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PRINCIPLES OF COMEDY IN EIGHT PLAYS OF MOLIERE

by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THEORIES OF LAUGHTER</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON COMIC ARTISTRY</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THEATRICAL GAMES</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. DRAMATIC STRUCTURE</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATION</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The scope of the present study of Molière's comic artistry is limited to eight comedies: *L’Étourdi*, *Le Coq imaginaire*, *Le Mariage forcé*, *L'Amour médecin*, *Le Médecin malgré lui*, *George Dandin*, *Monsieur de Poucet**, and *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. The reason for this focus is that critical work needs to be done on these plays. That little criticism has been written on a sizable portion of the work of one of the masters of comic drama is surprising. This neglect is even more startling when we learn that most of these comedies were among Molière's theatrical triumphs, stage hits to which the King and the Court as well as the Parisian public responded with hearty laughter. Information about the performances of these plays indicates that on the whole their entertainment value did not diminish as centuries went by and that they still hold a strong appeal for present-day audiences.

However, the existing lack of critical appreciation of these plays is understandable if we remember that to a large extent Molière's theater has been judged by realistic, empirical, or moralistic standards. Critical attention has been lavished on plays that seem close to the texture of the actual world of men, respectful of the laws of causality and probability, or intended for moral teaching through laughter. Since the comedies to be considered in the present essay neither depict reality with any degree of verisimilitude nor impart serious ideas about human conduct, they have been deemed unworthy of critical evaluation or looked upon as insignificant minor works. However, the guiding principle of criticism should be that of promoting a broad understanding and enjoyment of the style and spirit of an author.
These antirealistic plays, unconcerned with philosophic or didactic messages, offer a splendid opportunity to deal directly with the essence of comedy and to study it as a vehicle designed primarily for the relaxation and the amusement of the spectators. We shall endeavor to examine how the comic genius of Molière manifests itself in this overlooked and denigrated segment of his work.

Since in these eight comedies Molière is primarily interested in an appeal to laughter, a cursory survey of what philosophers and psychologists have had to say about the nature and the function of humor seemed appropriate. Major theories indicate that laughter is stimulated by the incongruous which does not totally disrupt reality's norms. These harmless deviations from accepted patterns of thinking, perceiving, and behaving often permit a vicarious fulfillment of repressed impulses. The temporary revolt against the limits of reality provokes a spontaneous ebullition of rollicking fun and joyous irresponsibility which calls out the play instinct in man's nature. With these considerations in mind, we proceed to determine how Molière handles stimuli to laughter in his treatment of themes, dramatic structure, and characterization.

Deception, the generator of dramatic action, is studied as a whimsical force, disturbing stability, social hierarchy and moral values. We then examine how this disruptive element is incorporated into dramatic frameworks. Molière's plot construction has long been considered deficient. We contend, however, that it shows a flexibility well adapted to the formal characteristics and practical need of comedy. Built on accidental relations, comic intrigue expands and does not converge; often it is reversed or deflated by swift and capricious endings. Critics have sought to press upon comedy a stringent degree of unity not suitable to a genre which often translates its fanciful, iconoclastic streak by
going counter to the requirements of causal continuity and inevitability.

We undertake to defend Molière's character types, which are sometimes treated as rarefied and bloodless travesties of real men or, amazingly enough, praised for being solid average representatives of some segments of society. After recalling the visual beauty and the emotional expressiveness conferred on these puppets by Molière the actor, we analyze the reasons prompting a comic dramatist to utilize two-dimensional characters, made flagrantly untrue to life through the use of exaggeration and simplification.

The present essay deals not only with the form of Molière's work but takes into account its function, what it does to the audience. Since no corrective and reformative value can be perceived in the eight plays presently considered, we have omitted the usual castigat ridendo moree aspect of the question. Far from being moral purgatives, these comedies are closely allied to a libidinous joie de vivre, their spirit transcending with irreverence and impiety the restrictions of morality. Therefore, Molière's drama is studied in terms of its capacity to give spectators an alleviating expression to the strivings of their will and desires, a vicarious fulfillment and completion of their inner life often suppressed by the dictates of the social order.
CHAPTER II

THEORIES OF LAUGHTER

Molière, a professional playwright, actor and director, depended upon his public for his livelihood. He had to satisfy his spectators by feeding their hunger for amusement. His artistic principles, as stated in a few prefaces and comedies, reveal that Molière was keenly concerned with audience reaction. To him, written drama achieved full theatrical existence only when it was made perceptible on the stage and projected over the footlights in such an engaging manner that spectators would respond with liveliness and merriment. His plays had to click, his public had to roar with delight. Therefore, the present study is based on the premise that Molière, primarily interested in entertaining and amusing his spectators, was a creator of laughter. Hence, it seems appropriate to begin with an inquiry into the causes of laughter by presenting a summary of the ideas held on the subject by major theorists.

Even before the days of Plato and Aristotle, philosophers had been occupied with the question of laughter. More recently, psychologists have deluged the modern reader with studies on the stimuli and functions of humor. Thus, at the risk of seeming arbitrary and superficial, we must select, from innumerable books and treatises, only a few outstanding works.

This selective survey is not intended to be critical in nature; it is a factual summary of some theories presented in chronological order. Its primary purpose is to show that, while divergences do exist among theories of laughter, these differences are neither so numerous nor so fundamental as to exclude their
reduction to one major principle with a few subdivisions. Each of
the latter embraces certain procedures which Molière and other
comic artists have put to work in the service of laughter. There-
fore, precedence has been given to those theories most closely re-
lated to comic art and which will help us to understand the tech-
niques used in the comedies of Molière.

Although Plato's views on laughter are scattered through-
out the Republic and Laws, his most significant remarks occur in
the Philebus. There, he noted the malicious pleasure afforded by
the discomfiture of others, these misfortunes being brought about
by the absence of self-knowledge. Imbued with lying conceit, the
ridiculous person is ignorant of his own shortcomings, of his lack
of personal attractiveness, mental ability, or wordly possessions.
In order to be truly ridiculous, self-deception must be present in
a weak man, unable to take revenge when laughed at. If he were
powerful as well as deluded about his personal merit, he might
readily become odious.

That we should laugh at another's pretentious behavior
implies an admixture of pleasure and pain, pleasure in our own
shrewd and self-satisfied detection of the true state of affairs,
and pain at the spectacle of ignorance and its consequent evils.
However, when Plato states that "we laugh at the folly of our
friends" he makes clear that he is speaking of light humor rather
than ill-natured, harmful ridicule.

Thus, Plato has been considered the initiator of the deri-
sion or superiority theory of laughter which was to culminate with
Hobbes in the seventeenth century. Further, by dwelling, as he did,
on self-delusions about one's material, physical and spiritual worth
as well as on one's absence of power, Plato underlined the incon-
gruity found in the ridiculous person. As we shall see, incongruity
was to become the cornerstone of most theories of laughter and comic
artists have readily capitalized on it.

While Aristotle refined Plato's ideas on laughter, he directed his remarks more toward comedy. In his *Poetics*, he stated that the ridiculous is a certain ugliness or defect unattended with pain and not of a destructive nature. Further, comedy represents man as worse than the average of the present day, not worse in any and every way, but only in so far as his shortcomings are ridiculous. Aristotle seemed to recognize that the deformity discovered in the other is a form of incongruity between what is and what ought to be, a contrast upon which one can look down with some contempt.

Harmless aberrations from normal conduct, therefore presumably suitable for comic characters, are discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Certain of these ridiculous characters were to become familiar figures in comedies. Among them are the miser, the hypocrite, the braggart, the ironical man and the buffoon.

In a way, Aristotle did more than develop Plato's theory of derisive laughter, stimulated, it will be remembered, by the perception of a contrast between actual distortion and normal wholeness. Aristotle had also an inkling of another theory which Kant made famous. In the *Rhetoric*, he spoke of laughter aroused by disappointment and surprise, when things turn out contrary to what one expects.

Plato and Aristotle's theories offered the main ideas which philosophers and psychologists were to explore for centuries to come: laughter springs from our feeling of superiority over people less perfect or less fortunate than we are; it is provoked by a comparison between normal values and some form of degradation of these values. As we shall see, comic artistry strives at engineering this kind of dual perspective which engenders comparison. Then,
both Plato and Aristotle stressed in their own way the incompatibility between laughter and strong feelings such as fear or suffering.

Among Roman writers, Cicero and Quintilian affirmed that the ridiculous or the laughable is closely linked with physical or moral ugliness and deformity, thus revealing a direct or indirect connection with Plato and Aristotle. They also mentioned that laughter may be aroused by astonishment and surprise caused by the decei of expectations, an idea already hinted at by Aristotle.

Both Cicero and Quintilian readily admitted knowing little about laughter and poked fun at those who pretended to explain it. Quintilian, in particular, doubted whether it could be pinpointed to a single cause. Thus, these two writers anticipated the sceptical tendencies of modern theorists who are more inclined to explain laughter with a broader combination of causes. Then aware as he was that laughter is a release of emotional tension, Quintilian had the honor of being the precursor of Spencer and Freud's theories of humor.

Renaissance writers, such as Trissino, Madius, Riccobono, Castelvetro, and others, followed closely the ideas of the classical theorists. In their synthesis of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian's theories, we find time and time again mention of derisive laughter at the ugly and the deformed, of laughter at deceived expectations, of laughter at things incongruous and out of harmony with the existing order. Considerations of the role of comedy as a social corrective are emphasized.

In the seventeenth century, the ancient theory of scornful laughter found its most vigorous exponent in Thomas Hobbes. In Human Nature and the Leviathan, Hobbes explained that laughter is
occasioned by a sudden inflation of our self-esteem, "sudden glory," as he called it, a happy state attained by contemplating the infirmities of others. We may also laugh at our own follies provided they belong to the past and that we are conscious of having surmounted them.

Since laughter was a malicious and aggressive self-assertion over others or over our past inferior selves, it could easily become cruel. In order to remove the sting from this sneering contempt, Hobbes recommended that laughter should be at absurdities or infirmities abstracted from real persons, thereby creating a situation in which all the company could laugh together. As this study will attempt to show later on, abstraction of reality is one of the essential methods utilized by the comic artist in order to transform the painful into the laughable.

One of the first to give a physiological description of laughter, Descartes may also be associated with the derision theory. In his treatise on Les Passions de l'Âme, he found laughter to be a manifestation of joy, but of a joy tinged with hate, mixed with surprise, and provoked by evil befalling others. However, he did tone down the malicious aspect of humor by explaining that it could be aroused only if the flaw or mishap was a minor one, and well merited by its victim. Only evil-natured people could think that major misfortunes were deserved by others and, therefore, laugh at their distress.

The belief that laughter results from our sense of superiority over social or human failings was widespread in seventeenth-century France. Closely associated with the unreasonable, "le ridicule" was a derogation of norms which one perceived from a position of superiority. The Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur, sometimes attributed to Donneau de Visé, who may have written it with Molière's collaboration, subscribes to the same point of view:
Le ridicule est donc la forme extérieure et sensible que la providence de la nature a attachée à tout ce qui est déraisonnable.... Pour connoître ce ridicule il faut connoître la raison dont il signifie le défaut, et voir en quoi elle consiste. Son caractère n'est autre, dans le fond, que la convenance, et sa marque sensible la bienséance....

Thus, "la disadvanence est l'essence du ridicule" or "nous estimons ridicule ce qui manque extrêmement de raison."

Our mind becomes aware of the ridiculous when it perceives an incongruity, a seventeenth-century synonym for a divergence from the reasonable. This dual vision, through which we perceive in the foreground the incongruous, or the unreasonable, against a background of congruence or reason, affords us a feeling of superiority, similar to Hobbes' "sudden glory":

Quand nous voyons une action ridicule, la connoissance que nous avons du ridicule de cette action nous élève au-dessus de celui qui l'a faite, parce que, d'une part, personne n'agissant irraisonnablement à son sujet, nous jugerons que l'homme qui l'a faite ignore qu'elle soit déraisonnable et la croit raisonnable: donc qu'il est dans l'erreur et dans l'ignorance, que naturellement nous estimons dés maux. D'ailleurs, par cela même que nous connaissons son erreur, par cela même nous en sommes exempts: donc, nous sommes en cela plus éclairés, plus parfaits, enfin plus que lui. Or cette connaissance d'être plus qu'un autre est fort agréable à la nature. De là vient que le mépris qui enferme cette connaissance est toujours accompagné de joie....

From the above-quoted passages, it would seem that the ridiculous goes against basic canons of rationality, interwoven in turn with standards of truth and morality. Encounters with the ridiculous involve an appeal to man's intelligence which procures him the superior pleasure of penetrating unreason by the use of reason, thus guarding him against certain deleterious tendencies of human nature.

As evidenced by his writings and an article entitled 'Esprit'
in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Voltaire had a sharp and lucid insight into the workings of witticism. However, since Molière's dialogue offers but few jewels of wit, we shall by-pass the master of crafty verbal pirouettes. Suffice it to say that Voltaire saw little merit in the philosophical inquiry concerning laughter. In his disdainfully brief article entitled "Rire" in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Voltaire maliciously evaded the question under discussion by pointing out that students of laughter were sad and ridiculous people, ill-equipped for their studies.

In spite of Voltaire's sardonic pronouncements, investigation of laughter continued to be pursued. Marmontel contributed to the *Encyclopédie* several articles pertaining to laughter and comedy. In a typically eighteenth-century manner, he presents laughter as a phenomenon intimately related to the behavior patterns of a given society, as a reaction molded by the public conventions of a particular time and place.

According to Marmontel, theatrically-produced laughter is the result of a conscious or unconscious comparison made by the spectator between his social behavior and that of the personage, the spectator being placed in an advantageous position. Thus, laughter depends upon superiority or, as Plato had indicated, on malice. Indeed, in his article entitled "Comédie," Marmontel states that malice is the mainspring of comic plays and goes on to observe that the spectator's merriment is intensified if an element of surprise is introduced.

As Plato and Aristotle had done before him, Marmontel points out that we laugh at others' defects as long as they are not serious enough to cause us to react with pity, fear, or hatred. Thus, once more, the incompatibility of laughter and strong emotions is noted. Marmontel was conscious of the moral paradox involved in the laughing phenomenon. We laugh at others' imper-
fections and derive pleasure at their expense. Therefore, he sought to justify this morally unworthy enjoyment by stressing the socially corrective powers of laughter. With the Renaissance theorists, he viewed comedy as a didactic art.

If this present study were concerned with the moral significance of laughter and comedy, an important place should be allotted to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles*, Rousseau opposed the establishment of a theater in Geneva, on the basis that the theater, and especially comedy, was a corrupting influence. Molière was severely condemned because he amused the public with an irreverent upheaval of social ranks and traditionally respected values. Sons quarrelled with their fathers and wished them dead, servants ruled their masters, sincerity and honesty were exposed to ridicule. Rousseau fails to see that sham license, associated since ancient time with man's search for relief from reality's restraints, is necessary to the creation of joy. In Chapter IV, we shall study how comic art deliberately stirs up the impious spirit of carnival time.

About one hundred years later, in his *Esquisse d'une philosophie*, Lamennais elaborated the ideas touched upon Rousseau. Lamennais, another *agelast*, excommunicated laughter as being an image of evil. He saw laughter rooted in individuality or egotism and comedy a deterrent to man's moral perfection; by inciting man to laugh at others' moral flaws, comedy encouraged him to believe himself exempt from vices. In short, comedy caused haughtiness toward others as well as a smug, self-satisfied attitude in the audience.

Haunted by the notion of sin, Baudelaire found laughter to be a mark of man's degradation brought about the Fall. Perverse and cruel, man laughs at the expense of his less fortunate brothers but as he baits them, fear of damnation grips his soul.
Aside from these moral considerations, Baudelaire's *curiosités esthétiques* contain some worthwhile comments on comic artistry, especially on what he called "le comique absolu" — the grotesque, the fantastic, the buffoonish. This playfully extravagant comic expression does not aspire to transmit any didactic message. Its value is simply in itself and for itself. If, on the whole, Baudelaire followed traditional literary criticism by assigning a moralizing intention to Molière's art, he did recognize that his plays were too rich in their diversity to be viewed only as morally useful. Thus, Baudelaire made an exception for the ballets of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and of *Le Malade imaginaire*. Their buffoonery seemed to him a perfect example of that exuberance which endows "le comique absolu" with a giddy quality. To be sure, no moral significance could be detected in this extravagantly imaginary world. Yet it had an aesthetic value all of its own. Perhaps unwittingly, Baudelaire suggested a new approach to the appreciation of Molière's theater. On the whole, the fantasy aspect of Molière's work has been dismissed, in favor of his alleged satiric realism, or simply treated as the vehicle by which the satirical message is conveyed.

In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant defined laughter as "an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing." With this celebrated formula, Kant came to be regarded as the father of the incongruity theory; yet, it will be remembered, this theory is not new, for in its essence it goes back through Quintilian and Cicero to Aristotle and Plato. According to Kant, laughter is caused by the abrupt dissolution of an attitude prepared to meet a situation. Our cognitive faculties are aroused and set to work, ready to proceed in a definite direction, but instead of being led on to the expected conclusion, they are suddenly wrenched off their path and turned into a different direction.
Kant goes on to explain that the laughter-producing situations must be momentarily deceptive, as well as contain a nonsensical element. In other words, the absurdity must be cloaked with logical appearances in order to pass our judgment's censorship and gain admittance in the field of our consciousness. Soon after, the absurdity will be stripped of its paralogistic disguise by our reason, recognized as absurd, expelled from our consciousness and reduced to unreality, to nothingness. In *L'Illusion comique*, published in 1940, Marc Chapiro elaborated on the Kantian mechanisms of humor. The absurdity, unmasked by our critical sense, is not the only element projected into non-existence by laughter. The detection and exclusion process creates a sort of explosion which shakes our whole structure of reality. Depending on the intensity and length of our reaction, the entire universe can be momentarily abolished. In those moments, man liberates himself from the presence of external reality which haunts him with visions of his oncoming death.

After reading those arduous explanations, Voltaire's article entitled "Rire" comes to mind: treatises on laughter are not very amusing and their authors seem to have forgotten the fun element inherent in their subject. However, in spite of his awesome cerebrations, Kant was one of the first Western philosophers who associated laughter with games and playfulness. To the dismay of serious-minded scholars, he held that what arouses laughter, namely the perception and exclusion of the incongruous from the structure of things, was merely a "play with aesthetical ideas, or with representations of the Understanding through which ultimately nothing is thought."  

Although reason is called upon to discern the absurdity of a joke, for example, and does experience a momentary, active enjoyment, laughter is primarily a physical pleasure. When our reason perceives the nonsensical element of a story, the illusion
previously created by our "expectation" is dissipated. Then, our mind goes over its experience, again and again, trying in vain to find some rational conclusion. In this way, it goes through a rapid alternation of tension and relaxation. This state of mental oscillation establishes a corresponding straining and slackening movement in our body which becomes like a cord being stretched, then suddenly relaxed. This internal bodily motion stimulates our vital processes and increases our well-being. This "alone, and not what precedes it in the mind, is the proper cause of the gratification in a thought that at bottom represents nothing." For Kant, laughter is primarily associated with good health and is also a means by which man can offset the miseries of his existence.

One cannot stress enough the importance of the connection which Kant established between laugh-provoking stimuli and games. Certain elements which he detected in both domains, such as disinterestedness, motion, tension, deflation, deliberate creation of pretense, surprise, thwarted expectations, are essential to the rhythm which comic artistry strives to achieve.

Schopenhauer makes explicit the inocongruity theory of laughter. He maintained that "the cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the inocongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this inocongruity." Before discussing the nature of laughter, Schopenhauer had been discoursing upon human reason. Reason is to him the power of thinking by conceptions which are more or less abstract. The process of thought consists in forming generalizations, or in the subsumption of particular and individual objects under more general conceptions. Laughter occurs when the process of subsumption goes awry. When an individual object is placed by our thought into some category where it is strikingly out of place, laughter results.
Schopenhauer held that sense perceptions are always correct, thought processes subject to error. Although thought and reason are stimulated by sense perceptions, they are not as accurate, being removed from the concrete reality of things perceived. Laughter occurs when sensuous knowledge shows the inadequacy of reason: "This victory of knowledge or perception over thought affords us pleasure.... It must therefore be diverting to us to see this strict, untiring, troublesome governess, the reason, for once convicted of insufficiently."\(^{10}\) Although the name of Schopenhauer is not usually associated with laughter and joy, in *The World as Will and Idea* he revealed himself to be an astute student of comedy. Quotations from his book will be used later on to illustrate some of our arguments.

After Quintilian, Spencer was probably the only philosopher to suggest that laughter is a discharge of emotional tension. By claiming that laughter is caused by a "descending incongruity," Spencer meant that our mind, expecting something grave or lofty, is suddenly confronted instead by something trivial. We had a store of emotion to meet the sublime, and now this emotional charge is an amount of energy no longer needed and which must be disposed of in some way. Laughter is the mechanism for the discharge of this surplus energy, the normal flow of which had been checked by the incongruity which transferred our attention from the grand to the small.

In *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*, and in a somewhat different connection, Freud was to further investigate laughter as a de-tension mechanism. The sexual and aggressive impulses of our libido, or primitive unconscious, clamor for gratification. A good deal of energy is used in suppressing these urges rendered unacceptable by social living. If under the disguise of witticism, we can elude the censorship of our superego and gratify our libido, a certain saving of inhibitory energy will have been realized.
Laughter results from this economy of psychic expenditure.

Meredith explained his views in *An Essay on Comedy*. The Comic Spirit appeals primarily to the intellect and aims at the correction of folly. Wary of disproportion, it helps man to develop a social sense by means of "humanely malign" laughter. But Meredith elevates comedy to a lofty plane and his belief that the test of true comedy is to awaken "thoughtful laughter" or the "laughter of reason refreshed," is too limited and narrow. There is little room in his theory for the comedies which are to be examined in this essay.

Bergson looked on laughter as a purely intellectual affair which was also a utilitarian and socially significant phenomenon. An exponent of the "élan vital," Bergson's ideal was flexibility, elasticity, and adaptability. Life is "... continuité variée, progrès irréversible, unité indivisée."¹¹ Thus, the process of living, in itself, and the requirements of society, in addition, demand alertness and suppleness of mind and body. Rigid, repetitive, mechanical behavior represents an opposition to life's evolution, an incongruity in the midst of life's constant flux. It was on this contradiction that Bergson based his explanation of laughter. He maintains that we laugh when a person gives us the impression of being an object, or when we perceive "du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant."¹² Thus, Bergson's prototypes of the risible are the man-automaton, the puppet on strings, the jack-in-the-box, the distracted person.

Society, the defender of life's active essence, uses laughter to correct eccentricity and to enforce conformity to its norms. Society distrusts inelasticity of character, mind and body; it is a sign of activity unused or of an activity with separatist tendencies which detaches the individual from society's common center. Therefore, laughter, which is always the laughter of a social group,
humiliates the living behaving like the lifeless, the conscious like the unconscious; it censures every triumph of matter over life, every victory of inanimate mechanism over human free will.

In Bergson's estimation, comedy stands midway between art and life; it is a kind of artifice which imitates the risible elements of real life. Therefore, in order to arouse our laughter, the comic dramatist will endow his characters with the automatic, inflexible, absent-minded or unsociable behavior that renders real people ridiculous. Stage characters will be degraded and turned into puppets or animated mannerisms manipulated by the needs of their vice or by other characters. Consequently, we shall look down at them and laugh at their vagaries in the same way the social group laughs at the alien habits of its eccentrics.

According to Bergson, comedy seems to be in direct opposition to all the other arts. True art aims at producing something very particular or individual that can never be repeated. Comedy aims at the general, at depicting types we have encountered and will meet again. Further, comedy is not disinterested as genuine art is. It accepts social life; its intention is to correct and to instruct.

After reading diverse theories formulated from Plato down to Bergson, one is struck by the fact that so little allowance has been made for the play instinct in man and his delight in gaiety, for a holiday spirit with the absence of serious thought. Thinkers have often named the unexpected, the illogical, or the incongruous as laugh stimuli; yet, they forgot to state that these elements contribute a playful aspect to the world of laughter, giving it a happy sense of irresponsibility, an air of disarming inconsequentiality. Joyous and contagious unruliness is one of the prime appeals of laughter and comedy.
As we have seen, Kant touched on the association of laughter with games. Bergson, himself, discerned that childhood games and their mechanisms were at the core of laughter and comedy. For him, comedy was a sort of theatrical game imitating life's ridiculous elements. Yet, he never elaborated and fully incorporated this idea into his theory. To him, it was a foregone conclusion that laughter was a censor on behalf of the ongoing social order, condemning the sclerosis and the mechanization of man's vital flexibility. Yet, buoyant, playful laughter, reveling in its own pleasure, irrespective of any ulterior purpose, does exist.

It was in 1899, the same year Bergson published his essay on Le Rire as a series of three articles in the Revue de Paris, that Renouvier and Prat studied the importance of the playful element in laughter. The authors of La Nouvelle monadologie used Schopenhauer's theory as a point of departure. When reason is abruptly confronted by a contradiction between concept and representation, laughter is aroused. Thrown out of its habitual paths, unable to exercise the laws which normally govern its conduct, reason abdicates. It makes fun of its own prerogatives and plays the role of voluntary and conscious folly. This mental carnival is translated physiologically by laughter.

However, Dugas was the first to concentrate solely on the "nature ludique" of laughter. He proclaimed outright that humor belongs to a game-like world, a world of unreality. In his Psychologie du Rire, he maintained that the laughable is synonymous with the imaginary:

Le risible en effet peut être défini ou bien ce qui n'existe que dans la pensée, mensonges joyeux, imaginations folles, déformations du réel, caricatures, çantages, inventions pures, ou bien ce qui, existant en fait, est tenu néanmoins pour nul ou non avenu, est conçu comme n'ayant pas le droit d'exister, est regardé comme chimérique et faux, en dépit de sa réalité matérielle et sensible. En d'autres termes, tout peut être risible et rien ne l'est; cela dépend de l'angle sous
lequel on regarde les choses. Le point de vue d'où elles paraissent visibles est celui du jeu.\textsuperscript{13}

The fictitious is, in essence, contradictory to reality. "La contradiction est très justement regardée comme le principe du rire, en ce sens qu'elle est l'indice ou la preuve de l'irréalité, ce caractère essential des choses visibles.\textsuperscript{14} Contradictions introduce incertitude in our mind. All at once, it believes and does not believe in the reality of laughable objects. And laughter lasts only as long as our mind oscillates between reality and unreality. Once the object is definitely categorized as real or unreal, laughter stops. Some forty odd years later, Claude Saulnier in \textit{Le Sens du comique} was to comment further on this "jeu de bascule entre le réel et l'imaginé.\textsuperscript{15}

For Dugas, fiction is often created by exaggeration which engenders a contradiction of reality. Hence, with discernment, Dugas commented on Molière's characters as follows:

\begin{quote}
De tels personnages, en un sens très réels, n'arrivent pas cependant à se faire prendre au sérieux: on voit qu'ils existent, on ne veut pas, on ne peut pas y croire. Le contraste est trop fort, soit entre leur nature et la nature humaine, telle que communément on l'observe ou on la conçoit, soit entre les éléments dont leur propre caractère est formé.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

In Chapters V and VI, we shall study how Molière, through the use of exaggeration, affirms yet annuls the reality of his characters and dramatic situations.

Thus, by adopting a playful point of view, man has the power to endow reality with a chimerical quality. "Le rieur s'ar- roge le droit ... de juger toutes choses au gré de sa fantaisie et les juge volontiers extravagantes ou absurdes ... de les juger sous cette forme de notre humeur qu'on appelle l'enjouement, le jeu."\textsuperscript{17} In this way, the laugher feels superior because he frees himself
from the limitations of the external and real world. "Rire c'est se dégager de la réalité, planer au-dessus d'elle." Dugas considers laughter neither good nor evil in itself; it is asocial and amoral.

In 1902, the publication date of Dugas' *Psychologie du Rire*, James Sully published his *Essay on Laughter*, highly regarded by critics for its rich and sound scholarly information. Sully is also a partisan of the play theory of laughter. The playful mood gains access into our consciousness when a particular trait forces us to amuse ourselves with an object rather than consider it seriously. Laughter is the long forgotten child in us, responding with wonder to the new and the unexpected. It is also freedom caught and sung after restraint.

For Max Eastman, author of *Sense of Humor* and *Enjoyment of Laughter*, humor depends on a playful mood. No situation is amusing in itself; in order to laugh, we must be in the spirit of fun. When we are in that particular state of mind, our scale of values seems to change and we are able to laugh at the unpleasant, so long as it is not disagreeable enough to interfere with our playful attitude. Yet, an element of frustration, of failure, of deception must be present in order to provoke merriment. Laughter is a game which permits man to take disappointment lightly. Conscious of the ambiguous nature of laughter, Eastman calls it "playful pain."

More recently, in his *Technique et psychologie du comique*, Elie Auboin has called our attention to the fact that the game-like nature of humor has been neglected. Most theorists have explained laughter as a manifestation of profound and serious motivations or given it a utilitarian goal, such as the *castigat ridendo mores*. Although his theory owes much to incongruity, a slight departure from the norms, denoting inferiority in the object, Auboin sees laughter as being born out of the "réconciliation ludique" of two
irreconcilable elements. A reconciliatory relationship exists when we accept simultaneously two opposed points of view regarding the same object. "La qualité ludique" comes from the very extravagance of the reconciliation, a transparently obvious mixture of logic and absurdity that cannot be taken seriously.

In their own way, many authors had previously dealt with this binary structure or dual vision which is at the basis of the laughers' consciousness of the incongruous. Of late, Arthur Koestler has also explained laughter as a result of dual association or "bisociation" — a term referring to the collision of two incompatible contexts. His theory depends strongly upon both surprise and incongruity. His belief that malice, debasement of others, and aggressive-defensive self-assertion are components essential to the production of laughter makes him also a stout exponent of the superiority or degradation theory.

With Koestler's *Insight and Outlook*, published in 1949, it seems that we have rejoined Greek and Roman thought on laughter. Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian had spoken of incongruity, surprise and degradation. This circular motion invites us to formulate some conclusions about laughter which are useful guidelines for our study of Molière.

In the introductory pages of this survey, we stated that it is possible to reduce the major theories of laughter to one category. Based on the opinions presented, it can now be seen that this reduction is possible because most theories are variants or by-products of the principle of incongruity. For Plato the ridiculous person is he who is farthest from fulfilling the Delphic inscription; one whose lack of self-knowledge as well as his conceit make him appear incongruous to his entourage. As we pointed out, Plato was the initiator of the incongruity theory which was to be the keystone of the philosophy of laughter.
Incongruity, regardless of its varieties, is basically a breach in the usual order of things, a contrast between what is expected by convention and what we see before us. Incongruity is a departure, an exaggeration, even a violation of the laws, concepts, processes evolved out of man's experience. It disrupts the norms, our preconceived ideas of the way things should be. More specifically, incongruities are jolts which disturb well-worn thinking patterns, mental quirks that throw man off his balance for an instant: logical fallacies, collision of incompatible worlds, distortion, surprise, reversal of familiar values, etc., in short, anything that temporarily shatters implicit thought habits and associative automatisms.

Whether explicitly stated or not, physical and moral distortions, fallacies in thought, language, and ways of living have been viewed by most theorists as incongruous. Incongruous facts or attitudes have been described as markedly dissimilar or plainly contradictory to one another, sometimes they have been characterized by a lack of relevance, or by a clear-cut incompatibility or inconsistency between them; and lastly, they have been deemed as inappropriate or unsuited to their situations. Aspects of man's nature and behavior are judged incongruous because they pull him away from the ideals of physical and moral harmony, rationality, intelligent and flexible social adjustment of which he and/or his society conceive him capable. Against this background of normative expectations, the clumsy, unreasonable, malproportioned creature appears incongruous and ridiculous.

The superiority theory of laughter, immortalized by Hobbes, is a by-product of incongruity. The "sudden glory" which flushes our mind with the conviction of its own superiority in the presence of another's infirmities, failures, or misfortunes is provoked precisely by these very incongruities. Hobbes viewed mankind as in a perpetual state of war and, according to his philosophy,
the ideal man was the most competent wolf among wolves. Rational and successful efficiency is the ideal principle of behavior in a ruthlessly competitive society, unsucess being the incongruous and the laughable which nourishes our feeling of superiority. Without necessarily limiting this theory to Hobbes' view of humanity, we can see that other people's inferiorities, detected by the laughers, are judged as divergences from established standards.

Furthermore, in the dissonant, disparate world of the incongruous we can expect mental bedlam: bumps, tumbles, surprises, reversal or disappointment of expectations—in short, the unexpected. Therefore, this element of surprise, recognized as important in the inducement of laughter, can also be considered as a by-product of incongruity.

Incongruity, which contradicts principles of logic, thought habits, accepted norms of behavior, creates a sense of fun and frolic, a holiday mood. The playful spirit prompts us to snap our fingers in joyous defiance at the serious world of reality from which the unintelligible, the inconsistent, the capricious have been eliminated. Thus, the "théorie ludique" of laughter is also a by-product of incongruity.

To a large extent, our notion of the real depends on conventions sanctioned by our social group. These norms may have reference to the laws of efficient causation applied to observed phenomena, or to agreed-upon meanings given to sound patterns, our vocalizations being organized in turn by accepted principles of reasoning, syntax, and grammar. Standards may also be concerned with codes governing man's moral, social, and religious behavior. These normative systems help man to do business with the world on a stable, predictable level. They also develop in man definite expectations with reference to things, to his fellow men, and to himself. These preconceived ideas, inculcated in him by
his social environment, form his notion of reality.

Laughter-producing causes, namely incongruities, are fits and starts, leaps and bounds which disrupt the more or less orderly, static patterns of the norms on which our sense of reality is based. These disruptive tendencies, shifts, and displacements in our habits undermine, in a flash, our apprehension of the real. Fernandez has admirably summarized this point of view:

La fonction du rire est claire: il consiste à rompre cet accord avec les choses, cette adhésion au réel.... Tous ces procédés qui obtiennent le rire se ressemblent par l'effet qu'ils provoquent: ils introduisent brusquement en nous une vue de l'événement différente de celle que l'événement nous suggère, et même contraire. Or, nous sommes ainsi faits que nous ne pouvons avoir deux consciences opposées d'une même chose, du même point de vue et dans le même moment: d'où cette impression de glissement, de chute, d'évanouissement qui accompagne le rire. 19

However, perturbations inflicted on man's value systems are not amusing in themselves. Irrationality, surprise, exaggeration, degradation — almost any departure from a given norm of conduct can be pathetic or tragic. To perceive the amusing element, some measure of emotional neutrality toward these deviations is demanded. Oppressively grave or momentous incongruities arouse sympathy, admiration, indignation, or fear. These emotions indicate that the authenticity or the seriousness of the distortions are present to such a degree as to obviate laughter. If, on the other hand, our mind is led by a riot of fantasies and extravagances, it will have little leisure to think of the importance or consequences of the violations of the norms. Soon, these aberrations will appear as fictitious parts of a harmless game. Fictitious, playful objects lose their power to awaken any deep emotion or sympathetic identification. This emotional detachment enables the laughter to survey abnormalities at a safe distance, especially if he is granted, by a comic dramatist for example, a
God's eye-view of the predicament he is watching. From that altitude, the laugh can look down with amused tranquility upon a world of contradiction, irrelevance and incompatibility.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that incongruities, aimed at producing gusts of joy, must never violate our norms totally. For example, pure irrationality is not amusing. Alienation toward one's soul and one's world arouses pity, fear, or at least a malaise in the spectator. If incongruities are to be funny, they must reaffirm, by their very denial of it, the existence of an underlying congruity. In spite of deviations, there must be an explicit or implicit respect for standards.

In the following chapter, we shall endeavor to show that it is indeed "une étrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens." As he capitalizes on plights generated by the incongruous, the comic dramatist must also overcome by laughter the tears of things in the affairs of his characters.
NOTES ON CHAPTER II


12. Bergson, p. 35.


CHAPTER III

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON COMIC ARTISTRY

Although most theorists have used the terms "laughable" and "comic" interchangeably, we should like, in this present study, to disassociate the comic from the amusing and consider it as an artistic technique. As such, the comic aims at the liberation of laughter through the distortion, fragmentation, or diminution of reality. Indeed, Molière strays from the paths of reality; his dramatic situations and characters have few features in accord with real and normal human life and nature. Personages and incidents seem capriciously shuffled as in a game of cards; hopelessly tangled plots are magically resolved by chance; whittled down to a single human attribute, caricature-like characters are incredibly cunning or gullible. Aiming at effects manifestly unrealistic, through the use of hammer-like repetitions, persistent interruptions, asides, and other deliberate artifices, Molière abstracts dialogue away from the real language of men. In short, plots, characters and dialogue are frankly and plainly extravagant and improbable. With these invraisemblances Molière creates a world of make-believe which helps him to remold into merriment materials fraught with tragic potential. In this chapter, we propose to show, in a general way, how the comic playwright operates on the most repellent aspects of human experience in order to shape them into dramatic situations to which spectators can respond with laughter.

We have already seen in Chapter II how most laughter theorists place incongruity at the center of their analyses, maintaining that we laugh at incongruities born of man's all too human frailty. Plato saw that inadequate answers find acceptance in the
hearts of men, pointing up their capacity for being well deceived, Kant noted that man's judgment can be tricked into accepting nonsense cloaked with simulated logic, and Schopenhauer observed that man's reliance on reason leads, ironically, to the irrational. Aristotle and others drew our attention to man's physical weaknesses and moral inadequacies which make sport of his dignity. The sense of all such contradictions and anomalies as these is translated into concrete theatrical terms by the comic dramatist. In consequence, the very stuff of comedies is riddled with incongruities. Comic characters are constantly confronted by contradictions and discrepancies. Acquisition of truth about themselves and about their world leads them to a rude awakening: Sganarelle in Le Mariage forcé becomes aware of his plight just in time to find it is too late to change his situation. He is left to live in a world which travesties his vision of happiness. In George Dandin, truth is parodied by falsehood, appearances are everything, and Dandin's efforts to set matters straight are defeated by human deviousness. Besotted by the figments of a suspicious imagination, Sganarelle in Le Cucu imaginaire misinterprets what he perceives. From insufficient information, he makes snap judgments which propel him into all sorts of futile gyrations. Comedy stresses the incongruous distance that separates what characters are in fact from what they think they are, it draws our attention to the discrepancy existing between their intentions and deeds, their deeds and words, or their effort and some result quite different from that intended.

Yet incongruous situations, characterized by illusions triumphant, reason and truth travestied, expectations and efforts relegated to failure and nothingness, can be painful. They bespeak of life's deep disappointments. Incongruity, capable of producing dire emotions as well as side-splitting laughter, may be the structural genius of both tragedy and comedy. Self-deception can be amusing, but when phoney dreams bred by a money
culture manipulate the figure of Willy Loman, we have one of the great pathetic dramas of the American stage. Herbert Muller¹ and Northrop Frye² see incongruity at the base of both dramatic forms, stating it in terms of the hero's inclusion or exclusion from the established social order. In describing tragedy, D. D. Raphael³ and Albert Levi⁴ both point to the same basic incongruity: that between fate and human freedom. Writers on comedy such as Samuel Seward,⁵ James Feibleman,⁶ and Cyrus Hoy⁷ all stress the incongruous situations as the foundation of the comic form. As Kierkegaard observed, both "the tragic and the comic are the same, in so far as both are based on contradiction; but the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comical the painless contradiction."⁸ In Kierkegaard's opinion, a contradiction is painless when it can be viewed as cancelled because it seems provided with "a way out." Incongruity will provoke laughter so long as it is not serious, unalterable or final, a view endorsed by most philosophers and psychologists mentioned in Chapter II. Long before Kierkegaard, Socrates had observed that the genius of tragedy and comedy is the same. His comments, reported in a flippant manner at the end of the Symposium, have been taken, however, as a joking paradox, dashed off at daybreak after a night of talking and drinking. If Aristophanes and Agathon were about to go under the table, we can assume perhaps, with Thomas Mann, that Socrates was at least legally sober. Agreeing with Socrates' thesis that tragedy and comedy have a common origin, Mann wrote: "... a change of lighting suffices to make one into the other."⁹

Molière's comic artistry lends an appealing light of fantasy to revolting events as it abstracts reality from the grimmest facts of human experience. If these occurrences were in comedies realistically presented, we would find these plays terrifying, so full are they of violence, deceit, and injustice. The world of Molière is rough: outrageous surprises lie in wait at every corner, pugilistic activities crop up at frequent intervals, there is pain,
worry and trickery everywhere. Molière's plays are peopled with opportunists who literally have no use for moral rules. Swindlers like Mascarille, Scapin, and Sbrigani operate solely on principles of resourcefulness and efficiency. With glee and pride, these scoundrels cheat and deceive their fellow men at every turn. At times, these plays become paranoid dreams resembling archaic scapegoat rituals of expulsion. An innocent victim of weird and malevolent experiences, M. de Fourceaugnac is finally driven out of a world he cannot fathom. His life has been pushed out of shape by people and circumstances.

If other Molièresque characters refuse to be flotsam and jetsam on the tide of events, their good intentions and purposeful acts swing back like a boomerang on their own heads. In Le Mariage forcé, the more frantically Sganarelle seeks to avoid his fate, the more surely does he encompass it, and the cruel irony of his situation is confirmed by the fact that he himself has paved the way to his affliction. **George Dandin** also deals with the incongruity of human fate, focused in ironic perspectives. As Dandin tries to have his parents-in-law witness the unbecoming behavior of his wife, she repeatedly manages to turn the evidence against him. At the end of the play, Dandin is left with the bitter realization that facts can be manipulated to confirm truth or lies. The relation of truth to falsehood has been reversed and, while his milieu brands him as an imaginary cuckold, Dandin knows in fact that he will soon be an affirmed one. He, too, must acknowledge that his own folly is responsible for his plight: "... vous l'avez voulu, George Dandin, vous l'avez voulu ... vous avez justement ce que vous méritez."

As it can be readily observed, the art of the comic dramatist involves a paradox. He wants his audience to derive pleasure from what might logically cause displeasure. In short, he makes us laugh at the workings of evil. Instead of being shocked,
or annoyed, or sympathetically concerned, when confronted by the soury tricks played upon Molière's characters, spectators feel actual delight and express their feeling in unfeigned laughter. It is with these plays, which set before us the cruel essence of an ironic universe, that Molière brought the house down with laughter. Some of the above-named plays have been and still are among the public's favorites; spectators continue to laugh unmercifully at the predicaments of characters defeated by self-delusions and by the deceitful practices of quick-witted rascals. As his materials, the comic dramatist uses raw life forces: all kinds of ego struggles brought about by the dynamics of living, engendering a series of contests, injuries and retaliations. The motivation of these conflicts is always the same: the individual's ego-centric affirmation, or search for pleasure, self-preservation, and domination over his environment. In L'Étourdi, Lélie must have his adored Célie and no rogneries will be spared by Mascarille in an effort to fulfill his master's desire. In turn, Mascarille, servant but "fourbe sublime," affirms his mastery over his social superiors. In Le Médecin malgré lui, Sganarelle pummels his bothersome wife who then seeks revenge, and in L'Amour médecin another Sganarelle selfishly rules marriage out of his daughter's life in order to keep her and the money destined for her dowry.

In the world of comedy, wish gratification is usually sought by means of deception. A comic plot is inconceivable without a deceiver. He may deceive others, he may deceive only himself, he may do both but his goal is always the same: to have things his own way. To satisfy his desires, he becomes a liar, a thief, a masquerader; all forms and shades of hypocrisy, affectation and conceit are used. However, it must not be forgotten that these manifestations of aggression and deceit have been censored, long ago, in self-defense, by society. Propelled by aggression and the will to live, natural man is prone to live at the
expense of others in order to ensure his organic unity, growth, and self-preservation. In individual development and satisfaction, the accent is on egoism. Unrestrained instinctual gratification leads man to attack and conquer other organisms with ruthless opportunism. Under such circumstances, he operates solely on the bio-psychological principle that "all life feeds on life" — a force which group living has had to regulate and repress as much as possible with the institution of restrictions. Man's cultural history is an unending struggle to overcome his instinctual egoistic drives, to harness their energy to cooperative social purposes. Civilization cannot exist without the regulation of egoistic instincts.

Then, how is the comic artist going to unleash laughter out of this taboo material? As we know, real transgression of the socially forbidden creates fear and unhappiness — an emotional state which paralyzes laughter. Therefore, the comic artist must metamorphose the forbidden into the licit by transforming the real into the unreal. As will be explained at greater length in Chapter IV, deception, for example, becomes a game. "While it is in progress all is movement, change, alternation, succession, association, separation." Not following a single, uninterrupted course, the evil of deceit does not gather momentum; it is dispersed by a profuse riot of shifting situations leading nowhere, as in L'Étourdi. Most of these loosely-connected episodes are self-refuting: the deceiver is deceived, trickery is proved futile and inoffensive. Associated with incongruous situations which nullify themselves, such as disguise, cross-purposes, dubious adventures arising from unlikely situations, inverted roles, situation reversals, exaggerations, etc., evil loses its reality. Caught in the movement of assertion and negation in plot and characters, it becomes inconsequential.

The comic dramatist does not pretend to construct plots
conforming to a cogent system of causes and effects; on the contrary, he reserves the right not to be hide-bound by considerations of logic and verisimilitude. Often, he builds a loose-jointed structure in which he can incorporate as many improbable mishaps or unbelievable windfalls as he needs, all designed to keep the dramatic machinery moving, puppets dancing, spectators laughing. Therefore, how could the spectator take seriously this flip-flop world, so contrary to the logic operating in the realm of human actions? In the world of comedy, logical coherence between motives and actions, between acts and consequences is broken. Scapin's motives for beating Géronte are flimsy; then, if the master swears vengeance, the threat of dire punishment never matures, the consequences of Scapin's misdeeds are magically dissolved in the general amnesty granted at the end of the play. Thus, confronted by a series of dramatic situations which cancel each other out, or collapse under the sheer weight of their own extravagance, the spectator limits his affective participation, conscious as he is of looking at a game. In the open and relaxed world of comedy, the spectator's mind can play happily and freely with mock evil and social taboos.

The game-like atmosphere of comedy, inviting spectators to free themselves from the reality of serious living, inevitably leads to irreverence. Comedy flouts traditionally respected values, comic characters care little about the Golden Rule or the Ten Commandments. In Monsieur de Pourcelsgagnac, Nérine and Shrigani congratulate themselves on their unscrupulous skills in getting along in the world; Mascarille upbraids Lélie for his sense of honesty and honor and Scapin calls justice and law enforcement "l'ingratitude du siècle." These impieties, appealing to the spectators' urge to misbehave, provide a vicarious release from social restraints, allowing harmless gratification of impulses which have to be repressed daily. Under the sacrilegious spell of comedy, spectators reclaim an inward freedom of expression for
their natural selves.

As stated earlier in this chapter, any society begins with the limitation or repression of man's instinctual gratification. History, anthropology, and psychology all testify to this fact. Both, Darwin in *The Descent of Man* and Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* pointed out, each in his own way, that the price of civilization is the imposition of a restrictive pattern on the expression of aggressive and instinctual drives. The social group, like the individual, is subjected to a superego, consisting of standards enforced by legal and ethical systems as well as by a sense of dread, arising from the fear of ostracism. As is to be expected, conflicts arise between men's natural impulses and the demands of their culture; therefore, just as the individual yearns at times to overthrow the repressive tyranny of his authoritarian conscience, society seeks to loosen temporarily the grip of its restrictive cultural superego. Since time immemorial, feasts, carnivals, orgies of all kinds have provided civilizations with outlets for man's irrational and unruly libidinous forces. It is in such merry-making affairs as the kômos, when revelers gamboled in animal disguises, dancing, singing, heaping abuse upon those standing by, that scholars, such as A. W. Pickard-Cambridge and others before him, have searched for the roots of kômoidia, of comic drama. These festive processions have been linked with magic rites for securing the fertility of the fields or of the human species and Francis M. Cornford, in *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, points to invocation and abuse as the basic elements of comedy. He considers ancient comedy as an art born of some sort of sacrifice followed by a feast. These ceremonies, assumed to be fertility rites, were associated with the killing of the old king, symbolizing the sterility of age, and the initiation of the young king. This death and initiation ceremonial seemed to have coincided with some well marked change of season, possibly the death of the old year and the birth of spring. Connected with
these rites was the expulsion of evil from the community: a scapegoat, animal or man, pronounced guilty of tribal sins, was expelled. Group redemption was probably followed by a period of license during which social restraints were thrown aside; transgressions, short of the gravest, were allowed to go unpunished. From these tribal celebrations, characterized by savagery and joy, evolved comic as well as tragic drama. The cruelty that lurks beneath Molière's laughter bears perhaps a vestigial connection with the pain inflicted upon the old king and the scapegoat amid a people rejoicing at the rebirth of their power and self-esteem. Be that as it may, these sacrifice-feast rituals seemed to have encompassed some of the fiendish elements deemed necessary by Hobbes, Ludovici, Rapp and others to raise that gleeful malice, called laughter. The tribe felt superior and triumphantly secure at the sight of victims defiled by the infirmities of old age or by communal sins. With sacrificial murder and ostracism, the tribe reaffirmed its dominion over death and evil.

In the numerous theories of laughter that have been suggested since Plato, the element of aggression, whether manifested as malice, derision, self-assertion or an absence of sympathy with the victim of humor, appears as the most persistent. The comic dramatist, intuitively aware of the emotional dynamics of laughter, stimulates aggressive reactions in his spectators. It is this element of detached malice which separates comedy from tragedy. Sympathy, aggression's opposite, can turn a comic character or situation into tragic ones. However diluted, sublimated, or unconscious, aggression must be aroused by comedy in a dose sufficient to keep spectators from experiencing an emotional identification with the characters. If civilized humor has lost the brutal animosity it once had in antiquity or biblical times, as evidenced by texts in the Iliad or in The Old Testament, it contains nonetheless an aggressive component. It is the mortification,
discomfort or hoaxing of Molière's characters which arouses our laughter. These situations stimulate aggressive urges curtailed by social and moral conventions, and also provide outlets for their discharge through reversal or deflation mechanisms. The tension is created and sustained by a situation, it keeps the spectator going along a certain direction up to the point where an abrupt switch-over takes place. The aggressive charge, left hanging in the air by the disruption of the situation which excited it, has to be discharged. Laughter provides the release mechanism and, according to psychologists, man finds pleasure in relieving tension, regardless of the latter's origin, be it hunger or sex. Spencer and Freud, it will be recalled, had described laughter as a discharge mechanism for redundant energy.

Thus, impulses inhibited by social conditioning find inoffensive satisfaction. Our cultural superego demands that we love our neighbor as ourselves, but this may be too lofty an obligation for man, neglecting as it does the aggressive cravings of his nature. For society, however, the individual member's happiness is incidental, the important aim being the creation of group unity. In spite of social pressures, which disregard man's search for pleasure, the individual continues to seek wherever he can gratification for his frustrated libidinous urges. Thus, in order to defend itself from the potent beast that lurks within each of its members, society must permit cathartic experiences through which potentially dangerous emotions are harmlessly discharged. Throughout the ages, theater has provided a safety valve for repressed feelings which otherwise might break social bonds with violence. As Alcides exercises his stick on Sganarelle's back in *Le Mariage forcé*, we shriek with laughter. Alcides is doing what we all would like to do when our fellow men become obstacles to our will. We roar at this blatant transgression of the Golden Rule, thereby vicariously venting our unused
aggression as well as cleansing ourselves of resentment felt toward social restraints. In terms of Freud's analysis of humor, vital energy normally cooped up in the service of inhibitions bursts out in festive liberty.

To digress for a moment, Nathan A. Scott and John Crowe Ransom both point out another therapeutic aspect of comedy: the purgation of man's debilitating awareness that this world is contingency and absurdity incarnate. Man, continually astonished or disconcerted by what things and people, plans and dreams have become, discovers that what he had set his heart on has passed away either suddenly or by gentle transformation. Finding at times everything ridiculously incongruous, man feels beaten and deceived. Therefore, comedy, dealing as it does with the ludicrous, arouses in the spectator the sense of the ridiculous in order that it may be worked off and expelled. This cathartic theory of comedy is supported by the Tractatus Coislinianus: "Comedy is an imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect ... through pleasure and laughter effecting the purgation of the like emotions." From passages in the Poetics and the Rhetoric, it has long been thought by scholars that Aristotle did produce a treatise, now lost, on comedy, as comprehensive and systematic as his analysis of the forms of tragedy. Therefore, in an effort to reconstruct Aristotle's views on comedy, Lane Cooper treats the Tractatus as part of the Aristotelian tradition. From the contents of this important vestige of a theory of comedy that has come down to us from the Greeks, Cooper deems it reasonable to suppose that Aristotle also conceived of comedy as a cathartic experience. Of this there is no indubitable proof, but in the light of what students of laughter have observed, it seems to be a good guess. Theorists have repeatedly pointed out that we laugh at the shattering of an expected pattern, whether it involves man's physical appearance, his actions, thoughts or language. So, as comedy lays
bare the silly, preposterous, utterly absurd behavior of its characters, we may be laughing not only at them but laughing away the uneasiness accumulated in us by our own foolish deviations from the norms. With honest roars of delight we may also be rejecting some of the disturbing affirmations that comedy makes about life, and which somehow seem to agree with our intuitive sense of how things are. As joyful, hearty and merry as our response may be, the comic form shows nonetheless that in the jumble of existence there are many a knock and many a grief; people live at cross purposes; the malicious rogue drains his victims by flattering their pretentious passions. Out there, in that unreal and harmless world of comedy, the dramatist has shown that life is the condition and source of all evil. However, unable to accept such a threatening truth, we seek to recover our equilibrium by reasserting in laughter, against all odds, our blind will to live.

But to return to the violence of Molière's world, as shown in Le Mariage forcé, no guilt whatever troubles our laughing at Sganarelle, beaten as he is for wanting to liberate himself from the burden of his own folly. Through selective and purposeful exaggeration, Molière has foreshortened to near absurdity Sganarelle's conduct. An over-reacher, unable to accept the limitations imposed on man's amorous activities by old age, Sganarelle pretends to seek insight into his problem; yet, his protestations quite gainsay his practice. Psychically deaf, Sganarelle is heedless of any advice which does not encourage his folly. So blindly stupid is he that he interprets people's derisive smiles as honest and joyful approbation of his prospective marriage. His shortcomings deprive him of dignity and minimize his value; Sganarelle, the man, is changed into the comic mask, considered by Aristotle as the arch-example of the ludicrous, "something ugly and distorted, without causing pain."¹⁷ Sganarelle's behavior, riddled as it is with contradictions,
represents a sort of artistically wrought interruption in the
normal patterns which govern our consciousness, our notion of
sanity and reality. Sganarelle displays but few of the common-
sense qualities generally expected from ordinary men in everyday
life; the very incongruity of his deameanor transforms him into
an artistic target shaped by Molière for our scorn and mockery.
Fernandez points out that Sganarelle's hopelessly foolish be-
havior "le retranche de la communauté des esprits. La raison se
désintéresse du personnage, c'est avec une conscience détachée
que nous le regarderons souffrir." The essential unreality
which underlies the personage allows us to laugh at his misfor-
tunes. We are not horrified because we know it is make-believe.
We laugh because of disbelief; we are sufficiently detached.

Gestalt psychologists advance quite an impressive mass
of experimental evidence to confirm that the conscious, rational
mind constantly projects ordered and articulate structures on
what it observes, rejecting breaks made in everyday molds of
perception, thought and language, or remolding these intrusions
to make them fit into accepted patterns. These mental mecha-
nisms stem from man's biological need to adjust to his surround-
ings. His observing, rational mind strives to eliminate distor-
tions, ambiguities, contradictions, incoherence in order to ar-
rive at the unchanging and constant properties in things and
people. These constancies are useful for a rapid and reliable
recognition of reality which helps man to find his bearings in
the world. It is on this acquired sense of constancy that man
builds his notion of reality, his norms of behavior and, as we
have seen in Chapter II, innocuous departures from the norms baf-
fle man into laughter. Therefore, it would seem that the comic
dramatist aims deliberately at twisting or breaking the stream
of our rational and everyday consciousness. As we have just
stated, he will endow characters with qualities so contradictory
to our familiar conception of a human being that it will be impossible to apply our usual ways of thinking or perceiving to what is presented to us. As we are unable to articulate and harmonize these unfamiliar aspects into familiar patterns, the mental energy held ready for this effort becomes useless and is spent in laughter.

These incongruities never violate totally the limits of rationality and are always interwoven with an underlying congruity, otherwise we would perceive them as distasteful abnormalities. They do bear, however, some resemblance to the irrational contents of dreams. A dream image contains, for example, several totally unrelated things, usually separated by time and space in our waking life and classified by reason in different thought compartments. There is something akin to a dream-like fusion in the Sganarelle of *Le Médecin malgré lui*. Two consecutive Sganarelles are seen from different angles merging into one single simultaneous view: one who refuses money while the other extends his hand to grasp the gold. Gestalt psychologists maintain that the rational, conscious mind cannot achieve such a feat as simultaneous perception of different and competing elements, one or the other is selected, not both. Therefore, the presentation of a simultaneous vision of two different attitudes becomes a laughter-raising effect. Again, in dreams, a part no longer contained by the whole breaks out and invades the whole dream picture, usually startling us awake. Through exaggeration, the comic dramatist imitates this dream-like distortion; he enlarges a trait, allowing it to grow and overwhelm the total personality of his character. These distortions, which suggest another sort of reality accepted only in sleep, when reason relaxes its control and censorship, probably prompted Bergson to note a similarity between *le comique* and dreams — an excellent idea which he never developed.
Detachment from everyday reality is further enhanced by the sensual delights found in the resources of spectacular elements such as décor, costumes, music and dance. This visual and auditive treat contributes much to the mood of playfulness, to the festive climate which comic artistry seeks to create. Romain Rolland has stressed, and rightly so, the role played by music in Molière’s comedies:

Elle [la musique] enveloppe le cerveau d’une atmosphère d’ivresse où les êtres vivants peu à peu se déforment, sortent du monde réel, prennent des proportions fantastiques....

La musique n’ajoute pas peu d’ampleur à cette magnificence du rire; surtout elle le rend possible; elle désarme la critique; elle livre la raison aux follies des sens. En même temps elle adoucit l’ironie; elle enlève à la parole râleuse ce qu’elle a toujours d’un peu sec; elle enrichit le spectacle de tout le luxe mondain des danses et des sons.20

Thus, the grip of the merciless and perverse fate pursuing Dandin was relaxed by the songs and dances of a pastoral comedy presented during the intermissions. As George Dandin’s second act began, the first seemed somewhat far away; spectators, entertained by the pretty laments of lovelorn shepherds, had probably forgotten George Dandin’s plot. The repetition of the same situation from act to act enabled the spectators to find their bearings easily while the pastoral dispersed the cumulative effects of Dandin’s misfortunes. In addition, Dandin’s repeated defeats when pitted against human crookedness took place in Versailles’ sumptuous décor that drew the spectators into a world of make-believe; the dazzling magnificence of Le Grand divertissement royal de Versailles was the perfect illusory frame for the fantasy world of Molière (illusion = in lusio = entry into play).21

In his thought-provoking, but regrettably too short a
book, entitled Molière, Léon Chanoeral pointed out that the use of spectacle by Molière was not a mere concession to le bon plaisir du Roi. Royal magnificence and munificence afforded Molière the opportunity to investigate new theatrical possibilities; therefore, he must have welcomed the obligation to produce sur commande for festivities at Versailles or Chambord. Indeed, spectacular effects are not apart from the playwright's own aesthetic values; the element of pure show is a ready auxiliary, for it serves to heighten or scatter feelings, whether of joy or horror. As we shall see in Chapter VI, Molière often utilizes an outburst of music, songs and dances to prevent us from thinking about the unhappy future of his hero. In other plays, such as Le Bourgeois gentilhomme and Le Malade imaginaire, the life of the play, by virtue of its compounded buffoonery, explodes into a spectacular ending which carries absurdity to a sublime height. As noted in Chapter II, Baudelaire appreciated the effectiveness of these denouements, and so did Louis Jouvet. Opposing the scholarly activity that has sought to "bourgeoiser le théâtre classique, et en particulier Molière," by accumulating an unwieldy mass of material to prove that his comedies are filled with logical inconsistencies, psychological improbabilities, structural flaws and the like, Jouvet proclaimed that "il y a une certaine impertinence à parler de la pauvreté des dénouements de Molière; ils sont de la plus parfaite et de la plus pure convention théâtrale." To Jouvet, "une comédie de Molière est un conte irréel ..." built on theatrical conventions and the denouement is "cette irisation finale et soudaine ... la dernière des ondulations que fait dans l'eau la chute de cette pierre à quoi l'on peut comparer l'attaque de ses pièces." We must not overlook the contribution made by costumes to that special and unreal world of Molière, situated "dans l'entre-deux du ciel et de la terre." In his Molière acteur, Léopold Lacour has assembled whatever extant comments there are,
made by the press or by private individuals, on the costumes worn by Molière and members of his troupe. Lacour quotes also from 
descriptions found in the inventory itemizing the stage property 
owned by the troupe, at the time of Molière's death.

From descriptions of Mascarille's costume in Les Précie-
euses ridicules, such as the one written by Mlle Desjardins, we 
can surmise the care taken by Molière to have stage garments sug-
gest visually what speeches and movements express in words and 
actions. The costume of Mascarille, a grossly exaggerated model 
of real marquis' clothes, expresses the absurd, the grandiose and 
fraudulent pretense of Mascarille, the valet turned marquis. 
Mascarille's sartorial being is the visual rendition of his in-
congruous position which distorts him not only morally but visu-
ally. In the same way as Molière fashioned his characters by ex-
tending a trait here, heightening a quality there, or intensifying 
a tone, so did he eliminate or underscore elements in costumes to 
have them express the characteristic quality necessary to the 
dramatic moment. Mascarille, disguised in grotesque clothes that 
hide his human shape, becomes a walking, rustling pattern of 
fluttering ribbons and laces. His affectedly ridiculous dress 
is an artistically contrived deformity that separates him from 
the real world of men. This bizarre assortment of clothes lends 
unreality to Mascarille's person, allowing spectators to laugh 
freely at the undeserved thrashing he receives at the hands of La 
Grange and Du Croisy. Sartorial incongruity is also reflected in 
M. de Pourceaugnac's clothes. Referring to a description found 
in the property inventory, Lacour states that Pourceaugnac's 
clothes with their reds, yellows, blues, and greens must have ri-
vealed with the brilliant plumage of a South American ara. Com-
menting also on this fantastic color scheme, Fernandez writes: 
"Molière, dans Pourceaugnac ... dépayssait, je pense, comme un 
clown nous dépayse. A le voir seulement, tout devenait permis;" 29

This extravagant costume prevents spectators from identifying
themselves with its wearer. Pourceauignac, the unwanted outsider, can be plunged and spun in a whirlpool of bad dreams, flung from side to side until the madness of the action compels him to flight — all to the delight of the audience.

In their own way, these artistic sartorial forms possess that same arresting quality found by modern Western man in the tattooed and painted bodies of primitive people. These colorful and complex designs disrupt visual habits built over the years by our perception of everyday surroundings where forms are seen not as abstractions but stubborn facts embodied in reality. Any element which contributes to the theatrical experience, whether it be gesture, word, setting or costume, seeks to establish a design with its own movement and rhythm, its own tone and tempo that are the soul of the magical experience it wishes to create.

For there is magic in the air. In the world of Molière miracles occur, the dead come to life, the living are reduced to sounds. There are all kinds of contradictions, impossible substitutions, recognitions and absurd distortions which follow one another without much reason and logic. Yet, the documents assembled by Lacour show that Molière, with the help of his troupe, unified these excesses and improbabilities into a dynamic theatrical experience, accompanied by whirling gusts of public joy. It was all conjured out of a wink, a gesture, the way Molière strolled and grimaced and careened across the stage. A magician, he could invent a world with a crook of his finger, an artist, he could create people with a modulation of his voice disembodied by acting skill. The most cursory reading of his plays makes us aware of a dialogue stamped by question-answer-interruption patterns, staccato successions, and arithmetical crescendos. It is probably safe to assume that, through expert movements, mimicry and time sense, Molière gave these verbal ceremonies a ritualistic acting form. In short, he sought to establish, as he had with
costumes and character delineation, that strong stylistic outline that divides his creation from reality and heightens it into art.

Here we have presented in a general way some of the salient elements of comic artistry; subsequently, we shall study a few of these aspects in greater depth in order to understand more fully how "le premier farceur de France" waged an artistic war on reality.
NOTES ON CHAPTER III


21 Huizinga, p. 11.


24 Jouvet, p. 294.

25 Jouvet, p. 291.

26 Jouvet, p. 294.

27 Jouvet, p. 292.


29 Fernandez, p. 206.
CHAPTER IV

THEATRICAL GAMES

Man is an active, dynamic creature; he must be doing, hunting whatever is necessary for self-preservation. His survival depends upon motion and change. He often meets unexpected threats or obstacles which must be overcome. Life is driving, advancing, pursuing, attacking. Being a struggle, it demands that man fight well and defeat his opponent. If the struggle for supremacy is deemed too dangerous, life's instinct propels him to flight. Throughout much of his existence he must keep moving with agility, forward or backward, to pursue or escape. However, man's sense of self-preservation may compel him to adjust. Adjustment is a source of creativeness, requiring man to fashion himself anew through self-control. He may become more objective in his observations and more alert to opportunities; exploited with ingenuity, these can be turned into assets. Observation and psychological intuition help man to guess his adversary's reactions. With imagination, he can manipulate his opponent with strategic moves and trap him with deceptive schemes. This combination of biological vitality and mental adroitness is summed up by Susanne K. Langer: "Mankind has its rhythm of animal existence — the strain of maintaining a vital balance amid the alien and impartial chances of the world...." Then she goes on to explain that "the process of living is incomparably more complex" for man, "his instinctual life modified in almost every way by thought — a brainy opportunism in face of an essentially dreadful universe." Man keeps seeking a satisfactory equilibrium or "life-feeling," and Miss Langer maintains that "this human life-feeling is the essence of comedy."
Games of any kind, whether they be boxing, poker, or comedy, reflect this biological "brainy opportunism," redirected in socially acceptable outlets. Deft utilization of favorable circumstances, deceptive strategies, suspicious appraisals of worth and character, and bold aggression are acted out in the ring amid the hue and cry of a crowd, in the atmosphere of blue smoke and blue chips of a gambling night, or on the stage as the audience laughs boisterously at the bluffing tactics of comedians. Gains and losses, the feeling of joy and pain associated with them, force and fraud as means of attaining or recouping one's fortune are the very stuff of games. Since we believe that Molière's comedies abstract man's deepest needs from reality and reincarnate them in an artistic game, we should like to analyze some of the characteristic elements which organize the form of games and comedies.

Johan Huizinga, in his influential book, maintains that "play is one of the main bases of civilization." Elements of it exist in all aspects of culture, in the arts, philosophy, religion, law, science and even war. "All are rooted in the primeval soil of play." A voluntary activity, executed within fixed limits of time and place according to agreed-upon rules, play is enjoyed by the participants who are conscious of the fact that they are "playing" and not engaging in the necessary behavior of ordinary life. On the one hand, play fosters a prudent evaluation of available resources, permitting the player to anticipate and bank on foreseeable results; on the other, it encourages a quick apprehension and exploitation of any stroke of luck, thus eliciting the desire to take risks. Play is governed by voluntary and freely accepted restrictions, thus creating a temporary but stable and orderly universe. Yet, within the limits of this legislated world, the player seeks a certain freedom from the rigorous application of rules. Therefore, play represents liberty and invention, fantasy and discipline; it stimulates ingenuity and
refinement. "Standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life," and performed in consecrated places, play proposes and propagates patterns which govern contests. Competitive actions regulated by accepted rules have furnished abstract structures after which man has modeled the forms of his cultural institutions and artistic modes of expression. Huizinga considers play a source of conventions which have allowed man to impose orderly patterns on nature's anarchy.

Equating competition with play, Huizinga has naturally emphasized the agonistic element that existed and still exists in man's cultural and artistic life. Using the anthropological research of George Davy, Huizinga shows how societies may operate on an entirely competitive basis. In British Columbia, among the Kwakiutl tribes, a group of Indians makes gifts on a large scale to another for the express purpose of showing its superiority, placing the recipient group under the obligation of reciprocating and surpassing the gifts received. This donative feast, called the potlatch, dominates the entire tribal life: its ceremonies, its law, its art. Huizinga goes on to remind his reader that in archaic and medieval societies poetry was the object of veritable verbae and musical tournaments; further, since antiquity, lawsuits have always been considered as an agon, "a contest bound by fixed rules and sacred in form, where the two contending parties invoked the decision of an arbiter." Basing his argument on research made into the contents of the Sacred Books of the East, Huizinga points out that since time immemorial search for truth and knowledge has taken the form of riddle-solving competitions. Greek philosophy had also a tradition of challenge in the forms of riddles. In the Hellenistic world, "the philosopher from the earliest times to the late Sophists and Rhetors, always appeared as a typical champion. He challenged his rivals, he attacked them with vehement criticism and extolled his own opinions as the only true ones.... In style and form the earliest samples
of philosophy are polemical and agonistic."\textsuperscript{6} An integral part of the essential fabric of Greek life, drama was also related to playful contests. "Comedy and tragedy alike come under the heading of competition, which, as we have seen, is in all circumstances to be called play. The Greek dramatists composed their works competitively for the feast of Dionysus. Though the State did not organize the competition it had a hand in the running of it.... The whole public understood all the allusions and reacted to the subtleties of style and expression, sharing the tension of the contest like a crowd at a football match.... The actual matter of the drama was also agonistic. The comedy, for instance, debated an issue or attacked a person or a point of view, as in the case of Aristophanes deriding Socrates or Euripides.\textsuperscript{7}

In these combats of wits, the participants are motivated by the ambition to exhibit their abilities, the desire to vanquish the adversary in a public contest, and by the wish to be praised and honored for their excellence. Man plays to feel the thrill of accomplishment, to create, to conquer, to impress and to win approval. Spencer had already associated play with man's need to spend excess energy as well as with his urge for rivalry and the love of victory. Anticipating the work of many recent psychologists, he further stated that play serves as a compensatory device through which satisfaction is obtained when the normal expression of natural impulses is impossible. In \textit{The Principles of Psychology} he writes: "This love of conquest, so dominant in all creatures because it is the correlative of success in the struggle of existence, gets gratification from a victory in chess in the absence of ruder victories."\textsuperscript{8}

In \textit{Les Jeux et les hommes}, Roger Caillois pays tribute to the profundity and originality of Huizinga's thesis, that play is a contest and, as such, the mainspring of civilization.\textsuperscript{9} However,
Caillois thinks that Huizinga's reduction of play to competition is a bit narrow. Seeking to enlarge the characterization of play's nature, Caillois classifies games in four principal categories: competitive games or tests of skills, exemplified by athletic events and governed by the *agon* principle; chance games, such as roulette gambling, with players passively awaiting the outcome of the wagers which depend on *alea*, or Lady Luck; illusionistic or symbolic games epitomized by theatrical experiences with *mimicry* producing numberless imitations and disguises, and lastly games ruled by *ilinx*, speed rotations or falls; *ilinx*, operating in mad toboggan rides for example, aims through physiological and psychological perturbations at the induction of intoxicating sensations of vertigo. We would like to borrow Caillois's classification in order to analyze some of Molière's plays as theatrical games directed by the principles of *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*. Since these terms are to be applied only to the theater, their meaning will differ from that of Caillois who defines them by examining a wide range of play activities subject to rules at times not applicable to drama. However, these principles do offer handy analytic tools which will help us toward characterizing some of the salient features found in Molière's comedies.

**CONFRONTATION OF AGON AND ALEA**

In Chapter III, we noted that swindling schemes and lies are the very stuff of which comic plots are made. A personage relies essentially on deceit in an effort to be victorious over those who are obstacles to the gratification of his desires. Deception incorporates an *agon*, a struggle. Cunning, premeditated or improvised moves, overt hostility are part of this contest which offers occasions for characters to demonstrate their inventive power and strategical skills.
One of the dilemmas presented in L'Étourdi is that of a young man, Lélie, in love and insolvent, who turns to his scheming valet for salvation. The slave girl and the money needed for her purchase are to be won at someone else's expense: the slave keeper, the boy's father or his allies — all resisting Lélie's attempts to obtain the charming girl. Of course, the father has other and more respectable marital ambitions for his son. Hence, paternal and other kinds of opposition must be overthrown by Mascarille, the servant, who has only one weapon at his disposal, namely trickery. Consequently, an active campaign is carried on by the unprincipled rogue who tries to outsmart the father and his friends. The love theme is of secondary importance and serves primarily as a pretext for knavery; it also lends an aura of benevolence to Mascarille's mischievous activities. Thus, throughout the greater part of the dramatic action, the spectator's interest is focused far less on the lovers and their problems than on the success or failure of Mascarille's deceitful plans and on the manner in which this shrewd, self-confident trickster tries to extricate himself from difficulties. Being entrusted with hatching the schemes, Mascarille becomes the architect of the plot. Skilled in the perception of the needs of his opponent, Mascarille is quick to turn them into advantages which enable him to control the situation and achieve his own end. He seduces his enemy by ingratiating himself with a display of false friendliness and sympathy. He eagerly offers his help but his actions are never succeeded by the expected consequences. His duplicity renders antithetical the relation between cause and effect. Pandolphe, Lélie's father, wants to get rid of Célie, the slave, who is no fit match for his son. Knowing this, Mascarille urges Pandolphe to finance the kidnapping of the girl. Of course, the outcome of the scheme is to be the opposite of that bargained for by Pandolphe. Once the girl is purchased from Trufaldin, her keeper, she will be entrusted to Mascarille who will deliver her to his master, Lélie.
Mascarille acts well in emergencies, adjusting quickly to a changing world. Having hoodwinked Trufaldin with fantastic stories, Mascarille has been able to establish himself in the slave keeper's house. Disguising Lélie as an Armenian, Mascarille also brings his master to Trufaldin's home, so that the young man can be near his sweetheart. Incompetent and impulsive, Lélie endangers the success of the whole operation by forgetting how to play his role. Hopelessly entangled in half-remembered lies, about to give himself away, Lélie is rescued by Mascarille who acts as his prompter. In that unexpected situation, Mascarille displays superb mental alertness.

Goaded by the desire to resolve problems or to surmount difficulties, Mascarille persists under reverses. He must show himself superior. Self-respect and a personal sense of responsibility toward a job well done urge him to go on with the struggle. Mascarille wants to win, to assert himself, to prove his worth, in short to abide by the spirit of agon, summed up in his celebrated monologue:

Si je suis maintenant ma juste impatience,
On dira que je cède à la difficulté,
Que je me trouve à bout de ma subtilité;
Et que deviendra lors cette publique estime,
Qui te vante partout pour un fourbe sublime,
Et que tu t'es acquise en tant d'occasions,
A ne t'être jamais vu court d'inventions?
L'honneur, à Mascarille, est une belle chose:
A tes nobles travaux ne fais aucune pause;
Et, quoi qu'un maître ait fait pour te faire enrager,
Achève pour ta gloire, et non pour l'obliger.

In this speech Mascarille is alluding to the second dilemma of L'Etourdi. Only too willing to serve his young master's cause by engineering brilliant stratagems, Mascarille sees time and time again his tricks foiled by Lélie's inopportune interventions. Through inadvertence, chance, lack of information or spontaneous reactions, Lélie destroys the very scheme from which he was to have benefited. For example, the stolen purse which
was to procure sufficient money to purchase Célie from Trufaldin is restored through Lélie's honesty to its owner, Anselme. Instead of developing a team relationship, Lélie and Mascarille work at cross purposes and this antithetical element increases the uncertainty of the whole undertaking. On the one hand, proceeding from chancy and imperfect situations, Mascarille has to play a fast, tight game with Lélie's father and his allies, planning attacks with fragmentary information at his command. Any strategical move leads the player to speculate on a partially fortuitous outcome because he cannot foresee all the possible reactions of his adversaries. Generals have to take risks. On the other hand, Lélie's blunders multiply a thousandfold the sum of unforeseeable factors which may prevent the successful realization of projects. In making plans, man projects his intentions onto the future in order to impose on it a predetermined form. If the project is successfully carried out, it means that through his calculations man is able to control the future and remove it from the domain of chance. With Lélie as a partner, Mascarille cannot predetermine the future. Lélie symbolizes alea the blind operation of chance. In an instant, alea negates strength, adroitness; in a moment, it abolishes the accumulated results of work, patience, and ability.

And as we, spectators, watch the amusing confrontations of agon and alea, the image of our situation in the real world is sent back to us by the gestures and the words of the players. Their chance games become an artistic representation of our human games and of our destiny. Caught in the meshes of time and place, in the grip of things and people, we act only to realize years later that we caused an unforeseeable irreversibility which annihilated our most cherished ambitions. Then, as we witness the final twists of L'Etourdi's plot, which reveal Mascarille and Lélie's schemes to be a wholly unnecessary sequence of events, we are also reminded that our existence is a medley of irrelevant
accidents. When we look down the road of time, life appears devoid of purpose, just like the play we have seen. It "begins, and then at a certain moment it is 'over.' It plays itself to an end." Perhaps it is those symbolic tales of man's existence that lie underneath the scintillating surface of Molière's plays which have prompted critics to call him a poet. However, during its actual performance, the play does not possess that sort of poignant perspective. It is only reflective hindsight that makes us aware of this allegorical contest between man and a chancy world which reduces human deeds to nought. This delirious alternation of success and failure is sufficiently abstracted from our life and interests to create a kaleidoscopic universe that enchants us. The sorrow or wistfulness arising from life's lack of any permanence has been transcended by aesthetic joy.

As pointed out in Chapter III, we are able to laugh at mock evil. In L'Etourdi, the dualistic structure of the plot and the agonistic confrontation of antithetical characters endow deception with a casual, a groundless kind of existence. Caught in the swing of affirmation and negation, deceit arises only to perish. This systematic nihilism is generated from the presence of two parallel lines of action which periodically converge and explode. Lélie, the incompatible accomplice upsets and destroys Mascarille's rascally schemes. Thus, we have a rapid series of possible successes which fail to gain a foothold in the play's reality. From the Gestaltists' point of view, Lélie is an entity which has lost its functional relationship to the whole, a disruptive detail in the proposed action pattern, preventing the intrigue from progressing toward its appointed goal. As though adhering closely to the Kantian mechanism of frustrated expectation, the successive undoings of Mascarille's plans cause the action to regress to zero, to start over again, then to sink once more into nothingness. L'Etourdi's plot, thanks to Lélie's interference, has a tendency to cease from being and Mascarille, "fourbe
sublime," becomes ironically a hero of gigantic effort and diminutive accomplishment; he belongs to the world of dreams where, sometimes, possessed by a frenzied desire for action, we find ourselves scarcely moving. Mingling illusion with reality, Mascarille calls to mind great mimes, Marcel Marceau, for example. They both perform a certain sequence of movements, the movements are there yet there is no movement, just *la marche sur place*.

Molière fashions the universe of *L'Étourdi* out of opposing principles. Dichotomy is found between characters, as the helpless, ineffective master is contrasted with the inventive, resourceful servant. This antithetical pair generates an agonistic game between cleverness and incompetence, endowing the intrigue with a twin strand of being: *la fourberie* and *l'étourderie*, the latter carrying the fundamental division a step further by turning triumph into defeat. This cleavage is at the origin of the eruptions which turn the world of comedy upside down. As the principle of *l'étourderie* goes into operation, it disrupts the balance and unity achieved by *la fourberie*, and thus it threatens and destroys unwittingly the reality shaped by roguery. Upheaval compels reorganization, a search for a new scheme and equilibrium, doomed in turn to an ephemeral existence. This antagonistic encounter of forces, provoking instability and fluctuation, shapes the protean universe of the play where fraud succeeds at best in acquiring a brief and fragile existence. Gain and losses alternate rapidly, double-dealings, a dime a dozen, come and go in a game-like atmosphere. Thus, deception assumes the disarming air of inconsequentiality.

The fundamental scission, generated by the opposition of *agon* and *alea*, is also a source of surprises which infringe Mascarille's power to will and order his rascals into reality. The unforeseen, personified by Lélie, pokes fun at Mascarille's calculations, upsets and negates his wishful visions of reality. In
turn, the unexpected engenders fumblings and improvisations, all of which are attempts on Mascarille's part to adapt quickly to the new reality brought about by the unknown. Precarious scaffolding of tall tales, such as the invention of Pandolphe's death, are hurriedly erected, tumbling down soon after under the sheer weight of their outrageous fantasy. The unending turbulence, produced by this schismatic universe, reverses situations so completely at times that the personage finds himself in a role opposite to the one he had been playing all along. The dynamic doer becomes the prototype of failure. Ever willing to respond to new situations as if he were able to cope with them, Mascarille has only one real ability: to act out the illusion of his competence. Thus, the bipolar technique provides contrasting and ironic perspectives which will be studied in more detail in Chapter V.

Contrasts, surprises, collisions of incompatible attitudes, reversals of roles, affirmative-negative rhythm, are variants of incongruity which, it will be remembered from Chapter II, has been considered since Plato as the key to the world of laughter. Therefore, by generating a pattern of incongruities through the use of dualism on all levels of the play, Molière demonstrated that he was in perfect control of his art. Consequently, we believe with Léon Emery that L'Etourdi is not the play of a beginner. "Parce qu'elle est la première, on est enollin à considérer cette pièce comme une ébauche à la fois pauvre et tâtonnante où brilleraient seulement les feux d'un pétulence juvénile."

Emery reminds his reader that L'Etourdi was the work of a thirty-one-year old man who had already undergone a twelve-year apprenticeship, during which he most likely wrote many a play or scenario. Because of his hearty invitation to laughter, Molière has been too often lauded or condemned according to his conformity or non-conformity to some preconceived standard of comedy situated in the critic's mind, without a con-
consideration of the poet's skill at handling comic artistry. That L'Etourdi is a veritable structure of absurd incongruities and coincidences, no one will deny. These should not, however, be perfunctorily dismissed as unworthy of attention. The constant use of the unexpected, the nonsensical, or the incongruous by all great comic dramatists, from Aristophanes onward, proves that these elements are not flaws but regular features of comic technique. These mechanisms, shaking the audience's notion of what constitutes normal human behavior and thinking, produce unfailingly their amusing effects. Spectators react with laughter to these absurd theatrical games which try to dislocate the norms of their experience.

That the action of comedy can be regarded as a game of chance, a contest, or a verbal battle, is further illustrated by George Dandin. This play is not unlike the archaic lawsuits described by Huizinga, "where the agonistic factor is at its strongest and the ideal foundation of justice at its weakest."13 "It is not so much the abstract question of right and wrong that occupies the archaic mind as the very concrete question of winning or losing. Once given this feeble ethical standard the agonistic factor will gain enormously in legal practice the further back we go; and as the agonistic element increases so does the element of chance, with the result that we soon find ourselves in the play-sphere."14 Dandin, the plaintiff, and Angélique, the defendant, construct different versions of the same situation; Angélique's story is judged by the de Sottenville as just and correct, deserving their moral approval because, in their estimation, it conforms to facts and moral standards. However, the judges make no distinction between well-founded accusations and pure slander. Right, which should be determined by a meticulous examination of the facts involved, does not triumph; wrong, helped by the artifice of persuasion and chance that turns truth into lies, gets the upper hand. The entire proceeding
is dominated by the intense desire of each party to gain his cause; however, the guilty one wins. The innocent Dandin is defeated by the irrational interference of alce and confounded by his wife's protean resourcefulness. Faced with the blank walls of a cheerless existence, due to parental and marital incomprenhension, Angélique dispenses quickly with any superfluous high-mindedness to attend to her own interests without consideration for others. Her superb theatrical talents, as evidenced by a dexterous manipulation of withering scorn and cold contempt, reveal that she considers people as mere tools to be used for her own purpose.

Before leaving alce, and in all fairness to this deity, we should point out that it can bring to the lucky player infinitely more than a life of toil and sweat. Such is the case of Sganarelle, the fagotier turned doctor. It does not take him long to exploit to the fullest the windfall brought to him, ironically, by his wife's revenge. Since his new profession gives him access to money and women, he readily lays his hands on both. It is this undeserved good fortune that gives Sganarelle a devil-may-care feeling of buoyancy, a happy-go-lucky self-assurance that spreads over into the audience. Sganarelle is the happiest man that ever lived, he has obtained everything for nothing. Luck is an insolent and sovereign derision of merit, but it contributes much to the festive climate of comedy which will be discussed later on in this chapter under the heading of Ilinx.

MIMICRY

Bewitched by the theater, Molière created in his characters a race of master actors, also possessed by "le démon du théâtre." Their consummate theatrical skills are put at the service of deception, a subject ideally suited for the theater which is the art of dissimulation *par excellence*. Characters
espouse the person and character of another, who in turn sees his fellow beings different from what they are, confusing appearances with reality. As an illusion is boxed inside another, as the levels of resemblance multiply, spectators begin to think that they are watching a play within a play. This feeling is strengthened by the use of technical language pertaining to the theater.16

Once the objective of the plot has been defined, Molièresque characters begin to display their talents. They appear to be improvising their roles as they go along. Seemingly free from a slavish adherence to memorized lines, they react in a spontaneous and versatile manner to a word or gesture of a fellow actor or to unexpected situations. With the barest outline of a plot in mind, these personages simultaneously compose and perform their roles, probably reflecting their creator's views on acting. Molière thought that a comedian should be capable of extemporizing his lines within the plot framework. When Mademoiselle Béjart points out in L'Impromptu de Versailles that neither she nor the other members of the troupe have had the time to learn their role, Molière replies: "Quand même vous ne les sauriez pas tout à fait, pouvez-vous pas y suppléer de votre esprit puisque c'est de la prose, et que vous savez votre sujet?"17 Dramatic flexibility, not parakeet reliance on memorized lines, imaginative acting rather than a pre-learned interpretation of written roles, seem to be recommended. According to Grimarest, the dramatist's first biographer, Molière "avait accoutumé sa Troupe à jouer sur-le-champs de petites Comédies à la manière des Italiens."18 And his characters show a good deal of that promptitude, imagination and adaptability, all deemed essential prerequisites for actors of la commedia dell'arte all'improviso which did exert some influence on Molière's art.19

In L'Etourdi, Les Fourberies de Scapin, and Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Mascarille, Scapin, and Sbrigani, forever performing
miracles by calling forth people and events out of nothingness, do display those primal requirements of suppleness of mind and imagination. Dramatists, they invent stratagems which make up the play. Sbrigani fills the theater with fraudulent personages and happenings: Eraste, the intimate friend of the Pourceaunaco family, wives and children abandoned by the polygamous Limousin gentleman, and Flemish merchants anxious to have Pourceaunaco pay his debts with Julie's dowry. And to cap the masquerade, Pourceaunaco becomes a lady trying to escape real yet fictitious pursuers. His feminine charms cause him to be propositioned by Swiss gentlemen; suspicion is awakened and the very disguise which was to restore his freedom becomes a trap. However, before being driven out, the soapgoat-entertainer has been given his chance at participating in the deceptive games of which he is the principal victim.

Directors and make-up men, the three shysters arrange the proper setting for their tricks, summon up illusions with disguises which become the pivot of little comedies. Sbrigani distributes the parts at the outset of Monsieur de Pourceaunaco. Soapin calls for a rehearsal; impersonating Argante, he prepares the son, Octave, to face up with courage to his father's wrath. Mascarelle, acting in the true fashion of the sugeritore, the actor-manager of la commedia dell'arte, goes over Trufaldin's life history several times so that Lélie will have in mind the scenario, the plot outline which is to serve as a guide to the young man's actions and words as he impersonates an Armenian bringing news to Trufaldin about the latter's long lost son.

But above all, these rogues are actor-magicians. With calculated gestures and words, studied attitudes, and subterfuges, they seek to insinuate themselves into the logical universe of their prospective victims, juggling with their sensorial and mental world in order to subjugate their critical sense. Psychological tactics, such as diversion, camouflage, and simulation
are used to modify the victims' intellectual perspective, to suspend their sense of logic and reason. Soapin encapsulates Argante in a hallucinatory world inhabited by monstrous lawsuits that endlessly feed on people's substance; he creates a threatening environment where Géronte appears suddenly to have become the focus of hostile ruffians. Limp with fear, Argante and Géronte become mere putty in Soapin's hands. M. de Pourcaugnaos sees and apprehends only what Sbrigani imposes on him. For example, the Neapolitan suggests to the Limousin that Julie, his prospective bride, is a "coquette achevée." And Julie, coached by Sbrigani, plays to the hilt the role of a forward woman. Disgusted, Pourcaugnaos will have none of this hussy for a wife, pompously proclaiming that "on aime à aller le front levé dans la famille des Pourcaugnaos." A similar sullenious innuendo is used by Mascarelle. Trying to discourage Léandre, Lélie's rival, from obtaining Célie's hand, Mascarelle tells him: "Vous épouserez le bien public en elle." Inferences which might help the dupes to discover the tricks played upon them are annulled by counter-ideas implanted in their mind by these manipulators of men. Once these counter-inferences are accepted, the mind is led astray and is no longer capable of drawing the logical conclusions which might save it from delusions.

And in these theatrical games, we, the spectators, perceive the symbolic manifestations of man's proverbial blindness. Molière's puppets, representing mental habits and characteristic human reactions, demonstrate the fragility of man's judgment. Rational thinking processes, on which man supposedly bases his knowledge of the concrete universe, are easily twisted by the deft maneuvers of rascals who play on the emotional needs of their gullible dupes. Knowing that the human mind seems to be capable of believing anything it wants to believe or rejecting anything it views with repugnance, these prestidigitators exploit their victims' hopes and fears by feeding them with illusions. In turn,
the gulls' repeated failures to detect the inaccuracy of these impressions prove that man's notion of reality depends much more upon what he wants or fears than upon logic or factual evidence. With thought and reason functioning as the servants and instruments of passions, man seems capable of giving only a highly subjective interpretation of reality. Molière's plays are a sort of dramatized version of the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*.

However talented Molièresque illusionists may be at using the resources of the theater to create sly artifices, it should be noted that often they succeed only in propagating contradictions which confound one another into unreality. In the conspiratorial mood of comedy, reality and sham come to form an antinomy. Often, false representations collide with evidence and since they rest on illusions, they cave in abruptly and utterly. Mascarille and Soapin have to switch roles from moment to moment and become different personages in swift succession. These rapid alternations, crowded within a brief space of time, contribute not only to the atmosphere of improvisation noted earlier but to the discontinuity and instability characteristic of comedy. Blocked by the constant clash of truth and falsehood, the plot of deception in *L'Etourdi* is not allowed to progress. This series of temporary and unsuccessful feints is part of the ambiance ludique necessary to the world of comedy. Molière accentuates this element of failure on purpose, thus ruining any possibility for dramatic illusion to exist. He means to stay in the domain of comic impersonation, which largely rests on inadequacy, irrelevance, and incompetence. Dramatic illusion belongs to serious drama. With polished techniques, it aims at creating an experience which fascinates the spectator by its very authenticity. Therefore, dramatic illusion needs to confer a quality of plausibility and logic to all shams. Any mistake awakens the spectator's sceptical sense which must be lulled if he is to be drawn completely outside of himself into a world of illusions.
Comic impersonation aims at an artistically planned amateurishness. The disguised character, who never believe for one minute that he is the other whose person he is simulating, is often made to appear foolishly inept. Seemingly lacking professional acting competence, he just plays ... at playing the comedy. Lélie turned Armenian shows all the dynamism of inexperience, a sort of youthful naïveté and enthusiasm, a playful exuberance which almost becomes a travesty of dramatic art. Further, even though comic impersonation may be successfully carried out, as is the case in Monsieur de Pourcessaugrec, it always makes the spectator aware of the seen and the known, the impersonated and the real, and these, often colliding, reduce each other to nonsense. The audience is made to see clearly through these gratuitous games of dissembling which by their hilarious absurdity take on the air of a carnival masquerade.

Comedies and carnival parades have much in common: clownish make-up, gaudy costumes and ludicrous dance sequences. The impersonal ugliness of the carnival masks, denaturing the human face through a combination of exaggeration and simplification, displays qualities found in comic characters. Capitalizing on grotesque eccentricities which turn the normal human way of living upside down, carnival and comedy create a spirit of riot and frolic which encourage spectators to indulge inwardly their irrational impulses and fancies and satisfy symbolically wishes that cannot be carried out into completed acts in real life. As carnival participants and comedians leap, dance, grin, shout, and perform unvirtuous and unreasonable acts, they generate a feeling of euphoria which exalt them as well as the spectators. Under the name of ilinx we shall now study this merry and insolent buoyancy.

ilinx

Plato recognized, with some misgivings, that one of the prime appeals of comedy is its spirit of mischief and license.
He feared its impudent spirit which stirs "the rebellious principles," or irrationality in the souls of spectators, leading them to enact the impious things they see on the stage and thereby disturb the life of the State. Although knowledge of the ridiculous is useful to citizens, enabling them to gain a better understanding of life's seriousness, Plato viewed acting in comedies as unsuitable to freemen. Comedies were to be performed only by slaves or hired strangers. Plato has not been alone in raising objections against the subversive spirit of comedy. Condemning Molière to suffer the anger of a God who had cried: "Malheur à vous qui riez! car vous pleurerez," Bossuet denounced him as a "corrupteur de bonnes moeurs." "Ce rigoureux censeur des grands canons, ce grave réformateur des mines et des expressions de nos précieuses, étaile cependant au plus grand jour les avantages d'une infâme tolérance dans les maris, et sollicite les femmes à de honteuses venenances contre leurs jaloux. Il a fait voir à notre siècle le fruit qu'on peut espérer de la morale du théâtre, qui n'attaque que le ridicule du monde, en lui laissant cependant toute sa corruption." Rousseau also accused Molière of loosening the moral bonds and obligations which cement the social edifice into stability. "Voyez comment ... cet homme trouble tout l'ordre de la société; avec quel scandale il renverse tous les rapports les plus sacrés sur lesquels elle est fondée, comment il tourne en dérision les respectables droits des pères sur leurs enfants, des maris sur leurs femmes, des maîtres sur leurs serviteurs!"

In spite of their puritan grandiloquence, these serious-minded gentlemen were not entirely mistaken. There is an anarchic streak in comedy and it can easily slip into irreverence and cruelty. Generally depicting a conflict, comedy presents characters having one aim: to win, that is, to re-order things so that their fancy is fulfilled and the object of their desire is secured. All parties husband their resources for the struggle
and for most of the combatants the means are the same, force and fraud. And it is violence or chance, not moral sense, that bring about the resolution of the conflict. Discord and simulation, the life and blood of comedy, contradict the principles of solidarity, trust, and sincerity with which political and religious philosophers try to discipline men into social living.

Moreover, the comic dramatist could be accused of performing a veritable desanctification of the normal human personality. Since we cannot laugh at what we supposedly hold sacred, comic characters are distorted so that they become scapegoats for our mockery. Certain characteristics are so emphasized that through these deformations characters are nothing but elemental grimaces. Exaggerated gullibility, for example, strips Argante and Géronte of human characteristics and turns them into targets for our derision. Hence, we can take great joy in seeing these imbeciles submitted to a war of nerves led by Soapin who systematically creates false fears in his interlocutors in order to bamboozle them in a royal manner. Nevertheless, defenders of sincerity and charity may point out that we are made to laugh at human frailty exploited by unscrupulousness, and that masters are flimflammed by an irreverent servant. Further, it could be argued that Molière's artistry closely imitates the malign workings of religious and racial prejudice. Once we overstate and oversimplify certain ludicrous or "bad" traits of men who threaten us, in real life, by their deviance from our way of living, depriving them thereby of our group characteristics and approval, we can turn them into butts of ridicule, objects of scorn, at times tortured and killed for our edification.

Moralists may also claim that George Dandin serves to illustrate that surface luster is all-important. What counts is not to leave illicit acts undone but to keep them unknown, hence passing muster in good society. To escape the odium that would
accompany provocative flirtations, Angélique drapes herself in saintliness, turns against her country yokel of a husband, snatches victory from defeat through ruse and nimble wit, and sacrifices the honest man to the gratification of her appetites. Greed and selfishness, not reasonable concern for the other's welfare, are the ruling motives behind most of the characters' actions. In *Le Mariage forcé*, Alcantor has no pity for Sganarelle's predicament; he wants to be rid of his daughter by marrying her off. To be on Fortune's side, Sganarelle of *Le Médecin malgré lui* changes his ways rapidly to exploit the situation in his interest. Ignorant as he is of the art of healing, he begins to practice, regardless of the consequences his imposture might have on his patients. Mr. Filerin of *L'Amour médecin* cynically exhorts his fellow doctors to take advantage of man's fear of death and turn medicine into a lucrative business. Thus, it would appear that desires and intrigues, and not bona fides, bind and loosen characters in their relation to each other. In fact, as soon as a personage places his trust in another, he becomes a fool, earmarked for deception. Faith seems to be the mother of deceit. Considering one another as instruments and objects of their desires, characters exploit each other. Their stance is opportunistic.

The temporary excesses of comedy, which aim at a momentary breaking of society's rules, have not always been condemned. On the contrary, communal and make-believe expression of impulses which run counter to group customs has been recognized as a healthy release for pent-up desires, as a source of euphoria arising from the spectators' sense of freedom from awe and respect. "The audience has gone on a holiday in going to a comedy." This festive feeling was described by Freud as "the liberty to do what as a rule is prohibited." Stressing how we evade the demands of our conscience through wit and humor, Freud saw in comedy an opportunity for man to perform in public
forbidden acts on the level of fantasy. Another psychoanalyst, Ernst Kris, has described comedy as a "holiday for the superego." 29 Seen in this light, comedy is a way of trying to cope with fear, guilt, and anxiety, resulting from conflicts between the repressive demands of group mores and man's cravings which will not be denied. Thus, it could be claimed that comedy relieves the individual from the burdens of alienation, thereby serving a useful social function.

Appealing to man's sense of mischief, the festive spirit of comedy aims at turning everyday attitudes and values completely upside down. As noted before, comic plotting depends on violations of the Decalogue and the Golden Rule. Fathers are defied, swindled, and sometimes dispatched into the great beyond — all in good, clean theatrical fun. "Quand d'un bel objet on est amoureux, Que ne ferait-on pas pour devenir heureux?" 30 asks Lélie, about to pretend deep grief over his father's swift demise, hoping thereby to obtain the money necessary to buy the beautiful slave he loves. The traditional veneration of parents is not the only value made to stand on its head. Marriage is also the object of attacks. There is rebellion against that other pillar of society, namely the wife. A constant source of irritation, always censoring her husband's behavior, Martine is pummeled by him in Le Médecin malgré lui. In the opening scene of L'Amour médecin, Sganarelle says candidly that his spouse pleased him as a wife — after she died. In George Dandin, the standard of conjugal fidelity is put in serious jeopardy.

Recognized moral principles are overturned. Duplicity being the rule of the game, Sbrigani and Nérine praise each other for their ruthless effectiveness. Perjury, theft, and swindles are eulogized in Monsieur de Pourcessugno, while honor and honesty are condemned in L'Etourdi as bothersome interferences with the successful carrying out of tricks. Fraud, often combined with
force, over-rules right in Le Mariage forcé, George Dandin, and
Monsieur de Pourvauignac. Continually involved in contests of
will, Molièreque characters fight and strike each other, pro-
voke their partners' rage, or seek revenge. Therefore, it is
not surprising to observe that their speech is attuned to the
agonistic quality of their actions. Le Médecin malgré lui starts
with a ritualistic exchange of insults; heaping outrageous terms
on his master, Mascarille elevates abuse to lyricism.

During the plays' performance, in a world of make-believe,
spectators can let their fantasias run riot and participate vi-
cariously in acts no longer tolerated by group standards. If the
aggressive drive is as deep-seated and as important to man as
most psychiatrists assume, all forms of combat, vituperation,
and vindictiveness must be gratifying to his belligerent nature.
Spectators enjoy hearing characters cursed vigorously, especially
if the denunciation takes on the form of eloquent speeches which
offer an additional and delightful compensation for the inarticu-
lateness from which most men suffer in real life. Freud main-
tains that, because our aggressive impulses toward others have
been restrained by home and school since infancy, verbal hostil-
ity has come to replace physical attacks.

For centuries now, folkloric, literary, and dramatic
tales attest to the open secret that marriage is not an unmixed
blessing. The traditional antagonism between husband and wife
may awaken the desire to overturn the household gods. If this
wish cannot find expression in real life, it can be given an
emotional work-out through watching a husband-wife fistfight,
such as we have in Le Médecin malgré lui. Without having re-
course to the Oedipal complex theory, we know that young people
resent familial restraints and obligations. Since parents sym-
bolize the "thou shalt not's," it is not surprising to find at
times defiance instead of deference on the part of sons and
daughters. With the intrepidity of youth, they throw filial obedience to the wind to claim their liberty and their right to personal happiness. Molière's plays, packed with rebellious children, must have had a special appeal to his adult and fashionable public, regulated and controlled as it was by rigid customs and manners. Through this youthful revolt against authority and restraint, Molière's audience could transcend, as in a day reverie, the dictates of their social environment and be young and free again. Spectators must have been highly entertained by Lucinde, in Le Médecin malgré lui, who, after recovering her speech, defies her father, preventing him with an impetuous flow of talk from putting in a word edgewise. In Les Fourberies, the sons, Octave and Léandre, take advantage of their fathers' absence to get into all sorts of amorous scrapes. They show no compunction at all about giving Scapin permission to rob and swindle their sires in order to obtain the girls they love.

Other figures of authority who pretend to raise themselves above ordinary men by professional knowledge are stripped of their superiority. The learned doctors of L'Amour médecin are revealed to be hollow men; their prestige rests on an astute intermingling of hypocrisy and greed, helped immeasurably by their patients' credulity. The incongruous distance that separates the actual practice of medicine from its ideal makes a parody of that supposed élite. With merriment, spectators can relieve their resentment born from their dependence on grasping men who quickly acquire their wealth out of life's gravest difficulties. Since doctors are closely associated with disease, by laughing at them spectators may also be seeking momentary deliverance from the unpleasant reality of their mortal condition. If this should be the case, we can also point out another element shared at times by comedy and carnival. Amid the festivities which re-affirm man's zest for life, the image of death is present. However, in this universe of masks and dis-
guises, death is not frightening. The general atmosphere of turbulent vitality as well as the grotesque abasement inflicted on it by its outrageous mask keep death from being accepted seriously. Its power thus seems diminished.

Another inversion of traditionally respected values found in Molière's comedies is the domination of servants over masters. Possessed by love but incapacitated by financial difficulties and paternal opposition in the pursuit of the objects of their desires, young masters beseech their valets to come to their aid. In *L'Etourdi* and *Les Fourberies*, the masters become suppliants, entreating Mascarille or Soapin to do something about their plight. These scenes resemble ceremonies which confer status to the lowly. Submissive and humble words from the masters, who even go so far as to kneel in front of their valets, erase social inequality in this world of fantasy where reality's norms have been temporarily suspended. Mascarille and Soapin know they are needed and that their talent for intrigues is appreciated. Feeling indispensable, they will not hesitate to reprimand, insult, and even beat their masters. However, they love the game of deceit and will use every trick and plot at their disposal to serve their masters and outmatch the latter's fathers and allies. And these patriarchs, for all the life experience they are supposed to have, become the victims of the servants' wily ways. Thus, those who enjoy prestige and power are assaulted and overthrown from their position of authority while their social inferiors elevate themselves through wit and inventiveness to become "Lords of Misrule." "*Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator!*" Threats are omnipresent, Mascarille and Soapin are aware of the risks inherent in the pursuit of mischief. Yet, their attitude is a light-hearted disregard for punishment. In the finale, indulgence is begged on Soapin's behalf, and pardon granted. The rogue is absolved for his misdeeds which become his proud accomplishments during his reign of misrule in topsy-turvydom.
License with impunity endows the play with a holiday spirit.

To an audience composed primarily of masters, not servants, as was the case in Molière's time and in our own days as well, this overturning of the social hierarchy has all the appeal of play. It is an activity distinct from everyday reality, both as to locality and duration. For a few hours, in a consecrated spot, on a stage, a special breed of men act out, according to the rules of the theatrical game, the folly of a "monde renversé." Knowing, of course, that servants couldn't get away with such impudent behavior in real life, masters turned spectators look upon this make-believe reversal of social classes with a comfortable feeling of superiority while being titillated at the same time by overt expressions of impertinence usually prohibited on all levels in their socially correct communities.

Roguish success, even of a temporary duration, as well as preposterous gains brought by Fortune account for much of the buoyancy of Molière's heroes. Mascarille and Scapin, the insolent servants, or Lélie, the inept child of luck, possess an irrepressible liveliness. Whatever mischances occur, they bob up again with unimpaired energy, ever ready to respond to new situations, ever expecting to succeed even though their expectation is not founded upon reasonable hopes. Meeting existence on its own terms, these indomitable creatures face the unexpected, the unreasonable, and the incongruous with an amoral vitality. There is no need for them to take setbacks tragically, for at bottom these are all gratuitous. Life's mishaps are as casual as its enchantments. In their chameleon-like universe, Mascarille or Lélie adhere only to one principle: the absurd expectation of undeserved success. And with it, they beckon the audience to regress momentarily to the irrational optimism, the joyful irresponsibility of childhood and partake with unrestrained delight in the games of the theater.
NOTES ON CHAPTER IV


3 Huizinga, p. 5.

4 Huizinga, p. 13.

5 Huizinga, p. 76.

6 Huizinga, p. 115.

7 Huizinga, pp. 114-45.


11 Huizinga, p. 9.


13 Huizinga, p. 84.

14 Huizinga, p. 78.


16 *L'Etourdi*, Act IV, Scene 1 and Act V, Scene 9; *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, Act I, Scenes 1 and 2.


CHAPTER V

DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

In Chapter IV, we saw that comedy is a strategical game serving desires better than morals. On an ethical level, there is nothing to distinguish between the combatants. Sganarelle in L'Amour médecin is as ready to deceive his daughter as she is her father. Both are moved by their needs and both employ all the willful lies and impersonations they can in the ensuing struggle. Neither side can boast of moral superiority in the choice of its tactics. The same observation can be made of the protagonists of L'Étourdi, Le Médecin malgré lui, Monsieur de Pourcounage and Les Fourberies de Soapin. In these comedies, the movement tends to be through frustration to freedom for a boy and a girl. They have been kept apart by paternal or other restraints from which they attempt to disengage themselves through the manipulation of the desires of others as a means to attain their own. To be successful in these games of deception and counter-deception, the protagonists must be adept in accommodating themselves to unexpected circumstances and in seizing opportunities; their world is full of changes, chance happenings and surprises.

We also noted the zest and the ingenuity with which the intriguers find ways of satisfying their cravings or at least of accomplishing the discomfiture of their opponents. From their "bag of tricks" which according to Eric Bentley is "the art of comedy" the comic heroes pull out schemes, aspiring to give them a viable existence. Their plans provoke a series of adventures and misadventures which account to a large extent for the episodic nature of comedy. Much of the vitality of the
comedies is furnished by the cleverness and the virtuosity with which the characters carry on their projects. Sbrigani, the professional rogue, Mascarin or Scapin, the impudent servants, or the lovers themselves put the audience in a playful and merry mood. There is always some satisfaction in seeing the successful conclusion of a love story, especially if, in the process, those who are in a position of prestige are shown up in an impertinent and mischievous way. Success, achieved by young love allied with roguery and in the face of age and authority, is delightful to the audience. The idea that good things like happiness are attained in a preposterous manner arouses in the onlookers a carefree attitude that encourages them to laugh at the folly of the whole undertaking. Exuberance is instilled in the spectators' mind when they see, for example, the disproportionate good fortune brought into Sganarelle's life by the homely device of a wife's revenge in Le Médecin malgré lui. Since reality's norms are no longer operating, they imitate Sganarelle and join in the topsy-turvy fun brought about by chance.

However, we also pointed out that undeserved success, built on the unreality manufactured by the knaves' trickery or by Lady Luck, repeatedly breaks down in impossibility. "Comedy ... supposes an unformed world, a world being made and turned upside down, a world about to fold...."2 The Molièresque universe, cleft into opposites and dominated by the thrusts and counter-thrusts of unreality and reality, creates ever-recurring plot patterns: rise and fall, or circular movements often leading nowhere. Molière's comedies rarely offer that direct, linear progression which has come to be considered as the only worthy kind of plot. Instead, we often have collections of loosely related scenes filled with a good deal of purposeless busyness. This loose and paratactic structure has not been viewed favorably by critics. Unable to free themselves from the spell of Aristotle's Poetics, they have judged Molière to be deficient in his
story-line construction. At best, his dramatic action has been found to have only a slight causal continuity, disturbed by intrusions from unexpected quarters or by all sorts of digressions. The devices, which Molière uses to extricate himself from plots which cannot possibly be resolved by an Aristotelian kind of inevitability, have also been considered to be serious defects. In this chapter, we shall endeavor to show that these difficulties adduced by critics are not flaws but characteristic features of the Moliéresque intrigue. Strictures upon Molière's dramatic structure arise chiefly from prejudice about what a plot is and what kind of unity it must have. What has happened is that one type of plot, the tragic variety, has come to be accepted as the only kind.

In his book entitled *Comedy*, L. J. Potts proves to be one of the few critics who has understood that comedy is structurally less rigid than tragedy:

> When people speak of plot, they usually have in mind a logical sequence of significant events, like the events that lead from the return of Oedipus to his native country up to the death of his wife and his own blindness.... With this notion in mind, critics find fault with a large proportion of our comedies: ... careless, ... trivial, ... improbable, ... non-existent. That is based on a fallacy: that the plot of a comedy ought to be of the same kind as that of a tragedy. But the end of comedy is not the same as the end of tragedy; and this not only justifies but demands a difference of structure."³

Then Potts goes on to explain that the nature of tragedy must be introverted and concentrated in order to show the isolation of the hero caught in an inescapable train of causation. "Unless there is a logical sequence of cause and effect in the events from beginning to end, the tragic atmosphere is lost; and if chance or accident interferes with this sequence at a single point, the tragic atmosphere is so far disturbed."⁴ Tragedy is a closed world; its future is shaped in advance by relentless
Fate. Comedy, on the other hand, is often steered by the unpredictability of Fortune; therefore, it needs an open form. "A comedy may even fail in its effect simply because the author has taken pains to make the plot conform strictly to the law of cause and effect; because he has insisted too ruthlessly on fate...."5 "A lack of logic in the sequence of events so far from being a weakness in the art of the writer is proper in comedy...."6

Aristotle defines plot as that synthesis of a series of incidents which gives form to the play as a whole. The series must be linked together in a natural and causal sequence. In combining the incidents which make up the complication of the drama, the writer must bear in mind the principle of probable and necessary relation. A well constructed plot, in Aristotle's opinion, cannot begin or end at any chance point. It is also desirable that the solution come to pass through the progress of the story itself rather than through the deus ex machina or other mechanical devices. The denouement is worked out by anagnorisis or by peripeteia or by both. These two elements of the plot must be, like every other event in the tragedy, a part of the unity of the whole, they must be the natural and inevitable consequence of something that has gone before.7 It is obvious that such a description of plot will not apply to the situation found in most Molieresque comedies, and for not conforming to the Aristotelian code of dramatic technique, critics have indeed condemned Molière's structures of dramatic action. Thus, in studying L'Etoile, Henry Carrington Lancaster shows this typical point of view which expects comedies to fit the Aristotelian theory of tragedy: "He [Molière] seems to have been undisturbed by the lack of verisimilitude in the plot and of logical connection between the episodes, and though he kept the unities of time and place and linked the scenes, he did not succeed in unifying the action, for he made no proper preparation for the denouement, which results from an unexpected return and a series of recognitions...."8
Scholars have stressed supposed defects, asking Molière’s plots to do things for which they were not designed. The apparent looseness of the dramatic construction of L’Étourdi is necessarily a sign of poor workmanship, due to Molière’s youth and lack of theatrical know-how. Thus, G. Michaut does not hesitate to state: "... 'le métier' de la pièce révèle une certaine inexpérience, — qui ne saurait nous étonner dans une œuvre de débutant, ce débutant fût-il Molière. Il ne sait pas encore bien enchainer les scènes et on le voit qui les amène comme il peut, là où il en a besoin." Michaut continues to point out other features which he regards as flaws. Regretting that the "long arm of coincidence" is the unifying thread which runs through the loose-jointed scenes of L’Étourdi, Michaut writes: "... d’un bout à l’autre de la comédie, c’est par une série de coïncidences ou de hasards que s’enchainent les divers épisodes. Maskarille aurait besoin de causer avec Célie? Justement la voici. ’Oh! bonheur! la voilà qui paraît à propos.’" He goes on to show at length how characters are perpetually entering just when wanted, and he lists dutifully all the justement and the à propos which turn L’Étourdi into "une pièce in raissemblable." Michaut stresses also the fact that characters such as Célie, Léandre, and Hippolyte are loosely or mechanically attached to the action, that Ergaste and others make an abrupt and late entrance, merely to contribute their little share to the plot and then casually drop out of sight. Since Molière’s denouements have long been grist to the scholarly mill, it was a foregone conclusion that Michaut would also have his say about "le factice" of L’Étourdi’s ending. And he does: "Il est clair que le dénouement est la chose qui l’intéresse le moins, et que, pour lui, il s’agit tout simplement de finir. Ici, il a recours à des hasards ir raissemblables, à des reconnaissances quasi miraculeuses et provoquées par des incidents tout fortuits...."

However, after reviewing the supposed structural flaws of
L'Etourdi, Michaut inadvertently reveals the theatrical value instilled in this play by Molière, as he worked over the subject matter borrowed from Beltrame's comedy, L'Inavvertito. "Enfin si l'on compare en général l'action de L'Etourdi avec celle de L'Inavvertito, on voit que la pièce italienne est bien mieux conduite. Elle a des scènes de galanterie précieuse qui la ralentissent; elle a des rôles conventionnels (le miles gloriosus) qui y prennent une place disproportionnée; mais dans l'ensemble elle est plus claire, car tout y est expliqué, et plus vraisemblable." It becomes apparent that Molière suppressed sentimental episodes, purely ornamental scenes and explanatory passages in order to give more scenic and histrionic vivacity to the play. Then, forgetting for a moment his academic allegiance to logic, Michaut unwittingly invites us to re-evaluate this play in terms of entertainment and amusement merits: "Il y a surtout de la gaieté. Tout ce que j'ai dit de l'absence de lien entre les scènes ou les épisodes de la comédie, je ne le retire pas; et à la lecture, le défaut saute aux yeux. Mais à la représentation, qui donc a le temps d'y penser? Un irrésistible mouvement emporte tout." 

In a sensible and discerning fashion, Eugène Rigal praised Molière for the changes he had made on his Italian model, L'Inavvertito. These innovations sharpened the focus of interest in numerous scenes, added fire to the action and the dialogue and showed that the French dramatist had an excellent understanding of acting and stagecraft.

Il [Molière] suivait de près L'Inavvertito, et, si nous comparons l'oeuvre italienne, dont l'auteur était pourtant un comédien, lui aussi, à l'oeuvre française, que constatons-nous? Qu'en vingt endroits il suffisait à Molière, pour être moins invraisemblable, de suivre son modèle de plus près. Molière a-t-il donc gâché ce modèle? Tant s'en faut. Si on pouvait voir jouer successivement les deux œuvres, on sentirait qu'au théâtre les explications fortraisonnables de l'auteur italien alanguissaient l'action,
Comparing the original play with its Molieresque version, Gustave Attinger also declares that "Molière s'attache à l'expression scénique et visuelle; il sacrifie le sentimental au geste...."15 "La pièce est plus ramassée; tout ce qui n'est pas jeu, action, comique immédiat, est supprimé...."16

Molière's plays are a theatrical rather than a literary experience. Everything in his comedies is dependent upon the immediacy of the theatrical effect. The overwrought drollery of padded scenes such as the consultation of the doctors in L'Amour médecin, seemingly episodical in nature, and putting for a time a check on the plot, was never intended to bear the microscopic analysis of literary and Aristotelian-minded criticism. These bold extravagances, obviously at odds with the critics' idea of what constitutes a well built plot, are vital features of comic artistry. The desire on the part of the comic artist to amplify, to load and slant his material, here the pretentions to sound medical knowledge of men completely lacking it, is a typical trait of comic art. Huizinga sees exaggeration or confusion of proportions as a play habit of the mind; psychiatrists have found that it is a trait common both to child life and to certain mental diseases, in acute mania for instance. However we may wish to view exaggeration, we should recognize that it creates something avowedly unreal; it deviates from the natural and the practical. Among other things, it is a means of comic stylization; Aristophanes, Plautus, Rabelais and Shakespeare have used it. Above all, it should not be evaluated in terms of vraisemblance; it has a form, a harmony, a rhythm all of its own. These scenes, viewed by rationalistic critics as digressions, could be detached from the plot, but much of the humor would disappear from the plays in the process. Unless we accept the unsystematic and unreal aspects of comedy, we will not make much headway in evaluat-
ing its positive formal merits.

Molière did not hesitate to insert episodes which exalt laughter but do not advance the plot. Sganarelle's consultations with Panorace, Marphurius and the Egyptian women in Le Mariage forcé, provide an intermezzo obviously turned into verbal fantasy for the amusement of the spectators. For the most part, the dialogue is built with verbal fragments complementing one another in question-answer or interruption-repetition relationships. This process tends to give a homophonic texture to the characters' speeches. Alliteration and assonance, anaphora, paronyms and other forms of repetitions generate echos and sound calls which punctuate the entire interlude with onomatopoetic beats and counter-beats. Identical sounds create aural themes and variations, giving rise to rhythmic patterns which mould the alternations of Sganarelle and Panorace. Further, repetitive speech relies on gesture and voice inflexions, particularly when identical verbal fragments follow one another. Bodily motions and voice modulations supply the emphasis necessary to differentiate each homophonic fragment from the other, thus avoiding monotony. Repetitions not only create sound patterns but summon forth visual designs. The plastic aspect is such an integral part of Molière's dialogue, that its thought content could at times be translated by the dream-like movements of a mime. These verbal and bodily dances with all their stylized changes and repetitions, stress and cadence are dramatic techniques which separate great theater from reality and make it art. The theatrical beauty, the gaiety and rapidity of those dialogue routines were such that spectators doubtless never complained about these scenes being irrelevant to the plot of the play.

However, it is interesting to note that Sganarelle's consultations are not really a digression. With his fine sense of irony, Molière uses this interlude to deepen the perspective of
the play by reminding us of the contrasting aspects of Sganarelle's behavior. At the start of the play, after asking for advice, Sganarelle refused to listen to Géronimo's sound counsel because it contradicted his passion. Man wants to hear only what supports the attitudes he already has. Illusions are needed because the truth is more than he can stand. Now, earnestly seeking guidance, Sganarelle finds caricatures of his former self: people rendered psychically deaf by their own fantasies. While foreshadowing Sganarelle's fate with these episodes, Molière also lets the audience have a glimpse into one of the many infirmities of the human mind. With a bold use of artifice and stylization, with situations based on follies so exaggerated as to leave the world of reality far beyond, Molière reveals, nonetheless, that which is common to humanity: man's myopic vision which dooms his responses and aspirations to irrelevance and failure. His comedies become a sort of screen on which he projects and makes explicit the panorama of human illusions. Underneath his laughter there lies a perception of the age-old foibles of mankind. Molière detaches the spectators from their human reality, draws them into the realm of the unreal, the realm of comedy, and makes them look at themselves from a distance and laugh at their own weaknesses.

The magnification of the doctors' consultation in Monsieur de Pourceaugnac is another example of an apparent digression which, in fact, bears an organic relation to the plot and the theme of the play. In the game of deception, Sbrigani tricks others consciously, while they, through self-deception, become involuntary swindlers. Used by Sbrigani for his own purposes, and blinded by their professional obsession, the doctors unwittingly trap M. de Pourceaugnac, declaring that he is mad when in fact he is of sound mind. Why is this verdict of insanity handed down with a prolixity that seems to hold up the action? Long-windedness is a mode of expression befitting these eccentrics who have lost all sense of order and proportion; it dramatizes the
disorder of their thought. Governed by the monomania pursuit of one goal, they necessarily have a one-sided apprehension of reality: these manias behave as if the world were filled with sick men needing their care; others have become mere extensions of their passion. Goaded on by their idée fixe, they build tall tales in which they play the central role, just as Sbrigani invents and launches exploits to gratify his love of roguery, which is another manifestation of self-affirmation. With this superfluity of words, Molière shows man erecting towers of fantasy and illusions, building colossal monuments to his self-importance. Moreover, the extravagance of these pages reveals a remarkable portrayal of the compulsive mind, with its ritualistic thinking and performance, its insistence upon rules of procedure, its devotion to the ceremonial aspect of reasoning, symptoms listed in abnormal psychology textbooks. Monsieur de Pourceaugnac is not "une farce pour laquis," crass and trivial; it attains a penetrating insight into the distortions of reason. Sticklers for rules and protocol, lovers of traditions and precedents, compulsive individuals emphasize order and abstract considerations at the expense of concrete experience. Unable to shift flexibly in accordance with the requirements of the occasion, compulsive people function in only one kind of thought system. "Reason, taken psychologically, is an old inherited passion like any other, the passion for consistency and order, and it is just as prone as the other passions to overstep the modesty of nature and to regard its own aims as alone important." 

Inflation of the self and exaggerated reasoning which neglects concrete experience are given their stylistic expression. Strings of nouns and adjectives, meandering and endless sentences, accumulations of examples produce a multiplication of words which convey a loquacious love of the self as well as a vacuity of sense. Soon, spectators become lost in this labyrinth of words; language onstage is not only a way of communicating,
but a way of not communicating. A communications breakdown is
fostered in this instance by inflated and jumbled speech but it
also occurs through the clear but deliberately deceitful utter-
ances of a Sbrigani. It should be further noted that if the
doctors' speeches are entrusted to skillful actors, euphoric and
high-spirited effects will result out of this flow of talk; and
these will be thoroughly consonant with the carnival elation that
reigns over the entire play. If these pages of purposely bad
rhetoric were written primarily for their intrinsic interest, thus
holding up the action, they add, nevertheless, much to the Babel
universe of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac. Psychologists have noted
that each person tends to develop a verbal style of his own, in
part dictated by education and occupation, in part determined by
other life experience. Mental disturbances also affect verbal
expression, giving it their own peculiar kind of idiosyncrasies.
The prevalent use of nouns and adjectives, noted above in the
doctors' speeches, is characteristic of the syntactical orienta-
tion of compulsive personalities, overly concerned with the iden-
tity and classification of things and experiences. All great
writers have endeavored to translate the disorderly workings of
man's mind through corruptions of style. For their verbal power
and inventiveness, for the beauty of their composition, these
speeches rival the discourses of Aristophanesque or Rabelaisian
characters or those of Homais, another talking machine, famous
for his universalistic reasoning. Therefore, we cannot agree with
Bordonove who states that Molière "écrit" Monsieur de Pourceaugnac
"comme un pensum." "Une fois de plus, Molière a visé juste en ne
visant pas trop haut. C'est cela, il le constate amèrement, que
l'on veut de lui: ces grossières sottises, ces remugles de olyss-
tères, ces bouffonneries de bas étage." We are inclined to see
greater merit in Sainte-Beuve's views. Noting that Molière's
buffoonery has never been approached in a spirit of true criti-
cism — for criticism means appreciation of the writer's original
purpose — Sainte-Beuve shows briefly the evolution of Molière's
taste for "la folie comique." Once the dramatist got a glimpse into the rich artistic possibilities offered by the genre of the comédies-ballets, his unbridled comic fantasy reached a climax in his "dernières farces:"

Quoi qu’on ait dit, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, Le Malade imaginaire, attestent au plus haut point ce comique jaillissant et imprévu qui, à sa manière, rivalise en fantaisie avec Le Songe d’une nuit d’été et La Tempête. Pourceaugnac, M. Jourdain, Argan, c’est le côté de Sganarelle continué, mais plus poétique, plus dégagé de la farce du Barbouillé, plus enlevé souvent par delà le réel. Molière, forcé par les divertissements de cour de combiner ses comédies avec des ballets, en vint à déployer, à déchaîner dans ces danses de commande les chœurs bouffons et pétulants des avocats, des tailleurs, des Turcs, des apothicaires; le génie se fait de chaque nécessité une inspiration. Cette issue une fois trouvée, l'imagination inventive de Molière s'y précipita.... Les comédies à ballets dont nous parlons n'étaient pas du tout (qu'on se garde de le croire) des concessions au gros public, des provocations directes au rire du bourgeois, bien que ce rire y trouvât son compte; elles furent imaginées plutôt à l'occasion des fêtes de la cour. Mais Molière s'y complut vite et s'y exalta comme éperdument...."21

Another much decried flaw has been Molière's so-called "désinvolture dans l'enchaînement des scènes." The fact that characters appear with relentless regularity, just when wanted, stems from the art of making each second count for itself, of saving any moment from dullness. The action culminates in an absurdity or in a surprise; the spectators laugh. But after their outburst there must not be a letdown; the play must move on without a breathing spell. Rather than being a sign of youthful gaucherie, the artificiality of the links between the scenes of L'Étourdi attests to Molière's understanding of comic rhythm. His artistic sense prompted him to have characters arrive exactly on cue, thus endowing his play with a rapid tempo which maintains the audience in an ilinx atmosphere, in a mood of
exhilaration. "A comic plot fails to justify itself when un-supported by comic rhythm, which is a fast, not to say diabol-ical one. Vivacity is the key." Further, the great number of scenes, and there are forty-seven of them in L'Etourdi, demands that the play be conducted with a darting rhythm, that each moment be fully exploited. To each offensive on the part of Mascarille, and with all the machinations that accompany such strategical moves, correspond rapid entrances and exits of all the personages involved in the conspiration. The entrance and exit of a character signify the oncoming of a new situation, of a new scene. Therefore, it can be seen that the dramatic movement, and its plastic translation, are accelerated in function of the number of the scenes. "Si les scènes sont nombreuses, c'est que les allées et venues des personnages sont fréquentes, et que les apparitions des personnages sont assez courtes, puis-que la durée de la pièce est à peu près constante; si au con-traire le nombre de scènes est peu élevé, ces scènes seront lon-gues et le mouvement des personnages sera lent." The alternation of entrances and exits stamps the dramatic action with a rapid cadence, evoking a light but precise dance which tends to remove the characters further from the real world. This ballet-like effect contributes to the elaboration of a fictitious universe which is not meant to be judged by realistic standards. These shifts from one incident to the next, causing characters to whirl about in a great variety of scenes, also emphasize the fortuitous nature of the comic game. To find the liaisons between L'Etourdi's scenes invraisemblables is to reveal both a narrow notion of reality and a failure to recognize the unreality of all art. It is to forget that "theater is an art ... based upon pretenses ... it lives by conventions: a convention is an agreed-upon falsehood, a permitted lie."24

In spite of the changes that Molière introduced in Bel-trame's play, Attinger states that "l'essentiel de la technique
et de l'expression vient de la commedia dell'arte." Beltrame's play no doubt reflected some of the acting dexterity and speed of the famous Fideli troupe of which he was a member. La commedia dell'arte had renowned acrobats and dancers as actors; speaking was but one of their several accomplishments. Hence, we can safely assume that the dance movement, created by constant entrances and exits, derives in part from the traditions of the Italian theater. Thus, before criticizing L'Étourdi too promptly, we should not overlook its link with a particular brand of theater which must have offered something distinctly beautiful, for it drew the applause of European audiences for three hundred years. Men and women of unusually versatility, intelligence, talent, and scholarship contributed to the development of its traditions.

Eric Bentley regards la commedia dell'arte as possessing "the characteristics of great comic theater of any place or time." For example, he praises Jean Louis Barrault's performance in Les Fourberies de Scapin because through the full use of his lithe and acrobatic body, Barrault endeavors to recapture the poetry of bodily movement so characteristic of the Italian mode of acting. "Barrault owes much to Jacques Copeau. Copeau aimed at rescuing the classics from the deadness of current academic performance, not by reclothing them in modern ideas but by rediscov- ering the original traditions, and, above all, that of la commedia dell'arte." L'Étourdi's artistic merits will remain unappreciated unless it is studied in relation to the traditions of the Italian theater. Furthermore, as René Bray notes "le personnage de Mascarille ... est presque toujours en scène.... Ce rôle est l'un des plus longs que l'on connaisse au théâtre." If this important part could be studied in conjunction with the knowledge available on the acting techniques of Italian actors, we would gain a better understanding of how Molière got himself and his matter across to the audience, how he made his person exist in
theatrical terms with the authority and magnetism of a great star. It was through the visual music, created by the actors' unbroken flow of gestures, through their capacity to transform their costumes into moving patterns, that the Italian comedians traced geometric figures related to the overall movement of their plays. It was with the fluidity of their body and the absorbing eloquence of its presence that the actors of la commedia dell'arte worked out lines, forms, a rhythm that animated the design of the plot. It is in that "cinéplastie parlante," to borrow a term from Léon Emery, that resides much of the stylistic virtue of L'Etourdi.

Comedy is not plotless, but the critics' notions of what constitute a good plot are often too limited to encompass the varieties offered by this genre. George Dandin has a tightly organized and unified structure while L'Etourdi reflects a certain disjunctiveness in its construction. The systematic quality of Dandin's plot does not make it superior to L'Etourdi's; it simply conveys a different kind of dramatic movement. L'Etourdi's plot is a collection of episodes connected like the beads of a necklace; they do not develop out of each other, the order of their presentation might be transposed, and some omitted without loss of meaning. However, this multitude of loosely jointed scenes creates smaller movements which trace the overall outline of the plot. Each episode has a rise and fall rhythm, manifesting the same self-defeating pattern implicit in the large plot movement and confirmed by the ending of the play. Each trick invented by Mascarille traces an ascending line, often emphasized by his gay and boastful speech. Elated by his ingenuity and the prospect of success, Mascarille describes himself as sitting on the top of the world.30 However, as Lélie destroys his schemes, the fall takes place, often accompanied by angry tirades. Lélie's blunders form a sub-plot which parodies the main one. As noted in Chapter IV, the plot is never allowed to progress toward the desired goal. Mascarille's eagerness to act yields no result.
The ascending-descending movement of the action has an ironic quality which turns Mascarille's plans into delusions of grandeur, as if they involved unrealistic ideas of self-importance, achievement or power. Mascarille appears almost as a caricature of self-assertion and assurance. The delusional character of the play is symbolized by the denouement. All conflicts are quickly settled by means of a recognition scene. It is abruptly discovered that Célie is of worthy parentage and therefore is a proper match for Lélie. Once again, chance relegates Mascarille's actions to irrelevance; their reality is sabotaged by their gratuitousness. Mascarille struggles to give form to his ideas, to shape them into acts; however, after achieving a transitory existence, they are condemned to non-being by the welter of his universe. The evanescence of Mascarille's actions calls to mind another kind of fragility, that of the theatrical world. Today, only the written play, L'Etourdi, outlasts the trampling years. Little is known about Molière's acting style. His passion for acting discovered forms for its soul, in acts, movements, spoken words which now have faded away; there was a brief, illuminating presence, soon followed by a lasting absence. Most of the details that made up the reality of the performance have been forgotten; the scenery and costumes have rotted away or become lost. In retrospect, we see the strangeness of a shimmering and shifting world, peopled with real men and personages trying to seize a kind of reality that dies when seized.

Thus, we have a plot built on the repetitive manifestations of failure. However, repetition, contrary to what Bergson has said, is not a sure sign of amusement; it can turn into a nightmare. It is precisely the structural situation of William Synge's tragic Riders to the Sea, where a woman who has lost her husband and her five sons to the sea inescapably loses her last child by drowning. However, the painful aspect of Mascarille's repeated failure and frustration is held in check by the exaggeration of the repetition. Exaggeration, the theatrical form
of the reductio ad absurdum, amplifies or multiplies failure into nonsense and unreality. In this connection, the persistence with which Alcestis complains about mankind is meant to break down whatever sympathy spectators may have for his professed sincerity. Constant complaints and blunders turn him in the end into an angry Jumping Jack, whose behavior becomes laughable. Mascarille's setbacks, repeated with such insistence, begin to resemble the small misfortunes to which we subject ourselves in roller coasters at the fairs. Frustration divided and scattered over a multitude of incidents loses its potential pain and becomes part of a game. Moreover, the rise and fall pattern keeps the audience emotionally removed from the dramatic experience, wary of investing affective capital in events that repeatedly cancel each other out. Before turning to George Dandin's plot structure, let us say that L'Étourdī's action is theatrically effective. Its episodic incidents may not be causally related to one another but they form part of a dramatic plan; they establish a strongly stylized rhythm, intimately connected with the subject of trickery and with the movement of the dialogue. The looseness of L'Étourdī's plot is more apparent than real.

Molière employs another plot pattern, the circular one, which also gives the illusion of movement. George Dandin attempts to give objective reality to what he personally knows to be true. He wants his "malheur" to gain official recognition from those who matter. At the start of each act, his project follows a straight, purposeful line which, however, curls back on itself at the end of each act. At the denouement the wheel has come full circle for the third time, the end has joined the beginning and Dandin is locked into circularity. The repetitive circular pattern emphasizes that a good deal of energy has been expended with no result obtained; Dandin's efforts have proved worthless, he has failed to give form and substance to his project. Sganarelle of Le Mariage forcé is also caught in that
circular wandering which leads him ironically right back to where he started, to his undesirable marriage with Dorimène. The rise and fall and the circular plot patterns become devices that point out a vision: the illusion of progress. For all their milling around and rushing about, the characters have failed to reach their goals. Much of the comic artistry aims at creating actions that come to nought, characters going nowhere yet going so doggedly. In his Essai sur le comique de Molière, Danilo Romano has analyzed this "mouvement à vide" in the situation reversals of "les débits amoureux" found in various Molieresque comedies.31

Other plays, such as Le Cocu imaginaire, are also constructed on illusions, on the characters' imaginary visions. Emotions, such as fear or jealousy, distort perceptions which in turn bring about false judgments and beliefs. Sganarelle, having become a magnetized center of delusions, draws other characters like iron filings. While Sganarelle sees Lélie as his supposed rival, Lélie begins to assume, wrongly, that Sganarelle's remarks, facial expressions, and general comportment have a particular application to his own problem, the hearsay loss of his beloved brought about by a breach of commitment on the part of the girl's father. Egocentric and partial vision generates a congeries of illusions, the fake encrusts itself on the fake, and the plot's complexity becomes expressive of the fantastic jumble created by minds that have temporarily gone out of control. Imbroglios, so lightly dismissed by critics, are plot patterns well suited to express confusion, the mother of unreality. Once man's obsessions invite him to tamper with the conceptual boundaries ordinarily assigned to objects, people, and events, a concomitant clouding of consciousness occurs. Thought becomes under or over-inclusive, in short, imprecise and unreliable, and the world turns to bedlam. In the land of comic make-believe, chaos without its pathology becomes playful; its fun and freedom are essential attributes of comedy's topsy-turvydom.
Les Fourberies de Scapin is constructed on a double intrigue pattern, involving two sets of actions and characters. Father, son, daughter and servant form one group which has its exact counterpart. Such doubling is characteristic of much of la commedia dell'arte's structure. The plot of Les Fourberies revolves around the same problem as that of L'Etourdi: a young lad, seeking to win the lady of his heart, enlists the help of a distinguished rogue-servant, Scapin, who displays an alarming lack of moral scrupulousness as he sets about to fulfill his assignment. In Les Fourberies, the problem is simply made more complex by the interplay of two love stories and two sets of personages.

Plot duality and character parallelism transform the play into a musical work with themes and variations. In the initial scene of Act I, we have Octave worried over the imminent return of his father whom he has disobeyed during his absence by marrying clandestinely outside of his class. Octave's agitation is contrasted with the resigned calm of his servant, Sylvestre, whose laconic echolalia is set in opposition to Octave's impatient exclamations and questions. Scapin's entrance causes this contrast between anxiety and calm to be repeated and prolonged. His serene self-confidence serves as a foil to Octave's distressed excitement. Once the son has acted out the agitation leitmotiv, the father takes it up. Argante's furor is for a time played against Scapin's cool and ironic asides. Then when Argante becomes aware of Scapin and Sylvestre's presence, he vents his anger on the latter who so carelessly watched after his master's interests. This explosion of bellicose humor is met by Sylvestre's silence and Scapin's overcompensatory courtesy. Once Scapin has softened Argante's anger with an imaginary version of Octave's supposed shotgun marriage, he reverses the decrescendo movement by contradicting Argante. A crescendo of furor develops once more. The interplay of angry reactions continues: Argante's
troubled attitude is contrasted with Géronte's complacent affability. Then, Argante's irritation rises as Géronte begins to censure his friend's behavior. Had Argante given his son the proper moral training, Octave would never have misbehaved. Argante abruptly retorts that charity begins at home, that Léandre, Géronte's son, has also done his share of mischief during his father's absence. Left perplexed and worried by Argante's words, Géronte bursts into anger upon seeing his son enter. Thinking that he has been betrayed by Scapin, Léandre is plunged into an unequalled rage against his disloyal servant whose life is spared by Octave's cool composure.

Thus, a thematic movement is developed by variations. The tendency of the primary material to repeat itself in a continuous braid-like movement which embraces constant shifts favors both a rapid harmonic rhythm and a constant tonal flux. Therefore, this structural style satisfies one of the basic requirements of art form: variety within unity.

Then, another theme is introduced, the war of deceit against the fathers, carried off with an art of infinite modulations. Scapin's mastery of strategical moves and theatrical tricks weaves unending embellishments on the melody of la fourberie, during three long scenes which form the core of the comedy. Argante and Géronte's undoing is brought about by Scapin's horrible tales of justice's rapacity and of Léandre's abduction by pirates. When Argante's reticences cannot be overcome by a concentrated description of the multifarious evil of lawsuits, Sylvestre, disguised as a swashbuckling ruffian and coached by Scapin, arrives on cue to terrorize Argante.

After successively playing on certain major themes, endowing them with rich variations, Molière flirts with the temptation of extinguishing them through dispersion. The changes
and reversals brought about by the denouement of Les Fourberies reduce Soarin's tricks to the ironic status of unnecessary incidents, collapsing into unreality through sheer lack of consequence: "le hasard a fait ce que la prudence des pères avait délibéré." But Molière allows the master of intrigue to perform one final roguery which places back into reality the lengthy ruse that was the substance of the entire play. With one more little play within the play, Molière briefly recreates the climate of his work, and recapitulates and reaffirms its main themes in a final accord: Soarin's effrontery, his ingenuity, and love of deception. Thematic elaboration, diffusion, and near extinction through dispersion are followed by ultimate unification.

Themes and variations, carefully contrived in their relationships, their tensions and oppositions, add a patent formalism to the plot structure of Les Fourberies. Art, ultimately, is a search for order, for form. The stylized organizational patterns of this play fill spectators with keen intellectual delight: confronted with a sense of tangible harmony, they can step out of life's imperfect reality, away from what is half-apprehended in the flux of sensation and activity, to enter into an autonomous and artistically composed universe.

From what has just been stated about plot construction in L'Etourdi, George Dandin, Le Cocu imaginaire, and Les Fourberies de Soarin, it is obvious that no hard and fast rule can be established with which to judge the validity of Molière's plots. For several centuries now, it has been proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that, from an Aristotelian point of view, Molierian plots do not satisfy our inexhaustible belief in logical coherence, relating act to consequence. However, by measuring comedies with the standard of the tragic plot, we have missed what is there, in the plays themselves. It is time that we begin to explore alternative approaches to the concept of comic plot so
that we may come closer to the author's basic assumptions on the subject of dramatic structure. Why don't we give Molière the benefit of the doubt and acknowledge that he knew what he was doing? Why should we overlook the artistic vitality of his dramatic action by busying ourselves with questions of legitimacy? Molière delights in jostling the causal presentation of events but his plots, reduced to a few essential lines, have a hard and bright beauty of their own. No fuzzy edges, no blurred contours are found in the repetitive rise and fall or the circular patterns which endow the plays with a formalism that needs to be studied on its own terms. Now that our vision has been conditioned by several generations of Cubist and abstract painters, we should be in a position to appreciate the designs of Molière's plots. Their geometric quality does not preclude dynamism; they call forth movement. Advance and withdrawal or circular motions, continuation through variation suggest some of the fundamental rhythmic drives that pervade cosmic and human existence.

In general, students and teachers of drama have been rather severe with regard to Molièresque denouements. Confronted by the miracles which Molière piles on one another at the end of his plays, critics wanting comedies presented in plausible nutshells simply throw up their hands in horror. So much arbitrary artificiality means that Molière, admittedly a comic genius, attaches no importance to the finale of his plays, or, not having the time to make things neater, he hurriedly restores long-lost children to their parents, opportunely reveals an unexpected inheritance which resolves all difficulties, or swiftly introduces a character from the blue to patch things up. By reverting to such cliché devices, used since the days of Greek and Roman comedies, it is argued that Molière displays no imagination. In short, most critics repeat what Voltaire stated over two hundred years ago. In a letter to the Russian dramatist, Aleksandr P. Sumarokov, Voltaire writes that in Molière's plays "il y a des
longueurs, les intrigues sont quelquefois faibles, les dénouements sont rarement ingénieux." In his *Commentaires sur Corneille*, Voltaire discusses Corneille's principle that "il faut qu'il n'entre aucun acteur dans les actes suivants qu'il ne soit connu dès le premier." Then, he adds that "Molière ... a manqué à cette règle de Corneille. Dans la plupart de ses dénouements les personnages ne sont pas assez annoncés, pas assez préparés." 33

After a proper quota of improbable mishaps has been meted out to keep the action going, it would be difficult for Molière to extricate in a plausible and reasonable way his characters from plots that rest on arbitrariness and fraud. What life-like ending could be given to *Le Médecin malgré lui* for example? None that wouldn't clash miserably with what went on before. Therefore, Molière tops his plays with another bit of nonsensical fun and packs his spectators off to their homes. Having presented an impossible world, the dramatist abides by its peculiar brand of logic in the finale. If Molière had cared to make his plotting and dénouement mechanics plausible, he could have done so with no trouble whatsoever; he had as much dramatic skill as any man who ever wrote comedies. For the most part, critics have been unwilling to recognize that Molière's theater does not operate on a life-like resemblance. A better insight would be gained into his vision if we could evaluate his plays as art, as entities complete in themselves, which do not pretend to duplicate things in life. Music critics, for example, judge a work by its tone, tempo, pitch and rhythm, making little or no reference to life and realism in appreciating the poetry created by sound designs. To be sure, a musician is freer from reality than a dramatist. The latter takes his subject from life and, to remain somewhat intelligible, he must be faithful to some extent to the facts of the external world; words — an important part of his medium — are intimately bound to the associations and connotations accepted in the actual world of men. Then his finished
work, even if it is constructed with abstract forms, must still be animated by real persons who may not have learned the abstract language that is fundamental to acting skills; they may move and speak too much like human beings who are seen by the public as personalities rather than as artistic agents at work in the play. In spite of its impurity, great theater strives to be natural to its artistic nature, not to life. A realistic gesture on the part of an actress playing Phèdre would be unnatural and untrue to the style of Racine. An illusion of realistic probability placed on L'Etourdi's denouement would destroy the fantasy of the entire play. With such a contradictory ending, Molière would have exposed himself to the scorn of his audience. Cognizant as he was of incongruity and its power to ridicule, Molière didn't take any risk; his plays' endings are consonant with the episodic and playful nature of his comedies.

By confusing life and the theater, critics have muddled their readers' mind with sterile distinctions between verisimilitude and improbability, between naturalness and artifice. Seemingly convinced that they know the one and only version of life's realities, they have found little interest in plays they judge unreal, therefore inferior. An excessive preoccupation with psychological and social realism has led students of drama to concentrate on a few plays which, wrongly, seem more life-like, therefore more important. Does Dom Juan, however, have anything to do with realism? No indeed! It is built according to the poetical method which allows the artist to use anything, whether or not it is possible or ever seen or heard. That Molière may have culled from life some of his Dom Juan material is possible, but he arranged it in a context that is fantastic, fervid and poetical. Are the formal attributes of this play greater than those of L'Etourdi? The profusion of articles and books on Dom Juan would seem to indicate that this is the case. We take exception to this attitude, the truth being that plays contemptuously labelled
as mere "farces" or "pièces à tiroirs" have a style to which few
if any critics have found the clues. Further, if Dom Juan has
been deemed worthy of scholarly attention because of its symbolic
significance, L'Etourdi holds its own on that plane. As we have
explained in Chapter IV, it expresses experiences deeply lodged
in the consciousness of the race. And if Mascarille has been dis-
missed as a mere silhouette, so should Dom Juan. They are both
poetic fictions, well equipped, theatrically speaking, to reach
the self-deceiving, romancing liar that is in the heart of man.
Both claim "the impulse to play ... the right to enact a pose,
to assume a panache ... for the mere sport and glory of it."

It should also be noted that both in L'Etourdi and Dom Juan the
curtain is brought down on a rambling sequence of events through
the help of a deus ex machina device. A contrived finale puts
an end to the episodes in which Mascarille and Dom Juan pause
only for a moment to find the splendid mask or the appropriate
one, playing different roles at different times and before dif-
ferent people, only to be swept onward into further change.

If a link must be established at all costs between the-
er and life, the work of Dr. J. L. Moreno demonstrates that the
urge to imitate, to impersonate is one of man's fundamental
drives; the human mind being a stage and life a play to be acted
out. In seemingly improvised theatrical games, Moreno acting
as le meneur du jeu explored the personality conflicts of his
patients by provoking them to play personages that corresponded
to deep but suppressed personality tendencies or to thwarted
ideals. Through the expression of these desires, anxiety was
reduced, and catharsis led patients to realize the inadequacy of
their role playing in real life. To be compelled by family and
social experiences to wear a mask that does not answer to the
needs or aspirations of our being is to be deprived of that re-
silience needed to sustain our search for happiness. An inade-
quate mask leads to alienation toward life ... and Mascarille
and Dom Juan need to avail themselves of several roles in order to live. Man has the impulse to shape a life larger than his own.

Almost to a man, critics have disapproved of Molière's use of chance events in his denouements. This wholesale condemnation seems to be based upon no other aesthetic criterion than the imposition on comedy of the Aristotelian requirement of inevitability for tragic endings. Each event that occurs in tragedy limits the number of alternative possibilities of events that can follow, until, when we reach the end, the conclusion should be strictly inevitable, given the succession of events that have preceded. At the end, there is only one possibility left. This rigid circumscription of dramatic action contributes significantly to the creation of an oppressive unity, consonant with the irreversibility which tragic drama strives to achieve. On the whole, however, comedy is not concerned with the irreversible; it welcomes changes, coincidences and surprises, which often overcome stringent causality or obstacles that could spell disaster. If chance events tend to weaken the tragic atmosphere, they heighten comic feeling. For example, coincidences liberate Molière's young lovers from paternal bondage, thereby confirming comedy's revolt against attempts to dam up and control vitality, pleasure, and joy. Furthermore, these happy concurrent happenings, one falling on the top of another with an incredible speed and in remarkable numbers, enhance playfulness. The falling-out of these chances, all resembling or somehow fitting into each other, clearly shows that comedy is a matter of rattling and throwing cogged dice. Therefore, it is absurd to expect playful mutability or variety, unexpected opportunities for happiness and laughter, to manifest themselves through devices appropriate to the tragic genre. Seeking to establish a pattern of intentional discontinuity, comedy cannot exhibit in the succession of its events the kind of unity, causality and inevitability found in
tragedy. Evaluated in terms of Aristotelian standards, comedy with its accidental features will invariably and unfairly be found to be deficient.

There is perhaps one valid reason for objecting to the introduction of chance events: when they seriously compromise the artistic unity of the work. If the continuity of action or the prevailing mood is broken by the injection of a chance event, we feel that the dramatist has changed the rules of the game; he had set up the action with certain kinds of characters in a particular situation, and implicitly promised to work with those elements; now suddenly, he changes the rules; it's a different game — and we feel cheated. This feeling of annoyance and disbelief is particularly pronounced when our expectation is changed in midstream, when we are in the thick of things. Further, the improbability of coincidences is increased when they become crucial occurrences in the story-line. It should be noted, however, that Molière has generally relegated improbabilities brought about by chance to the outskirts of his dramatic action. In such plays as L'Etourdi and Les Fourberies de Scapin, the part played by chance usually concerns the antecedents of the comedies, not the action of the plays themselves. Chance prepares matters in advance and then allows the characters to play their parts with no interference until the end, when the discovery of the real identity of the heroines extricates the personages from their predicaments. In Le Médecin malgré lui, chance, under the guise of an unexpected inheritance, comes in unobtrusively in the very last moments of the performance, bringing a happy conclusion to the play. It is likely that after two hours of adventure and tension, spectators welcome a swift denouement, and never begrudge its implausibility if it is logical enough to serve as a pretext for ending the play.

Molière also uses the element of chance in developing the
plot, in Le Coqu imaginaire for example. Again, it is to be noted that coincidences are only parts of the dramatist's storytelling mechanism, devices for launching a series of adventures. Célie's fainting and losing the portrait of her beloved and other chance occurrences do not constitute such a dissonant starting point for the extravaganza that is to follow. Considerations of niceties of craftsmanship put aside, chance is an indispensable part of comic drama. Comedy presents the stumblings of purblind characters, their futile quests, their misplaced exultations, their groundless fears. Comedy deals with limitations. Its personages are the prisoners of mental aberrations such as obsessions, rationalizations, projections which prevent them from being free and reasonable. They are also held in bondage by their body's instincts. Fearing for his security, Géronte allows himself to be treated as a thing; Seapin stuffs him into a bag and, under the pretense of helping Géronte, beats the living daylights out of him. To steal Anselme's purse, Mascarille distracts the old man's attention with inflammatory tales of love. Chance is just one more limitation to which man is heir. It contributes its proper share to blindness of mind. Through a series of coincidences, Sganarelle of Le Coqu imaginaire begins to act as if he were groping in the dark, grappling with the wrong objects and people. Then as we have seen in L'Etourdi, chance throws out of gear "the best laid plans of mice and men," causing ironic reversals where the dupe becomes duped, where the man of action does not act.

For a moment, let us place ourselves under the banner of realism, with critics who expect theater to recreate a rather literal and sober representation of life. In the name of plausibility, are these critics justified in condemning the use of chance in Molière's denouements? No. Chance events occur all the time in life — chance not in the sense of having no causes, but in the sense of unintended and unexpected, and perhaps in
some sense unpredictable, intersections of causal series of events. Man's life is governed by chance to a larger extent than he is prepared to admit. It is true that he does not like to think of *alea* because it makes him aware that ultimately he has but little control over his existence. However, improbable events do occur in real life. Our modern age, with its concentration camps, abounds in tales of forced separations, kidnappings, unexpected reunions of survivors. Exposure of children still occurs. At times, brothers and sisters abandoned by their parents or placed in separate foundling homes are brought together years later by life's motion to discover their families. Shipwrecks, pirates and abductions were still frequent in the seventeenth century and they were familiar happenings in antiquity, from which Molière borrowed these so-called *invraisemblances*. However, we shall leave this argument, for we believe that Molière's plays seek their effect, not in plodding probability, but in delightful improbability where "the long arm of coincidence" has its legitimate function.

It has been stated, erroneously we think, that the finales of Molière bear no organic relationship to the body of his plays. Comedy, unlike tragedy, does not reach any conclusions. It is a form that has to be interrupted arbitrarily, since it has no inherent reason for halting the perpetual-motion machine of its plot. *L'Etourdi's contre-tempes* could be improvised indefinitely. These loosely connected scenes do not develop from each other, accumulating thereby a convergence of forces that reach a maximum point and are resolved in a finale. Since no ending is possible, Molière decides to make one up. He spins the wheel of Fortune, changes the relationships of the characters with dizzying speed and resolves the tangles. The inconclusive nature of comedy prompts the dramatist to impose a contrived ending on an inexhaustible action, or end his play on a question mark, as Molière did in *Le Misanthrope*.37
Molière's endings are related to the body of the comedy in another way. L'Etourdi, Les Fourberies de Soapin, Le Médecin malgré lui, and Monsieur de Pourceaugnae are a series of lies and frauds; in Le Coq imaginaire, the characters are set adrift on a sea of misconceptions of their own devising; L'Amour médecin and Le Mariage forcé revolve around Sganarelle's vain desires. The illusory nature of the comic world, where shadows lean forward only to recede into nothingness, is emphasized by the endings of the plays. Mascarille and Soapin's actions prove to be a mere rhetorical flourish; the personages' preoccupations in Le Coq imaginaire are revealed as unreal; in the end, Sganarelle of L'Amour médecin and Le Mariage forcé sees his wishes pass away into unreality. Characters try to breathe life into their pipe dreams but Molière comes along, claps his hands, brings on with a grin a denouement as fraudulent as his characters' schemes, and symbolically wakes his audience up to the unreality and the pure theatricality of his plays. By saying "Ecoutez, voici ... la fin d'une vraie et pure comédie," Mascarille compels the spectators to regard the performance of L'Etourdi as nothing but a game.

As a rebuttal of another common criticism made of Molière's dramatic structure, let us ask the following questions: Why shouldn't characters be able to disappear from the action once they have fulfilled their function, or arrive late in the play as they are needed? Their entrances and withdrawals are sufficiently explained so as not to affect the coherence of the plot; once no longer needed, they are abandoned without disrupting the play. If the structure of the play or the unity of the atmosphere is not disturbed by these temporary roles, why do critics object to them? We believe that their objections rest on a misunderstanding of organic unity. Since Plato introduced the notion of organic unity in the Phaedrus and Aristotle adopted it in his Poetics, what has this principle come to mean? In a
general way, it claims that any subtraction or addition not only diminishes the value of the work of art as a whole but changes the character of all its contained parts. In short, a work of art is indivisible.

In our opinion, this view is erroneous. In any artistic organic whole there is, for example, elaboration without strict necessity, padding that is dispensable or replaceable by another kind of filler equally serviceable. In other words, every part of a work of art is not equally important or relevant to its main representation, theme, or argument. A minor element may be changed, substituted, or removed without undermining the value of the whole work or of any of its parts. Therefore, it is quite conceivable for a playwright to dismiss some of his characters without endangering the essential unity or value of his drama.

There are in every play essential characters who define the theme, and auxiliary characters, not indispensable to the theme, but simply convenient for filling in the canvas and carrying on the action. The essence of plays such as L'Etourdi or Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, which call for so much external movement and bustle on the part of a rather large dramatic personae, is not disturbed by the late entrance or abrupt departure of characters. Too many episodic roles would, however, upset the sense of concentration and inescapability which Molière seeks to create in George Dandin. On the other hand, the brief presence of Lucette and her children makes a distinct addition to the texture of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, a variety which is, however, connected with the main motif of the comedy. Their removal does not impair the coherence of the play in any way. Operating under the prior conviction that stringent unity is almost an aesthetic necessity, most critics have been rather negative toward the variety displayed by Molière's comedies. J. L. Styan even goes so far as to call Dom Juan "a dramatically purposeless mixture."
The fact remains, however, that Molière's comedies often resem-
ble vaudeville parades, capitalizing on diversity without chaos.
Therefore, critics should stop laboring under anciently imposed
notions and enlarge the scope of their appreciation. Although
a play may exhibit tight unity, does it need to do so? Is or-
ganic unity a criterion of excellence, of greatness? Does the
stature of a work of art stem from its unity? Shakespeare is a
magnificent playwright yet he is the last dramatist whose plays
one would describe as unified wholes. Molière seems to have
understood that variety and unity are basically irreducible.
Maximum unity tends to curtail variety and the greater the vari-
ety, the less unity there is likely to be. Since the comic genre
thrives on accidentalness, discontinuity and change, Molière
wrote plays that excel legitimately and characteristically in
variety, not necessarily in only one kind of unity.

Modern interpretation of Molière's comedies is hampered
by this demand for regularity of structure. The dramatic action
of L'Étourdi, for example, is carried on mainly by Mascarille
and Lélie who continue through the play and are closely inter-
woven in the web of the plot. Apart from them, there are a
number of other characters such as Léandre, Ergaste and Andrès
who appear infrequently and for short intervals. They are needed
only for the intrigue and their activities accordingly cease when
the trick is played. Comedy does not hesitate to employ mechani-
cal and temporary roles for promoting action. The use of inci-
dental roles may also be protatic in nature. In L'Amour médecin
the appearance of Aminte, Luorèce, Messrs. Guillaume and Josse
is entirely confined to the initial scene. They merely assist
Sganarelle in expounding his problem, helping thereby with the
delineation of his character. Their presence promotes a dialogue
which reveals an astute Sganarelle, readily discerning the under-
lying motives of these minor characters. This initial character-
ization will furnish an ironic contrast with the final portrait
of Sganarelle, that of an overly confident and short-sighted master duped in the end by his servant's quick cleverness at intrigue. Although Martine in Le Médecin malgré lui will be momentarily rehabilitated later on in the play, she will not resume an active part after having initiated the action in the course of a brief sequence of scenes at the play's outset. Once her service is performed, she drops out of sight. As indicated earlier in this chapter, professional types such as philosophers and doctors occupy the stage for a scene or two. They owe their temporary existence mainly to the amusing possibilities of their egotism. These entertaining clowns provide the play with a padding primarily designed to delight the audience. It would thus appear that one of the striking features of comedy is the relative profusion, as compared with tragedy, of temporary roles created for the purpose of assisting in expository needs and character portrayal, of entertaining the audience with buffoonery and of promoting action and dialogue. These incidental roles seem to be very good illustrations of the loose touch-and-go method which seems to guide the organization of comedy.

Deliberate patterning of plots, episodes inserted primarily to arouse laughter, extravagant events based on improbable premises or created by chance give a palpably fictitious framework to the plays we are attempting to defend as a meaningful and respectable part of Molière's work. Dramatic irony, built on situations openly declared as false, is another reason why literary realists have belittled or ignored these plays. The author carefully lets the audience know that the dramatic action is all a mistake, that it rests on situations that are not real. If he didn't present his characters' actions in the context of a world of imagination, the onlookers, far from laughing, would find what they see thoroughly distasteful. Evil deeds, realistically presented, would arouse their indignation. But the audience, who knows better, is able to observe at a safe distance,
with guiltless pleasure, the kind of behavior which would be painful in life-like situations.

Duality, the basis for much of Molière's dramatic irony, is a salient feature of his comedies: dual intrigue, or a subplot forming a built-in critique of the main plot, master-servant dichotomy, the divided nature of some characters such as Sganarelle of Le Coup imaginaire, a mixture of cowardice and brag-gadocio, etc. These contrasts transform Molière's plays into prismatic crystals, composed of a certain number of facets, establishing thereby a reciprocal but contrasting relation. As Mascarille rhapsodizes over his own cleverness, his four previous failures flash back into the spectators' consciousness, providing an ironic foil to these boastful claims, alerting the audience to an oncoming fall. Guilty of verbal hubris, Mascarille, the self-proclaimed emperor, is due to tumble down. From one scene to the next, or within one scene, sudden evanescent comparisons are made by spectators between successive actions, points of view, or poses, and through this sort of mental gymnastics, the audience apprehends simultaneously the different levels of the play's reality. This special double vision allows the onlooker to perceive contrasts which help him to sift out appearances from realities. Retrospection, comparison, and contrast constitute an ironic game, based on an interplay of antitheses which incessantly transforms the perspectives of the play. For example, Sopin, who has just proclaimed his bold and blithe disregard for punishment to Sylvestre, his fellow servant, is seen two scenes later abjectly kneeling and trembling under Léandre's threats. In this scene, the vision is further divided by Sopin's forced confession. Although not guilty of betraying Léandre's secrets to Géronte, Sopin seeks to pacify his master by admitting past misdeeds. Despite his pose of humility and contrition, Sopin asserts by his very confession, and to Léandre's face, a rare mastery in the technique of bamboozling one's master.
Then as bad news is announced, Léandre immediately forgets his anger and turns to Soapin for help. The servant refuses to be of any assistance, thereby forcing Léandre to kneel and ask for forgiveness. The tables being turned, Soapin is avenged. This vital interplay between coexisting but contrasting levels of the play continues: as Soapin refuses to take Argante's money, playing the honest man, whose self-respect commands him not to tolerate the slightest suspicion that would cast aspersion on his sense of honor, spectators juxtapose in their mind this refusal with the arduous work he has just put forth to extort the money he is now so reticent to take. The contrast between these two attitudes reveals the astonishing discrepancy that exists between Soapin's means and the goal he wants to attain. In other words, he uses the truth to carry off his trick. When Soapin says: "Non, Monsieur, ne me confiez point votre argent.... Non, vous dis-je, ne vous fiez point à moi. Que sait-on si je ne veux point vous attraper votre argent?" he conditions Argante's mind in such a way as to make the dupe accept as false what is really true. Then recalling Soapin's previous effort to obtain Argante's money, and seeing him now willing to bring his scheme to the brink of disaster, spectators become aware of the full measure of Soapin's art. Like an acrobat, who can maneuver his body at will, Soapin plays a dangerous game with a cool calculation that bespeaks of skill and technique acquired through long practice. For an instant, the figure of Soapin acquires a diabolical side to it; his manipulation of evil is so deliberate. So confident is he in the perfection of his art, that Soapin indulges in the luxury of playing dangerously and cynically stating the truth. As noted earlier, Molière seems to imitate his personage, bringing his theatrical stratagems to the verge of dissolution through the use of a denouement that momentarily reduces Les Fourberies to absurdity.

The audience's appreciation of this play of opposing
perspectives depends to a large extent on foreknowledge. More often than not, Molière lets the spectator in on things which are not yet revealed, and may never be revealed, to some of the characters on stage. The onlooker evaluates the personages' actions, attitudes, and words against the total view which he alone possesses and his superior knowledge prompts him to exercise his judgment continuously. As G. G. Sedgewick points out, the spectator becomes an ironist, an observer who beholds with impartiality the discrepancy between appearance and reality, who grasps the double meaning of words, whose lucidity contrasts with the blindness of the characters. It will be remembered from Chapter II that this fusion of superiority and detachment has been considered by philosophers and psychologists as propitious to the liberation of laughter. Molière seldom withholds information; to keep a secret from the onlooker is to deprive him of his clairvoyant aloofness and reduce him to the level of the characters, and its revelation provokes surprise which topples the spectator from his Olympian position. Total vision is a privilege enjoyed almost exclusively by the audience. Sganarelle of L'Amour médecin flatters himself into thinking that he is ubiquitous, only to discover that, in the end, he possesses an incomplete vision, that he was merely a segment of the drama. While Sbrigani shares a delightful sense of complicity with the spectators, dominating with his god-like vision dupes as well as accomplices, voluntary and involuntary ones, through the entire play, Mascarille and Soapin fall to the level of their blind victims. Through bad luck or overestimation of their abilities, these two plotters are found out and humiliated. For a time Molière allows his rogues to be in control of the action, thus affording the spectators the opportunity to collaborate vicariously in the art of dissimulation and enjoy the thrill of power that comes from the manipulation of men. However, if Mascarille and Soapin were not brought low, the audience would begin to admire them and subjective identification would take place.
Since we rarely laugh at what we admire, the comic atmosphere would be ruined. Therefore, equality and complicity between personages and spectators have to be replaced eventually by audience superiority. Sbrigani is treated somewhat differently; he is completely successful as a *meneur du jeu*, and yet he does not awaken any sense of wonder in the mind of the viewers. Molière uses him more as a master of ceremonies who introduces oncoming scenes with a few explanatory comments which enable the audience to understand the details of the deception about to be engineered. He directs and organizes crowds of men but rarely performs solos which by the brilliance of their competence would soon arouse the spectators' admiration.

Scholars tell us that irony was linked with dissemblance in the Hellenistic world. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle refers to the ironical men as deceivers. Eironeia designated a foxy mode of behavior characterized by a put-on inferiority complex; deceptive use of words was but one of its manifestations. Therefore, it is interesting to observe that double-dealing seems to be a made-to-order device for creating dramatic irony. Trickery, with its accompanying instability, brings about continual and brusque modifications which cause the play's perspectives to shift constantly. Events and characters are swiveled by deceptive schemes and subsequent changing angles of vision create for the spectators' amusement an ironic commentary on the whole undertaking. Thus, we see Pourceaugnac, the victim of Sbrigani's machinations, saying a heart-felt good-bye to the villain who so persecuted him: "Adieu. Voilà le seul honnête homme que j'ai trouvé en cette ville." Introducing another level of reality, these words produce such an abrupt distortion in the perspective of the play we had thus far acquired that we explode with laughter. As William Empson points out, irony is a device which sets our judgment free, preventing identification with characters who are revealed to be such fools that we say
with laughter: "'a plague on ... their houses.'" Dissimulation, the art of manipulating men like pawns on a chessboard, prompts Molière to do some maneuvering of his own; by the arrangement of his action and the way in which his characters are placed in the sequence of events, or come face to face with each other, Molière creates oppositions, juxtapositions and reversals, mirror-like devices offering spectators simultaneous and contrasting views of the play's reality. Changes created by the nature of the subject bring incongruous consequences, expressed by dramatic forms which emphasize flux and contrast; these in turn cast an ironical light on the play. Thus, form and content are closely intertwined, creating constant metamorphoses which reflect so well the quintessence of theatricality. Therefore, we cannot agree with Alan R. Thompson when he writes that Molière's "dramatic irony ... is chiefly found in his use of such traditional farcical devices as having a character accomplish in ignorance the exact opposite of his wishes, and in reversals, when the audience rejoices to see a bit... Irony in Molière occurs incidentally as heightening to purely farcical or comic situations." Irony is everywhere in Molière's work but its varied and refined uses have been left virtually unexplored by critics. As the planes of the plays' reality move incessantly, a trompe-l'oeil perspective is created; this ever-changing vision enables Molière to evoke meanings, to make oblique statements which usually concern man's lack of knowledge and freedom of mind, turning him into a slave to circumstance and impulse. Irony, which depends on indirection and duality, becomes a tool with which Molière traces, in the mirage world of the theater, a few symbolic images depicting that game of blind-man's-buff, called human existence.

Asides, slips of the tongue, and monologues also contribute to the unstable perspectives of the plays' reality. In Act I, scene 4, Soapin's eavesdropping gives him the opportunity to in-
dulge in asides which serve as a sly commentary on Argante's soliloquy. These amusing quips, ranging from jovial sally to insolent cynicism, include a variety of attitudes: the patronizing tone, mockery, detached assessment of the oncoming conflict, cool reflection on possible moves—all forming a counterpoint to Argante's angry agitation. The rapidity with which tones and attitudes change and intermingle add to the playful and provocatively impertinent atmosphere of the comedy. This criss-crossing of comments also presents in a nutshell the major theme of the play, the subversive war about to be led by the deceitful servant, as well as the main traits of the protagonists: Argante's blind anger and self-centeredness and Scapin's cerebral evaluation of people's behavior. In short, asides may serve as foreshadowing devices enhancing the spectators' foreknowledge which, as we have seen, is essential to their appreciation of irony.

Lapsus linguae, such as Mascarille's inadvertant use of "la bourse" for "la bouche," bring into sudden and sharp focus the dual perspective which fashions Scene 5 in Act I of L'Estourdi. Anselme has good reasons to feel happy: he has just been paid an important sum owed him for over two years and Mascarille's story of Nérine's ardent love seems to cap this lucky day—at least so it seems to Anselme. While he thinks that he is a winner, the audience knows he is about to be a loser: Mascarille turned pickpocket is only distracting Anselme's attention with this tall tale of passion. Thus, the spectators follow the unfolding intrigue simultaneously through Anselme's blinkered eyes and Mascarille's and their own superior vision. Suddenly, Mascarille's slip sends reality into a somersault which threatens to annihilate his work. Fortunately, Mascarille hastily catches his slip; reality's flip is arrested midway in its course and falls back on its feet, into status quo. Mascarille's lapsus becomes a sort of junction point where two incompatible worlds have a near collision.
Molière often punctuates his comedies with brief monologues that periodically add to the spectators' foreknowledge, thus enabling them to ameliorate their view of the play's microcosm from on high. Sbrigani's short statements on the general aim of his campaign against Pourceaugnac and Julie's father are good examples of this principle. In L'Amour médecin monologues contribute also their share to dramatic irony. In Act I, Sganarelle flatters himself into thinking that, by preventing his daughter from vocalizing her wish to be married, he has settled the situation to his own satisfaction. Sganarelle's denial technique, as a defense maneuver to protect his own interests, appears highly unrealistic to the spectators who have just learned that Lisette, the servant, has plans of her own to defeat Sganarelle's obstinate and selfish stand. Thus, with its dual view, the audience looks on Sganarelle as the mythical ostrich sticking its head into the sand when unpleasantness appears on the horizon. In Act II, Sganarelle's soliloquy appears to be an ironic conclusion to the doctors' consultation. Having learned nothing about his daughter's illness from these supposedly eminent men of science, Sganarelle decides to seek out a street vendor to purchase from him a miracle drug called orviétan. Why not? All men who claim to remedy illnesses are charlatans anyway; some dress with long black gowns, others wear clownish suits, some speak Latin and bleed their patients to death, others sing at fairs, selling wonder powders. The form may vary but the content is the same: all are quacks profiteering on men's miseries, real or imagined.

A special kind of monologue, inherited from Roman comedies, is that delivered by a willfully blind character who rushes across the stage, at top speed, with news of great importance. Purposely failing to discover the very person he is seeking, the oncomer declaims with haste and excitement his wish to perform his important errand. In L'Amour médecin, Lisette pre-
tends to look for Sganarelle who is under her nose; Scapin goes through the same routine with Géronte. Since the audience has been warned that some sort of a trick is about to be played, it watches with ironic delight the antics of Lisette and Scapin. The violent and frenzied gestures, the woeful exclamations of these two rascals are meant to unsettle their prospective victims by paralyzing their mind with fearful apprehension. Such scenes as these create a certain "mouvement à vide," explained earlier in this chapter, and give actors the opportunity to perform exquisite mime sequences.

These scenes in which characters run on the stage to deliver terrible news, the delivery of which is delayed by all their rushing about, lead us to the problem of suspense. Alan R. Thompson states that Molière, influenced by Plautus and Terence, made dramatic irony depend on early revelation, early explanation of the situation to the audience. "This device is of course awkward, and the dramatist, by revealing the secret at the outset, gave up both a principal source of suspense in the excitation of curiosity, and the advantage of surprise when the revelation of the secret to the characters brings about the resolution of his plot." This statement does not do justice to Molière's dramatic skills. It should be understood, first of all, that suspense cannot be as intense in comedy as in tragedy. In order to retain the intellectual freedom necessary for the appreciation of an ironic game, the spectator must never be totally absorbed by what he sees or expects to see. Secondly, as indicated earlier, surprise places the onlookers in a position equal or inferior to the characters, a situation not favorable to laughter. Therefore, it has to be used sparingly or its effects must be toned down by repetition as is the case in L'Étourdi. However, Molière does create sufficient suspense to arouse and maintain his audience's interest. If spectators have a general idea of what is going to happen, seldom do they know the exact
nature of the oncoming events. For example, from the outset the viewers know that Pourceaugnac is going to be swamped with trickery but they ignore what form the deception will take. The same remark can be made about Soapin's war of deception. Just enough advance information is given, enabling spectators to understand the action of the play and to facilitate dramatic irony but the actual details are withheld and added only as the schemes progress. If the nature and purpose of a trick have been described in considerable detail before it is put into effect, as is the case of the Armenian role to be played by Lélie in L'Etourdi, it is to make sure that the audience will clearly understand this rather complicated story. In this case, Molière counteracts foreknowledge to a certain degree by portraying the misgivings of Mascarille, who does not expect Lélie to do his part well and complete the undertaking successfully. With this uncertainty, a tension is created and the audience's interest is maintained. Then as Lélie forgets or mixes up the details of the story so carefully planned by Mascarille, moments of suspense are created by these blunders which endanger the completion of the deception. Further, Lélie's bad performance brings back in an ironic contrast Mascarille's competent coaching. Finally, as mentioned before, Lisette and Soapin do a good deal of running around on the stage before imparting their message. Since the audience ignores the nature of the news to be delivered, this retarded delivery does create an element of suspense, arousing the spectators' curiosity. It can be readily seen from these few examples that irony and suspense are not mutually exclusive and that, as a master of dramatic techniques, Molière was able to utilize both.

To a large extent, the essential pleasure of the theater lies in foreknowledge. Spectators are privileged to take off the veil they wear in daily life and experience for a moment the glory of omniscience. Molière grants us that superior clair-
voyance by unsealing our eyes and enabling us to watch the game from our coign of vantage. We know more than the characters do of the implications of their acts and the network of difficulties in which they are involving themselves. Yet, overpreparation and elucidation are not present. While helping his spectators to detect whither they are going, Molière leaves them to wonder how they are to get there. Their mind is stretched forward, intent on what is to come, attentive to what is there and then happening. The spectators take pleasure in an event which has been prepared in the sense that they have been led to desire it and have wondered how it was to be brought about.

In the preceding discussion we have attempted to review some of the structural errors pointed out by critics. It is our firm belief that these alleged flaws arise from the application of criteria that are irrelevant to Molière's comedies and to comic drama in general. The protean nature of Molière's work brings sharply into question the so-called rules that must be followed by a dramatist or the properties his plays must exhibit in order to be judged good works of art. In *La Critique de L'École des Femmes*, Molière saw the danger of having his comedies evaluated by critics who approach a play with a greater equipment of aesthetic theory than of dramatic perception. He voiced his impatience against the mandarins of aesthetics who expect playwrights to adhere to systems built on abstract assumptions that are unrelated to the effects desired in the auditorium, devoid, in short, of dramatic wisdom. We should cease studying Molière's work with sets of rules that have been tacitly transposed from an aesthetic system designed to evaluate tragedy. How pointless to condemn the salient features of his theater: the heterogeneous nature of his plays, the incredible absurdity of his plots, the arbitrariness of his endings! We resemble that football reporter who, when called upon to substitute for his sick friend, a drama critic, applied the rules of his football experiences to
a first-night performance of *Othello*.

More attention needs to be paid to Molière's dramatic resourcefulness, to his efforts to capture the laughter of his audience. A study of his sources, for instance, might shed a good deal of light on this complicated but important subject. Molière begged and borrowed from a wide range of literary and theatrical sources — including his own comedies. Up to now, most scholars have pored over these works with a complete disregard of the demands of play-making and staging of plays. Their comparative studies often leave the reader with the feeling that Molière had no originality or ability to compose. Yet, this impression is erroneous. Molière was a successful comic playwright who wrote to be acted before an audience and for whom entertainment and amusement were the main criteria applicable to his work. How did he change his models in order to create plays that were new and astonishing, refreshing by the ingenious fugue of their plots, or by their overall impression of ceaseless movement, variety and surprise? What structural elements did he omit or add in order to appeal to his public and get the intended effect of humor? As a means of freeing ourselves from the spell of irrelevant standards, we might also embark on a series of detailed investigations of each play. The diversity of Molière's comedies virtually precludes generalizations; each play needs to be considered by itself since it is almost incommensurable with any other. A concrete study of the stuff of each comedy would sharpen our awareness of the total pattern of each play as it takes shape from the work itself. We might discover that the creative impulse which fixes the unity of a work takes little or no account of aesthetic rules, however time-honored or fashionable these may be. In short, we would come to a better understanding of the artistic material itself, and of the intentions of the man who formed it. Is it perhaps time to reaffirm that the function of criticism is to promote understanding and
enjoyment, to increase our appreciation and love of the creative spirit of one of the masters of comedy?
NOTES ON CHAPTER V


4. Potts, p. 129.

5. Potts, p. 130.

6. Potts, p. 140.


Attinger, p. 135.


Commentaires sur Corneille, Remarques sur le premier discours, in Œuvres complètes de Voltaire (Paris: Imprimerie de Mme Veuve Perronneau, 1821), XXXVIII, p. 32.


34 Santayana, p. 138.


37 The arbitrariness of Molière's denouements, required by an action that could prolong itself indefinitely, was touched upon by Regula Billster de Mähnendorf, Les Valeurs spectaculaires dans l'œuvre de Molière (Boulogne: Imprimerie Maleva, 1962), pp. 19-20.


41 G. G. Sedgewick, Of Irony, Especially in Drama (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1935).


47. *Duckworth*, p. 106.

48. Thompson, p. 91.
CHAPTER VI

CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATION

It is true that Moliéresque personages do not correspond to realistic taste in character delineation and whatever may be realistic about them is strongly modified by fantasy. But they stand forth clearly individualized, and the mode of their characterization is appropriately related to the interior dynamics of the play.

Often, critics, not to mention teachers of literature, have divided the Moliéresque population into individual characters and types, the former being good illustrations of the writer's skill at character drawing, and the latter bad examples of it. In this chapter, we shall attempt to defend type characterization. In Chapter V, we pointed out that many moliéristes have forced his comedies into the limitations of tragedy by evaluating plots in terms of a unity suitable only to tragic action. We find the same irrelevant evaluative attitude with regard to characters. Critics have applied to type characterization criteria that may be meaningful only to individualized portrayals which, in turn, have been judged, wrongly in our opinion, according to true-to-life standards. With this kind of realistic approach, types have invariably been found to be deficient, therefore unworthy of much attention. Later on, we hope to demonstrate that Molière's types, far from being bloodless dullards, are lively, notorious individuals, motivated by a powerful, self-centered individualism; their shameless determination to have things their own way is of utmost importance to Molière's whole concept of drama. But for the moment we shall leave this question and simply state that to keep asserting that good char-
acter presentation rests on a high degree of life-likeness shows no understanding of the antirealistic nature of Molière's comedies. His personages, situations and dialogue are artificial and the playing demands a high degree of stylized speech and movement. The characters' behavior is that of puppets which, perhaps incidentally, give us tiny and momentary insights into human nature. They are not real people but mere embodiments of one or two attitudes which are fully displayed within the first ten minutes, and then keep on repeating themselves. Their background and past not being granted a sufficiently detailed history, these personages remain two-dimensional. Molière is neither a realistic character drawer nor a psychologist but a dealer in personified ideas — love of self, knavery and stupidity being the most prevalent among them. His characters neither disclose previously unplumbed psychological depths nor are they built with commonly recognized, understood and accepted aspects of human nature.

Exaggeration is the cardinal principle which guides the creation and presentation of Molière's personages, an exaggeration which manufactures a relatively uncomplicated sense of incongruity designed to release laughter. Their ways are deliberately shown at some distance from normal behavior in order that spectators may freely laugh across the gap at what they believe different from their own. Just as we laugh in Charlie Chaplin's films at the visual incongruity brought on by the tramp wearing trousers that are too big for him, so we laugh at Pourceaugnac, grotesque in his exaggerated gullibility. Plays extravagant in word and deed call for excesses in characters. Critics tend to forget that Molière invents fantastic worlds peopled with outlandish creatures. It is only after we have laughed spontaneously that we perhaps make a reference back to real life, perceiving, as an afterthought, that the laugh has rebounded upon us: the unreality of the situation and of the characters was all a snare, and, in the end, Molière made us laugh at our own folly.
Since Molière's personages neither reveal unsurveyed regions of the human soul nor present plausible depictions of real people, we should not measure their value with psychological or realistic yardsticks. These puppets cannot be submitted to a mere checking off of certain characteristics approved for character drawing by psychologically or realistically-minded critics. With this method, critics have perfunctorily dismissed Molière's types or merely described the few traits exhibited by these two-dimensional creatures. On occasions, major puppets, such as Mascarille or Scapin, have been studied; influenced, however, by a bias in favor of psychologically individualized character drawing, critics have dealt with them too individually, with little attention paid to the interrelationship of personae within the play. It would be more meaningful to study these types as members of a theatrical group and evaluate them in terms of the function which they perform in their universe.

Perhaps these personages can be roughly divided into two kinds: those whose main function is to assist in carrying forward the plot and those intended chiefly to promote amusing scenes relatively insignificant from the point of view of plot. Characters such as Mascarille, Sbrigani, or Scapin move with or create the events, dramatizing a sense of acom, of dynamic doing and wishing to impose upon their environment a vision of their own making, in which moral values are manipulated freely and dexterously. Other personages, such as the doctors of L'Amour médecin and of Monsieur de Pourceaugnae, or the philosophers of Le Mariage forcé become lyrical presences, almost supplanting the action. So magnified are they by the nonsensical bombast of verbal fantasy or by the preposterous exaggeration of some affectation that they dwarf any concept we may have about normal behavior. The over-stated vitality of the former group or the deliberately expanded whimsey of the latter, both superbly theatrical in their exhibitionism, also serves to accelerate or slacken
the tempo of the plays.

Consideration should be given primarily to the manner in which personages are arranged and integrated in the play as a whole. In this connection, an analysis of the technical devices which Molière used to depict his creatures would yield gratifying results. To study characters from the point of view of the technique used to reveal them offers a distinct critical advantage, namely, it obviates the temptation of treating personae as representations of real people and of concentrating only on a few personages. For example, the use of contrast needs to be discussed in terms of its value in characterization. Many expressions of contrast are afforded by a recurrent phenomenon in Molière's plays, that of a balanced pair of characters, of the same sex or age or social status. Although in many cases both members of these pairs are equally active, in some instances one member of the pair serves primarily to set off by contrast the character of the other, who is more thoroughly an integral part of the action. Such is the case of Sylvestre in Les Fourberies de Scapin. Distinctly in the background, he sets in relief his stronger and more important partner, Scapin, and enhances the portrait of the rogue. These two characters are often seen expressing opposite reactions on an issue or in a situation. Thus, Sylvestre's fear of punishment is an excellent foil for Scapin's superb insouciance toward painful retribution. Sylvestre's passive and pessimistic outlook on the difficulties created by his master's escapades is calculated to bring into focus the peculiarly non-problematic attitude that Scapin takes toward a distinctly problematic set of circumstances. Such an attitude implies that Scapin, the hard-minded schemer, has learned that he is alone in the world, entirely dependent upon his own resourcefulness. In plays such as L'Ecole des maris, Le Misanthrope or Les Femmes savantes, characters present contrasts of one another, their ways of life and their divergent theories and principles.
The pictures are mutually corrective, and the characterizations, accomplished by letting each one describe himself or herself and in turn suffer criticism from the point of view of his partner's ideals, are made sharper and more delicate by the technique of dual contrasts. The interplay of contradictory attitudes within a single individual may also be used as a means of presenting his character. Contrast may be insignificant from the point of view of plot but valuable as technique for the portrayal of character. It has also been exquisitely used by Molière for purposes of dramatic irony which should also be studied as a device of character portraiture.

No less prominent a means for character drawing is repetition. L'Étourdi is a succession of repeated incidents designed to display Mascarille's temperament. The basic structure of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme or L'Avare is a case of repetition with variations, repetitions of Jourdain's attempts to become "un homme de qualité" or of Harpagon's efforts to increase his gold, to safeguard his treasure and then to recover it. In both plays, all occurrences of the motif count toward character portrayal.

Other technical means for presenting personages include self-description in monologues, such as Mascarille's philosophizing solo, asides revealing side-lights on the nature of a personage, the use of an eavesdropper whose comments crystallize the impressions made by other characters, descriptions of an absent personage in the play by another. Admonitions, advice, boasts, flatteries, complaints, taunts, witticisms, proverbs, billingsgate also act as catalytic agents that bring out or sharpen the outlines of character.

The quality that makes theatrical creatures convincing is born out of the dramatist's imaginative fusion of various elements: the just observation of physical appearances, of appro-
ropriate psychological traits, and the predominant idea or feeling embodied in the play as a total pattern to which the former ingredients are incorporated. These elements, however, may vary greatly in degree and balance, and this in itself confirms that the power of such characters lies in their invented nature, not in their supposed resemblance of a normalized objective reality.

A detailed, true-to-life realization of a character does not necessarily add to his dramatic reality nor to his validity. Considerable realism of character would be out of place in Molière's plays which are stamped with stylization or artificiality. By contrast, a personage, whittled down to a profile corresponding to a single human attribute, may be far more believable and effective as a participant in the aesthetic game that is being played by the author, the actors and the spectators. A creator of successful characters may gather suggestions from the behavior of real people which will help him to form his creatures but ultimately his personages are ordered creations of his imagination, fulfilling with discernment the ideational or emotional logic proposed by the conception he has given to his play. Hence, the material used by the dramatist in shaping his characters may spring from human experience but it is always distorted to fit the presiding purpose of the dramatic scheme. The personages, as everything else in a play, end by being invented parts, designed in such a way as to contribute effectively to the total reality of the dramatic work. Therefore, if we want to open our mind and heart to the artistic coherence of Molière's work, we should begin by recognizing that all of his characters are inventions, often extravagant and grotesque, but always conceived to take their place in an imaginative world which plays with everyday reality, disturbs and overwhelms it.

It will be recalled that in his essay on laughter Baudelaire made a distinction between the significantly and the absolutely comic. The significantly comic encompasses all forms of
satirical humor which arise from a direct relation to life experience. Satire reduces its targets with disapproving laughter and does not include them in an invented reality. In contrast, the absolutely comic is an invention which bears little rapport with the world of practical relevance, it does not comment on anything; it just presents an image of absurdity. The absolutely comic cultivates boundless inflation of itself, thus overturning accepted standards and discrediting the world of reality. The purely ludicrous is a sort of poetry of nonsense which achieves a specially designed order, grotesque and lyrical because of its lack of relation to reality.

Even though Baudelaire saw the bulk of Molière's work as belonging to the domain of the significantly comic, except for the finale of a couple of plays to which reference has already been made, his critical approach merits being pursued. If we are to enter into the rich and complex world of comic fantasy, we must read Molière the poet, not the realistic dramatist, the satirist or the moralist. Therefore, it seems somewhat regrettable to spend so much time and labor trying to determine whether Molière's doctors in L'Amour médecin, for example, were in fact the Court physicians or other well known medical figures of the time, or to ascertain whether Molière was satirizing French medical practices of the seventeenth century. What Molière's imagination transformed was necessarily the familiar, either well known tidbits on contemporary doctors and their professional demeanor or traditional views on medicine which Molière possessed from his cultural heritage. No artistic reality, however farfetched, can be invented except by an imaginative recombination of known elements.

However, most moliéristes have evinced a sort of puritanical and philistine attitude of mind which predisposes them
to believe that art must be serious; if it is not, it certainly isn't important. When confronted with the work of a man traditionally looked upon as the greatest French comic dramatist, critics have sought to justify his reputation by separating the funny from the serious, ignoring or condemning his ability to excite laughter and commending his services to morality. Concentrating on Molière's alleged satiric realism, critics have neglected to study the workings and the artistic significance of his fantasy, often dismissing it as unsophisticated buffoonery. Very little can be found in the work of nearly three centuries of scholarship that deals directly with Molière's comedy as comedy. Intent upon discovering Molière's moral catechism, scholars have asked: "What serious message are his plays trying to convey, even though presented in the form of comedies?" Such an approach makes the form an obstacle to its own meaning, which form never is, except when handled by a bad artist. Or preoccupied by realism, critics have aligned the plays with known historical situations or figures, trying to decide whether or not Molière's plays are true reflections of public issues or accurate portrayals of real people, or whether Molière took a didactic stand about certain social phenomena. Such studies, concentrating on elements exterior to the artistic form and matter of the plays, have overlooked Molière's fantasy. In short, by this moralistic and realistic approach, the author has been deprived of his poetic creativity. He has been made to appear essentially as a satirical playwright, with reformatory overtones; his plays have been turned into commentaries on the social or even the political scene of his epoch, his characters condemned as travesties of human nature or praised as true-to-life pictures of real people.

With regard to the research that has been done in order to discover whether or not Molieresque characters were portraits of actual men, Sainte-Beuve declares:
... tout cela est futile.... Les personnages de Molière, en un mot, ne sont pas des copies, mais des créations.... Il y a des traits à l'infini chez Molière, mais pas ou peu de portraits. La Bruyère et les peintres critiques font des portraits, patiemment, ingénieusement, ils collationnent les observations, et, en face d'un ou de plusieurs modèles, ils reportent sans cesse sur leur toile un détail à côté d'un autre.... Molière, lui, invente, engendre ses personnages, qui ont bien ça et là des airs de ressembler à tels ou tels, mais qui, au total, ne sont qu'eux-mêmes. L'entendre autrement, c'est ignorer ce qu'il y a de multiple et de complexe dans cette mystérieuse physiologie dramatique dont l'auteur seul a le secret. Il peut se rencontrer quelques traits d'emprunt dans un vrai personnage comique; mais entre cette réalité copiée un moment, puis abandonnée, et l'invention, la création qui la continue, qui la porte, qui la transfigure, la limite est insaisissable.

Molière's characters, such as his doctors, belong to a fantastic counterpart of the real world. The satire that seems so telling and realistic works only within a structure fabricated by poetic frenzy, a world larger and freer than our everyday one. There is a quality of heroic absurdity in Molière's medical world, where doctors appear to outdo, with inconsequential sportiveness, the absurdity of the incorrigible world of actual men. This fantastic quality elicited deep admiration on the part of Flaubert, the master of the realistic novel, a labeling which infuriated him. As we learn to forget what literary manuals have stated about Le Solitaire de Croisset's style, and reread with an unprejudiced eye Homais' speeches, Emma and Léon's conversation at Le Lion d'Or or the scene of Les Comices, we are struck by a quality of epic nonsense, found also in Molière's work, a mode of colossal exaggeration which engulfs the realistic documentation so painstakingly accumulated and transforms it into a new poetic reality. But let us listen to Flaubert:

Il ne faut jamais craindre d'être exagéré, tous les très grands l'ont été, Michel-Ange, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Molière. Il s'agit de faire prendre un lave-ment à un homme (dans Pourcaspàgnac), on n'apporte pas
une seringue, non, on emplit le théâtre de seringues et d'apothicaires; cela est tout bonnement le génie dans son vrai centre, ce qui est l'énorme. Mais, pour que l'exagération ne paraîse pas, il faut qu'elle soit partout continue, proportionnée, harmonique à elle-même; si vos bonshommes ont cent pieds, il faut que les montagnes en aient vingt mille, et qu'est-ce donc que l'idéal si ce n'est ce grossissement-là?

And Rigal comments: "Flaubert a raison: encaadrée par les fourberies énormes des Sbrigani et des Nérine, par la naïveté énorme du gentilhomme limousin, par l'énorme clameur des soi-disants enfants de Pourceaugnac ... l'énorme poursuite des apothicaires devient quelque chose comme l'idéal de la grosse bouffonerie gauloise."  

Whatever Molière's characters may have in common, among themselves or with real men, it is something different from petty preoccupations with reality or with morality. The real world with its norms implies limit, and most Molièresque personages have an affinity with the illimitable. Since Aristophanes, the essence of comic artistry has been boundlessness, the opposite of reality and its restrictive standards. With reckless bravado, Mascarille, Sbrigani or Soapin carry fraud into the limitless. Further, deception is the means that will transform the world and rectify its inflexibility; it is the evasion of limit. As we have seen, Sganarelle in Le Médecin malgré lui stumbles by chance on a scheme which allows him to escape from the unwieldy realities of his milieu. Other Sganarelles, whether of Le Mariage forcé, L'Amour médecin, or Le Coq imaginaire, assert themselves against all reason or opposition in the name of an impudent self which has become liberated from restraints of plausible or socially responsible behavior. The same observation applies to better known characters, Don Juan, Alceste, Orgon or Harpagon. Molière's doctors and philosophers are visionary madmen, whose sheer single-mindedness permits them to change everything.
they encounter. All of these personages, and each in his own way, symbolize a grand thumb-to-nose gesture at the high and mighty, at reality and its standards. They are all involved in a dethronement of limit, of reason, of morality.

This release from reality's bondage has been studied in Chapter IV. It suffices here to state that comic artistry seeks, through fantasy, a liberation from controlling and regulating social realities. As mentioned before, comedy is the "Time of Misrule:" in spirit, it is akin to the Bacchic festivals where men dressed as animals, to Roman Saturnalia where slaves became masters, or to the medieval parodies of the Mass. That is why it is rather vain to search for realism and morality in comedy. Its plot, characters, and dialogue are artistically contrived to produce a cheerful tumult of nonsense which releases spectators from the hindrances and the humdrum routine of real life.

By what has just been said, it can be seen that Molière's characters are not types in the Bergsonian sense. Drawing examples chiefly from Molière's work, Bergson concludes that comedy deals with general types, embodying those peculiarities of human nature which are most commonly witnessed. Hence, the comic dramatist creates personages that express "une moyenne d'humanité. Et, comme toutes les moyennes, celle-ci s'obtient par des rapprochements de données éparses, par une comparaison entre des cas analogues dont on exprime la quintessence, enfin par un travail d'abstraction et de généralisation semblable à celui que le physicien opère sur les faits pour en dégager des lois. Bref, la méthode et l'objet sont de même nature ici que dans les sciences d'induction, en ce sens que l'observation est extérieure et le résultat généralisable." We beg to differ with Bergson on his views pertaining to the nature of comic characters. Scapin is not a typical rogue, Argante and Géronte are not representatives of old age. Sganarelle of Le Médecin malgré lui has nothing to
do with the average peasant of seventeenth century France. Nor does Harpagon or Jourdain embody the typical qualities of a miser or of a parvenu. Contrary to Bergson's belief, Molière does not portray "des caractères que nous avons rencontrés, que nous rencontraurons encore sur notre chemin." His characters are projected outside of our actual world by flamboyant exaggeration and simplification, without any process of comparison or induction based on realistic observations. Abstraction obtained by simplification and intensification produces results very different from those obtained by comparison and generalization. Molière's characters are not average fellows determined by scientific or statistical means. Should they suddenly come alive, and were we obliged to live with them, we would be frightened or maddened by these freakish creatures who do not represent the average attributes of any part of the human species. Molière's types cut across the boundaries of history, nations and classes to present in an almost mythical fashion an idea, an attitude, or a passion that is dormant or active in each human being. That Molière was inspired by personal observations made on real people's comportment, or that he borrowed observations found in other authors' works, is certain. Direct or indirect observation of reality is the point of departure of any artistic endeavor but it is a mere step in the formulation of an artistic work. Pure and simple observation only serves to discover what is, it does not create anything. The creative process is based on an interpretation of exterior reality; it is a voluntary act which structures, orders, elaborates or condenses on a fictitious plane impressions received from the exterior world. Observation is metamorphosed by the creative man as he seeks to integrate it in his visionary scheme. Observation, however realistic it may be, is never used by the artist without an ulterior motive. An objective and real fact serves to illuminate by a concrete example the content of his vision, to shape a world drawn out of his imagination which, in the closed universe of his work, presents a different, a
symbolic image of the world of reality. If myths and symbols are rooted in our human reality, they also transfigure it. Too much emphasis has been placed on Molière's observation of life, not enough on his vision of it.

Let us turn to the question of individualism as found in Molière's characters. His comic heroes, whether simple or complex, are individualistic beings, primarily interested in self-assertion. If their gifts are craft and persuasiveness of speech, they will try to have their way through shameless cleverness. Mascarille, Sbrigani and Soapin become masters of the moment through their ability to use people and situations to their own advantage by virtue of an unscrupulous exercise of cunning. Their aim is simple — to come out on top; their means are devious but always delightful. Possessing a splendid line of talk, these resourceful rogues display high skill in handling the challenge of their situation. Unhampered by scruples, they easily dispense with morality, a superfluous obstacle to the achievement of their goal. Their course of action is not always crowned with success; at times, their plan misfire, capsizing their impostures, but their tenacity turns them into indomitable creatures. Not over-courageous, they may temporarily submit to or run away from their enemies. Far from being dull, repetitious, and other unflattering things Bergson and other critics have said about them, these knaves show a good deal of nimbleness and of awareness of themselves and of others. They emerge as a symbol of man's libidinous will to live that impels him to survive against the odds of existence. In their rough-and-tumble contests with the world, these figures right themselves after every upset, dramatizing a buoyant affirmation of life. Susanne Langer has linked the attributes of the comic hero to man's urge for personal salvation: He "is the indomitable living creature fending for itself, tumbling and stumbling ... from one situation into another, getting into scrape after scrape and getting out again, with or without a thrashing."
He is the personified \textit{élan vital} ... his whole improvised existence has the rhythm of primitive, savage, if not animalian life, coping with a world that is forever taking new uncalculated turns, frustrating but exciting. He is neither a good man nor a bad one, but is genuinely amoral.... He is all motion, whim, impulse — the 'libido' itself.... He is Life, he is the Will, he is the Brain...."\textsuperscript{6}

Motivated by a vital self-centeredness, Molière's creatures behave as though they were the center and law of life. Obeying their brazen compulsions, they tend toward excess and extremes. Their individualism may vary: as we have just seen, it may be an intelligent and gay opportunism; it may also be selfish wish fulfillment or the satisfaction of a mania. They are all interested in affirming themselves and bringing the world under their control. Pancrace dominates others with his vocalizations, Marphurius with his universal doubt, the doctors with their cant and droning. There is nothing feeble or flat about these characters simplified to one governing trait. They may be utterly demented but they are vital and thoroughly consistent with the logic of their dominating "humour." By customarily describing them as mechanical or skindeep, critics do not indicate the kind of life they possess; what theorists fail to suggest is that the center of interest is not a detailed character portrayal but an energetic individualism. They should not be considered as regular characters with something wanting but as valid and positive creations well suited for a theater based on speed, extraordinary acting skills and visual effects.

Although it is virtually impossible to state with any degree of accuracy what these types owe to the French farce and the \textit{commedia dell'arte} traditions, we have every reason to believe that both are essential in their formation. From what we know, French and Italian farces were conducted with brio and rapid fire.
Therefore, if psychologically detailed characters had been launched in the whirls of plots, fairly complicated at times, the public would have been nonplussed; the combination of speed and complexity would have overtaxed the audience's capacity for assimilation. Aware of the spectators' limitations, dramatists have always presented fresh and original studies of fully developed characters in a simple intrigue, or at least in a well known story. That is one of the reasons why tragedy frequently makes use of narrative myth which permits the dramatist to set up his plot with a minimum of fuss, since he is dealing with material generally familiar to his audience, and to concentrate on the psychological portrayal of his characters. By contrast, dramatists have presented imbroglios which sweep into their vortex simplified and conventionalized characters. The public, in the days of the French and Italian farce, looked for nuance and novelty, not in character drawing, but in the new twists of familiar stories and especially in the physical dexterity of the actors' performance. When the commedia dell'arte was performing, the narrative of an event was very often mimed. When players improvised dialogue, it was, in many instances, as a refinement of what they would express by physical actions.

Today, satisfied as we are with performers who know little about the art of stylized motions and speech, we have difficulties in imagining the sensuous richness offered by the actors of those days. To populate the stage with ruffians speaking different tongues with the rapid tonal changes of one's voice, or to imitate the sounds of all musical instruments, thereby creating a vocal symphony, to fight with one's shadow or leap into a back somersault in order to trace a visible rendition of fear demanded incredible acting skill. Actors knew how to convey a sense of poetic fantasy or absurdity by the simple gesture of taking off their hat. Under broad daylight or the full illumination of candles they created night. Groping about, bumping into each
other, indulging into all sorts of telling gestures, they granted to the spectators the power of entering into the folds of darkness. In short, with the magic of their art, actors speculated on the nature of time and space, condensing or expanding them at will, with an almost complete disregard or reality. Therefore, before denigrating these types, we should place them back in their theatrical family history, a long and respectable one, and then imagine how actors, exploiting their virtuosic skills, transformed these "fantoches de convention" into dynamic percepts to be grasped by the eye by way of movement as well as concepts to be grasped by the way of words. Confronted with so much expressiveness of gesture and bodily motion or acting bravura, onlookers were far too well entertained to complain about ready-to-hand characterizations. On the contrary, knowing more or less what to expect from personages whose array of psychological characteristics was immediately disclosed by masks and costumes, the public could devote its attention to the skills of the performers who, from all accounts, acted with an almost inhuman speed.

Molière also gave an important place to mime in his plays. In the Au lecteur of L'Amour médecin he states: "Il n'est pas nécessaire de vous avertir qu'il y a beaucoup de choses qui dépendent de l'action. On sait bien que les comédies ne sont faites que pour être jouées; et je ne conseille de lire celle-ci qu'aux personnes qui ont des yeux pour découvrir, dans la lecture, tout le jeu du théâtre." What he calls "le jeu du théâtre" is the design created by the ensemble of movements, gestures, and attitudes that accompanies the dialogue and which often became stylized into lazzi or stage tricks. Such gags, based to a large extent on gestures, are at times spelled out by Molière in stage directions, such as those that go along with the bottle scene in Le Médecin malgré lui: "Ici il [Éganare] pose sa bouteille à terre, et Valère se baissant pour le saluer, comme il croit que c'est à dessein de la prendre, il la met de l'autre côté; ensuite
de quoi, Lucas faisant la même chose, il la reprend et la tient contre son estomac, avec divers gestes qui font un grand jeu de théâtre." These movements created a visual spectacle in which suspicion and misunderstanding became theatrically perceivable shapes. Molière and his fellow actors devised bodily movements that gave sensible representations to qualities of character and emotion, just as Martha Graham did in her choreographic and dancing work, claiming that the proper aim of dance is to render visible the interior landscape of man. Therefore, these seemingly two-dimensional personages told a good deal about their character and inward feelings — by moving — not by speaking psychological profundities or subtleties. In his early movies, Charlie Chaplin never spoke, yet his walk — small steps, chest sunken, shoulders pinched inward — conveyed the soul misery endured by a pitiful, flea-bitten, little tramp. The hallucinatory effects of hunger were revealed as the starving bum looked into the window of a restaurant, watching and unconsciously mimicking a fat man eating a huge steak. As Chaplin cut a dream steak with a flourish and lifted a juicy morsel to his mouth with anticipatory delight, not a word was uttered, yet the spectators lived through the fantasy with which man transforms the reality of starvation.

Bodily biplay interpolated in Pancrace and Sganarelle's lines also makes a dance expressing exasperation and its developing crescendo. At the onset, Pancrace, still cursing an invisible enemy located in the wings of the stage, does not see Sganarelle. The latter tries in vain to attract the philosopher's attention with to and fro movements, and this sequence of gestures leading nowhere enhances the theme of the entire work: Sganarelle cannot change his fate. Then, as the Aristotelian gradually directs his self-unwinding toward Sganarelle, the latter is drawn into the whirls of a verbal Niagara. Entrapped once more by circumstances, Sganarelle attempts to check this
flow of words. Pancrace cannot be subjugated. Pushed into the house by Sganarelle who guards the door, he appears at the window, speaking; when Sganarelle leaves his post to throw stones at the babbler, the latter appears at the door, speaking. He comes and goes, in and out the house, vociferating. The increasing agitation translates visually both the maniacal force of compulsive talking as well as Sganarelle's mounting rage. This sort of ballet also accompanies the dialogue between the de Sottenville and Dandin, as he kneels, candle in hand, to beg for Angélique's forgiveness. Dance also mingles with the thrashings meted out to various Molièresque heroes, with the pursuit sequences in Monsieur de Pourcraugmac, or with le jeu du sac in Les Fourberies de Scapin.

These movements were not natural or literal expressions of emotions. Because actors are people, their movements are naturally expressive; but it is their unnatural skills that make their movements meaningful. Any component of drama needs stylization or it degenerates into self-expression, which is fine in its place, but that place is not the theater. Besides, the repetitive nature of the situations mentioned above called for building movements into a visual pattern which, coordinated with the dialogue, ultimately formed an aural design as well. The very elements of stylization — prolongation, repetition, contrasts, quickening in time, extension in space — are elicited by scenes primarily built on repetitive actions. Repetition becomes dynamic only when its basic configuration is extended or contracted by variations, when rhythmical changes are set to it through a quickening or slowing of tempo, or through sharpening the contrasts between tension and relaxation. Such manipulations do not obliterate the significance of the gesture but rather they enhance and clarify its emotional meaning. Acceleration of pace may, for example, create excitement. Repetition can, of course, be employed in a seemingly unchanging and monotonous way to underscore, for example, the monumental absurdity of a situation or
the rock-like stupidity of a character. In any case, we should remember that through movement these simple puppets expressed lots of emotion.

From the accounts of friends and foes alike, we know that Molière possessed that power of expression through movement. Somaize and Le Boulanger de Chalussay, trying to ridicule and vilify Molière, revealed him to be an assiduous student of the acting techniques of la commedia dell'arte, watching and imitating the great Trivelino and Scaramouche. Molière's troupe in 1658 shared with the Italians the use of Le Petit Bourbon and the two groups appeared to have worked side by side in harmony. It was but natural that this close association should produce an exchange of theatrical know-how. This close contact continued; when the Italians returned to France in 1662, they followed Molière to Le Palais Royal and at that time they had in their troupe the greatest of all Arlequins, Domenico Biancolelli. These renowned actors were popular and especially appreciated by the Court. Molière, relatively a newcomer on the Parisian scene, wanting to make good, must have watched these successful actors with particular attention, trying to understand an art which was so appealing to the public. "Plaire" was Molière's maxim and from his Préface to Les Précieuses ridicules onward, he continued to proclaim that the value of any dramatic work is to be measured by the pleasure it gives the audience and in terms of its theatrical legibility on the stage. In that same Préface, he explained his reticence toward publishing his comedy; according to him, a printed play was deprived of its theatrical dimension, "le jeu du théâtre." "Mais, comme une grande partie des grâces qu'on y a trouvées dépendent de l'action et du ton de voix, il m'importait qu'on ne les dépouillât pas de ces ornements.... J'avais résolu, dis-je, de ne les faire voir qu'à la chandelle...." Praising Molière's miming talents in Le Coq imaginaire, La Neufville wrote: "Il ne s'est jamais rien vu de si agréable que les postures
Thus far, we have seen that an imaginative heightening of individualism, leading to a wanton display of the whimsical, and calling for an antirealistic mode of acting, tends to transform Molière-esque creatures into aesthetic beings. In what other ways are Molière's characters made into aesthetic fictions? First of all, these personages are seized in the here and the now. Their lives are viewed for only a moment; they have little or no past and no future. Few, if any, indications are given concerning the characters' past. Allusions to shipwrecks, forced separations, lost children, references to sojourns in foreign lands create an aura of romance and exoticism which adds no substantiability to the past. If the solution of the plot is wrested out of these fantastic events, chance has prepared matters well in advance. These antecedents play a minimal role during the play. Brought in, in a slapdash fashion toward the end, such improbabilities contribute little toward filling in the empty blank of the characters' past; if anything, they reinforce the fairy-like quality which envelops the action and its agents.

The present is also unsubstantial. Love, the theme of many of Molière's plays, is the youthful kind, lightly sketched
at that, not the love of married domesticity. Usually kept apart by various restraints, the young lovers seldom meet, hence, their emotional tie is rarely presented to the audience in a tangible fashion. Moreover, expressions of sentiments, which could add a certain reality, are cut short. At times, a young lad, Lélie of _L'Étourdi_ or Octave in _Les Fourberies_ waxes sentimental about the depth of his passion, or "les célestes attraits" of his loved one, or her pitiful plight; however, these emotional outbursts, befitting a _pastorale_ or a _comédie larmoyante_, are neutralized by the interlocutor's reactions. Mascarille flattens out Lélie's _préciosité_ of style with a practical rejoinder deprived of any stylistic frills. As Octave tells of his chance meeting with "une jeune fille toute fondante en larmes, la plus belle et la plus touchante qu'on puisse jamais voir.... Une autre aurait paru effroyable en l'état où elle étoit, car elle n'avoir pour habilement qu'une méchanté petite jupe...." Scapin acknowledges these heart-rendering vignettes with a few curt "Ah! Ah!" or ironic comments such as "Je sens venir les choses.... Oh! je n'en doute point.... Je vois tout cela." The brevity, the detached and superior tone of his replies parody Octave's lengthy and enthusiastic speeches and underline the young man's loss of objectivity, an attitude he has ironically just finished condemning in his love-smitten friend, Léandre. Hence, love floats like a pretty but pale cloud over the microcosm of the play, and in no wise does it carry our thoughts into any realm of future consequences. It is treated strictly in relation to the present moment of the action. Sganarelle and Martine, Dandin and Angélique do not offer any glimpse into the marital world. Their conjugal situation merely provides tit for tat encounters, pulsating with an agonistic rhythm that is gloriously theatrical. Rather than being an honest domestic fight, Sganarelle and Martine's quarrel provides Molière with an opportunity to display his art at engineering a game of wits, a verbal contest that is a mixture of rhetoric, war, and play. The amusing effect arises
from the contradiction between the insulting nature of what is said which appears to indicate a passionate relation of hostility and the calculated skill of verbal invention which indicates that the protagonists are thinking less about each other than about language and their pleasure in using it inventively.

Beyond the present moment, Molière's thoughts do not go. This means that certain elements of actual existence must be excluded — mothers and children in particular. Mothers represent the past and social solidity, children suggest the future. Therefore, they must be kept out of plays which aim at holding time within the present. It is true that wives and children besiege M. de Pourceaugnac, calling him "Papa, papa, papa!". This past is fraudulent, however, designed to disorient the provincial gentleman so that he will flee from Paris. Part of the grandiose nonsense erected by Sbrigani's mind, these deserted wives and children have nothing sentimental or realistic about them. To the merriment of the audience, they contribute to Pourceaugnac's nightmare and the variety of their speeches enriches the total sound design of the play.

The speeded-up pace of the denouement does much toward obliterating the future. As Molière piles up as fast as he can all sorts of miraculous events, leading to a final recognition and reconciliation scene, the retrospective feeling of playfulness and fantasy is reaffirmed. His denouement is a magic formula that brings the curtain down at the right moment, while spectators have barely recovered from the dizzying speed with which the tangles dissolve in a mood of general happiness. Speed and joy cut short any wish on the part of the audience to know what will happen to the characters. Doubts, for example, about the future marital happiness of young lovers so willing to fulfill their desires by unblushing deviousness never enter the spectators' mind. By its very arbitrariness and absurdity, the
denouement confirms that all that has happened is inconse-
quential, that the characters belong to fairyland where painful
tomorrows never come. In a similar fashion, the final explosion
of joy afforded by dances, songs, music and colorful costumes
prevent the public from thinking of what characters may become.
Seized in an immutable present, these creatures have no future.
It is just as well. What kind of future could we surmise for
Sganarelle of Le Mariage forcé or Dandin? In Molière's time,
when these two plays were presented with their ballet sequences,
no one was prone to meditate on Dandin's misfortune as he was
swept away by Lulli's music and a crowd of dancing shepherds
and Bacchic satyrs who invited him to drown his sorrows in drink-
ing. Similarly, a joyous masquerade terminated Le Mariage forcé
with Sganarelle dancing in a "charivari grotesque" given in
honor of his impending marriage. Festal scenes, which imposed
rhythmical regularity on the motions and the songs of the par-
ticipants, whose costumes also wrought visual designs moving in
cadence, filled the stage with deliberate patternings intent upon
drawing attention to themselves. While focussing on the bril-
liance of the finale, spectators just about lost track of the
unhappy heroes. Of course, we cannot totally overlook the fact
that they are forced to take part in merry festivities, made
to hear songs about the pleasures of love, or; in the case of
Sganarelle, obliged to see his future wife flirting with four
gentlemen. Eric Bentley has ably argued that Molière's denoue-
ments are "a smiling convention in which irony lurks beneath
the flowers." 18 Such is the nature of comedy and laughter: often
there is a thorn beneath the rose. As we have seen in Chapter II,
laughter can be a way of judging, of hurting the other, of toying
with his confusion and humiliation. However, the cruelty of Mo-
lière's laughter was doubtless absorbed by the gaiety of his
ballets, therefore remaining implicit. In any case, Schopen-
hauer's comment on comedy applies particularly well to some of
Molière's plays: "It must hasten to drop the curtain at the
moment of joy, so that we may not see what comes after...."\(^{19}\)

Thus, it can be seen that characters have little or no history. Abstracted from the past and future, their lives are viewed only for a moment. On this lack of biographical existence, Henri Gouhier has based his definition of a type: "Le type se définit non par l'absence d'individualité mais par la disparition de la personnalité engagée dans une histoire.... Il est clair qu'un type est pourvu d'une individualité.... Mais l'histoire s'est retirée de cette individualité, de sorte que le type conserve assez d'individualité pour représenter un personnage, sans l'historicité qui en ferait une personnalité."\(^{20}\) His definition has the merit of acknowledging that a type is an individual, a feature almost entirely overlooked by Bergson. Then Gouhier goes on to say that it is only when a personage is a type, that is to say when he is deprived of a unique and historically concrete existence, that spectators become sufficiently detached from him so as to laugh at his idiosyncrasies and misfortunes. "Molière se garde bien d'apporter des précisions sur le passé du personnage: que la personne perço sous le personnage et c'en est fait de la comédie.... Un personnage devient comique à mesure qu'il est vidé de la biographie qui fait de lui cette personne unique ... la sympathie qui nous attache à la personne historique disparaissant avec elle, le comique peut naître."\(^{21}\) Thus, the type carries his own alienation effect which serves the comic cause, since a certain emotional distance on the part of the audience is a prerequisite for laughter.

From all that has been previously indicated in this study, it can be readily seen that exaggeration is another major means with which Molière transforms his characters into aesthetic images. Exaggeration is a clash between fact and fiction; its effect is plausible yet improbable. What is exaggerated does exist, yet it is made unreal by overstatement. Everything about
Nolieresque creatures is over-emphasized; their movements, actions, reactions and expressions. And to a large degree our acceptance of them as comic figures is due to this intrusion of the unreal into the real. Were we to take them as actual abnormalities, we would watch them with pity or loathing, not with amusement.

Comic artistry, which must keep the audience's projective empathy in check, utilizes quickening of pace for that very purpose. Spectators tend to be detached from creatures whose movements are sped up beyond normal human rhythm. Acceleration gives an air of shadow boxing to pursuits, beatings, and violence in general. Therefore, onlookers will not identify themselves with the victims; on the contrary, this playful chaos encourages them to laugh at these poor devils with boisterous hilarity. Bedlam scenes give the viewers a delightful sense of liberation from spatial and temporal coercions, disrupting as they do the pattern of normal perceptual habits. As stated before, confusion is the mother of unreality. When people are set in rapid motion without discernable purpose and direction or with apparent purpose and direction that somehow go astray we have a wild tumult — a world that has become free for all. Molière delights in having a character, such as Lisette in L'Amour médecin or Scapin, who bursts in on the stage with news of great importance; failing to see the very person he is seeking, the personage indulges in a sequence of feverish and aimless acts, creating thereby as much bustle and disarray as possible. Other favorite situations are those in which characters, such as Dandin and Colin, seek each other without being able to get together. They are set in motion, running in opposite directions, falling over themselves, shouting and hurling abuses at each other, and finally bumping into each other. For a moment, spectators have the illusion of emancipation from the normal procedures of society, from the regulations and coherences of life, as well as from the logic and the laws of
nature. Reality's norms collapse, human bodies collide or receive blows, yet no anguish nor harm, only joy is generated out of this make-believe pandemonium. This chaos without penalty induces spectators to release themselves vicariously from the stern realities of life and reintroduce in their regulated existence some agitation and disorder.

Exaggerated haste and vigor also serve to neutralize the spectators' habitual tendency to pass moral judgment on wicked characters. We are all potential liars and thieves, and the comic dramatist who sets undesirable characters to gambol on the stage can depend upon their appealing directly to our instinctual nature. However, there comes a time when this appeal may be disturbed by our moral upbringing. Therefore, the playwright must defend nature over nurture. Soapin is made to live in another world with a specific rhythm of his own, as if the pulsebeat in him had changed and was twice as fast as that of the spectators. As he goes about his swindling work with speed, verve, and enjoyment, he makes the comedy go with a swing that dazzles the spectators and leaves them with little time to think. They are kept on the run, and have little breath left with which to make the protests of virtue. Then as Soapin animates and reshapes the theatrical universe with nimble movements, the audience becomes vicariously free from the bondage of space and time. Swift as lightening, Soapin refuses to be pinned down by Bergson's definition of comic types. Alert and supple, he does not entertain his public by being an automaton who fails to accommodate himself to circumstances. His vitality and speed create a dance that carries off the audience into a land of poetic fun where body becomes form and dimension. Soapin, the spirit of ilinx, intoxicates onlookers by the very freedom of his movements and transports them into a world of fantasy.

The comedian, as writer or actor, avails himself of exag-
geration in character portrayal. A few essential features are selected, exaggerated to such a degree that they are equated to the totality of the character, depriving him of psychological subtlety or complexity. At times, a character consists of only one dominant aspect which has stunted the rest of his person. Pancreas and Marphurius or Bahys and Macroton have been so rarefied that their whole personality corresponds to their professional function. Thus, exaggeration in character depiction may cause the personage to retain the same attitude and perform the same function throughout the play.

Lanson, W. G. Moore and others have pointed out how the mask or the heavy make-up worn by the actors of the French farce as well as of the commedia dell'arte has influenced the characterization of Molieresque personages. It gave them a rigidity of character as well as a fixity of role. While recognizing that the mask may have contributed a certain inelasticity of characterization, we wish to point out that this quality may have an older and more universal source because it appears to be related to character organization and formation in real men.

What is human character? A small bundle of reactions developed in the course of parental training received in infancy. Through examples, rewards, punishments and other mechanisms of family life, parents inculcate in their children patterns of behavior, usually pre-determined by social traditions. After a certain conditioning period, basic personality habits are established and throughout our life we will be repeating these fundamental responses. The hard core of character is a mechanization of deeply ingrained ways of reacting, it is simply the phonograph record playing over again. If we could observe with lucid detachment our patterns of behavior, we would be amazed to see how much we resemble these theatrical types. Years ago, the fundamental definition of ourselves was set, to be subsequently confirmed and hardened by automatic repetition. To an objective observer who
knows us well our actions and reactions appear fixed and predictable. However, we do not wish to pursue this realistic vein any further for, in our opinion, it is anti-theatrical. To be sure, drama is intertwined with the picture of human existence but the dramatist, apprehending material close to life, reconstructs and impregnates it with his own ideas. A vision arises out of this reconstruction — an artistic creation in which everything is calculated and artificial, plot, characters and dialogue.

There are other reasons for thinking that rigidity of characterization is perhaps not entirely a by-product of mask wearing. It may be the result of a kind of streamlined simplification used by writers, both comic and tragic, of various lands and historical epochs. A dramatist, more so than a novelist or even a short story writer, must put his characters through a situation, usually one of crisis, which will bring their characterization into full focus in a remarkably short time. Situations which do not do this are simply not used. Further, the playwright excludes countless details or features irrelevant to his vision. By sifting, chopping, deleting and inventing as he forges ahead with the chosen theme of his play, he emerges with personages endowed with a limited array of characteristics. Diversity in events and in character traits being removed, it is inevitable that this rarefaction will bring on concomitant rigidity. Barthélémy Taladoire observes the same characterization stiffness with regard to Plautus' characters. "La galerie des personnages est toujours la même; à la constance de la tromperie qui fait le fond de toutes comédies, répond l'identité des rôles." Plautus utilized "des rôles convenus," "des types au sens le plus conventionnel du terme," "des personnages figés dans leur emploi...." However, Taladoire points out that Plautus did not use masks.26 It may be argued that the Greek theater, where both comic and tragic personages wore a mask, had an impact on Plautus' char-
acters. Generations of scholars have burned midnight oil, studying this question, and today the best among them admit that such influence remains to be proved.

If a short digression be permitted, let us point out that the separation made between tragic and comic characters on the basis of individuality and generality is false. Marmontel, Diderot, and Bergson have been guilty of blowing up criteria that may be relevant to a particular kind of tragedy or comedy into criteria of alleged universal validity. Thus, Marmontel states: "La tragédie est un tableau d'histoire; la comédie est un portrait ... d'une espèce d'hommes répandus dans la société, dont les traits les plus marqués sont réunis dans une même figure.... Ce n'est point un individu mais une espèce qu'il faut prendre pour modèle.... Le comique porte sur des caractères généraux et sur quelque vice radical de l'humanité...." And Bergson states: "Peindre des caractères, c'est-à-dire des types généraux, voilà donc l'objet de la haute comédie.... Non seulement, en effet, la comédie nous présente des types généraux, mais c'est, à notre avis, le seul de tous les arts qui vise au général.... Le héros de tragédie est une individualité unique en son genre.... Cette différence essentielle entre la tragédie et la comédie, l'une s'attachant à des individus et l'autre à des genres, se traduit d'une autre manière encore." And so on as the argument continues, running downhill into a belittlement of comedy as a bastardized literary form "mitoyenne entre l'art et la vie." However, in his Hamburg Dramaturgy, Lessing refuted Diderot's argument, stating that both comic and tragic personages are generalized in their characteri-
zation. The composition of any dramatic personage calls for an abstraction and simplification process which leads to generalization. Iago, or Racine's Narcisse, and Tartuffe, are incarnations of a generality, perfidious hypocrisy; all three are the miraculous flowering of artistic abstraction and exaggeration. Dramatists use the attendant simplification and generalization necessary for dramatic presentation which demands that in a few short strokes the writer strike to the roots of a character's fundamental nature and motivation. Characters are thus purified of all sorts of details of no importance to their drama, and what remains from this artistic distillation is a generalized character trait brought out with force, clarity, and eloquence. Generality of character is not unique to comic personages. We find this quality in plays of serious tone, in medieval moralities, for instance, where characters are abstract personifications depicting the temptations that inhabit man's mind or the contest between virtue and vice for the human soul. More recently, this allegorical process has been used by T. S. Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral* to portray the inner suffering of Becket.

The argument for the so-called particularity and individuality of tragic characters can be quickly undermined in another respect. Tragedies, as well as comedies, are made of a cloth that is woven out of imitations. For example, characters from seventeenth century French tragedies are composed of elements borrowed from Greek and Latin tragedies, from ancient history and from the epoch in which the dramatist lived. Tragic dramatists, as well as writers of comedies, borrow from artistic traditions; from this stock of theatrical forms, they may choose plot situations or character traits or both. Personal experiences and observations may also help them in the creation of their work. Thus, the individuality of tragic personages is less real than it is claimed to be.
To return now to fixed characterization, Molieresque personages retained, in their style of mind and action, according to Lanson and Moore, the rigidity of the mask worn by their ancestors. On the whole, the dupes and the monomaniacs remain unmarked by experience and disclose little potential for registering the differences between situations, hence rarely do they respond to them with appropriateness. Abnormally insensitive to clues, they lack inquisitiveness; gullible, they accept easily one incredible event after another. They seldom develop during the course of the play. They are incurables. If the rogues out better figures, they too do not change. They only play against obstacles which their ruse permits them at times to overcome but these experiences do not bring out any latent temperamental qualities. We should note here that immutability of character prevents the comic dramatist from inventing a denouement brought about by the alteration of the character of his personages. Thus, contrived endings are partially related to the comic heroes' fixity of character. The final recognition scene of L'Auvare is in part due to Harpagon's rigid mentality, and regardless of how deplorable critics have found this sort of denouement, it is far less arbitrary than Harpagon's becoming suddenly a generous man!

Another point should be made in connection with the mental invariability of Moliere's characters. Their constricted behavior engendered by the restricted range of their minds serves the distancing requirement necessary for the liberation of laughter; their mask-like character prevents spectators from seeing anything beneath that could lay claim to their compassion. This psychic carapace is akin to the perpetual smile on the clown's painted face; it prevents the audience from perceiving winces of pain as he receives a beating or takes a header. Comedy capitalizes on trouble but its personages are made to appear invulnerable so that spectators can relax and laugh. When individual behavior is stressed, audience sympathy is captured by the char-
acters' more personal and complex motives and reactions. This extra dimension in character portrayal shatters or confuses the comic pattern. In the light of the explanations given by philosophers and psychologists on the nature of laughter, it would appear that true-to-life characterization is not an asset to comic art. Plausible character drawing tends to narrow the gap between the normality of the audience and the abnormality on the stage. What remains incongruous is too close to human reality and, as Anatole France once said: "le comique est vite douloureux quand il est humain." Confronted by a realistic attempt to handle personages, the audience loses its critical distance and begins to identify with them. In other words, the public moves across the frontier of the comic world into the realms of the pathetic or of the tragic. Further, by their simplicity and lack of potential for development, types give the audience the confident feeling that it knows and understands them through and through. Spectators feel superior to these creatures so transparently obvious in their simple and unchanging passions and attitudes. Superiority, one of the causes of laughter, fosters a detached spirit of amused observation, which we have studied previously under the name of dramatic irony.

One last comment on fixity of characterization; as was indicated earlier in this chapter, comic dramatists purposely deprive their personages of any future. A mask-like character contributes to this end, for it admits to a past but denies that its owner has a future. His past has created his character traits up to a certain point, but now they have taken charge of him so that he can never change; he has become a single possibility, completely realized. Should he have any future, he would have only one possibility, not several, to realize it. As we can see, caricature portrayal, often viewed as uninteresting and incomplete, should be assessed in terms of its artistic purpose. It is in this way only that we will appreciate the legitimacy and importance
of types in the world of the theater.

However, what Lanson and Moore do not mention is that the limitation of facial expression, brought on by masks, compelled players to develop the expressiveness of their body. In his book on la commedia dell'arte, Constant Mic does bring out this point:

L'acteur qui pose un masque sur son visage, fonde son jeu non plus sur la mobilité de sa physionomie, mais sur les mouvements de son corps; et ce faisant, il agit très judicieusement au point de vue théâtral.... Si rationnellement que soit construit un théâtre, la grande majorité du public ne voit les acteurs que de loin, leur visage ne lui apparaît que fortement réduit, la distance effaçant les détails de leur mimique. Or, jadis, cet inconvénient devait se faire sentir bien davantage, à cause de l'éclairage défec- tueux fourni par les chandelles ou par les lampes à huile....

... l'acteur doit agir, il lui faut jouer, marcher, se tourner vers son partenaire, etc., mais alors, dans la plupart des cas, sa physionomie n'est entrevue que par la moitié des spectateurs.... Ayant renoncé au masque et préoccupé trop exclusivement de son visage, l'ac- teur moderne a négligé cet instrument théâtral qu'est son corps.31

If we can keep in mind that body suppleness and agility were an intrinsic part of role interpretation, we will begin to understand the extraordinary life that was given to these caricatures. We must not forget that they belong to a theater that capitalized primarily on visual effects and was indifferent to refined portrayals of souls and manners. Their simple and transparent motivations, their limited emotional responses became visual patterns through gestures and movements that constituted a language in themselves. The rigidities and limitations of their characterization were the armature that gave the necessary firmness and shape to the incessant and miraculous mobility of body; they were the choreographer that directed the actors' dance, giving cues for appropriate enhancement of stylization.
Other forms of exaggeration are found in the type of plays where the intrigue and its complications are all important. A character, existing less as himself than as a member of a team, derives his primary meaning from the tactical role he plays in a strategical game; hence the dynamics of his doing, not his isolated psychological being, is stressed. Extension in the length of his role, not greater psychological depth, distinguishes a central personage from secondary ones. Therefore, characters whose very existence depends on the plot, reflect all the twists and leaps of the dramatic action. Sudden inversion of feelings, produced by the uncovering of a deception or by the assumption of a new pose to implement another scheme, create considerable behavior fluctuation. In L'Amour médecin, Sganarelle alternate with startling suddenness between different kinds of emotional responses. Eager to have his daughter abandon her desire to be married, Sganarelle attempts to bribe Lucinde, promising to buy her new clothes and new furniture for her room, thus adopting, Ironically enough, the very suggestions he has just rejected from neighbors and relatives. When it becomes clear that Lucinde will not resign herself to be a spinster, Sganarelle's sweetness abruptly turns into anger. He conducts himself as if he had a prodigious capacity to forget what he has just said. These abrupt changes are caused by plot complications as well as by the brevity of plays which may be only one or three acts long. The dramatist does not have at his disposal the time needed to depict the gradualness that normally leads to change. He stuffs all sorts of events or responses in a short span of time, with the result that what is presented becomes over-stressed by shrinking the time that would normally elapse in real life. If this telescoping of time over-emphasizes character traits and behavior, it quickens the tempo of the play. Short-lived feelings give an angular and staccato rhythm to comedy. The movement is spasmodic because the psychological elaboration is cut short, the transition eliminated — yet the agonistic energy is continually spluttering. As regards
these jumps from mood to mood, schematic characterization is highly appropriate for conveying in a flash vision the culminating points of rapidly changing emotional reactions. Further, simplified characters, entirely taken up by the forceful and insistent assertion of their eccentricity or passion, impinge invariably on the desires of their fellow creatures, thus provoking numerous and marked crises which in turn encourage quick emotional changes.

Time compression exaggerates also the characters' mode of expression. They speak much more sharply and forcefully than real men. Their encounters with each other are made without inhibitions. The playwright who is not writing a comedy of manners does not care to take the time to portray politeness and conventions which preside as inhibitory forces over the meetings of people in actual life. He does not want his creatures to keep each other at arms' length, he wants them to confront each other fully and openly so that conflict, the base of all drama, will soon erupt because of the unhindered expression of their feelings. As indicated throughout the present essay, Molière's comedies abound in scolding matches and clashes of warring wills.

Time contracting effects are also felt in the intensification of the contrasts between two or more attitudes displayed by the same character. Time condensation eliminates all sorts of factors that normally come and go to attenuate the impact of the clash between contradictory personality aspects, thus compromising their peaceful co-existence. Proclaiming to be a courageous man who will fight for his principles, Sganarelle of Le Coclé imaginaire puts on a show of warlike prowess but immediately thereafter shows himself to be an utter coward. This abrupt disparity between lofty speeches and low behavior calls in question the reality of Sganarelle's existence. Unity is threat-
ened and we have an image of a disjointed block ready to collapse into non-reality. Or to put it in eerie terms, we feel that the character has failed to coalesce the different phantoms which live in him. This lack of harmony, exaggerated by the rapid alternation of contrasting attitudes, gives a disconnectedness to Sganarelle which places him in the world of comic make-believe.

Of course, that sort of juxtaposition of contradictory but adjacent elements helps dramatists to bring out the full value of the psychic mask. The mask is a borrowed attitude which does not blend with the underlying personality of its wearer. When the mask forgets to play its role, a contrast is born and a lack of coherence and cohesion appears in the entity of the character. This lack of unity signifies the disorganization of the reality of the hypocrite. At such times, when, for example, the concept of the pious man forgets to be in full command, Tartuffe, the concrete representation of such a concept, disobeys and this discord engenders confusion and unreality. As pointed out in Chapter III, the results of investigations in the field of Gestalt psychology seem to indicate that there are relatively stable patterns of thought and perception on which man relies, as a result of habituation and cultural conditioning. Parts not integrated in the stability of the whole disrupt man's apprehension of reality. As he tries automatically to grasp these disruptive elements with his conventionalized perceptual and thinking ways, and finds that it is not possible, the mental energy held ready for this effort becomes useless and is spent in laughter. Hence, in interpreting Tartuffe, an actor must not deprive him of his share of fumbling. The mask exaggerates the expression of hypocrisy and rigidifies it. But overstatement and fixation are not sufficient to produce amusement. The mask must be allowed to function inadequately and finally fall off so that clashes between the real and the impersonated occur. These collisions produce an impression of plausibility disintegrating into impossi-
bility. Tartuffe's hypocrisy exists yet it does not because his flesh refuses to become one with the mask. The animal in him responds to things and people according to their substance, edible or sensuously pleasurable. However, in order to push his way victoriously through the material world, he has chosen a means that is distasteful to his animalistic nature: an arrested expression, a husk, cold and unresponsive, whose eyeless gaze is turned toward eternity, looking beyond earthly joys. And it is this conflict which must be underscored by the performer if Tartuffe is to be kept on the plane of comic fiction. An actor who plays this role with too much sustained and successful simulation turns Tartuffe into an odious character whom spectators can admire or hate for his smooth and imperturbed histrionic gift, but not laugh at. Deformity, physical or psychological, is amusing so long as it is not real. We laugh at cartoons depicting misshapen men; their distortions may be visually plausible but biologically impossible. However, when these deviations become both visually and factually real, we cease to be amused, we are in presence of repulsive and ghastly monstrosities which somehow did not acceed to a normal human form. According to Claude Saulnier, as soon as the mind stops oscillating between reality and unreality, the onlooker ceases to laugh because he re-enters the seriousness of reality or is carried away into the domain of the fabulous or the bizarre.32

In the course of this chapter, we have tried to defend type characterization, and show some of its merits. If we want to criticize fairly and relevantly Molière's types, we must regard them as components of a complex whole and evaluate them in terms of the function they perform in that configuration. Further, they should be judged by standards that are applicable and pertinent to the specific class of characterization to which they belong. To use an example from art criticism, the judgment that a Norman Rockwell is better than a Braque because the figures in
the former painting are anatomically correct will be found inadequate, not because it is factually wrong, but because one is aware of the fact that the kind of painting of which Braque is an exponent is usually understood as not being concerned with achieving anatomical correctness. It seems futile to blame either painter for the lack of qualities with which they do not seem to be concerned. Likewise, it is silly to take criteria relevant only to fuller and more complex characterization and apply them to types; obviously, with such a method, two-dimensional personages will always be found incomplete. A more helpful evaluation depends on finding the objective which these types are to achieve in the particular comedy in which they perform and study their performance accordingly.
NOTES ON CHAPTER VI


5. Bergson, p. 104.


29. Bergson, pp. 96, 104–05 and 108.


CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The foregoing examination of some of Molière's plays shows that the author creates a world of jest and fantasy for the amusement of his spectators. We find his comedies to be theatrical games based on the art of trickery. To be implemented, deception depends on lies and various means of impersonation. A character is imitated without his knowledge, or an exchange of roles is made between two personages, or an imaginary person is conceived. Intrigue relies also on asides, monologues, chance meetings and failure to see eavesdroppers. Molière, a master of stagecraft, accepts the improbable in theatrical conventions and uses them with gusto, thus sacrificing realism for the "let's suppose" effect so characteristic of the comic game. In Molière's dramatic technique, there is none of the art that conceals art, on the contrary, the method is intended to draw attention to itself. This obviousness accentuates a certain playful element which in turn eschews serious thought and helps spectators to maintain a carefree attitude necessary for the release of laughter. For instance, it is in the play spirit of his comedies that we find an explanation of Molière's repetitive devices. The joyous absurdity that arises from the recurrence of situation or speech creates a realm where will is arbitrary and logical necessity non-existent. If Pancrace's recurrent entrances and exits strike the reader as artificial and improbable, they are, however, brilliantly adapted to the actor on the stage. Their appearance is half of the sport; the fun is essentially visual.

Deception and falsehoods, with their brisk and immediate effects of slapped and puzzled faces, of palpable bewilderment,
of action at cross purposes, are admirably suited to the art of
theater which depends on the visible and the audible. In addi-
tion, the instability engendered by tricks and counter-tricks,
often tearing down what has just been built, endows Molière's
comedies with a whimsical and playful quality. As we watch a
character cornered, another confronted, one caught, the other
struggling to extricate himself from the results of his tall
tales, we are conscious of witnessing a display of imaginative
wealth squandered on the wantonness of sport without an object.

Through imaginative heightening, Molière stresses the
weaknesses and peculiarities of his characters, endowing them
with unalleviated imbecility or unscrupulousness. Unlike real
men, these bold creatures display their follies openly and com-
pletely. They neither suppress, hide, nor counteract their aber-
rations by other tendencies. Far from being group representa-
tives or social types, these subnormal and grotesque creatures
live outside the world of reality. Further, these fanciful,
amoral figures have no desire to inform or teach; they have noth-
ing of practical value to give to their audience. They ask only
for temporary acceptance, just time enough to call the play in-
stinct out of the child that is father to each man. With their
extravagant behavior, they hope to make grown-ups forget them-
selves, lose the complexity of their existence and set aside the
social and personal considerations of the real world. Molière's
personages challenge us to play and to enjoy the purposeless ac-
tivities of their universe which is one great joke, comprehending
a world of jokes within it.

Molière heightens the sense of unreality in his comedies
by presenting little worlds devoid of moral substance. Since
trickery or deception is the center of interest in nearly all the
comedies considered in the present essay, we find that the Ten
Commandments and the Golden Rule are transgressed with verve and
vigor. Molière recognizes the malicious elation which an audience feels in seeing someone fooled or acting under a misapprehension of some kind, and he caters to this taste. From these amoral activities, spectators derive a delightful sense of escape from the rules which they know cannot be set aside in the world of reality. Since a good deal of what was intended by biological nature has been forbidden by nurture, the audience experiences vicarious satisfaction upon seeing their repressed aggressive impulses fully expressed and acted upon by Molière's characters. This display of hostility, with its accompanying horseplay, brings comedy that much closer to the physical activity of play. Slips, stumbles, falls and beatings create chaos which temporarily liberates spectators from an orderly and stable style of living imposed upon them by cultural patterns and social institutions. Of course, good drubbings and resounding blows, with their visual and aural effects, add considerable snap to comedy.

The removal of the limitations and prohibitions of the real world is also carried out by the behavior of Molière's characters. Outspoken and insolent sons and daughters openly defy parental authority or contrive elaborate deceptions against their fathers. Impudent servants ridicule their young masters and direct machinations against their older masters. When the tricks are disclosed, these scoundrels not only escape punishment but they are pardoned quite readily. The freedom and insolence of the cunning servants, their immunity from punishment, their happy-go-lucky existence, combine to paint a picture of servant life that bears little relation to reality. No respectable master in seventeenth-century France would have accepted such a state of affairs and Molière's spectators were well aware of this fact. Such a reversal of the norms creates the incongruity needed to jostle the social relationships established in the everyday world, thereby provoking laughter. Professional
types, such as the doctors and philosophers, are fantastic creatures that transcend reality. Wandering in and out, rarely moving the action forward but continually talking, they live in an allegorical world of exaggeration and absurdity. Unable to think or to speak in a simple, logical manner, they express the delirious nonsense of minds that have abandoned all bounds of reality.

The comedies studied in the present essay are pure theatrical fictions, with no didactic design, whence the neglect or contempt in which they are held by literary critics who rarely dwell on the fantasy or the entertainment value of Molière's work. In general, critical literature is preoccupied with realism, psychology and moral philosophy. However, all this concern with art as a representation of actual life or with the philosophical and ethical significance of drama, leads away from the artistic significance of the plays. Molière's comedies have been subjected to this critical fallacy of looking not for the artistic function of what the dramatist represents and the way he represents it, but for something that his representations are supposed to illustrate or suggest — something that belongs to life, not to his plays. The kind of criticism that measures the value of drama by the way it represents life, or by the author's implied beliefs about life, transforms Molière's work into a dubious mixture of art and reality and, in general, is destructive to comedy's place in the field of aesthetics.
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