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DONNEAU DE VISE AND MOLIERE

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The seventeenth century being an extremely rich period in French literature, its many great authors are often studied as independent units, by themselves and within their own lives and works. This tendency causes a regrettable neglect of many less famous authors who in any other period might have been considered important. It may also, in the long run, be detrimental to scholarship dealing with the great masters of the century since these ought to be studied, not as isolated cases but in terms of their surroundings—ideas, customs, and manners of the time and, not least, in relation to the many secondary authors who surrounded them, creating a condition of interesting and important interdependence.

Molière is a good example of this interaction. In spite of his apparent luck soon after his return to Paris, and in spite of the protection of Louis XIV and Monsieur, Molière met with great difficulties. Any good critical edition of his works or in-depth study on his life must often mention his problems arising from the enmity of the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, the jealousy of Corneille, and the often unfair criticism of Somaize, Boursault, Montfleury and Donneau de Visé, just to mention a few. The story of Molière's career is
a story of bitter attacks against him and of plagiarism of his works, often carried out with venom and underhandedness. Yet, in the midst of all these struggles, Molière succeeded in writing such masterpieces as L'Ecole des femmes, Tartuffe, Dom Juan, Le Misanthrope, and Les Femmes savantes—all today recognized as some of the greatest contributions to French literature and civilization.

Molière's severest critics, as well as his best friends, are often quite unknown today. Anybody who is deeply interested in Molière would like to know them more closely in order to better understand his career, his work and the theatrical world around him. The subject of this dissertation is a study in some depth of the relationship between Molière and one of these peripheral authors. He is perhaps one of the least known today, but as this study hopes to show, was one of the most important writers in the group around Molière at the time—Jean Donneau de Visé, Molière's most bitter critic who was to become his close friend.

This study seems all the more important since nothing of the sort has previously been undertaken. All existing research on Donneau de Visé is quite scattered and inadequate. As a matter of fact, there is only one major work that focuses its attention on him, namely Pierre Mélèse's book¹ which, however, gives emphasis to the journalistic career of the author and sweeps over the theatrical side of it too lightly. Thus, in order to find information leading to a study such as this
one, it has been necessary to turn to several smaller and more
general studies, especially to the profuse Molière criticism
which inevitably includes notices on Molière's relationship to
Donneau de Visé. Some seventeenth-century works which provide
invaluable information for a study like this one are the
gazettes of the time and such documents as the Registre de La
Grange. Another extremely important source is, of course, the
works of the two authors, and many of those by Donneau de Visé
can be consulted only in the original editions. Our study will
be limited to the period when the two men were acquainted, that
is, from 1663, the year of the battle of L'Ecole des femmes, to
1673, the year of Molière's death.

Most facts of Molière's life, with the exception of his
years in the provinces, are quite well known, although many mis-
understandings and myths may have been created over the cen-
turies. It is therefore unnecessary for the purpose of this
dissertation to enter into a discussion of Molière's life.
Donneau de Visé, on the contrary, being relatively unknown, de-
serves and needs a rather detailed biographical introduction.
It is given in the following chapter, which seeks to present
the man who was in his time a person of great importance and,
according to Malassis, "le premier homme qui ait connu tout
Paris."\(^2\)

In subsequent chapters the focus of attention will be
on the relationship between Donneau de Visé and Molière, be-
genning with the literary quarrel around L'Ecole des femmes,
La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, and L'Impromptu de Versailles. Donneau de Visé took part in this as a bitter, often unjust critic of Molière. A radical change in attitude took place in 1665. That year marks the beginning of a close friendship between the two authors, characterized by favorable criticism on the part of Donneau de Visé and a deep understanding for the genius of Molière. He expressed his opinions in some very important documents, the full understanding of which suggests new roads to take for Molière criticism.

The final part of this study concerns an interesting producer-author relationship in which Donneau de Visé's theatrical production during his years of acquaintance with Molière will be investigated. In this nine-year period Donneau de Visé wrote six or seven plays for Molière's repertory and five for a rival troupe. He developed into an independent, sometimes quite original and mostly rather successful dramatist in whose works we often find a more or less tangible influence of Molière. As could be expected, this is particularly true of the comédies de moeurs.

It is hoped that this study will shed some light on many little-known details of the relationship between Molière and Donneau de Visé and thereby help to open up new directions for Molière scholarship. At the same time an attempt is made to reestablish Jean Donneau de Visé as an author in his own right, as he was known in the seventeenth century—not merely as a journalist, a nouvelliste and a historian, but above all as a productive and talented dramatist.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I


3 Since quotations from works by seventeenth-century authors come from editions of different periods, a unified system of spelling has been considered desirable. The Moland edition having been used for all citations of Molière in this study, its orthography has served as a basis for the modernization of all other seventeenth-century texts—all prose, and poetry to the extent allowed by the versification and rhymes.
CHAPTER II

DONNEAU DE VISE: BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Donneau de Visé was a very productive author of his time, a well-known dramatist, poet and journalist. His Mercure Galant made him even more important in Parisian society, and opened up the doors to all literary circles and the salons. However, we know very little about many aspects of his life and personality. For example, there does not exist a single known portrait of Donneau de Visé. Nor is there to be found any physical description of him. This strange fact causes one to wonder about the man, what he looked like and what kind of person he was.

Many details and dates concerning the author and his family are equally difficult to establish, especially because of the lack of reliable documents and the fire at the parish of St. Germain l'Auxerrois in May 1871 where the civil documents of the Donneau de Visé family were destroyed. Our only remaining source of information concerning specific facts in Donneau de Visé's life are men like his contemporary, Robinet, who in his Lettres en Vers¹ speaks about him quite frequently, the Parfait brothers who in their Histoire du Théâtre français,² furnish certain details about the dramatic authors of the time, and, most important, Auguste Jal's Dictionnaire critique de
biographie et d'histoire, published the year after the fire, in which the author gives excerpts of civil acts which were still available to him and which one therefore may trust without too many reservations.

The history of the origins of the family has been treated in considerable detail by Georges Mongrédién. His study tells us that the Donneau de Visé family originated in Belgium, where a little town—Visé, close to Liège—still bears witness to their onetime importance. It had been for generations a noble family, whose sons competed for fame on the battlefield. Jean Donneau de Visé's grandfather, Gilles Donneau, left his native Liège and arrived in France in 1562, thereby establishing the French branch of the family. Gilles himself and also his five sons and their descendants were distinguished veterans and heroes of many wars. They received well earned consideration for their services through high military appointments and important positions at the court. Their brilliant careers brought them into the circles surrounding the King, the Queen, and Gaston d'Orléans. Gilles' fourth son, Antoine, was Jean Donneau de Visé's father and one of the most outstanding soldiers of the family. Through his great services to the country, as well as those of his cousin, Gaspard, and their ancestor, Gilles, the Donneau de Visé family, on July 3, 1673, received new French noble titles in place of those from Liège; the latter were unacceptable in France because of insufficient documentation.
This extremely strong, active and courageous family, composed of valiant military men and a few brilliant ecclesiastics, presents one sole exception in the choice of career—the writer Jean Donneau de Visé. It is impossible to explain why Jean turned in the direction of literature rather than follow the family tradition. One's imagination, unaided by facts, has a rather free field. Could it have been because of some infirmity? If so, it is strange that nobody, not even his enemies or the gazetiers of the time, ever spoke about it. Nor do we know who or what may have inspired him to enter the field of literature, which was so far from all the interests of his forefathers. It was perhaps because of somebody he came to know at the university or else simply by vocation. We must be satisfied with the little we know about Jean Donneau de Visé's life, and, perhaps more important, study his rather extensive literary production which in itself is clear evidence that, whatever brought him into this career, Donneau de Visé succeeded in displaying in it the same enterprising attitude and the same feverish activity which seem to have marked the lives of the military men in his family.

Jean Donneau de Visé was born in 1638. No information exists regarding his education or upbringing, but it can be concluded from his literary work and his general success in Parisian life, that it must have been quite solid and good. He always took great pride in the distinction of his family, as was witnessed in his own words toward the end of the century:
Je vous dirai d'abord que peut-être auraient-on de
la peine à trouver encore une famille aussi nom-
breuse sans qu'aucun eût jamais pris d'autre parti
qui celui de servir le Roi, et les Rois ses prédé-
cesseurs dans leurs maisons et dans leurs armées,
et qui ait répandu plus de sang pour le service de
Sa Majesté.  

Jean first decided to become a priest, presumably to comply
with the family’s wish, and seems to have received some bene-
fices. However, he soon left *le petit collet*, apparently to
devote his time fully to the theater and other literary ac-
tivities that seem to have been his major interests in his
early youth. Emile Magne, unfortunately without indicating
his source, informs us that

parvenu à l'adolescence, il préféra à fréquenter
les académies où se formaient les gens d'épée,
hanter le théâtre, les ruelles, les groupes de
beaux esprits et, déjà chargé d'un bagage de proge
et de vers, il embrassa la carrière des lettres.  

In view of the fact that we know so very little about de Visé's
life, in particular the early years, this statement may very
well be true. On the other hand, Mouhy suggests another
reason why de Visé left the clerical career, a reason which
seems more plausible in view of the fact that at that time,
worldly interests, such as the theater and literature, were not
considered to be incompatible with the ecclesiastical habit.
What Mouhy submits is that Jean Donneau de Visé had fallen in
love with a beautiful, but apparently poor, painter's daugh-
ter. Whatever the cause, the fact is, however, that we find
de Visé in his early twenties, launched in a career which he
seemed determined to pursue to the point of fame, and some
years later, married to a girl whose name and background we know nothing about and who was not accepted by the family but actually caused de Visé to break off relations with his father and brothers for several years.

Jean Donneau de Visé began his new career in 1663 with the publication of a collection of short stories and tales entitled *Les Nouvelles nouvelles*. Loret tells about this work in his letter of February 17, 1663:

Il court un livre de nouvelles,
Nommé les *Nouvelles nouvelles*,
Livre, certes, très inventif,
Fort plaisant et recréatif,
Et dont une plume excellente,
(Mais plus critique, qu'indulgente)
Et des plus fines d'â-présent,
A fait, aux curieux, présent.
Cette plume, des plus artistes,
Entreprend fort les nouvelistes
D'état, de Parnasse et de Cour;
Je ne l'ai que depuis un jour,
Et n'en ai lu que trente pages:
Mais je crois qu'entre les ouvrages
Qui depuis dix ans ont paru,
Celui sera des mieux couru.
Car cet auteur-là dit, lui-même,
Que, par une manie extrême,
Le siècle aime mieux les censeurs
Que les livres pleins de douceurs,
C'est-à-dire plus les critiques,
Que les doctes et politiques:
Et ce qui le livre susdit
Mettra, sans doute, en haut crédit,
C'est que dans ce peu de lecture
Que j'en ai fait à l'ouverture,
Je m'imagine et je m'attends
Qu'il doit être un tableau du temps.

Loret seems to be correct on at least one point—the century tended to prefer critics over flatterers. Thus, Donneau de Visé could not possibly have founded his literary fame
better than, as was the case in this publication, in the guise of a sharp critic of France's two most famous writers of the time, Molière and Corneille. At the end of the third volume of *Les Nouvelles nouvelles*, he attacks first Corneille's latest tragedy, *Sophonisbe*, then *L'Ecole des femmes*. *Sophonisbe* had recently been produced by the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and Donneau de Visé made a point of showering the actors with a praise that all the more underlined the sharpness of the criticism he bestowed upon the author. It must be noted, however, that this man, who here appears as one of Corneille's fiercest enemies, was to make a complete turnabout and become one of the warmest admirers of Corneille's work and, later on, choose the younger Corneille as his co-editor of the *Mercure Galant* and co-author of several plays. At the time, however, it must have been considered quite irregular and unusual that a writer attack simultaneously works by two authors who themselves were not on very friendly terms. After having discussed *Sophonisbe*, Donneau de Visé proceeds to Molière's work, ending his book with a discussion of *L'Ecole des femmes* and the forthcoming *Critique de L'Ecole des femmes*, speaking about them in a half flattering, half envious and partly bitter tone.

Later on in the same year Donneau de Visé published his first satire against Molière, a play with the title *Zélinde, ou la véritable Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, et la Critique de la Critique*. This play appears never to have been staged at any legitimate theater, but it was able to slip into the lit-
erary circles of the tonegiving Salons of the time. It was played there, enjoying great popularity among the many enemies Molière had made, especially because of Les Précieuses ridicules and L'Ecole des femmes. We can be quite sure that all the circles that had been laughed at in Les Précieuses ridicules, all the authors whose fame was withering away because of Molière's new concept of theater—so clearly illustrated in L'Ecole des femmes—all these had praise for Donneau de Visé and saw in him a weapon to be used against Molière. Thus, the strategem to receive the attention of the literary circles and the public had succeeded. It was a speculation which took quite a bit of courage to bring about, and we know from his own words that de Visé was well aware of the need for this trait of character in order to get anywhere in life. He said that "on me fera tou-
jours beaucoup d'honneur de me donner le non de téméraire. La
témérité appartient aux jeunes gens, et ceux qui n'en ont pas,
loin de s'acquérir de l'estime, devraient être blâmé de tout le
monde."12

Any satirization of Molière on the part of Donneau de Visé would necessarily bring about a change in his relationship to Corneille. The author of Le Menteur had been accused of being envious of Molière's success, although the latter openly admitted that this particular play by Corneille had helped him in finding the right way to comedy. This accusation, coming from l'Abbé d'Aubignac, an enemy of Corneille, seems to be well founded, as it is recognized as true by Segrais, who was a
friend and exclusive admirer of Corneille. Thus, it is not impossible that it was Donneau de Visé's criticism of L'Ecole des femmes that procured him the forgiveness for his attacks on Corneille's Sophonisbe, and which brought about a reconciliation between the two men. Donneau de Visé then suddenly became an outright admirer of the same Sophonisbe that he had earlier so harshly condemned, bringing upon himself the displeasure of the Abbé d'Aubignac, with whom he began a long literary quarrel. Thus, Donneau de Visé became included in Corneille's circle, a group he was never to leave again.

However, the attacks on Molière continued. Early in 1664, Donneau de Visé published a volume entitled Les Diversités galantes. This work includes, among other things, the Réponse à l'Impromptu de Versailles ou la Vengeance des Marquis and a Lettre sur les affaires du théâtre, both of which have often been erroneously attributed to the actor and comedy writer, de Villiers.

The second edition of Les Diversités galantes appeared early in 1665, without any notable changes, although another publisher had been entrusted with the work. Thus, with this rather venomous criticism against Molière still in the air and certainly still read in Paris, the event in late October of the same year must have been even more startling.

On Friday, October 23, 1665, Donneau de Visé presented his first play written for the theater, La Mère coquette ou les Amants brouillés. Two facts, however, caused a great sur-
prise to the Parisian public. A play by this confessed enemy of Molière was staged by the Troupe du Roi under Molière's direction, and another play with exactly the same title, written by Philippe Quinault, had opened about a week earlier\textsuperscript{14} at the rival Hôtel de Bourgogne. The question of who had plagiarized whom was apparently solved and explained very soon. Robinet, for example, who is usually quite careful in making direct judgments, attributes without hesitation the authorship to Donneau de Visé, both in his account of the quarrel\textsuperscript{15} and in his review of the two performances.\textsuperscript{16} As for the greater problem, however, we can still today only guess and speculate about what brought Molière and Donneau de Visé together. Perhaps it was that Molière, who was definitely above all a man of theater, sensed that this was a rather good play and that he definitely needed new comedies to fill the constant need of change in the repertory. This need often weighed quite heavily on him and sometimes forced him to write a play under extreme pressure. A talented young comedy writer could bring a much-needed relief to Molière, and at the same time provide some new ideas to compete with the powerful rivals at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Perhaps Donneau de Visé had offered his play to Molière with these considerations in mind, knowing that the man he had previously attacked so harshly was, after all, France's most promising comedy writer. The time might have seemed right to change tactics and admit his admiration for Molière. If Donneau de Visé was as rusé as he seems to have
been and if he behaved according to his philosophy of success, which we have already mentioned, he might very well have used both Corneille and Molière and his criticism of them in order to be known, to make himself a name. Once he was well established as a man who dared to attack the great masters, he could afford to change to another policy and admit where his actual sympathies lay.

Recent Molière research has, however, opened up new horizons in this matter and, perhaps, made it even more difficult to judge when, how, and why Donneau de Visé became a friend rather than an enemy of Molière. A new theory, presented by René Robert\textsuperscript{17} and supported by W. G. Moore\textsuperscript{18} shows quite convincingly that the friendship between the two authors had started already around the summer of 1665 with the anonymous \textit{Lettre sur les observations d'une comédie du Sieur Molière intitulée Le Festin de Pierre}, previous to \textit{La Mère coquette}. This pamphlet presents the same lines of thought and the same warm defense of Molière that we find in the equally important \textit{Lettre sur la Comédie de l'Imposteur} and also the \textit{Lettre écrite sur la Comédie du Misanthrope}, which appeared in the first edition of this play in 1667 and is signed J. D. D. V.--Jean Donneau de Visé.

The cooperation between Molière and Donneau de Visé continued--from 1667 to 1669, four more plays by Donneau de Visé were staged at the Palais Royal, all with considerable success: \textit{La Veuve à la Mode}, a comedy; \textit{L'Embarras de Godard},
a farce; Délia, a pastoral; and Les Maux sans remèdes, a comedy. The last, in spite of the rather respectable recette accounted for by La Grange, had only two performances at the time, on January 11 and 13, and was never again played by the Troupe du Roi, nor was it printed.

The years 1668 and 1669, however, were marked also by productivity in fields other than theater. In February, 1668, an army under the command of Condé had invaded and occupied the Franche-Comté, and at the end of the military operations the King had gone there on official business. Donneau de Visé, always ready to profit from any opportunity that was offered, published a beautiful, luxurious little volume of twelve pages, entitled Dialogue sur le voyage du Roi en Franche-Comté, an allegory in rather mediocre verse where le Repos, les Plaisirs, la Gloire and la Renommé express exaggerated eulogies of the King. Shortly thereafter, a similar publication by Donneau de Visé appeared at the same publisher, Mabre-Cramoisy. This poème de circonstance, written in somewhat better verse than the previous one, contained only four pages and was entitled La France au Roi sur le sujet de la Paix. The subject is a rather direct appeal to the King to give the country the peace in which he himself would find a greater glory.

Donneau de Visé had not lost his interest in his first literary activities, however. His Nouvelles nouvelles and Diversités galantes had been extremely successful—they apparently appealed to certain readers of the period, and the
fact that the short stories were quite evidently *histoires à clef* only contributed to their success. Therefore it is not surprising that our author tried his luck at this very fruitful genre a third time by publishing in February 1669 the three volumes of *Les Nouvelles galantes, comiques et tragiques*. The preface in the first volume is quite interesting in that it presents the theory that, in this classical age where *vrai-séance* was one of the foremost conditions of literary technique, the fictional work was entitled to do without it. The forty-four stories included in the three volumes are, however, of little or no literary interest, although they probably reflect the taste of the *salons* so strongly attacked, especially by Molière and Boileau. But there are admittedly a few moments of depth and well turned phrases even in this insignificant work. In the first volume, Nouvelle XIV is worth noticing because it includes a satirical dialogue on blood transfusion which had recently been introduced in France. The second volume contains a short story entitled *l'Inconnu* where one finds complete the theme of the play Donneau de Visé was to write six years later in collaboration with Thomas Corneille. In the same volume, an allegorical story in the form of a prose fable is striking because of its quality and beauty. The most interesting traits of the third volume are the two *poèmes de circonstance* that have been discussed. Donneau de Visé inserted in a rather artificial manner both the *Dialogue sur le voyage du Roi en Franche-Comté* and *La France au Roi sur le*
sujet de la Paix, the latter as a part of an interesting discussion about satire, Satire contre les Satiriques.

It must be presumed that Les Nouvelles galantes met with some success, for at the end of November Donneau de Visé ventured the publication of another similar work, again in three volumes: L'Amour échappé ou les diverses manières d'aimer. The forty stories are dedicated to Chapelle and contain several portraits of famous persons of the time, followed by a key at the end of the volume. Also this work carries some interest from the theatrical viewpoint in that several authors of the eighteenth century, notably Mouhy\textsuperscript{20} 1st among Donneau de Visé's plays a prose comedy in one act, entitled L'Amour échappé which is said to have been played at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1670 but has never been published or found. This information is difficult to verify, as there does not exist any register for this theater. Not even Robinet, who usually announced or reviewed new plays, speaks about one with this title--the only Amour échappé he mentions is apparently the short story.

On March 2, 1670, Donneau de Visé returned to the stage with a play entitled Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis. But it was not at the Palais Royal that he presented this new play. Instead he started a cooperation with the Théâtre du Marais, that was to last for two years. There seems to be no explanation for this change in theater. We have, however, no reason to believe that there was any break in the relations between
Molière and Donneau de Visé—nothing indicates this, while, on the contrary, everything appears to indicate a continued mutual friendship—and admiration on the part of Donneau de Visé—until Molière's death in 1673.

Is not the natural explanation instead that Donneau de Visé in creating Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis, his first tragedy and his first machine play, preferred to see it staged on the great stage of the Marais, equipped for splendid machine spectacles since 1648? Perhaps there was also an added attraction in the fact that the Marais had been the first public theater to stage a play by Pierre Corneille, and that this master sometimes, and especially toward the end of his career, gave this theater his new plays. Thomas Corneille, moreover, had seen in 1656 at that same theater his Timocrate become the greatest box office tragedy of the entire century, with eighty consecutive performances. The odds for a possible success must have appeared overwhelming. Whatever the reason for his turning to the Marais, however, Donneau de Visé got what he wanted for his Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis—a rather good reception.

Half a year later, in August, Donneau de Visé was the playwright again at the Marais, this time with two comedies, Le Gentilhomme Guespin and Les Intrigues de la Loterie. Both were relatively successful, perhaps more because of their subject matter than because of their theatrical excellence. Les Intrigues de la Loterie shows a remarkable talent and interest
within the author to follow the trends around him, a trait that will be all the more evident a couple of years later when Donneau de Visé the journalist emerges.

The greater success of his machine tragedy, Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis, however, seems to have encouraged de Visé to return to this genre which so greatly appealed to the public of the time. On February 6, 1671, he presented, still at the Marais, Les Amours du Soleil, a five-act machine tragedy in verse. Again, mythology provided him with the subject which he borrowed from Thomas Corneille's translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses. The play was a considerable success, the King expressed his approval, and the interest of the public was great enough for a long run, until Easter, and a second presentation from October to December.

Donneau de Visé profited from this enduring popularity by giving, on January 7, 1672, a fifth play at the Marais, Le Mariage de Bacchus et d'Ariane, a comédie héroïque in free verse and with music. This play was also quite successful, and Thomas Corneille took up the same subject a couple of months later in his Ariane which followed Bajazet at the Hôtel de Bourgogne and was met with the same enthusiasm as Racine's powerful tragedy.

The remainder of the year 1672, and all of 1673, were to be more than ever filled with work. This author, who had succeeded in becoming, in less than ten years, a well-known polemic writer, nouvelliste and dramatist, was nevertheless not
yet satisfied with his accomplishment. His literary production, although in many instances quite successful, did certainly not make him a rich man. Nor had he attained any directly tangible evidence of the King's favor. It is true that the King did not seem to be displeased with the two poèmes de circonstance of 1668 nor with the many dedications Donneau de Visé had written in his honor. It is also true that he had given his approval of Les Amours du Soleil in 1671, but Donneau de Visé's ambitions stretched farther than that, and his own creativity had a wider span than he had shown up to this date.

We have already seen that Donneau de Visé was very interested in events of the day: in his Nouvelles nouvelles he wrote about the nouvellistes of the time; in his comedies, especially La Veuve à la Mode and Les Intrigues de la Loterie, he made many allusions to contemporary society, with its trends, ideas and, not least, its vices. He was, as we know, always ready to take advantage of a situation: he was alert and scheming, in short, a born journalist.

Aside from his own character, Donneau de Visé had another advantage in his new quest for fame. The press in France at the time was extremely meager and very specialized. There were only four "newspapers" which appeared with some regularity: the official Gazette, a weekly publication devoted to short political and military information, founded in 1631 by a physician named Théophraste Renaudot; 24 Le Journal
des Savants, which consisted of a bibliographical catalog and a collection of obituary notices; La Gazette d'Amsterdam, which naturally could speak more freely, but which carried little new of interest for the Parisian public; and Lettres en Vers by Robinet and others, who all reported in a rather vague way but with constant enthusiasm on the social events of the time. There was no doubt that Paris needed a publication which came out regularly and contained varied material that would appeal to several groups in the reading public. And this is why Donneau de Visé commenced, on January 1, 1672, his first weekly prose letter about the events of the day. At the end of May, he published his first collection of "letters" in a volume called LE MERCURE GALANT, contenant plusieurs histoires véritables, et tout ce qui s'est passé depuis le 1er janvier 1672 jusques au départ du Roy. Considering the fact that the Mercure Galant was the work that made our author achieve complete and lasting fame, it cannot be left aside entirely in this study.

The first volume of the Mercure Galant includes an Epître dédicatoire to the King, followed by a "Libraire au Lecteur," where the publisher sketches the goal of the work, underlining the diversity of the planned contents and the fact that the Mercure Galant did not intend to repeat the information of the Journal des Savants. The first letter, dated January 1, 1672, expresses the intentions in the author's own words. He enumerates and clarifies his objectives:

Je vous écrirai tous les huit jours une fois, et vous ferai un long et curieux détail de tout ce
que j’aurai appris pendant la semaine. Je vous manderai des choses que les gazettes ne vous apprendront point ... des moindres choses qui se passeront ici n'échapperont point à ma plume ... Je ne manquerai pas de vous divertir d'aventures et de vous en mander les véritables circonstances ... 

But he had more serious subjects in mind at the same time, saying that he would include in his letters "toutes les pièces galantes qui auront de la réputation" and report on the public reception of all new comedies and "livres de galanterie" which would appear. To complete this table of contents which in a remarkable way resembles that of a modern weekly magazine, he declares that he would even describe the latest fashions, a subject of great interest in the provinces where nothing is "souhaité avec plus de passion." And he sums it all up with striking foresight:

Si je puis venir à bout de mon dessein, et que vous conserviez mes lettres, elles pourront dans l'avenir servir de mémoires curieux, et l'on y trouvera beaucoup de choses qui ne pourroient se rencontrer ailleurs, à cause de la diversité des matières dont elles sont remplies. 27

The Mercure Galant was a milestone in the history of the press in France, and it actually constituted the beginning of modern journalism. Certainly, it was at times very superficial, very subjective and partial. But its importance and success lie in the fact that it was entirely geared to the public it wanted to reach—and this public was large, as there was something in the Mercure Galant to satisfy every taste. Hatin repeats this several times, saying that "ce qu'il avait
voulu faire, ... c'était un journal pour tous, un journal pour tout le monde."

However, the Mercure Galant is of a great importance also for today's reader. He will find that a number of well-known authors participated in the work—notably Fontenelle, Robinet, Boyer, Quinault, Cotin, Perrault, Mlle de Scudéry, Mme Deshoulières, and not least, Thomas Corneille who was its co-editor beginning in 1681. As a matter of fact, through the works by these often secondary authors, and through the great success of the publication, we learn that neither Boileau nor Molière nor Bossuet alone represented the taste of the "classical age." On the contrary, the Mercure Galant with its many examples of préciosité can also be considered a mirror of the taste of the public. The Mercure Galant is an important link in the development from Racine to Marivaux, and from La Princesse de Clèves to La Vie de Marguerite. At the same time that it helps to illustrate how French literature passed from préciosité to marivaudage, it furnishes valuable documents on those little-known details of the period that are so difficult to find out about. It is true that, in order to search them out, one has to read through page after page of rather uninteresting galanterie, but once the information is found, it is a great help to scholars. This is not the least true about the information Donneau de Visé provides concerning life in the provinces. His comments also put many plays in a new light. Another indisputable lesson we learn from the Mercure Galant
is that the form of letters in prose and verse still remained in great favor. This type of letters constitute, moreover, some of the best passages in the Mercure Galant.

The Mercure Galant did not only receive praise, however. Much of the adverse criticism was due to the fact that Donneau de Visé at times was unable to soften the satirical flow that was such an integral part of his character. He also had a rather unappealing way of wanting to make himself the supreme judge of all matters of taste which, needless to say, irritated his opponents. The fact, moreover, that he took the side of Corneille against Racine, and of Perrault and the Moderns against the Ancients, gave him many eloquent and important critics, especially Boileau, La Bruyère, and Gacon, who attacked him fiercely in his Poète sans fard. We know that his former friend Boursault in 1683 even satirized the Mercure Galant in a very successful comedy to which he wanted to give the name of the periodical, but because of Donneau de Visé's violent opposition and appeal to the authorities he decided to call it La Comédie sans titre.

In Boursault's play we are told that Donneau de Visé "rapporte tous les ans plus de dix mille livres." However accurate this may be, there is no doubt that the Mercure Galant provided the greater part of his income. But Donneau de Visé did not only reach that first goal he set for himself when founding the Mercure--that of financial profit. In return for his praise of Louis XIV, he soon got tangible evidence of the
King's favor.

The *Mercure Galant* became a giant enterprise for its founder. It is true that the beginning was quite slow with an issue only every three months, and with a complete silence from 1675 until April 1677, when it returned under the title *Le Nouveau Mercure Galant*. From the year 1678, however, it was published regularly with at least one issue every month, each one of two to three hundred pages, and it grew in proportion and importance. It was soon no longer possible for Donneau de Visé to manage it all by himself. His good friend Thomas Corneille, who had contributed to the *Mercure* since 1677, had taken over a greater and greater share of the responsibility for the periodical and became an actual co-editor. At the end of 1681, the two friends decided to make official this close collaboration\(^30\) and signed, on January 18, 1682, a contract which established their equal partnership in the *Mercure* as well as in any pension or other gratification either one of them might receive. For Thomas Corneille this contract must have been economically advantageous, as his pension amounted to 1000 *livres*, while Donneau de Visé, as we will soon see, reached many times this amount. The fruitful association lasted until the death of Corneille in December, 1709, six months before that of Donneau de Visé.

In spite of his bad health, and in spite of the immense work load the *Mercure* provided him with, Donneau de Visé succeeded in continuing his theatrical career. Already in
January 1673 we find him back again at the Palais Royal where Molière and his Troupe du Roi played Donneau de Visé's Marie infidèles, which the author had had the opportunity to announce in advance in his Mercure. A month later, on February 17, 1673, Molière died. The former enemy, now a great admirer of Molière's art, could present his feelings in an éloge and Oraison funèbre in the Mercure. Donneau de Visé showed great understanding and intelligence in this his last direct mention of Molière.

However, life went on and Donneau de Visé published his fifth and sixth volumes of the Mercure in December 1673. He apparently devoted the next couple of years to the theater. On March 17, 1675, the tragedy Circé was played for the first time by the old Troupe du Roi at the Théâtre Guénégaud, with an enthusiastic reception that was to last all through that year, and longer. This machine play, which was one of the greatest successes of the century, marked the beginning of the collaboration with Thomas Corneille, which, as we know, was to extend not only through several good plays but also into their journalistic endeavor. Thirty-five years later, in looking back upon his late partner's life work in an obituary article in the Mercure, Donneau de Visé speaks about the fantastic success of Circé:

Le succès de cette pièce fut si prodigieux qu'elle fut jouée sans interruption depuis le commencement du Carême jusqu'au mois de septembre. ... Il est à remarquer que pendant les 6 premières semaines, la salle de la comédie se trouva remplie dès midi,
et que, comme l'on n'y pouvait trouver de place, on donnait 1/2 louis d'or à la porte seulement pour y avoir entrée, et que l'on était content quand pour la même somme que l'on donnait aux premières loges on était placé au troisième rang.31

Encouraged by the tremendous success of Cirec, the actors of the Théâtre Guénégaud asked the two authors to write for them another play worthy of succeeding it. The opening night for their new comedy, L'Inconnu, was at the end of the year, on November 17. The five-act play was written in regular verse with a prologue and chansons in free verse, intermingled with divertissements. The subject of this delightful comedy, which resembles somewhat the Amants magnifiques by Molière, came from the nouvelle entitled L'Inconnu in Donneau de Visé's Nouvelles galantes, published in 1669. As was his custom, Donneau de Visé added in his play some contemporary allusions, retelling a well-publicized scandal involving the Président à Grenoble and Mlle Molière, in which the Président had been ordered by the court to apologize publicly to the actress for his behavior. The comedy was very well received, and it was played without interruption until the beginning of the following year and was taken up again from time to time until the end of the eighteenth century.32

During the years 1676, 1677 and 1678, Donneau de Visé was probably quite occupied with his Nouveau Mercure Galant, which he started publishing again in April 1677. It is possible that he was the co-author in Corneille's machine play Le
Triomphe des Dames in 1676, but there are no absolute proofs. He might, however, have contributed his skill in the great spectacle.

It is not until in November 1679 that we find him again among the authors of plays in the Registre de La Grange, this time with La Devineresse, a comedy concerning extremely current events, and written in cooperation with Thomas Corneille. The subject was a fad that La Fontaine had attacked already in 1676 in his fable Les Devineresses (VII:15), and which had since only increased in popularity. About 400 devineresses were active in Paris at the time of the play and, taking advantage of the credulity of the public, poisoned unwanted children, long-lived husbands and straying men. It appears that Louis XIV himself was punished with a sickness from poison administered by Mme de Montespan. The most famous—and richest—of these "witches" was a Catherine Voisin, who was arrested in March 1679, tried and condemned to be burned alive after having been tortured. The investigation into the custom of "witchcraft," conducted by the specially formed Chambre ardente, was extremely confidential—many famous names were involved—and the journals had been ordered absolute silence concerning the affair. De Visé's and Corneille's play, however, received the sanction of the authorities—perhaps they found it desirable to expose the technique of the devineresses in order to abolish eventually the practice entirely. Donneau de Visé, who gave much attention to advertising his own plays,
managed to announce the coming play in his _Mercure_, and the success of the comedy was guaranteed in advance. The play is in itself quite good, and its popularity lasted through a great number of presentations and revivals in later years.

This was an encouraging comeback for Donneau de Visé, who continued in the same genre. The Hôtel de Bourgogne and the Théâtre Guénégaud had been united in 1680, the year of the creation of the Comédie Française. Here _La Comète_, a little one-act _comédie-ballet_, was played, without the name of the author, in January, 1681. It is not impossible that Donneau de Visé had a hand in this play, which was, of course, rather insignificant. One month later, on February 23, 1681, the theater presented a comedy in five acts, _La Pierre Philosophale_, "remplie de spectacles d'une invention très singulière." 34

Again, the two co-authors turned to their own surroundings for the subject of the play, which sought to unveil the unethical practices of the alchemists which had grown in number and danger since the scandal of the poisons. Unfortunately, this time the plot was not strong enough to make the characters plausible or to tie together the fantastic scenes of magic, machines and songs which were apparently Donneau de Visé's contribution. As a matter of fact, the comedy had only one performance, and was not even printed—only an _Argument_ of 24 pages was published.

However, their close theatrical cooperation had tied together Thomas Corneille and Donneau de Visé in such a manner
that, as already shown, they set up the contract of partnership at the end of the year. The next few years were, for Donneau de Visé, filled with work on the Mercure and on relations and éloges to solicit a pension from the King. The entire 333-page issue of the Mercure of August, 1682 is devoted to a "Relation sur la naissance du Duc de Bourgogne." This attempt at gaining the King's favor was not immediately successful, but on February 28, 1684, Donneau de Visé finally reached this ultimate goal: he received a pension of 6000 livres. It is interesting to note that on the same occasion, Pierre Corneille "premier poète dramatique du monde" was listed as receiving the amount of only 2000 livres.

With the assurance of a continuously good economic situation, and thus a guaranteed future for his Mercure, Donneau de Visé could without danger devote some time to the theater again. The play this time was the comedy L'Usurier, a five-act play written with Thomas Corneille and played for the first time on February 13, 1685. Its subject was a dangerous one—nobody except Molière in his l'Avare had before had the courage to attack so directly the problem of bankers, usurers and the lending of money—La Bruyère's Caractères were to do it three years later. It is quite natural that the authors and their play would be severely criticized by some, as had so often happened to Molière, and the Mercure notes that c'est le sort des pièces qui reprennent les vices d'être condamnées dans les premières représentations. Le chagrin de se reconnaître dans des por-
traits généraux, et de s'accuser en secret des fautes qu'on blame, obligent ceux qui se les reprochent à eux mêmes de décrire cette pièce, afin d'empêcher qu'on la voie ... 36

Naturally, the play enjoyed a great success, but notwithstanding, the violent criticism from influential persons caused its disappearance from the repertory. It was unfortunately not even printed.

From the day Donneau de Visé finally received the much coveted pension, he tried, with admirable zeal, to prove himself worthy of it. From the month of June, 1684, he published, first in the Mercure and then in special editions, articles with historical contents which showed his hope of becoming, if not official historiographe du roi, at least the King's personal historiographer. In this varied production, too large to enumerate, we distinguish titles such as L'Histoire du siège de Luxembourg (1684), Voyage des Ambassadeurs de Siam en France (four parts, 1686-87), Relation de la réception de Louis XIV à Paris, Histoire de Mahomet IV dépossédé (three volumes, 1688), Relation de la bataille donnée auprès de Fleurus (1690). These efforts on the part of the author to merit and keep the royal favor were not in vain. On March 5, 1691, Louis XIV awarded the founder of the Mercure another pension of 6000 livres, bringing his total amount to 12,000 livres, a considerable amount at the time. At the same time, he was also given an apartment in the Louvre, where he lived until his death.
Shortly before this gratification as historian and journalist, the dramatist Donneau de Visé had encountered his first real opposition. He had presented to the Comédie Française a new comedy, L'Aventurier, which was refused on the basis of its low quality: "... nous ne risquons pas votre pièce, puisqu'il s'agit autant de votre réputation que de notre intérêt." After a long correspondence and a compromise where Donneau de Visé reworked the weakest parts, the play was finally performed, for one single night, on January 2, 1696. The comédiens were right, the play was very bad.

In the meantime, on February 22, 1695, the Comédie Française played another comedy by our author, this one immediately accepted by the actors, and reasonably successful: Les Dames vengées ou la Dupe de soi-même. The subject is the same as in Boileau's Satire X (Sur les Femmes), published in 1694, but written already in 1688. It is probably the best of Donneau de Visé's own plays, presenting a dialogue that holds our interest throughout the five acts. The fact that Les Dames vengées was not taken up again after Easter recess must have been a severe blow to the author, evidenced by his almost desperate but fruitless letters to the comédiens. Had he perhaps nourished a small hope of taking the place of the great Molière as the master of character comedies?

Donneau de Visé once more had a new play performed, but again without success. On February 8, 1696, his last play, Le Vieillard couru ou les différents caractères des femmes was
presented but discontinued after three performances. The theatrical career of Jean Donneau de Visé had come to an end, after 33 years.

Our versatile author, however, still had his hands full with his other literary activities. The *Mercure* flourished and was read by greater and greater numbers of persons, and his historical activity, which had not slowed down even after the second pension was granted, increased steadily. It was apparent that Donneau de Visé was working toward a new goal with his usual zeal—to receive the official title of *historiographe du roi*, which was then held by Racine and Boileau.

In order to further this quest, Donneau de Visé undertook a tremendous new work in the publication of the *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de Louis le Grand* of which three thick, in-folio volumes came out in 1697. This work was, of course, absolutely devoid of scientific value in that it solely strived to glorify the King, and also, as the author admits himself, because he had, in writing it, not had available to him the secret documents that only the official historiographer could use. Thus, it was not the history of France that he wrote, but the history of Louis XIV, seen through the eyes of an admirer and flatterer.

In the next year, 1698, Donneau de Visé got married again, although he was sixty years old. His second wife was Marie-Catherine Le Hongre, the daughter of the sculptor. But it was also a year of great pains and difficulties for Donneau
de Visé. The attacks upon his Mercure grew stronger and stronger, and the bitter criticisms had to be met with even more bitter defense or counterattacks. The hardest blow came in the form of the venomous satires by François Gacon in Le Poète sans fard. The latter passed from criticism of the Mercure to purely personal matters, insinuating that Donneau de Visé's noble title was false and presenting the idea that the author was trying to take the post as historiographe du Roi away from Racine. As could be expected, Donneau de Visé replied in a long article in the Mercure (February 1699), enumerating the genealogy of his family to the smallest detail. It is interesting to note that he in the course of this explanation calls himself Historiographe de France. This was more than two months before Racine's death—would it be possible that the King then, or even later, had bestowed this honor upon Donneau de Visé? We cannot be sure, but although no documents pointing in that direction have been found, the great majority of scholars who have studied the problem seem to conclude that Donneau de Visé, if he did not succeed Racine in the office, at least held an "unofficial" title of historiographer. The King's weakness for flattery, the pensions and the Louvre apartment seem to agree with that conclusion.

It also appears reasonable to believe Donneau de Visé's own words when he says in his article that he does not present any facts for which he does not have the documents in hand.

From this date on, whether he carried the title or not,
Donneau de Visé was almost entirely a mémoraliste, for a great part of the Mercure seems inspired by the court. His historical articles were even more numerous than before, and he continued publishing the King's Mémoires, until he completed in 1703 its ten volumes, all enormous and in very luxurious form. By 1706, at the age of 68, Donneau de Visé started to lose his eyesight, just as his partner Thomas Corneille had done some eight years earlier, becoming entirely blind in 1704, five years before his death. For the rédacteur of the Mercure, bad vision was an extremely serious matter, and the progress of his illness can be traced through the slowly increasing number of typographical errors in the Mercure. His last article of literary importance, the obituary article about Thomas Corneille, published in January 1710, was entirely dictated.

However, Donneau de Visé worked until the end. The last number of the Mercure under his direction was published on June 3, 1710. On July 8 he died, 72 years old, after a life full of demanding activities into which he had always put his heart and soul. Whatever his reasons for not following in the footsteps of his soldier family, they certainly had nothing to do with a yearning for an idle life.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II


5. Louis XIV, recognizing the great services of the Donneau de Visé family, intervened in person and ordered that the new titles be issued.

6. The information available on this point differs considerably from one source to another: the Parfait brothers say 1645 (*Histoire du théâtre français*, X, p. 173; Michaud, 1638 (*Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne*, XLIII, p. 641); and Didot, 1640 (*Nouvelle biographie générale depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours*, XIV, p. 573). A contemporary of de Visé, Robinet, in 1665 calls him an "auteur de vingt ans" (*Lettre en vers*, October 11, 1665, p. 322), which is probably to be understood as "d'une vingtaine d'années." The only really dependable source, in the absence of baptismal documents from the parish St. Germain l'Auxerrois, is Auguste Jal's dictionary, written before the fire. Jal says under the heading "Visé" that Jean Donneau de Visé was born on December 3 or 4, 1638 (p. 1279).


31 *Nouveau Mercure Galant,* January 1710, p. 107. His words are well supported by the *Registre de La Grange,* pp. 170-76.

32 Mongrédien, p. 107.

33 Mélèse, p. 131.

34 *Nouveau Mercure Galant,* January 1681, p. 41.

35 Mélèse, p. 174.

36 *Nouveau Mercure Galant,* March 1681, p. 213.

37 Mélèse, p. 201, quotes from a letter to Donneau de Visé written by the comédiens.

38 Ibid., p. 225; Hatin, I, p. 402; Michaud, p. 642.

39 *Nouveau Mercure Galant,* February 1699, p. 36.
CHAPTER III

DONNEAU DE VISE AND MOLIERE, 1663-1665:

THE LITERARY QUARREL

As has already been mentioned, the literary career of Jean Donneau de Visé started out with attacks on Molière and an ensuing literary quarrel between the two authors, where Molière, as we will show, answered Donneau de Visé quite directly. The cause or basis for this cabale was L'Ecole des femmes, presented at the Palais Royal for the first time on December 26, 1662. This quarrel lasted about two years, starting in early 1663 when Donneau de Visé's first attack came and reaching its peak late the same year with the publication of Les Diversités galantes, which contained the two last attacks, La Vengeance des Marquis and Lettre sur les affaires du théâtre. A second unchanged edition of Les Diversités galantes was published early in 1665, only a few months before the probable end of the enmity between the two authors and the beginning of their friendship.

The four works attributed to Donneau de Visé to be considered in this debate are Les Nouvelles nouvelles, Zéline, La Vengeance des Marquis and Lettre sur les affaires du théâtre. Literary historians have for centuries hesitated about the authorship of these four anonymous publications,
many wanting to attribute some or all of them to de Villiers, the actor at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, whose real name was Claude Deschamps. It would indeed be more creditable for Donneau de Visé if we could quite lightly decide that he did never write against Molière but on the contrary was all the time the partisan and admirer of Molière that he came to be after 1665, and perhaps above all in his Lettre sur Le Misanthrope, which admittedly is by his hand. But unfortunately, the problem is more complicated than that. While trying to be faithful to scientific principles and after having carefully established Donneau de Visé's responsibility in the creation of the four works in question, this study will proceed to situate them in relation to Molière's work.

Let us first review the facts around the four critical works:

1. Les Nouvelles nouvelles came out, anonymously, on February 9, 1663;

2. Zélinde was published, anonymously, on August 4, 1663;

3. Les Diversités galantes containing, among other things, La Vengeance des Marquis and the Lettre sur les affaires du théâtre, were brought out, anonymously, on December 7, 1663.

The three works are without any doubt by the same author. The author of Les Nouvelles nouvelles speaks about his new play Zélinde and the author of the Lettre sur les affaires du théâtre distinctly mentions himself as the creator of Les Nouvelles nouvelles, Zélinde, and La Vengeance des marquis.
This shows that the Parfaict brothers, Paul Lacroix and others who separated the works and attributed them to different authors did not read the text carefully enough. Victor Fournel, however, recognized the fact that one and the same person had written the three publications, but was mistaken in his choice of author. He seems convinced that the works are by de Villiers on the basis that "La Vengeance des marquis ne [lui] a jamais été contesté." In reality, the comedy had not been attributed to de Villiers until the Parfaict brothers did so, and were followed by other bibliographers. However, although the Parfaict brothers in general seem to have been conscientious scholars, they made mistakes, and this is one of them.

The first person to establish the correct authorship was, as a matter of fact, Despois in his edition of Molière's complete works. This conclusion can be proved in the following manner. Les Nouvelles nouvelles are certainly by Donneau de Visé—he recognizes this authorship in his Défense de Sophonisbe. Furthermore, the preface to the collection is signed D, just as in de Visé's other signed works, and the privilege is given to "sieur Jean D.***," who certainly could not be de Villiers—his first name was Claude. The final proof lies in the fact that the fly-leaf of the Bibliothèque Nationale copy of volume II carries some old handwritten information: "Donné par l'Auteur Monsieur de Visé." Thus, it is established beyond any doubt that Les Nouvelles nouvelles were written by Donneau de Visé who must then also be the author.
of the two other publications by the same hand, Zélinde and Les Diversités galantes.

Not even Despois, however, quite dares to condemn the Parfait brothers' opinion that de Villiers had something to do with La Vengeance des marquis—he says that "la pièce ayant été jouée, la collaboration de l'acteur de Villiers est plus probable que pour d'autres productions." Many other scholars have been of the same opinion, basing their conclusion on the following kind of reasoning: La Vengeance des marquis is concerned with a quarrel among actors, in that it is the defense of the comédiens of the Hôtel de Bourgogne against Molière. De Villiers played at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Furthermore, there is in La Vengeance des marquis a valet by the name of Philipin which is the customary valet name in de Villiers' comedies. Finally, Molière had satirized de Villiers in his Impromptu de Versailles, which would well explain a vengeance on the part of the actor. However convincing these points may seem, they must still be considered as constructed excuses to cover up a mistake by the Parfait brothers. It is not difficult to show on how unstable grounds they rest. The fact that de Villiers was an actor at the Hôtel de Bourgogne does not mean that nobody else might be interested in defending these actors while attacking Molière. We know that Donneau de Visé was close to the Hôtel at the time, and that La Vengeance des marquis was played at that theater. As for the name Philipin, it proves nothing, being a "type" name like Scapin or Crispin
and found as well in works by Thomas Corneille and Scarron. All these facts lead us to believe, without reservation, Don- neau de Visé's own recognition of his authorship of all these works against Molière.

To these three works by Donneau de Visé, containing four different attacks on Molière, correspond three of Molière's plays: L'Ecole des femmes, La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, and L'Impromptu de Versailles. These three plays, presented for the first time on December 26, 1662, June 1, 1663 and October 11, 1663 respectively, represent three parts of a battle that Molière fought with his adversaries during one year, a battle which he won. This decisive victory, however, was to exasperate his enemies to the point that it actually hurt Molière--from writing rather innocent, sometimes outright ridiculous, pamphlets and plays against him, his enemies turned to other techniques after L'Impromptu. A series of denunciations and calumnies developed, but Molière remained silent. Whether or not his silence was the best weapon in the second battle is, and will always be, a point of uncertainty and discussion for moliéristes. Perhaps he simply exhausted his interest in polemics during the feverishly active year of 1663.

Let us now trace the literary quarrel between Molière and Donneau de Visé within the framework of this whole battle, while studying the seven works concerned on the two sides.

1. L'Ecole des femmes

It was, of course, L'Ecole des femmes that caused the
furor around Molière. He had already awakened some animosity, especially with Les Précieuses ridicules, but this had only been the hurt pride of a small number of persons. What had increased, however, together with Molière's fame, was the envy of his adversaries, primarily perhaps authors and actors connected with the rival Hôtel de Bourgogne, and their protectors. L'Ecole des femmes, then had two opposite effects: brilliant success and violent opposition. Let us first establish once and for all the extent of the success, and then show the contradicting side.

L'Ecole des femmes was first played on December 26, 1662, with a respectable income of 1518 livres for the evening— not unusual for a première of a play by Molière. There were two more performances that year, on the 29th and the 31st. After that, it was played without interruption until Easter recess on March 9, both at the Palais Royal and at visits at the Louvre, for the King, for Richelieu, Colbert, and many others. The receipts continued to be high all through these months, and the play had sixty-three consecutive performances, the thirteen visits not included, and eighty-four during Molière's lifetime, which is the highest for any play by Molière with the exception of Sganarelle, L'Ecole des Mari and Les Fâcheux. 9 When it was played for the King on January 6, it was warmly received by the Court, just as Loret says in his Lettre:

Pour divertir Seigneurs et Dames,  
On joua L'Ecole des Femmes,
The King showed his pleasure in an even more tangible way, however, in that he awarded Molière the amount of 4000 livres on March 12. This annotation by La Grange is followed by one of stronger bearing: "M. de Molière a reçu pension du Roi en qualité de bel esprit, et a été couché sur l'état pour la somme de 1000 livres, sur quoi il fit un Remerciement en vers pour Sa Majesté." If there had been any doubt about the King's standpoint in the battle that was already developing, his pension clearly showed his preferences and sympathies. Thus, Molière was not any longer just an actor—he was an officially recognized man of letters, praised and pensioned. Molière's self-confidence is apparent in his Remerciement, a poem full of badinage and satire. It is a small masterpiece, graceful, fine, witty and in itself a triumphant response to the enemies of l'Ecole des femmes.

The opposition seems to have been in existence since the very first performance of the play, but it was only slowly gaining strength and voice. In January, Loret did not quite dare to take sides:

Pièce qu'en plusieurs lieux on fronde;
Mais où, poutant, va tant de monde,
Que, jamais, Sujet important,
Pour le voir, n'en atira tant,
Quant à moi, ce que j'en puis dire,
C'est que, pour extrêmement rire,
Faut voir, avec attention,
Cette représentation,
Qui peut, dans son genre Comique,
Charmer le plus mélancolique,
However, during the first few months the quarrel had an oral character—the written criticisms had not yet had time to appear. The printing and publishing process was slow at the time, especially as all authors who wanted to publish their works in France were forced to wait for the official privilege to be issued. *L'Ecole des femmes* itself received its privilege on February 4 and left the printing presses on March 17, an unusually rapid publication. Only one printed attack on Molière and *L'Ecole des femmes* appeared before the presentation of Molière's *Critique de l'Ecole des femmes* on June 1, 1663. Donneau de Visé alone, already prepared to grasp the opportunity, found a way to present his criticism in print at an early stage.

2. *Les Nouvelles nouvelles*

On February 28, 1662, Donneau de Visé had been given a privilege for the publication of *Les Nouvelles nouvelles*, a collection of short stories in a precious style. Before delivering his completed work to the printer, he added at the end of the third volume a passage in which, in a curious blend of praise and criticism, he reviews Molière's life and work up
to date. In this his first mention of Molière and his work, the text is characterized by a tone of ironic superiority and feigned impartiality.

Straton, Donneau de Visé's mouthpiece in the conversation that forms this criticism, assures:

je dirai la vérité, sans que ce fameux auteur s'en doive offenser; et certes il aurait grand tort de le faire, puisqu'il fait profession ouverte de publier en plein théâtre les vérités de tout le monde.\textsuperscript{13}

Straton goes on, admitting that Molière must necessarily be one of the greatest men of the century or he would not be discussing him seriously and at length:

mais comme il peut passer pour le Térence de notre siècle, qu'il est grand auteur, et grand comédien lorsqu'il joue ses pièces, et que ceux qui ont excellé dans ces deux choses ont toujours eu place en l'histoire, je puis bien vous faire ici un abrégé de l'abrégé de sa vie...\textsuperscript{14}

It is evident, that in praising Molière here, the author is honest and rather sincere. But the irony is not far away, and the point by point review of Molière's early works contains quite a few unkind or spiteful remarks, between which the envy of the young author shows through. When he starts speaking about \textit{L'Ecole des femmes}, however, the tone becomes sharper, and the rhythm more rapid and striking, as fits the atmosphere of literary quarrel in which the passage was written. He declares:

Cette pièce a produit des effets tout nouveaux; tout le monde l'a trouvée méchante, et tout le monde y a couru. Les dames l'ont blâmée et l'ont été voir: elle a réussi sans avoir plu,
et elle a plu à plusieurs qui ne l'ont pas trouvée bonne...

He admits, however, that it has its good moments, a very half-hearted concession: "cette pièce est un monstre qui a des belles parties et ... jamais l'on ne vit tant de si bonnes et de si méchantes choses ensemble." But for Donneau de Visé, the success of the "monster" lies in the manner it is played, for "jamais comédie ne fut si bien représentée, ni avec tant d'art; chaque acteur sait combien il y doit faire de pas, et toutes ses œillades sont comptées." This well founded admiration for Molière as actor and director was to remain characteristic of Donneau de Visé—he returned to it in his Oraison funèbre of Molière ten years later. However, at this earlier date he overdoes it in order to underline the irony in his text:

Après le succès de cette pièce, on peut dire que son auteur mérite beaucoup de louanges pour avoir choisi, entre tous les sujets que Straparole lui fournissait, celui qui venait le mieux au temps; ... et pour avoir si bien joué son rôle ..., pour avoir enfin pris les soins de faire si bien jouer ses compagnons, que l'on peut dire que tous les acteurs qui jouent dans sa pièce sont des originaux que les plus habiles maîtres de ce bel art pourront difficilement imiter.

His next attack on Molière is the most perfidious one, and it also shows how the contemporaries at once saw autobiographical elements in L'Ecole des femmes: "... mais si vous voulez savoir pourquoi presque dans toutes ses pièces il raille tant les cocus et dépeint si naturellement les jaloux,
c'est qu'il est du nombre de ces derniers." This was a clear insinuation about Mlle Molière's coquetry and the distance is very short from there to actually saying that Molière's wife was unfaithful—the full step was taken later on, as we shall see.

Donneau de Visé then proceeds to speak about "une pièce de lui [Molière] intitulée La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes" which, he says, will soon be performed. It is interesting to note how well informed Donneau de Visé was already at the very beginning of his literary career—he must certainly have had good and dependable sources of information. As a matter of fact, he seems to have known better than Molière did at the time. Let us study this surprising fact for a minute. Les Nouvelles nouvelles left the printing presses on February 9, 1663. L'Ecole des femmes carries a privilege dated February 4, only five days earlier, and its printing was completed on March 17. This first edition of L'Ecole des femmes was preceded by a preface, in which Molière says that he will not there defend his play against its critics, but is arranging his arguments in a dialogue for which he got the inspiration after two or three performances of L'Ecole des femmes. However, he had not yet at this date decided whether or not he would stage the little play, and "cette incertitude est cause que je ne mets point dans cette préface ce qu'on verra dans la Critique, en cas que je me résolve à la faire paraître." —Strange foresight on the part of Donneau de Visé—or did he
know that Molière, contrary to what he expresses in the preface, had decided to stage *Le Critique*?

Furthermore, in *Les Nouvelles nouvelles*, Donneau de Visé mentions by name the "personne de qualité, dont l'esprit est assez connu dans le monde" who, according to Molière's preface, wrote a "plus galante et plus spirituelle" *Critique* than Molière could do himself. 18 Donneau de Visé identifies the author of the *Critique* which was offered to Molière—-he had already discovered that it was l'Abbé du Buisson. 19

The article in *Les Nouvelles nouvelles* as a whole, although at times quite ironic, nevertheless made none of the slanderous personal comments on Molière, or the accusations of immorality, which seem to have been common at the time, since Molière even answers them in his *Critique*. He performed his *Critique* before some of his enemies could have their pamphlets printed.

3. *La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes*

As his preface to *L'Ecole des femmes* shows, Molière was well aware of the criticism of his play, and wanted to do something about answering it. His young, and then still unknown, friend Boileau gave advice of another kind:

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Laisse gronder tes envieux;
Ils ont beau crier en tous lieux
Qu'en vain tu charmes le vulgaire,
Que tes vers n'ont rien de plaisant:
Si tu savais un peu moins plaire,
Tu ne leur déplairais pas tant. 20
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Molière, however, did not follow Boileau's advice but, as we
know, proceeded not only to answer his enemies, but actually
to hit them hard, in his Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, played
for the first time on June 1, 1663 and received with a great
enthusiasm by his admirers. Its success brought life back to
L'Ecole des femmes, presented together with La Critique on the
double bill. Thirty consecutive performances and several
visits at the Court proved the great interest on the part of
the theater public in this major literary quarrel of the time.
As was customary, this play was not printed until its success
could be considered nearly exhausted.

Again, Molière showed his prudence, in that he chose
to dedicate this play to the Queen Mother, who could certainly
not be suspected of libertinage. The fact that this highly
respectable lady gave her permission to this dedication was a
great mark of confidence, and in itself an answer to those who
wanted to interpret L'Ecole des femmes as being sacrilegious.
Molière gave this description of Her Majesty:

Elle, Madame, qui prouve si bien que la véritable
dévotion n'est point contraire aux honnêtes divul-
tissements; qui, de ses hautes pensées et de ses
importantes occupations, descend si humainement
dans le plaisir de nos spectacles, et ne dédaigne
pas de rire de cette même bouche dont Elle prie
si bien Dieu.21

The privilege is dated June 10, 1663, but the play did
not leave the printing presses until August 7, five days be-
fore its final performance at this time.22

One of the arguments Molière had to meet in this
little play was the supposedly bad taste in some expressions.
The most often repeated one, for lack of anything more important, was tarte à la crème. Grimarest tells of a conversation between a bon esprit and a courtisan:

Tarte à la crème, morbleu, tarte à la crème. Mais tarte à la crème n’est point un défaut, répondit le bon esprit, pour décrier une pièce comme vous le faites. Tarte à la crème est exécrable, répliqua le courtisan. Tarte à la crème, bon Dieu! avec du sens commun peut-on soutenir une pièce où l’on ait mis tarte à la crème?

And Grimarest is quite blunt in his judgment:

Cette expression se répétait par échos parmi tous les petits esprits de la Cour et de la Ville, qui ne se prêtent jamais à rien, et qui, incapables de sentir le bon d’un ouvrage, saisissent un trait faible pour attaquer un auteur beaucoup au-dessus de leur portée.

Besides the tarte à la crème, most critics found fault with suggestive expressions such as enfants par l’oreille and potage. The strongest outraged modesty, as we know, was directed against the le of the second act.

As for religion, it was supposedly hurt by Arnolphe’s sermon and the Maximes du mariage, resembling, according to some, the Ten Commandments. But there were also literary objections, especially from rival authors, concerning invraisemblance, structure, location and characters of the play.

These and many other accusations had to be met by La Critique, and met in a forceful way. Molière succeeded above expectations. His new little play not only answered the criticism, it also gave the most charming peinture de moeurs and one of the finest and most delicate satires which he ever
wrote. What Molière actually did in this play was not so much to prove how wrong his critics were, but rather to show that they simply could not be right because they had illogical, false and queer minds that distorted their judgment. Thus, those who did not want to laugh at Molière's *Ecole des femmes* were laughed at in *La Critique* where they were painted as they were. This little play, therefore, is in reality not by an author who wants to convince others of his merits, but by an artistic genius who proves his talent by giving another exquisite example of it.

All of this was accomplished through a sequence of conversations, without any intrigue to speak about. As a matter of fact, Molière hesitated to call it a comedy for this reason. During the course of the conversation, the characters take form and become the "types" Molière is a master in creating. The least distinguishable individual is probably Dorante, who is simply the author's mouthpiece and the representative of common sense. The two cousins are also on Molière's side in the discussion, although Elise pretends to go along with Climène's ideas without reflexion, thereby strongly underlining the emptiness of the critical arguments. Uranie, of course, is calm, composed, full of reason and a perfect contrast to the précieuse, admirably well painted with all her gestures, mimicry and exaggerated behavior. Her male counterpart, the marquis, is as idiotic and stupid as one can wish for, with no ability to discuss or explain anything. He is
as much an imbecile as Lysidas is a pedant. Lysidas, moreover, uses the tone of condescending generosity we know so well from Stratton in Donneau de Visé's *Nouvelles nouvelles*. There is little doubt whom Molière had in mind when creating Lysidas.

*La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes* brought to a peak the irritation of Molière's enemies, and also gave him some new ones. Again, most of the criticisms were oral discussions, but a few printed attacks started to appear. The first one, as could be expected, was by Donneau de Visé: *Zélinde*, 24 carrying a privilege of July 15 and an *achevé d'imprimer* of August 4. A few months later appeared on the stage the other two attacks of some importance. First of all Boursault's *Le Portrait du Peintre, ou la Contre-Critique de l'Ecole des femmes* 25 which had a *privilege* of October 30 and a printing date of November 17. It is a parody on Molière's *Critique* in that the author has followed that play quite closely, turning all arguments and viewpoints to the contrary, thereby achieving a comic, and also satirical, effect. This play, which was presented at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, was written primarily out of indignation, because its author was convinced that Lysidas in *La Critique* was in reality himself, and in his own play he makes an effort to paint himself under the name of Lizidor, as the very witty, honest and good man that would be almost the opposite of Molière's insufferably conceited and pedantic writer. Boursault's presumption seems quite mistaken—it was
was doubtless Donneau de Visé whom Molière had in mind. Later, in his Impromptu de Versailles, Molière seems to clearly differentiate between Lysidas and Boursault:

Mlle de Brie: Vous voulez bien, Mesdames, que nous vous donnions, en passant, la plus agréable nouvelle du monde. Voilà Monsieur Lysidas, qui vient de nous avertir qu'on a fait une pièce contre Molière, que les grands comédiens vont jouer.

Molière: Il est vrai, on me l'a voulu lire; et c'est un nommé Br.... Brou.... Brossaut qui l'a faite.

Du Croisy: Monsieur, elle est affichée sous le nom de Boursaut...26

The third work of importance against Molière's two plays was Le Panégyrique de l'Ecole des femmes, ou Conversation comique sur les oeuvres de M. de Molière for which Robinet had acquired a privilège on October 30, and which left the printing presses one month later. It is a rather heavy, badly written play which, in its conversation pour and contre establishes its preference beyond any doubt. Like Boursault's play, Robinet's comedy was performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

4. Zélinde

Zélinde is the only one of the three plays that has bearing on this study. If Boursault felt attacked in the character of Lysidas, we can be quite sure that Donneau de Visé did so to an even greater extent. As a matter of fact, his reaction to La Critique was rapid and decisive. As has already been shown, the printing of Zélinde was completed three days before that of La Critique—Donneau de Visé was perhaps not
even aware of the high protection Molière had procured himself for La Critique through the dédicace to the Queen Mother. Therefore, or in spite of it all, his attack was this time direct, detailed and anything but diluted with praise like the passage in Les Nouvelles nouvelles.

The complete title of the play is Zélinde, ou la véritable critique de l'Ecole des femmes et la Critique de la Critique. The scene is the upstairs showroom of a lace dealer, Argimont, on the Rue St. Denis in Paris. In the beginning of the twelve-scene play, only one customer is present, the beautiful Oriane, who is supposed to meet, secretly, her admirer Mélante in this shop. Mélante is delayed, and Oriane, to pass the time, in Scene III gets into a conversation with Argimont. The latter who, as we learn, is an old theater-goer, is soon ready to start a long, detailed criticism of L'Ecole des femmes. The title already displeases him, but he does not discuss it since Molière, here for the first time called Elomire, agrees on that point. The staging, however, is impossible, for "si ... toute cette comédie se passe dans une place de la ville, comment se peut-il que Chrysalde et Arnome s'y rencontrent seuls? C'est une chose que je tiens absolument impossible." Had the plague struck the city? Chrysalde is actually quite superfluous—he only comes "sans nécessité, dire six ou sept-vingts vers à la louange des Cocus..." Moreover, it is absolutely unbelievable, that a man who is so afraid of being a cocu invites for supper with the girl he intends to marry, "un rail-
leur qui semble lui prédire que s'il se marie, son front ne sera pas exempt de porter ce qu'il craint." Furthermore, continues Argimont, for somebody who has been away for a while, Arnolphe's behavior is strange when he, rather than entering into his own house, calls Agnès out on the public square to talk to her while she continues her work. Arnolphe stays in the street, as if in order to wait for Horace who comes along for their first meeting. And at once, without hesitation and after only a glance at the letter from a person he has not seen for years, Arnolphe, who surprisingly enough carries a large--and exact--amount of money on him, hands it to Horace, only to learn how unwise this gesture was, as Horace was planning to use the money to win Agnès. Horace on the other hand must have been quite stupid as he did not notice with what cold attitude Arnolphe received his confidences, but instead repeated it five or six times. By the same token, it seems quite impossible "qu'Arnolphe joue au barrès toute la journée, comme Elomire le fait jouer, ni qu'un amant aille cinq ou six fois en un jour voir sa maîtresse; qu'à chaque fois il lui arrive des incidents nouveaux, et qu'il aille autant de fois les raconter à son rival."

Speaking about the unbelievable, Argimont passes to the problem of the famous grès, its size and Agnès' scheming. This is a subject that is close to Oriane's heart, for she explains how much the grès has displeased her and says she wanted to ask Elomire if he knows that
un grès est un pavé qu'une femme peut à peine soulever, et qui, par conséquent, étant capable d'assommer un homme tout d'un coup, ne doit pas être jeté en plein jour par une fenêtre, et surtout dans une ville qu'il dit être nombreuse en citoyens.

She is also surprised that Horace, who supposedly well knew how naive Agnès was, thought of searching around the grès for a letter he did not know existed and which he should not have expected, judging from Agnès character. Argimont, who agrees with Oriane's opinion, then continues his criticism, speaking about the improbability of a scene such as that where Arnolphe asks Alain and Georgette how Horace got to be admitted into the house: "il n'est pas vraisemblable que deux mêmes personnes tombent par symétrie, jusques à six ou sept fois à genoux, aux deux côtés de leur maître." And as Arnolphe questions Agnès on the same matter, the mere tone and formulation of the questioning would normally have made a young girl decide not to tell the truth as she would have understood from Arnolphe's reaction that she had behaved improperly.

And "enfin nous voici à ce mot de deux lettres, qui a fait tant de bruit, à ce le. ..." --Oriane's reaction is, all by itself, the condemnation of this word: "La rougeur qui lui est montée au visage fait assez voir que ce le a perdu sa cause." It cannot be denied that Molière has made the word le ambiguous. But, on the other hand, as Uranie says in La Critique, "si vous voulez entendre dessous quelque chose autre, c'est vous qui faites l'ordure, et non pas elle [Agnès]." (Scene III).
Then Argimont presents another, more perfidious, insinuation, namely, that the Maximes du Mariage are sacrilegious. "Je ne dirai point que le sermon qu'Arnolphe fait à Agnès, et que les dix maximes du mariage choquent nos mystères, puisque tout le monde en murmure hautement." Arnolphe, moreover, seems to defeat his own purpose with this sermon, in that he wants to teach Agnès in a quarter of an hour what he has made an effort for many years to hide from her, namely "les moyens de le faire cocu en lui apprenant comment se gouvernent les femmes coquettes."

The last scene to be criticized by Argimont is the one presenting the Notaire, whom he considers useless and as little needed as Chrysalde. Furthermore, "la scène qu'il fait avec Arnolphe serait à peine supportable dans la plus méchante de toutes les farces." And like most other things in this comedy, it shocks la vraisemblance, for nobody could speak behind somebody else's back for such a long time without being heard, while the person who does not hear happens to answer quite correctly as many as eight times. Then, Argimont makes these final comments, which are even more uncalled for and unfair than all the rest together:

Je laisse la catastrophe, que l'on a trouvée détestable, et je passe par dessus beaucoup de choses, dont je ne me puis souvenir, sans avoir ou sans lire la pièce. Mais je sais bien qu'il y en a encore une fois autant que je vous en viens dire. Je ne vous parlerai ni des mots impairs, ni des méchants vers, ni des fautes de construction dont on pourrait faire une véritable Critique.
The long Scene III being finished, one would expect to
be at the end of the criticism. On the contrary, however, Don-
neau de Visé continues, but on another level, and with new at-
tacks. A servant comes upstairs to announce the presence of
Elomire (Molière) downstairs in the shop, together with "un
autre qui fait aussi des vers" and whose name we learn a little
later--Aristide. Is Paul Lacroix perhaps right when he iden-
tifies this Aristide as La Fontaine?28 Argimont goes down to
try to lure Elomire upstairs in order to draw him into the con-
versation. He does not succeed in this, but upon coming back
sketches for Oriane this portrait of Molière:

Depuis que je suis descendu, Elomire n'a pas dit
une seule parole. Je l'ai trouvé appuyé sur ma
boutique, dans la posture d'un homme qui rêve. Il
avait les yeux collés sur trois ou quatre personnes
de qualité qui marchandoient des dentelles; il
paraissait attentif à leurs discours, et il sem-
bloit, par le mouvement de ses yeux, qu'ilregar-
doit jusqu'au fond de leurs âmes pour y voir ce
qu'elles ne disoient pas; je crois même qu'il
avait des tablettes, et qu'à la faveur de son
manteau, il a écrit, sans être aperçu, ce qu'elles
ont dit de plus remarquable. --Peut-être que
c'étoit un crayon et qu'il dessinoit leurs gri-
maces, pour les faire représenter au naturel sur
son théâtre.-- ...C'est un dangereux personnage:
il y en a qui ne vont point sans leurs mains;
mais l'on peut dire de lui qu'il ne va point sans
ses yeux, ni sans ses oreilles. (Scene VI).

This description was obviously created with the intent of de-
nouncing Molière as a sort of spy. Yet, unconsciously it of-
fers to the modern reader a striking portrait of Molière as an
observer of society--watching people, listening to them, and
perhaps even taking notes.
As he left the shop, Elomire had dropped a paper, which Argimont has picked up and now reads to Oriane, since "l'on peut lire tous les papiers des poètes sans scrupules." The paper turns out to be a letter to Elomire from a certain Licaste, who, in turn, criticizes La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes. In it we read that Elomire repeats himself over and over again; that his Marquis has much in common with Mascarille, and with Lisandre, Alcipe and Dorante in Les Fâcheux. They all behave in the same manner, and in all of them, persons of quality are ridiculed. Clémène is but a female version of the Marquis de Mascarille. Licaste goes on to say that he had not thought that "ceux qui sont en toutes manières les plus braves à la Cour, fussent si patients, que de se souffrir appeler Turlupins, en plein théâtre, sans en témoigner le moindre ressentiment." --We here meet a new attempt on the part of Donneau de Visé to turn all the courtiers against Molière, an attempt which, as we know, was not successful.

Licaste comes back to the famous Le "mis pour donner lieu d'agir à l'imagination," then turns to the subject of La Critique again. He complains that the two sides are not fairly represented, since Molière has chosen for attacking L'Ecole des femmes

un Marquis, que vous nous dépeignez comme un ridicule, et qui avoue lui-même qu'il n'a pas voulu écouter la pièce; un auteur, qui, en qualité d'auteur, c'est-à-dire de personne intéressée, ne doit pas être cru; et une femme, que vous faites folle.

In this, says Licaste, Molière has admitted to the weakness of
his play, for, had the play been good enough, he would have chosen strong persons with bearing arguments to attack it. As a whole, Licaste finds the play quite badly made and boring, and in any case indebted to the Chevalier Doriste (presumably l'Abbé du Buisson of whom we already have spoken), since it is his play in verse, plagiarized and transcribed into prose, that Molière has presented, according to Licaste.

After the reading of the fallen letter, Donneau de Visé introduces two new characters, first Aristide, a "poète à dentelle et à grands cheveux" (scène VII) and Zélinde, femme savante and "un de ces grands esprits du siècle ... qui écrit si bien en vers et en prose; ... elle va seule entretenir toute la compagnie." (scène VIII). And that is certainly true. She starts out conversing with Aristide, whom she knows quite well, giving him a suggestion about a play to write about "ces dîcrêtes médisantes," but, she says, it is necessary to embroider a bit around the subject and in order to succeed, do like Elomire and "lire comme lui tous les livres satiriques, prendre dans l'Italien, et lire tous les vieux bouquins. Il faut avouer que c'est un galant homme, et qu'il est louable de savoir si bien se servir de tout ce qu'il lit de bon."

---Donneau de Visé did not ever miss the chance to remind us of the fact that Molière had imitated and borrowed from many authors. Zélinde tries to convince Aristide to do likewise, and write another two or three plays, until his talents become as well-known as those of Elomire, for
après cela, l'on commencera à connaitre que tout l'esprit n'est pas dans une tête, et que faire des satires du temps, sans travailler sur les mêmes sujets, n'est point imiter Elomire, mais faire aussi bien que lui.

Is there not a hint of the aspiring young comedy-writer Donneau de Visé here, perhaps the same sort of professional envy that is evident in Lysidas of *La Critique*?

Zélinde goes on to give to Aristide a suggestion which, interestingly enough, was to become the evident point of departure for Boursault's *Portrait du Peintre*:

*Il faudrait que vous fissiez la Critique, sous le nom d'Apologie ... en faisant seulement que ceux qui défendent *L'Ecole des femmes*, la combattent; et que ceux qui la combattent, la défendent. Ne seroit-ce pas une chose bien divertisante de voir le marquis donner mille louanges à Tarte à la Crème et de l'entendre crier au lieu de: voilà qui est détestable, Tarte à la Crème est incomparable! C'est ce que l'on appelle incomparable!*

Another possibility, says Zélinde, would be to make fun of Elomire himself, by representing him as a man whose appearance has at the same time a bit of Arléquin, of Scaramouche, of the Doctor, and of Trivelin; and by having these and others come, one by one, asking Elomire to give them back what he had taken from them in his acting or in his clothes. Then could come authors and all the old books that have supplied the most beautiful parts of his work, and so at last the *gens de qualité* whose adventures he used and whose mannerisms he had copied. This way, at the end, not only would Elomire be left all naked, but his works would be stripped of beauty. And, Zélinde claims, the actors at the Hôtel de
Bourgogne would be more than happy to perform such a play--they are intelligent enough to judge a good play, although Elomire treats them as ignorant.

But Aristide hesitates--how can he dare to attack Elomire who is respected even by the Turlupins whom he ridicules? And Donneau de Visé, through his mouthpiece Zélinde, bursts out:

Quoi! vous craignez d'attaquer un homme qui n'épargne pas le sexe! et les auteurs, qu'Elomire joue sous le nom de Lysidas, sont aussi lâches que les Courtisans, qu'il joue sous le nom du Marquis Turlupin. Ah! que je ne suis pas si patiente!

We recognize Donneau de Visé's method of trying to incite a common cause and throw as many enemies as possible into the attacks on Molière. He tries to convince women, too, that Molière has misrepresented them in describing them as being as stupid and ignorant as Agnès, without showing that any intelligent and educated person would know how to avoid acting the way Agnès does.

Zélinde then, in turn, presents her criticism of L'Ecole des femmes, with the same old arguments repeated in her own way--so that it becomes quite boring to the reader! However, she is so eloquent and goes into so much detail, that Argimont says admiringly to himself: "Je ne sais plus où j'en suis! je croyais avoir remarqué toutes les fautes de L'Ecole des femmes; cependant je commence à connaître qu'il y en a bien d'autres!" And Zélinde sums up her criticism in words that clearly reflect Donneau de Visé's bitter envy:
Il faut que tous ceux qu'Elomire joue soient bien insensibles ou ne se reconnaissent pas... Cependant toutes ces menaces s'en vont en fumée, et le bonheur d'Elomire est tel qu'il fait tourner à son avantage tout ce qui lui devrait nuire... S'il a du mérite, ce n'est pas pour ce qui regarde la comédie, et il ne doit tous ces grands succès qu'à son bonheur. N'est-ce pas être heureux, que de prendre hardiment partout, sans qu'on s'en aperçoive? N'est-ce pas être heureux que de faire valoir ses pièces soi-même? N'est-ce pas être heureux que de représenter toujours les mêmes choses, sans que l'on s'en lasse? Et n'est-ce pas enfin être heureux que d'avoir rencontré un siècle, où l'on ne se plait qu'à entendre des satires? (Scène VIII).

As far as Donneau de Visé is concerned, this is the end of his comedy. He has said all he had to say, and more. But as it is a play, the almost nonexistent plot must be completed. The four last short scenes provide this necessary but very weak dénouement, where Mélante finally arrives in the shop, finds Oriane, receives news of an inheritance that assures his acceptance by Oriane's father and is at last united with his beloved one. What an oversweet and trite frame for a venomous, unfair and, above all, unintelligent attack on Molière!

5. L'Impromptu de Versailles

In the midst of the quarrel, when the accusations were at their height, Louis XIV invited Molière and his Troupe to Versailles for a prolonged stay, October 11 to 23. The order alone was a good indication of the fact that Molière was still in high favor at the court. It also showed that the King more than ever took Molière's side in the quarrel. We
have already seen this repeatedly: the invitation to play L'Ecole des femmes, the pension, the dedications accepted by Madame and the Queen Mother. This time, the King took the full step and urged Molière to present, during the stay at Versailles, a new play where he would counter his enemies. It is easy to guess that Molière must have reacted by being flattered and embarrassed at the same time. Flattered, because of the confidence of the King, embarrassed about the new and difficult task he had to cope with. The time was short, and if he did not succeed, it would be an enormous triumph for his enemies. But Molière had no choice, he sat down to work, according to his own words eight days before the performance, and wrote the little comedy L'Impromptu de Versailles. The play was a success at Versailles, and it was received with great expectations and enthusiasm at the Palais Royal on November 4. It was played there until December 23, in all nineteen times and twice en visite, and several times during the next two years until its last performance at the time, during a visit to Versailles between September 13 and 17, 1665. Molière never had his play printed—he presumably considered it an oeuvre de circonstance, a pamphlet in a literary battle and without any value in itself. La Grange, however, included it in his 1682 edition of Molière's complete works and it has been reprinted with the works ever since.

The interest in this play for most of today's public lies no longer in its satire and its part in the quarrel, but
almost entirely in the fascinating experience of seeing Molière at work, surrounded by his actor-friends. Everybody is presented under his own name, as we know, and Molière shows us their personalities in the way he has them speak and react. We meet, for example, a Madeleine Béjart who is quite evidently the queen of the Troupe, a Mlle Molière who speaks with the assurance of a young wife, a La Grange who, being probably the best actor beside Molière, needs no direction: "Pour vous, je n'ai rien à vous dire" (scène I). We learn how Molière succeeded in making his actors feel the roles and develop the best way of expressing them.

What concerns this study, however, is the role of the play in the quarrel between Molière and his adversaries. Because of its character as a theatrical rehearsal, this play could not present its attacks veiled or suggested—they became, of necessity, direct and even personal. It is quite interesting to imagine this satire played in front of the splendid Court of Louis XIV. L'Impromptu being so well-known, there is no need for going into detail here about its contents. Instead, it is of interest to underline a few facts and incidents in the play that are of particular importance.

We have already mentioned the fact that Molière said he wrote the play in a week's time. His contemporary adversaries seem to have doubted this claim, but considering that Molière wrote Les Fâcheux, which has three acts and is in verse, in fifteen days, there is no reason not to believe
Molière in this. It is true, however, that something like the scene giving imitations of the rival actors may have been done before, within the circle of the Troupe itself. Although we can feel that Molière is anxious to establish how little time he had available to him in creating his play, there is another fact which seems to have even more importance for him, and which he repeats three times: "[le] Roi me l'a commandé." Thus, not only is Molière under the protection of Louis XIV, he is told by him to defend himself by attacking his adversaries.

The strongest attack on a group in this play was, as could be expected, directed toward the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, who took an active part in the quarrel and also staged the Portrait du Peintre with evident pleasure. Montfleury was the first to be imitated, with such success that his son found he had reason to defend his father in L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé, which we will speak about shortly. Other actors satirized by Molière this time were M. and Mlle Beau-château, Hauteroche, and de Villiers. And, as Molière says, had he only had time to sit and study them all for a few nights, he would have been able to do more of the same.

The other person to receive hard blows from Molière's pen was the author of the Portrait du Peintre, Boursault. We have already referred to the passage where Molière seems to differentiate between Lysidas and Boursault. That is, however, just the beginning of a long discussion concerning the play
and Boursault, in which Molière shows that he considers the author of no importance and speaks about him in such a contemptuous manner that Boursault, on November 17, burst out in angry protests in the preface to his play, printed two weeks after the presentation of *L'Impromptu* in Paris. It is Mlle de Brie who gives Molière the cue by saying: "Ma foi, j'aurais joué ce petit Monsieur l'auteur, qui se mêle d'écrire contre des gens qui ne s'ongent pas à lui." And Molière gives his reply, which sums up his ideas about this whole affair, and indicates the direction he was to take from then on when it came to attacks from whoever it may be: despising silence.

Vous êtes folle. Le beau sujet à divertir la Cour que Monsieur Boursault! Je voudrois bien savoir de quelle façon on pourroit l'ajuster pour le rendre plaisant, et si, quand on le berneroit sur un théâtre, il seroit assez heureux pour faire rire le monde. Ce lui seroit trop d'honneur que d'être joué devant une auguste assemblée, il ne demanderait pas mieux; et il m'attaque de gaité de coeur, pour se faire connaître de quelque façon que ce soit. C'est un homme qui n'a rien à perdre; et les comédiens ne me l'ont déchâiné que pour m'engager à une sotte guerre, et me détourner, par cet artifice, des autres ouvrages que j'ai à faire. Et cependant, vous êtes assez simples pour donner dans ce panneau. Mais enfin, j'en ferai ma déclaration publiquement. Je ne prétends faire aucune réponse à toutes leurs critiques et leurs contre-critiques. Qu'ils disent tous les mauux du monde de mes pièces, j'en suis d'accord. Qu'ils se saisissent après nous, qu'ils les retournent comme un habit pour les mettre sur leur théâtre, et tâchent à profiter de quelque agrément qu'on y trouve et d'un peu de bonheur que j'ai, j'y consens: ils en ont besoin, et je serai bien aise de contribuer à les faire subsister, pourvu qu'ils se contentent de ce que je puis leur accorder avec bienséance. La courtoisie doit avoir des bornes, et il y a des choses qui ne font rire ni les spectateurs, ni celui dont on
parle. Je leur abandonne de bon coeur mes ouvrages, ma figure, mes gestes, mes paroles, mon ton de voix et ma façon de réciter, pour en faire et dire ce qu'il leur plaira, s'ils en peuvent tirer quelque avantage. Je ne m'oppose point à toutes ces choses, et je serai ravi que cela puisse réjouir le monde. Mais en leur abandonnant tout cela, ils me doivent faire la grâce de me laisser le reste et de ne point toucher à des matières de la nature de celles sur lesquelles on m'a dit qu'ils m'attaquaient dans leur comédies. C'est de quoi je prierai civillement cet honnête Monsieur qui se mêle d'écrire pour eux; et voilà toute la réponse qu'ils auront de moi. (Scène III).

The heat and intensity of this speech by Molière is quite astounding. What we hear is a man asking for his human right of having a private life, free from insinuations. It has been suggested, and is probably true, that the printed Portrait du Peintre we have is a very much expurgated version of the play presented at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. We know that personal attacks on Molière were common at the time, especially involving the presumed infidelity of Mlle Molière—Donneau de Visé, as we shall soon see, did not even hesitate to print them. Another reason for Molière's irritation may be that he thought Boursault had not been alone in writing the play—or at least he served, in writing it, the interests of many of his strongest enemies, for example Corneille who had been one of the harshest critics of L'Ecole des femmes and was extremely sensitive at the time, since he was himself in a low period of his career.

As was to be expected, L'Impromptu, which was more direct and more satirical than La Critique, stirred up more
protests and counter-attacks than either *L'Ecole des femmes* or *La Critique*. We have already mentioned that Boursault added a preface to his *Portrait du Peintre*, written before but published after *L'Impromptu*, on November 17. Robinet's *Panégyrique de l'Ecole des femmes* likewise appeared in print after the Paris première of *L'Impromptu*, but seems to have been printed as it had been played. There are only three major criticisms in the form of plays that were actually written after *L'Impromptu*: *Réponse à l'Impromptu de Versailles ou la Vengeance des Marquis*, 31 *L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Conde* 32 and *La Guerre Comique ou la Défense de l'Ecole des femmes*. 33 The latter, by an unknown author named Philippe Lacroix, printed in early 1664, is all in all a work in favor of Molière and his production. Montfleury's *Impromptu*, the only one of all the *libelles* discussed in this chapter to have a real justification, for "à qui venge son père, il n'est rien d'impossible," is a well balanced play in which Molière is attacked only as an author and especially actor, since it was the elder Montfleury's acting ability he had questioned. Personal insinuations, on the other hand, are absent from this play, performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne toward the end of 1663 and printed in January 1664. The first-mentioned of these three plays, usually called *La Vengeance des Marquis*, is the most unfair and critical one, and since it is by Donneau de Visé, the one we are most closely concerned with in this study.
6. *La Vengeance des Marquis*

When the success of the *Portrait du Peintre* started to diminish, and while still waiting for the play Montfleury was in the process of writing, the *comédiens* of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, probably in November, 1663, presented a new little anonymous play entitled *La Vengeance des Marquis*. Donneau de Visé's authorship of this badly written, shamefully unfair play is only too evident.

The play takes place in the house of Cléante, a friend of the *Peintre*—Molière—on the day of the first performance of *L'Impromptu de Versailles* in Paris. The general remarks throughout the seven scenes are very much in the style of *Zélinde*, with criticism of small phrases and expressions, and long, empty and forced discussions such as one about the time put into the creation of the work. But soon the venomous personal attacks start, this time more daring, perfidious and direct than ever before—or after—in print:

> Il a plus été de cocus qu'il ne dit voir le *Portrait du Peintre*: j'y en comptai un jour jusques à trente et un. Cette représentation ne manqua pas d'approbateurs: trente de ces cocus applaudirent fort, et le dernier fit tout ce qu'il put pour rire, mais il n'en avait pas beaucoup envie. (Scène III).

There is, for the first time, a public allusion to Molière's unhappiness over his wife's presumed infidelity.

Then Donneau de Visé claims, through Ariste who "soutient à outrance les intérêts de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne," that it is Molière who has started this avalanche of hostili-
ties by attacking the Grands Comédiens in his Précieuses ridicules and his Critique. These comédiens ought, in turn, to ridicule Molière by showing him as the mediocre actor he really is. But Molière is not the only one to be subjected to this treatment. A list of personal attacks on the actors follows: "le dieu Vulcan n'est-il pas de sa troupe?"—This was, of course, a reference to Louis Béjart who limped; "Ce gros porteur de chaise des Précieuses" is Duparc (Gros-René) who had a rather imposing figure; and most cruelly of all

que dites-vous de celle qui joue la première amante [de Dom Garcie]? Le Peintre dit qu'il faut de gros hommes pour faire les rois dans les autres troupes, mais dans la sienne il ne faut que de vieilles femmes pour jouer les premiers rôles, puisqu'une jeune personne bien faite n'aurait pas bonne grâce.

Poor Madeleine Béjart! But that was not all that concerned her. The valet Philipin enters and sings a "Chanson de la coquille." After the song, Philipin adds: "Il me semble que je suis aux Fâcheux et que je vois sortie d'une coquille une belle nymphe." And Ariste answers: "Il me souvient de cette nymphe: on croyoit tromper nos yeux en nous la faisant voir, et nous faite trouver beaucoup de jeunesse dans un vieux poisson."

(Scene VII).

It is evident that this play without a plot, without any literary value whatsoever, had only two things which could attract the public to the theater: its actuality and its underhanded personal attacks. It is surprising that in an age of extremely close control over everything being printed,
such a libelle against one of Louis XIV's favorites could be legally published in France. And, to be sure, the history of the publication of La Vengeance des Marquis is a curious one. As it was necessary to use illegal procedures, Donneau de Visé turned to the famous publisher Ribou, known to be quite unscrupulous. Ribou's printing presses had completed, on September 27, 1663, the work on les Délices de la Poésie Galante, a poetry collection dedicated to the Marquis de Coislin. The volume includes an extrait du privilège, valid for nine years and dated September 14, 1663. However, as was often the case, Ribou had not yet had his privilege registered—he did not do so until February 18, 1664. In the register we find the title which Ribou showed the censor in obtaining the privilege: Délices de la Poésie et diversités galantes et meilleures nouvelles, dédié à M. le Marquis de Coislin—a considerably longer title than that finally used for the published work. In comparing the two titles, we find the important "extra" word: Diversités, which had not been used for the poetry collection, but presumably reserved for Donneau de Visé's Diversités galantes, which appeared on December 7, 1663, without having been subjected to censorship and protected by the second half of the false privilège. 35

It is into this volume of short stories that Donneau de Visé slipped his Vengeance des Marquis and, at the same time, a Lettre sur les affaires du théâtre 36 in which he renewed and repeated his ignominious attacks on Molière. These two attacks
must have given increased popularity to the publication, for it was sold in large quantities and was even reprinted in a second edition in early 1665.

7. Lettre sur les affaires du théâtre

In his Lettre sur les affaires du théâtre, Donneau de Visé intervenes a fourth and last time against Molière in the quarrel. This is done in the form of a report on news concerning the theater, but, as could be expected, Molière is the main subject. The tone is, from the beginning, triumphant, and Donneau de Visé asserts that

la réputation d'Elomire a longtemps empêché que l'on ne l'attaquât, et l'on se fût toujours persuadé qu'il ne pouvait être vaincu, si l'auteur du Portrait du Peintre n'eût fait voir qu'il n'a triomphé si longtemps que faute d'avoir été attaqué, et que ce fort pouvait être surpris par tant de faibles endroits qu'il ne fallait que se présenter pour en demeurer vainqueur. Voilà ce que vous ont dû faire connaître les deux pièces que vous avez reçues de ma part.

It is, of course, a question of Zélinde and La Vengeance des Marquis. As for the latter, the author apologizes for its weaknesses, assuring that it was the work of one and one half days. Its title is admittedly not very proper—the subject is the vengeance of the comédiens rather than of the marquis; but says Donneau de Visé, this was done intentionally, as he wanted to imitate Elomire who never worries about whether his plays have convenient titles or not, as long as they are striking and arouse the curiosity of the public.

He claims that the marquis have taken their own re-
venge on Elomire by remaining silent in the quarrel and there-
by showing their wealth of "esprit." But he cannot resist the
temptation of once more inciting them as a group against
Molière:

Ce n'est pas que la gloire de l'Etat ne les dût ob-
liger à se plaindre: puisque c'est tourner le
royaume en ridicule, railler toute la noblesse, et
rendre méprisables, non seulement à tous les Fran-
gais, mais encore à tous les étrangers, des noms
éclatants, pour qui l'on devroit avoir du respect.

Donneau de Visé went a step further this time—he was
not content merely to try to bring the marquis into the battle,
he even tried to arouse the King to disfavor and anger. He
insisted that the same marquis in reality form His Majesty's
Court and that

cet incomparable monarque est toujours accompagné
des gens qu'il [Molière] veut rendre ridicules, que
ce sont eux qui forment sa Cour, que c'est avec eux
qu'il se divertit, que c'est avec eux qu'il s'en-
tretient, et que c'est avec eux qu'il donne de la
terreur à ses ennemis... Quoi! trahir si mal
l'appui et l'ornement de l'Etat! avoir tant de
mépris pour des personnes qui ont tant de fois, et
si généreusement exposé leur vie pour la gloire de
leur Prince!38

This unfair exclamation is a strong proof of the degree of envy
from which the Hôtel de Bourgogne was suffering because of the
royal favor showered over Molière!

Molière's success being undeniable, Donneau de Visé
had only one way of explaining it—by Molière's acting talent.
As we recall, he had already mentioned this as an important
factor in Les Nouvelles nouvelles. Here he says that

les postures contribuent à la réussite de ces sortes
de pièces, et elles doivent ordinairement tous leurs
suc
c
cès aux grimaces d'un acteur. Nous en avons un exemple dans L'Ecole des femmes, où les grimaces d'Arriphe, le visage d'Alain et la judicieuse scène du notaire, ont fait rire bien des gens; et sur le récit que l'on en a fait, tout Paris a voulu voir cette comédie.39

However, the faults in this play were even more evident, so evident that Molière had to answer the accusations in his Critique which caused "que je fis ensuite ma Zélinde, voyant qu'il avait agi en père, et qu'il avait eu trop d'indulgence pour ses enfants."40

Perhaps the most interesting parts of this Lettre are, however, those that deal with the value of tragedy and comedy. Donneau de Visé sets the stage by ridiculing Elomire who, just because he so easily puts together something amusing, therefore thinks that his comedies are better than serious plays. But, says Donneau de Visé, there is one great difference between the two genres and their success:

Une pièce sérieuse réussit pour son mérite, et sa bonté seule nous oblige à lui rendre justice; mais l'on va souvent voir en foule une pièce comique, encore que l'on la trouve méchante, et l'on va plutôt aux ouvrages qui sont de la nature de ceux d'Elomire, pour les gens qu'il on y croit voir jouer que pour la judicieuse conduite de la pièce, car l'on sait bien qu'il ne s'en pique pas.41

--These words, so unfairly uttered about Molière are only too true when applied to the attacking plays in this quarrel, especially Donneau de Visé's own, as well as of some of his later comedies.

But Donneau de Visé becomes more specific in referring directly to the passage concerned, in the Critique, where
Molière so well explains why it is more difficult to make a good comedy than a good tragedy. Allow us to recall this well-known passage in order better to contrast the answer:

Je trouve qu'il est plus aisé de se guider sur de grands sentiments, de braver en vers la Fortune, accuser les Destins et dire des injures aux Dieux, que d'entrer comme il faut dans le ridicule des hommes, et rendre agréablement sur le théâtre les défauts de tout le monde. Lorsque vous peignez des héros, vous faites ce que vous voulez; ce sont des portraits à plaisir, où l'on ne cherche point de ressemblance, et vous n'avez qu'à suivre les traits d'une imagination qui se donne l'essor, et qui souvent laisse le vrai pour attraper le merveilleux. Mais lorsque vous peignez les hommes, il faut peindre d'après nature; on veut que ces portraits ressemblent, et vous n'avez rien fait si vous n'êtes faites reconnaître les gens de votre siècle. En un mot, dans les pièces sérieuses, il suffit, pour n'être point blâmé, de dire des choses qui soient de bon sens et bien écrites; mais ce n'est pas assez dans les autres, il y faut plaisanter; et c'est une étrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens. (Scène VI).

There could be no doubt, no misunderstanding about Molière's clear words—we all know what he meant, and many would tend to agree. Donneau de Visé, however, who was "by profession" a critic of Molière, was bound to disagree and to want to reject the ideas expressed in this passage. Moreover, he was at this time a well established admirer of Corneille, and perhaps he felt that he owed the great tragedy-writer another proof of support to soften the memory of his criticism of Sophonisbe. His defense of the task of writing a tragedy was based on the principle that

pour faire parler des héros il faut avoir l'âme grande, ou plutôt être héros soi-même... il n'est pas de même des fous qu'on peint d'après nature:
ces peintures ne sont pas difficiles, l'on remarque aisément leurs postures, on entend leurs discours, l'on voit leurs habits, et l'on peut sans beaucoup de peine venir à bout de leur portrait... [Dans la tragédie] on ne brave pas toujours la fortune en vers; l'on n'accuse pas toujours les destins, et l'on ne querelle pas toujours les dieux.

And, for those who still were not aware of the fact that he spoke for Corneille:

Il est aisé de connaître par toutes ces choses qu'il y a au Paranss de mille places vides 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 auprès de lui moins qu'un homme; et qu'il est plus glorieux de se faire admirer par des ouvrages solides que de faire rire par des grimaces, des turlupinades, de grandes perruques et de grands canons. Le nom de monsieur de Corneille, que nous pouvons justement appeler la gloire de la France, est adoré dans toute l'Europe; et comme il a travaillé pour la postérité, tout le monde publie hautement qu'il mérite de l'encens et des statues. Ses copies sont plus estimées que les originaux qu'Elomire nous veut faire passer pour des chefs-d'œuvre beaucoup plus difficiles que des ouvrages sérieux.42

The end of this Lettre is unbelievably hypocritical. After several pages of direct criticisms of Molière, and after three earlier works in which the attacks became progressively more and more personal and odious, Donneau de Visé here assures his readers that he had never attacked Molière's person, but only his works. Moreover, he believes Molière to be an honnête homme and would be wrong in saying the contrary since he does not know the details of his life! And he adds: "mais quand je les saurois, je n'en parlerois point, puisque ces sortes de choses n'ont rien à démêler avec l'esprit."

Furthermore, Molière would be wrong in taking offense
at what he has written against him, for literary works are by nature open to criticism. As a matter of fact,

tout ce que l'on écrit contre lui ne sert qu'à faire voir qu'il triomphe. J'en demeure d'accord avec tous ses amis, et c'est par là que je crois qu'il m'est permis de lui dire tout ce qu'il me plair. Je le traite comme le plus grand homme de l'antiquité, et je suis l'exemple des Romains, qui permettoient à tout le monde de dire aux vainqueurs tous leurs vérités le jour de leur triomphe.43

It is impossible to say which is more difficult to accept: the attacks against Molière or the disgusting hypocrisy in these final paragraphs. Perhaps these last words, as well as the entire four works by Donneau de Visé that we have just studied, are indicative of the character of the author. Perhaps they are, on the other hand, the products of a scheming, but intelligent and daring mind, that worked toward one main goal: fame. Whatever the truth may be, there is no denying that these four attacks on Molière and his work constitute a shameful period in Donneau de Visé's career as a writer, short as it may have been. It is also true, however, that the same four works procured the fame the young man was looking for. With this he forever left the side of Molière's attackers, to join instead, only a short time after the publication of the second edition of his Diversités galantes, Molière's friends and admirers.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1 Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, VIII, p. 86.


4 Ibid., p. 299.

5 De Leres, Dictionnaire des théâtres (Paris, 1763); Le Vallière, Bibliothèque de théâtre français (Paris, 1768); Mouhy, Tablettes dramatiques (Bibl. Nat. Manus. fonds franç. 15047); Duval, Dictionnaire (Bibl. Nat. Manus. fonds franç. 9466); Auger, Œuvres de Molière (Paris, 1819-25); Paul Lacroix, Bibliographie molièresque; and Victor Fournel, Les Contemporains de Molière.

6 Eugène Despois and Paul Mesnard, eds., Œuvres de Molière, Collection des grands écrivains de la France (Paris, 1873-1900).

7 Ibid., III, p. 112.

8 Registre de La Grange, p. 54.

9 Ibid., passim.

10 Loret, Lettre deuxième, January 13, 1663, p. 6.

11 Registre de La Grange, p. 55.

12 Loret, p. 6.


14 Ibid., pp. 361-62.

16 Ibid.
17 Oeuvres, IV, p. 242.
18 Ibid.
19 "Elle n'est pas de lui, repartit Straton; elle est de l'Abbe du Buisson, qui est un des plus galants hommes du siecle.-- J'avoue, lui repondit Clorante, que cet illustre abbe en a fait une, et que l'ayant portee a l'auteur dont nous parlons, il trouva des raisons pour ne la point jouer, encore qu'il avouat qu'elle fut bonne." --This passage is quite valuable to Moliere research, as it would have been almost impossible to guess without it who had made la Critique Moliere refused to play.
21 Oeuvres, IV, p. 394.
22 Registre de La Grange, p. 59.
24 Oeuvres, V, pp. 1-41.
25 Ibid., pp. 43-77.
26 Ibid., p. 474.
27 Ibid., pp. 79-125.
29 Registre de La Grange, pp. 60-61.
30 Ibid., passim.
31 Oeuvres, V, pp. 211-34.
33 Ibid., pp. 261-303.
According to Donneau de Visé's "Au lecteur" following the play in Les Diversités galantes, the "Chanson de la coquille" was written by him but was "lent" to the Portrait du Peintre during its run at 1'Hôtel de Bourgogne, and then returned again to the rightful owner's play. This is a strong indication that our previous assumption may be correct that the Portrait du Peintre was expurgated before its publication.


Ibid., p. 254.

Ibid., p. 255.

Ibid., p. 256.

Ibid., p. 257.

Ibid., p. 256.

Ibid., pp. 257-58.

Ibid., pp. 258-59.
CHAPTER IV

DONNEAU DE VISE AND MOLIERE, 1665-1673:
RECONCILIATION AND COOPERATION

The guerre comique, caused primarily by L'Ecole des femmes, was a trying ordeal for Molière. It arose to a great extent from professional antagonism, caused by the envy of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. The hostility between the two theaters continued, and for the rest of his life Molière had to struggle to keep his troupe alive and in the King's favor. To these professional difficulties, easy to recognize and at first rather simple for Molière to combat, was soon added another type of antagonism, less visible and therefore more effective. This was the war on Molière undertaken for moral and religious reasons by the dévots. It had started already around L'Ecole des femmes and became quite strong after L'Impromptu de Versailles. At the center of the battle was, of course, Tartuffe.

In this dispute Molière did not stand up and defend himself publicly. Instead he tried to free himself from the accusations of heresy by appealing to the authorities, especially the King, whose favor he still had. If Molière kept silent, there were, however, others who spoke up, even in print, for and against him. The heat of this battle was
higher and more intense than all previous antagonisms—and the plays involved constitute the peak not only of Molière's dramatic career but also of classical comedy as a whole: Tartuffe, Dom Juan, and Le Misanthrope. The history of their creation and presentation, disappearance and reappearance on stage is a well-known one, in its large features. Many details are still obscure or the subject of scholarly debates. A rapid review of some events surrounding these works in the critical years 1664 to 1669 is a useful and necessary background to a discussion of Donneau de Visé's part in the battle.

The first of the capital works concerned, Tartuffe, was originally played at Versailles on May 12, 1664, in connection with Les Plaisirs de l'Ile enchantée, but only partially—"trois actes du Tartuffe qui étaient les 3 premiers," according to La Grange.¹ The play was forbidden and the three acts not shown again until September 25, 1664, at a private performance at Villiers-Cotterets, on the invitation of Monsieur. A month later, on November 29, the Prince de Condé invited the troupe to play at Raincy for the Princesse Palatine, a performance at which, La Grange informs us, Tartuffe was played "en cinq actes."² There were also several readings of the play, especially for the legate of the Pope, Cardinal Chigi, and his company. Molière's first placet, presented to the King at the end of August, 1664, was of no avail. There was not very much else to do than to wait and hope that permission to play Tartuffe would come. However, the problem
did not concern only Molière—the troupe had no doubt counted on a long and prosperous run of the new work, and its economic situation became precarious. They had to fill the empty period with performances of old plays, which rarely provided good receipts but at least gave them their living. In the meantime, during the last months of 1664, Molière composed quite rapidly a new play intended to fill the gap left by the forbidden Tartuffe. This was Dom Juan, played for the first time on February 15, 1665. It was an immediate success; during the month of February, the income was steadily around 2000 livres each night, giving the actors shares which were up to twenty times that which they had received for the preceding twelve months. Only the last six of the twenty performances show a decrease in interest. Molière had, as we know, chosen a well-known and extremely popular subject for his play, one that had earlier proved to be a great success at other theaters where it had been presented for a couple of years in different languages. Loret's announcement beforehand might also have helped:

L'effroyable Festin de Pierre,
Si fameux par toute la terre,
Et qui réussissait si bien
Sur le théâtre italien,
Va commencer, l'autre semaine,
A paraître sur notre scène,
Pour contenter et ravir ceux
Qui ne seront point parasseux
De voir ce sujet admirable,
Et lequel est, dit-on, capable
Par ses beaux discours de toucher
Les coeurs de bronze ou de rocher;
Car le rare esprit de Molière
L'a traité de telle manière,
Que les gens qui sont curieux
Du solide et beau sérieux,
S'il est vrai ce que l'on en conte,
Sans doute y trouveront leur compte;
Et touchant le style enjoué,
Plusieurs déjà m'ont avoué
Qu'il est fin, à son ordinaire,
Et d'un singulier caractère.4

In spite of its success, Dom Juan did not appear again after Easter or at all in Molière's lifetime. Nor did Molière publish the play, so the privilège of March 11, 1665 remained unused. The play was finally published in La Grange's complete edition, seventeen years after its performance.

On October 8, 1665, the troupe was at Raincy visiting the Princesse Palatine on Condé's invitation, again performing Tartuffe in five acts.5 At the Palais Royal, in the meantime, a new comedy by Molière had somewhat filled the void. The comédie-ballet L'Amour médecin was presented on September 15 at Versailles and a week later in Paris and brought in considerable income for the troupe, followed by and later joined with La Mère coquette by Jean Donneau de Visé.6 During the following months the program was filled with these two plays and several revivals of older ones, especially the dependable Les Fâcheux.7

Molière's energy did not diminish, however. During a considerable part of this battle, he had been working on a second extensive project,8 which was to result in the third great masterpiece Le Misanthrope. If we today consider this play to be one of the most important dramatic works ever writ-
ten, this was regrettable not the case at the time of its first performances. However, the reception was not quite as bad as some scholars want to make it. Le Misanthrope was presented on June 4, 1666, with rather normal receipts for that night and the following eight performances. In July the interest had slowed down considerably and did not increase again until in September when the play was presented together with a new comedy, Le Médecin malgré lui.10

The elevated thoughts, the refined language and the subtle qualities of this play could not but appeal primarily to the educated elite. The parterre, usually on Molière’s side, expected comedies more akin to farce—not philosophical social satires. The connaisseurs appear, however, to have admitted their admiration, according to Subligny’s Muse de Cour:

Une chose de fort grand cours
Et de beauté très singulièrè
Est une pièce de Molière.
Toute la cour en dit du bien:
Après son Misanthrope il n’est plus voir rien;
C’est un chef-d’œuvre inimitable.11

In his letter a week after the first performance of the play Robinet went further—he not only praised the work, he seems to have tried to educate his readers by explaining the value of the play. He did quite well, considering the haste of composition and the relative superficiality of his publication.

Great success or not, Le Misanthrope was played without interference from the authorities or influential persons. It is evident that it did not cause a storm of the kind which
surrounded L'Ecole des femmes or Dom Juan and certainly nothing like the battle around Tartuffe with which it has, however, many points of resemblance or kinship. Aside from the pure lack of understanding for the play, its most disturbing effect was the fact that it lent itself to innumerable identifications of characters through its finely drawn portraits which in their natural truthfulness seemed to resemble many persons at the court as well as in the city.

Le Misanthrope continued to be presented occasionally with the reinforcement of new plays in the second half of 1666: the comedy Le Médecin malgré lui and a comédie pastorale héroïque, Mélicerte, written for the Ballet des Muses and performed at the court in December, 1666. Mélicerte was replaced in January by La Pastorale comique which, in turn, was joined a little later by Le Sicilien, a delightful one-act comedy. It is evident that, in spite of all his difficulties and worries, Molière did not lose either his energy or his talent.

Shortly after Le Sicilien had had its first presentation in Paris, Molière got the good news of the permission to present Tartuffe at the Palais Royal. Immediately, on August 5, 1665, the play was offered, but under a new name: Panulphe ou l'Imposteur, and in a somewhat modified tone. The receipts, which on the previous theater night, August 2, had been a total of 87 livres, jumped to the great amount of 1890 livres, the highest since Dom Juan, two and a half years earlier. The triumph did not last long, however. The next day the play was
forbidden by the first president of the Parlement, Lamoignon, who used the authority bestowed upon him through Louis XIV's absence. The immediate reaction on the part of Molière was, of course, to try to appeal to his protectors, notably Madame, as well as to explain to Lamoignon how innocent his play actually was. In neither case did he achieve what he had hoped for, but the visit to the president was to have wider implications.

By August 8, Molière had prepared his next step in his renewed fight for this work that had come to mean more to him than just another play. He sent La Grange and La Thorillière to Lille with a second placet to be presented to the King. The result of this very costly visit—1000 livres was spent on it—was very vague. His Majesty sent word, says La Grange, "qu'à son retour à Paris il ferait examiner la pièce de Tartuffe et que nous la jouerions."13

The situation was to get even worse. On August 11, 1667, the archbishop of Paris, Hardouin de Péréfixe, in his quality of highest leader of the church in France, forbade all performance of, listening to, or reading of, Tartuffe in his diocese, with the penalty of excommunication. The blow was extremely hard, but Molière continued his silent battle while his actors worked as usual, presenting other works in the repertory and three new plays by Donneau de Visé. In the beginning of 1668 Molière had a new poetic work ready for performance, his Amphitryon, which was quite well received. Dur-
ing the same year Molière played his *Tartuffe* for the Prince de Condé three times at private performances. All in all, the great Condé must have seen the play six times while it was forbidden.

A turning point was finally in sight when, on January 1, 1669 a religious concord and pacification came about, which quieted the jansenist quarrel, the basic cause and original igniting force in the interdiction of *Tartuffe*. A month later, on February 5, 1669, Louis XIV finally authorized public performances of *Tartuffe*, and the première took place that same evening. Molière in his joy presented a third placet to the King. The evening produced a record income of 2860 livres and the success remained high through numerous consecutive performances. On March 23, 1669 the first edition of *Tartuffe* was released, containing the play in its final state and preceded by Molière's famous preface. A second edition, to which had been added the three placets, appeared on June 6, 1669.

Thus ended the long, exhausting battle implicating, to a varying degree, Molière's most important works to date, from *L'Ecole des femmes* through *Don Juan* and *Le Misanthrophe*, and centered around *Tartuffe*. Molière was the apparent victor, but how had he achieved this victory? Did he interfere at all himself, except for his placets, or did somebody else speak for him? These are two of many questions in this battle which are of great importance to Molière scholarship, but which have been given different answers and solutions by many scholars
who often have made themselves guilty of either repeating statements from earlier research or forming their own judgment without taking all elements into consideration.

The three plays which caused the most problems at this time for Molière were Dom Juan, Tartuffe, and Le Misanthrope. In the discussion around them, Molière remains silent. Instead of this surprising or even embarrassing silence one would have expected some forceful answers, or perhaps something like Corneille's Examen. Molière had promised in his Avertissement to Les Fâcheux that "... le temps viendra de faire imprimer mes remarques sur les pièces que j'auria faites, et je ne désespère pas de faire voir un jour, en grand auteur, que je puis citer Aristote et Horace." Since he never did this, and in view of his silence in the great battle, it is perhaps of importance to remember also the last sentence in the same paragraph. Does it possibly give one explanation for his silence? Molière says there that he finds it "... aussi difficile de combattre un ouvrage que le public approuve que d'en défendre un qu'il condamne." One might protest, however, that he did actually defend his Ecole des femmes and Critique. But it was not the public that condemned those plays; it was rather the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne and their supporters. In the later battle it appears that part of the public disapproved, and Molière did not defend himself. He did worse than remaining silent, say some: he allowed his Misanthrope to be preceded by a commentary with which he was not happy.
If this accusation were true, it would show something more serious than silence—indifference. On this point Molière criticism has gone astray by not regarding the circumstances carefully.

Even more serious, probably, is the common tendency of considering the written play as the complete work Molière created. This can be done perfectly well with a tragedy where the words, the verse and the general construction tell the reader all about the characters. In most comedies, however, and particularly in Molière's work, this is far from true. We have already discussed the tremendous importance of the acting in his plays, an aspect so powerful and so well executed than even his enemies had to admit this acting power existed and, so to say, "made" the play. Donneau de Visé in his early criticism went as far as to attribute Molière's entire success to the acting. Molière himself was of the opinion that "... il y a beaucoup de choses qui dépendent de l'action. On sait bien que les comédies ne sont pas faites que pour être jouées, et je ne conseille de [les] lire qu'aux personnes qui ont des yeux pour découvrir dans la lecture tout le jeu de théâtre."\(^{14}\)

Unfortunately, however, we possess extremely few indications of how Molière's plays were performed by his own troupe. Some of the most important commentaries have long been disregarded by many critics under the pretext that they were anonymous or written without Molière's consent. These are the three neglected documents concerning the three most discussed plays
by Molière: Lettre sur les Observations d'une comédie du sieur Molière intitulée le Festin de Pierre, Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur, and Lettre sur le Misanthrope.

These documents are invaluable for the understanding of the plays. Everyone must admit that they were at least written by Molière's contemporaries, by eyewitnesses who had attended his own performances. This fact alone is worthy of attention, for even a mediocre eyewitness is more dependable than ideas constructed centuries later. This is particularly true in the case of Tartuffe, for which the letter gives detailed indications of the acting and gestures. Therefore, the letters must be considered an important part of the documentation for the plays in question, and ought to be included in every complete edition. 15

However, these letters consist of more than just important information about the stage interpretation at Molière's time, for they actually contain Molière's own opinions and therefore his answers to and his clarification of the accusations made concerning his works. 16 Robert has made a convincing case of his attribution of the three letters to one man, Jean Donneau de Visé, acting as Molière's defender and close friend and, most probably, as interpreter of the great master's thoughts and work. Robert's ideas have served as a source of inspiration for the following discussion about the authorship of the letters. However, many details introduced as arguments by Robert have been left out in the present study because they
are vague or can be interpreted in different ways.

1. *Lettre sur les Observations d'une comédie du sieur Molière intitulée le Festin de Pierre*

After *Tartuffe* had been forbidden in 1664, Molière rapidly composed his *Dom Juan ou le Festin de Pierre*. Its success was considerable and lasted until Easter recess. Yet, the play was not taken up again after the holidays, but disappeared for the rest of Molière's lifetime. Many scholars have attributed this to a secret order from the King, impossible to disobey. This explanation, however, appears to be wrong. First of all, such a secret action on the part of the King would very rapidly have become known. It would have been mentioned somewhere, especially in the *libelles* against *Dom Juan*, since a triumphant enemy would have done his best to collect all the facts in his favor. Similarly, Thomas Corneille in reworking *Dom Juan* into verse in 1677 expressed pride in the fact that he worked with Molière's play, without suggesting that it had ever been banned. Moreover, La Grange, who must have known of any such serious thing as a royal interdiction, published *Dom Juan* in his-1682 edition of Molière's works. Finally, Molière himself who admitted so openly the interdiction of *Tartuffe* would presumably not have tried to hide a similar action against *Dom Juan*.

The explanation for the disappearance of *Dom Juan* is probably simpler than it seems. Could it not be that Molière considered its success more or less exhausted by Easter? Con-
sidering the fact that Dom Juan was rather expensive and complicated to stage, perhaps Molière did not find it worth-while to venture the theater's resources on later, less profitable performances. Thus he probably simply decided that it would be better for the troupe to let Dom Juan fall into oblivion. At the same time there was a certain amount of protest against the play. Molière's own first concern during these years was always Tartuffe, a cause which could not suffer any risks. He must have found it wiser to sacrifice Dom Juan. This sacrifice was perhaps not so great in itself—we probably attach more importance to Dom Juan today than Molière ever did.

In the battle surrounding Dom Juan, the strongest published attack was one entitled Observations sur une comédie du sieur Molière intitulée le Festin de Pierre. This was a personal attack on Molière, denouncing his supposed atheism, his libertinage, and hypocrisy. The author of the pamphlet, signed "B.A S^e B.R., avocat en parlement à Paris" is more precisely indicated in a later edition as le sieur de Rochement. The critic's violent outbursts are similar to those of many jansenist writers of this period who tried to undermine and destroy the theater. Although these anonymous publications did not have any direct effects, they created hostility in part of the theatrical public.

The attacks in the Observations were perfidious and unfair enough to deserve a reply. Molière, however, remained silent and no doubt rightly so. If he had declared war on
his attackers then, while the case of his Tartuffe was still pending, he would probably have destroyed any possibility of victory. Louis XIV was without any doubt still on his side, although temporarily embarrassed by his mother and by religious fanatics, and all the time awaiting the right moment for the lifting of the ban. It is natural that Molière was impatient, but anything stronger than his placets would have angered the King.

The Observations was avidly read and reprinted in several editions. In the absence of any reaction from Molière, an anonymous author wrote a Réponse which only worsened the situation. Within only eight days after the publication of that Réponse, there appeared another answer to the Observations, the Lettre sur les Observations, published anonymously and announced in warm words by Robinet on August 9, 1665:

Partisans du Festin de Pierre,
Indignés de l'injuste guerre
Qu'un atrabilaire docteur
A faite à son célèbre auteur,
Je vous avertis qu'une plume
Artisane de maint volume,
L'a défendu, mais du bel air,
En un style énergique et clair,
Et tout-à-fait avec méthode,
Sans citer digeste ni code.
Ne prenez pas Marc pour Renard,
Car ici, raillerie à part,
Et sans que personne s'offense,
Ce n'est pas certaine défense,
Qui depuis dix jours a paru,
D'un auteur armé non à cru,
Qui carabinant et peu ferme,
Effleure à peine l'épiderme.
Je parle d'un autre assaillant,
Et d'une escarmouche nouvelle,
Autant vigoureuse que belle,
Et vous apprendrez chez Quinet
Ce qu'ici vous dit Robinet.

Robinet evidently was not the only one to agree with the Lettre—on August 15, only six days later, Louis XIV declared Molière's group the Troupe du Roi and awarded it a pension of 6000 livres. This was a welcome sign of the King's favor. The author of the Lettre immediately added to it a long, triumphant Apostille in which Molière is defended with even more strength than before. And interestingly enough, in this apostille it is Tartuffe that is discussed rather than Dom Juan, and in a manner which very much suggests the later Lettre sur l'Imposteur.

While assuming that the anonymous author of the Lettre sur les Observations was in reality Jean Donneau de Visé, we shall proceed to try to prove this more conclusively, partly with the help of Robert's arguments. First of all, there does not exist any attack by Donneau de Visé on Molière after L'Impromptu de Versailles. He never wrote anything against Dom Juan. It is also important to remember that Donneau de Visé's Mère coquette was played at the Palais Royal on October 23, 1665. In consideration of the fact that the play must first have been accepted by Molière, then rehearsed, then widely discussed in the quarrel over the two Mère coquette before its first performance, it is evident that the reconciliation of Molière and Donneau de Visé must have taken place already in the summer. Therefore, as far as time is concerned,
our young author could very well be the creator of the Lettre in question.

Furthermore, Donneau de Visé's authorship appears strongly indicated through Charles Robinet. The young gazetier was a good friend of Donneau de Visé and his sisters, a friendship which certainly dates back at least to 1663 when the two young men both wrote plays against Molière, for Corneille and the Hôtel de Bourgogne. On May 25, 1665, just before Donneau de Visé's Mère coquette was accepted by Molière, Robinet founded his weekly gazette of Lettres à Madame. This good friend gave Donneau de Visé whatever publicity he wanted, and as he wanted it. Robinet, like all gazetiers, had to please publishers and mention some newly published works from time to time, but he very rarely went into any detail. The above quoted comments on the Lettre sur les Observations stand out as one of these rare occasions. There he speaks about the author of the Lettre as a "plume, artisane de maint volume." A similar laudatory expression was not repeated again in two and a half years, except for his letter of October 11, 1665, where Robinet announces Donneau de Visé's Mère coquette:

"L'autre est un auteur de vingt ans,/ Mais qui, nonobstant son jeune age,/ Nous a fait voir maint bel ouvrage." Could this be a mere coincidence or is it not rather a strong evidence for the identity of the author? Another point that speaks for Donneau de Visé in connection with Robinet is the fact
that in his mention of the Lettre sur les Observations, Robinet praises Molière, although he was by no means reconciled with the poet at this time, nor seemingly wished to be so. Only one kind of situation could possibly have caused the tone of Robinet's Lettre: the fact that he wrote it for a friend who was, in turn, Molière's friend. Since the theatrical group in Paris at the time was relatively limited, the facts again seem to point directly and clearly to Donneau de Visé.

If the exterior proofs do not seem convincing enough, the document can speak for itself in indicating its author. The opening words are typical of Donneau de Visé, who appears to have suffered from a lack of imagination in starting his works. In his Zélinde, Argimont opens his criticism with the words: "Puisque vous voulez savoir mon sentiment touchant la Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, ... je vous dirai ..." (Scene III). The idea is exactly the same in the opening words of the Lettre sur le Misanthrope, even though somewhat paraphrased. And here, in the Lettre sur les Observations, the first sentence repeats that of Zélinde with a fidelity which appears to be more than circumstantial: "Puisque vous souhaitez que ... je vous écrive ce que je ... pense, je vous dirai mon sentiment ..." Moreover, Robert points out that many words in the Lettre are typical of Donneau de Visé's style. For example, he often uses the word adresse in the sense of crafty conduct, as is the case here.
As for the form of the Lettre sur les Observations, it constitutes perhaps the only weakness of the document—it follows very closely the course of the libelle it seeks to refute. The same technique had been used already by Donneau de Visé in Zélinde and especially in the Défense de Sophonisbe, where he was in a situation surprisingly similar to that of this Lettre—he was defending Corneille against the attacks of the abbé d'Aubignac and he did so step by step, line by line. A close comparative study of the Défense and the Lettre gives strong indications of their common authorship. Let us mention a few examples here.

The most striking effect after only a rapid reading of the two works is the great resemblance in tone. Although the author in the Défense directs his arguments directly to the critic while the Lettre is written to a third person, the sentence structure and general tone are very similar. Both are written in a fluid, rapid, familiar style, with a preponderance of short, even choppy sentences or clauses. Exclamations and rhetorical questions are very common in both cases, adding to the feeling of immediacy, zeal, and sincerity. His sincerity is, moreover, an aspect that the author wants to stress in the two works. Toward the end of the Défense he says that he had to write it because "... je me devais rendre à la raison et à mes propres sentiments" (p. 81). In the Lettre, the author makes a similar statement (p. 432). And, he assures us, he is trying to write this defense ser-
iously and sincerely, and therefore avoids the stronger but less honest weapons of counterattacks and satire (p. 439).

There are occasions of actual repetition of words or phrases, with little change from one case to the other, for example the passage about envie\(^{26}\) which has been transferred rather directly from the Défense to the second paragraph of the Lettre:

Défense

Quoi que l'envie ait de tout temps été condamnée, je pré- tendais aujourd'hui ... qu'elle fait souvent plus de bien que de mal, et qu'elle relève le mérite de ceux qui en ont assez pour la confondre ... Il ne faut pas s'étonner si elle l'attaque encore [M. de Corneille], ce n'est que pour achever son ouvrage, que pour le rendre immortel, et que pour le placer avantageusement dans la postérité (pp. 4-6).

Lettre

Encore que l'envie soit généralement condamnée, elle ne laisse pas quelquefois de servir à ceux à qui elle s'attache le plus obstinément, puisqu'elle fait connaître leur mérite, et que c'est elle, pour ainsi dire, qui y met la dernière main. Celui de Monsieur de Molière étant depuis longtemps reconnu, elle n'épargne rien pour empêcher que l'on en perde la mémoire et pour l'élever davantage (pp. 431-32).

Further on, the author proceeds to his remarkably similar arguments. The introductory words resemble each other. In the Défense he says: "... voyons celui qui l'a fait agir et qui parle par sa bouche" (p. 6), and in the Lettre: "... voyons de quoi s'est servi l'auteur de ces observations" (p. 434). Later, in tones that are equally ironic in the two pamphlets: "Que vous êtes malheureuse, Sophonisbe, de ce que celui qui vous fait revivre sur la scène n'a pas été voir celui qui vous condamne!" (p. 8); and "A quoi songiez-vous,
Molière, quand vous fîtes dessein de jouer les tartufles?" (p. 434). --In both cases, he considers the attacker's arguments as unbased and sheer nonsense. The idea is essentially the same in both texts, although worded differently:

**Défense**

Il m'est impossible de combattre vos raisons, puis que vous n'en donnez point; tout ce que je vous puis dire là-dessus, c'est que ce que vous avez avancé n'est pas véritable. (p. 25).

**Lettre**

Molière doit toutefois se consoler, puisque l'Observateur avance des choses qu'il ne peut savoir, et qu'en péchant contre la vérité il se fait tort à lui-même et ne peut nuire à personne. (p. 436).

The same sort of resemblances, close but not exact, can be found all through the Défense and the Lettre, ending upon similar notes of confidence in the defended writers' immortal fame— in both works we find the idea that nothing, not even the most clever, unfair, and shocking adverse criticism can ever hurt the empires of Corneille or Molière, their greatness being established and widely known through innumerable successes on the stage. --These and many more parallels between the two works cannot be considered only incidental. On the contrary, it seems impossible to assume that the Défense and the Lettre sur les Observations could possibly have been written by different persons.

Having thus established the strong likelihood that Donnneau de Visé is the author of the Lettre sur les Observations, written in the beginning of his friendship with Molière, we may proceed to study the contents of the letter to try to
determine how close the cooperation between Donneau de Visé and Molière may have been. The most interesting point in the Lettre is one already touched upon: Donneau de Visé's whole argument seems founded upon the difference between faux dévots and vrais dévots and, as Robert points out, upon the fact that if Molière had not written Tartuffe, his "Festin de Pierre ne seroit pas si criminel." Molière's action in voluntarily withdrawing his play so as not to cause a quarrel which would endanger his Tartuffe proves that for him, too, Tartuffe was the essential thing. The fact that the preponderance of arguments referring to this play increases in the apostille, added to the letter immediately following the pension and nomination by the King, seems to point to an increased hope with Donneau de Visé—and Molière—that the resurrection of the banned play was imminent.

This letter contains both action and reaction, however. The entire letter no doubt pleased Louis XIV, who was still supporting his favorite and was himself at the time discontented with the power of those who had forced him to ban Tartuffe. Yet, there is one part which must have appealed particularly to the King, and probably even touched him. Donneau de Visé speaks about the praise for the King expressed in the Observations, saying that all the author succeeds in doing is actually to show how wrong the King had been in not forbidding the Festin de Pierre. Donneau de Visé's correct and ironic conclusion was that, in his letter he had to defend not
only Molière's play, but "encore le plus grand, le plus estimé et le plus religieux monarque du monde. Mais comme sa piété le justifie assez, je serois téméraire de l'entreprendre."
And he goes on to say that the King knew very well what he did in allowing Le Festin de Pierre to be played, because he did not want the tartuffes to have more authority than he in his kingdom and because he was unwilling to hurt his own glory and duty by authorizing hypocrisy. 30 A similar, although much shorter, passage was devoted to another important early protector of Molière, the Queen Mother, who, however, had abandoned him as a result of her allegiance to the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrément. 31

The strongest defense of Dom Juan itself is concerned, as could be expected, with the accusation of Molière as an atheist, centered around Dom Juan's statement that he believes only that "deux et deux sont quatre et que quatre et quatre sont huit" (act III, scene I). Donneau de Visé explains that all this proves is that Dom Juan is an atheist, a fact that had to be established to show that he had brought upon himself the punishment at the end of the play. Instead of blaming Molière for defending atheism one should admit that "ce qui fait blâmer Molière lui devroit attirer des louanges et faire remarquer son adresse et son esprit." It was a difficult task to present an atheist on the stage, making it clear what he stood for without allowing him to actually say it. Yet Molière succeeded in this, for "... par un trait de prudence admirable,
[il] a trouvé le moyen de la faire connoître pour ce qu'il est, sans le faire raisonner." For the same reason it would be impossible to execute on the stage what the Observations suggests, namely, to present somebody who would argue for religion and God. That type of procedure would give great importance to atheism and would force a discussion of the subject, containing arguments which would have been a real cause for alarm and would have been damaging to the author.

As for the "foudre en peinture" which the hostile critic had refused to accept, it is the proper punishment for a pretended crime, says the Lettre. Everything on stage is by nature "peinture" and the viewer's imagination must accept it all on an equal basis. How is it that the public cries at the death of the hero in a tragedy? That is only a death "en peinture," as little or as much real as Dom Juan's punishment.

At the end of the actual letter Donneau de Visé speaks as if about a joint but lost cause for himself and Molière, saying that the author of the Observations no doubt will win the battle and "... les tartuffes publieront ses louanges, et, le regardant comme leur vengeur, tâcheront de nous faire condamner, Molière et moi, sans nous entendre." The apostille occupies itself primarily with proving the innocence of Tartuffe, and it does so in a short but effective manner. The philosophical arguments which are of great importance in the Lettre sur l'Imposteur are not present
in the Lettre sur les Observations, but the reasoning is basically the same. Donneau de Visé explains the difference between a vrai dévot and a faux dévot, thereby proving that the author of the Observations belongs to the latter category. Molière who always used this idea wrote along the same lines in his preface to Tartuffe in 1669: "C'est aux varis dévots que je veux partout me justifier sur la conduite de ma comédie ..."35

There are many more resemblances between this Lettre on the one hand and the preface to Tartuffe, the placets and even La Critique and L'Impromptu de Versailles on the other. From La Critique we recognize in the Lettre the idea that obscenity is in the eye of the beholder and that one must have a corrupt mind to read corruption into innocently meant and expressed scenes. The dédicace of La Critique to the Queen Mother is reflected in the mention of her devout character. From the Impromptu we recognize the technique in dealing with Boursault: it is better not to do him the honor of refuting his attacks. Here, in the Lettre, the question of atheism is treated in the same manner. In the placets as well as in the preface to Tartuffe we find again many of the ideas expressed in the Lettre, in particular the fact that comedy has a moral purpose, a task of teaching virtue and condemning vice through the procedure of punishing or ridiculing on the stage what is morally bad; the fact that Molière's comedy is marked by honesty and a wish to do what is right, which in itself in-
volves a conscientious attempt to avoid double meaning and a wish to explain instead all characters and situations; the fact that the tartuffes, with their false gestures, words and sentiments, which bring them power and consideration, should be reduced to what they really are and made to lose the terrible power they have procured themselves—a power often greater than that of the King himself; the fact that the King was quite benevolent in regard to Molière's latest comedies, in particular Tartuffe, which had also been very well received at private readings in circles of great distinction and exquisite taste.

As this enumeration clearly shows, and a line by line comparison would establish beyond any doubt, the Lettre sur les Observations was written in full understanding of Molière's work, his ideas and his thoughts—that is, in close contact with the master himself. Yet, from its evident relationship to other works by Donneau de Visé we feel that the pen was his. This earliest work by the author in defense of Molière may be considered an independent work in itself, but written in an atmosphere saturated with Molière's genius.

2. Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur

Throughout this period Molière's mind did not let any of his many interests and creations take over; it was mainly focused on one point: Tartuffe. This was evident in his readiness to read this play in private circles whenever asked to do so. He also continuously worked on Tartuffe, changing
and perfecting it, and his troupe presumably rehearsed the play often enough to be able to present it with a few hours' notice. He wrote the two first placets where he pleaded his cause so skillfully and yet to no avail. The above discussion of the Lettre sur les Observations shows that his friends were almost as concerned as he was himself and did not hesitate to say so.

The battle for Tartuffe developed in waves, with moments of great concern and activity. One of these peak situations came in 1667 when Molière was permitted to play his toned down Imposteur for one single night, on August 5. We have already discussed the subsequent ban of the play by the first president Lamoignon and the rapid trip by La Grange and La Thorilllière to the King with the second placet. A few days later, according to Brosette, Molière with his friend Boileau visited Lamoignon in order to try to obtain a reversal of the ban. Molière explained the reason for his visit. He expected to hear the usual excuses for the interdiction and was ready to explain again the difference between a faux and a vrai dévot. But he was extremely surprised and confused when he heard instead M. de Lamoignon express his opinion:

... Je suis persuadé qu'elle [la comédie de Tartuffe] est fort belle et fort instructive; mais il ne convient pas à des comédiens d'instruire les hommes sur les matières de la morale et de la religion; ce n'est pas au théâtre à se mêler de prêcher l'Evangile....

At the moment, Brosette says, Molière was at a loss for words.
However, he did not blame M. de Lamoignon but instead the archbishop who on August 11 had placed a penalty of excommunication on any active interest whatsoever in Tartuffe.

The silence from Molière's camp did not last long, however. About a week later there appeared a long work bearing the date August 20, 1667: Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur,\(^{38}\) printed without name of author or publisher. Given the circumstances, we are not surprised to find that a major part of this Lettre was devoted to explaining why the theater not only had the right to present arguments about religion, but actually also was the most perfect place available for this instruction.

The first part of the Lettre is a detailed and precise account of the performance of August 5, and thereby an excellent--and the only known--source of information regarding the version of the Imposteur presented. But perhaps more important to us in this context is the fact that because of the very minuteness of the study of the text and the description of the acting we must conclude that the author must have had the opportunity to see the play during rehearsal. One single performance simply could not provide anybody with so much point by point information. To whom would Molière lend his script? In those days the text of an unpublished play was extremely valuable to the troupe and was jealously guarded. We can be certain that Tartuffe in its different versions was the subject of even more care than usual because of its controver-
sial character.

Thus, only a trusted member of Molière's entourage would be allowed to lay hands upon this valuable document. Who could this be? Considering the attribution of the Lettre sur les Observations to Donneau de Visé and the recognized fact that he was the author also of the Lettre sur le Misanthrope of 1666, his name naturally comes to one's mind. We also know that he was almost a "permanent resident" of the Palais Royal during the year 1667, since three of his plays were presented then by Molière's troupe; La Veuve à la mode (May), Délie (October), and L'Embarras de Godard (November). The strongest argument for the hypothesis, however, is one presented by Robert, namely that the form of the Lettre sur l'Imposteur is the same as the one first used by Donneau de Visé in his Lettre sur le Misanthrope: a scene by scene, sometimes verse by verse, review of the play. This was not the normal procedure in literary criticism of that period. As a matter of fact, I have been unable to find a third example of this technique. Instead, most critics studied broader aspects of a literary work, and always with a laudatory or critical intention, never explanatory.

As for the small mistakes in detail here and there, they must be accounted for in the same way as the spelling of Tartuffe in Lettre sur les Observations--it was presumably necessary to try to confuse the reader as to the identity of the author, so that a suspicion of cooperation between him and
Molière could not arise.

Although the attribution of the Lettre sur l'Imposteur to Donneau de Visé would by now seem established, there remains one detail to be discussed—the famous "C" found at the end of one copy of the Lettre and which at once caused scholars to submit that the author was Chapelle or Chapelain. However, this single appearance of a C does not weigh heavily enough to contradict the theory of Robert, especially since those who have had the opportunity to study the copy in question do not agree on the nature of the C—some say it is printed, others that it has been added by hand. Moreover, on the same copy somebody who presumably disagreed with the C wrote under it "Molière."39

The first part of the Lettre sur l'Imposteur is valued by today's moliéristes mainly as a historical document. This was naturally not true at the time. What was, in fact, the purpose of this point by point study, and how might the public have reacted to it? The important purpose was, of course, to prove beyond doubt that both the text and the acting, taken separately or as one unit, very carefully and unequivocally distinguish vraie from fausse dévotion. Moreover, it assured a continued public interest in the play which many had not yet seen at the time. By describing the play and paraphrasing it in prose as it did, the Lettre simultaneously gave a favorable impression and kept public curiosity high. The final sentence of the first part sums up in an excellent manner the basic pur-
pose of the author:

Conclusion, à ce que disent ceux que les bigots font passer pour athées, digne d'un ouvrage si saint, qui n'étant qu'une instruction très chrétiennne de la véritable dévotion, ne devait pas finir autrement que par l'exemple le plus parfait qu'on ait peut-être jamais proposé, de la plus sublime de toutes les vertus évangéliques, qui est le pardon des ennemis.40

Orgon and Mme Pernelle did not at first want to forgive the impostor. Thus they did not act as truly religious persons. The vrai dévot, Cléante, forgave the enemy of the family, the faux dévot—a true lesson in religious virtue, according to the Lettre.

If the first part bears witness to an excellent understanding of Molière's intentions and thought and a surprisingly fine appreciation of theatrical matters,41 the second part in its profound reasoning gives the impression of a closer tie with Molière himself. Just how deep this cooperation went seems difficult to estimate. Scholars have on the basis of comparisons of style arrived at many different conclusions, often diametrically opposed. Since that kind of study is quite subjective and often can be used to prove one's own point, we will not even attempt it here. However, the concise and clear presentation of Molière's deepest thoughts and ideas strongly suggest that the poet supervised Donneau de Visé's work on this second part very attentively, sometimes perhaps even dictating or explaining his own ideas. Some of this strangely molièresque atmosphere of the passage may very well
have come about through intensive listening and a profound temporary influence on Donneau de Visé's expressions and phraseology, a phenomenon which should not surprise when it is a question of a very flexible, productive author who is also a budding journalist. As a matter of fact, a similar influence of ambiance from Molière can be found in several of Donneau de Visé's plays, especially his comédies de moeurs.

This second part goes on to a rather different subject. It is a systematic rebuttal of the argument given by M. de Lamoignon at the time of Molière's and Boileau's visit eight or nine days earlier. The discussion starts out with a rather precise report of the explanation the first president gave Molière for his interdiction: "à cause seulement qu'il a est parlé de la religion, et que le théâtre ... n'est pas un lieu où il la faille enseigner." This, says the author of the Lettre, is outrageous, for "il n'est point de si chétif lieu commun où l'ardeur de critiquer et de mordre ne se puisse retrancher, après avoir osé faire son fort d'une si miserable et si ridicule défense." And he goes on to claim that religion being, in a moral sense, the perfection of reason, it can be taught "de tous temps et de tous lieux." Antiquity in its wisdom knew this and therefore the theaters in those days often presented religion on stage. As a matter of fact, he says, our own forefathers knew the advantage of this procedure.

This reasoning gives, at the same time as the defense
of Molière, an interesting insight into the dramatist's religious ideas. If we believe the Lettre, and everything seems to indicate that we should, Molière had a purely humanistic concept of religion which points directly toward the deism of the eighteenth century. Molière, however, living in the seventeenth century, probably thought the Christian religion could be combined with this morality based on reason.

The author then continues with his second reflection, concerning the strength and efficacy of the comic—le ridicule—as a pedagogical device available to comedies but not to serious presentations of morals, or to religion. In order to explain this point better, the author makes a lengthy but extremely clear and penetrating analysis of le ridicule which in itself is an important part of what must be considered Molière's theory of the comic, although Donneau de Visé most probably shared his views. W. G. Moore has made a study of this theory, basing his arguments on Robert's demonstration concerning the authorship as well as the importance of the three letters. Agreeing fully with Moore's article, we have used some of his ideas as a point of departure for the following brief discussion of Molière's ridicule.

According to Molière's theory the ridicule is whatever is visually or audibly unreasonable: "Le ridicule est la forme extérieure et sensible que la providence de la nature a attachée à tout ce qui est déraisonnable." However, one cannot just passively receive this impression—to recognize it "il
faut connaître la raison dont il signifie le défaut et voir en quoi elle consiste." This means that what is comic is openly and markedly contradictory to both bienséance and convenance, for "la bienséance est la raison apparente" and "la convenance est la raison essentielle" of a theatrical work. And the Lettre sums it all up in two concise phrases: "... la disconvenance est l'essence du ridicule" and "... nous estimons ridicule ce qui manque extrêmement de raison." This reasoning helps us draw several conclusions. First of all, Panulphe (or Tartuffe) is comic, because he breaks both rules. His galanterie offends against convenance, and his hypocrisy, his pretended piety which is entirely directed to his own profit, offends against bienséance. Secondly—and this goes against most Molière criticism up to date—for Molière, the comic is not always the opposite of serious. On the contrary, one situation, action, or person can be both serious and comic at the same time. Thirdly, the widely accepted assumption that everything that does not make one laugh is not comical is, when applied to Molière, in gross contradiction to the text of the Lettre and must therefore be considered as a serious misunderstanding of his intentions. For Molière, the comic goes deeper than superficial laughter:

Si le ridicule consiste dans quelque disconvenance, il s'ensuit que tout mensonge, déguisement, fourberie, dissimulation, toute apparence différente du fond, enfin toute contrariété entre actions qui procèdent d'un même principe, est essentiellement ridicule. (p. 222).
With this theory applied to them, Molière's comedies receive new light. Tartuffe himself, for example, is always comic although we would hardly call him amusing. At the same time, the character of Harpagon receives more depth than many critics have admitted him to have—he is amusing at times, but we must also admit that he is pathetic, since this is in no way contradictory to being comic.

In order to convey a pathetic scene in a manner which does not provoke laughter but a deeper sense of the comic, the actor controls the effect in an intellectual manner so as to achieve the effect of absurdity. However, Molière's comedy is not therefore to be considered exclusively an intellectual type of theater—the Lettre insists on imagination as the means of achieving the right comic effect, an esthetic approach marked by full artistic creation. This is why, of course, Molière's comedies build to such an extent on the combination of words, gestures, mimicry and pauses.

The Lettre sur l'Imposteur, through its profound understanding of Molière's thoughts and its remarkable clearness in conveying them, shows a great kinship with the poet himself. Several of the ideas expressed in this Lettre have been presented earlier, as we have seen, especially in the Lettre sur les Observations and Molière's two early placets. Many are completely new, especially those in the second part. The most important of these ideas, however, will be found again in the preface to Tartuffe of 1669, often expressed in almost the
same manner. This preface, like the letter, was written after the visit to Lamoignon which had inspired the arguments. In Molière's preface, the rebuttal of the president's objections forms the fourth and fifth paragraphs which in a very concise manner repeat what was said in the Lettre on the subject. 43 As a matter of fact, the ideas are so condensed in the preface, that the corresponding text in the Lettre helps in deciphering them. The striking resemblances between the two passages prove very strongly and convincingly that the close source for the ideas of the Lettre sur l'Imposteur must have been Molière himself. This fact then also explains why that same letter is the best and the only believable explanation we have of Tartuffe.

3. Lettre sur la comédie du Misanthrope

The third Lettre to be considered in this study, the Lettre sur la comédie du Misanthrope, 44 would be expected to raise fewer questions than the other two. At least, the identity of the author is established in this case--we know it is Donneau de Visé. However, another important point of dissent is to be clarified here: Did Donneau de Visé or did he not have this Lettre published with the play against the wish and without the knowledge of Molière? The two major known facts are seemingly contradictory. The Lettre, written several months earlier, was published, without name of author, with the Misanthrope in its first edition from Ribou authorized by
Molière and with an achevé d'imprimer of December 24, 1666. On the other side there is a strong and rather convincing testimony by Grimarest saying that the Lettre had been included without Molière's knowledge. Many scholars have accepted this as the whole truth and have reproduced Grimarest's long anecdote about how furious Molière became when he found out what had happened, how he went to Ribou and ordered the entire edition burned, and how Donneau de Visé got himself invited to dinner at Molière's house in order to beg for forgiveness. 45 Michaut goes in the opposite direction, rejecting this whole idea as improbable and concluding that Molière and Donneau de Visé doubtlessly had agreed upon the arrangement. 46

Should we, however, lightly dismiss all weight and importance of the opinion of a contemporary? It appears that through a careful consideration of the surrounding facts, most of which have been presented by Robert, we can arrive at a better explanation which shows both sides as being essentially correct.

The Misanthrope, although not at all a failure, did certainly not achieve the success Molière had hoped for. He had spent a couple of years writing this play and must have had high hopes for it. It has already been said that the evident lack of interest in the play must have been caused simply by a lack of understanding on the part of the higher social classes and a subject matter and approach which could not possibly be appreciated by Molière's perhaps strongest fol-
lowers in other cases, the **parterre**. Its taste, as we know, leaned more toward the farcical or obviously amusing than toward fine **satires de moeurs**.

It was certainly because of this **demi-échec** of *Le Misanthrope* that the **Lettre** was written, with the evident aim to enlighten the public by explaining the play. Such a procedure seems quite appropriate and it would be in keeping with Molière's role of author as well as theater director to try to gain his public's interest through a discreet lesson. The **Lettre** was written the day after the première of June 4, 1666 and was addressed particularly to the court, then at Fontainebleau. The "*Le libraire au lecteur*" admits freely that the court was the primary target, while the **Lettre** indicates it in a more subtle way while also flattering the judgment of the aristocracy: "... on ne peut ne la [la comédie] pas trouver bonne, sans faire voir que l'on n'est pas de ce monde, et que l'on ignore la manière de vivre de la cour et celle des plus illustres personnes de la ville." (p. 517).

It was a very clever step to try to blame indirectly the lukewarm reception of the play entirely on the **parterre**—this could keep that reaction from spreading to the court circles which had not yet seen the play. The mourning period imposed at the death of the Queen Mother was still not completed—Robinet announces its end on October 31. When the **Lettre** was written, on June 5, the author certainly had in mind the return of the court to Paris and the resumption of
normal pleasures, including the theater. The Lettre had been circulated in manuscript form after its completion and, according to Ribou, it had won strong approval from the "meilleure partie de la cour" who had seen it. How good a result was achieved by the Lettre, however, is difficult to say. The Registre de La Grange does not show any evidence of a sudden, or even slow, increase in interest in the play. Nor is there any mention of any performance of Le Misanthrope at the court in Molière's lifetime. Although of lesser importance to the present study, this puzzling fact is interesting—and presumably impossible to explain at our distance in time.

When the Lettre and Le Misanthrope appeared, Molière had been with his troupe at Saint-Germain playing for the court since December 1. As we know, Ribou assumed full responsibility for including the Lettre in the publication. To say that he did so against Molière's wish and in a private understanding with Donneau de Visé is to go too far. Molière's presumed anger and irritation may very well have been true, however, although the reason for his reaction was perhaps different from that held out in anecdotes. First of all, one must reject any possibility of conscious trickery on the part of Donneau de Visé—he had just begun to feel the glow of relative success at Molière's theater, and with the knowledge we have of his character it seems safe to assume that his own glory was more important to him than having his little Lettre printed with Molière's play. He would certainly not have en-
dangered his position with the poet. As for Molière, he could not have disapproved of the contents of the Lettre which is well written and clearly presented, and gives an excellent explanation of the play, describing it as the fine satire de moeurs it is.

The apparent reason for Molière's anger is very much simpler and nearer at hand. In the Lettre sur les Observations Donneau de Visé had inserted small mistakes so as to dispel any thoughts of collusion between himself and Molière. This was to be done with even more care in the Lettre sur l'Imposteur in August, 1667. The concern was perhaps even greater then because of the blunder with Le Misanthrope: in adding the Lettre to the edition, Donneau de Visé made it apparent that its author (anonymous in the first edition) was actually a close friend to the Palais Royal, and thus the Lettre became a piece of publicity from the theater for its unsuccessful play. We can see why Molière would not like the situation and rightfully got angry, although he certainly could have no doubts that Donneau de Visé had acted with good intentions during his own prolonged absence. The most important thing in this connection, however, is to establish that Molière knew about the Lettre and approved its publication, or Donneau de Visé would never have dared to submit it to Ribou.

The contents of the Lettre sur le Misanthrope are too well known and too uncomplicated to require a close study here. May we only point out again the unusual form, which was to be
used in the Lettre sur l'Imposteur, and the simple, clear language, so appropriate in a study of Molière's work. There is an apparent difference in tone here, however, from the other two letters: one can feel that it is not a question of defending but rather of calmly and slowly explaining. The result is a happy one—a relaxed Lettre full of well formed phrases that again bear witness to Molière's influence. We must in all fairness give Donneau de Visé part of the credit for the Lettre, however, and not the least for the famous expression "rire dans l'âme" which he uses also in his play La Veuve à la mode (scene XIV).

During the study of the three Lettres, we have repeatedly expressed the opinion that Molière during their composition was in contact with his defender, perhaps even using him solely as an interpreter. This assumption seems to be supported by the fact that a similar relationship appears to have existed in earlier years between Pierre Corneille and Donneau de Visé. During their cooperation, Donneau de Visé wrote his Défense de Sophonisbe which repeats step by step the ideas expressed in Corneille's Avis au lecteur. It is to be remarked, however, that the Défense was written before the appearance of the first edition of the play, and thus is probably of an earlier date than the preface. This parallel to the case of the Lettres for Molière cannot be dismissed as a mere coincidence; there is too much resemblance in Donneau de Visé's relationship to the two authors. It seems safe to submit
that Donneau de Visé had early formed a method of work which consisted in collecting precise information from the best source—the author—and then working it into a Défense or a Lettre. This conclusion, it is true, may reduce our consideration for Donneau de Visé's own literary creativity, but it certainly does not diminish the value of the three excellent Lettres he wrote for Molière's greatest masterpieces.

4. Notice sur Les Femmes savantes

The great closeness of the friendship between Molière and Donneau de Visé seems to have diminished somewhat toward the end of the decade. Molière's major struggles were over, his plays were successful—he did not need a defender. Donneau de Visé's four comedies were still played from time to time by the Palais Royal, however, and the young author's esteem for Molière seems unchanged even though he later had five subsequent plays presented at the Marais. In 1672, shortly before he returned to the Palais Royal with a comedy, Donneau de Visé started his new venture—Le Mercure Galant. In the first issue he took the opportunity of speaking about his good friend and benefactor in a notice dated March 12 and concerning Molière's newest play, Les Femmes savantes, which had had its first performance the night before. 48

The passage is an appreciative compte rendu of Molière's play, written in a fluent and clear journalistic style and in a form surprisingly similar to that of modern theatrical criti-
cism. Donneau de Visé's admiration for Molière is felt from the beginning to the end, but is toned down in a manner which avoids exaggerations and increases the feeling of sincerity and objectivity.

Donneau de Visé starts his article with a reference to the completed and final Tartuffe and the promise of greatness it showed, a greatness which is repeated again in Les Femmes savantes. Then, in a few short phrases, Donneau de Visé describes the different major characters of the play. He says, for example:

On y est bien diverti, tantôt par les précieuses ou femmes savantes, tantôt par les agréables railleries d'une certaine Henriette, et puis par ... un père qui veut faire croire qu'il est le maître dans sa maison, qui se fait fort de tout quand il est seul, et qui cède tout dès que sa femme paroit.

He then goes on to speak about the relationship between the mother and Monsieur Trissotin, comparing it to that of Orgon and Tartuffe in which the same stubbornness was present. Another point of comparison in the two plays is, according to Donneau de Visé, the "artifice ingénieux" of the denouement: the false news about a lost case and the resulting bankruptcy is as ingenious as the invention of the exempt in l'Imposteur [sic].

Trissotin, says Donneau de Visé, is rendered as a man who is "... tout rempli de son savoir et tout gonflé de la gloire qu'il croit avoir mérité" and who "paroit si plein de confiance de lui-même qu'il voit tout le genre humain fort
audessous de lui." This description of Trissotin was, of course, how everybody saw him and how Molière wanted him to be seen. This pedant was easily recognizable to the Parisian public. It at once saw in him the abbé Cotin who considered himself "le père de l'énigme française" and whose conceited pride was well known at the time. The story of the quarrel between Cotin and Molière has been discussed often enough. Let us only comment that Cotin's attack on Molière was sufficiently strong to deserve the punishment Molière gave him in Les Femmes savantes. Cotin's reputation was forever destroyed through this play—the ridiculous image was to remain with him to his death in 1681, and his only oraison funèbre was made up of a quatrain:

Savez-vous en quoi Cotin
Diffère de Trissotin?
Cotin a fini ses jours,
Trissotin vivra toujours. 49

These events, as well as the last line of the quatrain, show the great power and influence of a fine popular comedy such as Molière's, and at the same time bears witness to the contemporary conviction of the immortality of Molière's work.

With the serious effects of Molière's satire as a background, Donneau de Visé's comments on l'abbé Cotin in the article must be either outright stupid or simply ironic. Malassis chooses the first alternative, 50 I prefer the latter, in view of Donneau de Visé's previous works as well as his known journalistic skill. He wrote:
Ce prétendu original de cette agréable comédie ne doit pas s'en mettre en peine, s'il est aussi sage et aussi habile homme que l'on dit; et cela ne servira qu'à faire éclater davantage son mérite, en faisant naître l'envie de la connoître, de lire ses écrits, et d'aller à ses sermons. Aristophane ne détruisit point la réputation de Socrate, en le jouant dans une de ses farces. 51

This article as a whole shows a remarkable appreciation of the humor of Les Femmes savantes, the fine character study and the excellent style. It ends on a tone of rebuttal toward critics, perhaps a remaining effect of the days of the Lettres. Donneau de Visé advises everybody to go and see the play and enjoy themselves, without listening to or searching for details to be criticized just out of habit or a wish to be considered a "bel esprit." Aside from the very beginning and this last point, however, this article is an interesting contrast to the Lettres. There Donneau de Visé was a participant and this fact can be felt in the tone of involvement in those works. Here, on the contrary, the author is part of the public—he sees the play from the other side of the stage, still trying, it is true, to convince the public to go to the theater.

5. Conversation dans une ruelle de Paris sur Molière défunt

Donneau de Visé published one more complete article about Molière and his work— the Conversation sur Molière défunt, 52 included in the fourth volume of the Mercure Galant, distributed in June, 1673. Again, Donneau de Visé had the opportunity of showing his literary judgment. The beginning
of the conversation is marked by dignity and grandiloquence, as the subject matter required. Donneau de Visé points to the King's regret at the death of Molière as one proof of the author's indisputable greatness. Then he writes about Molière's skill as a painter of characters and his general importance for comedy saying that

... il a trouvé l'art de faire voir les défauts de tout le monde, sans qu'on s'en pût offenser, et les peignoit au naturel dans les comédies... C'est lui qui a remis le comique dans son premier éclat; et depuis Térence personne n'avait pu légitimement prétendre à cet avantage.

Donneau de Visé's admission of and insight into Molière's inventive and creative importance goes even further: "il a le premier inventé la manière de mêler des scènes de musique et des ballets dans les comédies, et il avoit trouvé par la un nouveau secret à plaire." Through this invention by Molière, says Donneau de Visé, operas became known and liked in France.

This precise and well weighed éloge of Molière is interrupted by some "pièces en vers" which the author presents as works by friends and admirers of Molière—the poet's death had caused a great flurry of eulogies and laudatory poems. The less said about the poems in the article the better. The conversation then continues again, turning around the subject of medicine: Molière's supposed aversion to doctors, his satires on the medical profession, and the medical treatments he had received himself. In itself this forms an interesting passage, providing information about medical procedures at
the time, but it is rather much beside the point. As the conversation goes on, however, the subject comes closer to Molière again; this time it is a question of his style and his excellent character paintings, and the manner in which he had turned small situations into great and important works:

une cabane bien touchée est quelquefois plus estimée de la main d’un habile homme, qu’un palais de marbre de celle d’un ignorant; et le portrait d’un roi qui n’est recommandable que par le nom de la personne qu’il représente, est moins admiré que celui d’un paysan, lorsqu’il n’y manque rien de tout ce qui le peut faire regarder comme un bel ouvrage.

There may possibly be in this comment an underlying comparison, to Molière’s advantage, of comedy and tragedy: cabane and palais de marbre, farmer and king.

The article then goes on to the Oraison funèbre, denounced by many critics for its lack of taste. A modern reader certainly feels almost embarrassed because of some aspects of this rather grotesque speech. The contemporaries do not seem to have considered it strange or lacking in taste, however. Their sense of bienséance was not offended. The explanation is simple: Donneau de Visé had made a pastiche of the oraisons funèbres of the time, exaggerating their weakest points. The passage is far from having the quality of the preceding conversation and shows few signs of the reasonable, skilled literary critic of Les Femmes savantes. Because of this contradiction I am tempted to believe with Pierre Mélèse that Donneau de Visé through this procedure tried to comply with the part of his public which had to pretend to ignore the
death of an actor who had been excommunicated by the church. The bouffonnerie would then so to say hide the praise. At first glance, this may seem like a very farfetched explanation, but it may be quite close to the truth. It is an established fact that Donneau de Visé tried to please a large public in the Mercure and at the same time not offend anybody. In order to do so, he must often have been obliged to act against his own wish and his own sense of literary procedure.

Whatever the reason for its form, the Oraison funèbre contains a few valuable pieces of Molière criticism. It is divided into four parts: the beauty of Molière's works, their moral effect, his excellence as an actor, and also as a director. Molière is presented as a painter, a philosopher, a defender of virtue, a satirist, and, most important for criticism, an actor:

il était tout comédien, depuis les pieds jusqu'à la tête, il sembloit qu'il eût plusieurs voix; tout parlait en lui, et d'un pas, d'un sourire, d'un clin d'œil et d'un remuement de tête, il faisoit concevoir plus de chose que le plus grand parleur ne l'auroit pu dire en une heure...

--This passage has become very famous, since it so well describes the greatness of Molière's acting ability. If only Donneau de Visé had given us the rest of the Oraison funèbre in a similar tone and quality!

The Mercure, in subsequent years, published reviews of the performances of plays by Molière. These articles, however, never mentioned Molière personally, and they treated his plays
in a rather routine manner. The task of the journal became that of informing its readers about what was going on in Paris, while not trying to impose new ideas or to teach appreciation of literature. The years of close cooperation between Molière and Donneau de Visé, however, were of great importance for both authors. For Donneau de Visé, still a rather young man at the time of Molière's death, his friendship with the great poet was a most rewarding experience.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

7. At this time of extreme difficulties Molière also had the bitter experience of Racine's treachery with his Alexandre, played for the first time at the Palais Royal on December 4, 1665. On December 18, 1665, says La Grange, "la troupe fut surprise que la même pièce d'Alexandre fut jouée sur le Théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne." (p. 81).
8. René Jaskinski in his *Molière et le Misanthrope* (Paris, 1951) dates the completion of the first act of the *Misanthrope* in 1664 and suggests that perhaps the second act was also under preparation then (pp. 36 and 47).
9. The success was by no means comparable to that of *Dom Juan* which in its ten first performances provided an average of 1624 livres while *le Misanthrope* in its ten first nights reached an average of 844 livres, or about half as much. There is no doubt, as we will see, that Molière would have preferred or expected the case to be the opposite.
15. This is unfortunately not the case, with the exception of Despois and Mesnard who in volumes IV and V of the edition Grands Ecrivains de la France include the three letters in their entirety; and in the Moland edition the entire letters are found in volumes VI and VII.

16. René Robert, op. cit., had expressed this idea in 1956, but without visible reaction on the part of Molière criticism.


19. Ibid., VI, pp. 431-47.

20. registre de La Grange, p. 78.


22. This journal was continued until the princess' tragic death in 1670, when the title was changed, first to A l'Ombre de Madame, then A Monsieur, and finally A LL. AA. RR. Monsieur et Madame (to December 1674).

23. On September 13, 1665, Robinet attacked Molière once more by comparing him unfavorably with the actor Beauchâtel who had just died. That was, however, Robinet's last outburst against Molière. Most probably he felt the danger of angering Madame who was also Molière's protectrice.


26. René Robert points out this striking similarity, p. 26, n. 1, comparing the two phrases.


28. Donneau de Visé everywhere writes Tartuffe, but that was, like many other "faked" mistakes, an attempt to make the reader think the author of the Lettre was independent and not allied with Molière.

29. Oeuvres, VI, p. 434.

30. Ibid.

Donneau de Visé was himself a dramatic author and apparently had an instinctive understanding of the theatrical medium, its expressions and possibilities, which had probably been further trained through frequent visits to the theaters of Paris from his early youth. His talent later on got its most rewarding opportunity in his theatrical cooperation with Thomas Corneille, in which the latter usually wrote the dialog for their plot while Donneau de Visé worked out special effects and great spectacles.


René Robert has compared these two texts in an excellent manner (pp. 31-32).


Registre de La Grange, pp. 87-88.


Quoted by OEuvres, XI, p. 364.

Malassis, op. cit., p. xi.


53 Mélèse, op. cit., p. 114.
CHAPTER V

THE FRIEND AND RIVAL OF MOLIERE: DONNEAU DE VISE'S
THEATRICAL PRODUCTION 1665-1673

Donneau de Visé was an author of very diverse interests, a "Jack of all trades" of literature. He won his greatest fame as a journalist and founder of the Mercure Galant. But his main interest was undoubtedly the theater. He started his literary career with theatrical criticism and this subject was to be one of the major interests of the Mercure. His last work of importance was the obituary notice concerning his friend, Thomas Corneille, whose whole theatrical career he reviewed in the article of January, 1710. Part of his early theatrical criticism was in the form of plays. Once he had renounced taking part in the battle against Molière and joined forces with the great poet he seems to have gained confidence in his own theatrical talent, which, presumably encouraged by Molière, grew in importance as well as quality. His early successes at the Palais Royal launched him on the way to a productivity in the field of theater which was to last through a major portion of his life--thirty-three years to be exact.

However, two periods can be clearly distinguished in Donneau de Visé's career as a dramatist. His very first real
play was staged at the Palais Royal as was half of all his theatrical production during his friendship with Molière, until the death of the great poet in 1673. These plays by Donneau de Visé were written by him alone but had often, as could be expected, a certain influence or at least flavor of Molière. The second part of his career as a dramatist, although it still at times may have reminiscences of Molière, is marked by his new close friendship and cooperation with Thomas Corneille, starting with Cérès in 1675, Donneau de Visé's first play after Molière's death. These works, many of which were very successful and perhaps as a whole better than the early ones, are of little special interest to this study. The twelve plays¹ by Donneau de Visé written between 1665 and 1673, however, are important in that they are theatrical products created during a close author-friend and author-director relationship with Molière. Three of these plays have been republished in modern editions. Since most of the plays are extremely rare, existing only in the original seventeenth century editions, and since no studies of the plays are available except for Lancaster's very insufficient synopses, it has seemed desirable to give some attention here also to the major lines of the plots.

1. **La Mère coquette**

    Donneau de Visé had his real debut as a playwright at the Palais Royal on Friday, October 23, 1665, with a comedy in
three acts and in verse, named *La Mère coquette ou les Amants brouillés*. It was that night, as in many subsequent performances, played together with Molière's *Amour médecin*. The event was, however, not an entirely peaceful and everyday one. On the contrary, the Parisian theater public had for some time been occupied with a rather heated quarrel between Donneau de Visé and the Palais Royal on the one side and Philippe Quinault and l'Hôtel de Bourgogne on the other. The reason was that two plays with the same title were announced simultaneously at the two theaters. It was evident that in the case of either play there must be a question of plagiarism, but which one? It is true that Donneau de Visé, twenty-seven years old at the time, had made himself well known while attacking Molière, but Quinault, although just a few years older, had already had some great successes with tragedies he had written and performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. They were both authors considered capable of writing the original play and each accused the other of plagiarism. Where was the truth, and how had it happened?

It is very difficult to know exactly the background to the dispute, as the only source recounting the events is Donneau de Visé's preface to his play, which was published in 1666. In it the author claims the entire honor of inventing the subject. Quinault had been present when Donneau de Visé had read parts of his play "chez une personne de qualité!" Quinault had himself admitted this, and many "personnes de naissance et digne de foi" could bear witness to the fact that
Donneau de Visé had written about this subject long before Quinault. These persons had even brought the dispute to the King who, although occupied with war problems, was quite disturbed. Quinault had then felt that an answer was needed and justified himself by saying that he had found the subject in a Spanish work. Donneau de Visé replies to this that in the Spanish play it is a question of an aunt who is the rival of her niece, a situation which is less original and comic than the one he was the first to use: a mother who wants to win her daughter's admirer for herself. Donneau de Visé does not deny the possibility that Quinault may have found the inspiration for some of the other details in the same work as he, but he reserves for himself the idea of transforming the pair aunt-niece into mother-daughter--that could not be found anywhere but in his Mère coquette: "... pour ce qui regarde le caractère de la Mère coquette, je crois en être le seul inventeur, et que rien n'a pu lui en fournir l'idée que les vers que je lui ai dis sur ce sujet." And he ends on a triumphant note concerning the success of his play which came about without his creating a cabale to help, "ainsi que font quelques auteurs." The last point was probably meant for Quinault, but it also reflects a serious consideration with Donneau de Visé who repeatedly during his life spoke up against the relatively common usage of creating an impression of success by inviting great numbers of friends and sympathizers to the early performances.
The explanation given by Donneau de Visé in the preface is quite plausible. The knowledge of Quinault's earlier demonstrated lack of conscience concerning plagiarism stands against him. The final confirmation seems established by Robinet—a friend of both authors—who had this to say about the quarrel on October 11:

La guerre est entre deux auteurs,
Et n'allez pas dire, lecteurs,
Que ce n'est qu'une bagatelle;
Non, non, certe, l'affaire est telle
Que je vous jure qu'en ce jour
Elle va partager la cour.

Having thus established the extent and seriousness of the situation, Robinet proceeds to introduce the authors:

Quinault, si fameux au théâtre,
Où le beau sexe l'idolâtre,
Est l'un de ces deux mécontents;
L'autre est un auteur de vingt ans,
Mais qui, nonobstant son jeune âge,
Nous a fait voir maint bel ouvrage ...

Although he evidently attempts to be objective, Robinet has already made up his mind as to who was the victim of plagiarism. Considering his usual caution in expressing definite views, the following passage must be considered the last word in the debate of originality and plagiarism:

Or ce dernier clairement montre
Qu'il n'a point tort en ce rencontre,
Que c'est à lui qu'on a volé
Le sujet dont il est parlé,
Et que plusieurs gens d'importance
Ont vu la pièce en sa naissance,
Longtemps avant que l'autre eut fait
Quoique ce fut sur ce sujet.
Sans que l'un ni l'autre je loue,
Attendons, lecteur, qu'on les joue
Et, pour lors enfin nous verrons
Qui le plus des deux nous louerons.
Je ne dis donc rien davantage,
Si ce n'est que de cet ouvrage
On ne verra l'original
Que dedans le Palais Royal. 4

Quinault's *Mère coquette* was in all probability performed on October 16, one week before Donneau de Visé's play. 5 The two comedies were quite successful, especially in the beginning—the quarrel had given them the best kind of advertising. And Robinet, who reviewed both of them the day after the *première* at the Palais Royal, testifies to the interest of the public. The plots being quite similar, the *gazetier* distinguishes the major difference between them: the point of emphasis. At the Palais Royal, he says, "... le caractère principal/ est d'une mère très coquette," while at the Hôtel de Bourgogne "c'est un marquis à gaie trogne/ qui fait plus de bruit et de jeu." 6 From the viewpoint of quality there was also a difference. Quinault's five-act comedy was and is still considered a better play, even if it may be a bit exaggerated to conclude like the Parfait brothers that Quinault's play "est d'un maître" while Donneau de Visé's "est d'un écolier." 7

The two *Mères coquettes* held the bill for several weeks; Donneau de Visé's consisting of only three acts, was always combined with another short play. The interest slowly tapered off and the two theaters prepared for new works. Robinet, on November 29, gives us the end of the story: two *Alexandres* are going to follow in the steps of the two *Mères coquettes*. L'Hôtel de Bourgogne dropped its comedy first, but
the Mère at the Palais Royal,

. . . . . . fière davantage,
Malgré l'Alexandre le Grand,
Conserve encore très bien son rang
Et plus que jamais est suivie.8

That same day was, as a matter of fact, the last performance of Donneau de Visé's Mère coquette. On the following Friday, December 4, the theater presented Racine's new play, which got a splendid reception. The unfortunate trickery on the part of Racine, however, and the resulting suppression of his play at the Palais Royal caused a void filled by several plays from the repertory, among them La Mère coquette.9

What was it like, this little three-act comedy, which Molière considered good enough to be worth a small quarrel and with which he began his long theatrical association with the young author?

Lucinde is the widow of Cléante, lost in a shipwreck four years earlier in which his friend, Géronte, escaped injury. Lucinde has two great concerns in life: to find a new husband and to convince everybody of her own youth—she claims to be thirty years old and looks much younger—in spite of the irritating contradiction personified in her lovely young daughter, Belamire. She discusses with her maid, Jacinte, different possibilities for ridding herself of Belamire. Marrying her off is rejected as fatal—she would soon be a grandmother! A marriage between Belamire and her young admirer Arimant, son of Géronte, must be prevented at any price. The best solution
is to send Belamire to a convent: no grandchildren, no more rivalry with her mother. Furthermore, Lucinde would then have Arimant for herself!

In a mother-daughter talk which takes a surprising turn, Lucinde paints for her daughter a discouraging picture of marriage and the suffering and mistreatment of women. As a loving, concerned mother the best she can do to protect her dear Belamire against such a cruel destiny is to advise her to retire to a convent. Belamire's "mais" is not accepted or listened to and her mother, whom she is to address as Madame rather than ma Mère, finally loses her temper and scolds her for her high-heeled shoes. Jacinte is one of the rare cases of a maid in a comédie de moeurs who sides with the older generation against the younger. She promises Lucinde to cause a misunderstanding between Belamire and Arimant, so that the young man will turn to Lucinde. A letter written by Belamire to be submitted to her admirer by Jacinte will serve to create the problem. Jacinte makes Arimant believe the letter is meant for another, the marquis. Arimant, hurt and angry, turns to Lucinde. Belamire who cannot understand Arimant's behavior, is equally hurt and turns her attention to the marquis--she will show Arimant he is not the only admirer she has! In the meantime a third admirer and a serious pretender to Belamire's hand appears: Géronte, Arimant's father, who since he returned from the shipwreck has fallen in love with the young girl. His three long speeches during his conversa-
tion with the marquis are most effective, both from the poetical and the psychological viewpoint.

The second act is a series of encounters and attempts to avoid encounters on the part of Arimant and Belamire. Lucinde tries her best to make Arimant fall in love with her and forget Belamire, and the poor young man, although enchanted with the mother's charm, cannot forget the daughter's loveliness. His jealousy of the marquis wins out, and a duel seems to be unavoidable.

Jacinte wards off the storm by telling Géronte about the situation between his son and the marquis. Géronte forces them to make up, thereby showing that he wants to make his son believe in Belamire's treachery. A very amusing discussion, in the meanwhile, takes place in Lucinde's room. It concerns planned parenthood model 1665 and is caused by Lucinde's fear that a new marriage with resulting pregnancy will age her terribly and forever destroy her beauty. Jacinte's suggestion for solving the problem is presented with a verve worthy of Molière.

Arimant and Belamire meet for a few seconds in Jacinte's company. Belamire remains silent, but Arimant, who has just realized that his father loves the young girl and who is getting angrier all the time with this "ingrate et volage beauté," bursts out in a declaration of his intention to marry Lucinde. Belamire suffers—she still loves Arimant. But Géronte comes along and declares his love for her. He is
quite eloquent and Belamire is surprised and perhaps just a little bit flattered. She hesitates, however, as to how she should react to the proposal. The approach of Lucinde and Arimant together decides the case:

Je sens que sa présence excite ma colère;
Et vous pouvez, enfin, commencer, aujourd'hui,
A me parler d'amour, et même devant lui.

Géronte asks for Belamire's hand and Lucinde approves, after Jacinte's little whisper: "Donnez-lui, vous pourrez n'être jamais grand'mère."—What follows is a delightful little qui-proquo, where Belamire and Arimant, in addressing themselves to Géronte and Lucinde respectively, give a clear evidence of their love for each other, a love that pride wants to hide.

However, word is brought that Cléante has returned after having spent some years in foreign lands as a slave. Lucinde, who finally sees how ridiculous the situation is, rejoices over her husband's return and admits to her daughter that Arimant still loves her. Jacinte then explains everything and in the happy ending Géronte, knowing that there was no hope for him, gives his permission to the marriage between Belamire and his son.

As far as the unities go, the comedy follows the rules strictly except for the action—the dénouement is brought about by an outside event rather than by the plot itself. But then again, this was nothing unusual at the time. The play is polished and the plot carefully carried through. The exposition is rapid and clear, and the action is well knit even from
the first few scenes of the first act. There are no lengthy passages, but instead amusing situations and a reasonably well prepared dénouement. The characters are quite believable. The clever Jacinte resembles many other maids of French seventeenth century comedy, with the difference that her loyalties go in the unusual direction of mother rather than daughter. She is an unscrupulous girl who seems to love her doubleplay and between times gives realistic accounts of parents' cruelty to their children. Géronte, the selfish and amorous "old man," is a rather conventional type who awakens sympathy and perhaps some pity, and who in his strongest moments has a certain resemblance with Arnolphe in love. The young couple is charming and follows the set rules for comedy in that they seem terribly innocent and believe all that Jacinte tells them.

As Donneau de Visé's preface very correctly claimed, the great innovation in this comedy lies in the character of the mother, Lucinde. Lancaster points out the fact that the very idea of this rivalry between mother and daughter was quite daring for the time and certainly not in agreement with the classical idea of motherly love.10 Donneau de Visé succeeded in carrying it through, however, in a successful manner by making it ridiculous and funny rather than shocking. He portrays Lucinde with keen psychological insight as a woman who is no longer young but wants at any price to hold on to the last little remnants of youth. She absorbs like a thirsty plant the maid's exaggerated compliments and tries to fool
herself into believing that Arimant's words of admiration are really meant for her instead of for her daughter. Deep inside herself she is actually a bit afraid of all that marriage brings—her doubts appear in the form of concern for her beauty. She treats her daughter in a harsh and mean way, but will not agree to the extreme actions suggested by Jacinte. She is still basically a mother, although she desperately tries to hide it, to forget and make others forget.

Another very interesting character in the play is the marquis, probably played by Molière himself—he resembles many of Molière's own famous noblemen, especially those of Les Précieuses ridicules, Les Fâcheux, and L'Impromptu de Versailles. Donneau de Visé has succeeded in presenting the marquis as a person who, rather than being superfluous and episodic, is involved in the action. The type is well presented—a rather stupid and conceited young man, whose whole existence seems to center upon his title and the way he is dressed when he shows off at the court. He is a solid comic character in Molière's style.

The Parfait brothers, who are usually quite critical of Donneau de Visé, accused this play of being boring, uninteresting and badly written. Although many passages may be rather slow or flat and lacking in taste, the judgment of the Parfaicts is quite unfair. On the contrary, many tirades are masterfully written, especially those of the amorous Géronte, the deeply disappointed Belamire, and the snobbish marquis.
Several situations remind one of Molière and may very well have been inspired by his plays; we have already mentioned a few, let us add to them especially the delightful lover's quarrel (Act III, scene VII), which in a remarkable way reminds one of similar situations in Le Dépit amoureux (Act IV, scene III) and Tartuffe (Act II, scene IV).

It is easy to see why Molière would like this comedy, in spite of its small faults. It is Donneau de Visé's best play, created with care and patience, and with an ambiance which in its totality is suggestive of Molière. It is enhanced by its clear, natural subject matter, by its simple action, and by its painting of customs and characters typical of the century. In his effort to write a play which would please Molière enough to be presented by him, Donneau de Visé, consciously or not, created a little comedy of Molière's own type which, although it is far from the level of the master's own creations, was quite successful and at the same time indicated the direction Donneau de Visé was to take in comedy.

2. **La Veuve à la mode**

Donneau de Visé, who in 1665 had been accepted by Molière and his troupe with his Lettre sur les Observations and La Mère coquette, spent the following year writing his second Lettre, the one on Le Misanthrope, and several plays of which three were performed at the Palais Royal during the year 1667.
The earliest of these is a play in prose, *La Veuve à la mode*, which had its first performance on Sunday, May 15, 1667 and was published on December 15 by Ribou. The little one-act comedy was announced by Robinet on May 8:

. . . . . . . la troupe du Roi
Remontant en très-bel arroi,
Donne une pièce toute neuve,
Qui porte pour titre la Veuve,
Mais Veuve à la mode et du temps.
Sans doute, les intelligents,
Si donc ils ont dessein de rire,
Qu'ils aillent au Palais Royal . . .

The performance was the first one after the Easter closing period but this fact, Robinet's publicity, and the company of *Attila* did not give a great economic success—the *recette* accounted for by La Grange amounted to a meager 252 *livres*. The little comedy was performed several times, in combination with different other plays, without great improvement in luck. Robinet's added recommendation a week after the *première* did not change the outlook, but constitutes an interesting document as it informs us about the distribution of the parts:

*La Veuve à la mode* se joue
Et franchement je vous avoue
Que si l'on veut bien rire, il faut la voir exprès:
Voyez la donc, je vous en prie.
Elle paroit sous les attraits
De Mademoiselle de Brie,
Qui, veuve, aurait bientôt un époux jeune et frais
D'ailleurs, la mignarde Molière,
Y fait le rôle d'une soeur
Avec qui l'amoureux mystère
Est, je crois, bien plein de douceur. 15

Only once did *La Veuve à la mode* receive the attention it deserved. On November 6, 1667, Molière and his troupe were
invited to play for the court assembled at Versailles. They
stayed there until November 9, and the plays performed for
the illustrious assembly were Corneille's *Attila*, *La Veuve à
la mode*, and two new plays, *Délie* and *L'Embarras de Godard* also
by Donneau de Visé. The rumor about this honor must have
reached Paris with the troupe, for at its first performance
after the return, *La Veuve à la mode* with *Délie* received the
respectable amount of 442 livres. An attempt to repeat the
success the next playing night was less fortunate, and *La
Veuve* slowly disappeared from the repertory, in spite of
Robinet's well-founded praise, saying that at the court, the
reaction to *La Veuve* was that "presque à chaque période,/ on
rit ..." It is difficult to understand just why *La Veuve*,
although not a failure, received so little acclaim. Even the
Parfaict brothers admitted that it was "passable" and Mouhy
calls it a play "de comique bas, mais plaisant" and is
rightfully surprised at its lack of success.

The entire plot is prepared in the first three of the
twenty-three scenes. A terrible disorder is reigning in
Cléon's house--Crispin is awakened before dawn by the nurse
Dame Jeanne, who is caring for the sick Cléon. The doctor is
needed immediately in order to save the master's life. Crispin
wastes his time in discussing the situation with the maid,
Béatrix. Their exchange of words is quite amusing--Crispin's
major concern seems to be whether his master has drawn up a
will or not and if so, how much the servants will receive.
He also forms the basis for the later events in saying that Madame "doit craindre fort le veuvage" because "on dit qu'elle perdra force biens." As Crispin is finally ready to leave, Dame Jeanne announces that Cléon is already dead. The sadness is great, and again Madame is in their thoughts for she has no children, and since a widow is not protected by the law, Cléon's nephew is the sole heir to his possessions. This means that the young widow, Miris, will find herself with support, unless . . . Beatrix is already forming a plan. Clidamis, the nephew, used to admire Miris. Perhaps he would like to inherit the widow together with the fortune?

Miris, "inconsolable" (Scene IV), enters with her sister, Ophise. Miris appears quite shaken by the death of her husband—as long as the nurse and Crispin are present. But once she is alone with Ophise and Béatrix, she drops the mask and shows that her only concern is the loss of the inheritance. It is not difficult to talk her into preserving some of the riches and hiding them before the property is sealed by an officer of the law. At the same time, their hope in Clidamis and his love increases. Miris has not yet eaten anything and Beatrix brings her some soup which her mistress eats after some coaxing. Whenever somebody knocks on the door, however, she hands it to Crispin—it is not proper for a new widow to show such a materialistic feeling as hunger—she is not supposed to think of anything but her dear deceased husband! A funny situation develops when Crispin instead of just taking the bowl as
he was expected to, gets the impression that he is to eat the soup, which he proceeds to do.

Clidamis finally arrives to convey his sympathies. Miris is upstairs collecting her valuables for hiding. Beatrix in the meantime arranges her scheme by suggesting to Clidamis what to do in order to win the hand of Miris at once without causing a scandal. He must send over a commissaire to take possession of his inheritance immediately so that Miris will be ruined. When she then yields to Clidamis it will be said that she did so out of pure necessity. Clidamis finds the idea splendid and it is agreed upon.

Shortly thereafter the tailor and the old clothes dealer arrive to provide Beatrix and Crispin with proper mourning clothes. The scene with the four of them is not only extremely amusing, but also quite revealing as to the customs of the time.

The commissary arrives and seals everything. Miris is quite worried but Beatrix lets her see the solution to which she agrees after she allows herself to be convinced by much insistence. When Clidamis appears, finally, to convey personally his deep regrets, it is not difficult to bring Miris to a hinted concession and a promise to marry Clidamis. The commissary will leave and everybody is happy and contented.

The unity of action is observed in that all that happens is in some way related to the old man's death. As for place, it is one room and the time is that of the performance. In
this very narrow and restricted frame Donneau de Visé has placed some interesting situations and character sketches. The comedy shows us scenes out of daily middle class life with some popular coloring provided by Dame Jeanne. In this amusing and cynical satire we see the falseness of society through examples of hypocritical behavior. The psychology in the characterization of Miris, although barely suggested because of the short duration of the play, is quite well studied, notably when she hesitates between dutiful sorrow and her real satisfaction in having lost the husband who had been forced upon her. The other characters are of little individual interest, but form essentially comical types.

It is interesting to note that Pépigué in his 1668 edition of Molière's works included La Veuve à la mode, but without a privilège. It is evident, of course, that he was mistaken in attributing the play to Molière--the Registre de La Grange refers to it as "Pièce nouvelle de M. de Visé" (p. 90). The idea itself is not at all absurd, however. As a matter of fact, this little play could very well be presented side by side with a play like Scapinelle, and it is quite possible that Molière during rehearsals suggested changes which Donneau de Visé would surely have accepted. Molière was, after all, at this time an extremely experienced author, actor and director.
3. Délie

Ever since L'Astrée had been published in the early years of the seventeenth century, the pastoral theme had been of importance in France and had appeared in different types of literature. Its appeal was still strong in the late 1660's—perhaps many people needed an escape from the horror of battles and war going on at the time. As could be expected, pastoral works were particularly popular at the court, and were sometimes combined with ballet performances. Louis XIV had a lengthy Ballet des Muses created as entertainment at Saint-Germain-en-Laye in December, 1666. In the course of this festival Molière presented two of his pastoral plays, Mélicerte and La Pastorale comique, both well received at the time. Molière was interested in pastorals not only as an author but also as a director, and on October 28, 1667 his troupe presented for the first time Délie, a pastoral by Donneau de Visé. This five-act play in verse, published in 1668, was for some reason included also in the complete works of Champmeslé at the end of the century, which is surprising since contemporaries seemed to agree on Donneau de Visé's sole authorship.

Délie was most probably written with the court in mind: as we have seen, Molière and his troupe had been invited to Versailles to perform, leaving Paris on November 6 and returning on November 9. The repertory of that visit included Délie. However, with a première on October 28, the play had three well attended performances at the Palais Royal before the de-
parture, the first one earning a good 679 livres. Robinet mentions the play briefly on October 29, calling it a "galant sujet" and a "mets délicat," but putting off any further discussion until he could see it himself. He evidently saw it at the third performance, for on November 4 he makes up for his tardiness by giving a long, detailed description of the play, indicating in the margin the names of the actors appearing—some very valuable information, unfortunately given only very seldom. At the end of the laudatory poem we learn that La Thorillière, playing Périandre, has an additional function in the role:

Faisant le portrait de son Roi,
Qu'il représente, en bonne foi,
Avecque tant d'augustes marques,
Que le plus parfait des monarques,
Se trouve dedans ce portrait,
Et Louis s'y voit trait pour trait.

Donneau de Visé's Epître to the King follows the rather exaggerated flattering style common in dedications of the time: "Je ne présente à Votre Majesté que des bergers, ne trouvant point des grands hommes dans l'antiquité, qui approchent d'un monarque qui nous fait voir en sa seule personne, tout ce qui a rendu leurs noms illustres..." The occasion was quite important for the young writer's career, however, and the Epître must be regarded not only as flattery but also as a sign of gratefulness for the opportunity given to him. After all, he had the honor of presenting at Versailles three out of the four plays he had written so far, and that in the company of
Attila by the great Corneille!

The source of Délie is Bonarelli's Filli de Sciro, already known to the French public in other adaptations. Donneau de Visé borrowed from the Italian pastoral the location: the island of Scyros. He also adopted several names of characters with only slight changes, and the main points of the plot. The most important original contribution to the play is the speech complimenting the king.

On the island of Scyros lives the shepherdess Délie, whose beauty enchants the shepherds and makes them fall in love with her. Her most persistent admirers are Licidas and Céliante, joined in a friendship so strong and unselfish that neither of them can accept the other's offer to withdraw. They decide that the choice will have to be up to Délie. This causes a great problem for Délie since they both love her dearly and both have put their lives at stake to save her from a wild boar. Délie's mind swings from the one to the other, unable to decide to whom she should give her heart. However, her hesitation is soon finished and in a manner that is unfavorable to both Licidas and Céliante. One of their rivals, Philente, who is a former admirer of the shepherdess Florice, also wants to win Délie and asks the help of his shepherd friend Céldan from Smyrna. Céldan makes Délie believe that Licidas and Céliante are already bound to girls in Smyrna. In this way, Philente hopes to make Délie refuse her two ardent admirers so that he can take their place in her heart.
Délie is easily convinced of the truthfulness of the story. From now on, she avoids the two shepherds, saying that she hates them and asking them to leave her in peace. The shepherdess Florice, whom Philente has abandoned, discovers the scheme and tells Délie all about it. Délie refuses to believe in the innocence of the young men until they have proved it and until Célidean has told her about his role in the story.

However, before Délie is able to investigate the truthfulness of her warm admirers, she becomes the object of another love—that of Périandre, the personal envoy of the king of Thrace. He has come to the island to obtain its yearly tribute of two shepherds and shepherdesses. He sees Délie and wants to bring her back with him, trying to tempt her with the luxury and brilliant life at the court. Délie's friend Orphise who loves Céliante helps Délie to decide in favor of Licidas and the problem appears to be solved. But when the lot is drawn it is learned that Orphise and Licidas are two of the four young persons who are to be sent to the king as a tribute. Périandre then offers to free Licidas in exchange for Délie's decision to marry him and accompany him back to his home. Délie refuses, and the situation is saved by a letter from the king to Périandre ordering him to marry a princess and releasing the inhabitants of Scyros from their obligation to give a tribute. Nothing any longer stands in the way of their happiness and Délie, Orphise and Florice will marry Licidas, Céliante and Philente, respectively.
Just as the action and conversations of the play are formal and superficial, as would be expected with this setting and this genre, so are the characters. Licidas and Céliante are presented as the traditional berger, so popular in the elegant circles at the time. Philente has more individual color since he shows a capability of acting. The most interesting male character of the play is Périandre, who is presented as the modern courtier, enchanted with the simple and natural life of the inhabitants of the island but at the same time unable to live without the politics and the brilliant life at court. In the picture he presents of the court of Thrace Donneau de Visé makes a striking description of Louis XIV and his court:

La, les jeux et les ris ont choisi leur demeure,
Les divertissements y changent à toute heure.
Là, se fait admirer ce jeune et puissant Roi,
De qui le monde entier doit recevoir la loi:
Ce Roi charmant en paix et redoutable en guerre,
Dont le nom, aujourd'hui, fait seul trembler la terre,

Qu'on ne voit qu'à travers d'une foule innombrable
De héros, sur lesquels il paroit en tous lieux,
Tel qu'on voit Jupiter entre les autres dieux.
Venez donc admirer ce plus grand des monarques.

Il diverte sa cour par mille nouveautés:
Et lui fait admirer d'étonnantes merveilles,
Qui, des plus beaux esprits, sont les savants veilles.

Et rien n'est comparable aux beautés, sans égales,
Des spectacles pompeux de ses fêtes royales.
Ce grand Roi prend, encor, un utile repos,
À voir, dessus la scène, éclater des héros,
Par les portraits parlant de tout ce qu'en leur vie,
Des demi-dieux ont fait de plus digne d'envie.

(Act III, scene II)

Délie is at first rather unsympathetic and cold. It is not until she finally chooses Licidas and dares to admit
her love for him that she becomes a warm, attractive person who reveals herself as being both unselfish in her love and true to her country. No tempting luxury at a distant court can make her give up Licidas and her island.

Donneau de Visé had a tendency to be conventional in his plays, with the exception of his comédies de moeurs where he showed considerable originality. Délie, not surprisingly, is a very conventional pastoral, like those written earlier in the century, with a close relationship to L'Astrée and the traditions it formed. The subject of Délie turns around an eternal series of amours contrariés. The tone is serious, courteous, gallant and, of course, precious. Just like the early French pastorals, Délie is a reflection of life in the salons, with its affected language and expressions. Although no music, songs or ballets were used in Délie, it was in ways a forerunner of the pastoral opera which was to delight the public shortly thereafter.

Molière's pastorals had little influence on Délie except probably in the choice of genre. Mélicerte and La Pastorale comique are not conventional pastorals; they followed the natural development of the genre which, according to Marsan, in the middle 1660's resulted in a type of play so close to the tragi-comedy that the difference often is difficult to point to. There are naturally certain conventions also in Molière's pastorals, but the usual artificiality and préciosité has yielded to a fresher, lighter, and above all oc-
casionally funny type of play, quite different from Délie and more in tone with its time.

4. L’Embarras de Godard ou l’Accouchée

The third play by Donneau de Visé to be presented at Versailles on November 8, 1667, was a little one-act farce, L’Embarras de Godard ou l’Accouchée. It was published at the same time as La Veuve and Délie the following year. Although written in about the same period, L’Embarras de Godard is as different from Délie as any play could ever be: the one a low comedy but funny, and natural; the other formal, artificial and cold. Between La Veuve and L’Embarras there is also a strong contrast but only of subject—the treatment and style are related. These two plays form, so to say, a pair. The one deals with death in a middle class family, and the other, in a livelier manner, with birth in similar surroundings. In La Veuve, the event is placed near the beginning of the play, while in L’Embarras it comes at the end. The choice of subject for the two plays is highly original and evidently Donneau de Visé’s own idea.

It is very surprising that the rather daring L’Embarras ever reached the court. An even more astonishing fact is that the King evidently allowed himself to show his delight. Robinet, on November 12, tells his readers about what happened at Versailles a few days earlier. It appears that both the troupe of l’Hôtel de Bourgogne and the one of the Palais Royal
had been invited in turn to amuse the court at Versailles, and that they had presented varied programs. However, of all the plays the one given on the very last day had pleased the most: **L'Embarras de Godard.** It was not originally on the program and therefore had not yet been fully rehearsed or prepared for a performance. But His Majesty requested one more play, and this was the only one available and the King's wish had to be obeyed:

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. . . . . . . . . la troupe de Roi,
Qui, tout à fait en bel-arroi,
Joua cette petite pièce
Qui remplit le coeur de liasse,
Faisant lors, pour Sa Majesté,
Presqu'un miracle, en vérité,
Car, sans l'avoir étudiée,
Ou du moins, je crois, repassée,
Ni sans même avoir les habits
Qui pour tel cas étoient requis,
Sachant que le Roi notre Sire
La voloit voir, car c'est tout dire,
Elle fit, par un heureux sort,
De mémoire un si noble effort.
Et s'aquitta si bien du reste,
Qu'au lecteur derechef j'atteste
Qu'on en remporta grand honneur,
Pour elle et pour Monsieur l'auteur. 27
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The enthusiasm in Robinet's description seems quite sincere, and it is evident that he was proud and happy over his friend's success. There is no doubt, however, that the circumstances gave Donneau de Visé an advantage and that, as the Parfait brothers say, "la précipitation avec laquelle son ouvrage fut représenté, le sauva d'un examen rigoureux, et fit rejeter sur le compte des comédiens les défauts dont l'auteur était seul coupable." 28 The actors are always of great impor-
tance to a farce, and it was certainly the excellent acting displayed in spite of insufficient rehearsal that delighted the King. Donneau de Visé is the first to admit this. We know how he felt about the importance of acting when it was a question of Molière's plays. In the preface to L'Embarra de Godard he writes:

La représentation étant l'âme de la comédie, je ne sais si celle-ci plaira autant sur le papier qu'elle a plu sur le théâtre, et surtout à Ver- sailles où, sans être sue, elle fut jouée par un ordre absolu, et ne laissa pas d'être trouvée fort divertissante. Aussi lorsque les pièces, qui ne consistent que dans l'action, réussissent, la gloire en est autant due aux comédiens qu'à l'auteur.

Donneau de Visé goes on to tell how he has added two more scenes to the play, the one with the midwife and the one showing the two servants, Champagne and Picard, coming home from the caba- ret, a little too happy. Aside from these two and perhaps a few more farcical scenes, Donneau de Visé seems to say that his work is rather a comédie de moeurs, and this is quite true.

It is before dawn. Isabelle, daughter of M. and Mme Godard, has been conversing with her admirer, Cléante, the whole night while Paquette has served as a chaperone. The poor Paquette is very sleepy and complains about the fact that she is unable to go and sleep. And the day will not be any better--Mme Godard is soon to be delivered. Paquette finally decides that Cléante had better leave, but sleepy as she is, she drops the candle as she tries to push him out of the door. She does not get very impatient, however--her sympathies are
quite evidently with the young couple. Cléante has for some time been welcomed in the house as a future son-in-law, but one day he was told that he was undesirable. M. Godard was going to become a father again, and this time it was sure to be a son, an heir. So Isabelle would be sent to a convent so as not to cut into the little Godard's fortune. The young couple continues to meet, like this night, with Paquette's help. But what is the future going to be like?

Steps approach—M. Godard cannot sleep because of his worry for his wife. He has heard sounds from the direction of Isabelle's room and comes to inspect. Paquette makes Cléante leave rapidly, and Isabelle disappears into her bedroom. Godard calls all the servants together. They all come running, thinking the house is on fire. Cléante who enters pretending he has heard the noise of the servants from the street, offers his help. Godard, fearing that the time is near for his wife, gives so many orders at the same time that the servants do not know what to do, and then leaves the room in total confusion. Isabelle intervenes, distributes the orders properly and sends the valet Champagne for the midwife. The valet, however, is in no hurry, knowing Mme Godard to be a good mother who would not allow her baby to be born during the night and thus subject to misfortunes instead of having the good luck and riches attributed to a daytime baby. He is not very eager to go out before dawn on the dangerously dark streets either, so he wastes as much time as he can by fumbling with his clothes.
Isabelle finally gets impatient, helps him to get dressed properly, gives him a couple of slaps in the face, and sends him off. He is gone for a while, then comes back—without the midwife. He has been stopped by the police, his light has gone out, and now he returns for a new light. After another quarrel with Paquette, Champagne finally leaves with Picard and they bring back the midwife. In the meantime, Godard is walking around the house nervously, commenting on his wife's great devotion and worrying about losing her. The midwife arrives and adds to the frustration by refusing to hurry upstairs—she knows Madame and she says there is no hurry. And she goes on to boast about the high class babies she has brought into the world. After having inquired in detail whether all the tools of her trade are ready, she finally proceeds upstairs. Madame Godard has taken advantage of the whole situation by forcing her husband, as a last request, to permit Isabelle and Cléante to get married.

Champagne and Picard, who evidently went to a cabaret to celebrate the big tip they got for helping, return home rather drunk. They see the layette—which must have been of gargantuan size—and Champagne dresses up Picard as a baby and feeds him a paste. Isabelle and Cléante finally rescue Picard, and the message is brought that Madame Godard has had a girl and is doing well. There is no more reason for postponing Isabelle's and Cléante's marriage.

The play is well written in a structure resembling that
of *La Veuve*: a single room as the place, the performance as the length of time required, and a simple subject tying the scenes together. It is, however, a pattern of farcical scenes, drawn against a background of situations worthy of a *comédie de moeurs*. The studies of manners include interesting glimpses of the daily life in a *bourgeois* family—the conversations of the young couple, the outbursts of Madame Godard when in pain, the fact that Isabelle in spite of the obvious proof of the suffering that marriage may bring, still does not hesitate to marry Cléante, the indications of superstition, and the customary ceremonies surrounding childbirth.

The farcical elements are spread through the whole play, starting with the fumbling in the dark, continuing through Champagne's dressing, to the joke of putting baby clothes on Picard. While he is getting dressed, Champagne also philosophizes about life and birth in particular, and in a manner very much like that of Molière's *Sosie*. Considering the fact that Donneau de Visé wrote his play while Molière was working with *Amphitryon*, the likeness must not be dismissed as entirely incidental. Interestingly enough, the farcical scene with Champagne and Picard also recalls Molière. Edouard Thierry has suggested that this scene was imitated from a lost farce entitled *Gros-René petit enfant* which has been attributed to Molière and seems to date from the years he toured the countryside before coming to Paris. The title of the farce appears to indicate that its plot probably cen-
tered around the actor in Molière's troupe, Gros-René, who presumably was dressed in baby clothes, just like Picard in Donneau de Visé's play. It is quite possible that Molière himself inspired this daring passage which is rather independent of the rest of the play, or perhaps even wrote it together with Donneau de Visé.

Another noteworthy scene is the one presenting the midwife which, although more refined, is also extremely funny. The good woman's long tale about her profession and her patients in a remarkable way reminds one of the famous conversation of the four doctors in *L'Amour Médecin* which was among the Molière plays that Donneau de Visé must have known extremely well, for he had not only seen it performed—it must have been under rehearsal at approximately the same time as his own *Mère coquette*.32

In spite of its excellence, its amusing qualities, and the King's favor, *L'Embarras de Godard* seems to have been unable to keep the interest of the public. As a matter of fact, it appears not to have been in the repertory for more than a year after its successful *première* at Versailles.

5. *Les Maux sans remèdes*

In order to make complete the study of Donneau de Visé's theatrical works during his friendship with Molière, we must here, in its chronological place, mention a play of which no printed version exists, not even an argument or
summary of the contents.

The play is *Les Maux sans remèdes* which La Grange reports as having been played on January 11 and 13, 1669, with quite good success. He mentions Donneau de Visé as the author. Since no other work was performed with *Les Maux sans remèdes* it must have been a five-act play, and it was amusing and worth seeing, according to Robinet. However, it was never played again, a fact which Lancaster explains by the overwhelming competition of *Tartuffe*, finally permitted to be staged on February 5. Although this situation may have been a contributing factor in the long run—no other play interrupted *Tartuffe* before May 21—it hardly explains why *Les Maux sans remèdes* was not shown on the remaining seven theater nights in January and the two in February preceding *Tartuffe*. The custom at the Palais Royal was to give a new play several consecutive nights even when it had brought in much less than the 528 livres La Grange accounts for on the opening night of *Les Maux sans remèdes*. Molière's *Sicilien*, for example, shows a recette of 142 livres the first night, yet it was played for seventeen consecutive nights! La Thorillière's *Cléopatre*, with 167 livres on December 2, 1667, was played the rest of that month and half of January, 1668. Thus, the reason must be something else. Not knowing even what the subject of the comedy was, one cannot even try to guess, but consider this one of the many unsolvable questions in the history of the theater.
6. **L'Amour échappé**

   The title *L'Amour échappé* is and will probably remain an enigma. Mouhy mentions an unprinted play with that name by Donneau de Visé, staged in 1670. There is, however, no sure indication that the play ever existed. With all probability it was instead a collection of short stories by Donneau de Visé which for some reason caused this confusion. Robinet speaks about a collection of stories but no precise information exists. However, it is not impossible that Donneau de Visé made a little play on the subject of one of the stories.

7. **Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis**

   As has been indicated earlier in this study, Donneau de Visé passed from the Palais Royal to the Théâtre des Marais during the year 1669. On this new stage he was to present, in the period of two years, five plays of rather different character. The exact dating of the performances is quite difficult with any theater other than Palais Royal because of the absence of registers like those by La Grange and La Thorillière. It appears, however, that the first of Donneau de Visé's plays at the Marais was the tragedy *Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis*, in five acts and a prologue in free verse.

   This work was the first of three machine plays Donneau de Visé wrote for the Marais during the period concerned. It was made according to the set conventions of this genre, developed in the 1650's and especially the 1660's. The subject
of the machine plays was always mythological, allowing for a number of gods and goddesses to descend from the skies, sometimes in chariots, at other times on clouds or by means of other special devices. The settings are multiple, splendid, costly, and intricate. The standard form was that of a five-act play, preceded by a prologue often written in free verse. It also became more and more common to mingle music and ballets into the scenes of the play, like the intermèdes already used by Molière in his comédies-ballets, "invented" as early as 1661 in les Fâcheux. 37

Machine plays were extremely popular at the time, and the public did not seem to mind paying a great deal more than usual to see them. Donneau de Visé took advantage of this popularity. He may also have been aware of the fact that this genre was particularly well suited for him since the technical effects would conceal any major flaws of a play. For additional support he included intermèdes of songs and ballets for which the music was composed by Charpentier, Lully's rival who was to create a couple of years later the music for Le Malade imaginaire.

On March 2, 1670 Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis was performed for the first time, and it was evidently very well received. In his preface to the play, published later the same year, Donneau de Visé says that it was presented for more than three months and always received with great applause. 38 Robinet gives a detailed review on March 8, where
he describes the entire tragedy, giving exact information on the actors performing. It is interesting to note that la Champmeslé played Vénus--she had brought many other plays to great success and Robinet devoted eight verses to her charms. His long article ends on a tone of admiration for the mechanical effects of the play:

Quiconque ne veut point aimer,
Ne doit point voir ce beau spectacle,
Car ce serait presqu'un miracle,
D'en ouir les charmans dictions,
Sans de douces convulsions,
Il faudroit fermer les oreilles,
Pour voir seulement les merveilles,
Et des machines, et des vols,
Où les dieux font des caracols,
Et dans lesquels le machiniste
Paroit vraiment un grand artiste.

Robinet speaks about love as being the subject of the play--it is, of course, also its title. The choice of subject may have been inspired by the Adonis, the long poem by La Fontaine, first published in 1669, just as Molière at about the same time may have chosen the subject of his Psyché partly because of La Fontaine's novel, Les Amours de Psyché et de Cupidon (1669). 39 Adonis, was like Donneau de Visé's play, primarily based upon Book X of Ovid's Metamorphoses. The play follows Ovid's story quite closely, but Donneau de Visé added to it another element--hatred--in the form of the nymph Chriséis, who is also in love with Adonis.

The plot is briefly as follows. Cupid had made his mother, Vénus, fall in love with Adonis. Chriséis wants to win Adonis for herself, and tells Mars about Vénus' love,
asking him to end it, but without harm to Adonis. The latter, however, angers Mars, and so does Vénus in trying to tell him that she does not love him any more. Vénus is told, through Mercury, to return to the skies for some time. Mars takes the opportunity of Vénus' absence to inspire in Adonis a desire to hunt. He kills the wild boar Mars sent to meet him, but is mortally injured by the animal before it dies. The dying Adonis is brought to Vénus, and Chriséis, realizing what she has caused, kills herself with one of Adonis' darts. On Vénus' plea, Jupiter changes Adonis' remains into a flower. Mars, hoping to have procured Vénus love forever, finds that she still hates him.

Around this rather meager plot Donneau de Visé created a grandiose spectacle with the gods flying through the air, Vénus lowered in her chariot, in short, with all the excellent machinery of the Marais taken advantage of. The play itself was constructed in a regular manner and written in verse that is often, as the Parfaict brothers say, flat and bad, but which just as often rises to a pitch that is close to that of Racine:

Que ne me trompez-vous? j'aimerois mon erreur.
Je sens que mon amour va jusqu'à la fureur;
Et lors que contre vous, mon dépit est extrême,
Je sens que je vous hais, parce que je vous aime.

(Act II, scene V)

These words by Chriséis are not only powerful as poetry--they present the two sides of her character, which is the most interesting one in the whole tragedy. She has a
close relationship to Hermione who also preferred to cause the
death of the man she loved rather than give him up to her ri-
val. Like Hermione, Chriséis is torn between her two contra-
dictory feelings of love and hatred in a manner that closely
resembles madness. Unfortunately, Donneau de Visé does not
let us see her inner struggles on the stage—they are told to
us by a nymph who also relates the news of her death. Chriséis
is the one character who gives the play its life and movement,
and this creation which was apparently Donneau de Visé's
original idea, constitutes the greatest literary value of the
tragedy.

The other jealous character is Mars, who is less con-
vincing, at times quite disappointing. Although Donneau de
Visé tries to present him as the great war god whose honor as
a god has been hurt, we see him more as a soldier who, wanting
to get his girl friend back, becomes an easy toy in the hands
of the clever Chriséis. His greatest moments are also some of
the best in the play—those where he tries to win Vénus back
by telling her about their past love:

Les avez-vous si tôt oubliés, ces moments,
Que ne doivent jamais oublier les amants?
Ces doux moments, qu'on n'a jamais que quand on aime;
Ces sensibles moments, où l'amour est extrême;
Où de nos seuls soupirs nous recevions la loi;
Où je n'aimois que vous; où vous n'aimiez que moi.
(Act IV, scene I)

Vénus is the true goddess of love, demanding that the
one she loves live for her alone. She is herself ready to
give up all in order to be loved by Adonis, and therefore his
death, indirectly caused by her, is so painful for her. When she in her despair turns to her father for help, she is only offered a flower to console her. She has no other way to receive some satisfaction than to hate Mars and she denies him her love forever. This Vénus is very much a woman and rarely seems like a goddess. She even made the mistake of asking her rival for advice and of leaving Adonis to go to the skies. This human character of both Mars and Vénus was, of course, part of the tradition from antiquity. But Donneau de Visé brought Vénus a step further. Taken out of her legendary context she is an unsatisfied, misunderstood woman who wants love and has love to give.

The subject for Vénus' love is Adonis, the hero of the tragedy. Only he is not anything like a tragic hero; he never faces an inner conflict or a struggle against fate. He is just a handsome, conceited young man, proud of having conquered Vénus, but hardly appreciating her love. Yet he appears to have been a popular character. In the Epître dédicatoire to the play, Donneau de Visé says about Adonis that he was born to love. Moreover, he had great attraction: "Pendant trois mois entiers qu'il a paru sur la scène, sa mort a fait pitié aux dames, et il a souvent été pleuré par de beaux yeux."

The great success of Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis no doubt depended on an overall impression rather than the details seen and studied individually. It may be compared to the splendid musicals of our time in which much of the
material is worthless and even bad, and whose librettos are absolute nonsense, but which, thanks to good music, some famous stars and excellent staging, become a dazzling production which the public comes in millions to see. Compared to these, Donneau de Visé's first machine play was a masterpiece—a great box office attraction which corresponded well to the taste of the public.

8. **Le Gentilhomme Guespin**

After his excursion into the area of tragedy, Donneau de Visé returned to comedy with his *Gentilhomme Guespin*,*41 probably presented at the Marais in the second half of 1670, and published with a *privilège* dated September 21, 1670 and an *achevé d'imprimer* of September 27. Donneau de Visé, always ready to follow the fashion, here presented a one-act play in verse satirizing the country nobleman just as Molière had done in 1668 in *George Dandin* and in 1669 in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, and more recently, Montfleury with his *Gentilhomme de Beauce*. But Donneau de Visé goes even further—to the country squire theme he adds the one of jealousy: *Guespin* means *jaloux* in the dialect of Orléans.

Le Vicomte de la Sablonnière, relatively recently married to a Parisian beauty and extremely jealous, has withdrawn with his wife Lucrèce to his country estate. He isolates Lucrèce totally, keeping her locked up and not allowing her to be seen by any visitor. He declines all invitations from the
friendly neighboring families for fear that Lucrèce's charm and beauty will attract his friends. He also keeps his sister Clarice hidden at home because he prefers to hold on to her share of the fortune rather than lose it by letting her get married. Clarice, however, is in love with a nobleman of the region, M. de Bois-le-Roux, who has lived at the court and consequently is more refined than the other neighbors. Clarice thinks up a rather clever way to see her admirer--she sends one of her brother's valets, on his way to Paris on an errand, to invite in the master's name several of the neighbors for dinner the next day. The Vicomte is of course both surprised and annoyed to see them come--M. de Cornanville, M. de Boisdouillet and his son, M. Bois-le-Roux and the local Dons-Juans; M. de Chante-Pie and M. de Cochon-Vilain. He suffers even worse when he sees them, according to the custom of the countryside, they must kiss his wife to greet her. Through seeing a letter he is informed about the scheme--Clarice has been imprudent enough to tell it to a girl friend who has in turn confided in her father. But the Vicomte does not yet know who has played this joke on him. Clarice, forced to confess because of the unexpected return of the valet, also tells her brother that she has done it all because she loves Bois-le-Roux. Her brother suddenly changes his mind completely and gives his permission to the marriage because he cannot any longer trust his wife in the company of a sister who can dream up such a scheme. He invites the neighbors to stay and
attend the marriage.

This rather thin plot is in itself not so bad, perhaps, but the treatment is too superficial: we are not convinced about why the Vicomte lets his sister get married, nor do we have any way of guessing what is going to happen to the incredibly patient and obliging Lucrèce now that both Clarice and her maid, who are both women of action, will leave her. The whole comedy is quite monotonous, especially because of the lack of disparity between the different gentlemen, and repetitions like the kissing ceremonies—each one behaves in just about the same way, saying the same thing. Moreover, the satire is a bit too exaggerated to remain believable.

As could be expected, the success was quite mediocre. Parfait and Mouhy both tell of how Donneau de Visé's friends in the loges applauded loyally, while the parterre whistled. When he published the play, the author seemed to realize that the verse was quite bad, for in his preface he wrote in an apologizing manner:

Le sujet m'a paru si plaisant et si propre au théâtre que je n'ai pu m'empêcher de la traiter. Peut-être qu'il ne paraîtra pas tel sur le papier, ce qu'il a de plus comique consistant plus dans les actions que dans les mots. Il y a un perpétuel jeu muet dans cette pièce, qui étant tiré du fond du sujet, donne un plaisir extrême à l'auditeur, et l'on ne dit presque pas un vers qui ne fasse rire dans la représentation par le chagrin qu'il donne au Vicomte. Le papier ne peut représenter son inquiétude ni ses postures, non plus que le grand bénéfice de fils de Monsieur de Bois-Douillet, dont on ne trouverà point le rôle dans l'impression, encore qu'on n'ait guère vu de personnages sur la scène qui aient plus fait rire.
There is doubtlessly a lot of truth in Donneau de Visé's statement that this kind of comedy is for the spectator rather than the reader. It must be played to be fully appreciated. Unfortunately, however, the public of the time did not quite like it on stage either.

The greatest interest in *Le Gentilhomme Guespin* consists primarily in its subject matter and in the painting of manners it gives, although exaggerated. Furthermore, an expression in the preface draws the attention: "le grand benêt de fils de M. Bois-Douillet." The phrase itself comes probably from Brécourt's lost comedy with the name *Le Grand Benêt de fils aussi sot que son père*, played in 1664. Lancaster suggests that the fumbling young Bois-Douillet, who must be told to do this or that and who is apparently quite stupid and shy, may have somewhat inspired Molière in his creation of Thomas Diafoirus in *le Malade imaginaire*. 43

9. *Les Intrigues de la Loterie*

In the same year, 1670, Donneau de Visé presented and published another comedy, likewise on a subject of current interest: *Les Intrigues de la loterie*. 44 The choice of subject is worthy of the future journalist and the author of such later works as *La Devineresse* (1679). Around the 1670's there seems to have been actual fever of lotteries, spreading into all classes of society, and Donneau de Visé criticized this fad in his play:
On en trouve aujourd'hui dedans chaque maison;
On en parle à la cour, on en parle à la ville;
L'ignorant en raisonne aussi bien que l'habile;
On entend retenir ce mot de tous côtés,
Dans tous les lieux publics, dans les sociétés.
(Act I, scene IX)

The play itself, in three acts and verse, is regular as far as time and place go, but has no real action—it is a composition of several conversations about different aspects and effects of lotteries. The thin thread that is supposed to be the plot is Céliane's lottery for which the drawing is to be that same evening. A young man named Valère is the admirer of Céliane's daughter, Clarice, and Cléonte loves her niece Mélisse. Clidamis, in love with Clarice, is brought into the home by a femme d'intrigue and the servant Florine. He turns out to be the son of one of Céliane's friends and Clarice falls in love with him. Valère then turns his admiration to Mélisse, and Cléonte, who lost out with the girls, hopes for better luck in the lottery.

In the course of the play we learn about the many dishonest ways in which the lotteries were conducted, for example forgery and the distribution of only white—blank—tickets to everybody except friends. Unfortunately, these are only glimpses and not thorough studies. As a whole, then, the comedy gives a superficial but yet quite interesting look at one aspect of society at the time. We learn about the type of prizes won:

J'en ai trouvé d'argent, de lits, d'argenterie,
De meubles, de bijoux, de toile, de tableaux,
De vieux livres de prix, et de livres nouveaux,
D'écharpes, de liqueurs, de vins, de friandises,
De vieux colifichets, de vieilles marchandises,
D'étoffes, de beaux points, de jambons, de pâtés.
Un curieux en fait de belles raretés,
De coquilles de prix, cailloux, cristaux, grains d'ambre.
Si vous avez besoin d'une robe de chambre,
J'en sais une qui n'est du tout que de cela,
Et tous les gens de cour ont mis à celle-là.
(ACT II, scene I)

The play also gives interesting information about the method used at the lotteries. The ticket was given to the buyer in a sealed box. It contained either a white (blank) ticket or a black one on which the prize was mentioned. It is easy to see how one could cheat in such a lottery. Donneau de Visé shows how simple it was for the ticketholder to exchange his white ticket for a winning one which he presented to get his prize. Or else, the lottery keeper made sure that some specially designated persons received winning tickets so as to encourage others to buy. Florine is in favor of this method which she wishes Céliane would use.

We know nothing about the success of the play or for how long it was played at the Marais. However, judging from Donneau de Visé's preface his play got a rather mediocre reception. That is what it normally means when he speaks, as here, about a "succès raisonnable." He ascribes this success to the new characters whom he has invented and for the first time presented on stage—it appears that he means Céliane, Clarice, and Mélisse, who are really all very vague and uninteresting. Yet Les Intrigues de la loterie must have made
some effect at the time, for it influenced other plays on lotteries and furthermore was reprinted in the eighteenth century.

10. **Les Amours du Soleil**

Donneau de Visé's two comedies presented at the Marais had had a relatively bad reception in comparison with his machine tragedy played earlier the same year—**Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis**. It was only natural that the author would turn back to the genre which had once been so successful for him and which pleased the public particularly.

**Les Amours du Soleil** was played for the first time on January 6, 1671 and printed the same year—its **privilège** is dated February 24 and its **achevé d'imprimer** is of October 31. Again, Donneau de Visé turned to Ovid's **Metamorphoses**, this time Book IV, in Thomas Corneille's translation. The mythological theme was, of course, particularly well suited for the use of machines which made the greatness of this spectacle.

In his preface to this machine tragedy, written according to the conventions in five acts in verse and with a prologue in free verse, Donneau de Visé explains the difference between the false machine play, to which a couple of machine effects have been added, and the true one, among which he only counts four plays: **Andromède**, **la Toison d'Or**, **Jupiter et Sémélé**, and now his **Amours du Soleil**. He says that his play is the most magnificent of them all, using eight tableau changes in the
lower scenery and five in the upper, and counting twenty-four flights of different length. He also admits fairly and honestly that the machines make the play and raves about the engineers and machinists. He also is proud of his painted set, the work of the most skillful man in France, M. Prat. The scenery consisted of a mountain in natural size with reliefs and trees, one of the most beautiful gardens ever presented on the stage, and a magnificent landscape showing a wilderness.

The success of the play was as spectacular as its construction—it was played consecutively for three months, until Easter, and was resumed in October, evidently with even more refined machinery, for another three months. Robinet wrote about it on October 24, hinting at the fabulous expense caused by the performance:

La belle troupe du Marais,
Sur nouveaux coûts, sur nouveaux frais,
Qui montent à très grosse somme,
Redonne, pour le dire en somme,
Ses brillants Amours du Soleil
Avec un nouvel appareil,
Tel, sans ajouter à la dose,
Que, c'est, encore, tout autre chose,
Que vous n'avez vu ci-devant.47

Some days later, Robinet again raves about les Amours du Soleil:

J'ai vu, de mes propres prunelles,
Les augmentations nouvelles,
Faites aux Amours de Phébus,
Et je puis dire, sans abus,
Que c'est enfin, l'un des spectacles
Le plus plein de petits miracles.48

This splendid presentation was built around a play of which the text seems to have been rather rapidly tied together.
Donneau de Visé allows himself to work quite freely with Ovid's fables this time, adding and changing as he pleases. The prologue tells about how Apollo, in love with Leucothoë, leaves the Muses after having asked them to sing about his adventures. Cupid warns Apollo that Vénus is angry with him and will try to do something about his new love.

When the actual play opens, Leucothoë's father, the King of Persia, is getting suspicious about his daughter's love affair. In falling in love with Leucothoë, Apollo has left Clitie, the daughter of Thétis and Océan. She tries everything to win back her beloved, just as the young prince Théaspe desperately fights for his Leucothoë. Long boring conversations go on between Apollo and the women, and between the women and their friends. In the meantime, Vénus rages and calls on the power of both the skies and hell to gain revenge against Apollo, with whom she is extremely angry for his having surprised her in the company of Mars. But not even Vénus can do much without outside help, this time from the jealous Clitie who tells Leucothoë's father all about his daughter's love. King Orchaimé, seeing his worst suspicions affirmed, furiously orders that Leucothoë be buried alive. Apollo does not succeed in resusitating her, but changes her body into an incense-bearing tree. Clitie who understands that Apollo has turned away from her forever, dies and changes into a heliotrope, the flower that follows the movement of the sun. Cupid ends the play by reminding Apollo that the
warning and prediction he gave have been fulfilled and that
Vénus has been sufficiently avenged.

As in Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis, Donneau de Visé
has considerably humanized the gods. By the same token, the
court of the King of Persia, around which the entire play is
situated, resembles a modern court of the time, and its in-
habitants behave and speak like persons of a civilized Western
world. This is particularly true for the King himself, whose
punishment of his daughter may seem barbarous, but whose ex-
planation for his action shows the touched father's heart,
free from cruelty for cruelty's sake:

J'ai dû le prononcer avec sévérité,
Quand l'honneur m'en a fait une nécessité.
Loin de me condamner, n'accablez point un père
Qui n'a fait aujourd'hui que ce qu'il a dû faire
Prince, si vous avez pour moi quelque amitié,
La rigueur de mon sort vous doit faire pitié:
Ne pouvant pas souffrir de honte à ma famille,
J'ai fait perdre le jour même à ma propre fille;
Et lors que l'on m'apprend qu'elle a fini son sort,
J'apprends son innocence, en apprenant sa mort:
Mais quand on m'en a vu donner l'arrêt sévère;
Je devois être juge alors, et non pas père.

It is a civilized man who speaks, just as in the case of
Racine's Pyrrhus and Bajazet.

His daughter, Leucothoë, is the tragic figure of the
play. Everybody and everything is against her love to Apollo,
even the gods. In this love which should have made her happy,
she suffers tremendously, not knowing whom to believe or whose
advice to follow. At the same time she greatly fears her
father's anger which she knows will be terrible if he dis-
covers her secret. Yet, through all this, she succeeds in remaining the incarnation of purity and innocence and keeps her charm which enchanted Apollo, all while she persistently fights for the right to love.

If Leucotoé has our admiration, Apollo has our pity. Vénus' punishment is extremely strong and cruel. Apollo is torn between the persistent love of Clitie, for whom he would always have admiration and pity, and the innocent, chaste love of the princess whose reproachful words and regards constitute a perpetual source of pain for him. To be convincing, however, Apollo would need more strength, more life and fire. Just as in Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis, the hero is no real hero, while the female characters have great strength.

Clitie is remarkable in her way of holding on to the only thing worth anything to her--her lost love. She never loses hope, but continues to fight for Apollo, taking her energy from memories of past happiness. She is even fair enough to admit that Leucotoé has a rarely seen charm and beauty, which she admires but which does not prevent her from fighting her rival to the bitter end.

From the literary viewpoint, Les Amours du Soleil is certainly far from being a masterpiece. However, the author showed the good taste of admitting that the great success of the play was due primarily to the machines and the spectacle as a whole. Yet we cannot deny that the character study and the text are at times excellent and that the verse at times
reaches a clarity and strength which clearly indicate to what heights Donneau de Visé might have risen as a dramatist, had he only been a little less of an opportunist and instead put enough time and interest into his literary works.

11. **Le Mariage de Bacchus et d'Ariane**

A year later, on January 7, 1672, Donneau de Visé presented a third machine play at the Marais, the *comédie heroïque* entitled *Le Mariage de Bacchus et d'Ariane*, in three acts and free verse, with a prologue. Although it used machines like its sister plays, *Le Mariage* was of a different genre—it was not a tragedy, nor were the machines the essential thing. When he had this play printed the same year, Donneau de Visé explained in his *Avis au lecteur* how he had, once more, tried to follow the popular trend in theater.

Comme nous sommes dans un siècle où la musique et les ballets ont des charmes pour tout le monde, et que les spectacles qui en sont remplis sont beaucoup plus suivis que les autres, l'auteur des *Amours du Soleil* dont les machines, pendant plus de 50 représentations, qui ont été faites pendant deux hivers, ont surpris tous ceux qui les ont vues, a voulu donner, cette année, une pièce dont la musique et les entrées eussent quelque chose d'aussi particulier que les machines de son dernier ouvrage...

The music, composed by Louis Mollier, the Dauphin's music teacher, was used not only in the *intermèdes* but also as an integral part of the play. This music was developed into songs and ballets, mostly in the scenes showing the local population on the island of Naxos. This technique somewhat recalls *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* played for the first time in
October, 1670. If this resemblance with Molière was only incidental, there is another one which is much more striking. It is certainly no accident that the structure of Le Mariage reminds us of Amphitryon—Donneau de Visé doubtlessly had Molière's play in mind when writing this work. This is further evidenced at the return of Le Mariage to the stage in 1685. Then Donneau de Visé said in an article for the Mercure: "Il s'y trouve une chose qui ne s'est encore vue que dans Amphitryon, c'est-à-dire du comique, mêlé parmi le grand sérieux." In addition to the genre itself, the form of the play also resembles Amphitryon: three acts, in free verse with a mixture of lines of 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 12 syllables, just as in Molière's play. Furthermore, the characters are somewhat inspired by Molière, especially Corine who has as much difficulty in trying to win Comus' heart as Cléanthis had had in winning Sosie.

While this impressive spectacle was partly influenced by Molière, Donneau de Visé had again found his subject matter in antiquity. Plutarch's Life of Theseus was the major source together with Diodorus Siculus, volumes III and IV. Ariane, who is the daughter of Minos, has been left on the island of Naxos by Thésée who abandoned her to join the nymph Eglé in Athens. Bacchus sees Ariane and falls in love with her. Junon who does not want to see a marriage between Bacchus and Ariane take place, forces Thésée to come back by provoking a storm on the sea. When he is told of Bacchus' courtship of
Ariane, Thésée pretends to be still in love with her. Ariane forgives him, in spite of warnings. Ariane decides to give up Bacchus if Thésée will marry her at once. When Thésée hesitates, Ariane decides proudly to forget him and accept Bacchus' proposal. Thésée receives almost simultaneously this news and that of Eglé's marriage to another man after her decision not to wait for Thésée any longer. The marriage of Bacchus and Ariane takes place in splendor and in the presence of the gods, while Thésée despairs over his loss of the two women.

Although the plot is rather pleasant, the themes are quite trite—jealousy, bad luck and misunderstandings. Again, the characters had little in common with their models from antiquity, and as for the comic element which is brought in among the heroes, one must agree with the Parfait brothers that it is a play "qui n'a d'héroïque le nom des personnages et dont tout le comique consiste dans les discours un peu trop libres des confidents." 51

The development of the characters in this play is of little interest. Thésée is painted as quite a weak man, far from what one would expect after having read Donneau de Visé's Avis au lecteur where he says that "il a plû à toutes les femmes." Ariane is definitely an imitation of Molière's Alcmène, as is Corine of Cléanthis. Yet, how far this divertissement is from Molière's delightful work of art! While Amphitryon is almost as much a delight to read as to see on the stage, Donneau de Visé's comédie héroïque, in spite of
many well written verses, needed the added attraction—or camouflage—of the songs, ballets, and machines to obtain any effectiveness. Being extremely well timed to the public's taste, however, Le Mariage de Bacchus et d'Ariane was an overwhelming success, with three consecutive months on the stage of the Marais. 52

The reputation of Le Mariage was affirmed even more strongly by the fact that it was revived in 1685, after Les Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis. As Donneau de Visé tells us, however, the music had had to be rewritten to comply with the regulations as to the number of instruments, and although the work had been entrusted to Lully's disciple Lalouette, the play evidently suffered from the change.

12. Les Maris infidèles

After two years' absence and five plays performed at the Marais, Donneau de Visé returned to the Palais Royal on January 24, 1673 with a comedy entitled Les Maris infidèles ou L'Ami de tout le monde. The author announced it in advance in the Mercure Galant: "J'entendis lire une pièce que l'on nomme Les Maris infidèles, et dont les comédiens du Palais Royal doivent commencer la première représentation au plus tard l'une des fêtes de Noël. Elle plût à toute l'assemblée..." 53 In the same article Donneau de Visé tells of another dishonest competition on the part of l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, similar to that concerning La Mère coquette. This time, the competing author
is Hauteroche, but, says Donneau de Visé, his play is only a farce in three acts and does not even have unfaithful husbands as a subject. And he dismisses the case in saying that those little insignificant plays should be forgotten rather than compared to good plays from which one can profit--his own, that is. The beforehand publicity did not help Donneau de Visé's play, however. Its great monetary success on opening night--893 livres--and at the following two performances--645 and 599 livres, respectively--seemed promising; yet, on its fourth night, the play only earned 179 livres. After that, it was never played again. How can such strange statistics be explained? We get a clue from a little notice in the Gazette d'Amsterdam of January 19: "Tout le monde s'empresse ici pour voir une comédie nouvelle qui a pour titre Les Marias infidèles; on la croit de Molière, et que pour des raisons particulières, il ne veut pas avouer qu'elle est de lui." By the fourth performance the public had doubtlessly found out who had written the comedy and it was then immediately a lesser attraction. As a matter of fact, the play not only disappeared from the repertory--it was never printed, nor has a manuscript or a summary of it been found. The only indication we have of its subject and form is Donneau de Visé's own comments in his publicity article in the Mercure. He speaks there about six different contrasting personalities and the effects of great passions on the calmest of husbands and wives as well as on the most unruly ones. All characters are tied by marriage or
love to somebody of a completely opposite personality.---How entertaining such a subject can be, we will probably never know. It certainly does not sound like a masterpiece, however.

This was the last play by Donneau de Visé written or performed during Molière's lifetime. The great master died the next month, on February 17, 1673. Donneau de Visé, occupied with his Mercure and other prose works, did not write any plays for some time. It was not until 1675 that a play in his name appeared again, performed by Molière's troupe, then at the Théâtre Guénégaud. It was Circé, the tremendously successful tragedy Donneau de Visé wrote in cooperation with Thomas Corneille. A new page was turned in the theatrical career of Donneau de Visé.
NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1. Ten of the twelve plays discussed are definitely by Donneau de Visé; two have been attributed to him by various sources.


3. Mélèse, in the introduction to his edition of *La Mère coquette*, states that Quinault had taken his *Rivales* from Rotrou's *Deux Fucelles* and his *Amant indiscrét* from Molière's *Etourdi* (p. xv).


5. Gros, op. cit., p. 82.


*Délie* was played at Versailles after its Paris première, not before, as the Parfaict brothers suggest, giving the Versailles success as the reason for Molière's venture of showing it at the Palais Royal. They may have been confused by the fact that the play was so evidently completed for the visit to Versailles, and even dedicated to the King. (X, p. 167).


28. *L'Embarras de Godard* was played for the first time on November 8, 1667 and *Amphitryon* on January 13, 1668.


30. Thierry rejects the Parfaict brothers' dating of 1664 as impossible, since Molière did not write any farces after his settling in Paris, and in any case inadmissible for November and December of that year since the actor Gros-René died on November 4, 1664, and no other actor carried that name except on stage.

31. *L'Amour médecin* was played for the first time on September 15, 1665, and *La Mère coquette* on October 23, 1665.
33. Registre de La Grange, p. 102.

34. Lancaster, op. cit., III:2, p. 836.


38. When Les Amours de Venus et d'Adonis was played again in 1685, Donneau de Visé wrote in his Mercure Galant: "Quant aux Amours de Vénus et d'Adonis, qu'on a représentés à Paris, je vous avoue, puisque vous le savez, que j'ai fait cette tragédie avant que d'avoir commencé à travailler aux lettres que je vous écris tous les mois. C'était dans un temps où le langage du cœur doit être naturel à tous les hommes: ainsi l'on ne doit pas s'étonner si cette pièce a été trouvée si tendre. Elle eut alors un fort grand succès, quoique ses machines ne fussent accompagnées ni de danses, ni de voix." (October, 1685, p. 353).


43. Lancaster, History, III:2, p. 839.


45. According to Lancaster (Histoire, III:2, p. 836), les Intrigues de la Loterie was republished in the Théâtre français, IX, in 1737.


48 **Ibid.**, November 7, 1671.


50 **Nouveau Mercure Galant**, October, 1685, p. 355.


52 Two months after the première of Donneau de Visé's play, the same subject was presented by Thomas Corneille in his tragedy *Ariane* at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. As could be expected, this play was better written and had a finer psychology than that by Donneau de Visé. If we add to that the fact that the title part was played by la Champmeslé, it is not surprising that *Ariane* had a colossal success, comparable to that of *Bajazet* which preceded it. This time it was not the spectacle, but the play itself which attracted the public.


54 *Registre de La Grange*, pp. 141-42.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Jean Donneau de Visé was a very ambitious man, who at an early age showed the opportunistic traits of his character which were going to be his driving force all through his life. His readiness to take advantage of every situation that was offered to him also foreshadowed the successful journalist he was to become. As a matter of fact, in almost all he wrote, be it nouvelles, literary criticism, plays, or historical works, the Donneau de Visé who founded the Mercure was always more or less visible. It is an undeniable fact that he was a journalist before anything else and it is therefore only natural that his lasting fame has derived from his being the creator of modern French journalism.

This study, however, has focused its attention on Donneau de Visé the man of the theater—theatrical critic and dramatist, and particularly his relationship to Molière. It has followed him through his most important years in this field, 1663 to 1673, starting with the harsh attacks on both Pierre Corneille and Molière in his Nouvelles nouvelles in 1663. He rapidly made a complete turnabout regarding Pierre Corneille. From having attacked Corneille's Sophonisbe, he came to defend both this play and Sertorius, thereby com-
mencing a lasting literary quarrel with l'abbé d'Aubignac. Yet, he had much to gain from such a change in sympathy. As Corneille's friend, he found the doors open to l'Hôtel de Bourgogne and its circle, and he formed another friendship which would prove to be of great importance for the rest of his life—that of Thomas Corneille, his future co-author of several plays and his co-editor of the Mercure.

Being a new friend of Pierre Corneille, however, Donneau de Visé did not at once give up his criticism of Molière. The two great masters were fierce rivals at the time—Corneille who was proud of his role as a comedy writer envied Molière his great successes in that genre. At the same time, the fact that Molière's Palais Royal was so successful and had the high protection of Monsieur caused a stir at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, Corneille's stronghold, where the troupe feared the new competition and wanted at any price to hold on to the special place in the King's favor which that theater had so long enjoyed.

Molière had in December, 1662 presented a new play, L'Ecole des femmes, which strongly increased the protests already raised at the time of Les Précieuses ridicules and subsequent plays. One of the most ardent contributors to the guerre comique which developed against Molière and his Ecole was Donneau de Visé who, being a Corneille admirer, remained an enemy of Molière. During the quarrel, Donneau de Visé published four anonymous attacks on Molière, all utterly unfounded and unfair. Molière, for his part, contributed to
this dispute—aside from its cause, *L'Ecole des femmes*, *La Critique de L'Ecole des femmes*, and *L'Impromptu de Versailles*. The presentation of these plays hardly had a negative effect for Molière—on the contrary, they were written with the encouragement and, for *L'Impromptu*, at the direct order of the King, and they were played at the court. In other words, the quarrel caused Louis XIV to take sides for or against Molière and, choosing Molière, he probably committed himself to the Palais Royal earlier than he would have done, had it not been for the quarrel. Moreover, Molière won a great victory not only in that he gained indisputably the favor of the King, but also that he was able to answer his enemies by ridiculing them and their arguments.

Thus, Donneau de Visé's early criticism of Molière cannot be said to have hurt the poet's situation or reputation. What did this criticism then do for its author? One might think that since Molière had won the battle, his opponents would be crushed. Not so Donneau de Visé. On the contrary, he had gained the one thing he was looking for—fame. The young man who had once dared to attack both Corneille and Molière at the same time, was now ready for the second turn-about of his career—he turned to Molière and somehow gained his confidence. One can speculate how this was done, without being able to ascertain anything. It seems probable, however, that Molière who has proved in his works that he was a good psychologist felt that Donneau de Visé in attacking him had
only followed his instincts as an opportunist—his *témérité* as he likes to call it himself—and that now that he had established himself as a man to be counted with in the theater and in literature, he would instead follow his reason and talent. Another factor which must not be overlooked is the fact that Molière was a theater director and an actor at the same time that he composed his theatrical masterpieces. Would not his qualities as a director make him see the promising possibilities of the young Donneau de Visé? The troupe at the Palais Royal was always in need of new plays—the theater public of the time was extremely limited, and the interest in a play, no matter how high at first, was usually rapidly exhausted. Molière knew all too well that a refusal on his part would mean that Donneau de Visé would join either l'Hôtel de Bourgogne or the Marais as a writer. Thus, forgetting his grudge, Molière accepted *La Mère coquette* and its author in 1665.

This was the beginning of a friendship and a cooperation which were to last until Molière's death, and an influence on the future works of Donneau de Visé the extent and importance of which cannot be precisely assessed. Donneau de Visé proceeded to write plays which were staged at the Palais Royal and even at Versailles. He rapidly became a fashionable author, and his plays, although they were perhaps rarely brilliant successes, were as a rule extremely well received. There is no surprise in the fact that the subject matter as
well as the treatment and the ambiance of Donneau de Visé's early comedies to a very high degree resemble those of Molière. Although the latter made no contribution as an author, we feel the master's presence behind Donneau de Visé in works such as La Mère coquette, La Veuve à la mode, and L'Embarras de Godard. Délire was written at a time when Molière, too, had to comply with the court's taste for pastorals.

During two of the eight years, Donneau de Visé's plays were presented at the Marais rather than at the Palais Royal. Again, the change is unexplained, but considering the fact that the friendship between Molière and Donneau de Visé appears to have been unaffected, the most plausible reason seems to be the fact that the stage of the Marais had the best, the largest, and the most modern machinery at that time. Donneau de Visé was writing and planning three great spectacles, which also show striking resemblances with or influences of Molière's work. This is particularly true of the last of these three machine plays, Le Mariage de Bacchus et d'Ariane, behind which we discern Amphitryon. Donneau de Visé's two comedies presented at the Marais between the machine plays were quite insignificant except for the fact that the author, as he was to do in most of his future plays, followed the trend of public taste at the moment. Molière had done the same thing, for example in presenting country gentlemen before Donneau de Visé.

At the time of Molière's death in 1673, Donneau de
Visé was back again at the Palais Royal. A great part of his future theatrical production, which was to encompass twenty-five more years, was played by the troupe in which Molière encouraged his first attempts as a dramatist. The theater being particularly sensitive to the attitudes and interests of the public, it is natural that Donneau de Visé's plays dating after 1673 differ in many ways from Molière's style and his treatment of themes. Another factor which led him in a new direction was his cooperation with Thomas Corneille, who often did the actual writing on the basis of a plot the two friends had composed together, while Donneau de Visé worked out staging and spectacles. There is no doubt, however, that the years with Molière caused a profound and lasting influence on Donneau de Visé's work—his comedy Les Dames vengées is a good example of that. It was written by Donneau de Visé alone and was presented in 1695, showing an atmosphere which is at least as molièresque as that of La Mère coquette and La Veuve à la mode.

However, the cooperation between Molière and Donneau de Visé seems to have gone even deeper than a dramatic influence on the young writer. It touched on Molière's greatest masterpieces and on his theatrical theories. At the same time as the troupe at the Palais Royal rehearsed his Mère coquette, it appears that Donneau de Visé, who had become very close to Molière, may have written in the early days of August, 1665 the important Lettre sur les Observations d'une comédie du
sieur Molière intitulée le Festin de Pierre, in answer to the criticism of Molière's newest play. This Lettre explains that play in an admirable way and also defends Tartuffe which was forbidden at the time. The most remarkable reaction to this Lettre was the King's declaration, a few days later, that the troupe de Monsieur was to be called the troupe du Roi and awarded the pension of 6000 livres. Again, Donneau de Visé was present and involved when the King distinguished Molière, only this time he was on Molière's side.

A little over a year later another Lettre was written for Molière—the Lettre écrite sur la comédie du Misanthrope, published in the first edition of the play with an achevé d'imprimer of December 24, 1666. The importance of this Lettre has always been recognized and its clarity and admirably well formulated opinions are considered an excellent help in understanding the play. In this case there is no doubt that Donneau de Visé is the author.

August 20, 1667, finally, is the date of the third Lettre: Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur. This is without any doubt the most important Lettre of the three, dealing not only with L'Imposteur itself, but with profound philosophical ideas on the theater and its theory. It has long been considered extremely important for its detailed description of L'Imposteur, the only document that can give us any idea about that earlier version of Tartuffe. However, until recently the second part of the Lettre has been dismissed by most scholars.
as interesting but as having no bearing on Molière and his work. In 1956 René Robert called attention to the reasons for attributing this Lettre to Donneau de Visé, who seemed to be writing in collaboration with Molière himself.¹ Then in 1966 W. G. Moore gave his support to these arguments in a brief but important article on Molière's comic theory.²

In adding evidence to support the theory that the anonymous Lettre sur les Observations and Lettre sur l'Impositeur are by Donneau de Visé and written by him under the close supervision of Molière—in part perhaps almost dictated by the master—this study has attempted to place these documents in a new light, making them an integral part of any research on Molière's work in general and on the plays concerned in particular. Considering the probability that Molière had read and approved every word said in the Lettres, these would then, in fact, be equal to Molière's own thoughts and ideas, as interpreted by Donneau de Visé.

In the light of these suggestions, a complete rethinking on the part of many moliéristes may be in order. For example, if he believes that the three Lettres contain Molière's own ideas and he reads them with care, Schérer can no longer say about Molière's religious stand: "Au mieux, c'est un indifférent."³ Instead, he will find that Molière felt strongly about religion and that his belief approached a Voltarian deism with the exception that Molière seems to have combined his humanistic concept of religion as the morale
de la raison with an acceptance of the Christian faith. Similarly, Cairncross' assertion that Molière was a libertin, especially in Dom Juan, would be belied by the Lettres which close the door to any such idea.

Of even more importance for the understanding of Molière's work as a whole is his theory of the comic, the ridicule, developed in the second part of the Lettre sur l'Imposteur. As Moore has suggested, the ideas explained in that part of the Lettre force us to separate Molière's ridicule from all we have earlier accepted as such. We learn that for this master of comedies, it is not necessarily what causes one to laugh that is comic; it is everything that goes against both bienséance and convenance—that which departs from the real nature of a certain action or person. This means, that for Molière le comique and le sérieux are not necessarily contradictory or even different—they can be present simultaneously, as can the comic and the pathetic. The comic thus becomes something intellectually absurd, contrary to reason.

It is easy to realize the importance a correct understanding of Molière's own ideas must have on our interpretation of his work. This study has sought to help in this search for truth by showing some new points of departure. At the same time, it has tried to show Molière as the focal point of the theater of his time in the light of the career of one of the many secondary authors who encircled him. Donneau de Visé was, moreover, not just a mere satellite—he was a good
author in his own right, with a long and fruitful career to prove it. He was the most highly pensioned writer of his time and greatly in the favor of the King. Unfortunately, however, his talent or his energy seem not to have been quite sufficient to compete with the brilliance of the great masters of the seventeenth century. Perhaps he could have done so, had he concentrated his genius rather than diversifying himself, following whatever trend seemed more profitable at the time. But then again, this would have been extremely difficult in view of his journalistic temperament.

Until now it has been generally asserted that Donneau de Visé's greatest contribution to literature as a whole was the foundation of the Mercure. This study shows that his importance goes far beyond his journalistic endeavors. He achieved a noteworthy theatrical career of his own and, above all, was joined in a friendship and a collaboration with Molière which may have given us what must be considered the most important documents for Molière criticism.
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1 Robert, op. cit.
2 Moore, op. cit.
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