Alice Marion - Ferrand

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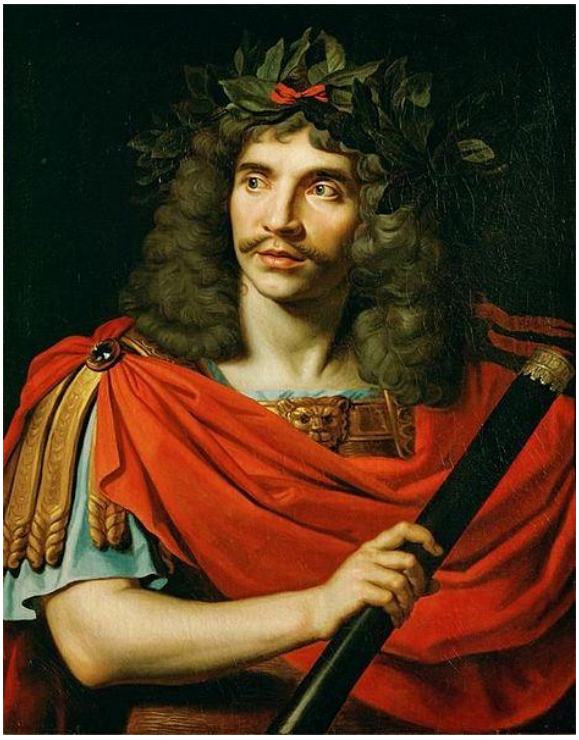

Mémoire de Master 2 en Études Anglophones

Sous la direction de Madame le Professeur Natalie Mandon-Hunter

UNIVERSITÉ DE LYON

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JEAN MOULIN

Unknown, *Portrait of George Etherege*. c.1700. Web. 1 May 2018.
Nicolas Mignard, *Portrait of Molière as "Julius Cesar".* 1656. Musée Carnavalet, Paris. Web. 16 November 2017.

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Introduction

In 1660, Charles II came back from France to reclaim the throne of England, Scotland and Ireland, thus marking the beginning of the Restoration period. During his years of exile in France, Charles II's tastes and ideas were shaped by French fashion, arts and culture. Charles II's – as well as his court's – ties to France did not subside upon their return to England. André De Mandach describes the consequences of this close contact as follows:

> C'est ce contact prolongé avec la culture française, c'est ce long séjour sur sol français, cette connaissance approfondie de la langue et du génie de la France qui auront un retentissement considérable sur le développement futur de la science, des arts et de la pensée en Angleterre. Cela d'autant plus que ces exilés, à leur retour, formeront la société qui donnera le ton à leur pays.[1]

Charles II's French education had another consequence: it greatly facilitated the exchanges of all kinds between the two countries. Thus, England was one of the very first foreign countries to encounter Molière's plays. The constant back-and-forth between France and England guaranteed that almost all English playwrights had seen – or at least read – some of Molière's plays, either on the French stage or performed by French actors on the English stage. It was the case for Etherege, who spent a significant part of his life in France, both before writing his first comedy in 1664 and before writing his last one in 1676, and a copy of the *Oeuvres de Molière* was found in his library after his death.[2] André De Mandach goes as far as to say: "Le théâtre de la Restauration était à cette époque directement ou indirectement sous l'influence du grand Poquelin."[3] This notion of "influence" remains to be studied. It is defined as "the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself"[4] by the Oxford English Dictionary. This definition remains vague – it does not qualify influence, distinguish different types of influences or explain how it works. The following questions have to be asked: how does it manifest itself in the plays? Did English playwrights simply borrow Molière's plots and characters, as critics, since Henri Van Laun[5]

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[1] André De Mandach, *Molière et la comédie de moeurs en Angleterre (1660-1668): essai de littérature comparée* (Neuchâtel: A la Baconnière, 1946) 15.
[2] Edmund Gosse, *Seventeenth Century Studies: A Contribution to the History of English Poetry*, (London: William Heinemann, 1897).
[3] Ibid., 7-8.
[4] Oxford University Press, 'Influence' *Oxford English Dictionary*. , 2017, online, Internet, 26 Nov. 2017. , Available: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/influence.
[5] "Presque tous les grands écrivains dramatiques de tous les pays du monde ont été pillés et mis à rançon, mais probablement nul n'a souffert davantage des plagiaires que Molière. C'est surtout en Angleterre qu'on a emprunté

first wrote about the relationship between Molière and the theatre of the Restoration, have claimed, or does it go further? In short, what type of influence did Molière have on the first generation of Restoration playwrights? When one tries to answer these questions, one problem arises: how can one prove that this element of plot or that comic device was borrowed from Molière and not from another playwright, from a common source? Comedy is also filled with tropes, stock characters and well-known comic devices, which complicates the question even more, blurring the line between influence and common theatrical heritage.

In the absence of a clear admission by Etherege of having borrowed from Molière, affirming a direct influence of Molière would be going too far. Harold C. Knutson proposes to study the conceptual relation between Molière's comedies and the Restoration comedies rather than the influence of one over the other, thus trying to answer the question "how does Molière relate to Restoration comedy in terms of comic technique, comic vision?"[6]. As this notion of "relation" is far less opaque than that of influence, this work will be rooted in it and shall endeavour to compare Etherege's and Molière's comedies, in particular the subgenres of comedy of manners[7] and *comédie de moeurs*, to which Etherege's and most of Molière's productions respectively belong. But what is the definition of the theatrical genre of comedy? According to Charles Mauron, comedy is traditionally defined in opposition to tragedy according to three criteria: "la qualité des personnages et de leurs intérêts, le dénouement, la nature des réactions psychologiques que l'auteur se propose d'exciter chez le spectateur."[8] Even though Mauron questions the validity of the first two in light of the many counter-examples found in theatrical creations, these criteria apply to Etherege's and Molière's plays, as all kinds of characters excluding the royalty – and even the court – are represented and the plays only deal with personal matters and end with a marriage or the promise of one. The subgenre of the comedy of manners is generally defined as a "witty, cerebral form of dramatic comedy that depicts and often satirizes the manners and affectations of a contemporary society"[9]. This definition suits the *comédie de moeurs* as well – with the exception of the profoundly English notion of "wit",

beaucoup à votre illustre poète" Henri Van Laun, "Les Plagiaires de Molière en Angleterre", *Le Moliériste* Aug. 1880 143.

[6] Harold C. Knutson, *The triumph of wit: Molière and Restoration comedy*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988) 3.

[7] Which, at the time, was referred to as "genteel comedy" – Charles Lamb coined the term "comedy of manners" during the Victorian era, according to Knutson, *The Triumph of Wit*, even though Lamb's definition has barely anything in common with our current understanding of the term.

[8] Charles Mauron, *Psychocritique du genre comique: Aristophane, Plaute, Térence, Molière* (Paris, France: Librairie José Corti, 1985) 8.

[9] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2018. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. 4 Feb. 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/art/comedy-of-manners>

which shall be discussed – but it remains broad and somewhat unsatisfying. As Knutson remarks:

> So far "comedy of manners" has been used as a loose tag to designate a cluster of plays held to share certain characteristics. When subjected to close scrutiny, the term, like most broad literary categories, eludes easy definition.[10]

As such, the notions of comedy of manners and *comédie de moeurs* have to be used with caution. Our aim will not be to define what comedy of manners and *comédie de moeurs* are, but rather to see whether there are similitudes between Molière's and Etherege's portrayals of their eras.

This work will focus on the representation of women of all ages and social statuses in the comedies by Molière and Etherege. In England, the Restoration period is a tipping point in the relationship between women and theatre, with women being allowed to act on stage, the rise of female spectatorship and, in the second part of the era, the emergence of female playwrights. French theatre is also subject to some changes, albeit a bit earlier, in the 1630s, with the comedies becoming more polished, thus drawing in more women and upper-class people, creating a mixed audience that influences the development of the plays of the second half of the seventeenth century, including Molière's.[11] We shall endeavour to compare how these playwrights – who both also staged their own plays – build their female characters, both through the significance of their actions in the plays and through their discourse and that of the other characters, and how this representation evolves during the second half of the seventeenth century. This study will focus on three main questions: that of the importance of female characters in the structure of the plays, that of their comic role, as well as that of the feminisation of the stage, with the progressive appearance of, as has been mentioned already, actresses, as well as female playwrights and female perspectives on stage. These topics will also lead us to analyse the relation of the audience to these characters and whether they offered a "realistic"[12] portrayal of the people and *mores* of their time, or even, in the case of young gentlewomen, an ideal to try and reproduce in real life.

The central corpus studied here is comprised of Etherege's three plays, *The Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub* (1664), *She wou'd if she cou'd* (1668) and *The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), as well as plays both representative of Molière's vast production, containing

[10] Knutson, *The triumph of wit* 9.
[11] Ibid., 30.
[12] Or at least as realistic as comedy can be, seeing as its main instruments to provoke laughter are distortion and exaggeration.

typical elements of the *comédie de moeurs*, and that represent typical or particularly interesting female characters, *L'École des femmes* (1662), *Le Tartuffe* (1664) and *Le Misanthrope* (1666), as well as *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (1971), which is one of Molière's later plays and is considered to be a blend of *comédie de moeurs* and farce in the Italian tradition, that is to say, a buffoon type of comedy that relies on exaggeration, absurdity and physical comedy. Occasional reference may be made to other plays, both by Molière and by other Restoration playwrights. Additionally, references will be made to present-day productions of the plays of the corpus, as sources on seventeenth-century productions are scarce and only studying the text of the plays amputates them from the essential feature of theatrical texts, which is that they are meant to be represented in front of an audience.

I. The Place of Women in the Plays: Between Presence and Absence

A first important notion when questioning the representation of women on stage is that of their importance in the play. In order to define this importance, we will consider very pragmatic questions, starting with the actantial roles performed by female characters. This will enable us to see what role they play in the plot and whether they can have the same function as male characters. Then, we will consider their presence on stage and the distribution of speech in the plays, in order to see whether female characters are as present as male ones, which character types and functions dominate the plays and whether this varies depending on the nature of the plays and the playwright. Presence and speech are the central quantifiers of the importance of characters in a play, as theatre is made up of language and visual signs. Yet this pragmatic analysis does not touch on the content of the characters' speech, the nature of their interactions and their meaning. The third sub-part will analyse these interactions, their importance in the play and in the building of the characters, as well as the originality of these scenes compared to the traditional interactions inherited from Classical comedy and the Commedia dell'Arte.

A. The Roles Performed by Women

This first part is based on Greimas' actantial model that reveals the macrostructure of a play, the action that drives it and the function of each character. There are six different functions:

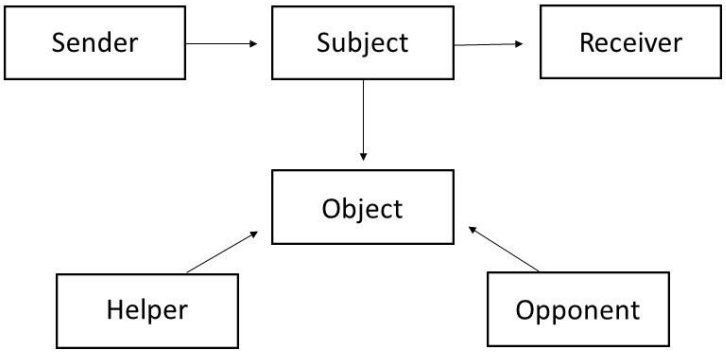

Figure 1: Greimas' actantial model

In theory, any character can have any function, even several at a time, and the actantial model is not limited to characters. Ubersfeld uses the notion of "actant" when talking about actantial models. An actant is an entity that is part of the actantial model of a play. It can be a character, an abstraction such as "Eros" or a collective, such as "Sir Fopling's servants". It can also be a

character that is only mentioned and never appears on stage, even though in that case, the character cannot be subject. A key question of the actantial model is to know who to choose as the subject of the play. Defining the subject of a play is no easy feat. One may think that the subject is the character who is on stage for the longest time and who speaks the most. But this would be the hero, the main character of the play, but not necessarily the subject of the action that leads the play:

> La détermination du sujet ne peut se faire que par rapport à l'action, et dans sa corrélation avec un objet. A proprement parler, il n'y a pas de sujet autonome dans un texte, mais un *axe sujet-objet*. Nous dirons alors qu'est sujet dans un texte littéraire ce ou celui autour du *désir* de qui l'action, c'est-à-dire le modèle actantiel, s'organise, celui que l'on peut prendre pour sujet de la phrase actantielle, celui dont la positivité du désir, avec les obstacles qu'elle rencontre, entraîne le mouvement de tout le texte.[13]

Thus, although Scapin is the main character of *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (henceforth referred to as FSca), he is not the subject of the action. Octave and Léandre stand as subjects of analogous actantial models, both chasing female objects – Hyacinthe for Octave and Zerbinette for Léandre –, motivated by Eros and helped by Scapin. Molière concentrates on the help provided by Scapin, but it is not the driving element of the plot.

Although it is limited, Greimas' actantial model gives a clear rendition of the structure of the play, which is not always easy to see. Through the actantial model of the plays, we will see whether women can give impetus to the play – whether they lead the plot or are more passive, what types of characters correspond to what roles and whether women can play all the roles or whether they are confined to a few.

1. The Balance Between the Number of Female and Male Characters

A first pragmatic question that needs answering is that of the number of women compared to the number of men. In Etherege's plays, there isn't a tremendous difference in the number of female and male characters who are named, even though women progressively come to outnumber men in his later plays (eight women and ten men in *The Comical Revenge*, six of each in *She wou'd if she cou'd* and nine women and seven men in *The Man of Mode*.) In Molière, there seem to be generally fewer female characters (seven men and only three women in FSca and *Le Misanthrope*, six men and three women in *L'École des femmes*). Yet women in Etherege's plays do not necessarily have more varied roles than in Molière's. The comparison between the actantial models of two plays shows that they occupy similar functions:

[13] Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire le théâtre* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1977) 58.

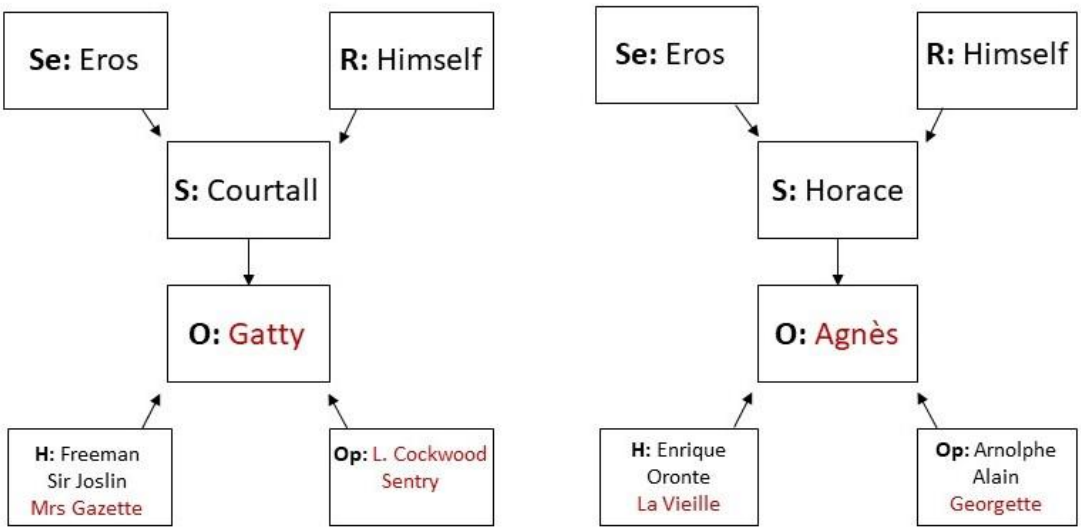

Figure 2: Actantial Models of She Would if She Could *and* L'École des Femmes.

La Vieille can be compared to Mrs Gazette as they both belong to the lower class and they both openly support Courtall and Horace but only help them incidentally. Georgette is Alain's female counterpart and, as a servant, she acts on behalf of her master, Arnolphe. She can be compared to Sentry, who is also a servant and does her mistress's bidding. The role played by her mistress Lady Cockwood is the main difference between the two plays: in *She Would if She Could* (henceforth referred to as SWC), the main antagonist is a woman. Courtall is not competing against a rival, unlike Horace who is in competition with Arnolphe who is bent on marrying Agnès; he is trying to shun Lady Cockwood's advances. Courtall is the focus of the desire of the gentlewomen of the play, in a sense, he is in the same situation as Agnès with Arnolphe and Horace. Yet as a man, he is not in such a perilous position as Agnès, who, as a woman, has neither authority nor autonomy.

Of course, all of Etherege's and Molière's plays do not have such similar actantial models, with characters that are almost equivalent. But this comparison shows that women can play almost all the actantial functions. They do not play the role of senders, as in comedies the subject is traditionally motivated by Eros, as well as social order- young noblemen are meant to desire young and virtuous noblewomen – and it is rare for a subject to be motivated by another character. In the case of the "subject" and "receiver" functions, these two actantial models do not have them as subjects or receivers because they have male lovers as subjects, thus putting women in the role of objects desired by these characters. If the actantial models were reversed, as we will see in the following subpart, women would play all the roles, except that of sender and object.

2. Subjects/Objects

All three of Etherege's plays and a significant number of Molière's are organised around a marriage – or, in some cases, several marriages. The plot is either launched by a first meeting – in person or symbolic through a portrait given by another character – between a man and a woman (*She Would if She Could, The Man of Mode, L'École des femmes)* or by the appearance of an obstacle that may render the amorous relationship between two characters impossible (*The Comical Revenge, Fsca, Le Misanthrope*). The main issue of the play is to know whether the two characters will manage to overcome all the obstacles in their path to get married and find happiness. Thus, this pair stands at the centre of the play. Their desire to get married is what motivates the plot, which places them in the role of subjects. It would be tempting to build an actantial model with the pair as the subject and "marriage" as the object, but that would deny the particularities of each character and their desire. This means that there are two competing actantial models in Molière's and Etherege's plays: the one that has the man as the subject and the woman as the object, and the one that has the woman as the subject and the man as the object. The actantial model that has the man as the subject is always apparent in the plays, but it is not necessarily the case of the second one. In order to be the subject, an actant has to be driven by desire and act in order to quench this desire. This is why characters who simply want to keep what they already have cannot be considered as subjects – their desire is not strong enough to prompt action.[14] Some female characters stand back and do not express their desire. This is due in part to the social codes of the seventeenth century that encouraged women to hide their love and desire for men. Yet most playwrights find a way around this convention, generally by using asides, monologues or a conversation between maid and mistress to reveal the latter's desires to the audience without breaking convention.[15] But it is also due to their absence from the stage and lack of significant discourse, as in Fsca. Theoretically, the subject-object axis can be reversed, but there are few textual clues indicating that this actantial model is indeed part of the play. Zerbinette announces her intention to marry Léandre once in the play (III,1) but describes their relationship as follows:

> ZERBINETTE.— […] En arrivant dans cette ville, un jeune homme me vit, et conçut pour moi de l'amour. Dès ce moment il s'attache à mes pas, et le voilà d'abord, comme tous les jeunes gens, qui croient qu'il n'y a qu'à parler, et qu'au moindre mot qu'ils nous disent, leurs affaires sont faites: mais il trouva une

[14] Ibid.
[15] See I,B,2.

> fierté qui lui fit un peu corriger ses premières pensées. Il fit connaître sa passion aux gens qui me tenaient, et il les trouva disposés à me laisser à lui, moyennant quelque somme.[16]

Léandre is the grammatical subject of almost all of Zerbinette's sentences. He is the one who pursues her, who acts, whereas she is the object of the sentences – and of Léandre's desire. Zerbinette is absent for most of the play, reinforcing the feeling that she is only there as the object of Léandre's desire. The one scene in which she plays a major role is the third scene of the third act, in which she reveals to Géronte, Léandre's father, that he has been tricked by Scapin. In this scene, she is motivated by her desire to share a funny story and ends up acting against her own interests, placing her in the temporary position of an opponent to Léandre's desire. Even though she plays a significant role in this scene, it does not establish her as a desiring character. She appears more as a rhetorical device that enables Molière to create both a comic scene, with the audience understanding the true meaning of Géronte's outraged reactions to Zerbinette's revelations, as well as a tension in the play, with Géronte now wanting to get revenge on both his son and Scapin. Thus, Zerbinette's role as a subject is very limited and it is difficult to justify the existence of an actantial model with her as a subject.

The example of FSca remains extreme, as the other plays of the corpus have reversible actantial models, although not always to the same extent. The complete opposite of FSca would be Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (henceforth referred to as MM), which comprises two competing actantial models that drive the action of the play: Dorimant wants to seduce Harriet and have her as a lover, whereas Harriet wants to change Dorimant's rakish nature and marry him. The main question of the play is to know whose desire will prevail: will Dorimant seduce Harriet and make her into one of his numerous conquests, as he did with Mrs. Loveit and Bellinda, or will Harriet manage to change his ways and ensure her happiness by marrying him? The play ends with Dorimant agreeing to come to the countryside with her, which seems to indicate that he has changed, as he agrees to leave the Town and all its pleasures. As Florence March explains, Restoration London is divided into three parts:

> À cette époque, la capitale se divise en trois grandes zones à la fois géographiques et sociales : la Cité [City] des bourgeois dans l'enceinte des anciens murs romains, les quartiers résidentiels de la Ville [Town] et la cour à l'ouest, les faubourgs industrieux à l'est été au nord.[17]

[16] Molière, *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, (Paris: Ribou, 1671). III,3.
[17] Florence March, *La comédie anglaise après Shakespeare: une esthétique de la théâtralité : 1660-1710* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2010) 35.

The Town is the one that is represented the most often in Restoration comedy, even though characters from other parts of London generally appear as well, but they are treated as boors as they are not really part of the peculiar and highly codified world of the Town. Thus, Harriet's desire prevails over Dorimant's, showing that not only is the actantial model reversible, but the dominant one may even be that which has Harriet as a subject.

Now that we have seen that female characters are almost always objects, but can also be subjects of the action, it remains to define which female characters correspond to this actantial role. Female characters who are part of the central couple are traditionally young, beautiful and virtuous gentlewomen. According to Margaret Lamb McDonald, before Shakespeare, the only women represented were either shrews or, from Tudor drama onwards, "constant, faithful and patient maiden[s]" whose love and faithfulness had to be tested.[18] Seventeenth-century comedy in France and England still uses these types, as well as those developed by the Commedia dell'Arte in the previous century, such as the pair of lovers who defy their parents' will, with one significant difference: female characters, in particular Etherege's, possess a decisive intelligence, or wit[19] in the case of Restoration comedy. This cleverness gives them an individuality beyond their type and sometimes enables them to play a prominent role in the plays, as we will see in the second part.

3. Helpers

Along with the central figure of the female love interest, other types of women also play a key role. The second actantial function played by female characters is that of helper. They can be on the side of the subject, the object, or both, but in any case, they are acting in favour of the realisation of the axis subject/object. A lot of different types of characters can be helpers. The traditional ally of the young lovers in Molière's comedies is the maid. In several of Molière's plays, the maid is key in bringing the two lovers together, as demonstrated by the following episode in *Tartuffe* (henceforth referred to as Tar):

> DORINE. *Elle quitte Mariane, et court à Valère.*
> Encor? Diantre soit fait de vous, si je le veux.
> Cessez ce badinage, et venez çà tous deux.
> *(Elle les tire l'un et l'autre.)*[20]

[18] Margaret Lamb McDonald, *The Independent Woman in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* (Salzburg: Institut Fur Englische Sprache Und Literatur, Univ Salzburg, 1976) 10.
[19] See II,A,1 for a definition of wit.
[20] Molière, *Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur*, (Paris: Ribou, 1669). II,4. v.767-68.

Dorine not only reasons with Mariane and Valère, she physically pulls them together. This underlines her importance as a helper: without her, Valère would have walked away and Mariane would have accepted to marry Tartuffe. Dorine is ready to do anything to see her mistress married to the man she loves and it includes breaking the rules imposed on her by her status as a maid and physically forcing her mistress to see reason. A similar type of character can be found in Etherege's MM, with Harriet's servant Busy, who encourages her mistress to admit her feelings for Dorimant and to pursue him. However, Busy does not play such an important role as Dorine, as she does not possess her impudence and thus does not dare interfere much in her mistress's business.

Another type of character that acts as a helper is the virtuous, married woman whose morals encourage her to help the young lovers. Lady Townley in MM is a good example: she does not pursue anyone in the play, unlike Mrs. Loveit and Bellinda, does not reveal Dorimant's true identity to Mrs. Woodvil when she unknowingly invites him to her dinner party, reasons with Old Bellair when he tries to marry Emilia, who is in love with his son, and even invites Parson Smirk so that he can officiate Young Bellair and Emilia's marriage before Old Bellair tries to marry his son to Harriet. She appears as the voice of reason in the midst of boorish and falsely prudish older characters: Mrs. Loveit fosters desires considered past her age, Bellinda surrenders her virtue to a notorious rake and Old Bellair wants to marry a woman half his age and is blind to his son's feelings. This, added to the fact that she is the only character who is a lady in the play, and thus has a higher social status than the others, establishes her as the symbol of good *mores* and respectable behaviour. A similar case can be found in Tar, in which Elmire, Orgon's wife and Mariane and Damis' stepmother, tries to prevent Orgon from marrying Mariane to Tartuffe (III,3). She sees Tartuffe's true nature and tries to show it to Orgon. She is ready to go quite far to do so, as shown by act IV, scene 5 in which she lets Tartuffe try and seduce her while Orgon is hidden under a table. Like Lady Townley, Elmire appears as a rational, morally sound character as opposed to the other ones. The fact that moral and rational characters are in favour of the relationship between the young lovers further proves its validity to the audience. The same goes for Molière's maids, who represent a form of innocent knowledge of wrong and right, as Bénichou argues: "Les servantes chez Molière ont plus de poids que les valets; c'est par la bouche des femmes qu'il a fait parler la sagesse sans fard du peuple."[21] This particular point will be developed in the third part.

[21] Paul Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) 263.

Not all helpers play a significant role in the plays, but some, like the two types that have been mentioned here, are essential to the functioning of the plays. Not only do they make the necessary happy end of comedies possible, they also give a moral basis on which to judge other characters, as we will see later on. It is also relevant to notice that some subjects have almost no helpers, which is the case of Célimène. It remains to see what the meaning of her isolation from helpers is: is it a way of signifying her moral unsoundness, and consequent incapacity to rally other characters to her cause or, on the contrary, is it a means of signifying her strength and independence as opposed to the other characters?

4. Opponents

Opponents are actants who try to oppose the desires of the subject. In some cases, an actantial model with them as subject can be developed, mirroring the models with the young lovers as subjects. In the case of Tar, the actantial model with Tartuffe as subject even appears to be the dominant one, as it is his desire to strip Orgon of all that he possesses, including his wife, that moves the action forward. Opponents are generally depicted as ridiculous, as they represent bygone values or exaggerated flaws. There are few female characters who are opponents to the subject and his or her desires in the plays by Molière, whereas two out of Etherege's three plays have female characters as opponents: Lady Cockwood in SWC and Mrs. Loveit, Bellinda and Mrs. Woodvil in MM. We mentioned earlier, when comparing SWC's and EF's actantial models, that Georgette and Sentry were opponents to Horace's and Courtall's desires. Indeed they are, but they merely follow the command of their master or mistress and do not oppose the subjects out of their own will. Additionally, their rare interventions do not turn the plot around. Thus, they cannot be considered as true opponents. On the other hand, Lady Cockwood acts entirely out of her own jealousy and can be considered as the main opponent in SWC. The example of Lady Cockwood is particularly striking: she is the main antagonist of the play, which can be surprising when compared to Molière's plays and their lack of female opponents.[22] She is often described through portraits drawn by other characters, which participates in building her character. The use of this classic device of Restoration comedy increases the centrality of her character: her aura seems to loom over the play even when she is not on stage, enhancing the idea of her representing a threat to the young heroes' schemes and future happiness. Her role in the plot is also significant, her attempts at seeing Courtall in private determining the progression of the plot although it must be said that she is not the only character

[22] The greatest opponent in Molière might very well be Célimène, who opposes Alceste's desire of being her only lover.

whose actions influence the plot to such an extent. Courtall's juggling of his various relationships and his refusal to surrender to Lady Cockwood's advances play an equally vital role in the development of the plot. Yet Lady Cockwood is never considered as a real threat by the other characters – and thus by the audience. The other characters mock her – Courtall calls her the "Longing Lady"[23], Freeman "the old Devil"[24] – and use asides to ridicule her and build connivance with the audience:

> *Court. aside.* Now am I going to be drawn in agen.[25]

And

> *Court aside.* Now is she afraid of being
> Disappointed on all hands.[26]

The interrogative form of Courtall's asides – despite the absence of question marks – gives a mocking tone to his lines. They sound almost like rhetorical questions, giving the feeling that Courtall easily anticipates Lady Cockwood's feelings and actions, emphasising both her utter predictability, which underlines her lack of wit (see II,A,1), and the ridiculousness of her behaviour.

Additionally, even though Edmund Gosse compares her to Tartuffe, calling her a "female Tartuffe"[27], as both characters fit the type of the old hypocrite who tries to hide his desires behind his pretended faith or virtue, Lady Cockwood is far from representing the same threat as Tartuffe. Her hypocrisy is more of a fumbling, almost accidental hypocrisy motivated by her desires, far from Tartuffe's masterful knowledge of how to manipulate people in order to reach his goals. Her plans are easily foiled by Courtall, who knows she is not as virtuous as she seems, unlike Orgon who has completely fallen under Tartuffe's spell and who does not heed his wife Elmire's and his servant Dorine's warnings. Only a deus ex machina, the unexpected intervention of the king's Exempt at the end of the play, prevents Orgon and his family from losing everything[28], whereas in SWC, Lady Cockwood realises all her plans have failed and makes up with her husband, Sir Oliver, thus making for a very rushed and anticlimactic

[23] George Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd*, (London: H. Herringman, 1668) 16. II,1.
[24] Ibid. 64. IV,1.
[25] Ibid. 23. II,2.
[26] Ibid. 42. III,3.
[27] Gosse, *Seventeenth Century Studies* 271.
[28] This ending can be compared to The Man of Mode's, in which the intervention of parson Smirk prevents Old Bellair from marrying Emilia, who is in love with his son Young Bellair. This parallel is strengthened by the close link that existed between royalty and the Church in both countries at the time.

denouement, which is settled in a few lines of dialogue before Lady Cockwood becomes a silent and passive observer. Her schemes are not openly revealed thanks to Courtall and she makes the choice to stop pursuing Courtall on her own. Etherege's play ends far less dramatically than Molière's which, during its first few representations, before it was censored, in 1664, actually ended with Orgon being aware of Tartuffe's true nature but ruined anyway and Tartuffe simply walking away. Molière's play is far darker than Etherege's: the threat represented by Tartuffe is closely felt by both the audience and the characters and jeopardises the happy outcome – as shown by the initial ending of the play – as well as the usual levity of comedy, with fear replacing mirth in the audience during some scenes. The fact that Lady Cockwood represents less of a threat than Tartuffe could be explained either by the comic nature of the play – which is unsatisfying as, while bleaker than SWC, Molière's play remains a comedy – or by the fact that she is a woman and, without taking into account Etherege's personal point of view on women, do not have the same kind of power and authority that a man has. This could be part of the explanation why Molière has very few female characters in the role of opponents, but it does not explain why it is not the case in Etherege's two later comedies. Another explanation can be found in the context in which the plays were produced: the court in Restoration England, especially under Charles II, was wild and libertine. This atmosphere represented a threat to husbands, as their wives could yield to temptation and make them cuckolds, even going as far as having a bastard child, which would disrupt the social order.[29] This fear was not so present in France, where the atmosphere was far less liberated, which, according to Bénichou, is what Molière denounces in his plays.[30] This could explain why in Molière's plays the supreme opponent and figure of ridicule is the "vieux barbon", whereas it is the "old coquette" in Etherege's, a character type that is almost absent from Molière's plays, with the exception of Arsinoé in Mis.

Thus, we can see that female characters can play almost all the functions of Greimas' actantial model, with most types of characters being limited to one or two functions. However, their presence in the actantial model does not mean that they play an important role in the play. Greimas' actantial models enable us to see the structures that underlie the play and are very efficient in schematizing the characters' roles in the plot. Due to their nature as a synthesis, they reduce the characters to functions, which is an essential starting point when dealing with

[29] Sarup Singh, *The Double Standard in Shakespeare and Related Essays, Changing Status of Women in 16th and 17th Century England* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1988) 156.
[30] Paul Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).

theatrical characters. However, it does not provide an answer to the following question: what is the importance of the characters in the play? We will endeavour to answer this question by first analysing the presence of female characters on stage, as well as turn-taking. We will then analyse the central element of theatre: the representation of the characters through discourse.

B. Distribution of Speech and Presence on Stage

Even though female characters are present in most of the slots of the actantial models, it does not mean that their importance is the same as that of men. A first way of definition this importance is comparing the number of times they appear on stage, as well as how many times they speak. We will analyse the number of appearances and vocal interventions of all the female actants and compare them to those of male characters that have the same function.

1. The Young Lovers

First, we aim to compare the presence on stage of the female type that is the common feature of most comedies: the love interest. As the two lovers form the central pair of most comedies, one could expect them to appear on stage equally as often. Yet it is rarely the case. In FSca, Hyacinthe and Zerbinette, the two love interests of the gentlemen Octave and Léandre, both only appear in seven scenes[31] out of twenty-six and only speak in four[32]. Despite their physical absence from the stage, the audience still has the feeling that they are central characters: it is the revelation of their true origin as the daughters of respectively Géronte and Argante which unlocks the situation and leads to the happy resolution of the plot; and they are constantly mentioned directly or indirectly throughout the play. This lack of female characters on stage could be explained by the nature of the play: FSca is a farce centered around Scapin's schemes and clever tricks to help the young lovers and exact revenge on his cruel master Géronte. The same goes for Tar, in which Mariane rarely appears (she is present in thirteen scenes[33] out of thirty-one and only speaks in six, including one in which she only says "je crois…"[34]), which may be due to the fact that the play concentrates on Tartuffe's character and his wrongdoings rather than on the pair of young lovers, as shown by the fact that the three scenes in which Mariane holds a real conversation with successively her father, Dorine and Valère all take place in the second act, before Tartuffe appears on stage in act three scene two. It must also be

[31] Hyacinte in I,3; III,1; III,9; III,10; III,11; III,12; III,13; and Zerbinette in III,1; III,3; III,4; III,10; III,11; III,12; III,13.
[32] Hyacinthe in I,3; III,1; III,10; III,11; and Zerbinette in III,1; III,3; III,4; III,10.
[33] I,1; I,3; II,1; II,2; II,3; II,4; IV,2; IV,3; V,3; V,4; V,5; V,6; V,7.
[34] I,1; II,1; II,3; II,4; IV,3; V,7.

mentioned that Valère appears even less than Mariane. The scenes in act two in which Mariane has a lot of dialogue not only develop the relationship between her and Valère and their respective characters, but also show the dire consequences of Tartuffe's scheming and set the scene for what is yet to come. Mariane is also completely absent from act three, in which the plot reaches its peak, following the traditional layout of five-act comedies.

Yet the argument of the nature of the play cannot be used to explain the case of Agnès in *L'École des Femmes* (henceforth referred to as EF), as it is considered to be one of Molière's "*grandes comedies*", *i.e.* comedies of manners in which farcical elements are almost absent. She only appears in nine scenes[35] out of thirty-two and only speaks in six[36] (it is even tempting to say five as she simply reads "*Les Maximes du mariage ou les devoirs de la femme mariée*" and doesn't say anything else in act III scene 2). Yet like Hyacinthe and Zerbinette, she is constantly mentioned by the other characters.

Even though *Le Misanthrope* (henceforth referred to as Mis) – another of Molière's great comedies – seems to be dominated by a male presence, Célimène is present in fourteen scenes[37] out of twenty-two – Alceste only appears in three additional scenes – and, most importantly, speaks in all of them. Célimène stands at the centre of every attention, which is made strikingly obvious in act II scene 4, in which the *petits marquis* Clitandre and Acaste encourage her to slander common acquaintances in front of Philinte, Éliante, Alceste and Basque, who act as an audience. Célimène gives impetus to the scene and to the whole play, she is a central character whose presence on stage and cunning, well-crafted discourse make her important and give her an identity that goes beyond that of the type of the *coquette*.

In Etherege's plays, in particular in the last two, the presence or absence of characters is more arduous to define as the five acts are divided into fewer scenes that do not correspond to the entries and exits of characters. In SWC, Gatty and Ariana appear in seven[38] out of ten scenes but participate actively in about thirteen dialogues. These figures also match Harriet's appearances in MM. The similarity between Etherege's plays is broken by his very first, *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub* (henceforth referred to as LT), in which three plots interweave.[39] Thus, it is logical that Graciana, who is the main love interest in the "noble plot",

[35] I,3; II,4; II,5; III,1; III,2; V,3; V,4; V,5; V,9.
[36] I,3; II,5; III,2; V,3; V, 4; V, 9.
[37] II,I; II,II; II,III, II,IV; II,V; II,VI; III,II; III,III; III,IV; IV,III; IV,IV; V,II; V,III; V,IV.
[38] : I,II; II, I; II,II; III,I; III,III; IV,I; IV, II; V,I.
[39] These three plots correspond to three social classes: the "noble plot", characterised by the blank verse used by the characters, in which Lords and Colonels pursue young gentlewomen, with the climax being a duel that ends with the symbolic death of the unwanted courtier; the "widow plot" in which a Sir and his French, harlequinesque valet try to trick a rich widow into marrying him, and the "tavern plot" in which two common people try to steal a naïve gentleman's fortune.

only appears in seven scenes[40] out of twenty-six. But if we only take into account the scenes that contribute to driving the "noble plot", Graciana appears in seven out of ten scenes and speaks in all of them. Even though it is impossible to generalise, in particular with Molière, who wrote more than thirty plays, we can still notice that the young women in Etherege's comedies appear more regularly on stage than they do in Molière's plays, and, more importantly, that they are almost never silent.

2. The Helpers

Thus, female characters that play the role of love interests are very present in Etherege's plays, but less so in some of Molière's. But what about secondary characters? Do they appear as much as young lovers in Etherege's plays? Are they as absent in Molière's works or, on the contrary, do they play a more prominent role? First, we will consider the case of helpers.

As we stated above, Mariane is only present in a few scenes in Tar. This is not the case of the two female characters that have the function of helpers: Elmire and Dorine. Elmire is present in seventeen scenes out of thirty-one[41], four more than Mariane, and speaks in fourteen[42], more than twice as many as her daughter-in-law. Mariane's absence from the play is even more apparent when she is compared to Dorine. Even though she has fewer scenes than Elmire (fourteen out of thirty-one[43]), she speaks in all of her scenes, often in long interventions, sometimes even tirades. Dorine is never a passive observer, she always intervenes, sometimes simply to move the plot forward – for example in act one scene three in which she announces Orgon's arrival and provides a clear transition between scene three and scene four – but more often to cheekily criticise the other characters' behaviour and help them. Elmire and Dorine appear almost as much as Orgon (who appears in nineteen scenes out of thirty-one[44]) and far more than Tartuffe (ten scenes out of thirty-one[45]). They are the only ones who actually try to stop Tartuffe's schemes and in that sense, they truly are essential characters.

Yet these two examples of helpers playing a crucial role and being very present on stage are quite isolated. In all the other plays of the corpus, there are either no female helpers, as in Mis and FSca, or female helpers play a far more restricted role and thus do not appear as frequently as other characters on stage. In EF, La Vieille is the only female helper: she relays messages

[40] I,IV; II,II; III,VII; IV,V; V,I; V,III; V,V.
[41] I,1; I,3; III,3; III,4; III,5; IV,2; IV,3; IV,4; IV,5; IV,6; IV,7; IV,8; V,3; V,4; V,5; V,6; V,7.
[42] I,1; I,3; III,3; III,4; III,5; IV,4; IV,5; IV,6; IV,7; IV,8; V,3; V,5; V,7.
[43] I,1; I,2; I,3; I,4; II,2; II,3; II,4; III,1; III,2; IV,2; IV,3; V,3; V,4; V,5.
[44] I,4; II,1; II,2; III,5 (doesn't speak); III,6; III,7; IV,3; IV,4; IV,5 (doesn't speak); IV,6; IV,7; IV,8; V,1; V,2; V,3; V,4; V,5; V,6; V,7.
[45] III,2; III,3; III,4 (doesn't speak); III,5 (doesn't speak); III,6; III,7; IV,1; IV,5; IV,7; V,7.

between Horace and Agnès as they are not allowed to see each other. But she is not represented on stage: she never appears and Agnès only relates her actions and reports her words to Arnolphe.

The examples of Mrs. Gazette in SWC, as well as Busy and Lady Townley in MM are less extreme, but these characters still do not have the same importance as Dorine and Elmire. Mrs. Gazette is on stage only in act III scene 1 and takes part in three short conversations, the first one with Courtall, in which he asks her to enable him to see Gatty. In MM, Busy appears in three scenes out of ten[46] and takes part in two conversations, in which she encourages Harriet to admit her feelings for Dorimant. As for Lady Townley, she appears in four scenes out of ten[47] and takes part in eight conversations, either discussing Emilia and Young Bellair's marriage and how to dissuade Old Bellair from marrying Emilia himself, or painting a positive portrait of Dorimant and encouraging Harriet to pursue him.

Once more, the distribution of speech varies a lot depending on the play. Some helpers, like Lady Townley, make a few appearances throughout the play, just enough to help the young lovers without taking centre stage, whereas other helpers, like Dorine and Elmire, give impetus to the play. Indeed, it is their attempts at reasoning with their families and stopping Tartuffe which shape the whole of the play and lead the plot forward.

3. The Opponents

Opponent play an essential role in plays. They represent the main obstacle that the subject must overcome in order to obtain what he or she wants. Do female opponents take centre stage, as Tartuffe does in the eponymous play, are they central figures of ridicule, like Arnolphe in EF, or do they play a more anecdotal role?

In EF, Georgette is the only female opponent. She appears in twelve scenes out of thirty-two[48] and speaks in eight.[49] Georgette works as a pair with Alain: they have the same number of lines, complete each other's sentences and act in unison. They have two roles in the play: they are Arnolphe's servants and help him in his endeavours, but they also make him even more ridiculous as they do not always obey him and make it clear that they do not respect him as a master. Georgette's role is akin to Sentry's in SWC, who only appears alongside her mistress, does her bidding and enables the audience to see her true nature through their private conversations. However, Sentry is far more dedicated to her mistress than Georgette is to her

[46] III,1; III,3; V,2.
[47] II,1; III,2, IV,1; V,2.
[48] I,2; I,3; II,2; II,3; II,4; III,1; IV,3; IV,4; IV,9; V,1; V,8, V,9.
[49] I,2; II,2; II,3; III,1; IV,3;IV,4; IV,9; V,8.

master. At the end of the play, she takes the blame for her mistess and enables Lady Cockwood to preserve her honour. These two characters serve as henchmen to the main opponents that are Arnolphe and Lady Cockwood. They do not play an essential role in the plot, as shown by their few appearances, but are essential in enhancing the ridiculousness of their respective masters.

Another type of opponent is Lady Woodvil in MM, who represents the parental authority who wants her daughter to marry the man she chose for her. She appears in three scenes out of eleven[50] and takes part in four conversations. She is the last obstacle that Harriet has to overcome in order to marry Dorimant, but she is not the worst one: she criticises Dorimant but in the last act, she is easily convinced by her daughter and the other characters that he is a noble gentleman. The same goes with Arsinoé in Mis, who appears in three scenes out of twenty-two[51] and takes a hostile stance against Célimène, but she is not what causes Célimène's downfall. In these two plays, the greatest opponents to the happiness of the lovers are the lovers themselves: if Dorimant does not change his ways, Harriet will not agree to marry him, and if Célimène does not accept to be faithful to Alceste, he will leave the society of men.

Finally, the presence of the main opponent of the corpus remains to be analysed. As expected, Lady Cockwood is a major feature of the play: she appears in seven scenes out of ten[52] and takes part in no less than nineteen dialogues. She appears as much as Gatty and Ariana and takes part in six more dialogues. The play is not centred around Courtall and Freeman's pursuit of Ariana and Gatty so much as around Lady Cockwood attempts at hindering such pursuit. In a sense, the structure of SWC is akin to that of FSca, although in a more moderate way, as the figure of the rake represented by Courtall is still central to the play.

All in all, female opponents – with the notable exception of Lady Cockwood – do not appear much on stage. This relative absence participates in making them less of a threat, as, in most cases, the other characters barely mention them when they are not on stage, which prevents them from casting an aura of danger over the whole play, as is the case with Tartuffe. As such, female opponents do not play a decisive role in the shaping of the plot and most of them are more of a slight hindrance to the young lovers than an actual threat, as is the case with Georgette, who is the extension of Arnolphe's will and is hardly distinguishable from her male counterpart Alain, making her femininity irrelevant, and Lady Woodvil who does not have much authority over her daughter as, in the seventeenth century, it was the father who had the last word on who the children married, as illustrated by Old Bellair's behaviour in the play.

[50] III,1; IV,1; V,1.
[51] III,4; III,5; V,4.
[52] I,2; II,2; III,1; III,3; IV,1; IV,2; V,1.

Harriet's mother cannot rely on the authority of her husband to keep her daughter from marrying the man she wants, as Harriet's father is utterly absent from the play and not even mentioned in act V scene 1, when Harriet describes her country home and talks about "a great rambling lone house, that looks as it were/Not inhabited, the family's so small; there you'l find my Mother,/An old lame Aunt, and my self."[53] This absence of a paternal figure is relevant in analysing Harriet's character, as will be shown in the third part. There are also several plays in which no female opponents can be identified, such as in FSca, Tar or CR. Thus, except in a few cases, the representation of female opponents is very limited, and they are rarely developed characters, mostly due to their lack of presence and discourse, which is not the case of male opponents.

What stands out after having analysed the presence of women in the plays is how important they *seem*. They are essential to the structure of the plays, provide motivation for male characters, sometimes even act as opponents, and yet most of them never quite manage to take centre stage. There is also a contrast between Molière's and Etherege's plays: in Etherege, the young gentlewoman or gentlewomen that are part of the central pair appear a lot, they are never silent and help shape the plot, but the other female characters are often more held back, often playing more of an anecdotal role. On the other hand, Molière's plays are far more varied: some of his young gentlewomen stand at the centre of the play, as is the case with Célimène, whereas some others barely appear, like Mariane. In some plays, he also gives a preponderant role to characters who are not part of the central pair, such as Dorine and Elmire in Tar. Thus, Molière seems to be more varied in his representation of women. The way these women are represented remains to be analysed. We will first focus on traditional interactions of comedy to see how each playwright writes them and whether female characters' interventions and interactions are more than a theatrical device – with male characters taking centre stage and female characters developed as little as possible, only there so that the main character has a goal, thus appearing only in necessary scenes such as, for the young lovers, the first meeting and the marriage at the end – or whether they are developed characters that hold an important part of the discourse.

C. Traditional Interactions

Even more telling is the question of discourse, briefly evoked already. Who do women talk with, and what about? Do they spur the dialogue, direct it a certain way or do they passively follow their interlocutor's steering? Are their interactions meaningful dialogues that flesh out

[53] George Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter*, (London: H. Herringman, 1676). V,1.

the characters or are they narratively compulsory scenes that do nothing more than further the plot? And are there significant differences between Etherege's and Molière's plays pertaining to these interactions? We can already guess that different types of characters will not interact the same way with other characters and that they will not be given the same part of discourse. We will focus on four different kinds of interaction: the dialogue between the young lovers, the dialogues between the young gentlewoman and her maid, the dialogue between rivals and the dialogue between friends.

1. Between Lovers

One of the most important interactions in comedy is that which occurs between the young lovers. In Etherege's last two plays, this interaction is based on banter. In his *Dictionary of the English Language,* which was published in 1755, Johnson defines the verb *to* banter and the noun *banter* as follows:

> To BANTER, *v. a*.
> To play upon; to rally; to turn to ridicule; to ridicule.
>
> BANTER, *n. s*. [from the verb]
> Ridicule, raillery.[54]

Even though Johnson's definition is concise, it still mentions the core features of banter: the notions of play and mockery. This definition also underlines the darker nature of banter. Banter can be used to ridicule someone; in which case it is closer to verbal bullying than to a teasing interaction. As Natalie Mandon points out, this darker meaning of the word is apparent in Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695), in which some characters feel threatened by the non-literal meaning of other characters' statements, which they perceive but do not understand: "On Congreve's stage, it is a practice that often causes not mock but true offence."[55] In Etherege's plays, banter is lighter than in Congreve's. It takes the form of a playful exchange in which the characters try to outwit one another and gain some power over the other. Men and women are on an equal footing, as they need to possess enough wit for this type of exchange to happen and be entertaining to the audience. In Restoration comedy, this interaction is heavily codified: women must hide their true feelings and mock the young gentlemen's attempts at seduction.

[54] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: A Digital Edition*, Ed. Brandi Besalke, (1755) 199.
[55] Natalie Mandon, 'Simulating ignorance: Irony and banter on Congreve's stage' in *The Pragmatics of Irony and Banter*. Linguistic Approaches to Literature 30 (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2018) 106.

But the gentlemen often hear what remains unsaid, they perceive the romantic affection – necessary to all sentimental comedies – felt by the young women, which encourages them to pursue them harder:

> *Free*. Must we then despair?
> *Aria*. The Ladys you are going to, will not be so
> Hard-hearted.
> *Cour. to Free*. On my Conscience, they love us, and
> Begin to grow jealous already.[56]

Courtall's private remark to Freeman enables the audience to understand what Ariana and Gatty really feel – or, at least, what Courtall and Freeman think Ariana and Gatty feel. This type of banter, which, in Restoration comedy, often takes the form of a battle of wits between young gentlemen and women in which the aim is to conceal one's true feelings while trying to reveal the opponent's, leads the audience to feel sympathy for the young women, and sometimes even laugh with them at the expense of the young gentlemen. This type of interaction structures Etherege's last two plays. In act I scene 1 of MM, Dorimant is introduced to Harriet through the portrait drawn by the Orange Woman and Medley. From there on, the plot is driven by his attempts at first meeting – then seeing – Harriet, which he eventually manages in act III scene 3, thus making their first meeting the climactic point of the play. They interact twice again, in act IV scene 1 and act V scene 1, constituting an substantial part of discourse.

In contrast, interactions between young lovers in Molière's plays and given less importance than in Etherege's. In three out of the four comedies of the corpus, the lovers only interact once, in act I scene 3 in FSca, in act V scene 3 in EF and in act II scene 4 in Tar. In all three of these, another character is present, adding some levity and humour to the scene, as these interactions are far more romantic and serious than in Etherege's last two plays. In EF, act V scene 3, Horace and Agnès can finally have a direct conversation. Words associated with love are repeated throughout the passage, for example "ma flamme amoureuse" (v1464), "mon amour extrême" (v1468), "vous ne m'aimez pas autant que je vous aime." (v1469) The dialogue between the two lovers completely lacks the battle of the sexes aspect that prevails in Etherege. The two lovers are entirely open with each other, creating a touching rather than amusing dialogue. Yet the scene is not entirely devoid of comedy. Arnolphe's masked presence during Horace and Agnès' declaration of love gives a comic dimension to the scene. Unbeknownst to Agnès and with Horace believing that he wants to help them, he is forced to witness a scene that will lead

[56] Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd,* 20. II,3.

to the failure of his plan to marry Agnès, leading the audience, who, contrary to the lovers, knows exactly what is going on, to laugh at his expense. Dorine plays the same role in Tar, turning a break-up scene that would have been better suited to a tragedy into a ridiculous scene between two lovers who refuse to listen to each other. Some stage directors even went as far as to represent Valère and Mariane as mulish teenagers who have trouble communicating, as did Gwenael Morin in his 2013 production of three of Molière's plays for his *Théâtre permanent* at the theatre Le Point du Jour, going as far as to declare: "Mariane, c'est une ado chiante".[57] Even more striking is the complete absence of representation of first meetings in Molière's plays. In Etherege's, the first meeting is double: the young gentleman is first introduced to the young gentlewoman through a description given by another character, then he meets her in person and can attest to the veracity of the portrait:

> *Dor*. 'Tis she! it must be she, that lovely hair, that
> Easie shape, those wanton Eyes, and all those melting
> Charms about her mouth, which Medley spoke of;[58]

Dorimant's lines here conclude the chase that has lasted for three acts and their meeting marks the climax of the play, as mentioned earlier. The first meeting between the lovers does not hold such importance in Molière's plays. It is never represented, but it is related three times in the plays: by Agnès in EF and by Octave and by Zerbinette in FSca. These retellings of first meetings serve a narrative purpose, they set the scene for the events that are to unfold, but they barely develop the characters and their relationship. They are the complete opposite of Etherege's first meetings, which are a testimony to the wit and spirit of both characters and establish their relationship as the battle between sexes mentioned above. Molière's lack of representation of first meetings may be because of the unity of time, which would be broken if he were to represent first meetings that happened weeks before the action of the play – even though it has to be mentioned that some of his plays, such as Dom Juan, remorselessly violate the unities and the *bienséance* – which is defined as respecting verisimilitude and the morals of the time, which, in French classical theatre, translates to scenes of violence and sex being told rather than represented. A complementary explanation would be that Molière's plays concentrate more on the obstacles that keep an amorous pair from marrying and being happy rather than on the courtship between the two lovers, as Etherege's plays do.

[57] Gwenael Morin. Personal conversation. October 2013.
[58] George Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* (London: H. Herringman, 1676) 45. III,3.

The one play by Molière that stands out is Mis. It is rich in conversations between the two lovers, if Alceste and Célimène can be called such a thing. The two interact privately twice (II,1 and IV,3), but share six group conversations. Their exchanges are barbed, they both have something to reproach each other for and try to verbally overpower the other:

CÉLIMÈNE
Taisez-vous.
ALCESTE
Aujourd'hui vous vous expliquerez.
CÉLIMÈNE
Vous perdez le sens.
ALCESTE
Point, vous vous déclarerez.
CÉLIMÈNE
Ah!
ALCESTE
Vous prendrez parti.
CÉLIMÈNE
Vous vous moquez, je pense.
ALCESTE
Non, mais vous choisirez, c'est trop de patience.[59]

This quick, tit-for-tat exchange – in which the characters' lines do not form full alexandrine verses and have to be combined for the verses to be complete – is very tense. Most verbs are in the future tense and try to dictate the other character's behaviour – and the one that is not in the future tense is in the imperative. The short sentences and abundance of full stops marks she curtness of their answers and the fact that they try to remain calm and show nothing of their feelings in order to gain the upper-hand. In a sense, their interactions are closest to the banter of Etherege's comedies, but with an underlying blend of darker themes and feelings, which eventually lead to their separation and the "tragic" ending of the play.

The dialogue between the two lovers in Etherege's plays seems to have more importance than in Molière's, except for Mis. This dialogue is the climax of the play, whereas in Molière, it feels more like a necessary step made more entertaining and original by the presence of a third character who adds humour and a certain distance to the scene. The comic aspect of the scenes relies on this outsider who brings an additional perspective and enables the scene to go from romantic to something more, whereas in Etherege, the lovers themselves seem to bring

[59] Molière, *Le Misanthrope*, (Paris: Ribou, 1666). II,4. v.563-65

this distance with romantic matters by discussing love in a very ironic way. In Etherege's plays, the interaction between the two lovers is a testimony to their wit and positive traits, although one exception has to be mentioned: Emilia and Young Bellair in MM. They are not the central pair of the play, which may explain why their interactions are closer to those found in Molière's plays: they do not banter but exchange promises of love and marriage. They offer a quieter counterpoint to Harriet and Dorimant's explosive relationship, similar to Philinte and Éliante's role in Mis. We shall see in the third part why this is relevant. Molière's plays do not work the same way as Etherege's, as the emphasis is not put on the lovers but on the situation they find themselves in and how they can turn it in their favour, generally with the help of another character. The one exception is Mis, in which the scenes between Célimène and Alceste are a battle of wit and show the characters' ingenuity. This plays a part in making Célimène the character closest to Restoration ones, and perhaps the freest of Molière's heroines, as we will see in the third part.

2. Between Lady and Maid

Another classic comedy interaction is the dialogue between the young mistress and her servant. The maids serve as their mistresses' doubles, as Nadia Rigaud explains: "Ces soubrettes sont le moyen théâtral par lequel l'auteur révèle les sentiments et les attitudes que la maîtresse a trop de retenue pour avouer."[60] Dialogues between maids and mistresses reveal to the audience the young women's feelings. In act V scene 2 of MM, Busy reveals that the song Harriet likes so much was written by Dorimant, which is why she likes it. The same goes for CR, in which the dialogue between Aurelia and her maid Leticia in act II scene 2 takes the form of the heartbroken mistress confessing her feelings to her devoted maid. A similar but much lighter scene can be found in Tar act two scene three. The scene has the same function and works in the same way, with Mariane admitting her love for Valère, the obstacle here being an unwanted marriage instead of unrequited love. However, contrary to Leticia, Dorine does not let Mariane wallow in self-pity. Her discourse is blunt, and her biting irony convinces Mariane to fight against her unwanted marriage to Tartuffe, and also elicits hilarity in the audience. Etherege's maid in CR corresponds to the type of the sympathetic maid who, as Nadia Rigaud explains, is nothing more than a theatrical device used to shine light upon a young gentlewoman's feelings and enable her to react by proxy in a way that is not socially acceptable for a woman of her status. To a certain extent, the maids in his other plays, as well as Molière's

[60] Nadia Rigaud, 'L'évolution des relations entre maîtres et serviteurs dans le théâtre d'Etherege' *XVII-XVIII. Revue de la Société d'études anglo-américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. 21.1 (1985): 87–95. 93

Dorine, have the same function. They also serve as revealers of their mistresses' ridiculousness, which becomes apparent during their interactions:

> *La. Cock.* I am betray'd, betray'd—by this
> False—what shall I call thee?
> *Sent.* Nay, but Madam—have a little patience—
> *La. Cock.* I have lost all patience, and will never
> More have any—
> *Sent.* Do but hear me, all is well—
> *La. Cock.* Nothing can be well, unfortunate Woman.[61]

The abundance of dashes indicating that the character has been cut off by his interlocutor shows Lady Cockwood's distress in the face of her honour having possibly been tarnished. The comic aspect comes from the fact that she is overreacting, as Sentry is trying to tell her that "all is well", but her mistress won't hear her out. This scene is Lady Cockwood's introduction scene, and she is immediately established as an unreasonable and overly dramatic character. Maids also reveals their mistress's true nature as a ridiculous character through the opposite of an interaction, that is to say an aside:

> *La. Cock.* I were ruin'd if it shou'd, Sir! Dear, how
> I tremble! I never was in one of these houses before.
> *Sent. Aside.* This is a Bait for the young Ladies to
> Swallow; she has been in most of the Eating-
> Houses about Town, to my knowledge.[62]

Sentry reveals Lady Cockwood's true actions and her hypocrisy, creating a comic moment and connivance with the audience. One could think that this function as an "enabler" of ridiculousness is reserved to maids of characters that play the role of opponents, but it is not the case. As mentioned earlier, Dorine acts as the voice of reason against Mariane's stubbornness and shows how ridiculous her and Valère's argument is. These three maids more or less fit the type of the cunning servant, but Dorine is the prime example: her meddling and her comic dimension give her far greater importance, as shown by the numerous scenes in which she interacts with all kinds of characters.

This mistress and maid pair has an equivalent that appears in Etherege's later plays: the pair of young gentlewomen, whether they are sisters, cousins or simply friends. In SWC, the maid

[61] George Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd* (London: H. Herringman, 1668) 9–10. I,2.
[62] Ibid., 41. III,3.

is replaced by an equal, a girl of the same social status as the main female protagonist. Most of the dialogues between Gatty and Ariana have the same function as those between a maid and her mistress and work in the same way. This perfect duplicity is a particular feature that does not exist in Molière's plays.[63] It could be linked to Nadia Rigaud's theory on servants in Restoration comedy, who progressively lose their privileged relationship with their masters and come to play lesser roles, in accordance with the social changes that would occur in Britain not long after.[64]

A last example of interaction – or, rather, lack thereof – between lady and maid can be found in Mis. Célimène does not have a maid, she has a valet with whom she barely interacts, as his only function in the play is to provide a transition in between the scenes by announcing the arrival of a new character. In comparison to the other female characters of Etherege's and Molière's plays, Célimène is isolated. The fact that she does not have a maid breaks both the theatrical conventions and the customs of the time, as all upper-class ladies of the seventeenth century had a maid to help them daily. There remains to be seen whether this absence of maid has a particular significance for the character of Célimène, a question which will be tackled in the third part.

Dialogues between ladies and maids are heavily codified and generally follow the same lines, with the maid enabling the lady to reveal her feelings, reactions and, in a sense, personality. The maid is often an extension of the lady, generally of her will, sometimes of her individuality. Some maids, such as Letitia, are confined to this role, which makes their interactions with their mistresses practical and conventional – as well as making these interactions the only ones that they have. But others, like Dorine, are more than a simple foil for their mistresses, as shown by the numerous dialogues she is part of.

3. Between Rivals

Contrary to the previous interactions mentioned above, dialogues between female rivals are not a traditional interaction of comedy. Few plays feature such dialogues, which may be due to the relative absence of female opponents as opposed to male ones. Only two plays feature such interactions in the corpus: MM and Mis, respectively between Harriet and Mrs. Loveit and between Célimène and Arsinoé. The scenes with Bellinda and Mrs. Loveit in MM can also be considered as interactions between rivals, but they do not function in the same way, as Mrs.

[63] One could argue that Hyacinthe and Zerbinette in Les Fourberies de Scapin constitute a pair of this kind, but their social status is believed to be different until the very end of the play and the farcical aspect of the play does not leave room for anything beyond the resolution of the problem through tricks elaborated by Scapin.
[64] Rigaud, 'L'évolution des relations entre maîtres et serviteurs dans le théâtre d'Etherege'.

Loveit does not know that Bellinda is also in love with Dorimant and thinks she is on her side, making the scene not one of strife but of double-meaning and connivance between Bellinda and the audience through the use of asides. One may have also expected to find such a scene in SWC, which we have established as having the greatest female opponent out of all the plays in the corpus. Yet Lady Cockwood, Ariana and Gatty never really interact. They share a few dialogues and jab at each other a few times, but it goes no further. This may seem surprising, but it is understandable in the context of the play: by declaring Ariana and Gatty her rivals and having a hostile exchange with them, Lady Cockwood would imperil her honour. The same goes for the young women, who cannot do such a thing for fear of disrespecting their aunt.

The scene of confrontation between Harriet and Mrs. Loveit is quite short, it takes place at the very end, when Harriet and Dorimant have agreed to marry and Harriet has convinced her mother to accept it. The interaction is short, but no less biting:

> *Lov*. There's nothing but falsehood and impertinence in
> This world! all men are Villains or Fools; take example from
> My misfortunes. Bellinda, if thou would'st be happy, give thy
> Self wholly up to goodness.
> *Har. to Loveit.* Mr. Dorimant has been your God
> Almighty long enough, 'tis time to think of another—
> *Lov*. Jeer'd by her! I will lock my self up in my house,
> And never see the world again.
> *Har*. A Nunnery is the more fashionable place for such a
> Retreat, and has been the fatal consequence of many a
> Belle passion.
> *Lov*. Hold heart! till I get home! should I answer
> 'Twould make her Triumph greater.
> *Is going out.*[65]

Harriet's comments about Mrs. Loveit's prospective future in a nunnery are both mocking and moralising. Mrs. Loveit's dramatic discourse about the falsehood of the world and her warning to Bellinda would have characterised her as a moral character who was deceived by a dysfunctional world and only realised it too late, and who now tries to warn other people so that they do not fall into the same trap. Mrs. Loveit blames the world instead of admitting to her own lust, she puts herself in the place of the victim, almost a martyr. Her last speech would have enabled her to make a grand exit if not for Harriet's intervention. Harriet reminds her – as

[65] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 94. V,1.

well as all the other characters – of her obsession with Dorimant and designates her "Belle passion" as the cause of her misfortunes instead of an immoral world. Comparing Dorimant to God underlines the excessive aspect of Loveit's feelings for Dorimant and the imbalance in their former relationship. The use of the French adjective "Belle", with the capital "b", may be intended ironically. Throughout the play, all things French are associated with Sir Fopling Flutter, the fop who gives his name to the play. His exaggerated French accent, obsession with French fashion and general foolishness make him ridiculous in the eyes of witty characters, as well as the audience. Thus, the definition of a nunnery as a "fashionable" place and the description of Mrs. Loveit's obsession as a "Belle passion" sound like a final provocation from Harriet, who compares Loveit to Sir Fopling and makes fun of her future move into a nunnery. Loveit's refusal to answer is a last-ditch effort to retain some shred of dignity. But even though her lines sound like asides, they are not, as Harriet directly responds to them. It is as though Mrs. Loveit does not know how to do an aside. This is a testament to Loveit's lack of distance, lack of theatricality even, in a society where representation is omnipresent – and even more so in the theatre – as Florence March argues:

> À l'époque de la Restauration anglaise, et plus particulièrement sous le règne de Charles II (1660-1685), narcissisme et histrionisme caractérisent les classes privilégiées. La théâtralité apparaît donc avant tout comme un phénomène de société. Il ne s'agit plus ni d'un comportement ponctuel ni d'une pathologie, mais du mode de vie ludique d'un groupe de population en représentation permanente.[66]

This idea of representation and understanding of theatrical social codes will be tackled in the second part. All in all, this exchange in quite violent on the part of Harriet: not only does she take the man Mrs. Loveit loves from her and get the happy ending Loveit never achieved, but she also refuses to let her bow gracefully out of the situation, reminding everyone of Loveit's true nature. This scene is one last occasion to oppose Harriet's wit to Mrs. Loveit's lack of it, underlining once more the ridiculousness of her character and Harriet's charm and intelligence in comparison.

The second interaction between rivals takes place in act III scene 4 of Mis. A whole scene is dedicated to Célimène and Arsinoé's dialogue, with no other characters to witness it this time. The scene starts with two tirades, in which each character draws a denigrating portrait of the other while pretending that it is what they have heard from others and are only repeating it because they are concerned friends. It then takes on the aspect of a battle of wits in which each character tries to prove that her conduct is better than the other's. The dialogue becomes

[66] March, *La comédie anglaise après Shakespeare: une esthétique de la théâtralité : 1660-1710* 14.

progressively more violent, the full-out accusations replacing the innuendos. It eventually ends in a draw, with Arsinoé refusing to talk any longer and Célimène leaving the room. This interaction reveals Célimène's spirit and wit, as well as her immoral way of life. It builds tension, as Alceste is not the only one who criticises Célimène's behaviour anymore, and it foreshadows the ending of the play. This interaction establishes Célimène as a character who is not afraid to enter a verbal battle and who is not ashamed of her way of life. Yet the abrupt end of the dialogue brought on by Arsinoé can only let us imagine what would have happened had it continued:

ARSINOÉ

Brisons, Madame, un pareil entretien,
Il pousserait trop loin votre esprit, et le mien[67]

The first part of Arsinoé's reply could be interpreted as a jab at Célimène's intelligence, but the addition of "et le mien" contradicts that interpretation. She could mean that keeping on arguing would definitely break their friendship, but they cannot exactly be called friends, as they cannot stand one another and vehemently criticise each other. The ending of this scene is surprising and it is not quite clear what Arsinoé means when she says "Il pousserait trop loin votre esprit, et le mien." Nonetheless, this scene plays an essential part in increasing the tension in the third act and develops Célimène's and Arsinoé's characters.

The two interactions between rivals that have been analysed share a common point: they both establish characters – except for Mrs. Loveit – as intelligent women who do not fear verbal confrontation. These scenes, along with scenes between lovers, are the ones that showcase most effectively the verve of these characters, for once without a male presence to take centre stage.

4. Between Friends

Even rarer than interactions between rivals are interactions between friends, male or female. In Molière, the few female characters who can be considered as friends barely interact: the development of the relationship between Hyacinthe and Zerbinette in FSca is limited to three sentences in act II scene 1, in which they declare their intention to be friends, and Célimène and her cousin Éliante do not interact outside of the context of a group conversation. Female characters are also rarely represented as having male friends – the men with whom they interact generally are their husbands or love interests. The female characters' lack of friends in Molière's plays can be explained by the importance of the maids, who play the same role of

[67] Molière, *Le Misanthrope*. III,4. v.1027-28.

confidents and allies that friends would have played. Contrary to Molière, Etherege does write dialogues between friends, as we have already seen in SWC with Ariana and Gatty, whose dialogues serve the same function as that between a maid and her mistress. Ariana and Gatty are twin characters, which makes their dialogues closer to a monologue than a real exchange: they finish each other's sentences, rarely disagree with one another and use similar witty repartee and comparisons. The only real dialogue between the two takes place in act I scene 2. Its main purpose is to introduce the characters and their intentions and moral values, but it is also an attempt on Etherege's part at differentiating one from the other by establishing Ariana as the more demure of the two sisters:

> *Gatty*. Why, hast not thou promis'd me a thousand
> Times, to leave off this demureness?
> *Aria*. But you are so quick.
> […]
> It may be, if your tongue be not altogether
> So nimble, I may be conformable; But I hope
> You do not intend we shall play such mad Reaks
> As we did last Summer?
> *Gatty*. 'Slife, do'st thou think we come here to be
> Mew'd up, and take only the liberty of going from our
> Chamber to the Dining-Room, and from the
> Dining-Room to our Chamber again? and like a
> Bird in a Cage, with two Perches only, to hop
> Up and down, up and down?
> *Aria*. Well, thou art a mad Wench.[68]

Ariana mentions her sister's quick wit twice, going as far as to call her mad. By contrast, Gatty accuses Ariana of demureness and uses the metaphor of caged birds to convince her to follow her adventurous spirit. Gatty's speech is more inventive and colourful than Ariana's, which shows indeed that she has more spirit than her sister. But this distinction between the two is short-lived, as Ariana surrenders to her sister's arguments a few lines later:

> *Aria*. But whatsoever we do, prithee now let us
> Resolve to be mighty honest.
> *Gatty*. There I agree with thee.
> *Aria*. And if we find the Gallants like lawless
> Subjects, who the more their Princes grant,

[68] Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd*. 13. I,2.

The more they impudently crave.
Gatty. We'll become absolute Tyrants, and deprive
'Em of all the priviledges we gave 'em—
Aria. Upon these conditions I am contented to trail
A Pike under thee—march along Girl.
Exeunt.[69]

Not only does Ariana agree to follow her sister in her endeavours, she also adopts her mindset and her way of speaking. In the first passage, her speech is hesitant: she uses the conjunction "but", the modal "may" as well as question marks several times and does not use any metaphors or imagery. In this one, she compares gallants to "lawless subjects" and her sister and herself to princes. Her former hesitancy and clumsiness with words are no more. Her metaphor is concluded by her sister, thus constituting the first instance of them finishing each other's sentences and using the same imagery, thus becoming indifferentiable characters.

It is in MM that there are the best examples of friendships: between Harriet and Emilia, and between Harriet and Young Bellair. Their interactions are more varied that those between Ariana and Gatty as all three characters are very different from one another and the scenes featuring them are quite numerous. Yet the dialogues between Emilia and Harriet, in particular act IV scene 1, serve the same purpose as those with Busy, who is often present: Emilia forces Harriet to admit her feelings for Dorimant. The scenes with Emilia also serve a second purpose, which is to define Harriet in opposition to Emilia: the latter is soft-spoken and earnest, whereas the former is blunt and wry:

Emil. Mr. Dorimant has a great deal of wit.
Har. And takes a great deal of pains to shew it.
Emil. He's extremely well fashion'd.
Har. Affectedly grave, or ridiculously wild and apish.
Busy. You defend him still against your Mother.
Har. I would not were he justly rallied, but
I cannot hear any one undeservedly rail'd at.[70]

Harriet's defensive retorts may be interpreted as a last, weak defence that relies on exaggeration and even slander to hide her feelings. But it could also be interpreted as a testament of the discrepancy between Emilia's and Harriet's wit, with Emilia falling into the trap of Dorimant's appearance and polished manners, whereas Harriet knows that he is a rake and tries to make

[69] Ibid., 14. I,2.
[70] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter*. 85–86. V,1.

him drop his mask, which she manages at the end of the play when he agrees to go to the countryside with her, far away from the rambunctiousness and illusions of the Town.

The most original interaction between friends occurs in act III scene 1 and features Harriet and Young Bellair promising not to marry each other and acting out a scene of courtship for their parents who are passing by. It is not a scene of admission like the one with Busy earlier in III,1, as Harriet does not admit to her feelings for Dorimant. The scene is also far less charged in tension than the ones between Dorimant and Harriet. It is a light-hearted, funny scene in which the characters are having fun, as shown by the lexical field of playing and pretending that can be found throughout the scene: "the Game", "playing", "pretend", "deceive", feign", "pleasure of dissembling", "play your part", "admirable well acted" and so on. This scene offers a reprieve from the tension of the plot and enables the audience to see a new side to Harriet: not only is she the perfect young gentlewoman, witty and beautiful, but she is also funny and not afraid to play a trick on figures of authority. Even more important is the fact that she understands social codes enough to act out a scene of successful courtship, which establishes her as one of the most intelligent characters of the corpus, as we will see in the second part. It is also relevant to see a female character have a relationship with a male character that is not amorous in any way. It establishes Harriet as more than a love interest, as she is a character that can be developed independently from Dorimant. The companionship between the two is also reinforced by the closeness of their names: it is revealed in this scene that Young Bellair's first name is Harry.

All in all, the interactions between friends are rare and often mirror that of mistress and servant. But the one example of Young Bellair and Harriet's friendship is striking: it is one of the only male/female friendships developed in the corpus and opens an entirely new realm of possibilities for the character of Harriet, who is not limited to traditional interactions with her maid and love interest.

The different interactions between the characters in Molière's and Etherege's plays are varied. Each playwright has his own vision of traditional scenes that can be found in his various plays. Yet they both also write scenes that resemble the other's traditional take on the interactions, such as the scenes between Emilia and Young Bellair in MM that sound like the interactions between Octave and Hyacinthe in FSca, or like Marian and Valère's in Tar. The most common points are found in the interactions between mistresses and maids, which follow the same lines in all of the plays. The similarities in these scenes highlight the shared comic tradition and influences of Etherege and Molière, as the theatrical device of the maid as a

revealer of her mistress's feelings, as well as the figure of the cunning maid are inherited from the Commedia dell'Arte and the character of Ricciolina, also called Columbina.

Both in Molière's and in Etherege's plays, the interactions that include female characters are generally more than a theatrical device to further the plot along. They develop the characters and enable them to show their wit and charm the audience along with the young gentleman.

Both playwrights also innovate by writing scenes that are not traditionally found in comedies, such as Molière's verbal match between Célimène and Arsinoé or Etherege's development of the friendship between Harriet and Young Bellair.

After having analysed these interactions, we cannot conclude that female characters are simple objects of desire for make characters or theatrical devices. Even though they appear generally less than male characters, they are – for the most part – fleshed out. They certainly are important, but this importance has to be nuanced: if we take their presence on stage and the speech distribution into account, they are not as important as male characters. It is not certain either that they carry a significant part of discourse: do the playwrights speak through their mouths? Do they stand for rationality and intelligence or is that reserved to men? This is a question that will have to be answered in the third part. Yet there are two female characters in particular that may be as – if not more – important than male ones: Harriet in MM and Célimène in Mis, who are both almost as present as their male counterparts on stage and have several important scenes in which those counterparts are not present. This point will be touched upon later, as we now have to tackle one of the defining features of comedy: the comic aspect.

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II. The Comic Dimension of Women

Comedy is defined by its "intention to make an audience laugh."[1] This laughter is a reaction to comic scenes; the real question is to know how these comic scenes are created. Jean Émelina identifies three necessary conditions to "le comique": distance, anomaly and lack of consequences. At the end of the first half of his essay, he issues the following statement:

> La condition nécessaire et suffisante du comique est une position de distance par rapport à tout phénomène considéré comme anormal et par rapport à ses conséquences éventuelles.[2]

The conditions identified by Émelina give us a first basis to identify the inner workings of comic scenes and to analyse the role played by female characters in these scenes. Playwrights and stage directors possess several tools to elicit laughter in their audience, such as asides, costumes or stage directions; as well as all that dialogue and language have to offer in terms of comedy, like banter between the characters, puns or amusing portraits. French theatrical theory generally divides these comic devices into three categories*: le comique de mots, le comique de gestes* and *le comique de situation*, to which one may add *le comique de manières* and *le comique de mœurs*, which work on the level of a whole play rather than just a scene or a dialogue. The question is to see whether Molière and Etherege use these comic devices in the same way and with the same results.

Before starting the analysis, two points have to be mentioned: the question of the vocabulary employed and that of the discrepancy between audiences.

When dealing with the question of comedy, a problem of vocabulary arises: the noun "le comique" poses a translation problem. There is no English equivalent, "comedy" referring to the genre, "laughter" to the physical reaction of the audience, "entertainment" being far too broad. A possible translation given by Émelina is "humour", which he considers as having a far broader meaning than the French "humour". He gives the definition of the 1954 *Britannica World Language Dictionary, Standard Dictionary*:

[1] *Oxford Online Dictionary*. 2018. Oxford University Press. 24 Feb. 2018. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/comedy>
[2] Jean Emelina, *Le comique : essai d'interprétation générale* (Paris: Sedes, 1991) 84.

> Disposition of mind or feeling; caprice; freak; whim – a facetious turn of thought; playful fancy; jocularity; drollery – The capacity to perceive or appreciate or express what is funny, amusing, incongruous, ludicrous, etc.[3]

This definition has several similarities to Émelina's own of "le comique"; we will thus use this term as the English equivalent of "le comique".

The other point we need to address is that of the audience. As Émelina reminds us:

> Il s'agit de dispositions mentales et de conditions de réception spécifiques, préméditées ou involontaires, *qui ne valent que pour celui chez qui elles se trouvent réunies à un moment donné.* Est comique ce que je perçois, de gré ou de force, légitimement ou non, par jeu ou de bonne foi, comme *détaché de moi*, *anormal* et *sans effet.*[4]

Comedy is not perceived in the same way by everyone. Every person in the audience will not laugh at the same moment, and not necessarily for the same reason. As already mentioned, comedy is created by abnormality. In order for an audience to laugh at something abnormal, it has to be perceived as such, as deviating from the norm. And norm, as has been proven time and time again, is everything but universal. The discrepancy between the spectators is even greater when we compare modern audiences to contemporary ones. The scenes will not be perceived in the same way, as the context of production and representation of the play is so different. The notion of what is normal and what is abnormal differs vastly from one era to another and even from one individual to another depending on their past experiences, education and subjectivity in general. Even though the study of the plays and of the context of the Restoration helps us identify the comic episodes, we must remember that we do not perceive these scenes in the same way as Restoration audiences did – and even in such audiences, there was probably some discrepancies between the spectators depending on their social status, gender and subjectivity.

A. The Notion of Wit

When talking about Restoration comedy, it is impossible to bypass the notion of wit, which is central not only to the comic aspect of the plays, but also to the nature of the characters itself. As Thomas Fujimura puts it: "The plot [of Restoration comedies] consists of an outwitting situation involving Truewits, Witwouds and Witlesses."[5] Yet the definition of wit remains

[3] Ibid., 126.
[4] Ibid., 71.
[5] Thomas Hikaru Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952) 65.

unclear. Our aim here will not be to give an all-encompassing definition of wit, but rather to condense the research of the major critics who tried to define wit and establish a basis that will then enable us to define Etherege's own brand of wit, its particularities, and even apply the term to Molière's plays and see whether we can find traces of this purely English concept in his comedies.

1. What is Wit?

The definition of wit given by Johnson in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) is vast and encompasses different meanings of the word:

> WIT, *n. s.*
> 1. The powers of the mind; the mental faculties; the intellects. This is the original signification.
> 2. Imagination; quickness of fancy.
> 3. Sentiments produced by quickness of fancy.
> 4. A man of fancy.
> 5. A man of genius.
> 6. Sense; judgement.[6]

Johnson's definition gives two distinct meanings to the word: in entries one to three, as well as six, he defines wit as a quality, a human feature or a feeling – close to the French notion of *esprit* –, whereas in entries four and five her defines wit as a type of person, *a* wit rather than wit. As such, the notion of wit can be understood in two different ways. Regarding the first meaning of the word, Hobbes gives a thorough definition in the first part of his *Leviathan* (1651):

> 1. […]And by *virtues* INTELLECTUAL, are always understood such abilities of the mind, as men praise, value, and desire should be in themselves; and go commonly under the name of a *good wit*; though the same word *wit*, be used also, to distinguish one certain ability from the rest.[7]

According to Hobbes, the term wit is used to refer to two different concepts. These concepts are intellectual virtues, which is mentioned in the quote above, and fancy, which appears in the quotes below. These two concepts are closely linked, as fancy can be an intellectual virtue. In the case of wit as intellectual virtues, Hobbes distinguishes between two different types of virtues, natural and acquired, which does not mean that humankind is born with one and learns the other, but that natural wit is learned by "use only, and experience; without method, culture

[6] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: A Digital Edition* 2286–2287.
[7] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ed. John Charles Addison Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 45.

or instruction"[8] while acquired wit is learned "by method and instruction."[9] Hobbes limits acquired wit to reason, which is linked to the right use of speech and produced the sciences. The definition of natural wit is more complicated:

> This NATURAL WIT, consisteth principally in two things; *celerity of imagining* (that is, swift succession of one thought to another;) and *steady direction* to some approved end. On the contrary a slow imagination, maketh that defect, or fault of the mind, which is commonly called DULLNESS, *stupidity*, and sometimes by other names that signify slowness of motion, or difficulty to be moved.

Natural wit is composed of two elements, "celerity of imagining" and "steady direction." Steady direction means that thoughts and imagination have to be directed towards an end. Despite Hobbes' use of the word "celerity" and his insistence on the "quickness" of the thoughts, the real difference between individuals is found at the level of the observation of the thoughts that pass in their heads:

> 2. And this difference of quickness, is caused by the difference of men's passions; that love and dislike, some one thing, some another: and therefore some men's thoughts run one way, some another; and are held to, and observe differently the things that pass through their imagination. And whereas in this succession of men's thoughts, there is nothing to observe in the things they think on, but either in what they be *like one another*, or in what they be *unlike*, or *what they serve for*, or *how they serve to such a purpose*; those that observe their similitudes, in case they be such as rare but rarely observed by others, are said to have a *good wit*; by which, in this occasion is meant a *good fancy*.

Hobbes insists on the observation of the similitudes, differences and purposes of the objects of individuals' thoughts. The second meaning of wit is found here: those who observe similitudes rarely observed by others are said to have a "good wit," or a "good fancy." In Hobbes' conceptual world, wit means both intellectual virtue and the ability to make original comparisons, which can be a virtue in itself. Yet in order for it to be a virtue, fancy has to be paired with two other features: direction, already mentioned above, in Hobbes' words "an often application of his thoughts to their end; that is to say, to some use to be made of them,"[10] as well as judgement:

> But they that observe their differences, and dissimilitudes; which is called *distinguishing*, and *discerning*, and *judging* between thing and thing; in case, such discerning be not easy, are said to have a *good judgement*: and particularly in matter of conversations and business; wherein, times, places, and persons are to be discerned, this virtue is called DISCRETION. The former, that is, fancy, without the help of

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 48.
[10] Ibid., 46.

> judgement, is not commended as a virtue, but the latter, which is judgement, and discretion, is commended for itself, without the help of fancy.[11]

Judgement appears to be the opposite of fancy, as it is used to distinguish between things rather than draw comparisons. It may be tempting to think that judgement and reason are the same thing, as they both oppose imagination, rely on discerning and are virtues. The difference lies in the mode of acquisition of knowledge. Reason is learned through a theoretic approach, while judgement is learned through concrete experience. However, this does not mean that they are completely separate: reason contributes to shaping the experiences which influence judgement, and judgement can be theorised.

Thus, wit as fancy is an unstable feature, which can become folly if not tempered by judgement, or discretion, and given an aim, which can range from demonstrating something scientifically, in which case judgement dominates fancy, to orations of praise, if which fancy dominates as the aim is not to tell the truth but to "honour or dishonour."[12] The balance between fancy and judgement must be modulated depending on the intended effect. Hobbes finishes by mentioning the effect of the similitudes on the audience or interlocutor:

> This done; he that hath this virtue, will be easily fitted with similitudes, that will please, not only by illustration of his discourse, and adorning it with new and apt metaphors, but also, by the rarity of their invention.[13]

Wit aims to please the interlocutor, which is attained by using metaphors that are both adapted to the speaker's discourse and innovative. The following diagram sums up Hobbes' theory on wit:

[11] Ibid., 45–46.
[12] Ibid., 46.
[13] Ibid.

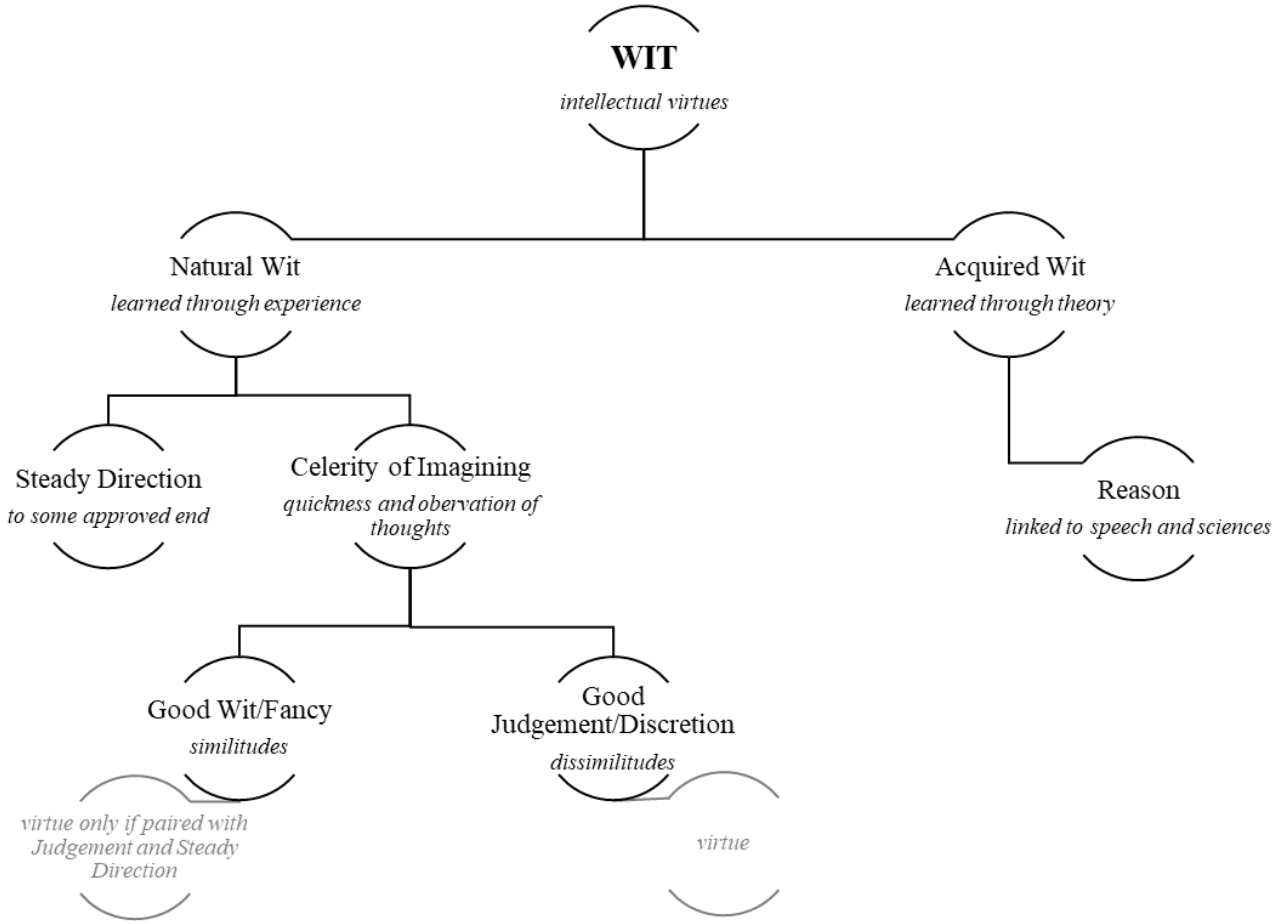

Figure 3: Explanatory diagram of Hobbes' theory on wit

Dryden follows Hobbes' conceptual frame on wit – using the word in the sense of fancy tempered by judgement and direction – but adds another dimension to it in the case of heroic and historical poems: that of the evocation of the object talked about to the mind of the listener or reader:

> But to proceed from wit in the general notion of it to the proper wit of an heroic or historical poem; I judge it chiefly to consist in the delightful imaging of persons, actions, passions, or things. 'Tis not the jerk or sting of an epigram, nor the seeming contradiction of a poor antithesis (the delight of an ill-judging audience in a play of rhyme), nor the jingle of a more poor paronomasia; neither is it so much the morality of a grave sentence, affected by Lucan, but more sparingly used by Virgil; but it is some lively and apt description, dressed in such colours of speech, that it sets before your eyes the absent object, as perfectly and more delightfully than nature.[14]

Dryden describes wit as the ability to make an audience see what a speaker is talking about, to make it appear even more beautiful and delightful than in reality. Dryden uses this creative

[14] *An Account of the Ensuing Poem*, 1666 in John Dryden, *The Poetical Works of John Dryden*, The Globe Edition. (London/New York: Macmillan and co, 1881) 40.

ability of wit to distinguish between true and false wit: only true wit will evoke such images to the minds of the audience, while false wit will be nothing more than empty linguistic devices.

Dryden's emphasis on the reception of wit and his mention of an "ill-judging audience in a play of rhyme" bring us to the relationship between wit, playwrights and audiences. As Dryden argues:

> This is the proper wit of dialogue or discourse, and, consequently, of the drama, where all that is said is to be supposed the effect of sudden thought; which, though it excludes not the quickness of wit in repartees, yet admits not a too curious election of words, too frequent allusions, or use of tropes, or, in fine, anything that shows remoteness of thought, or labour, in the writer.

His use of the verb "supposed" underlines the central aim of playwrights concerning wit: to make thorough thinking and deliberate phrasing appear natural and easy. In theatre, wit – that is to say, images and similes – must appear obvious and so believable that the audience does not even wonder whether it is indeed believable.

Hobbes' conceptual frame on wit has been adopted by several scholars since Dryden. Fujimura defines wit as follows, emphasising the ambiguity of the term:

> Wit is a very comprehensive and ambiguous term, and it is sometimes contradictory in its implications: as judgement, it implies restraint, good taste, common sense, and naturalness; as fancy, on the other hand, it implies whatever is striking and novel and remote.[15]

The main idea of Fujimura's definition is that of an opposition between judgement and fancy. His understanding of the terms is in accordance with Hobbes' definitions: fancy does represent striking novelty born of imagination and is restrained by common sense, or judgement. Fujimura seems to consider that wit is a combination of fancy and judgement, which is one of the meanings of the word in Hobbes' theory, but not the only one, as mentioned earlier. This conception of wit as needing both fancy and judgement to exist is supported by several scholars. Peter Holland's description of the "correct way of being witty" also uses concepts similar to Hobbes' and emphasises the importance of judgement to temper fancy:

> There is a correct way of being witty, of talking with a masked lady, of conducting an affair, and that way is not merely a bookish repetition of another's brilliance but an individual's originality combined with a knowledge of the limits of social procedure.[16]

[15] Thomas Hikaru Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952) 38.
[16] Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 58.

These conceptions of wit as oscillating between two features of the human mind bring us to the notion that we believe to be essential when it comes to wit: that of balance. To be witty, one has to be original, which corresponds to the fancy, while still being aware of the social codes, which can be associated to the judgement. This notion of balance is also identified by Florence March, for whom the dichotomy between nature and appearance is at the heart of Restoration comedy:

> Le contraste entre la représentation des provinciaux et celle des membres de la Ville concrétise en effet la dialectique de la nature et de l'apparence. Si cette dialectique n'est pas nouvelle en soi, elle semble néanmoins prendre une signification originale dans la société comme dans le théâtre comique de la fin du XVIIe siècle en Angleterre. La société prend soudain conscience de la non-coïncidence de la nature et de l'apparence de l'individu et cette prise de conscience se traduit dans la comédie par la mise en scène d'un conflit. Le personnage se voit contraint de concilier son être intime et son être social, deux réalités distinctes et conflictuelles qui contribuent également à le définir.[17]

And she goes on to say: "Il semble que [la] fonction essentielle [du bel esprit] consiste en effet à concilier habilement les deux niveaux de réalité que sont nature et apparence."[18] Thus, wit appears to be a layered concept: it lies where originality and a flair for novelty meet understanding of and compliance with social decorum, thus creating a social persona that appears as witty. But in order to be a true wit and not simply to appear as such, there needs to be a second balance achieved, this time between this carefully crafted persona and one's true nature, if such a thing exists. It may be more relevant to talk about the opposition between the self perceived by the others (including the audience) and the self the characters perceive themselves to be, rather than talk about the "nature" or "essence" of characters.

The second meaning of wit identified by Johnson, that of a wit as a type of person, comes in handy when dealing with characters, in particular in the theatre. In Restoration comedy, characters are divided according to three categories: Truewits, Witwouds, and Witlesses. A Truewit is the equivalent of what Johnson calls a wit, that is to say, a person or character who possesses real wit, who has a "good fancy" and who mastered the balance between fancy and judgement. A striking feature of female Truewits that contradicts Hobbes' conception of wit is their lack of experience. When young gentlewomen are Truewits, they have good fancy, judgement and direction even though they are young and have generally just arrived in London, as is the case for Ariana, Gatty and Harriet, yet they do possess this "good wit" which is only

[17] Florence March, *La comédie anglaise après Shakespeare: une esthétique de la théâtralité : 1660-1710* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2010) 65.
[18] Ibid., 61.

gained through experience according to Hobbes. A Witwoud is a character who tries to imitate Truewits but fails because he or she lacks wit. Their imitation is often ridiculous because it is reminiscent of the original but exaggerated, which makes them pale copies. Their failed imitations underline the discrepancy between how they perceive themselves, the image they want to give of themselves, and how outside observers, including the audience, perceive them. Finally, a Witless is a character who possesses no wit and does not pretend to. They generally live on the outskirts of high society, of which they have trouble understanding the social codes. The distinction between the first two was already made by Congreve in the dedicatory epistle of The Way of the World: "For this Play had been Acted two or three Days, before some of these hasty Judges cou'd find the leisure to distinguish betwixt the Character of a Witwoud and a Truewit."[19] These categories appear as straightforward, but one can wonder whether the difference between the three types of characters is that obvious, in particular between Truewits and Witwouds. Knutson argues that:

> In all probability, then, the Restoration audience had no trouble differentiating between true wit and false, and the dialectical opposition between the two must have been apparent at all times.[20]

Knutson's suggestion is not an affirmation, as shown by the use of "in all probability" and the modal verb "must" and he gives few reasons as to why it would have been apparent. On the other hand, Fujimura declares that there is a "double standard of laughing", with the audience laughing with the Truewits at the Witwouds but also laughing at the Truewits' "too great conformity to an artificial social standard which keeps them from expressing their true personality."[21] This claim, which contradicts the definition we have given of wit and its effects on the audience, blurs even more the frontier between Truewits and Witwouds. As such, it is necessary to define how wit is expressed in Restoration comedies: how is a character identified as a Truewit?

A first means of identification would be their speech. In addition to the similes, metaphors and antithesis mentioned by Hobbes and Dryden, McDonald names three stylistic devices that are typical of wit: parody, allusion and imagery.[22] The latter is reminiscent of Dryden's description of wit as the evocation of delightful images in the mind of the audience. These three devices are repeatedly used by witty characters in Etherege's plays: Harriet parodies Old

[19] William Congreve, *The Way of the World*, (London: Jacob Tonson, 1700).
[20] Harold C Knutson, *The Triumph of Wit: Molière and Restoration Comedy* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988) 48.
[21] Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* 9.
[22] McDonald, *The Independent Woman in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* 92.

Bellair's verbal tic "A Dod" (III,1); Harriet and Dorimant allude to poems by Waller and Cowley (V,1); the metaphor of relationships as business runs throughout all three of Etherege's comedies and the dialogue between Ariana and Gatty quoted earlier in I,C,4 is an extended metaphor presenting relationships between men and women as akin to governing. Another significant extended metaphor can be found in II,1, in which Ariana, Gatty, Courtall and Freeman all use the lexical field of sailing to refer to the chase between the four of them through Mulberry Garden. Other than through their particular speech, Truewits are also defined in opposition to Witwouds or Witlesses, as well as by their relationship to the audience and their role in comic scenes. Witty characters appear as intelligent, natural and balanced when compared to characters that have one exaggerated personality trait. They also generally mock these characters alongside the audience, which creates a complicity between witty characters and the audience. It remains to be seen whether Fujimura is right and the audience both laughs with and at Truewits. Once a character has been established as a Truewit, their opinion on others can be trusted by the audience. Thus, when Harriet and Dorimant declare that Young Bellair lacks wit (I,1, p.14 and III,1 p.32), the audience is inclined to believe them, even if there are no other textual clues indicating that Young Bellair is anything other than a Truewit. These features of wit will be developed further when dealing with Etherege's own brand of wit.

Thus, wit is a broad concept that has been interpreted in various ways throughout the years. But we managed to figure out one element that is common to several definitions of wit given by various scholars: balance. Wit is a question of balance, and the characters who lean too far on one side fall into the categories of Witwouds and Witlesses, some going as far as to become extreme caricatures of one trait. Etherege's own take on wit remains to be analysed, along with the devices he uses to separate Truewits, Witwouds and Witlesses.

2. Etherege's Own Brand of Wit

Each Restoration playwright represented wit in a certain way. Thus, each playwright offered his or her own definition of this notion. For Dryden, comedy was divided into two categories, as mentioned earlier: comedies of humour and comedies of wit, with wit being a more noble genre that creates pleasure rather than huge guffaws. Dryden defines wit through the reaction of the audience, but he says nothing of the dramatic means employed by the playwrights to create wit. Our aim is to define how Etherege's own brand of wit is created, and what particular features it possesses. We will first consider how Etherege uses wit as a linguistic device, relying on the notion of wit as a balance between fancy and judgement, then we will focus on what

characteristics Etherege's witty characters have, thus focusing on the understanding of a wit as a type of person.

As mentioned earlier, wit can be defined as the ability to make original comparisons that surprise the audience but appear spot on. In Etherege's comedies, such similes take the form of extended metaphors, as mentioned earlier, generally comparing love or relationships to sports such as hunting or racing (SWC IV,2 p.67), as well as sailing (SWC II,1 p.17). These metaphors underline the playful aspect of the courtship and the relationship between men and women. Less playful metaphors can also be found, with, as mentioned earlier, love being compared to business by male characters and to governing by female characters. Wit can also be found in the repetition of a linguistic structure with a different meaning:

> *Free*. And I would no more betray the Honour
> Of such a Woman, then I would the life of a
> Man that shou'd rob on purpose to supply me.
> *Gat*. We believe you men of Honour, and know
> It is below you to talk of any Woman that deserves it.
> *Aria*. You are so generous, you seldom insult▪
> After a Victory.
> *Gat*. And so vain, that you always triumph
> Before it.[23]

Gatty and Ariana's first two interventions serve as a set up for Gatty's final comment, which acts as a punchline, destroying Freeman's argumentation and underlining the fact that the previous comments were ironical. Witty characters often use such structural repetitions in Etherege's comedies, which enables them to undermine their interlocutors' arguments. They also use interruptions to contradict their interlocutors:

> *Dor*. It has been fatal—
> *Har*. To some easy Women, but we are not all
> Born to one destiny, I was inform'd you use to
> Laugh at Love, and not make it.
> *Dor*. The time has been, but now I must speak—
> *Har*. If it be on that Idle subject, I will put on
> My serious look, turn my head carelesly from you,
> Drop my lip, let my Eyelids fall, and hang
> Half o're my Eyes— Thus while you buz a speech

[23] Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd* 68. IV,2.

Of an hour long in my ear, and I answer
Never a word! why do you not begin?[24]

Such interruptions underline the "quickness of thought" that Hobbes identifies as natural wit: Harriet anticipates Dorimant's arguments and answers them by completing his unfinished sentences, demonstrating her ability to adapt her thoughts and their formulation in a split second. By keeping Dorimant from expressing his thoughts, Harriet asserts verbal dominance over him. In Etherege's comedies, witty female characters use speech and wit to rebel against male domination. Their status as women restricts them to talk rather than action, as shown by Gatty's comment:

Court. Since you your self sent the challenge,
You must not in Honour flye off now.
Gat. Challenge! Oh Heavens! this confirms
All: were I a man, I would kill thee for the
Injuries thou hast already done me.[25]

Gatty is not a man, so the only way she can confront Courtall is verbally. This is also made obvious in the following utterance:

Gatty. Pish! the men were only acquainted with
Our Vizards and our Petticoats, and they are wore
Out long since: how I envy that Sex! well! We
Cannot plague 'em enough when we have it in
Our power for those priviledges which custom
Has allow'd 'em above us.[26]

Gatty openly mentions the difference of status between men and women and vows to "plague 'em", which her and Ariana do through the use of wit and verbal domination.

A particular feature of witty speech in Etherege's comedies is the debasement of religious imagery. Instead of using religious imagery in a traditional way, Etherege's witty characters systematically associate it to ridiculous carnal desire and relations. Harriet's last interaction with Mrs. Loveit is a prime example of this phenomenon:

[24] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 60. IV,1.
[25] Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd* 69. IV,2.
[26] Ibid., 14. I,2.

Har. to Loveit. Mr. Dorimant has been your God
Almighty long enough, 'tis time to think of another—[27]

Such religious images are used to ridicule passions like Mrs. Loveit's and extramarital relationships in general. Comparing Mrs. Loveit's passion to one's dedication to a god is a hyperbole which highlights the ridiculousness of her obsession with Dorimant. It could also be understood as a mockery of religion, which is not usually referred to in such cases, in particular in seventeenth-century literature, as religion was an essential feature of society. The perversion of religious imagery is reserved for witty characters who use it to mock the passions of the other characters. This is apparent in the last dialogue between Harriet and Dorimant:

Har. In men who have been long harden'd in Sin,
We have reason to mistrust the first signs of repentance.
Dor. The prospect of such a Heav'n will make me
Persevere, and give you marks that are infallible.
Har. What are those?
Dor. I will renounce all the joys I have in friendship
And in Wine, sacrifice to you all the interest
I have in other Women—
Har. Hold — Though I wish you devout,
I would not have you turn Fanatick […][28]

Harriet uses religious imagery to question Dorimant's claims of love and repentance, whereas Dorimant accepts the religious comparison and uses it to express his passion, thus using the same rhetoric as Mrs. Loveit uses in the rest of the play. Harriet immediately stops him, as shown by the dash at the end of Dorimant's line and the 'hold' at the beginning of Harriet's. Harriet and Dorimant are not speaking the same language anymore: Dorimant has reverted to an honest speech which does not ridicule passions and religious imagery anymore, while Harriet is still using wit, criticising Dormant's open expression of love by comparing it to religious fanaticism. Religious imagery, when used to criticise other characters' passions, is an expression of wit in Etherege's comedies, while using religion to talk about one's passions unironically is a mark of a lack of wit. Rigaud explains this use of religious references by Truewits as follows:

A mon sens que ces jeunes gens ont <u>besoin</u> des images religieuses. Non qu'ils y voient un modèle contraignant de conduite, et encore moins parce que, comme le veut Canfield, Etherege désire placer sa

[27] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 94. V,1.
[28] Ibid., 88. V,1.

> comédie dans un cadre moral chrétien. Ils ont besoin des images religieuses parce que, bon gré mal gré, elles leur fournissent une armature, un système de référence, qu'ils refusent certes, dont ils pervertissent le sens, mais qui demeure stable au milieu du tourbillon de leur vie.[29]

Rigaud's interpretation underlines the idea that Truewits do not have the same moral values as the other characters. They do not openly value love, passion and matrimony as other characters do, in particular Witwouds, who have a tendency to use heroic speech, that is to say, an elevated style which aims to praise a hero and his deeds. Lady Cockwood's use of the terms "villain" (IV,1 p.57), "perfidious man" (III,3 p51), or "ravenous cormorants" (III,3 p51), as well as the length of her interventions, which are close to being tirades, and her extreme invectives and calls for revenge give her speech a heroic quality, which contrasts with the fashionable wit of the Truewits. According to Robert Markley, this type of speech not only marks her as an outsider who does not follow the linguistic codes of the Town, but the use of "stock phrases" also "trivialize[s] her passionate displays."[30] As such, the speech patterns of Truewits and Witwouds are vastly different.

The various examples of wit quoted above all have one thing in common: they aim to destroy an opponent's arguments to make the logic and morals of the Truewit saying them prevail. As such, wit in Etherege's plays is a weapon used to dominate one's social environment and make one's logic prevail. But this is not the only use of wit in Etherege's plays. Wit is a way to impose one's point of view on others, as we have already seen, but it is also an essential part of the game played by young gentlemen and young gentlewomen. Four out of the five examples quoted above are taken from exchanges between the rake(s) and the heroine(s). The characters' wit is mostly employed in interactions with their equals, *i.e.* other Truewits. Even though these exchanges are particularly entertaining for the audience, this is not their only reason for existing. As Markley explains:

> Their languages represent male and female versions of libertinism: the first to depart from the rhetoric of wit – the first, in other words, to be forced into sincerity – loses. In a society in which pretense is the norm and romantic love ridiculed, the wit battles between Dorimant and Harriet become their only means to distinguish dissembling from 'genuine' emotion. Their exchanges, in this respect, have a dramatic purpose often absent from earlier versions of the wit duel.[31]

[29] Nadia Rigaud, 'Contribution au débat sur le vocabulaire religieux dans The Man of Mode' in *Miroirs de l'être : 'Macbeth', 'The Man of mode'*. (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1987) 214.
[30] Robert Markley, *Two Edg'd Weapons : Style and Ideology in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1988) 117.
[31] Ibid., 133.

According to Markley, wit is the only way of distinguishing true feelings from make-believe, which makes it essential to the plots of the plays. Markley also highlights the fact that to depart from wit means to lose the game. We have already observed this in our analysis of the last dialogue between Harriet and Dorimant and their opposite uses of religious imagery. This indicates that the game between Dorimant and Harriet is won by the latter, as we shall see in the third part.

Thus, wit in Etherege's plays manifests through the use of images and metaphors, comparing love and relationships to sports, business, governing or religion. Characters use wit to impose their point of view to others, and, in the case of female characters, it represents their only means of fighting against male domination.

Now that we have analysed the linguistic patterns of wit, we will examine which behavioural and ideological features distinguish Truewits from other characters. As such, the following paragraphs focus on a wit as a type of person or character who possesses distinct intellectual features rather than as a linguistic device, even though the linguistic dimension of wit will still be mentioned. In Etherege's plays, young gentlewomen appear to hold most of the female wit. In MM, Mrs. Loveit is a Witwoud, an old coquette who thinks she understands the social codes of the time but who does not realise she is ridiculous. At first glance, Bellinda appears to be the same as Mrs. Loveit, yet she is not treated in the same way by the other characters, as we will see in II,C,3. She is a mix of Witwoud and Truewit. Pert, Busy and the Orange-woman are lower-class women who, as Rigaud argues, are no more than the representation of their master's psyche[32] and, as such, are excluded from the three categories of wit. Emilia and Lady Townley could both be considered Truewits, but their somewhat subdued presence causes them to pale in comparison to Harriet. Despite her rural origins, Harriet appears to be a major Truewit. Her wit is praised several times by the other characters, both by positive characters like Medley or Young Bellair and by ridiculous characters like Old Bellair. Her ability to be praised by both truewit and witless characters shows her ability to adapt to a social situation and always come out well-liked and respected. Her ability to banter with Dorimant is also proof of her wit, their exchanges being extremely entertaining to witness. Harriet adapts perfectly to any social situation, she only finds herself unsettled during the last dialogue with her maid Busy (V,2), in which she is led to admit her feelings for Dorimant. She also quotes famous and rather shocking pieces of writing like Bussy Rabutin's *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*, which is a somewhat scandalous chronicle of the French court's *mores* and practices during the early years of Louis

[32] Rigaud, 'L'évolution des relations entre maîtres et serviteurs dans le théâtre d'Etherege'.

XIV's reign, thus showing her good education and unconventional reading choices. This type of reference illustrates the notion of balance at the heart of wit: she mentions an unusual and somewhat scandalous piece of writing, thus showcasing her originality and rejection of conventional choices, but does it with dignity and good taste, presenting the author as a gentleman and only hinting at the content of the book. All these traits correspond to the general definition of wit given previously but go no further; they are not sufficient to identify what makes Etherege's witty characters different from other representations of Truewits. What truly differentiates Harriet from the other characters of the play, as well as from other witty gentlewomen found in plays by other playwrights?

Harriet's genuinely distinctive feature is her ability to distance herself, both from social codes and her own desires. Harriet achieves the balance necessary to wit by distancing herself: she criticises the affectation so common at the time, going as far as to accuse Dorimant of being too affected:

> *Y. Bell.* On the contrary, have you not observed something
> Extream delightful in his Wit and Person?
> *Har*. He's agreeable and pleasant I must own, but he
> Does so much affect being so, he displeases me.
> *Y. Bell*. Lord Madam, all he does and says, is so easie,
> And so natural.
> *Har*. Some Mens Verses seem so to the unskilful,
> But labour i'the one, and affectation in the other
> to the Judicious plainly appear.
> *Y. Bell*. I never heard him accus'd of affectation before.[33]

Harriet establishes herself as the only one who sees through Dorimant's act, as shown by Young Bellair's last line. She creates an opposition between the "unskilful" and the "Judicious" and it is clear to which category she thinks she belongs. This scene could be interpreted as a proof of her vanity, and thus make the audience laugh at Dorimant for conforming too much to social standards and at her for being conceited, thus creating the double laughter mentioned by Fujimura. Yet the rest of the play proves that she is a Truewit and indeed sees Dorimant as he really is, as she manages to make him drop his mask and abandon his life as a libertine. This, added to the fact that Young Bellair is not considered to be a Truewit by the other characters, leads us to believe that Harriet's words were not considered as conceited, even though there

[33] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 45. III,2.

can be no certainty. This dialogue plays a part in building her character and establishing her as on the side of nature rather than appearance, as shown by these lines:

> *Dor*. Where had you all that scorn, and coldness
> In your look?
> *Har*. From nature Sir, pardon my want of art:
> I have not learnt those softnesses and languishings
> Which now in faces are so much in fashion.[34]

Harriet describes herself as natural and incapable of the affectation found in other women. Yet what she says here is not entirely true. While she does show less affectation than Mrs. Loveit or Bellinda, she knows how to act as a soft and languishing young woman. This is particularly apparent in act III scene 1, in which Harriet and Young Bellair pretend to be having a gallant conversation while being observed by their parents, when in truth they are giving each other directions as to how to act the part of the smitten lover. This scene is a performance inside the play, in other words a *mise en abîme*. This photograph of the 1971 production of *The Man of Mode* at the Aldwych Theatre, directed by Terry Hands for the Royal Shakespeare Company, illustrates the scene:

[34] Ibid., 58–59. IV,1.

Figure 4: Harriet and Young Bellair acting in front of Busy, Old Bellair and Lady Woodvil in the 1971 production of the Man of Mode

This picture shows the theatricality of Harriet's and Young Bellair's gestures, in particular compared to the attitudes of the characters in the background. Everything, from their facial expressions to the way they hold their arms away from the axis of their bodies is exaggerated. Harriet and Young Bellair are putting on a show: they are the centre of attention of both the audience and the other characters, who need to be able to see them act the scene with their bodies as, in the case of the other characters, they cannot hear what they are saying. The scene they are enacting is one of open and mutual seduction, which does not happen anywhere else in the play, especially not between Harriet and Dorimant. By directing each other's movements, they take the point of view of a stage director, thus distancing themselves from the action. The fact that their imitation of a scene of courtship is believed to be real by the Witwouds witnessing the scene shows that they understand social codes and are perfectly capable of reproducing them, with just enough distance to make it into a comic scene while still fooling the other characters. Once more, it is a question of balance. This scene illustrates the central feature of Etherege's conception of a witty character: the clear understanding of social codes and the

ability to distance oneself from them. Harriet not only understands the situation and the role she is supposed to play but also manages to describe it down to the last gesture and to perform it admirably. She knows how she is supposed to act and shows enough distance to make her able to mould herself to a social code without losing her personality and desires, in short, her nature as Florence March calls it. Harriet also regularly describes and mimics the attitude of the characters around them, which was a way for Etherege to include stage directions, but which also shows Harriet's understanding of the codes of non-verbal communication. As McDonald puts it: "Harriet's gift for mimicry is her special talent, a talent which heightens her playful treatment of serious matters."[35] This notion of playfulness evokes once more that of distance, as the light-hearted treatment of situations, which is part of humour, depends upon it, as we have seen with Émelina. Thus, distance in Etherege's plays is what enables characters to achieve the balance needed to be Truewits. Witwouds are characters who are incapable of distancing themselves from social conventions and their own desires, thus becoming ill-adapted fools who are unable to control their passions, and thus their social image, leaving them to be mocked by characters and audience alike.

Even though some characters easily fit into the categories established, it is not the case of all of them. We mentioned earlier that Young Bellair was considered as a Witwoud by other characters such as Medley, Dorimant and Harriet. Yet he performs as well as Harriet does in III,1. Even Harriet and Dorimant find themselves disarmed when faced with their feelings for each other and are unable to keep distancing themselves. Yet these moments are not humorous, as one may have expected, but touching:

> *Har. Aside turning from Dorimant*
> My love springs with
> My blood into my Face, I dare not look upon him yet.[36]

Harriet's admission of her feelings for Dorimant is done in an aside, thus in connivance with the audience. The scene does not appear to be comic, as – to paraphrase Émelina – that would require distance on the part of the audience and a lack of perceived consequences, which is not the case here: Harriet's feelings for Dorimant could be her downfall, she could end up like Bellinda, who, by ceding to Dorimant's advances, lost her social status. As this takes place near the end of the play, one could also suppose that the audience has become attached to Harriet, which would only strengthen the previous point.

[35] McDonald, *The Independent Woman in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* 93.
[36] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 87. V,1.

Thus, Etherege's characters do not fit seamlessly into the three types of wit-related characters. Even Truewits sometimes totter on the verge of unbalance when they cannot keep their distance anymore. This concept of distance appears to be the distinctive feature of Etherege's take on wit. It remains to be seen whether Molière's comedies contain something akin to wit.

3. French Wit?

Wit is an inherently British concept, it would thus be very surprising to find a similar thing in Molière's comedies. If we consider the linguistic expressions of wit found in Etherege's plays, we notice that Molière's characters use some of them as well, but they are not exclusive to characters that could be considered as Truewits, or rather *ayant de l'esprit*. The main element of wit is absent, as Molière's characters rarely use similes or metaphors. Yet banter between lovers, which is used by Etherege to reveal his characters' wit, can also be found in Molière's plays. Etherege's lovers show their wit, which is an essential quality, while bantering and the pretended rejection of their suitors by the women is no more than a game to see whether they will keep trying to seduce them, as we have seen with Ariana, Gatty, Freeman and Courtall. In Molière's plays, the lovers' conversations are generally romantic, as seen in I,C;1. But in some cases, a form of banter can be found:

> CÉLIMÈNE
> Mais, de tout l'univers, vous devenez jaloux.
> ALCESTE
> C'est que tout l'univers est bien reçu de vous.
>
> […]
>
> ALCESTE
> Oui, je puis, là-dessus, défier tout le monde,
> Mon amour ne se peut concevoir, et jamais,
> Personne n'a, Madame, aimé comme je fais.
> CÉLIMÈNE
> En effet, la méthode en est toute nouvelle,
> Car vous aimez les gens, pour leur faire querelle;
> Ce n'est qu'en mots fâcheux, qu'éclate votre ardeur,
> Et l'on n'a vu jamais, un amour si grondeur.[37]

[37] Molière, *Le Misanthrope*. II,1. v495-528.

The banter between Célimène and Alceste shows their intelligence and ability to find *bons mots*, striking formulations that show their intelligence and resourcefulness, exactly like Etherege's banter, yet there is an underlying tension that dampens the playfulness of the exchange, as we already mentioned earlier. This scene takes place at the beginning of the second act and lays down the foundations of the tensions that will blow up in the third act. Alceste and Célimène's mocking reproaches have dire consequences: they eventually lead to Alceste's self-imposed exile and Célimène's temporary withdrawal from public life. Banter in Molière's plays is often more serious than in Etherege's. In some cases, in the dialogue between Mariane and Valère in act II scene IV of Tar for example, the conversations progressively lose their playfulness to become full-out arguments, that can only be resolved through the intervention of a third character like Dorine in the case of Mariane and Valère.

The mocking asides used by Etherege to build connivance between the audience and truewit characters at the expense of Witwouds, for example with Lady Cockwood and Courtall (cf I,A,4), are also often used in Molière's plays, mainly by servants to underline the fact that their masters are being unreasonable:

ORGON
Pense, si tu le veux; mais applique tes soins
À ne m'en point parler, ou… suffit.
(Se retournant vers sa fille.)
Comme sage,
J'ai pesé mûrement toutes choses.
DORINE
J'enrage
De ne pouvoir parler.
(Elle se tait lorsqu'il tourne la tête.)[38]

Dorine, like Scapin and Sylvestre in FSca, acts as a voice of reason for her master, who refuses to listen to her. Both Dorine and the audience know that Orgon is blind to Tartuffe's scheming; this inability to see the truth is what makes him a ridiculous character. In a sense, Etherege's and Molière's mocking asides work in the same way: both are used by one character to point out the foolishness of another to the audience. The difference lies in the relationship between the characters. Where Courtall only shows contempt towards Lady Cockwood, which is mirrored by the audience, Dorine embodies the traditional figure of the faithful servant who tries to protect her masters from a detrimental fate. Dorine has the quality of *discernement*, or

[38] Molière, *Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur*. II,2. v556-559.

sound judgement, which is a feature of English wit, as we have ween with Hobbes, but she cannot be considered a Truewit as she does not understand social codes and consciously play along or defy them; Dorine expresses what Bénichou calls the wisdom of the people:

> Les servantes chez Molière ont plus de poids que les valets ; c'est par la bouche des femmes qu'il a fait parler la sagesse sans fard du peuple.[39]

This wisdom of the women is a central element of Molière's plays, as we will see later on.

Even though Molière and Etherege use similar literary devices, they do not do it in the exact same way. The surface elements of wit can be found in Molière's comedies, but his characters lack a central feature of wit. The question of balance is far from central in Molière's plays. His characters are generally defined by one trait, some considered as positive and some as negative: Dorine is cheeky, Mariane is in love, Célimène wants to have fun, Agnès is innocent. Some traits, such as avarice, lewdness, or foolishness are always ridiculous; some, such as cheekiness are always positive; and some, such as Alceste's misanthropy, lead the audience to oscillate between mockery and compassion depending on the choices made by the stage director and the actors. Molière's characters are not torn between their desires and the social codes of the time, there is no discussion of appearance, except perhaps in Tar, in which Tartuffe tries to hide his desires behind his appearance as a devout man and Orgon's inability to see Tartuffe's true nature and schemes is a major part of the plot. Thus, the central feature of wit is absent from Molière's comedies, which does not plead in favour of French wit.

Yet this does not mean that there is absolutely no wit in Molière's plays. There are several Witwouds throughout his plays, in particular in *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659) and *Les Femmes savantes* (1672). These two plays offer representations of characters, principally female ones, who want to be trendy and are obsessed with novelty and what they consider to be superior literature, speech and culture in general – in short, perfect examples of fops like Sir Fopling Flutter in MM, the subtitle of which bears his name. Fops are foolish characters who are overly concerned with their appearance and with being fashionable. This criticism of affectation and pedantry follows the trend of the ironical use of the term "bel esprit" in the seventeenth century. This period marks the appearance of the pedantic *bel esprit* as a comic character, as shown by the many characters of Molière who belong to this type, such as Oronte and les petits marquis in Mis, les précieuses ridicules or Trissotin, Vadius and les femmes savantes. Jocelyn Royé goes goes as far as to declare:

[39] Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* 263.

> Il revient à Molière de porter un coup fatal aux beaux esprits. Dans l'ensemble de son œuvre, il s'en prend au pédantisme sous toutes ses formes et à la crédulité de ses dupes, aveuglées par un langage trompeur dont la comédie excelle à dévoiler les ressorts.[40]

These notions of pedantry, affectation and deceptive language are also essential to Witwouds. In the case of the *beaux esprits*, Molière does represent the opposition between nature and appearance and the discrepancy between the way Witwouds perceive themselves and the way they are perceived by other characters. The essential difference between Molière's and Etherege's plays is that the Witwouds are not made even more ridiculous by comparison with Truewits, as there are no Truewits. Once more, servants serve as a rational basis, but they do not provide an example of what acceptable social behaviour is. As such, the only Truewits who can really perceive the scope of the Witwouds' ridiculousness are the spectators. It is their standards of normalcy which are opposed to the affected behaviour of the characters, there are no referents of ideal wit or conduct inside the plays, which is not the case in Etherege's comedies. In the latter, Truewits set a basis as to what is acceptable and witty, which is not to say that the audience's notion of normalcy plays no part in identifying ridiculous characters, but it is steered in a certain way by the discrepancy between the representations of Truewits and Witwouds and their discrepancy of awareness, with the Witwouds not realising that they are being ridiculed by the Truewits. This showcases the different visions of the audience held by Molière and Etherege, which would be an interesting subject to research. Thus, Molière does represent a version of wit, which is not true but artificial wit, and which is equally mocked in Molière's and Etherege's comedies. Yet it is still doubtful that true wit can be found in Molière's plays.

Most of Molière's comedies are also missing distance, so central in Etherege's plays: his truly witty characters are aware that they are playing a role, they immediately know what kind of character they are talking to (Truewit/Witwoud/Witless) and, most of all, play with social decorum and expectations to get what they want. Most of Molière's characters do not have this self-awareness and this cynical distance from society and its norms, and those who do, like Alceste in Mis, are ridiculous figures who see no possible outcome other than to exile themselves in a desert. Molière's comic figures are often amusing despite themselves. Agnès may be the most striking example of a character who is unwittingly comic. Some of EF's most famous scenes rely entirely on Agnès' innocence – in the *Personae Dramatis* she is even

[40] Jocelyn Royé, 'Pédant et bel esprit : la représentation du savant mondain et du mondain savant dans les comédies du XVIIe siècle' *Litteratures classiques*. N° 58.3 (2005): 110.

presented as follows: "Agnès, jeune fille innocente" – as opposed to Arnolphe's desires, for example in act II scene 5, in which Agnès admits that Horace took something from her, making Arnolphe's imagination run wild, only to reveal after quite a lot of prompting that it was nothing more than a ribbon. Agnès' innocence and gullibility would make her a witless character in Restoration comedy, yet she is not ridiculed in Molière's play, only Arnolphe is. Thus, it appears that women in Molière's plays can be a source of comedy without being witty or ridiculous, which seem to be the main comic aspects with which Etherege's female characters are endowed, as we shall see in the second subpart.

Yet there are a few striking examples of female characters who do distance themselves from social expectations and the events they are a part of. As has already been mentioned, Dorine acts as a rational counterweight to her masters' foolishness. Her rationality is not only due to her character, but also to the distance she keeps between herself and the events unfolding around her, as evidenced by this line:

> DORINE
> Voyons ce qui pourra de ceci réussir.[41]

This takes places during II,4, when Mariane and Valère are arguing and on the verge of breaking up. Dorine takes the time to coldly assess what is going on before intervening at the last moment.

Elmire in Tar also has some witty traits. She performs a scene of seduction with Tartuffe to convince her husband that he is a bad man (IV,5). This performance inside the play can be compared to the one featuring Harriet and Young Bellair. The one difference is that Elmire is not trying to fool an audience composed of observers but the very person she's interacting with, Orgon and the audience already knowing that it is a performance.

But the most striking example is that of Célimène in Mis. She may very well be the one female Truewit in all of Molière's production. Célimène possesses all the attributes of the Truewit: she is praised as an excellent judge of character (she has *discernement*), banters with other characters and knows how to navigate social situations. She distances herself from the situations she finds herself in, taking Alceste's reproaches with good humour and mocking his strict view of love, as Émelina argues: "Dans le même sens, on rira ou sourira des fureurs futiles d'un enfant gâté, un peu comme Célimène des fureurs d'Alceste."[42] Her status as a widow gives her more leeway to act as she wishes, and even though her schemes are revealed at the end,

[41] Molière, *Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur*. II,4. v.704.
[42] Emelina, *Le comique: essai d'interprétation générale* 35.

many critics consider it nothing more than a minor setback rather than a thorough humiliation and first step towards the nunnery:

> In all this, as well as in other respects detailed earlier, [Célimène] is not vastly different from the Restoration gentlewoman, a truewit in her own way. In the more forgiving atmosphere of Restoration comedy, her peccadillos would be the object of indulgent laughter, and a twist would reestablish her ascendency and happy prospects for the future. Molière situates us more in the ambiance of the animal fable and its harsher concept of comic justice; Célimène has overreached herself and deserves the setback she suffers, if only temporarily, at the end.[43]

Furthermore, she is also part of a *mise en abîme*, a play inside a play, when she draws the portrait of several of her acquaintances in act II scene 4. Célimène's complete control over both language and the stage marks her not only as a witty character, but also as an utterly theatrical one. This is the main common feature between Célimène and Restoration Truewits: Célimène acts her part to perfection, while remaining aware that it is nothing more than a role. She, like Harriet, is in control because of the distance she puts between herself and the social norms.

Wit is a complicated concept that can be understood and has been represented and interpreted in various ways, but we managed to identify two recurrent features of witty characters, whether in general or in Etherege's take on wits, that enable us to analyse its presence in the plays: balance and distance. As expected, Molière's comedies do not really feature wit, but there are still some characters or elements that come close to it. Molière's treatment of Witwouds in particular is very close to Etherege's. But the unique character which is the closest to a British Truewit is Célimène, who also happens to be the freest of Molière's female characters as we will see in a third part. But for the moment, an analysis of the different types of comic characters that can be found in the plays will lead us to see whether they are represented in the same way and create laughter through the same comic devices.

B. Comic Types

Seventeenth-century comedy inherited stock characters from Greek and Roman comedy, as well as the Commedia dell'Arte, which had already taken some if its stock characters from ancient comedy. In the case of British comedy, the stock characters of the Commedia dell'Arte were also revisited in Ben Jonson's comedies, which were the catalyst of Restoration comedy of manners. In his *Dictionnaire du théâtre*, Patrice Pavis defines the notion of stock character

[43] Knutson, *The triumph of wit* 115.

as follows: "Personnage conventionnel possédant des caractéristiques physiques, physiologiques ou morales connues d'avance par le public et constantes pendant toute la pièce."[44] The central element of this definition is the audience's knowledge of and ability to immediately identify stock characters. Characters such as the *Innamorati*, the young lovers, the Elders who represent the main obstacle to the young lovers' happiness, and the *Zanni*, the servants who help the young lovers whether it was their intention or not, are used by both Etherege and Molière. Scapin in FSca and Dufoy in CR are *Zanni*. The latter is a perfect Harlequin-type – that is to say a bumbling sidekick who finds himself in ridiculous situations – while the former is more of a mix between Harlequin and Brighella, who is more scheming than Harlequin is. Arnolphe and Old Bellair are also excellent representations of Elders as they have the same characteristics as Pantalone, who is an old libidinous man who wants to marry the *Innamorata*.[45] Concerning female characters, the two types inherited from theatrical tradition are the *Innamorata* and the type of cunning servant called Columbina that we already mentioned earlier. The question is to see whether Molière and Etherege use these stock characters in the same way to make the audience laugh, whether they have reinvented these characters in different ways and which other types of comic characters they represented.

1. Witty Gentlewomen

The stock character of the young lover has existed since Greek and Roman comedy. In that type of comedy, as well as in the Commedia dell'Arte, the young lovers stand at the heart of the plot: the two opposing forces in the play either fight to keep them apart or to bring them together. Even though the play revolves around them, the young lovers are not the ones who move the plot forward. The *Zanni* are the ones who act for their masters. This representation of the young lovers can also be found in Molière's plays, in particular in FSca. The young lovers of the Commedia dell'Arte are not comic characters, they are the only characters who wear no masks, which symbolises their innocence, and they are rarely present in scenes other than the opening and ending ones that serve to launch and conclude the plot. Even though the young lovers are not traditionally comic characters, Molière's and Etherege's plays do feature comic scenes with the young lovers. How do these scenes work?

In EF and Tar, the young gentlewomen cannot be considered as comic characters in themselves in the sense that they only talk about love and are truly affected by the situation they

[44] Patrice Pavis, *Dictionnaire du théâtre* (Paris: Dunod, 1997) 394.
[45] Ludovico Zorzi, 'Autour de la Commedia dell'Arte' in *L'Art du masque dans la Commedia dell'Arte*, (Florence: Solin, 1983), 59–77.

find themselves in. They can be represented as ridiculous, which is the choice made by some stage directors, as mentioned in I,C,1, but they can also be represented as entirely serious characters. Yet this does not mean that the scenes in which they are featured are necessarily serious. On the contrary, there are several comic scenes in EF that feature Agnès. The main comic element of the play is Arnolphe, whose age, desire to marry a woman far younger than him and repeated failures make him a ridiculous character. This ridiculousness is enhanced in the scenes that feature a dialogue between him and Agnès, the discrepancy between her innocence and his desires rendering him even more ridiculous. Another device often used by Molière is the addition of a third character – who generally belongs to a known comic type, such as a *Zanni* or an Elder – who adds distance and humour to the scene, as we have already seen in I,C,1 with the scene between Agnès and Horace, which features Arnolphe as a spectator, and the scene between Mariane and Valère in which Dorine intervenes. Thus, Molière manages to include the stock character of the *Innamorata* in comic scenes without detaching himself from the theatrical tradition from which he inherited the character. These comic scenes do not rely on the discourse or physical stunts of the *Innamorata* which, in themselves, are not particularly funny, but on the addition of a second or third character that shifts the nature of the scene – the humour in these scenes is born of *comique de situation*, to which is sometimes added the *comique de mots* of the additional character. As such, most of Molière's young lovers cannot really be considered as comic characters, which is in adherence with theatrical tradition.

On the other hand, Etherege's young gentlewomen are comic characters: their discourse and movements do create humour, they are a source of *comique de mots* and *comique de gestes*, mostly due to their wit. This type of the witty gentlewoman represents an evolution from the *Innamorata* of the Commedia dell'Arte. As mentioned earlier, Etherege's heroines have wit – are even Truewits for the most part –, which, even if it had already existed before the seventeenth century, only became central in the Restoration period. Wit enables Etherege's young gentlewomen to create a link with the audience through humour: their humorous metaphors and scathing remarks to the other characters are understood by the audience – if not always by the characters they are addressed to, as shown by the exchange between Harriet and Sir Fopling Flutter in MM:

Sir Fop. Are you women as fond of a Vizard as we men are?
Har. I am very fond of a Vizard that covers a
Face I do not like, Sir.[46]

Harriet's quip could be interpreted as a simple funny comment, but it could also be seen as an innuendo that she does not like Sir Fopling's face, which is covered by a vizard during the exchange. However one wants to interpret it, there are no indications as to Sir Fopling's reaction in the text and their conversation stops there. Harriet's witty comment goes over his head, maybe because he is distracted by the other characters around them, but more likely because he is not witty enough to understand it. It seems plausible that for its part, the audience would understand Harriet's wit and laugh with her. This idea of laughing along with a character is essential in comedy: it creates connivance between the audience and the character and leads the audience to identify with her. The comic quality of Etherege's young gentlewomen is defined by their intellectual superiority – whether it manifests through witty remarks, a game of imitation or any other device of wit mentioned in the previous part. This intellectual superiority and the fact that they distance themselves from the events unfolding around them brings them closer to the side of the audience than of the other characters. Harriet often takes a stance as an observer, commenting on the mannerisms and wit of the characters around her which, in the context of Restoration representation, was close to the attitude of the spectators. In the Dorset Garden Theatre where the play was performed, the audience was close to the stage, if not on the stage, and the heads of the members of the audience were level with those of the actors, according to Todd A. Alexander,[47] encouraging the amalgamation of audience and actors.

Once more, the one character of Molière's which is closer to Etherege's is Célimène. She lies in between the character type of the young lover, as she is young, beautiful, intelligent and desired by the main male character of the play, and the type of the old coquette, as she is a widow who does not intend to remarry but wants to enjoy the company of several lovers. Her eloquence and ease in social situations mirror those of Harriet, and they both use the same type of *comique de mots*:

> Harriet's Janus-faced treatment of her friends reminds us of Molière's Célimène. Although Harriet is not the "notorious coquette" that Célimène is, she does share that same malicious brand of wit. Her cruel

[46] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 61. IV,1.
[47] Todd A. Alexander, 'Echoes of the Masque: The Physical Aspects of Etherege's The Man of Mode' *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theatre Research*. 2.14 (1999): 25.

> vignette of Lady Dapper is very much in the tradition of Célimène's vitriolic protrayals of the habitués of Louis XIV's court.[48]

Yet the audience's relationship to Célimène is not necessarily as positive as its relationship to Harriet. The fact that she wavers between two character types, one traditionally seen as innocent, and the other as ridiculous and to be mocked by the other characters and the audience, means that stage directors can represent her character in different ways: she can be an overreaching, cruel woman whose aspirations are ridiculous; she can be an innocent woman married young to an old man who now wants to enjoy life; or she can be a mixture of the two depending on the way her character is played. The line "Je le veux", repeated three times in act 2 scene 3, illustrates the different ways in which Célimène's character can be interpreted. Célimène is trying to convince Alceste to stay despite the imminent arrival of the *petits marquis*. This line can be said in a variety of different ways: in a petulant way, like a child having a temper tantrum, thus making Célimène ridiculous and emphasising the discrepancy between her age and status and her hedonistic behaviour, or it can be said in a playful way, as was the case in Clément Hervieu-Léger's 2017 production for La Comédie Française, underlining her affection for Alceste and desire for pleasure, which this time appears as a consequence of her joyous nature rather than a vice of character. One can imagine this line being delivered in other ways, for example angrily or pathetically. The meaning perceived by the audience depends on the delivery of the line. Thus, the audience can either laugh with Célimène, at her or oscillate between the two. But the fact remains that Célimène is different from Molière's other young gentlewomen as she is an active part of comic scenes, it is her wit which elicits laughter in the audience, not the intervention of a secondary character which adds distance and a comic aspect to the scene.

Thus, Molière and Etherege do not treat the character type of the young gentlewoman in the same way at all. Molière stays close to the theatrical type inherited from the Commedia dell'Arte, whereas Etherege invents a new type of character which will become a central feature of Restoration comedy. The evolution from his first comedy to his last mark his progressive detachment from the traditional type of the *Innamorata*. In CR, Widow is a prototype of witty gentlewoman, but with the social attributes of the old coquette: she is a widow who wants to enjoy life and has some wit to match the rake's. On the other hand, Graciana is a traditional *Innamorata* around whom the plot revolves but who does not play a huge part in the play beyond giving a reason for the plot. In SWC, Ariana and Gatty are a mix between Widow and Graciana,

[48] McDonald, *The Independent Woman in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* 91.

possessing Widow's wit, desire for pleasure and social background, as well as Graciana's irreproachable virtue and restraint. Harriet in MM is the pinnacle of the type invented by Etherege, a heroin as witty – if not more – than the play's rake and possessing all the qualities of the perfect young gentlewoman.

2. The Old Coquette

The term "old coquette" is used to refer to characters who are past their prime, sometimes married or widowed, and who want to experience pleasures, generally of a sexual nature, which, in the play-world of the seventeenth century, are reserved for the young. In some cases, they try to hide their exacerbated desires behind a veil of false prudishness, which Truewits and characters with sound judgement, as well as the audience, easily see through. This character emphasises the discrepancy between appearance and reality, as it tries to hide its age and lewd desires behind the appearance of an honourable man or woman. The character type of the old coquette does not come from the Commedia dell'Arte which, beyond the *Innamorata* and Columbina, did not represent many female characters. This type of the coquette appeared along with the comedy of manners, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, both in France and in England. As such, it is not certain that she was considered as a stock character by Molière's and Etherege's audiences. One thing we know for sure is that Molière and Etherege participated in the establishment of the coquette as a stock character of comedy. As such, there is no theatrical tradition to which Molière's and Etherege's old coquettes can be compared. But we can still compare how both playwrights represented this character type.

The most striking examples of women who provoke laughter in Etherege's plays are those of Lady Cockwood and Mrs Loveit, the two purportedly prudish old coquettes of SWC and MM who try to keep their lovers Courtall and Dorimant from frolicking with other, younger gentlewomen. This figure of the old coquette is recurrent in Etherege's plays, with the character of the Widow Mrs Rich from CR to add to the list. They can be considered as Witwouds, as they desperately try to adapt to their social environment but are too old and not witty enough to understand and handle the social cues and practices enforced by truewit characters. These characters are particularly easy to identify, as they are generally very caricatural. Some productions go to particular lengths to make them instantly identifiable to the audience. The costume and accessories of Marie Mullen, who played Mrs. Loveit in the 1989 production of MM by the Royal Shakespeare Company, directed by Garry Hynes, visually identified her character as out of the norm, and thus ridiculous:

Figure 5: Mrs. Loveit and Bellinda in the 1989 production of The Man of Mode directed by Garry Hynes

Mrs. Loveit's red, beribboned dress represents her desires, and the contrast between her clothes and Bellinda's darker, more understated dress is a testimony to her inability to understand the social codes and expectations of the world she lives in. The contrasts between their hair and make up serve the same purpose, Bellinda's hair being made up into an intricate hairdo and her eyes noticeably lined while Mrs. Loveit's hair and face are left more natural – or unfashionable. Finally, the colour of their fans symbolises the difference between the two characters at the beginning of the play: Mrs. Loveit has cheated on her husband and lost her virtue, which is why she bears a black fan, whereas Bellinda has not succumbed to Dorimant's advances yet and thus still has a white fan – like Harriet does –, symbol of her innocence, but with dark edges, foreshadowing the events of the play – as do Mrs. Loveit's disgruntled expression and her suspicious eyeing of Bellinda, who will betray her and steal her lover. It is probable that the

actress playing Mrs. Loveit in the Dorset Garden Theatre in 1676 was wearing clothes that made it equally obvious that she was a Witwoud and a coquette, enabling the audience to immediately identify her character as diverging from the norm.[49] This, added to the fact that her characterisation remains constant throughout the play, contributed to the establishment of the coquette as a stock character.

Etherege's old coquettes play a huge role in his comedies. In SWC, Lady Cockwood even appears to be the central character: the title of the play is a reference to her fruitless endeavours to seduce Courtall and she is mentioned from the very beginning, when her servant Sentry goes to see Courtall behind her back. Despite, as mentioned in the first part, the role she plays in the plot and the fact that she could be considered as the main opponent, Lady Cockwood's true significance lies in the comic aspect of her character. The title clues in the audience: Lady Cockwood wants to seduce Courtall but cannot, which is a great source of frustration for her and of comedy for the audience. The elliptic title foreshadows Lady Cockwood's comic role, just like her name. The name "Cockwood"[50] could be a crude reference to her very forward approach to seduction and adultery, which is most often considered to be manly behaviour, and thus explains the presence of a symbolic phallus in her name. But it could also be a reference to the failure of her romantic endeavours and her subsequent frustration, symbolised by the wooden quality of the phallus in her name which makes it unable to orgasm and thus to relieve her frustration. This game of onomastics is typical of Restoration drama and was inherited from Jonson's comedies. According to Anne-Marie Imbert, it is a means of communication between the stage and the audience and, like the portraits drawn by the other characters before the appearance of the character onstage, it builds the audience's expectations.[51] The onomastics of her name hint at the kind of comic quality detained by Lady Cockwood. She is not a comic character because she is witty, she represents a cruder, more farcical type of humour. She forces other characters to hide under tables and in closets on more than one occasion, which is a farcical device that creates *du comique de situation*, and her constant frustration is the comic backbone of the play. The laughter she elicits is not commiserating, she is a ridiculous figure who is mocked by other characters and whose actions and portrayal encourage the audience to

[49] John Louis Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 43.
[50] According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the first use of the word "cock" meaning penis dates back to the 1610s, making it possible that Etherege had the pun in mind when he named her, although there can be no real certainty. But the comic potential of her name is too great not to be mentioned here. Online Etymology Dictionary. "Cock". Web. 30 Dec 2017.
[51] Anne-Marie Imbert, 'Conventions et communication dans The Man of Mode, or, Sir Fopling Flutter de Sir George Etherege' *XVII-XVIII. Revue de la Société d'études anglo-américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. 25.1 (1987): 29–38. 30

laugh at her. The many references to her honour, either made ironically by the characters or not, are a cue to the audience who knows that Lady Cockwood is everything but virtuous, they are a source of comedy and create complicity between the audience and the characters who are in the know. The treatment of Lady Cockwood by Etherege vastly differs from the way he portrays Gatty and Arianna, who are mostly defined by their wit, age and beauty. Lady Cockwood's lack of wit, her married state – which is linked to her age and her residency in the countryside – as well as her inability to conceal her desires behind fake prudery are what makes her a farcical character.

Even though there are a few good examples of old coquettes in Molière's plays, like Arsinoé in Mis, they remain minor characters. Molière mostly chooses old stick-in-the-mud bourgeois to act as comic figures in his plays, like Tartuffe, Géronte in FSca or Harpagon in *L'Avare*. While Etherege never represented a male prude – that is to say, a character who displays a severe and often excessive concern for virtue and decency while, in the context of comedy, being unable to refrain his own desires –, Tartuffe could be regarded as Molière's greatest prude, as symbolised by the famous verse "Couvrez ce sein, que je ne saurais voir"[52] which clashes with his attempts at seducing Orgon's wife, Elmire. Contrary to Restoration plays, Molière's plays very rarely ridicule women, with the notable exception of the *femmes savantes* would-be *précieuses* characters whom Molière attacked with a passion. As Paul Bénichou explains, Magdelon and Cathos from *Les Précieuses ridicules* are not mocked because of their preciosity, which was a respectable mode established by noblemen and women and which reached its apex in the decade before the play was released. Magdelon and Cathos are ridiculed because they are part of the bourgeoisie and are trying – and failing – to emulate a trend that was already outdated:

> Quant aux précieuses ou aux femmes savantes, leur ridicule naît en grande partie de la disproportion qui existe entre leur rang et leurs visées.[53]

This desire and subsequent inability to adapt to social norms is a significant feature of witwoud characters and Magdelon and Cathos would perfectly fit in with Restoration Witwouds like Lady Cockwood. Yet, as mentioned earlier on, there is one notable difference in the treatment of the *précieuses* as compared to Etherege's Witwouds. Lady Cockwood and Mrs. Loveit's ridicule is exacerbated by both the comparison with truewit characters and their disparaging comments. On the other hand, there is no Truewit or *honnête homme* to which Magdelon and

[52] Molière, *Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur*. III,2. v860.
[53] Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* 233.

Cathos can be compared in *Les Précieuses ridicules*. The other two main characters are servants disguised as a *marquis* and a *vicomte*. There is no positive, witty character with whom to compare the Witwouds, the spectator is the sole judge of the ridiculousness of the characters.[54] On the contrary, in Etherege's plays, the audience's judgement of ridiculous characters and subsequent laughter is reinforced by the mocking comments of Truewits, creating a dual approach to these characters that coincides with Dryden's two types of comedies: the spectator laughs heartily at the ridiculousness of the character, which is the comedy of humour's main feature, and chuckles at the witticisms of Truewits, which is how comedy of wit functions.[55] Molière's play only triggers the first kind of laughter, which permeates the whole play as the four main characters are ridiculous.

Thus, this character of the old coquette is far more important in Etherege's plays than in Molière's, in which it is barely featured. This may be the major difference between Etherege's and Molière's comedies: the main ridiculous characters in Molière's plays are men, while the figure of the old coquette is recurrent in Etherege's plays and takes centre stage, in particular in SWC, as Mrs. Loveit in MM is somewhat eclipsed by Sir Fopling Flutter. Etherege's recurrent representation of this character type means that female characters play essential roles in his comedies, but also that they are represented in a ridiculous way, which may lead the audience to be more ambivalent concerning this type of characters.

3. Cunning and Boorish Servants

The character type of the *ancilla* was recurrent in Classical comedy. It was divided in several sub-types, such as the cunning servant, the old servant or the wet-nurse. Yet the role of the servant was limited by the importance of other female characters, such as the matron or the prostitute, who Céline Candiard considers to be "meneuses de jeu."[56] In Molière's plays, the roles of the prostitute and the matron have disappeared, which, for the former, may be due to the *bienséance*, and for the latter, to the will to represent the bourgeoisie – and sometimes the nobility – but not the common people, with the exception of servants, who were considered as part of the bourgeois lifestyle. As for Etherege, these two character types are still somewhat present in his plays, in particular in CR, with the characters of Mrs. Grace and Mrs. Lucy, who

[54] Which is something that may not be possible in some Restoration plays, as the line between true wit and false wit is thin and sometimes indistinguishable without the added help of a character's judgement.
[55] John Dryden, *The works of John Dryden. Volume III, Poems 1685-1692*, Ed. Earl Roy Miner and Vinton Adams Dearing (Berkeley, 1969) 248; Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* 11.
[56] Céline Candiard, *Esclaves et valets vedettes dans les comédies de la Rome antique et de la France d'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017) 402.

are both described as follows in the *personae dramatis*: "A Wench kept by Wheadle/Sir Frederick."[57]

Maids play very different roles in Molière's and Etherege's plays. As mentioned before, the character of the maid progressively loses importance in Etherege's plays, which Rigaud explains by the progressive re-centering of Restoration comedies on characters that belong to the nobility and emulate the court.[58] Letitia in CR and Busy and Pert in MM only play the classic role of their mistresses' confidents, only appearing alongside them and speaking to announce the arrival of other characters or to encourage their mistresses to reveal their deepest thoughts. Sentry in SWC is the most developed of Etherege's maids, and even she is little more than a theatrical device: she is the extension of her mistress's will, going where her mistress's social status forbids her from appearing and helping her reach her goals. At the end of the play, she even takes the fall for her mistress, enabling her to save face and to keep the ending of the play light-hearted on all fronts, with no real consequences to dim the happiness of it. As maids in Etherege mostly take part in scenes of confidences, which are pathetic scenes, they do not really play a comic role. Some of their exchanges with their mistresses are comic, such as that between Harriet and Busy in act III scene 1, in which Busy tries to convince Harriet to pay more attention to her appearance and Harriet shoots her down, but this is due to their mistresses' wit rather than to the maids' comic quality. Thus, the maids in Etherege's plays correspond to traditional comic types but play a far lesser role than they did in Ancient comedy and the Commedia dell'Arte.

In Molière's comedies, the role of the maid goes beyond that of a confident. Candiard claims that the seventeenth century French maid's distinctive feature is her double ability to take part in pathetic scenes – scenes of confidences – as well as in comic scenes – scenes of scheming, arguing with their mistress or master, etc.[59] There are a few examples of maids in our corpus, but the main one is that of Dorine, who corresponds to the character type of the cunning servant. Dorine's comic role corresponds to that of Columbina in the Commedia dell'Arte. Her distinctive feature is her impertinence, as the other characters are well aware of:

> MADAME PERNELLE
> Vous êtes, mamie, une fille suivante

[57] George Etherege, *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub*, (London: H. Herringman, 1664).
[58] Rigaud, 'L'évolution des relations entre maîtres et serviteurs dans le théâtre d'Etherege'.
[59] Candiard, *Esclaves et valets vedettes* 404.

> Un peu trop forte en gueule, et fort impertinente:
> Vous vous mêlez sur tout de dire votre avis. [60]

Madame Pernelle's comment on Dorine is uttered at the very beginning of the play, in the first scene, the aim of which is to introduce all the characters. From the very beginning, the audience is aware that Dorine is a cunning maid and that she will act as a rational basis against the folly of her master. Dorine's comic aspect comes from the discrepancy between her status as a maid and the brutal truths she tells her masters, going as far as to admonish them.[61] The comic scenes featuring Dorine function with *du comique de mots*, as she does not mince her words, as well as with *du comique de situation*, which corresponds to the oddity of having a servant talk this way to her master.

Molière's maids follow the opposite evolution of Etherege's. Not only do they appear more and more in Molière's comedies, but they also become the lead role of the play, the "meneuses de jeu" as Candiard says. Molière's last play is the one that illustrates this phenomenon the best: the character of Toinette appears in eighteen scenes out of twenty-seven, which is almost as much as the other lead character, Argan, who appears in twenty-five scenes. Her role in the play is much more diversified than that of her predecessors, as Candiard explains:

> Aux séquences classiques de la soubrette qui accueille et annonce les visiteurs, commente en plaisantant les évènements et reçoit les confidences de la jeune amoureuse, Toinette ajoute la mise en œuvre d'un stratagème complexe qui occupe l'essentiel du troisième acte, ainsi qu'une multitude de feintes.[62]

Among the feints mentioned by Candiard, there is one in particular that is of interest to us: in act III scene 10, Toinette pretends to be a doctor and tries to convince Argan that physicians are not to be trusted by giving him nonsensical advice. She tells him that a solution to his ailments would be to cut off one of his arms and to scratch off his right eye. Toinette's ability to play a role and fool her master mirrors that of Harriet and Elmire. Not only is Toinette a paragon of reason, which Dorine already was, she is also a master trickster who understands the characters around her and manipulates them to obtain what she wants, i.e., her masters' happiness. The comic heart of the comedy is not limited to the ridiculous character who gives his name to the play anymore, but now includes the cunning servant who tries to make him see reason. Toinette's comic features are the same as Dorine's, but she is much more present and thus has more occasions to showcase them. As Émelina writes, Toinette belongs to a particular

[60] Molière, *Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur*. I,1. v.13-15.
[61] Paradoxically, it is her status as a maid which enables her to speak as she does, as shown by Molière's stage direction "c'est une servant qui parle" in Act I Scene II.
[62] Candiard, *Esclaves et valets vedettes* 406.

group of characters, that of the "wise who enjoy watching the folly of the world."[63] Not only is Toinette able to perform various roles in the play, she also takes the position of an observer who comments on the events happening around her and enounces general truths that both justify her behaviour and make her sympathetic in the eyes of the audience:

> ARGAN.— Je lui commande absolument de se préparer à prendre le mari que je dis.
> TOINETTE.— Et moi, je lui défends absolument d'en faire rien.
> ARGAN.— Où est-ce donc que nous sommes? et quelle audace est-ce là à une coquine de servante de parler de la sorte devant son maître?
> TOINETTE.— Quand un maître ne songe pas à ce qu'il fait, une servante bien sensée est en droit de le redresser.[64]

This last line establishes Toinette as a rational character who shares the views of the audience, as they both consider Argan to be ridiculous. The shared awareness that Toinette is playing a trick on Argan, that it is all staged, also brings her and the audience closer together. Toinette and the audience possess the same knowledge of the events unfolding in front of them,and her resourceful and no-nonsense attitude towards them leads the audience to side with her and laugh alongside her.

Thus, the treatment of servants is very different in Molière's and in Etherege's plays. Where Etherege's maids progressively lose characterisation to become theatrical devices used to expose their mistresses' thoughts, Molière's become progressively more important, notably in terms of comic function. Molière's earlier maids stay close to the traditional representation of the *ancilla*, in between *pathos* and humour, but progressively lean towards the side of humour as they gain more and more importance in his comedies. The traditional scenes between mistress and maid even take on a comic dimension, for example in act I scene 4 of *Le Malade imaginaire*, in which Toinette listens to Angélique lauding Cléante and sharing her insecurities and answers either ironically:

> TOINETTE.— Je m'en doute assez, de notre jeune amant; car c'est sur lui depuis six jours que roulent tous nos entretiens; et vous n'êtes point bien si vous n'en parlez à toute heure.[65]

or curtly, with variations of "Oui", "D'accord" and "Certainement." Toinette's answers, as well as the stage direction "ANGÉLIQUE, *la regardant d'un œil languissant, lui dit confidemment*" give distance to the scene: the audience is used to this scene that exposes the lovers'

[63] Emelina, *Le comique: essai d'interprétation générale* 39. My translation.
[64] Molière, *Le Malade imaginaire*, (Paris: Ribou, 1673). I,5.
[65] Ibid. I,4.

relationship, they know it is a compulsory part of the play and are expecting it. By making Toinette react as she does, Molière is acknowledging that the audience is familiar with this type of scene and that they rarely vary. Once more, Toinette's reaction mirrors the audience's: she knows what Angélique will tell her because she has heard it before, but also knows she cannot avoid it, just as the audience does.

Even though they share common influences, Molière and Etherege have distinct takes on stock characters. Where Molière's young gentlewomen are rarely comic characters, Etherege's witty gentlewomen carry an important part of the humour of his comedies. Similarly, where Etherege uses Truewits to contrast with ridiculous characters, Molière prefers to confront them with the down-to-earth attitude of servants. Etherege's ridiculous characters are both female and male, whereas Molière's plays have a tendency to focus on male ridiculous characters, as shown by the titles of his plays, all referring to the main character's flaw, which is what makes him ridiculous: *Le Misanthrope*, *L'Avare, Le Malade imaginaire, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme,* etc. This discrepancy in the comic function of the different character types could be explained by the taste of the audiences, for example by the high regard in which wit was held by Restoration audiences, which was not the case with French ones. This could also be explained by the difference in influences: English theatrical production was heavily influenced by Shakespeare's and Jonson's plays, which only crossed the channel in the eighteenth century.[66] On the other hand, Charles II's court was familiar with early seventeenth century French theatrical production, and it is believed that Etherege was as well.[67]

C. The Power of Comedy and Laughter

There remains one aspect of humour that we have briefly mentioned but have not dealt with yet: power. Laughter is a way of establishing a norm, what is acceptable and what is not, as well as power over someone, of making them feel abnormal and ridiculous. This is a consequence of laughing *at* someone, of declaring them abnormal and distancing oneself from them and the consequences of their abnormality, as we saw earlier. The distinction between laughing *at* someone and laughing *with* someone is essential: being laughed *with* contributes to creating a community united by a similar vision of abnormality, it creates kinship and

[66] Bénédicte Louvat-Mozolay and Florence March, *Les théâtres anglais et français (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle): contacts, circulation, influences.* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016) 14.
[67] Dale Underwood, *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners*, (New Haven: Yale University press, 1957).

establishes those who are laughing as the dominant group able to impose their vision of the norm on others. On the other hand, being laughed *at* means being excluded from this group, pointed out and mocked more or less violently. Thus, the question of who the audience laughs along with and who is mocked in comedies is closely linked to that of the norm established by comedies. We have already seen which character types are mocked and which ones do the mocking. But mocking comments are not only addressed to specific characters. Men and women in general are also mocked. We can wonder whether these comments contribute to the establishment or the reinforcement of a norm concerning the sexes, and if it is the case, which vision of women is established as the norm. But laughter is a double-edged weapon, and the audience does not necessarily side with all the characters who laugh in comedies.

1. Men Mocking Women

As mentioned earlier, Lady Cockwood – as well as Etherege's other old coquettes – not only provokes laughter by acting and speaking in a ridiculous fashion but is also mocked by the other characters through the use of derogative epithets and ironic asides. These denigrating comments are not only used to mock precise characters: they often target womankind in its entirety. In MM, the Shoomaker says:

> *Shoom*. Z'bud, I think you men of quality will grow
> As unreasonable as the Women[68]

The Shoomaker's lower social-class and his clear distancing from the "men of quality" he is talking about – with the interjection "z'bud" that no upper-class person would use as well as with the "you" underlining the fact that he is not part of the group he is talking about – lead the audience to classify his remark as an indecorous joke made by a common man.[69] Thus, his comment – as well as the Shoomaker himself – is easy to laugh at and does not convey any particular ideology – it mocks Dorimant and Medley, women in general and also the high-born audience, which is filled with "men of quality" who identify with Dorimant and Medley, and the audience laughs as much at the characters mocked, including themselves, as – if not more – at the Shoomaker who does not understand the codes and behaviour of the upper-class. But what does it mean when this type of comment is made by a "positive", or rather, upper-class and witty character? In some cases, it says more about the conception of masculinity than that

[68] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter*. 9. I,1.
[69] Despite being a common man, the Shoomaker refers to Cesar's *Commentaries* during the same conversation (p10), which may hint at him having some culture and being more than a simple shoemaker, or mays just be there to make the audience laugh at the discrepancy between his status and the reference.

of femininity, as when in MM Dorimant and Medley draw a derogatory portrait of Sir Fopling Flutter by comparing his manners and his garb to a woman's. But most of the time, these comments only target women:

> *Sir Fred*. […] men are
> Now and then subject to those infirmities
> In drink, which women have when th'are sober.[70]

Or

> *Med*. I wait upon you, and I hope (though Women
> Are commonly unreasonable) […][71]

As well as

> *Emil*. There are afflictions in Love Mr. Dorimant.
> *Dor*. You Women make 'em, who are commonly as
> Unreasonable in that as you are at Play[72]

And

> *Dor*. There is an inbred falshood in Women, which
> Inclines 'em still to them, whom they may most easily deceive.[73]

Sir Frederick, Medley and Dorimant are all witty, upper-class characters, yet they make the same type of comments as the Shoomaker – Medley and Dorimant even use the exact same adjective as him to describe women, "unreasonable". These comments seem to be designed to create connivance with the audience and laughter, but why was it considered amusing? Gross generalisation and cynical disdain may be the source of the laughter, as well as the inclusion of this kind of joke in the battle of the sexes that seems to rage on stage, but it could also be because, to a certain degree, it mirrors the contemporary view of women held by most men and even women, thus provoking laughter born of approval. Without precise sources on Restoration audiences, there is no way to know whether this type of comment made the whole audience laugh, or only men, and why they laughed.

[70] Etherege, *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub*. 4. I,1.
[71] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter*. 22. II,1.
[72] Ibid., 39. III,2.
[73] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 79. V,1.

A second sort of comment, this time not so much on womankind as on femininity, can be found in MM. Sir Fopling Flutter is repeatedly described as effeminate:

> *Med*. He was Yesterday at the Play, with a pair of Gloves
> Up to his Elbows, and a Periwig more exactly Curl'd
> Then a Ladies head newly dress'd for a Ball.
> *Bell*. What a pretty lisp he has!
> *Dor*. Ho that he affects in imitation of the people of
> Quality of *France*.
> *Med*. His head stands for the most part on one side,
> And his looks are more languishing than
> A Ladys when she loll's at stretch in her
> Coach, or leans her head carelesly against the
> Side of a Box i'the Playhouse.[74]

Medley compares Sir Fopling to a lady twice in the span of eight lines. Medley does not simply compare Sir Fopling to ladies, he compares him to ladies in particular situations, namely, at a ball and in the playhouse. These were situations in which ladies aimed to charm their fellow attendees; the theatre in particular was a place of pleasure and seduction where women – both ladies and prostitutes – wore vizards that hid their identity (see III,A). Even before appearing on stage, Sir Fopling is established as a ridiculous character because he behaves like a woman trying to seduce men.[75] This aspect of the character is made even more obvious in Garry Hynes' 1989 production of MM: Sir Fopling Flutter and his footmen were the only male characters that bore fans. Sir Fopling's effeminacy could be seen as an attack on femininity, on the behaviour of women in the theatre and on female fashion, but we do not believe that it is the case here. Sir Fopling's ridiculous effeminacy is not a mocking depiction of femininity. Rather, it serves to define what type of masculinity is acceptable in the play-world, namely, a virile type of masculinity.

The comparison with Molière is striking: generalisations about women are few and far between and leave no doubt as to within which ideology they fall. Like Etherege's characters, Arnolphe talks about "les femmes" in general. His descriptions of the women's "tours rusés" (v75) and their tendency to act like coquettes (v294) correspond to the overly conservative ideas often attributed to the character type of the ridiculous bourgeois by Molière; ideas that stood in

[74] Ibid., 12–13. I,1.
[75] However, this does not mean that Sir Fopling Flutter is represented as homosexual. His interest in Mrs. Loveit is an important point of the plot and his effeminacy is more of a ridiculous trait than a criticism of the deviant practice that homosexuality was considered to be.

opposition with the more liberal and pleasure-oriented ideology supported by the upper-class, as Bénichou explains.[76] Arnolphe's statements cannot be taken seriously because they go against the dominant ideology of Molière's audience and come from a character who is so ridiculous that his comments about women can only be laughable. They underline his lack of understanding of female characters and paranoia, two traits that set him up for defeat, thus participating in the announcement of the ending of the play. In this case, the audience laughs more at Arnolphe than at the women he talks about. There is no uncertainty, unlike with Etherege, and the battle of the sexes is once more absent. This could be explained by the fact that the *topos* of the conflictual relationship is reserved for married couples in Molière and is not broached otherwise, the lovers being defined by their fusional relationship, as Zaragoza explains.[77] The opposing forces of the play are the young and the old, not the men and the women. In Etherege's plays, there are several axes of opposition which do not necessarily merge like in Molière's comedies, in which the young also represent reason, balance and the norm, whereas older characters represent deviance and folly. In Etherege's plays, there is an opposition between the young and the old, Witwouds and Truewits, as well as between men and women, and these oppositions cannot be summed up as a single axis.

Despite these differences, both playwrights use a generic term, "the women" or "les femmes". We can wonder whether "the women" refers to all women in general – even though the primary target is often upper-class women – thus including both the characters and the audience, like a universally acknowledged truth echoed in comedy, or whether they only concern the small world of the comedy, thus reflecting a much more personal point of view on the part of the playwright. As Etherege's plays and most of Molière's reflect their contemporary society, its issues and dominant traits, we find it hard to believe that "the women" simply refers to the characters and not to the audience and society at large, in particular in Etherege's case, as Restoration comedy acts as a mirror held to the narcissistic society it portrays, as Florence March argues.[78] Moreover, the vision of women expressed through these comments corresponds to the general view of women at the time. Women were seen as unreasonable because they were governed by their feelings, and thus likely to scheme in order to get what they want. This vision of women corresponds to what Zaragoza calls "le prétendu éternel

[76] Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle*.
[77] Georges Zaragoza, *Le personnage de théâtre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2006) 71.
[78] Florence March, *La comédie anglaise après Shakespeare: une esthétique de la théâtralité : 1660-1710*, (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2010).

féminin", which he defines as being "ruse, habilité, coquetterie"[79], that can also be found in Molière's characterisation of his female characters.

2. Women Mocking Men

Men's witty or derogatory comments about womankind are frequent, but what about the opposite? Do women do the same thing about men in general, giving more credit to the interpretation of this phenomenon as being part of the battle of the sexes, or is it one-sided?

There are fewer instances of female characters talking about men in general, and most of the ones who are allowed to do so are Truewits:

> *Har*. The sordidness of mens natures I know makes 'em
> Willing to flatter and comply with the Rich, though they
> Are sure never to be the better for 'em.[80]

As well as:

> *Gatty*. From one Play-house, to the other Play-house,
> And if they [the men] like neither the Play nor the Women,
> They seldom stay any longer than the combing
> Of their Perriwigs, or a whisper or two with a
> Friend; and then they cock their Caps, and out they
> Strut again.[81]

These portraits of men seem to work in the same way as Freeman, Courtall and Dorimant's comments. Some of the accusations are even similar: Harriet accuses men of being "willing to flatter and comply with the Rich", which echoes Dorimant's mention of the "inbred falshood in Women." Like the comments made by male characters about women, these replies build connivance with the spectators, who laugh because of the wit displayed by the character as well as because they recognise some of their acquaintances – or even themselves – in the portraits drawn by the characters. Gatty's description of the behaviour of some men in the theatre is very vivid and it must have resonated with the audience who was a target of the description. Thus, these comments both contribute to the battle of the sexes on stage, and in the game of mirrors played with the audience. female characters' portraits of men are more imaged than the comments made by male characters about womankind. Most comments quoted earlier were short, Medley's was even in brackets, whereas the women's statements, in particular Gatty's,

[79] Zaragoza, *Le personnage de théâtre* 70.
[80] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 47. III,2.
[81] Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd* 13–14. I,2.

are full portraits. The humour does not rely so much on a shared knowledge as on a vivid and amusing description. The notion of a "nature of men" does not seem to be as established as that of a "nature of women," female characters have to justify the points they make by a description. Their status as Truewits also helps in making these comments a sound analysis of their environment rather than an unfounded accusation.

The relationship between wit and comments on men goes both ways: being able to identify men's "true nature" is a mark of the Truewit. It appears clearly when we compare Gatty and Harriet's comments to those of their less witty counterparts, such as Bellinda in MM:

> *Bell*. Do not think of clearing your self with me, it is
> Impossible—Do all men break their words thus?[82]

Bellinda does not possess Harriet's *discernement*, she is an innocent who does not understand how the social game is played and what she needs to do to preserve her virtue. Her question "Do all men break their words thus?" contrasts with Harriet's self-assured "I know": Bellinda does not know men's nature, and thus believes Dorimant to be sincere in his courtship of her, which leads to her downfall. On the other hand, Harriet's cynicism and awareness of the intentions of rakes serves as a defence against Dorimant's courtship.

But all portraits of men in general are not a proof of wit. We already mentioned Mrs. Loveit's parting words in I,C,3 and how Harriet defuses her grand exit by ridiculing her one more time. Mrs. Loveit's declaration that "all men are Villains or Fools" is a dramatic statement that emphasises the discrepancy between how she sees herself – as a victim of villainy – and how the other characters and the audience perceive her – as a woman overcome by lust who gets what she deserves. Had this comment been made by Harriet, it may have been interpreted as a witty repartee, part of some banter with Dorimant, and would have led the audience to wonder how Dorimant would respond to it and convince Harriet that men – and Dorimant in particular – were not necessarily "Villains or Fools". But when uttered by Mrs. Loveit in the context of her last words after her utter defeat and with Harriet's mocking comments following, this statement reinforces the ridiculousness of Mrs. Loveit's character and leads the audience to laugh at her. The same goes with Lady Cockwood in SWC:

> *Court*. This is meer passion, Madam.
> *La. Cock*. This is the usual revenge of such base
> Men as thou art, when they cannot compass

[82] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 92. V,1.

Their ends, with their venomous tongues
To blast the Honour of a Lady.
Court. This is a sudden alteration, Madam; within
These few hours you had a kinder opinion of me.[83]

Lady Cockwood also presents herself as a victim. The emphasis on her "Honour as a Lady" with a capital "H", the violent image of the "blast" of her honour, her overall dramatic speech which contrasts with Courtall's calm replies, as well as Courtall's reminder of her previous passion all contribute to making her ridiculous. She cannot control her feelings and overreacts, to which Courtall replies mockingly, keeping the audience from empathising with her. Thus, comments on men are not always a proof of wit. When uttered without cynical or amused distance by Witwouds, they reinforce their ridiculousness. In a sense, they work in the same way as Arnolphe's comments on women do: they are a caricatural vision held by characters who do not understand the world they live in.

In Molière's comedies, there is only one instance of a female character enouncing a general truth about men:

HYACINTE.— J'ai ouï dire, Octave, que votre sexe aime moins longtemps que le nôtre, et que les ardeurs que les hommes font voir, sont des feux qui s'éteignent aussi facilement qu'ils naissent.
OCTAVE.— Ah! ma chère Hyacinte, mon coeur n'est donc pas fait comme celui des autres hommes, et je sens bien pour moi que je vous aimerai jusqu'au tombeau.[84]

Contrary to what has been mentioned before, Hyacinthe's comment on men's inconstance is not a witticism. It is part of the serious dialogue between the two lovers who are afraid that they will not be allowed to marry, and as such it serves the purpose of establishing the love between the two of them, which will be the driving element of the plot, as we have already seen. Octave's answer makes it plain: instead of answering with a witticism as a Restoration hero would have done, he assures Hyacinthe of his love. Hyacinthe's accusation is not so much a criticism of the behaviour of men as a way for Molière to establish the feelings of both characters and to launch the plot, as this dialogue takes place in the first act.

Even though this comment is the only one made by a female character about men, it does not mean that no other general truths about men are uttered. Most of the comments on men are actually made by men. Alceste is particularly prolific, his misanthropy leading him to criticise mankind throughout the play. Yet the double meaning of the word "les hommes" in French and

[83] Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd* 76. V,1.
[84] Molière, *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. I,3.

the context in which Alceste uses it leads us to believe that he is referring to humanity rather than simply men:

> ALCESTE
> Quand je vois vivre entre eux, les hommes comme ils font;
> Je ne trouve, partout, que lâche flatterie,
> Qu'injustice, intérêt, trahison, fourberie;
> Je n'y puis plus tenir, j'enrage, et mon dessein
> Est de rompre en visière à tout le genre humain.[85]

Alceste uses "les hommes" and "le genre humain" interchangeably, and his insistence on the fact that he observes despicable behaviour "partout" indicates that he is indeed referring to humanity at large. Most characters in Molière's plays seem to be talking about humanity rather than men or women, he does not emphasise the discrepancy between the genres as much as Etherege does.

In Etherege's plays, male characters often comment on the "nature of men":

> *Med*. But I have known men fall into dangerous relapses
> When they have found a Woman inclining to another.[86]

As well as

> *Med*. Your Nephew ought to conceal it for a time,
> Madam, since Marriage has lost its good name, prudent
> Men seldom expose their own reputations till 'tis
> Convenient to justify their Wives.[87]

And

> *Dor*. […] Dear Bellair, by Heavens
> I thought we had lost thee; men in love
> Are never to be reckon'd on when we wou'd
> Form a Company.[88]

The use of adverbs such as "seldom" and "never", as well as Medley's "I have known" emphasise the "general truth" aspect of the comments. These comments show the Truewits'

[85] Molière, *Le Misanthrope*. I,1. v.92-96.
[86] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 53. III,3.
[87] Ibid., 84. V,1.
[88] Ibid., 15. I,1.

self-awareness; they have enough distance and *discernement* to analyse men's, as well as their own, behaviour. These comments, along with the unbalance between the number of female characters talking about men and the number of male characters talking about womankind hints at the fact that it is mostly through male characters that Etherege establishes general truths on the perceived "nature", or, more precisely, on the social practices, of men and women.

3. Rallying the Audience to One's Side

Although mocking comments can create complicity with the audience and lead it to laugh alongside a character, it can also make the character who utters them ridiculous, as we have seen with Mrs. Loveit and Lady Cockwood. The same goes with laughter. It is a way of establishing power over someone and of protecting oneself, as Émelina argues: "Le rire protège contre le désarroi, l'incompréhension, l'humiliation et la peur."[89] This protection comes from the distance established by laughter and from the solidarity created between those who laugh. But the kinship between the characters who laugh and the audience is far from ubiquitous. If the laughter on stage does not seem justified to the audience, then the latter laughs at the character who is laughing rather than alongside him or her. Émelina sums it up in the following way: "On peut ainsi, dans la comédie, rire de celui qui y rit. Autant on est solidaire des rieurs, autant on se désolidarise des railleurs niais, maladroits ou vaniteux."[90] This notion of "railleurs niais, maladroits ou vaniteux" corresponds to what we have seen about Mrs. Loveit and Lady Cckwwod's comments. Molière's plays present several examples of female characters who laugh a lot, mostly maids. They can either appear as *rieuses* and entice the audience to laugh alongside them or oscillate between *rire* and *raillerie*, thus leading the audience to have a more ambivalent relationship to them.

As mentioned earlier, Toinette in *Le malade imaginaire* brings distance to the events of the play. Her many mocking comments underline the ridiculousness of the characters she shares the stage with. The recurrent use of the stage direction "Toinette, en le raillant"[91] illustrates her outlook on the events of the play. The same goes with Nicole in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, who cannot contain her laughter in act III scene 2 when she sees how her master is dressed. Candiard describes it in the following way: "la Nicole du *Bourgeois gentilhomme* présente un *lazzo* de rire inextinguible."[92] The term *lazzo* is used in the context of the Commedia dell'Arte to refer to a comic scene. In this case, Nicole's laughter multiplies the comic dimension of the

[89] Emelina, *Le comique: essai d'interprétation générale* 32.
[90] Ibid., 39.
[91] I,3; II,2; II,5.
[92] Candiard, *Esclaves et valets vedettes* 404.

scene. M. Jourdain's ridiculous outfit may lead the audience to chuckle, but it is Nicole's contagious laughter that turns the scene into a hilarious episode. Nicole's interventions work in the same way, underlining the ridiculousness of her masters and thus siding with the audience.

But laughter is not always as contagious in Molière's plays. Act III scene 3 of FSca presents the same characteristics as act III scene 2 of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme.* Zerbinette cannot stop laughing at the story she was just told and decides to tell it to Géronte, whose identity she is not aware of. Zerbinette tells him the story of how Scapin manipulated him and extorted money from him. Her story is interspersed with laughter, signified as "Ah, ah, ah" in the text. She calls Géronte a "chien d'avare" and "le plus vilain homme du monde", mocking him to his face. Contrary to the scene with Nicole, humour here does not solely come from Zerbinette's contagious laughter triggered by Géronte's ridiculous behaviour. The audience knows something that Zerbinette does not: she is telling this story to the man himself, and this could have consequences on the unwinding of Scapin's plan. Because she is incapable of controlling her laughter, Zerbinette creates an additional obstacle to her marriage with Léandre and subsequent happiness. Even though her laughter is shared by the audience, as she laughs for good reasons, the fact that she had no idea who the man she is telling the story to is and her lack of awareness of the consequences of her actions lead the audience to laugh at her as well. As such, Zerbinette oscillates between the status of *rieuse* and that of *railleuse*.

Thus, rallying the audience to one's side through laughter is not as easy as it may seem. Not all the characters who laugh are followed by the audience, and laughter is a dangerous weapon that can turn against those who wield it. But laughter is not the only way of rallying the audience to one's side. Even though the opposition between laughing with and laughing at is the dominant structure of comedy, it is not the only element that defines the relationship between the characters and the audience. The example of Bellinda in MM is particularly striking. Her character type lies in between that of the witty gentlewoman and that of the old coquette. She corresponds to what Mrs. Loveit may have been when she was younger, as well as to what Harriet may have become had she not been witty enough to foil Dorimant's advances. Bellinda is a Witwoud who loses her virtue in the play, but she is not mocked by the other characters as Mrs. Loveit is, and the other characters rather express sympathy towards her. Yet the fact that the other characters do not mock her and rather empathise with her does not necessarily mean that the audience does the same thing. The spectators could be influenced by the behaviour of the other characters towards her, in particular that of Truewits, but it is not the main element that leads the audience to empathise with her. It is Bellinda's recurrent use of asides that creates kinship between her and the audience. The connivance created by the asides is reinforced by

the active participation of the seventeenth-century audience in the play, which was loud and sometimes responded to actors on stage, in particular to asides.[93] Bellinda says thirteen asides throughout the play, which is far more than all the other characters, including Dorimant, who says eight, and Harriet, who says three. Most of Bellinda's asides are used to share her feelings with the audience:

> *Bell. Aside*. I am so frighted, my countenance
> Will betray me.[94]

And

> *Bell. Aside*. Then I am betray'd indeed,
> H' has broke his word, and I love a man that does
> Not care for me.[95]

As well as

> *Bell*. He's tender of my honour, though he's
> *Aside*.
> Cruel to my Love.[96]

Bellinda talks about her feelings, with the words "frighted" and "love". Her asides provide a glimpse into a parallel story that feels like a tragedy. Bellinda is not a ridiculous character, but she is not witty either, she does not manage to distance herself from the events that take place and from her own feelings. Her high number of asides could be explained by the fact that she does not have a confident, unlike Mrs. Loveit and Harriet. She has no ally in the play and her isolation makes her even more of a pathetic character. This window into her interiority brings the audience closer to her, and the fact that she is not mocked by the other characters means that the audience can empathise with her without second thought. Bellinda seems to be more of a tragic character than a comic one. Her asides are not used to mock the other characters or to enhance her ridiculousness, as is the case with Mrs. Loveit, but to show that her tragic loss of virtue was not caused by her own uncontrollable desires but by her inability to defend herself in a world of libertinism. As such, the treatment of her character is very different from that of

[93] Judith W. Fisher, 'The Power of Performance: Sir George Etherege's The Man of Mode' *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theatre Research*. 10.1 (1995): 15–28.
[94] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 77. V,1.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 92. V,1.

the others and appears as an oddity in Etherege's play-world, where Witwouds and women who lose their virtue are treated with scorn.

Thus, in order to rally the audience to one's side, a character does not necessarily have to mock others and lead the audience to laugh alongside him or her. A measure of empathy can be found in comedy, but in order for the comedy to remain humorous, there cannot be too much empathy, at the risk of involving the audience too much and destroying the distance necessary for laughter.

Thus, laughter on stage plays a big part in establishing the power relationships between the characters, as well as the relationship of the audience to the characters. It would be tempting to think that is comedy, those who laugh have the upper hand. But it is not always the case. The characters' laughter has to be interpreted as relying on sound judgement by the audience in order for the characters to take ascendance over the ones they are mocking. If it is not the case, they become the butt of the joke and are mocked in turn. Laughter also contributes to creating or asserting a norm and punishing those who stray from it. Yet it remains to be seen whether this really has an influence on the world outside of comedy. The motto *castigat rirendo mores* claims that comedy is made to chastise the practices seen as negative. Molière adopted the same point of view, as demonstrated by the *Premier placet présenté au Roi, sur la comédie du* Tartuffe:

> Le devoir de la comédie étant de corriger les hommes en les divertissant, j'ai cru que dans l'emploi où je me trouve je n'avais rien de mieux à faire que d'attaquer par des peintures ridicules les vices de mon siècle.[97]

This vision of the comedy as a tool to reform society was also held by later Restoration playwrights such as Congreve, Vanbrugh and D'Urfey, in answer to Jeremy Collier's essay *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, published in 1698. Yet there is no evidence supporting the idea that comedies can change the world. As J.L. Styan argues:

> It is possible to ridicule individual behavior and social convention without suggesting that they are wrong and should be changed. Dorimant's pursuit of three different women one after the other places extraordinary emphasis on social forms, but Etherege is hardly in the business of recommending Dorimant's behavior as

[97] Molière, *Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur*.

> an example to others; nor is he condemning it. Much of the interest in his plays lies simply in observing the shifting patterns of relationships between one man and the opposite sex.[98]

Even though both playwrights, and Etherege in particular, mock social behaviours and draw portraits of ideal men and women, we cannot know whether the audience saw these comedies as a source of moral to be followed, or whether they saw them as nothing more than entertainment. As often, the answer probably lies in between the two. Would these comedies still be represented if they had succeeded in reforming social and moral behaviour? Probably not. But this does not mean that they had no influence whatsoever. The one thing that must not be forgotten is that the theatrical space is separate from the social space the audience lives in. Even in the case of Restoration comedy, in which the correspondence between the theatrical and the actual world is very high, the theatrical space is still distinct. It follows particular rules and the question of its influence on the actual world is vast and has not been answered yet.

Both Molière's and Etherege's female characters make a significant contribution to the comic aspects of the plays. Without the discrepancy between Agnès' innocence and Arnolphe's desires, without Lady Cockwood's endless pursuit of Courtall or without the banter between Célimène and Alceste or between Harriet and Dorimant, the plays would lose their comic backbone. Female comic figures in Etherege's plays are either ridiculous or witty, with no evolution possible throughout the play. On the other hand, Molière represents different comic types, giving a lot of importance to maids but putting less emphasis on ridiculous female figures such as the figure of the old coquette that is so prominent in Etherege's plays. A good part of the humour of the plays is created by the contrast between witty or rational female characters and the ridiculous figures of the plays. Female characters are very rarely excluded from comic scenes, even though each playwright has types of characters that are more comic than others. Even though the raw elements of the comedies are the same, with the opposition between the old and the young, obstacles that prevent the young lovers from being together and a common theatrical inheritance, Molière and Etherege use very different comic devices and do not give the same importance to recurrent scenes of comedy, such as the dialogue between the young lovers. However, despite their differences, both playwrights represent young, witty and beautiful women like Célimène and Harriet who defy social expectations and bring about a change in the typical ending of comedies, neither of them being married to their suitors at the end.

[98] Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* 214.

III. The Progressive Feminisation of the Stage

The centrality of some female characters, their wit and ability to rival male characters and their preponderant comic roles lead us to assert that female characters are essential to Molière's and Etherege's plays. Yet all these elements are linked to the structure of the plays, to their inner balance. The question of the ideology, that is to say, of which perspective is dominant on stage is another matter, that has been briefly evoked already. The word "dominant" here is used to refer to the ideology which prevails in the play, meaning the system of ideas and beliefs which is not ridiculed and which the audience accepts to be right in the play-world. The question here is to know whether female characters go as far as to infuse the plays with female concerns and perspectives and whether they play a part in establishing the dominant ideology of the plays. Another essential question is that of freedom. Are female characters and actresses granted more freedom on stage than they are in the world of the seventeenth century? All these questions lead us to a broader concept: the feminisation of the stage. Our aim in this part is to define where Molière's and Etherege's plays stand in regard to the feminisation of the stage, whether they represent liberated women, and whether there is an evolution, in the case of Molière, from the earliest plays of the corpus to the latest ones, and in the case of Etherege, from his plays to the ones of later Restoration playwrights such as Congreve. Our first concern will be the place of actresses and female spectators in seventeenth-century theatre. Then, we shall see to what extent female characters are granted freedom in the plays. Finally, we will analyse the emergence of a female perspective on stage.

A. Women in the Theatre: Actresses and Female Spectators

The seventeenth century marked the beginning of the democratisation of the presence of women on stage. With the apparition of actresses, women took up a new role in the theatre. Before that, their presence was limited to the audience, and even there their presence was not always indisputable: scholars are still arguing about whether women were allowed to see plays in Ancient Greece and in France, upper-class women were not allowed to go to the theatre before the 1630s. As such, the status of female spectators was still uncertain in the second half of the seventeenth century. In England in particular, principally at the beginning of the Restoration period, plays were generally intended for a male audience. We can wonder how female spectators reacted to these male-oriented performances. It also appears logical

to think that the apparition of actresses caused a change in the audience's relation to theatrical productions. It remains to be seen why women were allowed to become actresses, who the first actresses were and what the consequences were for the contemporary productions, as well as on the audience, both male and female.

1. The First Actresses and the Emergence of Female Spectatorship

A central innovation of Restoration comedy is the apparition of actresses. Charles II, who, until his return to England, had mostly attended performances in which women were played by actresses, as was the norm in France, found the British tradition of having female characters played by young men old-fashioned. Thus, on 25th April 1662, Charles II issued a decree demanding that female characters be played by actresses. His main argument was that "it was just as offensive for the male sex to wear skirts as it was for the female sex to display itself in public."[1] As mentioned by Jean I. Marsden, before then, the only actresses the English audience had ever seen had come with foreign troupes or had acted in a private setting.[2] This was not the case in France, where female characters had been played by women since the end of the sixteenth century. The earliest proof of the existence of actresses are two contracts, the first signed in 1544 by troupe leader Jehan Anthoine, allowing his wife to act in his productions; the second in 1545 between Marie Ferré and Antoine de L'Esperonnière, allowing her to act with the latter's troupe.[3] Yet these remain isolated examples, and actresses remained scarce until the 1570s. The increasing number of Italian troupes on French territory played an important role in the democratisation of actresses, who started regularly appearing in Italian troupes faster than in their French counterparts. According to Candiard, the Gelosi Troup brought several actresses to France in the 1570s, progressively getting the audience used to having women on stage.[4] The number of actresses kept growing in the seventeenth century. The development of female spectatorship was also significant, in particular in the 1630s, due in part to the Cardinal of Richelieu's attempts at moralising the theatre. Léopold Lacour talks about "une réforme du goût" and "une élévation générale du niveau"[5], which were further encouraged by the presence of women. Thus, when Molière started writing and staging his plays, women had already found their place in the theatre,

[1] Ibid., 89–90.
[2] Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660-1720* (Cornell University Press, 2006) 1.
[3] Virginia Scott, *Women on the stage in early modern France: 1540-1750* (Cambridge, Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord, Pays multiples, 2010) 59–60.
[4] Candiard, *Esclaves et valets vedettes* 402.
[5] Léopold Lacour, *Les premières actrices françaises* (Paris, France: Librairie française, 1921) 173.

both on stage and in the audience, as shown by the dedicatory epistle of *La Critique de l'École des femmes* addressed to Queen Anne of Austria, which, although it was probably a way of circumventing the criticism of the cabal by placing his play under the protection of a powerful stateswoman, also shows that his play was addressed to a female audience or readership. Although female spectatorship is often alluded to or even represented in Molière's plays and the presence of women in the theatre was undeniable, the lack of contemporary female writing on the theatre means that this female audience now represents a silent presence for scholars. In England, the situation was different, as the Restoration represented a time of transition. According to Florence March:

> Le monde du théâtre à la Restauration est particulièrement révélateur de l'évolution du regard porté sur la femme, puisqu'elle conquiert peu à peu la place qui lui est due dans l'univers dramatique, parmi le public et sur la scène.[6]

Women progressively took their place in the theatre as actresses, members of the audience or playwrights, which contributed to reshaping society's vision of women, as they gained the right to write, perform and judge theatre, thus expressing their creativity and judgement. But the situation was very different at the beginning of the period. Not only were there barely any actresses before Charles' patent in 1662, but female spectators were also rare. The emergence of both female spectators and actresses is a feature of Restoration theatre. Etherege's plays were written and first represented at the beginning of the Restoration period, when women appeared on stage for the first time. The first actress is said to have appeared on stage in 1660 in the role of Desdemona in *Othello*.[7] Critics believe that this mysterious first actress was either Mary Saunderson – who was the wife of famous actor and company manager Thomas Betterton –, Anne Marshall or Katherine Corey.[8] Yet it is believed that some women had already performed on stage before the shutdown of the theatres in 1642, in the context of court masks or representations by visiting French companies.[9] But most of the representations took place in the private context of the King's court, and the French companies who tried to perform with actresses on the English stage were received negatively, some even being chased off the stage, according to Styan.[10]

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[6] March, *La comédie anglaise après Shakespeare* 121.
[7] McDonald, *The Independent Woman in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* 6.
[8] John Harold Wilson, *All the King's Ladies: Actresses of the Restoration*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
[9] Norman H. Holland, *The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve* (USA: Midland Book, 1959) 11.
[10] Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* 89.

As such, the situations in France and in England were not exactly similar, as women started insinuating themselves in theatres earlier in France than in England. Yet, in both countries, the presence of women both on stage and in the audience was questioned, in particular due to morality questions.

2. The Male Audience's Relation to Actresses

The fact that female characters were played by young men or boys gave all the scenes that featured them a comic potential that disappeared with the appearance of actresses. Men's interpretation of female characters could easily slip into a caricature of femininity and add a ridiculous dimension to female characters that would not have been there had the roles been played by actual women. Even though actors used this aspect to add a comic dimension to humorous scenes, they had to find a way to avoid it in tragic scenes. In order do so, actors represented a codified version of femininity that did not vary much from one play to another so as to be easily recognised by the audience.[11] The presence of actresses led to a broadening of the representation of femininity, as they did not have to stick to a universally acknowledged code to be seen as feminine. As such, the relationship of the audience to female characters changed. Even though the appearance of actresses led to a greater verisimilitude in the representation of female characters, it does not mean that these characters immediately gained the same status as male characters and that actresses were treated the same as actors by the audience. Where actors such as Thomas Betterton drew in crowds thanks to their comic talent, it was their gender and subsequent sexual appeal that made actresses into marketing arguments. As Florence March explains:

> Il semble qu'elles [les actrices] soient surtout utilisées pour promouvoir le théâtre et séduire le public masculin, le seul dont on cherche vraiment à flatter le goût, tout au moins pendant la première partie de la période.[12]

March's idea of seducing the male audience is central to the understanding of the role played by actresses at the beginning of the Restoration period. Actresses were not chosen and judged according to their theatrical skills but to their appearance. To be more precise, their ability to charm and please an audience was the skill required for an actress to be considered as a good performer during the Restoration. As such, one could argue that they were appreciated for their acting skills, as long as the latter is defined as the ability to charm an audience. In

[11] Candiard, *Esclaves et valets vedettes* 402.
[12] March, *La comédie anglaise après Shakespeare* 121.

any case, they were not treated according to the same standards, as male actors were admired for their ability to project their voices and bring a character to life. This is underlined by the emergence of several tropes that emphasize the sexual appeal of actresses, like cross-dressing scenes – called "breeches parts" –, "bosom as a letterbox" scenes – in which a woman hides a letter in her bodice, thus drawing attention to her anatomy (see CR, I,4) – or even rape scenes in tragedy.[13] Marsden sums it up by saying that "Her [the actress's] appearance made possible the use of female sexuality not simply as discourse but as genuine spectacle."[14] Holland goes as far as to say that "a pretty girl could make any play a success."[15] As such, the relationship of the male audience to actresses seems to have been one of open desire, as shown by the comments of some spectators on the performances:

> Hither I sent for Captain Ferrers to me, who comes with a friend of his, and they and I to the Theatre, and there saw "Argalus and Parthenia," where a woman acted Parthenia, and came afterwards on the stage in men's clothes, and had the best legs that ever I saw, and I was very well pleased with it.[16]

Pepys' only comment on the play concerns the actress's legs, which illustrates the point made earlier: with the appearance of the first actresses, the female body became a point of focus on for the male audience, a source of pleasure, as shown by Pepys' statement "I was very well pleased with it."

There are few accounts of this kind in France, where Richelieu's moralisation of the stage and the importance of the *bienséance*,[17] as well as the audience's accustoming to seeing women perform on stage, made for a different ambiance in the theatre. Yet this does not mean that French actresses were not regarded in a sexual way. Both in France and in England, the status of actress was closely linked to that of prostitute. In England, several actresses took lovers among the members of the court or wealthy members of the audience. Eleanor ('Nell') Gwyn, who appeared on stage from 1664 to 1670 with the King's Company, was the mistress of renowned actor Charles Hart, then of court member Lord Buckhurst and eventually became Charles II's mistress.[18] In a significant number of the paintings left of her, Nell Gwyn is represented bare-chested, for example in Simon Verelst's portrait of her, dated around 1670:

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[13] Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* 93.
[14] Marsden, *Fatal Desire* 3.
[15] Norman H. Holland, *The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve*, (USA: Midland Book, 1959).
[16] Samuel Pepys, *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 1660-1669. 28th October 1661.
[17] See definition p.28.
[18] Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* 91.

Figure 6: Portrait of Nell Gwyn, *attributed to Simon Verelst, circa 1670, National Portrait Gallery, London*

This painting illustrates the aura of sexuality that surrounded Nell Gwyn. It is believed to have been painted at the end of her career, when she was considered as an established actress. This shows that she was primarily appreciated for her body, which is the main focus of this painting. She is not represented with any attributes that could hint at her status as an actress or as Charles II's mistress. Instead, she is represented half-naked and looking straight at the spectator with a slight smile that could be interpreted as inviting. The fact that dozens of portraits of her were painted also underlines her status as a celebrity, as only noblemen and noblewomen, very rich citizens and celebrities could afford portraits in the seventeenth century. In his diary, John Evelyn reacts to the appearance of the first actresses as follows:

> Women now (and never 'til now) permitted to appear and act, which inflaming several young noblemen and gallants, became their misses, and to some, their wives.[19]

This view of actresses as prostitutes created a familiarity between them and the audience, as illustrated by the names the audience used to refer to them: in France, actresses were called "la" outside of the theatre, for example, Jeanne Olivier Bourguignon, who married Jean Pitel, nicknamed Sieur de Beauval, was called "la Beauval" by the audience. This practice illustrates the audience's refusal to give a title to actresses, even one as low – but which still alluded to a purity that actresses were not considered to have – as the "demoiselle" or "mademoiselle" used by the troupes.[20] According to Styan, even though there were some actresses with a genteel background, most of them had modest origins, which was the case both in France and in England.[21] In England, the common practice was to call actresses by their first names, or even by their shortened versions, as Pepys does when referring to Nell Gwyn, calling her "pretty, witty Nell."[22]

This sexual dimension of actresses was enhanced by the device of the double entendre. This expression started being used during the Restoration period. According to Styan, it is "an incomplete syllogism which the audience must finish, making it as engaging a device as comedy could wish for."[23] Even though the term "syllogism" may not be adequate, as the audience does not complete logical reasoning to arrive to a conclusion, but understands the lewd double meaning of a line, Styan is right when he underlines the importance of the audience's participation when he calls the double-entendre an "engaging" device. In SWC, the following line probably elicited a strong reaction in the audience:

> *Sir Oliv*. Well, farewel my Dear, prithee do not
> Sigh thus, but make thee ready, visit, and be merry▪
> *La. Cock*. I shall receive most satisfaction
> In my Chamber.[24]

Lady Cockwood is trying to convince her husband that he should go out without her. Her comment can easily be interpreted as meaning that she will receive satisfaction in a sexual way rather than just enjoy a quiet night alone. These double entendres were generally of a

[19] John Evelyn, *Diary*, 1666.
[20] Virginia Scott, *Women on the Stage in Early Modern France: 1540-1750* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 2.
[21] Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* 90.
[22] Samuel Pepys, *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 1660-1669. April 3rd, 1665.
[23] Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* 202.
[24] Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd* 12. I,2.

sexual nature and were bound to make the audience react with raucous laughter, so much that actresses sometimes could not even complete their lines.

Thus, actresses seem to have been regarded above all as objects of desire for male spectators. This begs the question of the place of female spectators in productions that seem primarily tailored to male tastes.

3. The Place of Female Spectators in the Theatre

Sources on female spectatorship are scarcer than sources on male spectatorship. As Marsden explains:

> No woman published her views, leaving us without a firsthand account of theatregoing in the Restoration and early eighteenth century. As a result, we find ourselves confronted with a theorized spectator, a woman constructed through the writings of men.[25]

The writing of men mentioned by Marsden include the attacks on the immorality of the stage, the defences of the stage, as well as the plays themselves. Even though these sources give some clues as to how women behaved in the theatre, they do not mention what women felt when watching the plays. We can infer that, in most cases, female spectators did not have a relation of sexual desire to actresses, contrary to most male spectators. But this does not mean that desire was completely absent from the relation of women to actresses and female characters. Instead of desiring actresses sexually, female spectators may have identified with them and the characters they portrayed. The character of the witty gentlewoman, with her beauty and wit, was probably admired by female spectators. Her physical appeal, eloquence and power over men may have created a desire of emulation in female spectators, although there can be no certainty as there are no direct sources from women to corroborate these assumptions. Some evidence can be found in the essays that criticise the stage, such as Collier's *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, published in 1698, which do mention a phenomenon of identification between female spectators and female characters. As Marsden explains, Collier's essay centres on the danger of female spectatorship rather than on the immorality of actresses. For him, "the danger lies not in the Harlot/actress, but in the act of looking itself."[26] It is by watching fictional representations of upper-class women who surrender to their carnal desires that female spectators can be led to sin: by identifying with these characters that have the same social background as they do,

[25] Marsden, *Fatal Desire* 19.
[26] Jean I Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality and the English Stage, 1660-1720* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2006) 22.

female spectators may become like them and lose all modesty, as Collier argues. Collier's accusations have the merit of corroborating one essential element of the relation of female spectators to female characters and actresses: that of identification. This highlights the changes brought by the appearance of actresses. Their female bodies and inherent femininity must have enabled female spectators to identify with the characters they portrayed much better than was the case in the preceding century, when female characters were played by boys.

The same goes for France, where few women recorded their reactions to actresses and to the plays in general. Once more, it is through male perspectives that we have access to a representation of female spectators. In *La Critique de L'École des femmes*, Molière represents four characters, including three ladies, who criticise EF, which they have just seen. Élise, Dorante and Uranie defend the play, while Climène, Lysidas and Le Marquis attack it. Climène is ridiculous because she reacts in an affected, prudish way and refuses to enjoy what she considers to be indecent. Uranie, on the other hand, represents a positive view of female spectatorship, which is characterised by sensibility and spontaneity rather than analysis based on the adherence to literary rules.[27] Although Molière's play does paint a picture of female spectators, they are seen through the prism of his vision of the audience, and his play aims to defend EF by arguing that the positive representation of the audience is in favour of the play, while women who are conceited and prudish are against it. As such, we can hardly consider Uranie and Climène to be faithful representations of female spectators. But the opposition between Uranie's visceral enjoyment of the comedy and Climène's false prudery is coherent with the representation of female spectators offered by other sources.

This vision of female spectatorship can also be found in essays that defend the stage. Both in France and in England, the defences of the stage and the defences of their plays by playwrights use one central argument, which is that the immorality of the plays can only be understood by female spectators who are personally acquainted with such immorality. Molière argues that only spectators who think like Tartuffe and Arnolphe and share their desires understand the innuendos made by the characters. In *La Critique de L'École des femmes*, Uranie argues that Agnès does not say any indecent word throughout the play:

[27] Véronique Lochert, 'Gender et réception : pour une étude des spectatrices de théâtre aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles' *TRANS-*. (2018), online, Internet, 25 Mar. 2019.

> URANIE.— Non, vraiment. Elle ne dit pas un mot, qui de soi ne soit fort honnête; et si vous voulez entendre dessous quelque autre chose, c'est vous qui faites l'ordure, et non pas elle; puisqu'elle parle seulement d'un ruban qu'on lui a pris.[28]

Uranie claims that it is the spectators who are shocked by this scene who are obscene rather than the character of Agnès, who is not aware of what Arnolphe thinks "le" is. Female spectators ought to be as innocent as Agnès; and accusing the play of immorality means that they did understand Arnolphe's innuendos, which identifies them as lewd women. The same goes in act II scene 1 of Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*, acted in 1676, the same year as MM, in which he defends his previous play *The Country Wife*, first produced in 1675:

> *Oliv*. Then you wou'd have a Woman of Honour with passive looks, ears, and tongue, undergo all the hideous obscenity she hears at nasty Plays?
> *Eliz*. Truly I think a Woman betrays her want of modesty, by shew|ing it publickly in a Play-house, as much as a Man does his want of courage by a quarrel there; for the truly modest and stout say least, and are least exceptions, especially in publick.[29]

Both Molière and Wycherley use the exact same argument to defend their previous plays. They put the blame on the audience, in particular on the female audience, whose immorality was far more threatening to society than that of men: women's ability to produce children of uncertain ascendance would have threatened the social order based on birthright and inheritance of the status of one's family. Marsden sums up the position female spectators find themselves in as follows:

> In essence, the plays leave women in an untenable position; on the one hand, the plays themselves are immodest, on the other, a truly virtuous woman should not be able to recognize this immodesty.[30]

This male vision of female spectatorship gives us hints as to the behaviour of upper-class women in the theatre. Molière's and Etherege's defences of their plays indicate that female spectators criticised them for their immorality, which indicates that women did not necessarily enjoy the plays, or rather, that they did not show their enjoyment. These accusations of immodesty may also have led upper-class women to remain stone-faced in front of comedies, to hide their amusement at the lewd comments made by both male and

[28] Molière, *La Critique de L'École des femmes*, (Paris: Ribou, 1663). I,3.
[29] William Wycherley, *The Plain-Dealer* (London: Roger L'Estrange, 1676) 24. II,1.
[30] Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality and the English Stage, 1660-1720* 26.

female characters, in order to appear as modest women. This last hypothesis needs to be tempered in the case of Restoration theatre, as there is a disruptive element that has not been mentioned yet: vizards. Until 1704, when Queen Anne prohibited the wear of vizards in the theatre, women of all social statuses wore masks to the theatre: "Aristocratic ladies, upper middle-class women like Elizabeth Pepys, and prostitutes all wore masks to the theatre."[31] This particular feature of Restoration theatre blurred the lines between the social classes, as Rosenthal explains. This may have had an influence on the behaviour of female spectators, in particular upper-class women: less susceptible of being recognised, they might have openly reacted to the plays with laughter rather than false prudery – although this has to be nuanced, as their garments and company identified them as upper-class ladies or even revealed their identity to people who knew them personally.[32]

Thus, the relation of female spectators to actresses and to comedy in general is hard to define. The lack of direct sources makes it impossible to have access to a female point of view on Restoration theatre, and the debate on the immorality of the stage must have complicated the relation of female spectators to the stage.

The presence of women in the theatre was still new in the seventeenth century. In France, even though actresses were well established, having female spectators was still a novelty, as women – and in particular upper-class women – only started going to the theatre after its moralisation in the 1630s. It was the opposite in England, where female spectators were well-established – even though sources on them are scarce – but actresses only appeared from 1661 onwards. Both sources on actresses and female spectators are mostly from men's points of view, which shows their domination in literary circles and in the theatre. Yet there was one notable difference between France and England: in France, in the second half of the seventeenth century, women started dabbling more and more in literary criticism, mainly due to the popularisation of the "salons" in which upper-class ladies invited *le beau monde* to discuss the latest writings and plays. This contributed to the acknowledgement of women as a significant part of the audience and led playwrights to take their tastes into account.[33] It was not the same in England, where, as Florence March writes in the quote above, "le public masculin [est] le seul dont on cherche vraiment à flatter le goût, tout au moins pendant la

[31] Laura J. Rosenthal, '"Counterfeit Scrubbado": Women Actors in the Restoration' *The Eighteenth Century*. 34.1 (1993): 11.
[32] Although it has to be mentioned that in MM, Mrs. Loveit knows that Dorimant was with "a mask" at the theatre, but does not identify her to be Bellinda, even though they know one another quite well.
[33] Lochert, 'Gender et réception : pour une étude des spectatrices de théâtre aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles'.

première partie de la période."[34] Even though the status of female spectators and actresses was still precarious compared to men's, this does not mean that female characters are simply objects of appreciation for both the audience and male characters and that seventeenth-century comedy is entirely male-centered. The question of the freedom of female characters is essential: what are women allowed to do on stage? Are they allowed to disrupt the social order and to desire freely or is the play-world as constricting as seventeenth-century France and England?

B. The Freedom of Women on Stage

The notion of "freedom" is vast and takes on a particular meaning in the case of theatre. Freedom is defined as "The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants." – meaning positive freedom, freedom *to* (do, think, be, etc.) – as well as "The state of not being imprisoned or enslaved." – meaning negative freedom, freedom *from* (enslavement, duties, conventions, etc.) by the Oxford English dictionary.[35] In the case of theatre, the only clues we have as to whether characters have the power to do as they wish and are not enslaved – not necessarily physically, but also by social conventions – are actions and speech. What do female characters do and say that demonstrates their freedom? We will tackle two aspects of this question: that of the disruption of the social order (the freedom from social conventions), and that of the freedom to desire.

1. Disrupting or Not Disrupting the Social Order

In comedy, young gentlewomen, helped by their maids, generally oppose the will of the figures of authority in charge of them to marry the men they love. Can this be considered as a disruption of the social order of the play-world – which, in the case of Molière and Etherege, is very similar to the social order of the societies they and their audience lived in – or not? Disrupting the social order would mean that these female characters behave in a way that is not appropriate for their status as servants or daughters and as women, thus emancipating themselves from the social codes of the world they live in. It is tempting to consider that characters such as Lady Cockwood or Mrs. Loveit challenge the social norms by expressing desires that they are too old and immoral to foster, but it is not the case. These characters try to conform to social norms; and it is their ability to do so that makes them

[34] March, *La comédie anglaise après Shakespeare: une esthétique de la théâtralité : 1660-1710* 121.
[35] 'Freedom' *Oxford English Dictionary*. (Oxford University Press, 2019), online, Internet, 25 Mar. 2019. Available: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/freedom.

ridiculous. As such, one cannot consider that Lady Cockwood and Mrs. Loveit rebel against an unjust social order. They try to conform to it but their inadequate behaviour marks them as outsiders and they are ridiculed and punished for it. Ridiculous characters such as Lady Cockwood and Mrs. Loveit reinforce the social order by leading the other characters and the audience to mock their deviance and stand on the side of the norm.

The type of character in Molière which is commonly believed to disrupt the social order is that of the servant. Molière's maids mock their masters, as does Nicole in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* when she cannot stop laughing at her master's outfit (III,2), they trick them, as does Toinette when she pretends to be a doctor in *Le Malade imaginaire* (III,10) and contradict them, as does Dorine in II,2. Their growing mastery of language, which they often use against their masters, also contributes to the feeling that maids are overthrowing the social order. Not only are maids quick-witted, often leaving their masters at a loss for words, but they sometimes go as far as to deny them the right to talk, as does Toinette in the second scene of *Le Malade imaginaire*: Toinette pretends that she hit her head while coming into the room and keeps interrupting Argan with fake shouts of pain to keep him from berating her for her tardiness. Argan is eventually forced to let it go and changes the subject, which consecrates Toinette's victory over him.

With all these examples of impertinent maids taking power over their masters and suffering no consequences, one could think that maids in Molière's plays overthrow the established social order, but it is not the case. Even though maids go beyond what is expected of them and what they are normally allowed to do, they do it with one goal in mind: helping their masters, in particular the young lovers. Contrary to valets, who are generally motivated by greed or the pleasure of intrigue and who are naturally deceitful, Molière's maids are only motivated by their loyalty to their masters and their slyness is a means to an end rather than their nature, as Candiard explains.[36] Toinette's reply to Angélique in I,8 of *Le Malade imaginaire* illustrates the relationship that maids have with their masters:

> TOINETTE.— Moi? vous abandonner, j'aimerais mieux mourir. Votre belle-mère a beau me faire sa confidente, et me vouloir jeter dans ses intérêts, je n'ai jamais pu avoir d'inclination pour elle, et j'ai toujours été de votre parti. Laissez-moi faire, j'emploierai toute chose pour vous servir; mais pour vous servir avec plus d'effet, je veux changer de batterie, couvrir le zèle que j'ai pour vous, et feindre d'entrer dans les sentiments de votre père, et de votre belle-mère.[37]

[36] Candiard, *Esclaves et valets vedettes* 411.
[37] Molière, *Le Malade imaginaire*. I,8.

Toinette's claim that she would rather die than abandon Angélique is extreme and shows her dedication to her mistress. She also announces her intention to trick Argan and Bélise, but takes the precaution of warning both Angélique and the audience that it is just a trick and that her allegiance still lies with her mistress. This underlines the essential feature of Molière's maids: for maids to be allowed to play tricks on their masters, the audience needs to be assured of their loyalty. As such, maids to not disrupt the social order – on the contrary, they help keep it in place by assuring that ridiculous characters do not rise above their station, as Nicole does with M. Jourdain in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, and that the young lovers prevail.

The same goes for the young gentlewomen in Molière's plays. Even though some, like Mariane and Angélique in *Le Malade imaginaire* rebel against their fathers' decisions to marry them to men they do not love, their rebellion is entirely justified in the play-world. They do bypass the authority of their fathers, but the latter cannot be considered as worthy authority figures, as their motives for marrying their daughters are ridiculous: Orgon is blind to Tartuffe's scheming and wants to marry him to his daughter to officially welcome him into his family, while Argan wants to marry Angélique to Thomas Diafoirus, who is a doctor, so that he can treat the numerous illnesses Argan is convinced he is suffering from. Both fathers want to marry their daughters for misguided reasons, whether it is gullibility or personal gain. As such, Mariane and Angélique, just like their maids, fight for the restoration of the order in which young gentlewomen are married to suitable suitors and ridiculous characters are chastised.

In Etherege's plays, the character most likely to disrupt the social order is Harriet in MM, who is generally regarded as the most refined of Etherege's witty heroines. One could think that Harriet's inclination towards Dorimant and decision to let him court her go against the authority of her parents, and thus her duty as a daughter to obey her parents. Yet it is not the case. Harriet's father is utterly absent from the play, he is not mentioned once, not even when Harriet paints the picture of her family home in the country where she lives with her mother and "an old lame aunt".[38] She describes her family as "so small", which could be interpreted as meaning that her father is not there anymore and that she lives alone with her female relatives. Harriet's lack of male relatives is significant. In the seventeenth century, a woman was under the care and authority of one of her male relatives – traditionally her father, but if he was not there to act as guardian, her brother or uncle, and, once married, her husband.

[38] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 95. V,1.

This lack of male authority means that Harriet only has to convince her mother to let her do as she pleases. Even then, Harriet does not go against her mother's wishes, even though she could, as mothers had little legal power over their children. Harriet does trick her into believing that Dorimant is Mr. Courtage to endear him to her, but in the end, Harriet chooses not to go against her mother's wishes:

> *L. Wood*. […] Come away— You shall never see him more—
> *Har*. Dear Mother stay—
> *L. Wood*. I wo'not be consenting to your Ruine—
> *Har*. Were my fortune in your power—
> *L. Wood*. Your person is.
> *Har*. Could I be disobedient I might take it out of
> Yours and put it into his.
> *L. Wood*. 'Tis that you would be at, you
> Would Marry this Dorimant.
> *Har*. I cannot deny it! I would, and never will
> Marry any other man.
> *L. Wood*. Is this the Duty that you promis'd?
> *Har*. But I will never Marry him against your will—
> *L. Wood*. *Aside*. She knows the way to melt my heart.
> *To Har.* Upon your self light your undoing. [39]

Harriet's tone here is completely different from the tone she uses in the rest of the play. She does not use witty repartees and sarcastic comments, instead showing her love and respect for her mother with expressions such as "dear mother" and the repeated use of the conditional with "were", "could" and "would". Harriet only uses the indicative when she says "I never will marry any other man" and "I will never marry him against your will". Harriet puts her love for Dorimant and her respect for her mother's authority over her on the same level. Only her mother conceding can extricate them from the deadlock they are at. The expression "melt my heart" hints at the commonly accepted view of women being creatures of sensitivity rather than sense, which is the case here, as Lady Woodvil agrees to what she thinks will be her daughter's "undoing" because she cannot resist her pleading. One could imagine that such a scene would have been strange had it been between Harriet and her father, as the traditional portrayal of male characters makes them less likely to be driven by their feelings. Thus, even though Harriet is free of any real parental authority, she does not

[39] Ibid., 93. V,1.

overturn the traditional order of children obeying their parents. This corresponds to the definition of a Truewit that we have given in II,A: Harriet knows what she wants and how to obtain it, but she is aware enough of the social norms and her duties as a daughter and makes the choice to respect both conventions and her own feelings.

The only form of disruption present in Harriet's character is her choice not to immediately marry Dorimant at the end of the play, which is a disruption of the traditional ending of comedies. A marriage is possible, but in no way certain, as Dorimant needs to prove that he has changed for Harriet to fully accept him. Even though it is used in several Restoration comedies, this ending remains idiosyncratic, as comedies traditionally end in a marriage, or at least in the promise of one. Mis offers an equally unusual ending, with Alceste leaving the company of men and Célimène being outed as a liar. Even the last line of the play, despite the glimmer of hope it offers, does not bring the play back into comic territory.

Another type of disruption, this time not in the play-world, but in seventeenth-century England, is that of the discrepancy between the social class of the actresses and that of the characters they play. According to Rosenthal, detractors of the theatre such as Collier feared that having lower-class women play upper-class character would lead to a disruption of the social order, as members of the audience would not only desire them physically, but confuse them for marriable women and desire to wed them, which would lead to permeation between social classes and thus to social disorder.[40]

Despite what one may have thought, maids and young gentlewomen in Molière's and Etherege's plays are not disruptive elements. On the contrary, they uphold the established order of the play-worlds they are a part of, which, for the most part, corresponds to that of seventeenth-century France and England. This order is both social, as they refuse to rise above their station or to fall below it and to let the witless and ridiculous triumph, and moral, as they respect their duties as daughters and gentlewomen. As such, maids and young gentlewomen cannot be considered to challenge the social order apparent in the plays. Their freedom must come from somewhere else.

2. Two Opposing Conceptions of Desire

Etherege's representation of desire suffers from a double-standard: men are pictured as libertines, they discuss love and carnal relationships crudely, have several mistresses – a fact around which the turns and twists of the plot often revolve –, whereas women are either depicted as virtuous young ladies or as old coquettes who are mocked for their sexual desires.

[40] Rosenthal, '"Counterfeit Scrubbado": Women Actors in the Restoration'.

Despite the licentious reputation of early Restoration comedy, female sexual desires are almost completely censored in Etherege's plays: they are either concealed, not even mentioned, or openly mocked as unnatural and preposterous. The title *She Would if She Could* is telling: Lady Cockwood desires Courtall, but cannot have him, and is mocked for it. Gatty and Ariana's stance is the opposite: they pretend that they do not desire Courtall and Freeman and thus are worthy of their courting and are offered marriage at the end. As in all Restoration comedies, noble female desire in Etherege's plays is hidden desire.

The discrepancy between the representation of male sexuality and of female sexuality is particularly striking when we compare the characters of Lady Cockwood and Sir Oliver. Despite the fact that he cheats on her, Lady Cockwood's husband Sir Oliver is defined by his lack of wit and blindness rather than by his unfaithfulness. Sir Oliver is a boor, who does not realise that Courtall and Freeman are using him to get first to Lady Cockwood, then to Ariana and Gatty. His extra-marital activities are not a source of comedy as such, it is their consequences that are ridiculed: Sir Oliver is forced to grovel at his lady's feet to try and repent and has no scruple lying – with the help of the other male characters – to appease her:

> *Sir Oliv.* Hark you in your Ear, Frank, this is
> My habit of humiliation, which I always put on
> The next day after I have transgressed, the better
> To make my pacification with my incens'd Lady—
> *Free.* Ha, ha, ha—[41]

And

> *Sir Oliv.* Or may I never have the happiness to be
> In her good grace agen; and as for the Harlots,
> Dear Madam, here is Ned Courtall and Frank Freeman,
> That have often seen me in company of the
> Wicked; let 'em speak, if they ever knew me tempted
> To a disloyal action in their lives.
> *Court.* On my conscience, Madam, I may more
> Safely swear, that Sir Oliver has been constant to
> Your Ladiship, then that a Girl of twelve years old
> Has her Maiden-head this warm and ripening Age.[42]

[41] Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd* 47. III,3.
[42] Ibid., 52. III,3.

The duo formed by Lady Cockwood and Sir Oliver is utterly ridiculous. The words "make my pacification" and "her good grace" show that Sir Oliver submits himself to his wife's judgement, without realising that she holds nothing on him as she as well has been trying to cheat on him. Sir Oliver is mocked – as shown by Freeman's laughter – because his attempts at repentance are ridiculous and should not even happen, as his wife is as bad as he is. Sir Oliver is a source of comedy because of his inability to see his wife's true nature. His unfaithfulness and tendency to drink too much add to the farcical quality of his character, that is to say, a comic quality that relies on buffoonery and bawdy humour rather than wit and *bons mots*: with the exception of his social status, he is close to the type of the Harlequin. In contrast, Lady Cockwood is defined by her unnatural desire to seduce men despite her age and status as a married woman. The relationships she longs for are of the same nature as those that her husband regularly has, but she is ridiculed for it throughout the play whereas her husband is seen as a merry fool, and his behaviour is barely commented on.

The word "Harlots" is also significant. The definite article and the capital letter hint at the fact that "the Harlots" is a category of characters, just like "the Ladies" or "the Women". These women are directly associated with desire and actual sex, unlike Lady Cockwood who never manages to do the deed. Yet they are never represented, only talked about by male characters – the fact that they are not represented may be explained by morality issues, as well as by the mirror quality of Restauration comedy, which centres on the upper-class and represents fewer and fewer common people. They represent an entirely masculine view of desire: they have no existence outside of male speech and male desire and have only one function, which is to fulfil these desires. In the case of the "Harlots", we cannot talk about female desire, even though they are defined by their sexual activity, as desire is only seen from a masculine point of view.

Contrariwise, Molière's depiction of desire is not based on a double-standard. The rule of *bienséance* forbids Molière from representing libertines as Etherege does – Molière's libertines, the most famous being Dom Juan, are severely punished at the end of the play and are generally counterbalanced by characters who question their way of life, like Sganarelle for Dom Juan. Other than in the case of these characters – and in rare comic scenes like the ribbon scene in EF mentioned earlier –, sexuality is seldom referred to. Yet desire is an essential part of Molière's plays. Love and pleasure are what Molière's characters, both male and female, are interested in:

DORIMÈNE

[…] J'aime le jeu, les visites, les assemblées, les cadeaux et les promenades ; en un mot toutes les choses de plaisir.[43]

And in matters of love, Molière's women have every right, which may be linked to the resilient idea developed in the Middle-Ages that women and love go together. Molière's female characters fight against the old morals that are embodied by the figure of the old bourgeois, like Harpagon, Arnolphe or Orgon, who tries to control women and their desires. Molière's plays encourage the liberation of these young, genteel women who want nothing more but to live a pleasurable life, thus following the frame of mind of the seventeenth-century upper-class, which Bénichou calls "le libéralisme élégant des honnêtes gens."[44] Liberalism here encompasses social life rather than economy and refers to the mentality of pleasure that infused the early years of Louis XIV's reign, in particular in his court. Bénichou describes Molière's female characters as follows:

> Les femmes sympathiques sont presque toujours chez lui en rébellion contre quelque autorité odieuse, bafouée au dénouement. Tout dans ses comédies respire le triomphe de la jeunesse et du plaisir sur la respectabilité et les convenances familiales.[45]

This notion of "sympathetic women" refers to the characters with which the audience empathises, or even identifies. These characters are not seen as ridiculous even when they challenge authority, as the form of authority they are confronted to is perverted, as we saw above, which corresponds to Bénichou's mention of "autorité odieuse". On the contrary, Molière's "femmes sympathiques" are represented positively. Women such as Célimène or Angélique in *George Dandin* are not criticised or ridiculed for their multiple love affairs and desire for pleasure. In Angélique's case, it is her husband who is mocked throughout the play. Her discontent is made even more understandable by the fact that her husband is a rich farmer and thus belongs to a lower social class. She justifies her unfaithfulness and lack of consideration for her husband by insisting on her youth and reminding both her husband and the audience that she was married by force because her parents needed money:

> ANGÉLIQUE. Oh ! Les Dandins s'y accoutumeront s'ils veulent. Car pour moi, je vous déclare que mon dessein n'est pas de renoncer au monde, et de m'enterrer toute vive dans un mari. Comment, parce qu'un homme s'avise de nous épouser, il faut d'abord que toutes choses soient finies pour nous,

[43] Molière, *Le Mariage forcé*, (Paris: Ribou, 1664). I,2.
[44] Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* 262.
[45] Ibid., 260.

et que nous rompions tout commerce avec les vivants ? C'est une chose merveilleuse que cette tyrannie de Messieurs les maris, et je les trouve bons de vouloir qu'on soit morte à tous les divertissements, et qu'on ne vive que pour eux. Je me moque de cela, et ne veux point mourir si jeune.
GEORGE DANDIN. C'est ainsi que vous satisfaites aux engagements de la foi que vous m'avez donnée publiquement ?
ANGÉLIQUE. Moi ? Je ne vous l'ai point donnée de bon coeur, et vous me l'avez arrachée. M'avez-vous avant le mariage demandé mon consentement, et si je voulais bien de vous ? Vous n'avez consulté pour cela, que mon père, et ma mère, ce sont eux proprement qui vous ont épousé, et c'est pourquoi vous ferez bien de vous plaindre toujours à eux des torts que l'on pourra vous faire. Pour moi, qui ne vous ai point dit de vous marier avec moi, et que vous avez prise sans consulter mes sentiments, je prétends n'être point obligée à me soumettre en esclave à vos volontés, et je veux jouir, s'il vous plaît, de quelque nombre de beaux jours que m'offre la jeunesse ; prendre les douces libertés, que l'âge me permet, voir un peu le beau monde, et goûter le plaisir de m'ouïr dire des douceurs. Préparez-vous-y, pour votre punition, et rendez grâces au Ciel de ce que je ne suis pas capable de quelque chose de pis.[46]

Angélique develops an extended metaphor of the lack of social life imposed by marriage as death: the words "m'enterrer", "finies", "les vivants", "morte" and "mourir" create a vivid image of how Angélique sees her marriage. Similarly, the use of words such as "arrachée" when referring to her hand in marriage, the expression "sans consulter mes sentiments" and "me soumettre en esclave à vos volontés" paint Dandin as an authoritarian husband who imposed his person on Angélique and does not respect her will and desires. This description of her husband leads the audience to empathise with Angélique and to understand her plight and why she acts as she does. Angélique also underlines her youth several times ("beaux jours que m'offre la jeunesse", "douces libertés que l'âge me permet", "mourir si jeune"), which is essential in Molière's view of women: a woman's youth should be dedicated to pleasure. The argument of youth can be found in several of Molière's comedies, the most famous one probably being Célimène's answer to Alceste's proposition to go and live as recluses with him:

CÉLIMÈNE
Moi, renoncer au monde, avant que de vieillir !
Et dans votre désert aller m'ensevelir ![47]

This line can either be played as surprised outrage, or as despair at the idea, as was the case in Clément Hervieu-Léger's 2017 production of Mis for La Comédie Française. In any case,

[46] Molière, *George Dandin*, (Paris: Ribou, 1668). II,2.
[47] Molière, *Le Misanthrope*. V,4. v.1769-70.

both Célimène and Angélique justify their behaviour by insisting on their youth and natural desire to enjoy what the world has to offer before aging. Bénichou argues that Molière's plays stage the opposition between the female instinct towards love and pleasure and the old conventions that either refuse love and pleasure or intellectualise them.[48] This interpretation is confirmed by Molière's depiction of his audience in *La Critique de L'École des femmes:*

> DORANTE – […] Laissons-nous aller de bonne foi aux choses qui nous prennent par les entrailles, et ne cherchons point des raisonnements pour nous empêcher d'avoir du plaisir.[49]

Dorante is one of the three characters who defend EF, along with Uranie and Élise. Dorante argues that what matters is the visceral pleasure felt by the audience rather than any moral or literary considerations. Spectators are encouraged to feel rather than think, to experience visceral pleasure rather than to gauge entertainment with critical distance. Molière's emphasis on pleasure does not only concern the theatre but englobes all aspects of life, as shown by his representation of young women like Célimène and Angélique. They are not traditionally positive characters as they are not pure like Agnès, but their advocacy for pleasure makes them sympathetic characters nonetheless. Célimène's shameless expression of desire and will in act II scene 3, in which she demands that Alceste stay by repeating "Je le veux." three times in quick succession, may best represent the lack of bashfulness of Molière's heroines.

Thus, despite his plays being less explicit than Etherege's, Molière encourages the liberation of the female desire. Young women are allowed to desire pleasure and love, even when it goes against what would be considered as moral. Molière's conception of female desire is very modern, whereas Etherege's remains more conventional. But it must be noted that Molière's liberation of women does not go beyond desire: the female instinct leans towards pleasure; men have no control over this instinct and must bow down before it, but by no means can women rival men in intellectual matters, as they are seen as creatures of the heart and not of the mind, as Bénichou explains.[50] On the contrary, Etherege's young gentlewomen are defined by their wit and knowledge, which rival those of the rake, sometimes even surpassing them. As McDonald argues:

[48] Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* 251.
[49] Molière, *La Critique de L'École des femmes*.
[50] Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* 265.

> The witty fair one who becomes the focus of the Restoration comedy is no longer a humour character satirized for her pretensions to learning. She is instead a clever and dynamic young woman who clearly dominates her social world.[51] P48

We have already proved that Etherege's heroines are intelligent, learned women who dominate their social world (II,A,2) and we believe this to be the greatest difference between Molière's and Etherege's representations of women: where Molière represents women unapologetically free to desire and encourages the world to adapt to their nature as creatures of pleasure but denounces women who try to rise above their station and behave like intellectuals, as is the case in *Les Femmes savantes*, Etherege arms his heroines with enough wit and modesty to survive in a world saturated with male desire and come out on top.

Even though female characters do not hesitate to verbally challenge other characters on stage, sometimes even characters who hold a certain authority over them, as is the case with Harriet when she fools her mother and Old Bellair (see I, C,4) and with Angélique when she talks to her husband, as we saw above, it does not mean that women disrupt the social order of the play-world. On the contrary, they try to uphold it. Maids in particular do not represent rebellion against a social order considered as wrong, but rebellion against a warped authority in order to set things right. It is relevant that female characters are given the task of righting unfair situations, as they represent rationality and thus are supported by the audience, but it is not a mark of freedom. Female characters' freedom is expressed differently in Molière's and Etherege's plays. In Molière's comedies, young female characters are free to desire as they wish, as it is in their nature to do so, which gives them freedom from constricting and old-fashioned social conventions. Yet this emphasis on nature also means that they are not allowed to go against it and to aspire to things which are not in their female nature, such as intellectualism, which is reserved for men. The ideology that shines through Etherege's plays is the complete opposite. His young female characters are not allowed to openly express their desires and must keep a sense of modesty but shine by their intelligence and understanding of social codes and human nature. It is this intelligence that enables them to navigate the dangerous play-world they are a part of and to solve one of the main issues of Restoration drama: how to combine desire and marriage. The answer given by Etherege is that women have to be as intelligent and witty as men to elicit a desire in men that trumps

[51] McDonald, *The Independent Woman in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* 48.

all others. As such, Etherege and Molière develop different visions of what a positive female character is, and thus represent different views of femininity.

C. The Emergence of a Female Perspective on Stage

Both in Etherege's and in Molière plays, female characters are given freedom, even if not in the same way. This is a first step towards a feminisation of the stage. The term "feminisation" is used to refer to the development of a female perspective on stage, first with women bearing an important part of discourse, like the author's perspective. A next step would be for plays to represent female concerns and female answers to problems. We will analyse which characters' perspectives are dominant in Etherege's and Molière's plays. Then we will see whether some female characters hold a significant part of discourse. Finally, we will broaden our horizons to see whether later Restoration and French plays do represent female concerns.

1. The Question of the Perspective in the Plays

The notion of "point of view", meaning the position from which the story is considered, through whose eyes it is seen, cannot easily be applied to theatre. Plays are composed of a multitude of points of view, represented by all the different characters. The terms "point of view" can also be understood as an opinion, a judgement, even an ideology. The fact that some of these opinions are ridiculed or presented positively helps us detangle the web of discourse that is a comedy as well as identify the dominant ideology of a play, but it does not enable us to figure out which character's perspective stands at the centre of the play. All plays do not have a dominant point of view in the sense of a character acting almost as a narrator would in a novel. Yet it is possible to talk about perspective in theatre when we take into consideration some elements in particular: who appears on stage first, leaves last, is alone on stage – or accompanied by a confidant – to reveal his or her inner thoughts, who uses asides to communicate with the audience, and even who is talked about by the other characters when he or she is not on stage. All this could be represented by the idea of a convergence towards a character in particular, as well as the feeling that the play revolves around him or her.

In SWC, at the beginning of act II, Courtall and Freeman enter Mulberry Garden and have a lengthy conversation about their plot to escape the company of Sir Joslin, Sir Oliver and Lady Cockwood and their desire to meet Ariana and Gatty. As they are talking, Ariana and

Gatty, who are wearing vizards, "pass nimbly over the stage".[52] A chase ensues, in which the men follow the women off stage, both pairs successively coming back on stage just long enough to comment on the chase. At the end of the scene, Ariana and Gatty are left alone on stage to comment on the encounter. Even though the men initiate the scene by discussing and then chasing the women, it does not mean that Gatty and Ariana are passive. They banter ruthlessly with Courtall and Freeman, as we saw earlier, and stand alone on stage at the end, thus showing that their presence and discourse do not depend upon men's, that they can occupy the stage on their own and speak without being prompted by male characters. This scene is remarkably balanced: men and women have more or less the same number of lines (28 for Courtall and Freeman, 22 for Ariana and Gatty) and both pairs of characters are given time alone on stage to reveal to the audience what they think of the meeting. Thus, we can consider that the scene starts from the men's perspective, as neither them nor the audience knows the identity of the masked women they decide to follow. At the end, the perspective shifts to the women's, thus informing the audience of their inner thoughts but leaving them in the dark as to the men's perspective.

On the other hand, Molière's comedies operate in a different way. The relationship between young gentlemen and gentlewomen is very rarely the playwright's sole focus. As mentioned in I,C,1, romantic scenes in Molière's plays are often multidimensional: the lovers exchange declarations while another character comments on the scene, giving it a comic dimension. But the romantic scenes are not the only ones that work on this model, as we can see in EF and FSca. In EF, almost all the scenes contain this double dimension, mostly thanks to the character of Arnolphe. Arnolphe is present in thirty scenes out of thirty-two and has the monopoly of monologues and asides: out of the ten asides indicated by the stage directions, Arnolphe delivers nine of them. He also stays on stage after several key dialogues to comment on them and express his old-fashioned opinions or his despair, to the hilarity of the audience:

> ARNOLPHE
> […]
> *(Tous étant rentrés.)*
> Héroïnes du temps, Mesdames les savantes,
> Pousseuses de tendresse et de beaux sentimens,
> Je défie à la fois tous vos vers, vos romans,

[52] Etherege, *She wou'd if she cou'd* 16. II,1.

> Vos lettres, billets doux, toute votre science,
> De valoir cette honnête et pudique ignorance.[53]

This type of conservative comment on women contributes to making Arnolphe a ridiculous, boorish character who understands nothing of contemporary modes. Molière's play relies entirely on the dichotomy between genteel, well-adjusted characters and Arnolphe's old-fashioned bourgeois views. It is the fact that the play is seen in part through Arnolphe's perspective and with his running commentary that makes it a comedy. Thus, Molière gives only a limited place to Agnès' female perspective. Agnès only expresses her desires in act II, scene V, when she relates her meeting with Horace and her subsequent conversation with La Vieille. She is never alone on stage and uses neither asides, nor monologues. Yet this lack of female perspective is not a result of Molière's refusal to give a more important place to female characters so much as a consequence of the structure of the play: as the main character and comic element, Arnolphe's presence is overwhelming, leaving no place for the other characters' perspective. Horace is in the same situation as Agnès, he is never alone on stage, never monologues, never uses asides. Even though they are the main couple of the play, Agnès and Horace do not stand at the forefront, as it is a place reserved for Arnolphe.

Even though it is the most recurrent one, this model is not the only one that can be found in Molière's plays. Once more, Mis appears as a particular case: both Alceste and Célimène stand at the heart of the story, they both get private conversations to express their desires and vision of the situation, as well as scenes in which they are the main focus of the other characters and the audience both, for example act I scene II between Oronte and Alceste and act II scene IV in which Célimène is the centre of all attentions. According to Anne Übersfeld:

> Le sujet Alceste et le sujet Célimène alternent dans la succession du récit dramatique. Le spectateur lit et/ou construit deux récits (ou, si l'on veut, deux fables) en concurrence, l'une qui est l'histoire d'Alceste, l'autre qui est l'histoire de Célimène.[54]

This is made obvious by the structure of the play. Alceste is first on stage, but the action takes place in Célimène's lodgings, giving the audience a glimpse into her private life. The first act is centred around Alceste's misanthropy and his feud with Orgon, with Célimène being completely absent from it, but the second act focuses on Célimène's social relations

[53] Molière, *L'École des femmes (1662) ; suivie de La critique de l'École des femmes (1663)*, (Paris, France: Hatier, 2011). I,3. v244-248.
[54] Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire le théâtre* (Paris, France: Éditions sociales, 1977) 71.

and entertainment, and even though Alceste is present, he is mostly silent and his conversation with Célimène is cut short by the arrival of guests. The third act may be the most representative of the balance between the two characters' perspectives, in particular in scenes 4 and 5 in which first Célimène, then Alceste have a conversation with Arsinoé. Both scenes enable the audience to glimpse into the interiority of the two main characters. Act 4 and 5 are similar to acts 1 and 2, with first Alceste and his judicial problems being the focus of the plot, and then the revelation in act 5 of Célimène's hypocrisy. Thus, Übersfeld's claim that the audience follows two plots at once is justified. But this alternating model remains an exception in Molière's production.

Therefore, Etherege's plays seem better balanced than Molière's, as the female characters are given time alone on stage and are active participants in the dialogues that take place. Yet there is one element that gives weight to the male perspective in Etherege's plays: all three of them begin inside the main male protagonist's private apartments. In CR, the audience witnesses Sir Frederick's awakening off-stage then his arrival in his night-gown, the scene taking place right outside his bed-chamber. The opening scene of MM is similar, with Dorimant coming on stage "in his Gown and Slippers".[55] Finally, in SWC, the opening scene is set in a dining-room, but the fact that Courtall is being brushed by a servant, which is generally done before the master leaves his lodgings, encourages the audience to think that it is his own dining-room. All three plays start with an incursion into the privacy of the main male character. It builds intimacy between him and the audience, as the latter has access to both his public and private personas. On the contrary, women are almost exclusively shown in public places, as it is where the men meet them, and they will not have access to the women's intimacy until they are married. This lack of female presence in private places can be explained by a sense of *bienséance* which may have kept the playwright from representing feminine intimacy, as it is supposed to be reserved for the husband. On the other hand, Courtall's, Sir Frederick's and Dorimant's intimacies are far more acceptable, as they are men, and as such are less burdened by questions of purity and virginity, as well as libertines, a fact that this breach into their intimacy illustrates perfectly. The fact that these scenes of intimacy take place at the beginning of the plays also leads the audience to immediately accept the rake as the main character of the play. This is further enhanced by the fact that both the audience and the rake first meet the heroine of the play through a portrait given by another character. Both the audience and the rake are in the position of imagining what she

[55] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 1.

looks like, which strengthens the identification between them, thus establishing the rake's perspective as the main one in the play. Even though perspectives balance out as the play carries on, this first impression is bound to leave a mark on the audience, who may then have the feeling that the main character is the rake and that the plot is the story of his conquest of the heroine rather than the story of the heroine's seduction of the rake.

Thus, even though Etherege seems to give more glimpses into his female characters' interiority and to balance male and female perspectives better, there are still some elements that tip the scales in favour of the male character's perspective establishing itself as the main one in the minds of the audience.

2. Female Characters Holding a Significant Part of Discourse

Yet this slight dominance of the male characters' perspectives on stage does not mean that female characters do not hold a significant part of discourse. The term "significant" here refers to the kind of discourse that expresses the ideology that the playwright wants to convey in his play, or rather, as it is arduous to know what the playwrights really wanted to say, what the play establishes as being relevant and even true in the play-world.

Among Molière's plays, it is EF that provides us with an example of a female character who expresses the playwright's point of view. As we saw in the first part, Agnès does not speak much in EF. She is defined by her innocence, which, at first sight, might prevent her from holding any kind of significant discourse, as she has never been confronted to the world and thus cannot comment on it. Yet it is this innocence that enables her to express Molière's point of view. According to Émelina, innocent characters in comedies are "faux innocents", "non pas parce qu'ils jouent aux sots par rouerie, (ce qui peut aussi arriver), mais parce que l'auteur parle à travers eux."[56] Their ingenuity creates a subtle comic game that consists in underlining the oddity of the discourse of the other characters by confronting it to their innocent view of life. This is reminiscent of Socratic irony, which consists in pretending to be ignorant in order to reveal the flaws in the reasoning of one's interlocutor. Agnès' innocence subtly exposes the perversity of Arnolphe's discourse and character to the audience, enhancing his ridiculousness – which is already signified by the actor's tone of voice and body language – and underlining the fact that his thoughts and discourse are morally wrong. Despite her relative absence, Agnès serves as a moral compass. Whether stage directors choose to represent her as ingenuous or as a sly character who pretends to be naive, it is her discourse that sets the moral basis of the play, which deems Arnolphe an

[56] Emelina, *Le comique: essai d'interprétation générale* 40.

immoral character. As such, Émelina's claim that Molière speaks through Agnès appears to be justified, or at least, we can ascertain that the character of Agnès does represent the morals defended by the play.

In MM, the character of Lady Townley is an on-stage representation of the audience and might also express Etherege's point of view. Scholars generally consider Medley to to be a representation of the playwright, as he stands on the outskirts of the plot and observes rather than intervenes. He launches the plot by describing Harriet to Dorimant, but then stands on the side and observes how the plot unfolds. His main feature is his ability to narrate, which is mentioned several times by the other characters:

> *Page*. Madam, Mr. Medley has sent to know
> Whether a Visit will not be Troublesome
> This Afternoon?
> *Town*. Send him word his visits never are so.
> *Emilia*. He's a very pleasant man.
> *Town*. He's a very necessary man among us Women;
> He's not scandalous i'the least, perpetually
> Contriving to bring good Company together,
> And always ready to stop up a gap at Ombre,
> Then he knows all the little news o'the Town.
> *Emilia*. I love to hear him talk o' the Intrigues,
> Let 'em be never so dull in themselves, he'l
> Make 'em pleasant i'the relation.
> *Town*. But he improves things so much one can take no
> Measure of the Truth from him.
> Mr. Dorimant swears a Flea or a Maggot, is
> Not made more monstrous by a magnifying
> Glass, than a story is by his telling it.[57]

Medley is described as the one who brings stories of the Town to Lady Townley and her guests. This narrator-like quality links him to the playwright, who also tells stories about what is happening in his play-world's Town. The insistence on Medley's exaggerations could be a way for Etherege to sidestep the accusations of immorality that started to appear at the time: the plays he produces are exaggerated to entertain the audience and in no way represent the actual Restoration world.

[57] Etherege, *The man of mode, or, Sr. Fopling flutter* 19–20. II,1.

The fact that Lady Townley is the main audience of Medley's tales already hints at the fact that she represents the audience. Other elements justify this interpretation of her character: like Medley, she takes on the role of an observer who is entertained by the events unfolding around her, which, for the most part, take place in her lodgings. She says it herself:

> *L. Town*. Indeed my House is the general rendevouze,
> And next to the Play-house is the Common
> Refuge of all the Young idle people.[58]

The mention of the play-house is not innocuous. Her house is compared to the theatre where young people go for entertainment. In this instance, the young people are the entertainment, which Lady Townley watches with detached interest. This comparison between her lodgings and the theatre could also be interpreted as meaning that she runs the theatre and thus controls the performances, bringing her closer to a representation of Etherege himself. This interpretation is reinforced by her intervention at the end of the play: by bringing in Parson Smirk, she enables Young Bellair and Emilia to marry and thus releases Harriet from her engagement to Young Bellair, which brings the play to its happy ending. Lady Townley is also firmly on the side of entertainment rather than censorship, as shown by her answer to Old Bellair questioning Dorimant's presence in her *salon*:

> *O. Bell*. Out a pize, what does this man of mode do here agen?
> *L. Town*. He'll be an excellent entertainment within Brother,
> And is luckily come to raise the mirth of the Company.[59]

As well as her answer when Emilia asks her why she invited Sir Fopling Flutter:

> *Emil*. Company is a very good thing, Madam, but I
> Wonder you do not love it a little more Chosen.
> *L. Town*. 'Tis good to have an universal taste, we
> Should love Wit, but for Variety, be able to divert
> Our selves with the Extravagancies of those who want it.[60]

Lady Townley's explanations show how important entertainment is for her. Her justification of her appreciation of Witwouds mirrors the attitude expected of a Restoration audience: to laugh both with Truewits and at Witwouds. The word "company" could also be understood

[58] Ibid., 40. III,2.
[59] Ibid., 95. V,1.
[60] Ibid., 40. III,2.

in the theatrical term, meaning a group of actors that work together, which would link her discourse even more with theatrical representation. As such, Lady Townley is a character that represents Etherege's vision of comedy, as well as a form of spectatorship that links her to the audience. This role of observer and holder of discourse on the theatre is the same that Philinte holds in Mis. When he is not tempering Alceste's hatred of the world, he stands back and observes. Alceste calls him "Monsieur le rieur"[61], which hints at Philinte's main feature: he laughs at the expense of the other characters, just as the audience does.

Thus, both Molière and Etherege represent female characters that express the points of view of the playwrights, which marks the progressive equality that is established between male and female characters: female characters are not simply the object of male desire anymore but can carry a significant part of discourse. This idea is reinforced by the fact that at the end of Mis and MM, Célimène and Harriet impose their vision of life and love on their suitors: as mentioned in II,A,3, Célimène suffers a temporary setback but ultimately evades remarrying, thus keeping the freedom that her status as a widow grants her, while Harriet imposes her will on Dorimant and refuses to become his mistress and to marry him until he has proven himself. By letting female perspectives dominate male ones, Molière and Etherege encourage the audience to accept these perspectives and to consider female characters and their discourse as significant, at least in the play-world.

3. Strong Female Characters and Female Playwrights

Thus, the plays of the corpus do feature developed female characters that impose their perspectives on the plays and hold a significant part of discourse. But Molière and, in particular, Etherege were both writing at a time when women were just starting to establish themselves in the theatre, and we can wonder which roles women come to play in the theatre and whether this representation of women as more prominent characters that starts to appear in Molière's and Etherege's plays is developed further in later Restoration and seventeenth-century plays.

Etherege's successors continued to represent developed female characters. Congreve's *The Way of the World*, written at the end of the Restoration period, in 1700, features a prime example of a strong female character in the person of Millamant. In act IV scene 1, Millamant discusses the terms of their engagement with her love interest Mirabell. This scene, generally called the "Proviso scene", features the two lovers drafting a marriage contract in which each one names his or her conditions:

[61] Molière, *Le Misanthrope*. I,2. v.414.

> *Mir*. Have you any more Conditions to offer? Hitherto your demands are pretty reasonable.
> *Mill*. Trifles,—As liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please, to write and receive Letters, without Interrogatories or wry Faces on your part. To wear what I please; and choose Conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation upon me to converse with Wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance; or to be intimate with Fools, because they may be your Relations. Come to Dinner when I please, dine in my dressing room when I'm out of humour without giving a reason. To have my Closet Inviolate; to be sole Empress of my Tea-table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly, where ever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in.[62]

Millamant insists on her "liberty" to do as she pleases: she uses the expression "as/what/when I please" three times and mentions her "own taste." This emphasis on her own pleasure highlights the idea that marriage does not have to be the end of her life as a young woman. She refuses to renounce pleasure and entertainment and finds a way to include them in her life as a married woman. Millamant also emphasises her need for privacy by demanding that Mirabell ask no questions about her private visits and letters and that he knock before entering the room she is in. The kind of marriage Millamant is asking for is one in which each spouse is free to do as he or she pleases, with no need to justify himself or herself to the other. She refuses to lose her freedom to marriage and proposes a solution that enables them to continue living as they do while being married. This conception of marriage corresponds to the "companionate marriage"[63], as Singh calls it, in which husband and wife are friends and partners rather than a hindrance to one another's freedom. Millamant and Mirabell's marriage may very well be a functioning marriage in which there is no frustration and resentment – which is a rarity in Restoration comedy – thanks to the freedom both characters, in particular Millamant, demand for themselves.

Molière's female characters also gain more importance in his later plays, in particular his maids. This is due in part to the entry in his company of an actress, La Beauval, for whom the roles of Zerbinette, Nicole and Toinette were written. Candiard explain that La Beauval's laugh had become famous, which prompted Molière to write the scenes in which Zerbinette and Nicole laugh to tears in FSca and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.[64] But the role that changed the theatrical conventions associated with the maid is that of Toinette in *Le Malade imaginaire*. Toinette shares the spotlight with Argan, who was played by Molière himself.

[62] Congreve, *The Way of the World* 57–58. IV,1.
[63] Singh, *The Double Standard in Shakespeare and Related Essays, Changing Status of Women in 16th and 17th Century England* 177.
[64] Candiard, *Esclaves et valets vedettes* 407.

This play gives unprecedented importance to the maid, who is given the role of *meneuse de jeu*, which was previously reserved for her male counterpart. Candiard explains Molière's decision as follows:

> Le choix fait par Molière de partager la vedette de la pièce avec la Beauval répond à des raisons complexes, parmi lesquelles sa propre diminution physique et la nécessité de renouveler la convention du valet fourbe, mais aussi les qualités d'exception de sa comédienne.[65]

Even though La Beauval's talent was not the only element that motivated Molière's decision to make Toinette into a main character, it still played a role in renewing the stock character of the maid. The development of the character of the maid is best illustrated by the comparison between act I scene 4 of FSca and act I scene 5 of *Le Malade imaginaire*. The dialogues between Scapin and Argante and between Toinette and Argan are eerily similar:

> SCAPIN.— Il ne le fera pas, vous dis-je.
> ARGANTE.— Il le fera, ou je le déshériterai.
> SCAPIN.— Vous?
> ARGANTE.— Moi.
> SCAPIN.— Bon.
> ARGANTE.— Comment, bon?
> SCAPIN.— Vous ne le déshériterez point.
> ARGANTE.— Je ne le déshériterai point?
> SCAPIN.— Non.
> ARGANTE.— Non?
> SCAPIN.— Non.
> […]
> SCAPIN.— La tendresse paternelle fera son office.
> ARGANTE.— Elle ne fera rien.
> SCAPIN.— Oui, oui.
> ARGANTE.— Je vous dis que cela sera.
> SCAPIN.— Bagatelles.
> ARGANTE.— Il ne faut point dire bagatelles.
> SCAPIN.— Mon Dieu, je vous connais, vous êtes bon naturellement.
> ARGANTE.— Je ne suis point bon, et je suis méchant quand je veux. Finissons ce discours qui m'échauffe la bile. Va-t'en, pendard, va-t'en me chercher mon fripon, tandis que j'irai rejoindre le seigneur Géronte, pour lui conter ma disgrâce.

As compared to:

[65] Ibid., 408.

TOINETTE.— Elle ne le fera pas, vous dis-je.

ARGAN.— Elle le fera, ou je la mettrai dans un couvent.

TOINETTE.— Vous?

ARGAN.— Moi.

TOINETTE.— Bon.

ARGAN.— Comment, «bon»?

TOINETTE.— Vous ne la mettrez point dans un couvent.

ARGAN.— Je ne la mettrai point dans un couvent?

TOINETTE.— Non.

ARGAN.— Non?

TOINETTE.— Non.

[…]

TOINETTE.— La tendresse paternelle vous prendra.

ARGAN.— Elle ne me prendra point.

TOINETTE.— Une petite larme, ou deux, des bras jetés au cou, un «mon petit papa mignon», prononcé tendrement, sera assez pour vous toucher.

ARGAN.— Tout cela ne fera rien.

TOINETTE.— Oui, oui.

ARGAN.— Je vous dis que je n'en démordrai point.

TOINETTE.— Bagatelles.

ARGAN.— Il ne faut point dire «bagatelles».

TOINETTE.— Mon Dieu je vous connais, vous êtes bon naturellement.

ARGAN, *avec emportement*.— Je ne suis point bon, et je suis méchant quand je veux.

TOINETTE.— Doucement, Monsieur, vous ne songez pas que vous êtes malade.

ARGAN.— Je lui commande absolument de se préparer à prendre le mari que je dis.

TOINETTE.— Et moi, je lui défends absolument d'en faire rien.

ARGAN.— Où est-ce donc que nous sommes? et quelle audace est-ce là à une coquine de servante de parler de la sorte devant son maître?

TOINETTE.— Quand un maître ne songe pas à ce qu'il fait, une servante bien sensée est en droit de le redresser.

ARGAN court après Toinette.— Ah! insolente, il faut que je t'assomme.

The two dialogues are almost the exact same, with the exception of Toinette's description of how Angélique would convince her father to keep her out of the convent, which is absent in FSca, and the ending: in FSca, the dialogue ends because Argante is done talking to Scapin, who has no other choice but to bend to his will. Her depiction of how Angélique could sway her father hints at her understanding of the relationship between father and daughter and may be linked to her status as Angélique's confident. As her confident, she is aware of Angélique's thoughts and feelings. This understanding of feelings may also be linked to her

status as a woman, as women were generally considered to be on the side of feelings rather than thoughts. In *Le Malade imaginaire*, Toinette goes further than Scapin and directly challenges Argan's authority. She openly criticises his behaviour, leaving Argan at a loss for words and with no other recourse than violence. Toinette's victory over Argan is undisputable, while the dialogue between Scapin and Argante ends in a draw. We have already analysed the reason why maids are allowed far more insolence than valets in III,B,1. These differences between the two dialogues highlight the new features of the character of the maid: she is able to perform the scenes of manipulation that used to be the valet's prerogative and takes them further by playing on her master's feelings and downright contradicting him when she disagrees with his decisions.

Thus, the evolution of the character type of the maid was shaped by the appearance of such a gifted actress. The audience's appreciation for La Beauval led Molière to give more and more lines to the characters she played, thus giving more importance to his female characters and broadening the roles of certain character types, which left a lasting impact on French comedy, as shown by the many plays that exploited this new side of the character, such as *Crispin musicien* by Hauteroche, written in 1674, which features a character very similar to Toinette called Toinon and interpreted by La Beauval.[66]

In the case of Restoration comedy, even though there were actresses as famous as La Beauval was in France, such as Elizabeth Barry for example, who was the first to interpret Mrs. Loveit, or Nell Gwyn who, along with her lover Charles Hart, prompted the invention of the gay couple, a central feature of Restoration comedy,[67] the one woman who had the most influence on the period is not an actress but a playwright: Aphra Behn, who wrote no less than eighteen plays from 1670 to 1689 – two of which were posthumously performed. Aphra Behn was one of the first female playwrights and the first British woman to make a living of her writings.[68] She also wrote several novels and participated in the development of the genre in Britain. Several of her plays deal with the consequences of arranged marriages on young women, for example *The Luckey Chance*, in which two young heiresses, Lady Julia and Leticia, are forced to marry older men, Sir Cautious and Sir Feeble. Her plays also represent developed characters who are whores, such as Angellica in *The Rover*. Yet Behn also exploited the conventions of the time to create plays that would please her audience,

[66] Ibid., 409.
[67] Holland, *The Ornament of Action* 84.
[68] Isabelle Le Pape, 'Aphra Behn: espionne et femme de lettres' *Le Blog Gallica*., 9 Jan. 2019, online, Internet, 1 Apr. 2019.

representing several scenes in which the actresses' bodies were showcased, such as "bosom as letterbox" scenes, scenes in bedchambers, breeches parts and even rape scenes, such as the one in *The Rover*. This shows that even though she was a woman, Aphra Behn was aware that she was writing essentially for a male audience and that her plays had to appeal to them, which prompted her to conform to a certain extent to the standards of the time and thus made her plays less oriented towards a female audience. This is underlined by the prologue of *The Luckey Chance,* which was spoken by a man, Mr. Jevon, and which is addressed to a male audience, as demonstrated by the mention of mistresses:

> Since with Old Plays you have so long been cloy'd,
> As with a Mistress many Years enjoy'd:[69]

The "you" refers to the audience, as shown by the context of enunciation and the mention of them having seen "Old Plays", and the mention of a "Mistress" indicates that the prologue is directed towards the male audience. However, one can still consider that the appearance of female playwrights, spearheaded by Aphra Behn, who was followed by Susanna Centlivre, to mention only the most famous, played a huge role in developing female perspectives on stage, as well as making female presence in the theatre less silent by offering a concrete trace of their presence unmediated by male interpretation. Behn's contribution to the status of women in the theatre, as well as in society at large, does not so much come from what she represented on stage rather than from the very fact that she wrote and represented plays, had success and provided an example of a woman succeeding in a field that, at the time, was considered as a male world.

Thus, both Etherege and Molière represent female characters – and young gentlewomen in particular – which are given a certain freedom, in one case the freedom to be learned and to dominate their world intellectually and verbally, and in the other the freedom to desire and seek pleasure. Some female characters also hold a significant part of discourse as they express the point of view that is defended by the play. Some of Molière's and Etherege's plays even represent female perspectives that compete with male ones. However, it is complicated to talk about a "feminisation" of the stage in the case of Etherege, who wrote at the beginning of the Restoration period, when the status of women in the theatre had not yet evolved much and the representation of feminine issues and women's points of view was

[69] Aphra Behn, *The Luckey Chance, or, An Alderman's Bargain*, (London: W. Canning, 1687).

still limited. There is a clear evolution from the representation of women in the preceding century, with plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which the moral seems to be that in order to be happy, a woman has to live under a man's power. The second half of the Restoration period provided us with more and more independent heroines and women that play an essential role in the theatrical production of their time, whether it was as actresses or as playwrights. In Molière's case, it depends mostly on the nature of the play. On one hand, farces represent very few women, as they centre in general – as is the case in FSca – on the relationship between master and servant, leaving limited room for romantic plots and thus women, as they are indissociable from love. On the other hand, his *grandes comedies* give great importance to female characters, who are sometimes given as much time on stage as their male counterparts, as is the case in Mis. Yet there is an evolution at the end of his career, with the character of the maid which gains more and more importance, going as far as to supplant the valet. As such, his later farces, in particular *Le Malade imaginaire*, represent maids rather than valets, which contributed to the progressive feminisation of the French stage.

Conclusion

Although the comparative aspect of this study is limited, as the plays were envisioned through the prism of female characters and comparison was only one of the three goals of this study, along with the analysis of the representation of female characters and its evolution in the plays of the corpus and in the following years, we can still conclude that, in the restricted case of our corpus and frame of analysis, there is no evidence as to one playwright having influenced the other. Etherege and Molière use the same stock characters and traditional scenes inherited from Greek and Roman comedy, as well as from the Commedia dell'Arte, but they do not use them in the same way. Although some parallels can be drawn, both playwrights have their own vision of traditional scenes, such as the dialogues between the maids and their mistresses, which, if they start as functional scenes that simply aim to reveal the feelings of the young gentlewoman, quickly become more developed and specific to each playwright, with the emergence of the figure of the cunning maid in Molière's comedies and the affirmation of the young gentlewoman as a Truewit who is recalcitrant about admitting her feelings in Etherege's. With the exception of the young gentlewoman, similar characters do not appear as much and do not play the same role in the two playwrights' comedies, as is the case with the character type of the old coquette, which is the main opponent and figure of ridicule in Etherege's plays and which is only represented in one of Molière's plays, Mis, with only a minor role. Comedy in the plays is not created in the same way, with different character types making a significant contribution to the comic aspect of the plays. In Etherege's plays, young gentlewomen and old coquettes spark the most humour in two different ways, one witty and the other unwitty, while in Molière's plays, female characters are generally less comic, with the notable exception of maids, who are the main comic characters of many of Molière's plays and whose comic aspect relies on their rationality and impudence. The notion of wit is also absent from Molière's plays, whereas it is regularly mentioned by Etherege's characters and is used as the main measurement of a character's positivity. It can be argued that the treatment of Etherege's Witwouds and Molière's ridiculous characters is similar, as they all represent the discrepancy between nature and appearance, between aspirations and reality. Even the main theme of each playwright's production is different: where Molière's comedies promote the freedom of the youth against the outdated vision of life of the old, Etherege's question the viability of social order and social links – in particular marriage – in the face of human

desires. As such, the similarities between the plays are more likely to come from common influences than from plagiarism, contrary to what earlier scholars argued.

Yet there are two plays which share a good number of common features: MM and Mis. Both of them feature competing subjects in the person of the young gentlewomen, Harriet and Célimène, and their male counterparts, Dorimant and Alceste. Célimène is the one character of Molière's that is closest to being a Truewit as she possesses a keen intelligence, is quick-witted, knows how to navigate her social environment and can distance herself from the situations she is a part of. Célimène and Harriet both dominate their social environments and are proactive heroines who decide for themselves and eventually reach their goal. It is interesting to notice that the most similarities are found between what is considered by many scholars to be Etherege's most accomplished play, the one that represents the logical evolution to his first two plays and which is most representative of what Restoration comedy of manners is, and one of Molière's most singular plays that does not feature any of the comic devices that dominate his other plays, such as cunning servants and farcical scenes. Rigaud describes the resemblance between MM and Mis as follows:

> L'une et l'autre comédie se déroulent dans l'air raréfié et tamisé des salons, entre gens du monde faisant montre d'esprit, s'adonnant pour le plaisir, sans souci de mettre une action sur pied, à la conversation brillante – non sans une certaine affectation rarement excessive.
>
> L'une comme l'autre est épurée de tout hors-d'œuvre spectaculaire : on ne se bat pas en duel, on ne complique pas l'intrigue pas des déguisements ; point non plus de scènes de tavernes où laisser libre cours aux instincts non policés, ni de domestique à forte personnalité pour faire un numéro particulier. Partout règne une urbanité de bon ton, même si elle voile des opinions incisives.[1]

This description underlines the main common feature between MM and Mis: the gentility of the characters and the atmosphere. For the first time, both Etherege and Molière only represent high-born characters on the stage – with the exception of servants who play minor roles and add to the realism of the scenes, as gentlemen and gentlewoman employed personnel – and set their scenes in private salons and places frequented by the upper-class. These two plays are the purest manifestations of the comedy of manners and of *la comédie de moeurs* in the playwrights' productions, which explains in part the similarities between the two plays.

These two plays also feature female characters who are the most developed and heavily contribute to the feminisation of the stage. Yet it does not mean that the other plays of the

[1] Nadia J. Rigaud, 'George Etherege : dramaturge de la Restauration anglaise' (Paris: Paris IV, 1976) 346.

corpus feature no significant female characters. As their careers progress, both playwrights represent more and more female characters, who take on different roles. The relevance of Célimène as a strong-willed woman has already been mentioned, but the character type of the young gentlewoman is not the only one who grows in importance in Molière's later plays. Maids, as was shown with the character of Toinette, become central comic characters in his later farces, *meneuses de jeu* on equal footing with their ridiculous masters after whom the plays are named. As such, female characters in Molière's plays not only take on a more significant ideological role, but also come to play a central role in the structure of the comedies. Yet the one character type that embodies the progressive liberation of women on stage is that of the young gentlewoman. In this also Molière and Etherege differ: young female characters in Molière's plays inhabit the realm of pleasure and desire, where they are free to do as they please, while Etherege's young female characters are able to choose the future they want and impose their will on others thanks to their keen intelligence. Yet this notion of freedom has to be nuanced. In the case of Molière, there is no certainty as to whether the female characters' freedom to desire encompasses sexual desire, as it is rarely mentioned in his plays and when it does appear, it is connoted negatively, as only old satyrs such as Arnolphe mention sexuality and such mentions are used to make the audience laugh at the character uttering them. In Etherege's case, even though his heroines choose their own husbands and establish the conditions of their union, they go neither against their parents' wishes, as shown with Harriet, nor against social conventions by marrying out of their social class. Furthermore, female freedom in the plays of both playwrights is always envisioned through the prism of male/female relationships and marriage. As such, female freedom is only envisioned through a patriarchal perspective. This may be explained by the strong anchoring of both of Molière's and Etherege's plays in their contemporary societies, as well as by their intended audiences – that is to say, in both cases, the upper-class. The representation of women offered by these plays is closely linked to the upper-classes' vision of women. Their rights and possible courses of action are thus almost as limited on stage as in French and English seventeenth-century societies. As such, even though Molière's and Etherege's comedies represent an evolution in terms of female perspective and freedom, there remains a long way to go.

The evolution already present in the comedies of the corpus continues in the second half of the Restoration period and in Molière's later productions, with the appearance of famous actresses and female playwrights, as well as the representation of characters like Millamant that follow in Harriet's footsteps. A similar analysis as the one done here concerning

eighteenth-century comedies would enable us to see whether this evolution continues steadily, or whether the establishment of women in the theatre suffers a setback. This would also enable us to analyse whether the Restoration period really is a distinct period that has barely any links to what precedes and what follows it, as many scholars argue. Finally, although the comparison between Molière's and Etherege's plays did not bring to light a parentage between the two playwrights, it enabled us to point out the idiosyncrasies of each playwright, which may not have been possible without the comparison to help us identify them. A broader comparative study, this time not restricted to female characters, may be a beneficial contribution to scholarly work on both playwrights.

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