remarquoit un défaut en lui, qui étoit d’avoir un visage riant dans les passions les plus furieuses et les situations les plus tristes’.¹⁹⁸ This causes Gros de Gasquet to remark that what Molière is demanding from actors is ‘plus de jeu et moins d’effets’.¹⁹⁹ In fact, Molière’s main criticism of the actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, is not their style itself, but rather the excessive lengths they take it to. As Gros de Gasquet notes, he is reproaching them for ‘l’exagération dans la diction, c’est le fait qu’ils se préoccupent de leurs effets sur le public plus que de leurs personnages’.²⁰⁰ He wants to show his audience that they are ‘des comédiens qui en font trop’,²⁰¹ hence his instruction to Brécourt, who is playing the *honnête homme*, that he should ‘gesticuler le moins [que possible]’ (scene 1). This appears to be the sense in which Molière wants his actors to be ‘naturel’, not necessarily true to everyday life, but simply less exaggerated or artificial than their rivals, while still respecting the traditional acting style. He is not mocking the fundamental style of acting at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, but rather certain excessive elements of it. This may explain why Floridor, the leading actor of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, was spared by Molière, as Molière felt that he did not over-act as much as the others. It seems highly unlikely that Floridor had a dramatically different style to

¹⁹⁷ Madame Paul Poisson *Lettres au Mercure sur Molière, sa Vie, ses Oeuvres* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969) p.34.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.37.

¹⁹⁹ Julia Gros de Gasquet *En disant l’alexandrin* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006) p.85.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.85.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.85.

the rest of his troupe, therefore Molière would not have ignored him if he was mocking tragic acting in general. However, if Molière simply wished to highlight the excesses of certain actors, he may have felt that Floridor did not fall into this category.

He also does impressions of Beauchâteau and de Villiers, but as he does not mention in the text any particular part of their acting style, it is impossible to know if he was highlighting any particular part of their acting. The fact that he impersonates them may explain why they both make brief, and unnecessary, appearances in Montfleury's play *L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé* (December 1663). However, the obvious point he is making is the comparison between their acting style and the style he wants to use, described as 'le plus naturellement qu'il lui aurait été possible' (scene 1). Again, 'naturellement' here would be used to form a contrast with 'excessivement'. Clearly a contemporary audience would have found his imitations extremely funny, much as a modern audience find imitations of popular celebrities amusing, and so they serve three functions, entertaining the audience, ridiculing and weakening a rival troupe, and allowing him to put forward his own theory.

As a further demonstration of his theory on acting, Molière explains to each actor how they should perform their role, which would have given him the opportunity to play each of their roles and also to display his talent before the royal family. During this, he takes the opportunity to criticise other authors by underlining 'cet air pédant... ce ton de voix sentencieux' (scene 1). This shows that he views the criticisms of other authors as pedantic, and is suggesting that they spend too much time preaching about dramatic theory, rather than thinking about what the audience enjoys. He continues this attack by sarcastically claiming that the approval of other authors is better than 'tous les applaudissements du public, et que tout l'argent qu'on saurait gagner' (scene 5), and mocking Lysidas because, although his plays are applauded by his fellow authors, no one else goes to see them. This implies that his pedantic critics do not know how to please the public, whereas Molière is extremely successful, and therefore happy to be criticised by other playwrights if that is the cost of filling theatres.

Dénouement

Molière uses *L'Impromptu* to announce his retirement from the *querelle* as he thinks that the best response is to write another successful play, rather than responding to petty attacks. The main way he has offended other authors is that he has 'eu le Bonheur de plaire un peu plus qu'ils n'auraient voulu' (scene 5), suggesting that they are simply jealous of his success. Molière hopes to be justified by the successes of his plays and the approval of the 'augustes personnes' in the audience, and so he praises the nobility in the audience in addition to his praise for the whole audience in *La Critique*. Molière also criticises his rivals for attacking a successful play, as they are in effect attacking the judgement of those who approved of it – which of course included Louis XIV.

He admits that he is happy for his opponents to attack his plays, his acting and his tone of voice if they feel that they need to do so in order to be successful, but simply asks that they do not attack his private life. Merlin-Kajman highlights the 'solennité performative' of these lines and says that, with the audience as his witness, Molière is attempting to turn the theatre into a court,²⁰² and in the manner of a counsel summing up, is attempting to appear both reasonable and generous. However, Molière's plea that the other authors '[ne touchent] point à des matières de nature' (Scene 5) suggests he was not confident that he had put an end to the rumours about his private life, and so he felt the need to ask his opponents to concentrate on his plays and acting. The rehearsal is then ended by the announcement that Louis XIV has arrived and would like them to start. However, it is announced that Louis has decided that they have not had enough time to prepare and so they can perform their new play at a later date. The play ends with expressions of gratitude to Louis for his kindness and understanding, which are simply another opportunity to flatter the King.

Although it was doubtless a difficult time for him, the *querelle* served a useful purpose for Molière, as it allowed him to express publicly his ideas about the theatre, to defend his acting style and to parody that of his rivals. Duchêne highlights the opportunity it afforded Molière to voice his views on comedy and tragedy, as well as his opinion that

²⁰² Hélène Merlin-Kajman 'Indignité Comique et Public en Débat' in Emmanuelle Hénin *Les Querelles Dramatiques à l'âge Classique* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010) p.108.

the nobility and the *parterre* could judge a play by the most important criteria, namely whether it was entertaining.²⁰³ It also showed the extent to which he enjoyed the royal favour and support throughout the debate. Molière did not attempt to answer many of the criticisms raised against him, preferring instead to concentrate on expressing the faults of his opponents and underlining the success he had enjoyed, both at Court and in the Parisian theatres. His main defence was that he would rather write entertaining and successful plays, than plays which are considered ‘correct’ by other playwrights. Both of the plays he wrote in his defence, but particularly *La Critique*, are certainly far more diverting and successful than those written by some of his opponents, notably Donneau de Visé, whose contributions seem to lack the humour which Molière relied on and were too didactic to be entertaining.

Chapter 6

The works discussed in this chapter appeared towards the end of 1663, following Molière’s *Impromptu* and largely in response to it. The exception is *Le Panégyrique de L’Ecole des Femmes*, which is included in this chapter on the grounds of chronology of publication date, although it seems to have been written before the first performance of Molière’s *Impromptu*.

La Vengeance des Marquis

De Visé’s *Vengeance des Marquis* appeared three months after *Zélinde* in late November 1663, about a month and a half after *Le Portrait*. Duchêne suggests that de Visé’s desire to be recognised and to have a play performed drove him to re-enter the *querelle*.²⁰⁴ Again, there is no documentary evidence that it was ever performed, and Donneau de Visé himself did not mention it in his *Lettre sur les Affaires du Théâtre (LAT)*, which he would almost certainly have done if the play had been a success.²⁰⁵ As

²⁰³ Rene Duchêne *Molière* (Paris: Fayard, 1998) p.355-356.

²⁰⁴ Ibid p.346.

²⁰⁵ Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l’Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.248.

with *Zélinde* it was a ‘dialogue sans action’²⁰⁶ and it contained the first personal attacks in dramatic form on both Molière and Madeleine Béjart.

Two friends discuss Molière’s *Impromptu*, one of whom [Ariste] supports the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and the other [Cléante] supports Molière. They ask a third friend, Alcipe, to adjudicate as he is supposedly impartial. The play also features Cléante’s wife, Orphise; his sister, Clarice and his niece, Lucile. Orphise and Clarice both openly condemn Molière, while Lucile, who is supposedly a naïve country-girl, has only a small part. Cléante’s two servants, Ergaste and Philipin, also appear, as does Orphise’s maid, Isabelle. This play is more entertaining than *Zélinde* as, although it is still simply a list of criticisms, there is no attempt at plot, which makes the play feel less contrived. The ending is weak and unexpected, but the majority of plays in the *querelle* struggle to find a suitable ending. The play ventures into a new area with some imitations of Molière’s acting, which would make the play more interesting, and the suggestion that Molière cared more about money and success than about the quality of his plays.

Lettre sur les Affaires du Théâtre

De Visé continued his involvement in the *querelle*, publishing a short work entitled *Les Diversités Galantes* in mid-December.²⁰⁷ This was made up of two volumes of 75 pages, and was, therefore, similar to his earlier *Nouvelles nouvelles*. In it, he included *La Vengeance des Marquis* and a *Lettre sur les Affaires du Théâtre*. This last is presented in the form of a letter to an unnamed recipient, who has apparently asked de Visé for news of the theatre. In it, de Visé also takes the opportunity to apologise for the quality of *La Vengeance des Marquis*, which he describes as ‘un ouvrage d’un jour et demy’ (LAT).

Criticisms raised

La Vengeance des Marquis begins with several derogatory remarks about Molière’s plays, suggesting that they are not entertaining as ‘[e]lle [Cléante’s niece] pourra divertir

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p.249-250.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p.250.

tous ceux qui la verront avant que la Comedie commence' as well as saying that Molière's *Impromptu* is 'un maigre divertissement' (scene 1). Cléante's niece is said to have enjoyed watching the marquis in the audience more than the play (scene 3), and his sister says that it was entertaining 'de voir rire tant de gens de si peu de chose' (scene 5). Lastly, when referring to Cléante taking his wife to see *L'Impromptu*, Ergaste says that he 'l'a persecutée de l'aller voir aujourd'huy' (scene 1). Having thus painted a negative image of the play, de Visé turns to his previous allegation that Molière's success was a result of fashion, with the impartial Alcipe saying that he '[n'est] point de ceux que le torrent entraine' and 'ne [rit] point par complaisance lors [qu'il n'en a] point de sujet' (scene 2). He seeks only to be entertained and 'non l'avantage d'un Auteur' (scene 2). This is once again a reference to the unthinking support that Molière supposedly enjoyed, and a criticism of those people who claimed all of his plays were excellent without being able to justify this view.

De Visé then repeats his previous criticisms that Molière is borrowing the subject of his play and reusing roles and portraits. He says that the idea for *L'Impromptu* is one that '[I]es Italiens en ont fait cent fois de mesme' (scene 1) and that Molière's theme of having to perform a play because the King has demanded it is borrowed from the *Rondeau d'Isabeau*, a poem about the demand for a poem to be written.²⁰⁸ This criticism is continued by the claim that '[il] est longtemps que nous n'avons rien veu de nouveau de luy' and so de Visé claims that there is no need for the Hôtel de Bourgogne to turn any of Molière's plays into new ones, which in his *Impromptu* he had said he was happy for them to do, as 'on ne doit pas prendre le soin de les retourner, puis qu'il se donne luy-mesme cette peine' (scene 2). De Visé also took issue with Molière's claim that he had many subjects for new plays (*L'Impromptu de Versailles* scene 4), saying that 'il a desjà donné plusieurs coups de pinceau à tous les gens de Cour qu'il nomme, et dont il dit qu'il n'a pas commencé le portrait' (scene 2). At the time when de Visé was writing, this criticism appears more justified, as Molière includes several *précieuses* and jealous husbands. Even if de Visé is justified in the first part of his criticism, the second part is less justified as Molière had not written about any of the characters he mentions

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p.263.

in scene 4 of *L'Impromptu*. However, de Visé uses the evidence he appears to have compiled as justification that Molière 'est plus épuisé qu'il ne le veut faire croire' (scene 2). This suggests on one level that Molière is too tired to write new material – implying that it is a short term problem, easily cured by a short break – but on another level, the use of 'épuisé' could suggest that he is mentally spent, implying that he has now used all of the subjects his inspiration can provide him with.

Another criticism that is repeated is that of Molière's characters. De Visé begins by claiming that they are overly exaggerated, to the point that '[il] nous font souvent voir des défauts où il n'y en a pas' (scene 2). This is, however, only a valid criticism if one accepts that Molière was aiming to be true to life, and basing his characters on real people. If, however, one accepts that his aim was to highlight a particular vice, then this criticism becomes ridiculous, since Molière was concentrating solely on the 'défauts' and not basing his characters on real people. This relates to de Visé's other criticism, that Molière contradicts himself about whether his characters are based on real people or not. In scene 4 of *L'Impromptu*, Brécourt claims that they are not, calling them 'des personnages en l'air', but in scene 5 of the same play, Mlle de Molière says that they are, arguing that 'il peint si bien les gens, que chacun s'y connaît'. However, since Brécourt was playing one of Molière's supporters, he is more believable than Mlle de Molière, who was playing one of his opponents. It seems unlikely that de Visé would have overlooked this key fact, again suggesting that he is looking for reasons to criticise Molière, rather than that he has a genuine grievance with the plays. However, de Visé maintains that Molière is basing his characters on real life, and uses this to suggest that Molière is not using any talent to write his plays, since if he 'peint d'après nature, il confesse qu'il n'y met rien du sien' (*LAT*). He also says that Molière has to base his characters on real life as Molière's imagination 'ne luy peut représenter des Heros' (*LAT*). Ignoring the talent that is required to represent accurately a recognisable person on stage, this criticism is based solely on a selective reading of the text, and therefore comes across as petty.

De Visé is also critical of the title of Molière's latest play, describing it as 'faite à loisir' (scene 2) and 'cét ouvrage de plusieurs années que l'on veut faire passer pour un enfant

de huit jours' (scene 3), as well as 'son *pretendu Impromptu*' (LAT). He bases this criticism on the fact that Molière refers to actors appearing in plays which they had not performed in recently, for instance Molière gives 'les Stances du Cid à un Acteur [Beauchâteau] qui ne les a point dites il y a plus de six ans' (scene 2). It seems, therefore, that this criticism is partially justified, although references in the play itself show that it must have been written (or, conceivably, rewritten) in the few days between the performance of *Le Portrait* and its first performance. However, even though this criticism is at least partially accurate, it is hardly a major attack. De Visé then combines this with his criticism of the titles of Molière's other two plays in the *querelle*, as Molière 'ne se soucie pas que ses pieces ayent des noms qui leur conviennent, pourveu qu'elles en ayent de specieux et qui puissent exciter de la curiosité' (LAT). However, this argument is weakened by de Visé's admission that he had followed Molière's example and given his own play 'un nom qui ne luy convient pas' (LAT).

One of the major, and potentially most damaging, criticisms raised is that Molière is attacking the nobility. De Visé begins by defending the marquis, who are described as 'une jolie chose' and 'bien faits et bien aimables' (scene 3). He also praises their 'humeur bien douce' since they 'souffrent que l'on se mocque de lui' (scene 3). De Visé says that 'ils se vengent assez par leur prudent silence, et font voir qu'ils ont beaucoup d'esprit en ne l'estimant pas assez pour se soucier de ce qu'il dit contre eux' (LAT). He then criticises Molière who wants to 'tourner le Royaume en ridicule, railler toute la noblesse et rendre méprisables [...] des noms éclatans' (LAT). More seriously, however, he suggests that Molière's mockery of the marquis is an attack on Louis XIV, who is 'tousjours accompagné des gens [que Molière] veut rendre ridicules' (LAT). For de Visé '[il] ne suffit pas de garder le respect que nous devons au Demy-Dieu qui nous gouverne, il faut épargner ceux qui ont le glorieux avantage de l'approcher' (LAT). He therefore advises Molière that he 'devroit plustost travailler à nous faire voir qu'ils sont tous des Heros, puis que le Prince est tousjours au milieu d'eux, et qu'il en est comme le chef' (LAT). As Merlin-Kajman notes, this was a serious criticism, since this comparison could be seen as insolent and disrespectful, and possibly even 'menaçant

pour l'ordre social'.²⁰⁹ However, as has already been mentioned, marquis were not always regarded as the pinnacle of society, a claim supported by Merlin-Kajman, as '[o]n a *qualifié* bien des gens du nom de marquis, qui n'ont point de titre pour cela'.²¹⁰ Therefore Molière is not threatening the social order directly by this suggestion, merely trying to highlight the number of false marquis in society. He is therefore mocking the marquis in particular, rather than the nobility in general. It also seems unlikely that Molière would wish to denigrate Louis XIV, who was his major supporter at this point and who he has praised in *L'Impromptu*. De Visé also uses the ridiculous servant Philippin to mock Molière's claim that marquis had taken the place of valets in comedy. Philippin enters dressed in 'tout ce qui peut rendre ridicule une personne' (scene 7). This comic exaggeration is criticising a statement which has been taken out of context: Molière was suggesting that marquis have become the stock farcical character, a role which used to belong to servants.

Next some attention must be given to the more minor criticisms raised by de Visé, beginning with his claim that Molière was mocking the French and his audience by trying to persuade everyone 'que les François n'aiment qu'à rire; mais il fait voir par là qu'il les estime peu, puis qu'il ne les croit pas capables de gouter les belles choses' (*LAT*). This was almost certainly not meant as a genuine criticism. Brief references are also made to the allegations that the play was vulgar and irreligious, as Clarice says '[n]ous y avons esté pour nous mortifier, et non pour nous divertir' (scene 5). She also admits that she wanted to see whether 'apres avoir fait un sermon dans une de ses Comedies, et mis les Dix Commandemens' (scene 5), Molière would now make fun of the Seven Deadly Sins. As while as being a minor reference to more major criticisms, which de Visé unfortunately omits in order to concentrate on personal attacks on Molière and his troupe, these quotations imply that many people were watching Molière's play because of the scandal. This therefore gives further evidence that, whether the playwrights were consciously taking advantage of the situation or not, the

²⁰⁹ Hélène Merlin-Kajman 'Indignité Comique et Public en Débat' in Emmanuelle Hénin *Les Querelles Dramatiques à l'âge Classique* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010) p.103.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.103-104.

querelle was ensuring that they attracted large audiences. Molière's reasons for retiring from the *querelle* are also, jokingly, questioned. As his works 'ont plus d'un père [...] il sçait bien ce qu'il fait, et n'abandonne rien du sien' (scene 3). Furthermore, continuing the accusation that *L'Impromptu* was not written in one week, de Visé claims that Molière would be unable to respond to any more attacks as '[il] ne travaille pas si vite' (scene 3). Both of these are relatively light-hearted references to criticisms de Visé has already raised, but with a slightly new, and interesting, twist, by placing them in a different context. The *querelle* between Molière and the Hôtel de Bourgogne is said to be Molière's fault since 'le Peintre avouë luy-mesme qu'il a parlé d'eux le premier' (scene 5). This is almost certainly an accurate criticism, as Molière had mocked the actors at the Hôtel in *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. However, this bickering was probably more an attempt by both sides to weaken their main opponent by highlighting their defects, rather than a serious feud. It is also pointed out that no one dares to attack Molière, with de Visé sarcastically remarking that 'sa réponse ne marque point d'animosité' and 'on ne luy peut rien reprocher' (scene 3). He finds it unusual that no one has yet attacked Molière as 'ceux que l'on croit indomptables sont plus souvent et plus facilement vaincus que les autres' (LAT). However, he attributes this to two factors, namely 'ses Amis sont en trop grand nombre' (scene 3) and 'la reputation d'Elomire a longtemps empesché que l'on ne l'attaquast' (LAT). This is, thanks to Boursault's involvement in the *querelle*, a weaker criticism than it was when de Visé first mentioned it in *Zélinde*, and certainly the authors do not appear to have had anything to fear from Molière's supporters, since his most powerful supporter, Louis XIV, made no active attempts to prevent the criticism of Molière.

De Visé finishes by praising Molière, albeit grudgingly, as 'tout ce que l'on escrit contre luy ne sert qu'à faire voir qu'il triomphe' (LAT). Molière's success has not been in the least affected by the criticisms leveled at him, and this gives de Visé the confidence to say what he feels, and also to warn Molière that '[ceux] qui joient tout le monde doivent sans murmurer, souffrir qu'on les attaque, puis qu'ils en fournissent le sujet et que l'on ne fait que leur rendre ce qu'ils prestant aux autres' (LAT). This is certainly a valid point, though it raises the question of to what extent Molière is complaining of his treatment. Certainly by the time this letter appeared Molière had withdrawn from the

public debate and apparently given his opponents permission to say whatever they wanted about his plays. He was merely offended by references to his private life, which seems reasonable, as the suggestions of his wife's infidelity in scene 3 moved the *querelle* from a literary debate into a very personal attack. Molière's main arguments during the *guerre comique* centre on his views of literary theory and dramatic performance, and there are instances of Molière making fun of himself and the public perception of him. While de Visé is right in principle to say that Molière should accept the same mockery that he subjects others to, it does not seem to be a justified criticism based on the plays in the *querelle*.

Defence

De Visé also claims that Molière has been beaten by Boursault, that in fact he has been 'battu de ses propres armes' (*LAT*). This also shows, according to de Visé, how weak Molière's original position was, as 'le premier qui est entré dans la lice l'a obligé de recourir à de honteuses armes' (*LAT*), a reference to his parody of the actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. De Visé claims none of the credit for Molière's defeat, even though he entered the *querelle* before Boursault. This may be because, although he had been the first to attack Molière, Boursault had made the first theatrical attack, and was, therefore, the first to enter 'la lice'. In *La Vengeance des Marquis*, Cléante praises Molière's bravery for going to watch *Le Portrait*, but Ariste says he was merely there to enjoy the satisfaction of seeing his play approved. However, this seems a strange claim, as Molière is unlikely to have enjoyed the play if he initially believed that Boursault was praising him; it is therefore more likely that he went to find out what the play was saying about him. It is also possible that he wanted to be seen to be there, so that people would think that he was happy to let his critics have their say.

De Visé then turns to Molière's defence of his plays, and begins by sarcastically agreeing with Molière's belief that it is better to entertain the audience than give them a list of reasons why they should support the play as 'il suffit de faire rire pour gagner sa cause' (scene 2). This criticism is perhaps more understandable than some, as de Visé is presenting a thorough critique of the plays, while Molière is entertaining the audience, and giving brief mentions to the plays. Molière's method seems to be better suited to

the medium of the debate, since in the theatre it is important to remember the presence of the audience, and entertain them, whereas a journal article can be more didactic. De Visé's background of writing journal articles and short stories rather than plays may explain why, at this point in his career, he prefers didactic, and often pedantic, articles in the form of theatrical discussions, rather than the entertaining plays that Molière contributes. De Visé is extremely critical of Molière for defending his own play, as he thinks Molière has 'agy en père, et qu'il avoit eu trop d'indulgence pour ses enfans' (*LAT*). This leads on to the criticism that he is praised by the rest of his troupe, underlined by the claim that 'il fait bien puis que tous ceux du reste de la troupe la disent' (scene 2). De Visé adds to the criticism of this point, by highlighting the fact that, not only is Molière praised by his own troupe, but they praise him using lines that he had written, 'il a luy-mesme fourny à ses camarades l'encens qu'il se fait donner' (scene 2). Linked to the criticism that Molière ought not to have defended himself is the accusation of vanity. De Visé sarcastically claims '[il] ne se fait point louer à l'ouverture de sa Piece par toute sa troupe, et il ne fait point dire qu'il devoit avoir soin de sa reputation, et ne pas entreprendre un Ouvrage en si peu de temps' (scene 2). Later on, while discussing Molière's acting, he also criticises Molière, who 'se croit le plus grand Comedien du monde' (scene 5). De Visé further backs up this allegation by criticising Molière's defensive strategy which revealed 'plus d'aigreur que d'esprit' (scene 2), since 'il ne s'est defendu qu'avec des armes dont on ne croyoit pas qu'il dût servir, et que l'on ne peut manier sans se faire plus de mal à soy même qu'à ceux contre qui on les employe' (*LAT*). He further suggests that, by mocking other actors, Molière has 'non seulement travaillé à leur gloire en les contrefaisant, mais encor à la perte de la sienne' (*LAT*). He is therefore suggesting that by defending himself Molière is simply using the *querelle* as a chance to boast. This is certainly a contrast to the attitudes of some of the other authors, most notably Chevalier, who claimed that he did not have 'l'esprit' (*Les Amours de Calotin* line 130) to write satire. He makes further disparaging remarks about himself, as one of his characters, the baron, says that '[i]l se mesle d'écrire/ Mais on ne le voit point mesler de la Satyre' (*Les Amours de Calotin* lines 127-128). This is clearly false modesty since the parts of this play which deal with the *querelle* are satirical, and Mongrédien mentions that the titles of his other plays

‘prouvent que Chevalier avait souvent recours à l’actualité pour divertir ses auditeurs’.²¹¹

Tragedy or Comedy?

De Visé, possibly inspired by a desire to flatter Pierre Corneille, attacks Molière’s claim that comedy was harder to write than tragedy, and maintains that Molière is only attacking ‘[les] choses pour lesquelles il devoit avoir beaucoup d’estime’ (*LAT*). He then praises tragedy, which ‘reussit pour son merite, et sa bonté seul nous oblige à luy rendre justice’, whereas ‘l’on va plustost aux ouvrages qui sont de la nature de ceux d’Elomire pour les gens que l’on y croit voir jouër’ (*LAT*): people watch Molière’s plays not for their quality, but to see whom he is mocking. He further goes on to suggest that comedies require no talent to write them, as ‘elles doivent ordinairement tous leurs succez aux grimaces d’un Acteur’ (*LAT*). He then begins a slightly more personal attack on Molière, and other comic authors, as ‘[pour] faire parler des Heros il faut avoir l’ame grande [...] il faut que le jugement et l’esprit s’y fassent remarquer [...] je vous laisse à deviner les belles qualitez que l’on doit avoir pour bien dépeindre des personnes ridicules’ (*LAT*), implying that no one with judgement will write comedies. De Visé then returns to his personal attack on Molière, and adds flattery for Pierre Corneille, claiming that ‘il y a au Parnasse mille places de vuides entre le divin Corneille et le comique Elomire, et que l’on ne les peut comparer en rien, puisque, pour ses ouvrages, le premier est plus qu’un Dieu, et le second est aupres de luy moins qu’un homme’ (*LAT*). This may well have been intended predominately as praise for Corneille, in the hope of winning his support not only in this debate, but for de Visé’s career in general.

Acting

In response to Molière’s attacks on the actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, de Visé analyses Molière’s acting and notes that ‘il souffle et qu’il escume bien’ and ‘il a trouvé le secret de rendre son visage bouffi’ (scene 2). Furthermore ‘il récite de Porfile [...] Il recite encors quelque fois ainsi en croisant les bras, et en faisant un hoquet à la fin de

²¹¹ Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l’Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.362.

chaque vers' (scene 5). This would appear to suggest that Molière recited his lines standing side-on to the audience, a stern and suitably dramatic pose, but one which would have severely limited his ability to perform to the audience. This scene would have been intended to give one of the actors at the Hôtel, offended by Molière's portrayal of him in *L'Impromptu*, the opportunity to gain some measure of revenge. However, de Visé goes on to say that this might not be a success as 'les Comédiens de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne ne sçauroient jouer si mal qu'eux [Molière's troupe]' (scene 5). This is followed by another criticism that Molière has taken his acting style from the Italians, but with the twist of suggesting that he has done so poorly, as he is only 'une mechante Copie' (scene 5). De Visé then claims that Molière had to give the lead role in *Dom Garcie* to another actor as 'l'on ne le pouvoit souffrir dans cette Comedie qu'il devoit mieux jouer que toutes les autres à cause qu'il en est Auteur' (scene 5). Mongrédien suggests that de Visé is the only source to claim that Molière was replaced,²¹² but he is unlikely to have invented this episode as his contemporaries would have known if he were doing so. De Visé then attempts to finish this particular debate by having Molière's supporter admit 'Je sçay bien qu'il n'est pas bon Comedien' (scene 5). De Visé mocks other members of Molière's troupe, calling Louis Béjart 'le Dieu Vulcan', Du Parc is 'ce gros Porteur de chaise' and Madeline Béjart is described as too old (scene 5). She is later described as a 'vieux poisson' (scene 7) and the infamous *Chanson de la Coquille* is sung about her. This is a reference to the opening of *Dom Garcie* in which Madeline, dressed as a nymph, climbed out of a seashell. She would have been 43 when she appeared in *Dom Garcie*, and so de Visé was implying that she is too old to play the part of attractive young ladies²¹³. Although it would appear to modern audiences that this is an accurate criticism, it was not unusual for seventeenth-century actresses to play the same role their entire lives, even when they were too old to pretend to be a young girl, or in certain cases even when they were pregnant.

²¹² Ibid, p.285.

²¹³ Rene Duchêne *Molière* (Paris: Fayard, 1998) p.346.

Mongrédien says that this song originally appeared in *Le Portrait*,²¹⁴ but it does not appear in the published version. However, in his *Au Lecteur* de Visé refers to it saying ‘ne t’imagines pas que je l’aye prise dans *Le Portrait du Peintre*’, clearly implying that the song, or at least one similar to it, had been performed in Boursault’s play²¹⁵. De Visé does, however, claim credit for writing the song as he had started writing his play before *Le Portrait* was performed and that the actors of the Hôtel admit that he encouraged them to use it²¹⁶.

This is followed by further insults, aimed both at Molière and at his troupe, who are described as ‘des Singes et des Guenons’ (scene 2). Ariste then accuses Molière of being a cuckold, as ‘j’y en [cocus] contay un jour jusques à trente et un’ (scene 3), a reference to scene 5 of Molière’s *Impromptu*. These personal attacks on Molière, as well as the insults mentioned earlier, are too extreme and ruin the effect of de Visé’s other arguments.

Success

De Visé also refers to an apparent contradiction between scene 6 of *L’Impromptu*, in which Molière criticises his rivals for trying to make money out of the *querelle*, and scene 6 of *La Critique*, in which Molière says he is happy to be criticised as long as people keep coming to see his plays. This criticism is slightly weakened because in fact Molière only talks about success, rather than profit, in *La Critique* (*CdEF* scene 6), but as the two are clearly linked, I do not agree with Mongrédien that this criticism ‘tombe ... à plat’²¹⁷ because of the slight mistake made by de Visé. It certainly raises a valid question of artistic integrity or financial success: is it better to write a controversial but successful play, or a play which adheres to all the dramatic conventions but which no one goes to see? Molière himself had raised this question in both *la Critique* and

²¹⁴ Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l’Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.294.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.297.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.297.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 282.

l'Impromptu by asking whether it was more important to please the audience or follow the rules, and suggesting that he would rather write plays that were criticised but successful, than plays which were praised by other playwrights but ignored by the public. This debate is impossible to resolve, but the subsequent question of whether playwrights provoked controversy to ensure a larger audience will be examined in greater detail later when the entrance of the Théâtre des Marais is examined.

End of a quarrel

As has already been mentioned Molière and Donneau de Visé were reconciled soon after the *querelle* and Wright Vogler feels that their subsequent collaboration serves to highlight 'Donneau de Visé's earlier professional opportunism'.²¹⁸ Molière's motives for working with de Visé so soon after the *querelle* are less obvious. Possibly he recognised that de Visé's attack was predominantly a publicity stunt, rather than a genuine grievance, and so could be easily excused. It is more likely however, that he felt de Visé had sufficient talent to write successful plays, and chose not to let personal differences stand in the way of a potentially successful collaboration. His strong criticism of Molière had helped Donneau de Visé to make a name for himself, which was his main ambition, but had left a very negative picture of him, particularly his claims that Molière was mocking religion and his insinuations about Molière's private life.²¹⁹

Le Panégyrique de l'Ecole des Femmes

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the appearance on 30 November 1663 of a work called *Le Panégyrique de l'Ecole des Femmes ou conversation sur les oeuvres de Mr. Molière* confuses the chronology. In his *Au Lecteur* the author, Charles Robinet claimed that his *Panégyrique* had been written in about September 1663, but 'il y a plus de trois mois que ceux [the publishers] qui te debitent ce *Panegyrique* l'ont entre leurs

²¹⁸ Frederick Wright Vogler *Molière Mocked: Three Contemporary Hostile Comedies: Donneau de Visé Zélinde (1663), Boursault Le Portrait du Peintre (1663), Le Boulanger de Chalussay Élomire Hypocondre (1670)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973) p.20.

²¹⁹ Pierre Mélése *Un Homme de Lettres au Temps du Grand Roi, Donneau de Visé, Fondateur du Mercure Galant* (Paris: Librairie E Droz, 1936) p.46.

mains'.²²⁰ This would explain why no mention of *L'Impromptu* is made, even though Robinet's work was published more than a month after the first performance of *L'Impromptu*.

Robinet, an author new to the quarrel, was much older and more established than the other writers who have been examined thus far. Born in about 1608, he spent much of his life as a journalist, either working for the *Gazette* or for two new periodicals *La Muse héroï-comique* (1654-1655) and *La Muse Royale* (1656-1660).²²¹

Despite of the views of some critics, notably the publisher Bibliophile Jacob, who says 'le titre de *Panegyrique* prouve d'une manière certaine que l'auteur avait voulu faire l'éloge de *L'Ecole des Femmes* et de Molière', there is little evidence that Robinet supported Molière.²²² Robinet explains the contrast between the title and the content by claiming in the *Au Lecteur* that he had not chosen the title himself, and would be happy for his readers 'le debaptiser'.²²³ The play certainly does not conform to the normal idea of a panegyric. Although the work is set out in the form of a conversation between two couples, with the men supporting Molière while their mistresses oppose him, at the end the young men admit they had only been supporting Molière as part of a game, allowing the detractors a complete victory.²²⁴

Robinet remained critical of Molière for a short while after: in 1665, following the death of one of the actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, Beauchâteau, he remarked that Molière was trying in vain to follow his acting style:

C'est en vain que Molière tâche à jouer son rôle ;
Il iroit longtems à l'école

²²⁰ Ibid, p.169.

²²¹ Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.164.

²²² Ibid, p.164.

²²³ Ibid, p.169.

²²⁴ Ibid, p.165.

Avant que d'égalier un tel original.²²⁵

However, almost immediately after this he seems to have decided to end the feud by praising Molière's *L'Amour médecin* and his 'gai génie'.²²⁶

In *Le Panégyrique* Robinet also discusses *Le Portrait* and de Visé. De Visé is described as having 'tout à fait de l'esprit' but also as 'un Censeur un peu trop raffiné' (Quatrième Entrée), which may be a criticism of some of the more pedantic points which he raises. Boursault's play, meanwhile, 'est un Tableau fort ressemblant' (scene 5), which could simply be an attempt to continue the metaphor of painting, but the use of 'ressemblant' suggests that the original play may have included imitations of Molière which did not survive in the published version. Robinet also suggests that Molière had attended a performance (scene 5).

The Criticisms

Robinet briefly repeats some of the criticisms raised by de Visé and Boursault, for instance that 'il n'y a presque point de tout d'action' (Scene 5). However, unlike the other two authors, Robinet's more balanced work offers some defence for this, initially asking that, although there might be less action, 'suffit-il pas que cette action [...] soit bien représenté?' (Scene 5). He then reinforces this by pointing out that 'toutes les agitations d'esprit en Arnolphe, et tant de precautions dont il s'avise pour détourner les coups de la Destinée n'estans autre chose que des Actions et des Mouvements' (Scene 5). In other words, Arnolphe's reactions should be viewed as action. Robinet then attacks Molière for borrowing from other authors, as his play is 'un mélange des larcins' and 'son jeu et ses habits ne sont non plus que des imitations de divers Comiques' (Scene 5). Although this is not a new criticism, Robinet's imagery is impressive, particularly the line that Molière is not 'une Source vive, mais seulement un Bassin qui reçoit ses eaux d'ailleurs' (Scene 5). Once again, Robinet provides a robust defence against this attack, pointing out that most of the 'Poèmes mesmes des plus beaux' are

²²⁵ Ibid, p.165-166.

²²⁶ Ibid, p.166.

simply ‘des Imitations, et des Traductions’ and have a ‘quantité de tres-mechans vers et un nombre infiny de larcins’ (scene 5). This criticism therefore shows that ‘on se plaist à critiquer’ (scene 5), rather than that the criticisms are being thoroughly thought through. Other criticisms which are repeated is that of the scene featuring Alain and Georgette, which is described as ‘quelque chose de bien surprenant’ (Scene 5). The servants are criticised for their ‘grossiere ignorance’, and Lidamon suggests that Molière is insulting the intelligence of his audience by suggesting that they want to see ‘les fadaises’ (Scene 5). However, it should be noted that Robinet himself includes two comical servants, who frequently provide light relief, and the first scene features only the two servants, and does not serve to add anything to the plot. This suggests that he did not disapprove of the use of comic servants as strongly as these lines appear to imply. He also criticises the ‘le’, sarcastically suggesting that it is a sign of Molière’s wit and highlighting its equivocal nature by saying that the audience did not know whether it was better ‘de rire, ou de rougir’ (Scene 5). However, the criticism is brief, as the women find it so offensive, that they do not wish to hear it defended and so say ‘nous vous dispensons d’y repliquer’ (Scene 5).

Robinet discusses some of Molière’s other works including *La Critique*, saying that Molière’s admission of certain faults shows that ‘il n’avoit pas peché par ignorance, mais expressement, et dans la veuë que son Poeme plairoit beaucoup plus avec ces defectüositez’ (Scene 5). Robinet is also critical of the title of *La Critique*, which he claims ‘chacun appelle son Apologie’ (Scene 5). The character Belise also criticises Molière for writing this defence, which is merely an opportunistic move designed to make money. The play is called a ‘[c]omédie à peu de frais’ and ‘une Farce des plaisanteries’ (Scene 5). Despite the supposedly low quality of the play, ‘[Molière] a neantmoins tiré le mesme profit, tant il est heureux, et tant nous sommes Fols, que de la meilleure Piece du monde’ (Scene 5).

Robinet repeats the criticism of others that by praising his own plays, Molière is showing his ‘vanité insupportable, pour faire voir avec quelle ardeur on court à ses Pieces’ (scene 5). He also attacks Molière’s verses which have ‘gueres plus de cadence, n’y d’harmonie’ (Scene 5). As with similar criticisms raised by other authors, though,

he does not go on to give any examples. Instead he defends Molière from the attacks on his characters and the question of the importance of the rules. Beginning with his character descriptions, the first defence is that even if they are not realistic, they have ‘tous les traits necessaires’ (Scene 5). He then says that Molière is not depicting real people, as his depictions ‘ne tombe point sur le Particulier’ (Scene 5). Once again he produces an excellent piece of imagery saying ‘c’est comme une Glace exposée, où chacun reconoist lui seul ce qu’il est, sans qu’il soit connu de personne’ (Scene 5). He then turns to the accusation that Molière is ignoring the rules, by saying that the rules are unimportant as ‘à quoy servent des regles qui ne sont connues que de ceux qui ont leu Aristote’ (Scene 5). Robinet then points out that the rules ‘ne contribuënt point au plaisir que tout un Peuple attend de la Comedie’ (Scene 5). Lastly he shows that Molière is far from the only dramatist who does not obey the rules and ‘si je voulois parcourir tous nos Dramatiques, je vous en ferois bien voir de plus défectüeux’ (Scene 5).

As with other plays in the *querelle*, the rise in popularity of satire is discussed, suggesting that before Molière ‘la Satyre n’avoit rien valu que du bois’, but Molière ‘a trouvé le secret de rendre agreable en public ce qui ne se pouvoit souffrir en particulier’ (Scene 5). Unlike in some of the other plays, there is a suggestion that the new popularity of satire is in part due to Molière’s talent, but this is instantly countered by the suggestion that he is simply fortunate that it is so popular, as ‘il a esprit et bonheur’ (Scene 5). However, Robinet also implies that the popularity of satire is protecting Molière, and that no one will complain about being depicted in one of his plays as ‘on prend plaisir à se voir l’objet de ses Satyres’ (Quatrieme Entrée). Once again this is a criticism which appears elsewhere, suggesting that people are foolish if they enjoy being satirized but that this is the main attraction of Molière’s plays for them.

Unlike some of the other plays in the *querelle*, there is very little praise for Molière, with merely a brief mention of ‘l’approbation que tout Paris luy donne depuis six mois’ (Scene 5), but there are many more insults aimed at him. There are direct insults, such as calling him ‘un Enemy Public’ (Quatrieme Entrée), but also more subtle insults, such as claiming that one of the Lacquais can write better plays than Molière. This

servant has written a play, and having read a brief passage, claims that ‘je ne trouve pas que le Poète qui est si fort en crédit, fasse guerre mieux’ (Premiere Entrée). Later on he quotes some lines similar to those used in *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, but when asked if he is quoting, replies that ‘j’y en ay changé quelques unes [vers], et ajouté d’autres pour enrichir sur l’Auteur’ (Quatrieme Entrée). Having therefore attacked Molière’s writing, Robinet explains his popularity in a derogatory fashion, because ‘le nombre des Ignorans est infini’ (Scene 5). It is then suggested that *l’Ecole des Femmes* has been successful without pleasing anyone, because the people depicted in it are pretending to laugh so that no one will suspect that they are Molière’s targets, and everyone else is amused to see people they recognise. There is also reference to women, who ‘meditans dans leur cœur des projets de vengeance, font par discretion aussi bon mine’ (Scene 5). By contrast, other women ‘par une petite malice de la Nature, prennent au contraire plaisir de voir râiller les autres’ (Scene 5). Having therefore implied that most of the audience are laughing at the plays purely to prevent the suspicion that they are being targeted, Robinet also suggests that most of the rest of the audience is laughing at seeing their friends mocked, rather than the quality of the play. This suggests, therefore, that no one is entertained by Molière’s writing.

Turning to the question of religion, Robinet describes the play as ‘plein d’impiété’ (Scene 5) and refers to ‘l’heresie de l’Ecole des Maris et celle des Femmes’ (Quatrieme Entrée). He also says that Molière will ‘gaster l’Image de Dieu’ (Scene 5). The main criticism is that ‘on releve tellement le stile et les conceptions, qu’il n’y a plus rien de proportionné à la simplicité de l’Ecoliere à qui on parle en Theologien’ (Scene 5). This is defended by the claim, that if this is worthy of criticism, then ‘c’est donc une faute de laquelle il faut accuser tous les Predicateurs de Village’ (Scene 5). Robinet also defends the maxims, which are simply ‘celles que doit observer une Femme sage et vertueuse’ (Scene 5). He also asks whether ‘des Exhortions que l’on fait à quelqu’un touchant le mal qu’il doit éviter, et le bien, qu’il doit faire, fussent impies?’ (Scene 5). However, the entire debate around whether the play is impious appears to miss the point that Molière is mocking Arnolphe’s self-importance, which is shown by his excessive use of dogmatic language.

Innovations

The main innovation which Robinet brings to the *querelle* is the idea of using a ‘foreign’ character, Lysandre, to give an international perspective. The English opinion is said to be that the play is ‘une assez languissante Comedie’ (scene 6). Lysandre also adds to the arguments in favour of tragedy by saying that ‘il y a longtemps qu’on n’aime chez nous que la pure Tragedie’ (scene 6). However, this seems a ridiculous argument, particularly as theatres in England were mostly closed between 1649 and 1660 by the Puritans: English audiences would have seen very few plays in the years leading up to the *querelle*. It is impossible to know whether Robinet was attempting to make fun of the Puritans’ distaste for comedy and light entertainment, but it is most likely that he chose to ignore the closure of the theatres in order to convey the impression that Molière’s play was being internationally condemned.

As has already been mentioned, the main criticism which Robinet raises, and which is mentioned in greater detail than in any other play, is that Molière is attacking women. The idea is briefly mentioned in *Zélinde* and *Le Portrait*, but is later mocked in de la Croix’s *La Guerre Comique* (March 1664). The allegations of Molière’s negative opinions of women begin at the start of the play, when one of the servants suggest that Molière thinks that ‘presque toutes [les femmes] fichent des cornes à leurs maris’ (Premiere Entrée). This view seems to be based on the assumption that Molière shares the views of his main character, which is always a dangerous assumption, particularly as Arnolphe is clearly meant to be a ridiculous character, with whom the audience has no sympathy. Robinet’s play centres on Molière’s view on women because the two main opponents, Belise and Celante, want to find out if their prospective lovers, Palamède and Crysolite, share Arnolphe’s view on the education of women. They are supported by their friend Lidamon, so that, as in all of the other plays one side outnumbers the other. The supposed attack on women is emphasised when Palamède says to Belise ‘[i]l est vray [que Molière] y traite étrangement mal vostre Sexe, et qu’il en parle le plus désobligeamment du monde’, to which she responds that ‘les hommes y sont du moins aussi galamment ajustez que les femmes’ (Quatrieme Entrée). Having therefore concluded that ‘cette Ecole est une Satyre effroyablement afilée contre toutes’ (Scene 5), Robinet expands on the reasons for this. Rather than suggesting that Molière is directly

attacking women, he suggests that he is teaching their husbands the wrong lessons ‘pour redüire le beau Sexe à la derniere des servitudes’ (Scene 5). To underline this, Lysandre arrives from England, and criticises *L’Ecole des Femmes* as ‘le Maitre de cette Ecole est un Maitre bourru, qui veut former les Maris tout à rebours de ce qu’ils sont en Angleterre’ (Scene 6). It is sarcastically suggested that Molière ‘a mérité de loüange de sa Patrie’ (Scene 5) for his efforts in limiting the freedom of women. Although Belise suggests that ‘les Dames Françoises ne sont point à plaindre [...] elles ont autant de liberté que les Femmes en puissent avoir ailleurs’ (Scene 6), Celante says that this happy situation will not last, and Molière’s negative influence can already be seen. To prove this, she claims that ‘il y a déjà des hommes qui se prevalent des fausses instructions qu’on leur a données, qui ont changé leur belle humeur en celle des Amans brutaux des deux Ecoles [de Molière]’ (Scene 6). Crysolite also suggests that Molière should apologise to women by writing a play entitled ‘le Triomphe du Beau Sexe’ (scene 5), which would in fact be a suitable subtitle for Robinet’s play. It is lastly suggested that Molière’s plays will ‘allumer la Guerre civile dans toutes les petites Republicues des Ménages’ (scene 6). Although this seems like comic hyperbole, it is a serious allegation, as the family unit was extremely important within society, since it was usually viewed as a microcosm of society, with the paternal figure, either the King or the husband, at the top, and all other members below him. By suggesting that women could hope for greater freedom, and escape loveless marriages, Molière could have been accused of attempting to upset this established order. Thus any attack on it could be seen as an attack on the fabric of society. However, this is a tenuous criticism, since it seems extreme to claim that Molière is encouraging husbands to imprison their wives. The maxims and the rest of the play, although they do not perhaps present it well, are encouraging women to be chaste and faithful, and all of the statements criticising women are spoken by the villain of the play. It seems, therefore, more likely that rather than intending this as a serious criticism, Robinet is merely commenting on the battle between the sexes, which was a common theme for seventeenth-century comedy.

Tragedy or Comedy?

Molière and other comic playwrights are mocked in contrast to Corneille, who is described as ‘un Geant investi par des Pygmées, et des Nains, qui luy veulent faire la guerre’ (Quatrième Entrée). The other comic authors are also described as ‘cette Fourmilliere de Grimelins’, implying a swarm of people concerned only with trifling matters,²²⁷ and ‘cette Vermine’ (Quatrième Entrée). Comedies are accused of ruining tragedy and forcing ‘l’unique et incomparable Troupe Royale, [...] [de bannir la Tragedie] honteusement de sa pompeuse Scene, pour y représenter des Bagatelles’ (Quatrième Entrée). Robinet also says that Molière ‘a ruiné le plus beau et le plus honnête divertissement’ (Quatrième Entrée). However, Robinet, like Boursault, claims that *L’Ecole des Femmes* features too many tragic elements, highlighting ‘un amour qui passe jusqu’à la fureur, et le porte à demander à Agnez si elle veut qu’il se tuë’ (Scene 5). He also mentions Arnolphe’s final line which means that ‘au lieu que la Comedie doit finir par quelque chose de gay, celle-cy finit par le desespoir d’un Amant’ (Scene 5). However, Robinet defends this by asking ‘peut-on dire qu’il soit contre le Caractere de la Comedie, et que les regles en soyent severes jusqu’à en exclure un soupir?’ (Scene 5). He comes to the conclusion that ‘on ne sçait si l’on doit rire ou pleurer’ (Scene 5).

Acting or Writing?

Although Molière’s play is criticised for not being an uplifting work ‘où l’on Remarque de beaux sentimens’ and, in which ‘[on ne parle] jamais que de la disgrace des Maris’ (Scene 5), which supposedly represents a poor moral lesson, there is also a convincing argument in favour of watching plays, rather than reading them. This is not simply an attempt to criticise Molière’s writing in favour of his acting, as all playwrights are targeted in the request ‘Je vous prie de me faire voir que les plus beaux Vers ayent le mesme effet sur le papier que sur la Scene’ (Scene 5). The conclusion to this brief debate leaves no doubt that it is not an attack on Molière, as without the need for acting to enhance plays ‘il ne seroit pas necessaire d’aller au Theatre pour avoir tout le plaisir de la Comedie’ (Scene 5). This therefore provides a valuable reminder of the

²²⁷ Abel Boyer *Boyer’s Royal Dictionary Abridged* (London, 1791) p.209-226.

importance of acting in conveying the full force of a play, and would be an excellent counter-argument to the criticism that Molière's plays lack action, since his acting on stage would make up for the use of *récits*. It is true that they lack conventional action if read, but the reactions and interactions provided on stage would more than compensate.

Dénouement

Although much of the play appears balanced, and Molière's supporters even win some of the arguments and are presented as rational, pleasant characters, the *dénouement* of the play makes Robinet's position clear. Both of Molière's supporters confess that they had simply taken his side 'pour rendre le jeu meilleur' and 'donner à la Conversation tout l'agrément qui luy vient de la diversité des opinions' (scene 6). Neither of them approve of Molière's play, but this underlines the interest that would have been generated by literary debate, and suggests that the audience would have been sufficiently interested to make it worth writing about the *querelle*. Robinet ends by suggesting that he did not want to attack or offend Molière: as Crysolite says, he had no other 'dessein que le divertissement de la Compagnie' (scene 6). This play therefore makes use of the majority of the criticisms raised by de Visé and Boursault, although it is slightly more balanced than their plays, but still ends by condemning Molière. The main points of interest are the emphasis on the wife's position within a marriage, and the brief debate about whether plays are better on stage or in books. Both of these are raised elsewhere, but in less detail. Robinet also underlines the popularity of the debate, giving further evidence that it may have been used as a money-making opportunity, and suggesting that that is precisely what Molière was doing when he wrote *La Critique*.

Unlike de Visé's plays, Robinet's work is more entertaining than a simple list of complaints. Robinet makes use of additional comic devices such as a rustic servant's humorous accent, for example 'J'avons servi ... chez un Histrion-graphe' (entrée première). The play also foreshadows Molière's play *L'Avare* in the lines 'quand on donne le foin et l'avoine à ses chevaux, il retranche toujours quelque chose de la bote' (entrée première) which is very similar to Harpagon stealing from his horses and could have served as inspiration for Molière. The prologue between the servants is long and

does not add anything to the debate on *L'Ecole des Femmes*; however, it does serve to give the play more subject matter than *Zélinde*.

L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé

As already mentioned, Robinet's work does not deal with *L'Impromptu*, so in response to Molière's mockery of them in that play, the Hôtel de Bourgogne turned for support and retaliation to Montfleury junior, the son of the actor who had previously accused Molière of incest, and whom Molière had mocked in his *Impromptu*. This play may well have been written in an attempt to 'avenge' his father, and Huart notes that Montfleury *fils* 'avait bonne grace à se servir, pour se venger son père, des mêmes armes avec lesquelles son père avait été attaqué', namely parodying Molière's acting.²²⁸ Baptised on 22 September 1639 as Antoine Jacob, Montfleury adopted his father's stage name and followed him into the theatre. Mongrédien suggests that the Hôtel de Bourgogne saw him as the natural person to match Molière in his own field and that this was not as difficult a task as it might appear, as Montfleury junior was one of the finest comic authors of the time, his two most successful plays, *La Femme Juge et Partie* and *La Fille Capitaine*, both appearing in 1669.²²⁹ Lérís also stresses Montfleury's intelligence and the probity of his work,²³⁰ which would have been important as the *querelle* was becoming increasingly personal. However, he had certainly not enjoyed the same level of success as Molière, and had only written three plays - *Le Mariage de Rien* (1660), *Les Bêtes Raisonables* (1661) and *L'Ecole des Jaloux* (1662) - before making his contribution, entitled *L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé*, to the *guerre comique*.²³¹

²²⁸ Pierre-Michel Huart *Théâtre de Messieurs de Montfleury Père et Fils* (Paris: Compagnie des libraires, 1739) p.20.

²²⁹ Jacques Scherer & Jacques Truchet *Théâtre du XVIIe siècle* (Gallimard: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1986) p.xxii.

²³⁰ Antoine de Lérís *Dictionnaire Portatif des Théâtres* (Paris, 1754) p.491.

²³¹ Claude & François Parfaict *Dictionnaire des Théâtres de Paris* (Paris: Chez Lambert, 1767) p.457.

The Play

The play is set in the Palais de Justice and takes the form of a discussion in Alis' bookshop where a Marquis, Marquise and two other characters, Alcidon and Cléante, are awaiting the results of a trial. The trial itself is incidental, and is merely added to give a semblance of plot, but actually detracts by adding in characters who play no other role. The play begins with two of the peripheral characters, the actors de Villiers and Beauchâteau, both of whom were targeted by Molière. They appear in the first scene, but as they do not reappear, there is no obvious dramatic reason for their roles, unless they simply wished to be associated with a play attacking Molière. It is similar to almost all of the others in *la querelle* in that it is mainly just a conversation, with no dramatic intrigue and, according to Mongrédien, does not come across well when read²³². Ironically this is one of the arguments used in Montfleury's *Impromptu*, namely that Molière's plays rely on his performance to make them amusing.

Criticisms Raised

The play contains a lot of sarcastic praise for Molière, who is described as 'ce Singe adroit' (line 188) and 'ce Fleau des Cocus' (line 83). The use of 'Fleau' leads the audience to expect something more religious or important than 'Cocus': it is hardly praise to be described as the scourge of cuckoldry. He is also referred to as a 'bouffon' (lines 83 and 103), and the Marquis, who supports Molière and is intended to be so ridiculous that the audience do not believe anything he says, claims '[c]ét homme est admirable/ Et dans tout ce qu'il fait, il est inimitable' (lines 125-126). Montfleury also calls him 'le Daubeur' (line 26), implying that he is only capable of mocking people, and not of serious works. Lastly Montfleury says that 'il paroist tout semblable à ceux qu'il represente' (line 86), which Mongrédien thinks is praise for his acting, but admits it could be a personal attack, describing Molière as a cuckold, which certainly seems to be a more plausible explanation.²³³ Although it is true that Montfleury does not otherwise refer to Molière's private life, there are certainly several possible

²³² Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.321.

²³³ *Ibid*, p.334.

interpretations of this line, and it may well be deliberately ambiguous, in order to suggest an idea to the audience without directly offending Molière. Molière is also indirectly insulted by the praise given to Corneille in the play. Corneille is described as ‘un homme si vanté’ (line 59), and Montfleury says ‘[n]ous n’avons point d’Auteurs dont la veine pareille...’ (line 61), which clearly shows that he considers Molière to be an inferior playwright. Corneille’s play *Sophonisbe* is called ‘du siecle present l’honneur et la merveille’ (line 58), which again suggests Corneille’s superiority. This defence of Corneille’s tragedy could also be an attack on Molière’s claim that comedy was as difficult to write as tragedy (*La Critique* scene 6), and Montfleury’s views on this question will be examined shortly.

Like de Visé and Boursault (in *La Vengeance* and *Le Portrait*), Montfleury adopts Molière’s tactic of making the character who is in opposition to the majority appear ridiculous. Once again he is a Marquis, of whom it is said, ‘je crois qu’il n’est pas sage/ De se tant demener’ (lines 38-39), thus showing that he is not acting normally or sensibly. He is also mocked by an impudent servant, who leaves before he has been given all of his instructions (lines 44-45), another device which was frequently employed to show how ridiculous a character was (see *L’Ecole des Femmes*, *La Critique* and *Le Portrait*). This ridiculous Marquis then shows that the audience ought to approve of Boursault’s play, by proclaiming that if he liked it, ‘j’aurois le goust bien depravé’ (line 71), implying that they should take the opposite view. Montfleury also uses the Marquis to mock Molière’s excessive popularity, with the line ‘[o]n ne rit que chez luy’ (line 104) clearly intended to be sarcastic. The Marquis also claims that comedy is a greater genre than tragedy, claiming that ‘pour le serieux on devient negligent’ (line 219) and ‘l’on veut aujourd’huy rire pour son argent’ (line 220). This leads Alcidon to counter that ‘nostre siecle est malade’ (line 222) therefore allowing Montfleury again to suggest the superiority of tragedy.

Montfleury repeats several of the criticisms already raised, but keeps his references to them brief. For instance, he refers to Molière’s lack of new material (‘[l]e reste est une Farce en prose /Aussi vieille qu’Herode’ (line 274-275)) and calls *L’Impromptu* ‘*L’Impromptu* de trois ans’ (line 268). He also questions whether the play is really

funny, asking ‘[p]ourquoy rit-on si peu?’ (line 257), as well as repeating the claim that no one dares to attack Molière since ‘[l]e plus hardy entre eux seroit déconcerté’ (line 236) because of Molière’s reputation and his powerful supporters. Arnolphe’s sermon is criticised, not for its mockery of religion, but because ‘il s’est fait peindre en chaise’ (lines 92-93), which might appear to be an unconventional position in which to give a sermon. Lastly Montfleury attempts to show that Molière’s characters are not very realistic, as the ridiculous Marquis is criticised by another Marquis for his ‘plaisante manière!/ Te mocques-tu?’ (lines 306-307), to which he replies ‘c’est du ton de Molière’ (line 307). Montfleury is attempting to show that marquis as a class did not adopt the exaggerated tone that Molière suggested they used in his *Impromptu* (scene 3).

Montfleury also repeats the criticism of the setting of *L’Ecole des Femmes*, saying ‘pour instruire Agnés, et pour se mettre en veüe/ Il se fait apporter un siege dans la ruë’ (lines 153-154), and perhaps because he was merely repeating de Visé and Boursault by attacking the scene involving the servants opening the door and Arnolphe spending his entire time in the street, Montfleury did not feel the need to elaborate any further. However, he does go on to criticise briefly the setting of *l’Impromptu*, which he claims is in ‘l’Antichambre du Roy’ (line 156) – although in fact merely the play within a play is set there, the rest of the work is set in the Salle de la Comédie. This is, however, a valid criticism, as although historical kings were often portrayed, it was almost unheard of for the reigning monarch, or his antechamber, to appear in plays.

Acting

Leandre, a lawyer waiting for the verdict of the trial, begins by praising Molière’s imitations of Beauchâteau and de Villiers, by saying ‘il a bien contrefait vos postures,/ Bien imité vos tons, vostre port, vos figures’ (lines 17-18). It is worth noting that neither Beauchâteau nor de Villiers makes any attempt to deny the accuracy of Molière’s portraits of them or their colleagues, which could be a tacit acknowledgement by Montfleury that Molière was indeed accurate. While it might be assumed that Montfleury was being sarcastic, Leandre is not on stage long enough to make it obvious that the audience should not trust him. It therefore seems plausible that Montfleury has accepted the accuracy of Molière’s portraits.

The major criticism which Montfleury raised was of Molière's acting, beginning with the accusation that '[d]e Scaramouche il a la survivance/ C'est pourquoy de bonne heure il tasche à l'imiter' (lines 178-179). He then suggests that Molière would be better imitating the actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, since he can impersonate them so well and since 'l'on voit à l'Hostel des Acteurs merveilleux' (line 199). The actors at the Hôtel, on the other hand, are too good to impersonate Molière: '[s]ont-ils assez meschans pour le bien contrefaire ?' (line 234). Although the ridiculous Marquis claims that the actors at the Hôtel are poor as '[c]es Acteurs [...] Ignorent les endroits qui pourroient faire rire' (lines 201-202), this is clearly not meant to be taken seriously. In response to this Montfleury claims that '[l]e dessein des Acteurs n'est pas de faire rire' (line 214) and that no one is laughing at the actors at the Hôtel, in fact '[c]'est de luy que l'on rit [...] ce n'est pas d'eux' (line 212). Even Molière's own supporter acknowledges 'pour le serieux c'est un meschant Acteur' (line 159), which leads on to a dissection of Molière's tragic acting: 'quand Molière est des deux/ On rit dans le Comique et dans le serieux' (lines 107-108), showing that his tragic acting is so poor that everyone is laughing at him. The criticism of his tragic acting covers much of the ground de Visé covered in *La Vengeance*, though Montfleury gives more detail, describing Molière, who 'vient le nez au vent/ Les pieds en parentaise, et l'espaule en avant [...] La teste sur le dos comme un mulet chargé [...] D'un hocquet eternel il separe ses paroles' (lines 131-132, 135, 137). This therefore supports de Visé's claim that Molière recited side-on, since his shoulder was 'en avant', and also refers to the 'hocquet', which if these sources are believable, suggests some problem regulating his breathing, which would have made lengthy speeches difficult. Certainly the farce elements in his own plays would have given Molière a greater scope for movement, rather than the position he apparently adopted for tragedies, but there is no obvious explanation of how he could overcome the 'hocquet' in comedy, but not tragedy. This scene would have offered the actor the chance to impersonate Molière, and so makes the play more entertaining. Lastly, Montfleury turns to another interesting question, namely whether Molière's plays were entertaining because of his writing, or because of his acting. The bookseller says that if his plays are being published '[i]l faudroit donc [...] vendre aussi ses grimaces/ Et de peur qu'en lisant on [n']en vit pas l'effet/ Au bout de chaque vers il

faudroit un portrait' (lines 286-288). This is reinforced by suggesting that Molière's plays are not worth reading, since '[l]'on rit à les entendre, et l'on pleure à les lire' (line 294). To underline the importance of Molière's acting to his plays, Montfleury says '[s]i quand il fait des vers, il les dit plaisamment/ Ce vers sur le papier perdent leur agrément' (lines 291-292). Although this appears to be praise for Molière's acting, in reality it is more likely to be an attempt to criticise the play 'en suggérant qu'elle ne doit son succès qu'à l'art des acteurs'.²³⁴

Les Amours de Calotin

Just as it seemed that the debate around *L'Ecole des Femmes* might be ending, the third French theatrical company in Paris, the théâtre du Marais entered the fray, in the person of Jean Simonin, an author who used the pseudonym Chevalier. He had been acting with the Maris since 1645, and began writing eight years after that.²³⁵ By 1664 he had already written six plays – *Le Cartel de Guillot* (1660), *Les Galants Ridicules* and *La Désolation des Filoux* (both 1661), *Les Barbons Amoureux*, *La Disgrace des Domestiques* and *L'Intrigue des Carosses à Cinq Sous* (all 1662), all comedies, and all except the last only one act long.²³⁶ His works do not appear to suggest a playwright capable of matching Montfleury or Boursault, let alone Molière. L'éris attributes a total of nine plays to Chevalier and says that he died some time before 1673.²³⁷

Chevalier used the debate as an added attraction at the beginning of his play *Les Amours de Calotin*, in which the first act and the first scene of the second act form a prologue to the play itself and have a supporter and an opponent discussing *L'Ecole des Femmes*.²³⁸

²³⁴ Véronique Lochert 'La Méditation de la Lecture Contre les Agréments de la Représentation : Lecteurs et Spectateurs dans les Querelles Dramatiques' in Emmanuelle Hénin *Les Querelles Dramatiques à l'âge Classique* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010) p.117.

²³⁵ Antoine de L'éris *Dictionnaire Portatif des Théâtres* (Paris, 1754) p.409.

²³⁶ Claude & François Parfaict *Dictionnaire des Théâtres de Paris* (Paris: Chez Lambert, 1767) p.84.

²³⁷ Antoine de L'éris *Dictionnaire Portatif des Théâtres* (Paris, 1754) p.409.

²³⁸ Georges Mongrédien *La Querelle de l'Ecole des Femmes: Edition Critique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971) p.361.

Les Amours de Calotin was performed in December 1663 and January 1664, taking the *querelle* into its second year, and was published on 7 February 1664.

The Play

The play is set in Paris and begins inside the Marais theatre. The characters - a Marquis, Count, Baron and Chevalier - are joined by various nobles taken from satirical plays, M. de la Souche, from *L'Ecole des Femmes*, the Marquis de Mascarille, a comic character played by Molière, and the Baron de la Crasse, from Poisson's play of the same name. All of them have gone there to avoid being satirised, but when the 'play' begins, it appears that they will be mocked even here, suggesting that satire of ridiculous characters is universal. Outraged by this, they leave and with their departure, the play itself begins and no further mention of the *querelle* is made.

This play marks the first involvement of the Marais in the *querelle*, and the baron takes the opportunity to defend them against the two other theatres, by saying that '[l]a Comedie icy me paroît aussi bonne/ Ils la font aussi bien' (lines 123-124). The Marais has the reputation of being free from mockery as '[ils] ne railent personne' (line 124), and so the ridiculous characters regard it as a safe haven, but 'en tous lieux la Satyre nous suit' (line 324). Chevalier's main focus throughout the play is satire and he ends his defence of Molière by claiming that it is ludicrous to attempt to run away from satire, since '[i]l faut estre bien fou, pour s'en aller ainsi' (line 339).

Chevalier's contribution to the debate is therefore not a key part of the play but is the first to provide a more balanced view and to tend towards support of Molière. Chevalier's apparent modesty and frankness also makes a pleasing change from some of the other attacks earlier in the *querelle*. The play itself also contains other humorous moments, which are unrelated to the *querelle*, such as the satire of nobles who disturb everyone else at the theatre by demanding to be seated. It also contains diverting lines, such as 'Rend-on le reste icy lors qu'on ne donne rien?' (line 146) and 'qui te croyait là? – Moy, je m'y croy sans doute' (lines 149-150). All of this helps to make the play more rounded and interesting than either of de Visé's efforts, which concentrated too much on the *querelle* and failed to entertain.

Defence of Molière

Chevalier initially begins by attacking Molière, suggesting that his use of satire makes him intimidating, and suggesting that no one is able to go to his plays ‘sans se faire draper’ (line 5), without being mocked,²³⁹ and then belittles him as ‘ce celebre Garçon’ (line 89). However, these insults are outweighed by the praise which he offers for Molière as ‘la merveille du temps’ (line 82) and ‘un Esprit au dessus de l’humain’ (line 85). He underlines Molière’s popularity with the aristocracy since ‘il est approuvé de tous les gens d’honneur’ (line 33). Chevalier also says that Molière ‘nous sçait railler si galamment’ (line 105), which could be ambiguous, but the line is spoken by a supporter of Molière, so it is most likely to be intended as praise. There is also the interesting assertion that ‘pour te faire voir sa valeur infinie/ Il tire quatre parts dedans sa Compagnie’ (lines 83-84), which shows Molière’s importance to his troupe, both as an actor, in which capacity he received one share, and as an author, for which he received two shares, with the fourth being for his wife.²⁴⁰ Lastly, Molière’s opponent is described as one of ‘ces foux que l’on voit qui haïssent Molière’ (line 333), showing Chevalier’s support for Molière.

Little mention is made of *L’Ecole des Femmes*, but *La Critique* and *Le Portrait* are both discussed. *La Critique* is praised, though mainly for the reactions of Molière’s victims in the audience, who do not know if they should ‘ou se fascher, ou rire’ (line 168). This is used as further evidence of Molière’s skill because ‘cet Esprit/ Sçait nous amadoüer alors qu’il nous aigrit’ (line 173-174). However, the contrasting views are also shown as ‘tel crioit tout haut que c’estoit des merveilles’ (line 163), but ‘bien d’autres aussi rioient en enrageant’ (line 162). The discussion of *La Critique* suggests that Molière achieved his aim by criticising all those who criticised him, and mocking everyone who mocked him, but does also suggest that the play itself is not hugely entertaining, rather it is pleasant to watch the reactions of the audience.

²³⁹ Abel Boyer *Boyer’s Royal Dictionary Abridged* (London, 1791) p.156.

²⁴⁰ Bert Edward Young and Grace Philputt Young *Le Registre de la Grange Tome I* (Paris, 1947) p.46-52.

The discussion of *Le Portrait* is initially simply a list of the criticisms raised by that play, mentioning ‘la Soupe où l’on trempe les doigts’ (line 202), ‘la Tarte à la crème’ (line 204) and sarcastically ‘ce charmant *Le d’Agnés*’ (line 206). Chevalier then mentions ‘cette façon dont Alain et Georgette/ S’appellent l’un et l’autre’ (lines 211-212) and Boursault’s claim that ‘la Piece estoit un Poëme serieux’ (line 214). He also refers to Boursault’s criticism of ‘[d]es Puces dont il a réveillé l’Auditeur’ (lines 209-210), which is an ambiguous phrase, possibly meaning that Molière’s use of the fleas woke his audience up from their boredom, or alternatively that Boursault awoke his audience to the possible *double entendre*. As Chevalier predominately supports Molière throughout the play, the latter seems more likely. Having thus examined the criticisms raised, Chevalier repeats the claim that Molière attended a performance, giving the audience the ‘charme sans égal/ De voir et la copie, et son original’ (line 197-198). Chevalier also adds to the belief that the play was more offensive in performance than the published version, perhaps referring to a personal attack in ‘[a]yant de nostre Peintre attaqué la vertu’ (line 221).

Although Chevalier predominately supports Molière, he does mock people who support Molière’s plays without even seeing them, and more generally, those people who judge plays based on the author’s reputation. While he admits Molière’s popularity with lines such as ‘pour plaire aujourd’huy/ Il faut estre Molière, ou faire comme luy’ (lines 181-182), he is more critical of the blind, unswerving support. This devotion means that all ‘les autres Autheurs vous sont insupportables’ (line 71), including both Corneilles, who are referred to as ‘Autheurs detestables’ by comparison (line 72), and indeed Chevalier, who again uses false modesty to describe himself as ‘un Auteur de bale’ (line 256), suggesting that he is part of the chaff.²⁴¹ He suggests that Molière’s supporters do not care if they are targeted by Molière, as ‘sans doute il vous plairoit, vous coupant les oreilles’ (line 244). However, the most convincing argument comes from Molière’s main opponent, who, having advised the other characters ‘ne blâmez donc rien sans l’avoir veu paraistre’ (line 268), says

²⁴¹ Abel Boyer *Boyer’s Royal Dictionary Abridged* (London, 1791) p.55.

Voilà de nos Messieurs dont l'ame prevenuë/

Blâme une Comedie avant que l'avoir veuë:/

Si d'une de Molière on vous donnoit l'espoir,/
/

Vous la croiriez fort belle, avant que de la voir. (lines 263-266)

All of this is of course a reasonable criticism, and it is not directed solely at Molière's supporters, but appears to result from Chevalier's impression that he is suffering from being judged on his reputation, rather than the quality of individual plays. A great author occasionally writes poor plays, despite his reputation, and similarly a relatively unknown author is capable of writing a great play.

Satire

The main topic of Chevalier's play is satire. Molière's opponent sees satire as offensive while his supporter regards it as acceptable and amusing. Chevalier claims that Molière 'ne cherche qu'à nous plaire en tout ce qu'il écrit' (line 30) and underlines the corrective function of Molière's satire, 'il sçait étaler nos defauts à nos yeux/ Nous pouvons, les voyant, nous en corriger mieux' (lines 93-94). By being offended one risks mockery since 'tu passeras [...] pour un homme ridicule' (lines 31-32), and such is the popularity of satire, that if you are not mocked by Molière '[q]uelqu'autre la feroit' (line 47). Chevalier points out the danger of satire, namely that 'quand nous avons quelques modes jolies/ Il les fasse passer toutes pour des folies' (lines 59-60). However, he then goes on to argue that there is no real risk as it is purely for amusement, and is not intended to offend, '[c]e qu'ils en font n'est rien que pour nous divertir' (line 54). The departure of all the characters who fear satire makes them appear cowardly, so it appears that Chevalier is defending the use of satire. However, he is defending satire in general, rather than attempting a specific defence of Molière.

Financial Success

The play also includes lines, which could be vital in an attempt to understand the reasons behind the *querelle*, and certainly Chevalier's involvement in it. The main reason for the *querelle* is said to be that the playwrights want to entertain and

‘[c]es Messieurs n’ont dessein que de nous faire rire/

Et quand vous les voyez se faire à qui pis pis/

Ce n’est que pour avoir nostre demy Lotüis’. (lines 236-239)

This appears to be exactly what Chevalier is using the *querelle* for, and possibly in an admission of this it is the character referred to as Chevalier who believes that they are merely prolonging the *querelle* to increase audiences. There is no evidence that this was the author’s view, however it is significant that these lines are uttered by the character called ‘le Chevalier’, and it seems highly probable that the audience would have made a link between the similarity of their names. The implication is that he was expressing his true feelings and simply wished to attract a larger audience by using the main debate of the day. Both Chevalier and de la Croix refer to the financial benefits offered by the *querelle*, and both take opposite positions to the plays most recently performed (*Le Panegyrique* and Montfleury’s *Impromptu*), suggesting that they may have been trying to re-ignite interest in the debate. There does not appear to be any other explanation for their late involvement, they had no apparent link to anyone attacked in any of the other plays, and if they had wanted to defend Molière, they could have intervened at an earlier point. Certainly Chevalier’s contribution, a prologue with no connection to the rest of his play, suggests that he was not attempting to write a serious defence of Molière.

La Guerre Comique

However, this was not the final shot in the theatrical war, as the little-known author Phillippe de la Croix published his *La Guerre Comique* on 17 March 1664. He is only known for writing three plays, the first of which was written in 1628,²⁴² suggesting that he would have been relatively old by the time of the *querelle*, and therefore would have had less to gain from taking a controversial position than the younger de Visé and Boursault, though he could still profit financially. This play, in the now familiar style of being mainly conversation with little action, has five dialogues joined by burlesque verses. In it de la Croix repeats all of the attacks raised in *Zélinde* and *Le Portrait* and

²⁴² Antoine de Lérès *Dictionnaire Portatif des Théâtres* (Paris, 1754) p.462.

proceeds to provide a response to all of them. The play features various mythical characters, such as Momus (the god of mockery), Apollo and the muses, as well as human debaters, Philinte (Molière's supporter), Cléone and Melasie, Alcipe, Rosimon, the author Alcidor, and Sieur de la Rancune, a character from Scarron's novel *Le Roman comique*. The two women initially oppose Molière, but appear to be won over by Philinte.

The Action

The play is well set out, the prologue between Momus and Apollo serving to give it more background than some of the other plays. Although mostly devoid of action, there is the possibility for a brief farce scene between the third and fourth debate, and some amusing turns of phrase. The play is structured in a similar way to *La Critique* with an initially outnumbered supporter being faced by varying opponents. The arrival of each opponent signals a new topic for debate – the improbability, Molière's use of real characters, the play's offensive elements, the ignoring of the rules, Molière's good fortune. However, all these attacks, apart from his defence of Molière's tragic acting, are dealt with convincingly by Philinte and indeed he appears to have convinced his initial opponents who agree him after the second debate.

The play begins with an argument between Momus, the god of satire and mockery, and Apollo, the god of music and poetry. Momus calls on Apollo to end *la querelle*, but Apollo is reluctant to intervene, saying that his opponents 'ont commencé la querelle' and '[q]uiconque commence a le tort' (Dialogue Burlesque). Molière should therefore be allowed to respond to their attacks, and as Apollo believes that Molière is winning the debate, he sees no need to intervene. Another early sign that de la Croix supports Molière is the large amount of praise he receives, being described as 'l'incomparable' (Dispute Deuxième) and 'bon Comedien' (Dispute Dernière). As praise for Molière's acting, Momus is called 'le Molière du Ciel' (Dialogue Burlesque), a reversal of the anticipated formula, which would have been to describe Molière as Momus's equal. Molière's supporters are also praised, as 'c'est le fait d'un galant homme de se declarer pour luy', as are his depictions of people, whom he portrays 'traits pour traits' (Dispute Deuxième). De la Croix also underlines the difficulty of writing good comedies,

‘[n]ous sommes en un temps où les beaux sujets de Comedie sont un peu rares [...] c’est une chose surprenante qu’un Auteur en ait fait paroistre neuf comme Molière avec applaudissement’ (Dispute Quatrième). He also suggests that Molière has surpassed all other authors, by asking ‘S’est-on jamais mieux diverty à la Comedie que depuis qu’il est à Paris?’ (Dispute Deuxième). Lastly he categorises Molière’s supporters and opponents, as ‘[l]es rieurs sont de son costé, et il n’y a que les Poètes et les Comediens qui l’attaquent’, which puts forward the view that only those with self-interest at stake are not laughing at Molière’s plays. A minor amount of balance is provided by one criticism, which suggests that Molière would be a better actor ‘s’il ne se méloit que de son métier’ and gave up writing (Dispute Dernière). However, when the overall verdict is announced it is overwhelmingly in Molière’s favour. The Muses call him ‘Molière, nostre Mignon’, and say that ‘[d]ans son stile [il] a de la douceur/ De la netteté, de la grace’, which leads people to ‘le prendre [...] Pour Terence ressuscité’ (Dispute Dernière).

Despite this obvious support for Molière, the play continues to attempt to find a balance, and includes in Alcipe, a character who in general supports Molière, but when asked about *L’Ecole des Femmes* says ‘j’y trouve bien des fautes’ (Dispute Deuxième), while Molière’s main supporter, who otherwise appears reasonable, claims that Molière is an excellent tragic actor, providing ridiculous justifications. It also continues the tradition of making the opposition appear ludicrous, although only one of Molière’s attackers is truly ridiculous, the rest appear more balanced. In this play the most ridiculous character is a self-important bourgeois, called Rosimon, who is a friend of the author Alcidor. Rosimond’s entrance and exit are humorous, and would have provided the opportunity for farce acting, as initially he

eut fait/

Force reverences bourgeois/

Qui firent un fort bon effet. (Dispute Deuxième)

He then admits that he cannot ‘discerner de moy-mesme les fautes d’un Ouvrage’ (Dispute Troisième). Having been defeated, he makes a comical exit, leaping off the

stage, and ‘Dieu sçait si l’on rist jamais mieux/ Que de ce saut capricieux’ (Dispute Troisième). As he is leaving through the audience, they take the opportunity to beat him, but de la Croix describes him as cutting such a pitiful figure that

en sortent, les laquais, les pages/

Au lieu de redoubler ces sensibles outrages/

Par un rare effet de pitié/

Ne pûrent, foy d’Auteur, le battre qu’à moitié. (Dispute Troisième)

De la Croix discusses *Le Portrait*, initially describing it as ‘joly’ and saying that it ‘vient de fort bon main’ (Dispute Deuxième). Molière’s main supporter likes Boursault’s play but says ‘je ne trouverois rien plus galant s’il y avoit moins d’invectives contre Molière’ (Dispute Deuxième). He agrees that Boursault had the right to criticise Molière’s plays but this right ‘ne doit point servir de pretexte pour injurier l’Auteur’ (Dispute Deuxième). De la Croix further suggests his disapproval for the insults raised in previous plays through Apollo’s line early in the play that he has ‘plustost dessein d’entendre quelquechose de divertissant, que du bruit et des injures’ (Dialogue Burlesque). This makes the point that comedy, and theatre in general should be entertaining, not abusive. De la Croix also touches on the question of whether Boursault wrote *Le Portrait*. Philinte says ‘je croy Boursault tres-capable de cela’ (Dispute Dernière), which, depending on one’s view of *Le Portrait*, could be a veiled insult, suggesting that the play’s poor quality is more worthy of an unknown author. However, this is unlikely to have been the intention of de la Croix, since, as has already been mentioned, he praised the play and also refused to stoop to insulting other authors. He also suggests that, given Molière’s success, it is unlikely that other authors would have wanted to help Boursault become a great comic author, asking ‘vous voulés qu’ils mettent encor au monde un Poëte comique?’ (Dispute Dernière).

De la Croix examines the roles of three characters in *L’Ecole des Femmes*, Chrysalde, Horace and the Notary. Chrysalde and the Notary are both attacked for being unnecessary, especially Chrysalde, who ‘ne sert qu’à dire des vers qui ne font rien au

sujet' (Dispute Première). However, this is defended by the claim that Chrysalde's character 'fonde bien le caractere de ce Jaloux' (Dispute Première). This links to the more general defence that Chrysalde's main role is as part of the exposition, revealing the plot and main characteristics of Arnolphe to the audience. As for the question of why Arnolphe would invite Chrysalde to dine with Agnès despite keeping her locked away for so long, de la Croix feels that the reason is Chrysalde's scepticism, and Arnolphe has invited him 'pour le convaincre absolument du bon choix' (Dispute Première). The scene involving the Notary is accused of being 'contre la vraysemblance?' (Dispute Quatrième), as Arnolphe does not hear anything that is said to him. Having pointed out that '[c]ela n'est pas sans exemple chez les Anciens' (Dispute Quatrième), which is a defence frequently used in this play, de la Croix says that Arnolphe's lines are 'veritables paroles que la rage et le trouble de son esprit luy font proferer' (Dispute Quatrième). In other words, Arnolphe is so far lost in his own thoughts, that he is incapable of noticing that someone else is present. Horace, 'un estrange estourdy' (Dispute Première), is described as an 'amant bien importun de venir voir Agnès cinq ou six fois en mesme jour' (Dispute Troisième). The initial defence to this is a sarcastic agreement that 'tous les Amans ne rendent pas des visites si frequents à leurs Maistresses' (Dispute Troisième). It is also suggested that normally Horace would have spent the whole day with Agnès, but because Arnolphe has returned, he cannot. However, 's'il trouvoit l'occasion d'y passer ce jour comme les autres, [...] il ne feroit pas tant de tours inutilement' (Dispute Troisième) and would have made one long visit, rather than several small ones. Horace is also criticised for confiding in Arnolphe, whose true identity he is unaware of, and de la Croix rightly points out that 'ne pouvoit-il point ouvrir son cœur à un amy qui vient de luy ouvrir sa bourse' (Dispute Première). Arnolphe's generosity has given Horace the confidence to trust him, and it is only hindsight which makes this confidence appear misplaced. The final criticism of Horace is that he stays to look for a letter wrapped around the stone that Agnès has just thrown at him. However, despite the apparent danger, Horace ought to have no fear as 'il connoist l'amour d'Agnès' (Dispute Deuxième), which means he trusts her and knows that she would not have thrown the stone at him willingly, so he is in no real danger.

De la Croix also deals with the major criticisms which have been raised throughout the *querelle*, beginning with the claim that Arnolphe should not have behaved out of character in lending money to Horace. Having first suggested that Arnolphe had nothing to lose financially as he knows Horace's father, and therefore that 'son debiteur est solvable' (Dispute Première), he uses sarcasm to show the ridiculous nature of this criticism. He points out the impossibility of getting the money back once Arnolphe realises it will be used against him by saying '[a]pres luy avoir presté [l'argent] de si bonne grace, je le prendrois à la gorge pour l'obliger de le rendre' (Dispute Première). He then highlights the advantage Arnolphe has gained by being taken into Horace's confidence, and says that if Arnolphe asked for the money back he would lose 'l'occasion de profiter de [cette] confiance' (Dispute Première). Lastly he shows that it is not in Arnolphe's interest to declare himself as 'ce galant homme qui renferme si bien cette fille' (Dispute Première). De la Croix also uses sarcasm to defend Molière's use of récits, saying that it is more amusing and less morbid than having the action on stage, using the line '[on] riroit assurément lors qu'Alain et Georgette assomeroient une eschele à coups de baton' (Dispute Première). This leads to the general conclusion that '[les] incidents de cette Comedie seroient ridicules sur le Theatre' (Dispute Première), and that it is therefore perfectly acceptable to use récits. However, this is a slightly less convincing defence than the claim that the actors' reactions ought to be considered as action, as de la Croix's defence opens the events of the play to attack; it could be counter-argued that if the incidents would be ridiculous on stage, they ought not to have been included. De la Croix does however follow the more familiar defence when dealing with Agnès's sudden intelligence, by claiming that she was inspired by love. Although this defence has been used elsewhere, de la Croix's imagery ensures that it is not merely a boring repetition, as he says that 'vous ne découvres son esprit qu'à travers un nūage qu'il faut que l'amour dissipe' (Dispute Première). He also says that love 'ne contente d'ouvrir l'esprit, il en donne quelquefois' (Dispute Première), taking a step further the idea of Agnès being awoken by love. He also adds an interesting point, which is otherwise overlooked in the *querelle*, namely that Agnès 'ne parest niaise qu'au moment qu'Arnolphe ne fait rien contre ses inclinations' (Dispute Première), in other words she is perfectly content with life until she is told she will not be allowed to marry

Horace. When she is happy, she has no need of intelligence, and her intelligence only appears when she needs to use it to ensure she gets what she wants. De la Croix also varies from the more standard approach in his defence of Molière's setting, initially saying that the play should end with everyone in the street as that is 'le lieu de la Scene', before saying that 'les Comedies de Plaute et de Terence se passent et se dénoüent au milieu des places publiques' (Dispute Deuxième). This therefore suggests that Molière ought not to be criticised for the improbability of his play's setting, as it was acceptable in Roman theatre.

De la Croix refers to other criticisms, such as the very general line that '[la] conduite de ses Pieces est déreglée, ses incidens sont forcés, ses Vers sont rampans et foibles' (Dispute Quatrième). As this is such a general criticism, with no specific examples, he does not offer a defence against it, nor does he present a strong defence to the claim that Molière's success is a result of luck. Having said that Molière 'est heureux et c'est tout', he suggests that 'la fortune ne luy rira pas tousjours' (Dispute Dernière). Although in other plays this line has been seen as suggesting that Molière's success will end soon, in a play defending him, it could be that de la Croix is attempting to imply that, as luck does not continue forever, if Molière enjoys sustained success it must be a result of his talent, not good luck. A brief reference is also made to the claim that Molière's plays relied on his acting more than his writing, as it is questioned whether '[s]es Pieces sont-elles si belles? C'est son jeu qui pipe et qui les fait parestre' (Dispute Dernière).

Although de la Croix makes little attempt to defend against these criticisms, perhaps because they are too general, or not worth mentioning, he makes a stronger defence against claims that Molière is deliberately depicting real people. After Alcipe and Melasie have claimed to recognise people in Molière's characters ('Je les ay reconnus, morbleu, dès la premiere desmarche' and 'J'ay reconnu chez luy vingt personnes si bien tirées que leurs portraits m'ont parû inimitables' (Dispute Deuxième)), de la Croix claims the portraits are general. They do not have an original as Molière does not 'faire connoistre les personnes distinctement' and in fact 'ils ont eu pour principes des observations generales' (Dispute Deuxième). At this point, Alcipe asks about the

impersonations in Molière's *Impromptu*, and while it is admitted that they do have original models, this is defended as 'Molière ne les peints qu'après qu'ils l'ont joué sur leur Theatre' (Dispute Deuxième), a further indication that Boursault's play may have included imitations of Molière. Lastly, de la Croix plays his trump card, asking 'sçais-tu pas [que Molière] y a travaillé par l'ordre de sa Majesté?' (Dispute Deuxième), suggesting that Louis XIV may have dictated the nature of the play. Although there is virtually no evidence to support this claim, it would have been an unanswerable defence against complaints that Molière was deliberately targeting real people.

De la Croix also refers to 'des choses qui blessent si fort les oreilles chastes' (Dispute Troisième), Agnès's 'le' and the *maximes*. The former is described as 'infame', and 'épouvantable', but the light-hearted defence of 'un mot de deux lettres vous fait peur, que deviendriés-vous donc s'il y en avoit davantage?' (Dispute Troisième), makes these claims appear ridiculous. De la Croix defends the *maximes* by inverting some of them, in order to show that anyone who disagrees with Molière's version, and so implicitly agrees with the opposite, is threatening women and society more than Molière. The best example of this is the inversion of the sixth *maxime*, which in the original encourages wives to reject gifts from other men, as they have an ulterior motive for giving them. However, de la Croix changes the original

Il faut des présents des homes/

Qu'elle se défende bien (*L'Ecole des Femmes* III, 2 lines 776-777)

By changing the main verb 'se defende' he is able to give a completely contradictory piece of advice

Il faut des presens des hommes/

Qu'elle s'accommode bien (Dispute Troisième)

This implies that anyone who objects to the original version is happy for their wives to be seduced by other men. The *maximes* themselves are relatively innocent and do not represent a threat to the stability of society.

The issue of borrowing from other plays is raised, as it is claimed that Molière ‘pille dans l’Italien, il pille dans l’Espagnol’ and that *L’Ecole des Femmes* ‘n’est qu’une pot pourry de la *Precaution Inutile*, et d’une Histoire de Straparolle’ (Dispute Quatrième). Molière is also described as ‘un homme qui n’est riche que des dépouilles des autres’ (Dispute Quatrième), and in his acting style he is ‘un fort mauvais copiste des Italiens’ (Dispute Dernière). De la Croix, therefore, appears to agree that Molière took inspiration from other plays and actors, but he does not view this as a negative. He queries why it is acceptable for tragic authors who ‘prennent des sujets entiers’, yet ‘un Auteur Comique n’a pas la liberté de se servir des lectures qu’il fait’ (Dispute Quatrième). To conclude this debate he admits the truth of the argument but says that it does not matter what the source is, ‘[il] est vray qu’il les copie, mais tout le monde en rit’ (Dispute Dernière). De la Croix is suggesting that if Molière’s plays and acting entertain the audience, then it should not matter where his inspiration has come from. Molière has also been accused of recycling characters and plots as ‘il jouë les mesmes choses toute l’année et personne ne s’en lasse’ (Dispute Dernière). De la Croix responds to this with the sarcastic remark that if everyone is coming to watch Molière’s plays that must be ‘un témoignage que ses Pieces sont fort mauvaises’ (Dispute Dernière), once again suggesting that the most important thing is to entertain the audience.

Who Judges?

De la Croix’s defence that it was more important to entertain the audience links to the debate about whether authors and actors could impartially judge a play, which also links to the idea that jealousy played a major role in the *querelle*. This suggestion is supported by the line ‘on ne pourroit souffrir les autres quand ils feroient mieux que luy’ (Dispute Dernière). As they are unable to compete with Molière, other authors are trying to bring him down through criticisms. De la Croix implies the bias of other authors, by asking ‘[l]es Auteurs n’ont-ils pas interest de l’étouffer?’ (Dispute Quatrième). However, he also points out that this obvious bias is to Molière’s advantage as ‘personne ne les croit’ (Dispute Quatrième). Authors supposedly have the right to judge plays because ‘il n’y a qu’eux qui s’y connoissent’ (Dispute Quatrième)

and Molière is therefore wrong as ‘[il] traite ses Confreres d’ignorans quand il s’agit de juger d’une Piece de Theatre’ (Dispute Dernière). However, de la Croix emphasises that they are not the most reliable judges, as if they were allowed to judge every play ‘il n’y en auroit point qui ne fust plein de fautes’, as all other authors ‘ont tous le talent de médire leurs confreres’ (Dispute Quatrième).

Tragedy or Comedy?

De la Croix also enters into the debate about tragedy and comedy, initially by having Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy, refuse to support Molière (Dialogue Burlesque). He then discusses Molière’s tragic acting, acknowledging that ‘[l]e serieux n’est pas son grand talent’ (Dispute Deuxième). He also admits that the Hôtel de Bourgogne are better tragic actors as ‘on ne vit jamais une Troupe plus accomplie pour bien représenter un Ouvrage serieux: mais [Molière] pourroit la surpasser dans le Comique’ (Dispute Deuxième). Molière’s supporter then claims that Molière is a good tragic actor, but his reasoning is poor, as he says that Molière ‘n’a point d’égal dans le tragique parce qu’il jouë le Comique le mieux du monde’ (Dispute Deuxième). When Melasie points out that this is a ludicrous statement, he changes tack, insisting instead that ‘Molière jouë la Tragedie de l’Ecole des Femmes d’une manière inimitable’ (Dispute Deuxième). This is based on Boursault’s ironic claim that *L’Ecole des Femmes* is a tragedy because the kitten dies, but is again ridiculed by Melasie, who points out that ‘il est nouveau que le trépas d’un petit chat fasse donner à la Piece le nom de Tragedie’ (Dispute Deuxième). De la Croix cannot seriously have believed that Molière was a good tragic actor, since his arguments are so weak, and he is unlikely to be mocking Boursault’s statement that *L’Ecole des Femmes* was a tragedy as that was clearly meant as a joke, although it would not be the first occasion in the *querelle* when an author apparently misinterpreted a written version of the play. It is most likely that de la Croix deliberately gave Molière’s supporter a weak argument in order to make the play appear more balanced, and to criticise those people who were blinded by their support for Molière. De la Croix returns to his defence of Molière by attacking the criticism of Arnolphe’s final ‘Ouf’, which his opponents sarcastically claimed ‘acheve plaisamment la catastrophe!’ (Dispute Dernière). The response to this is equally sarcastic, when it is suggested that

‘[au] lieu de dire cét ouf, cinq ou six coups de ceintures à sa maistresse et à son rival auroient terminé la Piece agréablement’ (Dispute Dernière). This is clearly meant to be sarcastic, as such a violent end would never have been suitable for a comedy. De la Croix also defends the importance of comedy by claiming that although ‘le serieux plaist encor quand il est bien manié [...] le Comique accomode mieux les gens’ (Dispute Quatrième). He reinforces this with the argument of a pedantic author, who claims ‘les esprits raisonnables tiendront tousjours pour le serieux’, to which one of Molière’s supporters replies ‘Il faut donc que la raison soit bien étouffé en France, car tout le monde dit comme moy’ (Dispute Quatrième) implying that people who prefer tragedy to comedy are mad.

Financial Success

The major emphasis in de la Croix’s play is placed upon the financial motivation. As Molière is the most successful playwright, others are looking to profit from his success. This is supported by the suggestion that *Le Portrait* was not designed to ‘diminuer sa reputation’, but rather ‘on cherchoit seulement le moyen de gagner de l’argent à la faveur de son nom’ (Dispute Dernière). Apollo also suggests that Molière’s success has brought about the *querelle*, as other authors would not be so angry ‘[si] Molière estoit moins charmant/ Ou bien s’ils en gagnoient autant’ (Dialogue Burlesque). De la Croix suggests that he believes the *querelle* is being prolonged as an opportunistic way to make money as ‘[au] lieu de vuider leur querelle/ Ils vuident plustost l’escarcelle’ (Dialogue Burlesque), meaning that they prefer to empty their wallets, rather than end the debate.²⁴³ Momus highlights the unique nature of this type of debate, in which ‘[I]es Juges payent les despens’, and Apollo says he is unable to intervene but ‘[de] l’argent/ Calmeroit tout ce differend’ (Dialogue Burlesque). This therefore suggests that the *querelle* is financially beneficial for the authors, which may in fact explain why de la Croix himself, who otherwise had no link to the *querelle*, has become involved.

²⁴³ Abel Boyer *Boyer’s Royal Dictionary Abridged* (London, 1791) p.181.

Conclusion

The final verdict provided by the Muses at the end of the play shows the outcome that de la Croix was intending the audience to arrive at, as they describe it as ‘belle et bonne’ (Dispute Dernière). The Muses also order everyone to ‘bien soutenir son party’ and judge that ‘L’Escole des Femmes enfin/ Doit passer pour un ouvrage fin’ (Dispute Dernière).

De la Croix’s play was the last literary contribution to the *querelle*, and the format he uses, having the Muses judge the arguments from both sides, provides an air of finality to round out the debate. The play mentions most of the major aspects of the *querelle*, and manages to find convincing defences for most of the criticisms raised. It is well-written, and although it is not particularly entertaining to read, there is scope for an entertaining performance.

Conclusion

The *querelle* was a short-lived sensation of interest to all levels of society in Paris and at the Court, from the humblest of play-goers to the King himself, and whether it be cause or effect, served as a means of self-promotion and profit for the authors involved. Nevertheless, it was also an important forum for the expression of opinions about dramatic theory, going beyond the particular details and incidents in *L’Ecole des Femmes*. The criticism that is most obviously linked to dramatic theory is the discussion of the play’s setting, where *vraisemblance* is strained by adherence to the unity of place; this develops into the question of whether the Aristotelian unities are relevant to seventeenth-century France. *L’Ecole des Femmes* does not represent a complete break with the unities, nor is there any reason to think that Molière is attempting to overthrow the unities. However, they are discussed in several of the plays and the *querelle* seems to be taking place at a period when the rules were increasingly seen as a hindrance. This view is openly expressed in both *La Critique* and *Le Panégryique*, while more cautious opposition is to be found in *Le Portrait du Peintre* and *La Guerre Comique*. The only dissent comes from de Visé in *Zélinde*, and even he is guarded in his support for the unity of place.

A central issue is whether the quality of a play should be judged by the amateur – that is, the audience - or the professional, which, in a time before the full emergence of the literary critic, meant one's fellow authors. De Visé, although quick to flatter his audience, insists that a play should be judged by other authors, and Robinet sides with him in suggesting that the writers are the true experts. However, both Molière and de la Croix point out that playwrights are obviously susceptible to envy, and that the true judge of a play's value should be the audience. This means that plays should be judged solely on the approval of the audience, rather than on canons of criticism, and is a further move away from Aristotelian guidelines and other dramatic theories.

A more balanced debate was caused by Molière's view in *La Critique* that comedy was at least as hard to write as tragedy. Perhaps surprisingly, given that all of the authors involved in the *querelle* were predominantly writers of comedies, Molière is almost completely isolated in this matter. Although de la Croix does give some minor support to Molière's view, Boursault, de Visé, Robinet and Montfleury are all resolute in their assertion that tragedy was a nobler genre. This could simply be the result of an attempt to argue with Molière, but it is more likely to reflect the prevailing situation, in which comedy was slowly emerging from simple farce into a more rounded genre. While comedy was still associated with farce, it was always likely to be regarded as a lower form of entertainment than tragedy, which dealt with nobler and graver issues. This is not to say that farce was not entertaining, the *lazzi* and farce scenes that appear in Molière's plays prove the contrary, but *L'Ecole des Femmes* was one of the first plays to link farcical elements to more rounded comedy and more serious themes. The novelty of this would explain, for instance, why Arnolphe is criticised for his generosity to Horace. This would have been impossible in a one-dimensional farce character, but Arnolphe is a more complex and developed character.

The last major theme of the debate centres on acting, and provides a supplementary reason why the *querelle* should not be overlooked. *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, *La Vengeance des Marquis* and *L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé* all give an insight into the acting styles of various seventeenth-century actors, mentioning specific details of their appearance or deportment, as well as allowing Molière to express his desire that

tragic actors should base their acting more on the text and be less fixed in their roles. Although acting styles feature in the other works, these three are the most important for the detailed description they give, whether it be mentioning Molière's stance and breathing, or Montfleury's emphasis and Mlle Beauchâteau's facial expression. Unfortunately they cannot be used as a complete guide, since all of the imitations feature the actors performing in tragedies. This may be because, as Molière suggests in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, comedies require traits to be exaggerated to the point where they become ludicrous, while tragic heroes can be more human and less exaggerated. All of the contributions not written by Molière agree that he was a poor tragic actor, but also praise his comic acting. All of the plays, perhaps unsurprisingly, regard acting as crucial to a play's success and suggest that it is better to watch a play than read it.

The *querelle de L'Ecole des Femmes*, therefore, is an important debate in seventeenth-century French theatre, not for the criticisms raised, but for the theories which the authors weave around the criticisms and for its documentary value in its discussion of the acting styles of the leading contemporary actors.

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