

THE RISE OF THE COQUETTE IN SEVENTEENTH- AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
FRENCH THEATER

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ABSTRACT

Andrew Jordan Gard: *The Rise of the Coquette in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century French Theater*
(Under the direction of Ellen R. Welch)

My dissertation examines the portrayal of the coquettish character type on the Parisian stage from the 1660s to the early eighteenth century. Having originated in Italian theatrical traditions, the coquette figure became an emblem of French femininity in Ancien Régime comedy where she represented the emerging image of the flirtatious, frivolous, acquisitive, and vain Parisian woman. Although representations of the coquette were not always flattering, I demonstrate that they in fact reflected the limits put on intelligent women in early modern French society. These characters use coquettish behavior to compensate for their lack of power in a patriarchal social system and a burgeoning mercantile economy. My study examines thirteen comedies across four chapters, each devoted to a sub-category of the coquette type, including courtiers, aging mother/widows, materialists, and young “coquettes in training.” As the first scholarly work devoted to the figure of the coquette on the early modern French stage, my dissertation aims to unpack the construction of this ambivalent stereotype in the context of theater history, gender studies, and the history of French culture.

To my family:
Pucky, Buhmmy, LD, FF, Hamod, and Metok.

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INTRODUCTION

ELVIRE

Hé, la ruse en amour ne passe point pour crime,
Ce sont vieilles erreurs et soucis superflus.
Tant d'estime ne sert que quand on ne plaît plus,
Quand on n'a plus d'appas pour paraître agréable,
Il est bon de tâcher à se rendre estimable,
Il faut charmer l'esprit ne pouvant faire mieux:
Mais quand un jeune amant se rend à de beaux yeux,
Il borne à ce qu'il voit son estime et sa flamme,
Et ne s'avise pas d'aller jusques à l'âme;
Le secret est de plaire, et l'on voit en effet
Que chacun croit toujours ce qu'il aime parfait:
Plaisons donc dans le temps d'une belle jeunesse,
Et laissons sans regret l'estime à la vieillesse.
Se pique qui voudra de grande probité,
Pour moi je ne veux point de cette qualité
Et comme par le temps elle m'est destinée,
J'attends pour l'obtenir ma cinquantième année.

LÉONOR

Voilà d'une coquette à peu près la leçon.

ELVIRE

Certes je ne sais pas si je la suis ou non;
Mais je m'aime beaucoup et j'aime fort à plaire,
J'aime assez le grand bruit et je hais le mystère,
Je fais moins pour autrui, que je ne fais pour moi,
Et la joie est en tout et ma règle et ma loi.
Si c'est ce qu'on appelle à présent des coquettes,
Il est vrai, je la suis.

--Marie-Catherine Desjardins, *Le Favori*

In Desjardins's tragicomedy *Le Favori*, the character of Elvire reluctantly accepts the title of coquette conferred on her by her best friend, Léonor. Elvire only admits to coquetry on conditional terms, the antecedent to which undermines both the authority and stability of the definition of the label "coquette" ("*Si c'est ce qu'on appelle à présent des coquettes*"). Elvire's

artfully evasive language in declaring herself a coquette is a very appropriate introduction to this most elusive character type of seventeenth-century French comedy, the coquette.

My dissertation explores the construction of the coquette figure on the Parisian stage from the 1660s to 1715, or roughly during the personal reign of Louis XIV. Originating in the Italian *commedia dell'arte* tradition, the coquette became an emblem of French femininity in Ancien Régime comedy where she represented the emerging image of the flirtatious, frivolous, acquisitive, and vain Parisian woman. Although representations of the coquette were not always flattering, I demonstrate that they in fact reflected the limits put on intelligent women in early modern French society, and that these characters use coquettish behavior to compensate for their lack of power in a patriarchal social system. As the first scholarly work devoted to the figure of the coquette on the early modern French stage, my dissertation aims to unpack the construction of this ambivalent stereotype in the context of theater history, gender studies, and the history of French culture.

According to lexicographers and the evidence provided by historical dictionaries, the term coquette emerged in French (and English) discourses in the seventeenth century.¹ The earliest documented appearance of “coquette” occurs in Randle Cotgrave’s 1611 edition of *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*: “a prattling, or proud gossip; a fiscing, or fliperous minx; a cocket, or tatling housewife; a titifill, a flibergebit.” As King and Schlick have remarked, Cotgrave’s definition “is more concerned with verbal display than the overt sexuality now associated with the figure” (17). By the end of the century, typical definitions of the coquette in French focused on amorous (but non-erotic) contexts. For example, in the *Dictionnaire universel* (1690), Antoine Furetière describes this figure as such: “Dame qui tâche

¹ As Natasha Sajé remarks, the etymology of the word comes from “cock/coq” though the origins of the word are somewhat disputed and difficult to trace (162).

de gagner l'amour des hommes... Les coquettes tâchent d'engager les hommes, & ne veulent point s'engager." In other words, she desires affection from men but merely teases them by refusing any commitment. The masculine form of the word, "coquet," is witnessed quite some time later in 1643 in poetry by Paul Scarron "à propos d'un homme qui cherche à plaire, à séduire."² Although the word existed, representations of men designated as coquets are much rarer than coquettes in the literature of this century, and the few who do appear generally earn their epithet strictly through unfaithful behavior.³ Thus, for the greater part of the seventeenth century coquettishness persisted in the cultural imagination as a feminine trait.⁴

Within the theatrical context, the definition of "coquette" becomes somewhat more difficult to assess by nature of its artistic nuancing. Playwrights of this period repeatedly depicted the character type on stage and developed a spectrum of coquettish behaviors. For example, Furetière's aforementioned definition that emphasizes non-commitment does indeed epitomize the theatrical coquette yet even so it is not universal: Some coquettes do believe in a faithful marital commitment, and either they cannot achieve it (due to their advanced age) or they

² *Le Robert: Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*.

³ For a graph of the term's written usage, see *Dictionnaire vivant*: <http://dvlf.uchicago.edu/mot/coquet>. The coquet seldom appears in the plays that I discuss, and his trickery and immorality are rarely the focus of dramatic plots in comparison to that of his female counterpart, including when he is featured in the title, as is the case for Baron's *Le Rendez-vous des Tuileries* ou *Le Coquet trompé*. Most often, authors reduce the coquet to a character type who prides himself on courting several women simultaneously and who enjoys causing trouble with no ostensible motive. In this sense, he lacks the depth of the coquette figure, perhaps in part because he inherently belongs to the dominant sex and authors feel no need to explain why he turns to coquettish strategies to fulfill his desires.

⁴ In contrast to coquettish characters, perhaps the century's most famous literary example of an "inconstant" character was Hylas, the carefree male shepherd from Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* (1610-1627). As Maxime Gaume notes, in the novel Hylas represents man's weak carnal desire that renders him a slave to his passion and separates him from the neo-Platonic ideal to love happily (12). Hylas represents a basic but important forerunner to all inconstant characters, and in particular to the coquette due to his cheerful demeanor, his slyness, and his desire to be admired that closely resemble her feminine form of coquettishness: "Il...privilégie l'esprit, la bonne mine et la plaisanterie" (Gheeraert 119). Furthermore, much like the theatrical coquettes that are to follow him, Hylas philosophizes about inconstancy in a way that aims to justify his rebellious stance. However, his dubious reasoning always fails to make him a convincing hero for readers, especially in comparison to the novel's more salient model, the faithful lover Céladon.

believe that coquettish teasing can indirectly help them reach their goal. Furthermore, by the late seventeenth century the figure of the flirtatious woman had become so culturally significant that a host of near-synonyms for “coquette” had emerged, including *femme galante*, *femme d'intrigues*, and *petite-maîtresse*. For the sake of ease and because “coquette” is the most frequently used label for designating this genre of figure (both within the bodies and titles of plays in the period of examination), I have adopted it as an umbrella-term for all theatrical characters that represent excessively vain and flirtatious women. Therefore, coquettishness on stage may manifest itself in slightly different ways but a persistent desire for attention remains the character type’s most fundamental element.

Like many characters in comic theater of the seventeenth century, coquette figures often appeared as exaggerated stereotypes. Yet they also reflected discourses and attitudes about women in French early modern society. The coquettish character type often appears on stage in satirical depictions of the Parisian social scene, designed to jeer at contemporary customs. Coquettes were current figures that ridiculed a new social type in elite Parisian and courtly society: women preoccupied with the latest fashions, leisure activities, and social climbing. Coquettes on stage embodied vices such as vanity, ambition, and superficiality and therefore, according to the moral logic of much seventeenth-century comedy, could serve as a corrective “mirror” for spectators (male and female) who suffered from these flaws.⁵

⁵ I owe this understanding of comedy’s reflective capacity to Larry Norman and his book *The Public Mirror* in which he develops this theory with regard to Molière’s oeuvre: “By calling his comedies “public mirrors,” Molière conceives of comic representation as a site of audience self-recognition. But the self-recognitions generated by his theater are necessarily volatile: spectators want a satire of their contemporaries, yet recoil from a satire of themselves...Comedy is provocative portrayal. Its moral charge arises not from a flat univocal censure, but from a dynamic process of viewer identification with characters on stage. Instead of producing a static moral denunciation, Molière’s satire creates an animated surface, which like the mirror, is metamorphosed by each new viewer. The play is an image in action, one that is formed by exchange and conflict with its audience, and one that provokes a second comedy in the audience viewing it” (1-2).

Although coquettish characters were usually targets for satire, I argue that playwrights also used this figure as a means of commenting on the changing behaviors of contemporary women. By dramatizing stories of coquettes reacting to particular social scenarios, authors reflected on women's roles as possessors of social influence and wealth, or as wives, mothers, widows, and daughters.

Playwrights most often staged the coquette as a subjugated female character who faces some form of social obstacle and uses coquettish behavior in order to rebel against it. For instance, coquette characters face patriarchal constraints much like Molière's theatrical daughter figures who are dominated by their overbearing fathers, but in contrast to Molière's ingénues these characters actively turn to ruses of their own devising to rid themselves of unwanted suitors or use men as pawns for acquiring a more advantageous position.⁶ By allowing the coquette figure to succeed in her theatrical plots and by depicting her as a light-hearted being capable of strategic reasoning, playwrights do not let her questionable behavior preclude her from becoming a heroine of substance within her play nor (on a larger scale) a culturally significant figure for demonstrating a certain form of female autonomy in the seventeenth century.

In this sense, I argue that dramatists contextualized and explored coquettish behavior in ways that demonstrated how more often than not it is a rational response to the restrictions of a woman's social condition. To support my reading I use Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* as a primary theoretical framework for the way it discusses the "tactical" reappropriation of space by "consumers," or individuals working against the "strategically" laid

⁶ Respective examples of each situation include La Marquise in *Le Rendez-vous des Tuileries* frightening off the incompatible fiancé that her family chose for her by demonstrating cruelty toward the man she truly loves, and Angélique in *La Parisienne* simultaneously courting two young suitors in the hopes that one of their proposals can prevent her impending marriage to an undesirable old man.

out environment of established institutions, the “producers” of a given society.⁷ Under such an interpretation, the coquette figure’s craftiness and manipulation of men can be read as a “consumer’s” attempts to infringe on the socio-political power structure of Paris, itself a “producer” that expects her to conform to established feminine behaviors such as fidelity and passivity. In other words, I argue that a coquette’s inconstancy, frivolity, ambition, or greed constitutes a deliberate and logical performance for navigating her confining environment.

The choice to focus on drama in this dissertation highlights the inherently theatrical nature of the coquette since she is a meta-theatrical figure, hyper-aware of her own “performances” in society.⁸ The role of the coquette demands highly performative qualities within the structure of the play in order for the character to succeed (or simply survive), which prompts reflection on the performativity of women’s roles in the increasingly appearance-based society of the Ancien Régime. I believe this includes coquettes’ reliance on external symbols (such as charming gestures and the latest fashions) to open paths of opportunity through men’s desires, as well as their highly vocal attitudes on infidelity that may in turn find importance on stage as part of an author’s social commentary. In other words, characters make explicit allusions to the deliberateness of their coquettish behavior so that their apparent frivolity and immorality emerge as unmistakably logical and effective social strategies for women. By stage-managing her own heightened visibility, playwrights can demonstrate how the coquette may strategically manipulate others’ desires in her plays and at the same time endear her to real-life spectators.⁹

⁷ Though they are clearly opposing terms in de Certeau’s philosophy of contrasting individual and social forces, I use “strategy” and “tactics” interchangeably throughout my dissertation for the sake of ease of exposition.

⁸ It is noteworthy that all performances (both on- and off-stage) are at heart unfaithful in their inability to be reproduced and in their inherent artifice. For more on theories of performance, see Cashman, Phelan, and Schneider.

⁹ For example, in *La Femme d'intrigues* Mme Thibaut manipulates the hearts of all those around her and still emerges as a likeable heroine.

The manipulative mutability of the coquette makes this figure unique among comic character types. In his analysis of the differences between theatrical and novelistic character representations, Richard Goodkin points out that character types in the theater of this era were generally fixed by way of contrast to other characters “through a system of differences,” while characters in narrative fiction are “essentialist” and defined through “the relation of outside to inside” (“Theatrical” 211) and thus on a more individualized and discrete basis. Yet the coquettish character Phylis in Corneille’s *La Place Royale* (1634) troubles this distinction. Phylis maintains a transparent character to the audience but also demonstrates a rather complex set of coquettish behaviors as she revels “in the utter permeability of affairs of the heart” (213) by frivolously engaging (and jettisoning) multiple suitors. The unfaithful actions of this proto-coquette toward her lovers reflects her mutability and thus the non-absolute nature of her being: By engaging in an “endless process of selection” (214) in love, Phylis and other fickle coquettes resist letting their personas become too typified or fixed in favor of displaying a broader inventory of traits that gives them an all-important flexibility. In consideration of the variable forms of coquetry to be discussed in my dissertation, this uniquely theatrical interpretation of character inconstancy supports my effort to categorize and elucidate the figure of the coquette. In other words, it is essential to understand that playwrights accorded this figure a certain proclivity for deviating from its fundamental character type as an attention seeker, thereby allowing it to possess a seemingly inherent adaptability and an exceptionally high degree of verisimilitude.

The corpus examined herein comprises thirteen plays published between 1665 and 1715 with nine unique authors between them, including canonical favorites Molière, Desjardins, and Quinault, as well as dramatists of the post-*moliéresque* era (Baron, Dancourt, and Dufresny) who would more likely be studied by scholars of the *fin-de-siècle* period due to their limited modern

publication and diminished reputation in comparison to the *grandes comédies* that preceded them. I shall examine plays from the chosen period that feature at least one coquettish character in a prominent role, with the exception of those under a much stronger Italian influence near the end of the century.¹⁰ The plays are significant in my view because they emphasize both the prevalence and strong characters of coquettes and appear to challenge their frivolity and inconstancy as being natural and involuntary. My selection exemplifies this era that treated theatrical coquettes variously as heroines (e.g. *La Coquette et la fausse prude*); as anti-heroines (e.g. *Le Misanthrope*); or as antagonistic comic targets (primarily the aging coquettes). In most of the works, the coquettish character is so identified by the language of the play itself, either specifically by “coquette” or a loosely-related derivative (as discussed earlier).¹¹

¹⁰ Certain coquette plays were more explicitly influenced by the Italian theatrical tradition, *la commedia dell'arte*, and although the *commedia*'s impression can be seen in French comedy throughout much of the seventeenth century (Molière's oeuvre being the most prominent example), it became increasingly prevalent near the end. The French figure of the coquette closely resembles one of the staple Italian character types who often appeared under the name of Colombina, a cunning trickster who uses artifice to gain power for herself and other oppressed women. This connection therefore warrants analysis in a future project that more closely examines the coquette's Italian roots.

Another prominent character that I have excluded from my study is the aforementioned Phylis from Pierre Corneille's *La Place Royale ou l'Amoureux extravagant* (1634). Because she predates the appearance of the first labelled coquette on the French stage by approximately thirty years, I propose that she better represents an important “bridge” between the primordial inconstant type (such as Honoré d'Urfé's Hylas in *L'Astrée*) and the coquette of late seventeenth-century theater. Phylis espouses the typical rhetoric of inconstancy (“La constance est un bien qu'on ne voit en pas un,” 2.4, p. 66) but unlike her predecessors she finds happiness doing so. As a rather basic inconstant type, Phylis only begins to approach the coquette figure's socio-political engagement and she does so through her decidedly feminine voice. As Jean Serroy notes: “S'appuyant sur un discours féminin qui considère que vouloir jurer fidélité à un seul homme, 'au lieu d'un serviteur c'est accepter un maître' (I, 1, v. 50), elle développe la propre option qu'elle a choisie d'aimer un chacun' par une sagesse qui apparaît, au contraire, forte d'une réflexion empreinte de gravité” (20). Accordingly, Serroy finds that Phylis has actively chosen to be an unfaithful person in reaction to the uncertain realities of her social environment (21), much like the coquettes examined in this project. However, at no point in the play do audience members actually witness Phylis facing patriarchal obstacles since she fears nothing and accepts life as it comes, including her parents' choice of a future husband. With this excessively conciliatory attitude, Phylis does not embody a rebellious coquette figure, nor does she emerge as a verisimilar character based on a real-life social type. Instead, she represents an intersection between blind inconstancy and premeditated infidelity, allegorical figure and social type, masculinity and femininity, and pastoralism and urbanity.

¹¹ In the unique instance of *La Parisienne*, none of these words arise and yet the character is nonetheless clearly recognizable as a coquette given that Angélique is clever, versatile, and comfortable with keeping multiple suitors, even going so far as to earn praise for her Parisian (and by association, coquettish) savoir-faire.

I have organized my dissertation chapters according to sub-categories of coquettes that may appear across works by several authors and in different time periods. The coquettes of the first chapter are isolated based on spatial and class restrictions in that they alone occupy a royal court or its adjacent areas by virtue of their privileged status as noble courtiers. The second chapter focuses on the combined traits of advancing age, motherhood, and widowhood among coquettes who struggle with the loss of their physical charms and compensate accordingly by wielding their matriarchal power and wealth. My third chapter examines quite the opposite: These are younger coquettes who lack the necessary funds to secure their liberty or happiness, leading them to use their beauty and wit to deceive others and arrive at their desired ends. The coquetry of the fourth chapter shares a heightened sense of artificiality as the women seem to have acquired their inconstancy in reaction to a lover's prior unfaithfulness or through unwanted indoctrination. Certain coquette figures may show some overlap with another sub-category but I seek primarily to highlight the most prominent facet of each character.

My approach to the theatrical coquette is rooted in the tradition of character types in European comedy. In early modern comic theater, most comic roles (such as *le fourbe* or *l'ingénue*) are easily identifiable by virtue of their appearance and actions, rendering their function in the play easily understood at first glance. These types tend to be one-dimensional and static characters who repeat themselves across space and time as well as within varied dramatic situations, albeit similar ones, as if the role were merely a costume that an actor could don in order to become that character in any context.¹² As Goodkin has insightfully discussed, unlike novelistic characters whose individual essences and psyches are explored on a philosophical platform, theatrical characters predominantly work within a system of “differences” wherein they

¹² Indeed, Furetière's 1690 edition of the *Dictionnaire universel* defines “type” as such: “Copie d'un modèle; caractère gravé, ou imprimé.”

are defined by contrast to others; they are judged solely from the outside and because they make all of their revelations on stage (“Theatrical” 210-211). *La commedia dell’arte* has perhaps the most well-known reputation for including character types in its theater and was very influential on French comedy during the seventeenth-century.¹³ The Italians had found success in Paris nearly a century earlier, in the 1560s, after which French dramatists began to imitate their styles (Lebègue 166).¹⁴ Molière in particular was an integral figure in appropriating many of the *commedia*’s features for his own dramaturgy and adapting them to French theatrical aesthetics. The traditional characters from the Italian comic tradition, including *le barbon*, *le valet rusé*, and *le blondin*, subsequently became staples of French comedy.

Whereas most comic types of the seventeenth century had been born of the ancient Greek and Roman traditions and were continually revived during neo-classicist eras, the figure of the coquette had no such roots and had been relatively freshly conceived by the actresses who played her during the rise of the *commedia dell’arte* in sixteenth century Italy, and typically under the name of Colombina (Radulescu 93).¹⁵ Nonetheless, one would expect the figure of the coquette to conform to steadfast comic oversimplifications. Yet unlike most *commedia dell’arte* types who translated relatively unchanged onto the French stage, the coquette is a complex and culturally significant character. Her lack of background allowed her to be interpreted with more variation as authors took many liberties with the type by continually nuancing her roles within the newer theatrical panoply. An unknown character in earlier eras, the coquette proliferated on

¹³ For more on *la commedia dell’arte*, see Attinger, Jolibert, and Scott (*The Commedia*).

¹⁴ As Domnica Radulescu points out though, in a theatrical scene with highly porous barriers, it is debatable whether Molière himself gleaned parts of this tradition during his time spent in the provinces among Italian troupes or if it was the Italian actors and actresses who were quick to infuse *moliéresque* influences in theirs (107).

¹⁵ Most likely thanks to her status as a female character in a classically male-dominated genre.

the French stage from the middle of the seventeenth century until just before the French Revolution.

Because the coquette most often appears in the Parisian social scene that dominated comic representations in the second half of the seventeenth century, the creation of this character type strongly suggests that she functioned as a comic reflection on contemporary women who toyed with men. The figure was most likely based on a new social type formed during Louis XIV's reign and originating within the elites of Versailles and Paris, then artfully exaggerated in her dramatic representation (as comic playwrights are apt to do, particularly in their comedies of character). Pierre Pasquier has demonstrated how the technique of "duplicating life" on stage was frowned upon in French classical treatises on mimesis in favor of "selection and correction" (25-37), which aimed at creating a more universal and recognizable portrait for its audience by carefully modifying real-life models. In contrast, Larry Norman points out that in Molière's radically innovative theater the playwright's own conception of characters is more analogous to the twentieth-century concept of "found objects" in that Molière claims to have "abandoned" authorship by simply placing the public's *own* crafted portrait on stage with no artistic intermediary (35-45). Even so, much like how the dramatic representations of the *précieuse* (in Molière's work and elsewhere) are largely purported to be unfounded and self-perpetuating, we must be wary when considering such a perfect correspondence between the satirical portrait and its real-life model, no matter what social type we are examining.¹⁶ One could also argue that authors and audiences were less interested in inimitable feats and old-fashioned heroic values found in the dying genre of the tragicomedy and more attracted to what was current, real, and recognizable on the comic scene: women preoccupied with the latest fashions, leisure activities,

¹⁶ See Domna Stanton's "The Fiction of Préciosité and the Fear of Women."

and networking opportunities in Paris. Regardless of the coquette figure's origins, it seems clear that through this new and oft-staged character authors were drawing connections to the real-life women that the type reflected in early modern French society.

Playwrights satirize the coquette in a way that most often does not detract from her appeal to audiences, which stands in contrast to other contemporary writers working in different genres.¹⁷ More specifically, dramatists lightly mock the coquette figure for the way that she juggles several suitors or frivolously spends her time and money, whereas other writers attack her morality and intellect. For instance, in his “Carte du royaume de Coquetterie” and accompanying text *Histoire du temps, ou Relation du royaume de Coquetterie* (1654), the theorist l'Abbé d'Aubignac satirized Madeleine de Scudéry's allegorical map “la Carte de Tendre” from her novel *Clélie* (1654-1660). As Jeffrey Peters remarks, though Scudéry's map promoted the constraint of vulgarity in romantic relations by providing a rational trajectory toward virtuous courtship, d'Aubignac “recast the language of Tendre as a coded invitation to sexual license...and intellectually ambitious women like Scudéry as duplicitious ‘coquettes’ who live a life of imagined social empowerment on an island utopia” (“Mapping” 117-118). Peters argues further that d'Aubignac renders his allegorical coquettes as dangerous usurpers of male privilege who are eventually removed from the island by a violent correctional authority that returns the women to their rightful domestic sphere on the mainland (129-131), thereby reclaiming masculine territory and rehearsing a version of patriarchy (139). In a similar vein, Nicolas Boileau mocked not only learned women but the female sex as a whole in his *Satire X* (1694). Through his humorous portraits of social types of the era, Boileau suggests that women “will not remain faithful to Clélie's Platonic language, nor will they agree to be confined within

¹⁷ The exception to this rule occurs predominantly with regard to the older coquette whose role as mother is shown to necessarily supersede her social right to court men.

the social space apparently mapped by Scudéry in the ‘Carte de Tendre’” (125) and that instead they easily fall prey to the numerous opportunities for sexual scandal in Paris.¹⁸ For the portrait of the coquette in particular, Boileau proposes that the young wife of his fictional interlocutor will receive many men in their home merely as a means of distressing her husband: “Mais que deviendras-tu, si, folle en sa caprice, / N’aimant que le scandale et l’éclat dans le vice, / Bien moins pour son plaisir que pour t’inquiéter, / Au fond peu vicieuse, elle aime à coqueter?” (108).¹⁹ As Peters notes, both writers focus on the social limits that must be placed on female behavior as they assume women are inclined to go beyond their socially imposed boundaries (“Mapping” 124-125). In this sense, the coquette figure in French culture at this time period seemed to be an apt target for such mockery because her specific propensity for subversive

¹⁸ As Boileau writes:

Bientôt dans ce grand Monde où tu vas l’entraîner,
 Au milieu des écueils qui vont l’environner,
 Crois-tu que, toujours ferme aux bords du précipice,
 Elle pourra marcher sans que le pied lui glisse ;
 Que, toujours insensible aux discours enchanteurs
 D’un idolâtre amas de jeunes Séducteurs,
 Sa sagesse jamais ne deviendra folie ?
 D’abord tu la verras, ainsi que dans Clélie,
 Recevant ses Amants sous le doux nom d’Amis,
 S’en tenir avec eux aux petits soins permis,
 Puis bientôt en grande eau sur le fleuve de Tendre
 Naviguer à souhait, tout dire et tout entendre.
 Et ne présume pas que Vénus, ou Satan,
 Souffre qu’elle en demeure aux termes du Roman.
 Dans le crime il suffit qu’une fois on débute,
 Une chute toujours attire une autre chute. (107)

¹⁹ Charles Perrault responded to Boileau’s *Satire X* with a poem entitled “Apologie des Femmes” (1694) that attempts to contradict his opponent’s stance on women’s universal inclination for transgression: “Il est, j’en suis d’accord, des femmes infidèles, / Et dignes du mépris que ton cœur a pour elles; / Mais, si de deux ou trois le crime est avéré, / Faut-il que tout le sexe en soit déshonoré?... / Sans peine on trouvera mille femmes de bien, / Qui vivent en repos, et dont on ne dit rien.” Instead, Perrault blames husbands for their excessive severity or overindulgence that should be replaced by “de l’amour, du respect, de l’estime” in order to gain their wife’s trust: “La femme, en son époux, aime à trouver son maître, / Lorsque, par ses vertus, il mérite de l’être.” As complimentary of female virtue as Perrault’s work is, it nevertheless encourages women to submit to their husbands and accept a domestic lifestyle in order to find happiness: “Par sa bonne conduite, une famille en paix, / A des enfants bien nés et de sages valets; / Par elle, une maison tombée en décadence, / Voit revivre en son sein l’éclat et l’abondance.” For this reason, Perrault emerges as a poor defender of women’s intellect and potential in comparison to his predecessors Gournay and Poulain de la Barre, as discussed further on.

behavior combined both sexual immorality and hyper-intelligence that together posed a perceived threat to patriarchal values. Thus, relative to other genres, theater treats coquetry much less harshly and in fact *celebrates* its strategic utility for women whose only price of its enactment is to appear somewhat ridiculous and self-interested.

Because French theater was highly steeped in neo-classical doctrines at this time, it is not surprising that the coquette plays nevertheless pursue a social utility to both please and instruct its audience. Comedy tends to easily reconcile these two demands by inciting laughter against a demonstrated vice, thereby generating a shared laughter that both publicly denigrates a recognized social imperfection and promotes social solidarity. In other words, while audience members take pleasure in the self-interest, craftiness, and even absurdity of the coquette figure, they are simultaneously reminded of either their own defects or of those found in the people around them, and the irony of the character type prevents the tone from becoming too sermonizing. Pierre Force adeptly makes note of comedy's particular effectiveness in inducing self-recognition and teaching through exemplarity with regard to Molière's oeuvre:

Si l'on se souvient des idées des moralistes sur l'amour-propre, on verra que la comédie réussit à faire ce à quoi la réflexion morale ne parvient jamais : mettre notre amour-propre sous nos propres yeux...Puisque, pour les moralistes, le monde est un théâtre, pour le dramaturge, le moraliste est un spectateur. Le dramaturge met ce spectateur sur le théâtre pour nous montrer, à nous spectateurs, que la position de spectateur n'est pas sûre et que tout spectateur est un personnage qui s'ignore...En ce sens, la comédie aide davantage à se connaître soi-même que la littérature moraliste. La leçon de la comédie n'est pas : soyez comme les autres, mais plutôt: quand vous vous connaîtrez bien, vous comprendrez que vous n'êtes pas essentiellement différent des autres, parce que, comme les autres, vous êtes un être humain. (246)

This philosophy may also apply to the coquette comedies of other seventeenth-century dramatists as they all show how the coquette character type suffers from a form of amour-propre that should not be imitated. Furthermore, Force remarks that comedy as a whole promotes a spectator's

understanding of others in society by exposing hidden differences: “Le but de la comédie est de rendre familier et évident ce qui devrait aller de soi, mais qui constitue ordinairement un mystère incompréhensible: la différence entre les autres et moi” (253). In a similar vein, the coquette plays largely render a seemingly enigmatic social type more comprehensible to audiences through the character type’s strategic enactment of coquettish behaviors. Therefore, what makes the figure of the coquette so fascinating is that she demonstrates several behaviors to be avoided (vanity, unmotherliness, greed) at the same time as she may subtly prove that some are advantageous to her social condition as a woman (inconstancy, self-interest, deviousness). In this sense, the coquette plays do possess a moralizing function for early modern audiences as a whole, but they may speak differently to perspicacious women who filter out the dangerous and beneficial behaviors narrated on the stage. These plays therefore establish an intriguing interplay between the society that they mimic and the society that they in turn address in the audience by instructing social strategies that are, morally speaking, both “good” and “bad.”

The subtle proto-feminist discourse of these coquette plays was of course only part of a larger contemporary discussion about the inequality between the sexes. One of the earliest voices in the seventeenth century belonged to Marie de Gournay whose essay *Égalité des hommes et des femmes* (1622) questions the social order’s differentiation of the sexes: “les sexes étant faits non simplement, ni pour constituer une différence d’espèces, mais pour la seule propagation” (74). Gournay argues that the inequality between men and women stems fundamentally from an inequality in education rather than an intellectual or biological difference, and thus as a remedy she supports children of both sexes having access to the same scholarly opportunities.²⁰ A half-

²⁰ Gournay later wrote a similar essay entitled *Grief des dames* (1626) that attacked prejudices against women and explained the contempt that every female intellectual faces before men: “on en a connu qui méprisaient absolument les œuvres des femmes, sans se daigner amuser à les lire, pour savoir de quelle étoffe elles sont, ni recevoir avis ou conseil qu’ils y peuvent rencontrer” (119).

century later, François Poulain de la Barre echoes Gournay's assertions in his essay *De l'Égalité des deux sexes* (1673) but he takes an innovative approach by applying the Cartesian method to the same issue in an attempt to dismantle any prejudices against the intellectual or moral faculties of women: "suivant la règle de la vérité, qui est de n'admettre rien pour vrai qui ne soit appuyé sur des idées claires et distinctes...on a trouvé que les deux sexes sont égaux: c'est-à-dire, que les femmes sont aussi nobles, aussi parfaites, et aussi capables que les hommes" (10). He marks his method's biggest adversaries as both "le Vulgaire" (e.g. common preconceptions, custom) and "tous les Savants" who merely confirm received prejudices and give them unwarranted credence. By advocating a personal examination of available facts and refusing to accept tradition, Poulain de la Barre reveals the societal obstacles that women face. I aim to show that playwrights perform a similar demonstration in plays about coquettes when they characterize them as subjugated figures using flirtation as a tactic to claim some degree of freedom.

The goals of this project are to investigate the emergence of the coquette figure on the French stage within its larger cultural contexts, to establish the repertoire of behaviors deemed coquettish as portrayed in comic drama, and to analyze the cultural significance of the coquette in this long period with respect to gender roles and changes in social structure. This dissertation strives to fill a gap in scholarship by examining the long seventeenth-century French dramatic context during which playwrights revived the coquette's original Italian manifestation and developed her character as a lens through which to study contemporary women. Two scholarly essay collections on coquettes have been published within the last decade, but they treat almost exclusively the figure of the British coquette across many literary genres of the long eighteenth-century.²¹ The French coquette can be seen as a precursor to that tradition and yet there is

²¹ See King and Schlick's *Refiguring the Coquette* (2008) and Braunschneider's *Our Coquettes* (2009).

currently no extensive study on this figure. The most relevant piece of research to my own dates back to 1929, a Master's thesis by Ellen Elizabeth Michael that treats similar theatrical figures from the 1680s to the end of the French Revolution. In contrast, I concentrate my research topic by condensing the period studied to the coquette's heyday. My project includes both canonical and lesser-studied works of the early modern period, making it of use to scholars who have varying degrees of familiarity with theater history and French culture. Furthermore, the subversive tactics of the coquettes and their outspoken desires to remain free women in a proto-feminist world will appeal to readers in gender studies and women's studies.

CHAPTER 1: COURTLY COQUETTES

Introduction

LA MARQUISE

Mais, Du Laurier, je t'en conjure, dis-moi un peu ce l'on dit de nous.

LA COMTESSE

Hé je t'en prie ?

DU LAURIER

Oh vraiment, je sais que les dames de votre caractère se mettent fort peu en peine de la manière dont on parle d'elles ; que ce soit en bien ou en mal : pourvu que l'on en parle, cela suffit. Les hommes aujourd'hui gardent bien plus de mesures...mais vous autres, vos plaisirs ne seraient point parfaits si tout le monde n'en était pas instruit, et si vous n'y faisiez penser quatre fois plus de mal qu'il n'y en a...Mais je ne sais quel mauvais exemple vous suivez aujourd'hui, et tout à fait indigne d'une personne de qualité comme vous...

--Michel Baron, *Le Rendez-vous des Tuileries ou le Coquet trompé*

Classical comedy during the reign of Louis XIV rarely staged the lives of the aristocracy because traditionally their rank was deemed appropriate for the more respected genre of tragedy. Within the tragic genre, noble characters may readily show the utmost concern for honor and virtue in the presence of royal figures whereas comedy treats bourgeois or rural settings and subjects often focused on financial and social ascension. However, some comic dramatists brought the nobility into their plays, mocking aristocratic values and behaviors and thereby exposing the ridiculousness behind ostensibly honorable façades. In fact, noble characters in comedy generally exhibit a great penchant for scandal and vice belying their honorable rank, as highlighted in the above epigraph in which a servant reprimands her aristocratic mistress and consort for delighting in their ill-repute.

Particularly within the courtly context, the comic coquette's behavior and manner are not very different from other courtiers, as analyzed by contemporary moralists who focused on the benefits and problematics of these social practices. For example, Nicolas Faret's early pamphlet *L'Honnête homme ou l'Art de plaire à la cour* (1631) teaches courtiers to display natural elegance and to impress important people through deference, and though he encourages his reader to be honest and virtuous, he nevertheless admits the fundamental utility of strategic kindness.²² Other moralists, particularly those writing later in the century, condemn this polite "art of pleasing" as a masked expression of self-interest, notably François de La Rochefoucauld whose famous epigraph to his *Maximes* (1664-1678) underscores the overarching criticism of dissimulation within court society: "Nos vertus ne sont, le plus souvent, que des vices déguisés" (9).²³ Given that courtly coquette plays begin to appear during this latter period it is not surprising that this character type shows demonstrations of self-interest and flattery, thereby participating in a larger moralistic discourse about courtiership and immorality.

If comic figures of the nobility lend themselves to showcasing dishonorable and ridiculous habits, the aristocratic coquette in comedy in particular accentuates excessive vanity. Authors do not focus on vanity as a preoccupation with physical appearance (as they do with the "aging" coquettes of Chapter 2) nor do they overly emphasize the noble coquette's beauty, although she is shown to be able to seduce male characters with ease.²⁴ Instead, they satirize her

²² "les louanges que l'on donne à autrui ont encore cet avantage, qu'elles nous acquièrent les acclamations et les louanges de ceux que les nôtres ont obligées" ("De la modestie à parler de soi, et de la franchise à louer les autres").

²³ Similarly, other writers such as Le Chevalier de Méré were concerned with the differences between "galant" and "honnête" practices as these two appeared to converge and be easily confounded: "[un] galant homme n'est autre chose qu'un honnête homme un peu plus brillant ou plus enjoué qu'à son ordinaire et qui fait en sorte que tout lui sied bien" (*Les Conversations* (1669) quoted in Viala *La France galante* 113).

²⁴ The bourgeois mothers in Chapter 2 seek attention from specific men more than general admiration as the courtly coquettes do. Furthermore, authors accentuate the older coquettes' appearance and capacity to uphold a suitable level of beauty.

obsessive desire to be the center of attention, an object of adoration who seems to largely base her self-importance on the validation of others.²⁵ Her egoism compels her to surpass her noble peers and turn them into an audience, and she thus establishes a locus of power much in the fashion of the king whose court she adjoins. In this light, the figure of the aristocratic coquette subverts the traditional role of the subservient courtier, appearing instead as a small-scale monarch in her own right, one to whom other courtiers flock to receive affection.

It is not without coincidence then that each coquette of this chapter occupies either a royal court or an adjacent area where the characters are exclusively noble (save for those who serve them).²⁶ The aristocratic coquette thus stands apart from other coquettes because her privileged rank permits her unique access to courtly spheres where she in turn finds ways of dominating amorous “subjects.” In Marie-Catherine Desjardins’ *Le Favori* (1665), the coquette Elvire represents a newcomer to the fictional court of the king of Barcelona where she prizes her own pleasure over more traditional virtues.²⁷ She uses her position at court primarily to advertise her beauty and to lure in men such as the protagonist Moncade; yet, as soon as this advantageous situation is threatened she denounces Moncade to the king, thereby proving her fierce desire to retain an individual space of admiration under the auspices of the monarch. In Molière’s *Le*

²⁵ Contemporaries of this period generally referred to this vice as “amour-propre.” The coquette was far from being the sole person to suffer from it because it was presumed to have a handle on most courtiers of the late seventeenth century (both fictional and non-fictional). Indeed, in his attack on courtly behaviors La Rochefoucauld defines l’amour-propre in the first of his *Maximes* (before it was removed from editions subsequent to 1664): “L’amour-propre est l’amour de soi-même et de toutes choses pour soi; il rend les hommes idolâtres d’eux-mêmes.”

²⁶ Characters never come into direct contact with the French court in any of the plays that I have chosen (nor in any that I have ever encountered) because propriety would not have allowed for an explicit representation of the reigning king’s political terrain. Naturally, authors such as Desjardins circumvent this issue by portraying foreign courts that act as thinly veiled metaphors for their own unstageable realities, thereby avoiding potential claims of sedition.

²⁷ Desjardins is perhaps better known as “Mme de Villedieu,” the name she used to sign her works starting in 1668 after the death of her almost-husband Antoine de Boësset, sieur de Villedieu. However, because she published all three of her plays from 1662 to 1665 under her maiden name (Gethner “Conspirators” 41), I have chosen to call her Desjardins for the sake of consistency.

Misanthrope ou l'Atrabilaire amoureux (1666), Célimène makes herself the center of attention by leading a salon popular among the younger court society. She excels at keeping several suitors interested without committing to a single one, but eventually her delicate balancing act is discovered and she is in effect banished from her own salon, though not before turning down a marriage proposal that would force her out of the Parisian social scene. In Michel Baron's *Le Rendez-vous des Tuileries ou le Coquet trompé* (1685), La Marquise is a coquettish ex-courtier who entertains several men in her home at night to cause scandal and amuse herself. Ironically, she cannot tolerate suspicions about her lover Éraсте being unfaithful to her and so she devises a ruse to be staged in the Tuileries to catch him. The irrefutable evidence provided by the ruse allows her to finally cure herself of love for him and simultaneously exemplify a threat to any other suitor who wishes to defy her resolution to never remarry. As these examples illustrate, the noble coquette makes use of her respective royal court by diverting members from the king's circle and creating her own private "court" of devotees in order to satisfy her personal cravings for attention and praise. Her more privileged rank thus places her on a different spatial plane than other coquettes because the latter more frequently inhabit bourgeois realms that in turn dictate their desires for more fundamental goals such as marriage, money, or even monogamous love.²⁸

In this light, the courtly coquette is a highly strategic character in the way that she establishes an advantageous position for herself in each play, and she does so while (falsely) projecting the image of herself as a frivolous courtier. Because the plays were staged during the solidifying of absolutist power within the monarchy and the weakening of aristocratic autonomy,

²⁸ The only other coquette in my dissertation who comes from an elevated rank is the title character in Molière's *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* (1671). However, she lives far from court (in the provincial city of Angoulême) and poorly imitates noble manners, even if she does manage to hold "court" in her own house in the way the courtly coquettes do. In other words, she is spatially and socially distant from the coquettes of this chapter and fits better with the "aging" coquettes of Chapter 2 due to her status as a mother.

they often reflect the conflicting attitudes of the courtly sphere wherein nobles either accept or reject their newfound status as dispossessed subordinates of the king. The coquette, rather than rebelling against the hegemonic influence of the monarchy, adapts to her milieu by subscribing to Louis XIV's politics of pleasure and "galanterie" and making it her own tool for success (that is to say, the means for satisfying her desire to be admired). While this method seems egotistical in comparison to other characters who defend honor and sincerity, it nevertheless allows the authors to reappropriate the figure of the frivolous courtier by suggesting the strategic enactment of the coquette's actions, however meaningless her intentions may appear on the surface.

Indeed, all three characters strategically seek to preserve their dominant position as prime objects of admiration and gossip, and they do so by adhering to the rules of the courts that they inhabit or orbit about. For Elvire and Célimène, locked in the social network of prestige and status in the 1660s, this involves subscribing to the burgeoning ethic of "galanterie" in which members participated in polite interaction.²⁹ Of course, these coquettes are more interested in giving the *appearance* of good manners than showing genuine respect toward others as they opportunely adjust their speech and actions to please their present company. As such, what began as a much sought-after technique of gallant courtiers eventually became known as a perverse strategy strongly associated with coquettish characters. The extreme of this is well demonstrated

²⁹ Admittedly, "galanterie" is a difficult concept to define in such simple terms because its meaning and practice have been discussed and reinterpreted for centuries. Alain Viala, whose book *La France galante* expertly explores the phenomenon primarily during the French early modern period, nevertheless allows himself to reduce "galant" behavior to a basic call for good manners: "un galant homme et une galante dame sont d'abord des gens qui savent les bonnes manières" (116). He explains further on that "galanterie" was in particular a boon for increasing women's stake in society because it gave them a greater visibility in everyday sociability: "Sans manquer à la galanterie, appelons les choses par leur nom: selon les usages dominants, [les femmes] n'avaient pas grand prix sur le marché social, il leur fallait soit se résigner, soit se donner de la valeur. Et comme elles n'étaient dotées ni de l'estime financière ni de la diplômatique, leur restait l'estime personnelle, exprimée au premier chef dans les relations avec leurs prétendants... Ainsi la galanterie a donc été indubitablement une attitude pro-féminine, elle a contribué à la reconnaissance des capacités intellectuelles des femmes et de leur droit au respect sexuel... Dans les pratiques des cercles mondains, elle a accéléré un processus qui restait jusque-là encore assez restreint" (199-200).

by Baron's character La Marquise who appeared on stage in 1685 when ideals of "galanterie" were less fashionable. La Marquise no longer pretends to project a polite front to suitors; indeed, she revels in her scandalous reputation, all of which permits her to have an unmitigated amount of fun and to repel unwanted appeals for love and marriage. As in the manner of the other courtly coquettes, her self-interest evolves into a useful strategy for remaining accessible and powerful within her peripherally-located circle of associates.

These plays illustrate how authors employ the figure of the courtly coquette to mirror the king's strategy of domination over his subjects, and how courtly behaviors trickle down to private spaces beyond royal walls, thereby creating an atmosphere of "courtliness" wherever noble subjects go.³⁰ Plays about this genre of coquette therefore have the potential to comment on courtly behaviors and the political structures and ideologies that they support while retaining an overall air of levity due in part to the character type's signature frivolity.

Côté Cour, Côté Jardin: A Coquette Grows in Versailles in Desjardins' *Le Favori* (1665)

According to the Registre of La Grange, the original title of Marie-Catherine Desjardins' play *Le Favori* (1665) was *Le Favori ou la Coquette*, exposing an opposition between two characters that highlights the underlying conflict of the tragicomedy as a whole: What kind of

³⁰ In his book *La France galante* Viala discusses in greater depth the diffusion of "galant" behaviors and ideologies during the early modern period, with particular attention to cultural media such as theater, opera, and literature: "Bref, il fallait transposer à son échelon le modèle royal et l'appropriier à son usage: qui agit ainsi marque son respect et son admiration envers le roi, et son adhésion à la monarchie en place" (110). Among the values that were important to Louis XIV's court society was perpetuating an air of "galanterie," or an eagerness for polite interaction between honorable people. As Viala remarks, the easiest way to achieve this was through royal "fêtes galantes" such as "Les Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée" in 1664 that demonstrated the brilliance of the rising monarch to those in attendance: "S'instaurait un genre officiellement adoubé qui portait la galanterie au plus haut niveau de l'État, l'affichait comme entreprise nationale et lui donnait un retentissement sans équivalent" (85). Naturally, only a relatively small group of courtiers was able to contemplate the grandeur of the king at these events and so it was important to further diffuse the absolutist propaganda through published accounts of the parties and reprisals of the performances themselves for non-noble audiences (106).

In fact, Jean de La Bruyère writes of the same phenomenon in his *Caractères* (1688-1694): "Les hommes veulent être esclaves quelque part, et puiser là de quoi dominer ailleurs. Il semble qu'on livre en gros aux premiers de la cour l'air de hauteur, de fierté et de commandement, afin qu'ils le distribuent en détail dans les provinces: ils font précisément comme on leur fait, vrais singes de la royauté... L'air de cour est contagieux" ("De la cour" 284-285).

courtier best pleases the monarchy during the age of absolutism?³¹ In the first camp is the king's favorite minister Moncade who prizes sincerity, altruism, and honorable acts, and in the second is the coquette Elvire who leads a life based on dissimulation, self-interest, and amusement. Elvire serves as an exemplary figure for future theatrical coquettes because she not only represents the first one to be prominently featured in a French play, but she also puts forth a coquettish philosophy rooted in self-preservation that helps establish and clarify the duplicitous motivations of the character type: "Je fais moins pour autrui, que je ne fais pour moi" (2.1, p. 86). In addition, with this philosophy Desjardins demonstrates how Elvire represents the ideal courtier during the reign of Louis XIV because the character forsakes socio-political ambition for individual pleasure, thereby serving both her king and herself in the process.

As one of the first French plays to stage a thinly veiled metaphor for Louis XIV's court at the newly-favored pleasure palace of Versailles, Desjardins' *Le Favori* draws attention to the evolving relationships of courtiers with their monarch, both on- and off-stage. Moncade, the titular favorite of the fictional king of Barcelona, is saddened by his impression that he is only respected for his prime position at court and not his noble character. He feels unable to distinguish between those who truly love him and the sycophants who pursue him at all times, including the petty-minded coquette Elvire who seeks his attention only to provoke jealousy from Lindamire, her rival in beauty and Moncade's honorable love interest. In order to resolve his faithful minister's dilemma, the king of Barcelona pretends (for all characters and spectators) to publicly disgrace Moncade, thereby freeing the minister of his burdensome favor and allowing him to see the other courtiers' true feelings toward him. Not surprisingly, Lindamire agrees to

³¹ According to La Grange the play was also briefly entitled *La Coquette ou le Favori* before being definitively shortened to *Le Favori*. While this may have been a simple clerical error on his part, it could suggest that Desjardins hesitated about the relative importance of her characters, thereby revealing the fundamental importance of the coquette Elvire to her work.

flee with Moncade whereas Elvire denounces them to the king so as to break any ostensible association with them and protect her place at court. The king then reveals that his tyranny was nothing more than a grand ruse meant to restore confidence in his minister and harmony within the court. He finally gives his blessing to the marriage of Moncade and Lindamire after which Elvire dismisses their success as she leaves the stage in pursuit of a new conquest.³²

The play creates a literary portrait of the social changes occurring within Louis XIV's young court and shows how nobles deal with a new royal climate. As Perry Gethner remarks, the play gains an important currency by focusing "on the radical change between the older and younger generations of the French nobility...[and] the erosion of such older aristocratic notions of chivalric love, independence and self-assertiveness, *générosité*, sincerity and social responsibility" ("Self-Love" 407). In short, the absolutist government was pulling away from a system of patronage (in which the aristocracy proved loyalty through military service) by establishing a "politics of pleasure" that solicited voluntary submission from the nobles in exchange for the king's affection and numerous artistic diversions (Peters "Kingship" 263-264). In other words, the monarchy surreptitiously robbed the aristocracy of its ability to obtain royal favor through noble action, in a large part by placing more emphasis on their servile presence at court where they were expected to engage in gallant civilities, participate in entertainment, and

³² It is worth noting that *Le Favori* is the only play in my dissertation not to have a coquette as the protagonist. Rather, Elvire represents an antagonist that plays the role of what Nina Ekstein calls the "second woman" within the theater of Desjardins: "All three plays foreground the figure of the second woman, second because her role is clearly less central to the play's action than that of another woman character...Furthermore, the second woman is not an object of desire...The second woman, as a departure from the norms of the classical stage, becomes a significant locus for Villedieu's inscription of a personal, and distinctly female, authorial voice" (213). Ekstein notes that Elvire is a curious character for the way she appears to be a villain at the same time she is an alluring character of independent thought (220). She claims that unlike Desjardins' other "second women" Elvire does not "parrot the patriarchy in their discourse of honor and strict virtue" (220) but I argue that that is only half true: Elvire, too, parrots patriarchal ideals but not of the older generation, having adapted herself to the new court mentality of Louis XIV where "galanterie" outweighs glory. Ekstein also makes a point of calling Elvire a superfluous character to the specific action of the play, but this ignores her significant role in the separation of Moncade and Lindamire that causes their insubordinate behavior, as discussed later.

observe the king's glorious reign. This newfound "courtliness" surfaces in the play and draws out the differences between generations: Older courtiers concerned with heroism (represented by Moncade and Lindamire) balk at their loss of agency and call their servitude into question while the better adapted courtiers (Elvire and Clotaire) look for ways to serve the monarch when not serving themselves, resorting to strategies of flattery and espionage that likewise undermine older noble values.

Through these ambiguous characterizations of her heroes and villains Desjardins reinterprets the meaning of devotion to the monarch and subtly exposes each camp for what they truly offer at court. Because the older courtiers defend traditional virtues, the playwright appears to reward them while in contrast punishing the opportunistic newer generation by contrast. However, this is a clever sleight of hand: What Desjardins more importantly reveals through the enactment of her king's ruse is the true allegiance of both generations not to *certain ideals* but to *the monarch figure himself*. As Aurore Evain remarks, the protagonists fall short of their heroic Cornelian predecessors and break the seemingly Manichaeian configuration of the play:

le clan des héroïques et celui des 'caméléons de cour' se révèlent moins étanches qu'il n'y paraît: les héroïques dévoilent des désirs cachés et un narcissisme exacerbé dans leur quête de gloire et leur ambition morale; à l'inverse, les seconds apparaissent plus francs dans l'affirmation de leurs désirs et le plaisir de la mise en scène de soi. C'est alors dans ces failles, à travers ces paradoxes qui agitent les deux types de courtisans, que, peu à peu, se construisent l'évolution du roi fictif et l'approbation du roi spectateur. (154)

As such, the rigid and old-fashioned morality of Moncade and Lindamire unexpectedly marks them as untrustworthy subjects whereas the flexible newcomer Elvire becomes a model of loyalty even in her ostensible role as a self-serving court chameleon.

Thus, Moncade and Lindamire may act virtuously in regard to each other but they nevertheless emerge as undesirable subjects to the one spectator who matters most: the king.³³ They both represent noble-minded Cornelian heroes (or “généreux”) whose values of esteem, sincerity, courage, and selfless devotion interfere with their integration into the hypocritical environment at court (Gethner “Self-Love” 411).³⁴ Most important, the widespread hypocrisy prevents Moncade from knowing if Lindamire in particular shows him true affection, creating an obstacle to their love and a visible case of melancholy in the favorite minister. This melancholy is perceived by the king as a serious threat to the collective happiness of the court in that all members are supposed to exercise the art of pleasing and make themselves agreeable to everyone else as “honnête” nobles.³⁵ As Jocelyn Royé notes, because Moncade has lost control of his feelings and thus diminished the king’s ability to make him happy, his false disgrace becomes truly legitimated as he has broken the sacred bond of reciprocal love between a king and his subject (165).³⁶ Moncade thus speaks a language of fidelity toward the crown but he involuntarily jeopardizes the monarch’s position with his conceivably narcissistic woes.

³³ Scholars have sometimes argued for a more subversive stance in Desjardins’ play, in particular regarding the disgraced minister Nicolas Fouquet, but as Gethner notes such boldness would have risked disgrace for all involved, from the fledgling playwright to her established collaborators Molière and Saint-Aignan: “Il est plus probable que Louis et la cour furent sensibles à la louange de la perspicacité du roi au dénouement de la pièce et à la répétition obsédante des doctrines de fidélité et d’obéissance que le roi est en droit d’exiger de ses sujets” (Notice 64). Thus, Desjardins mirrors the strategy of the courtly flatterers as an author writing to please her king and gain favor.

³⁴ Roxane Decker Lalande offers a succinct definition of “généreux” for this era: “the early-seventeenth-century ideal of a man with moral integrity who is willing to place love of country above love, and love above self” (“Villedieu” 241).

³⁵ As the king himself tells Moncade, “Je suis jaloux de voir que toute ma faveur / N’ait pu jusques ici vaincre votre froideur, / ... Puisqu’avec tout l’effort du pouvoir souverain, / Je ne puis rendre heureux l’ouvrage de ma main / ... Apprenez pour finir des discours superflus / Que je veux cet effet de votre obéissance, / Qu’il y va de ma joie et de ma bienveillance” (1.6, pp. 80-81).

³⁶ As Royé notes, melancholy had been an enemy of the court lifestyle for over a century, starting with Baldassare Castiglione’s courtesy book *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) in which the author argues that a subject must overcome personal feelings in front of his king lest his moodiness trouble the monarch and alter his good judgment. Nicolas Faret subsequently picks up on this mentality of moderation in his 1630 French treaty *L’Honnête homme ou l’Art de plaire à la cour* (164-165), as discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

Whereas Moncade never tries to actively rebel or even justify himself because he truly believes that the king owes him nothing for his past services, Lindamire takes a more seditious plan of action. She values pure and sincere love above all and so it is for this reason that she critiques the monarchy's encroachment on private feelings: "J'ignorais jusqu'ici que le pouvoir suprême / Dût asservir un cœur aux droits du diadème. / Je savais qu'on doit craindre et qu'on doit obéir, / Mais pour la liberté d'aimer et d'haïr, / Je croyais que les rois la laissent à nos âmes, / Et que l'amour dût seul se mêler de nos flammes" (3.1, p. 95).³⁷ Here, Lindamire expresses her conditional obedience and paints the king as a tyrant. As Royé remarks, Lindamire possesses the inverse philosophy of the tyrant-king whose early tirade puts political value above sentimental value; for the heroine, love supports no concession, including before duty (167-168).³⁸ In consequence, Lindamire agrees to flee court without permission and in the process shows her true dissociation from the Cornelian ethic because she is willing to sacrifice her glory for love. Thus, Desjardins shows that virtue can be an advantageous disguise for self-interest.³⁹

If Desjardins reveals that austere virtue surely hides a fault, then the moral grandeur of a heroine such as Lindamire loses values in the face of a more forthright secondary character such

³⁷ As a coquette Elvire opposes Lindamire in her understanding of love: "Volage, cynique et désabusée...Elvire se moque de l'amour idéalisé qu'elle ridiculise et parodie, ce qui l'intéresse ce sont les jeux de séduction et de manipulation" (Goldwyn 115-116). For Elvire, love merely supports her light-hearted pursuit of pleasure: "Comme il est un enfant, on croit qu'il aime à rire, / Et l'on traite de jeu ce qui fut un martyre" (4.1, 106).

³⁸ Royé references the two opposing speeches: The king of Barcelona's, where love obstructs Moncade's duty ("Quoi! je me donne entier à ce cœur téméraire, / Et je suis moins pour lui qu'une vaine chimère, / Qu'une vapeur d'amour dont il est enflammé?" 1.6, p. 83), and Lindamire's, where she tells Moncade that before his disgrace his ministerial duties never permit him to love her ("Vous n'étiez pas à moi, Seigneur, avant ce jour; / Les soins de cet état vous occupaient sans cesse, / Et vous étiez à lui plus qu'à votre maîtresse" 3.6, p. 102).

³⁹ Gethner points out that no one in the play (including Lindamire) thinks about conspiring against the king even if they break some of his rules. In contrast, Elvire and Clotaire do plot against Moncade but given that he is just another courtier Desjardins avoids delivering a truly anti-monarchic message ("Conspirators" 38).

as the coquette Elvire.⁴⁰ As the “unhesitatingly frank spokeswoman of the new generation,” Elvire does not worry about her own virtue or glory and she shows disdain toward “those reactionaries who cling to the outmoded ideal of *générosité*” (Gethner “Self-Love” 408). She will not understand virtue’s utility until the day that her physical charms have faded and she needs another strategy to attract attention.⁴¹ In truth, Elvire does not even believe in virtue in the new age of the court and openly admits it before the king, accusing its supposed practitioners as pure dissemblers: “Ah! Seigneur, de tout temps ces vertus exemplaires / Sont des masques adroits pour cacher les affaires; / Ne vous fiez jamais à ces cœurs de rocher” (4.5, p. 111). Her blatant corruptness emerges in her false friendship with Lindamire whom she detests for stealing Moncade’s attention. Elvire stays close to Lindamire solely to prevent Moncade from approaching her, causing both lovers visible pain that pleases the coquette:

Elle devient chagrine et presque en un moment
 Son visage et ses yeux changent visiblement,
 Son humeur devient sombre, et sa mélancolie
 Fait que Moncade même auprès d’elle s’ennuie,
 Il croit l’importuner, il en devient jaloux,
 Et moi dans ces moments je lui darde mes coups. (2.1, p. 85)

This sequence of events is significant because here we see how Elvire indirectly causes Moncade’s melancholy (and Lindamire’s as well). In other words, were Elvire to let the lovers meet and share their mutual feelings, Moncade would not have reason to suspect Lindamire of an unfaithful heart or ulterior motives and he would not be insubordinate toward the king through

⁴⁰ Henriette Goldwyn finds that Desjardins’ theatrical œuvre as a whole supports a movement away from heroism toward “un épicurisme galant démuné de culpabilité et suscité par l’intérêt de soi et la poursuite du plaisir” (108). She demonstrates how female characters play a role in the deconstruction of heroic values, with the coquette reaching her apogee in this new age that is hungry for entertainment, power, and joy (116).

⁴¹ “Se pique qui voudra de grande probité, / Pour moi je ne veux point de cette qualité, / Et comme par le temps elle m’est destinée, / J’attends pour l’obtenir ma cinquantième année” (2.1, p. 86). A year later in *Le Misanthrope*, we see Célimène’s reminiscent declaration in Act III about turning into a false prude such as Arsinoé.

his melancholy.⁴² Whereas many scholars attribute Moncade's melancholy to his realization that his "submission to the king's desire is predicated on the eradication of a natural desire for personal recognition" (Lalande "Villedieu" 235), Elvire's immorality and scheming provide more evident causes for the two protagonists' psychological crisis.⁴³

Elvire's lack of concern for virtue and the welfare of others leads her friend Léonor to label her a coquette, a type of woman whose ideals align well with those of the new monarchy as demonstrated throughout the play.⁴⁴ Elvire is at first hesitant to accept such a title but then fully embraces it, explaining how coquettishness must apparently be rooted in egoism and self-gratification:

Certes je ne sais pas si je la suis ou non ;
Mais je m'aime beaucoup et j'aime fort à plaire,

⁴² It is true that Moncade has suspicions of Lindamire based solely on the fact that she is a woman ("Et d'ordinaire, ami, ce beau sexe est trompeur" 1.3, p. 76) but it is impossible to say if this paranoia occurs before or after Elvire starts occupying Lindamire's free time. Because his friend Dom Alvar seems so sure of Lindamire's innocence, and because Moncade himself holds on to hope going into his first meeting with her (1.3, p. 77), it is more likely that he falls prey to Elvire's scheme first. Also of note is how the king interrupts the lovers' first conversation about their feelings, acting as an extension of Elvire and her self-serving strategy (as discussed further in footnote 51).

⁴³ Lalande notes that in order for Moncade to follow a Cornelian model, he must renounce his individual glory in deference to the monarch who then immortalizes the hero's achievements in exchange ("Villedieu" 233). She accuses the king of not following through on his promise, which is wrong in light of the many favors ("Plaisirs, fêtes, bontés, présents, honneurs, largesses" 1.2, p. 73) that he has bestowed. She further argues that the king "interprets Moncade's resentment of his favors as a subconscious desire to eradicate (symbolically murder) the king to attain the right to self-determination" (237) thereby placing the monarch in a villainous position in comparison to the loyal subject who has only served him. This reading forgets that Moncade is the first of the two to be at fault by letting his melancholy interfere with his status as a good subject. Additionally, Moncade believes that his virtuousness can earn him mythical glory but what he misunderstands is that this outdated individualism becomes a form of dangerous narcissism in the new court because it does not rely upon the king's volition (Goldwyn 115).

Jeffrey Peters makes a similar error by interpreting the play as a portrait of how "royal subjects, of which the favorite is an idealized version, come to accept the ideology of their sovereign's authority" ("Kingship" 263). He argues that Moncade rebels not against the king's punishment but against his royal favor and "society of pleasures" that are secretly rooted in violence: "The narrative form of the play...makes of Moncade's obsessions the psychological foundation of the state ideology according to which the aristocracy must willingly misunderstand its political marginalization and relegation to the frivolities of galanterie as a renewed and continuing form of noble générosité" (264).

⁴⁴ Perhaps because the dubious figure of the coquette was not likely to draw the immediate approval of Louis XIV, Desjardins included a poem in her dedication to the king that requests he look beyond her character and see another side to her: "Et pour notre jeune coquette / Si son amour pour la fleurette, / Ses regards affectés, ses souris et ses soins, / Sont assez heureux pour vous plaire; / On blâme en vain son caractère / On peut être coquette à moins" (Dédicace 70). It is evident that Desjardins has some agenda in singling out Elvire here, and the most likely explanation is that the coquette best represents the new court mentality that Louis XIV is trying to cultivate.

J'aime assez le grand bruit et je hais le mystère,
Je fais moins pour autrui, que je ne fais pour moi,
Et la joie est en tout et ma règle et ma loi.
Si c'est ce qu'on appelle à présent des coquettes,
Il est vrai, je la suis. (2.1, p. 86)

Elvire places her own happiness above all else and thus she tries to avoid falling into a dangerous state of melancholy in the way Moncade does. She explains later that her self-love in fact promotes the well-being of everyone at court, including the king: “Que c’est un grand fardeau que le courroux d’un roi, / Il le faut éviter avec un soin extrême, / Et le premier amour est l’amour de soi-même. / ...Pour moi, mon bonheur fait le premier de mes soins; / Ici-bas le bon sens gît à se rendre heureuse” (3.4, p. 99). In other words, Elvire does not actively support the preservation of the monarchy with the intention of obtaining favor (as Moncade has) so much as she avoids causing worry for the king, thereby allowing him to rule undisturbed. As such, she subscribes to the new court’s “politics of pleasure” in which she accepts a marginal and passive position in exchange for more opportunities to amuse herself.⁴⁵ These primarily involve attracting men with her beauty so as to fulfill her desire for attention and to demonstrate her powers of seduction. Much in the fashion of other coquettes, she shuns the notion of constancy, taking on a new lover as soon as the seat becomes vacant in order to avoid the embarrassment of being without an adoring subject.⁴⁶ In this light, Elvire may not be a powerful political figure but she creates her own sphere of influence through her coquettish management of other courtiers.

⁴⁵ Elvire’s friend Léonor highlights the largely frivolous position of these newer courtiers in her embarrassment over their early rising: “Vous vous moquez de moi, Done Elvire, ou je meure, / De me faire sortir de ma chambre à cette heure, / Tout le monde repose, on se rira de nous” (2.1, p. 84). In other words, the newcomers pride themselves on idleness and would not want to be seen awake at the same early hour as Moncade and his old-fashioned associates.

⁴⁶ After snubbing Moncade due to his royal disgrace, Elvire takes on an unseen lover named Dom Lope whose presence appears to prevent her own version of disgrace as a young woman of the court: “Il suffit qu’il occupe une place vacante; / Je mets le reste au sort, il viendra quelque instant, / Qu’il m’embarrasserait s’il était plus constant; / Il m’épargne du moins la disgrâce cruelle, / D’être un jour sans amant, et d’être jeune et belle” (4.2, p. 109).

Elvire bases so much of her identity on the court that she even fears her existence without it, causing her to become quite ruthless in her attempts to protect her position there.⁴⁷ After the king orders Moncade's disgrace and exile, Elvire immediately distances herself from the favorite minister because she fears that her former association with him may cast doubt on her as well. She recognizes that sharing exile with him would render her powerless since she cannot properly satisfy her consuming desires for attention without the court supplying her with an audience of men.⁴⁸ Elvire therefore decides to become an unambiguous enemy to Moncade and Lindamire, not because she possesses ambition to please the king ("La belle ambition! Grâce au Ciel, mon cœur / Ne veut point à ce prix de ce titre d'honneur," 4.1, p. 107), but rather in order to preserve her ideal place at court.⁴⁹ Upon learning that Lindamire plans to follow Moncade into exile without permission, Elvire relates the incriminating information to the king, thereby thinking to prove that she is a better subject even if she is motivated by selfish reasons. In this sense, as a coquette Elvire may not be faithful to any man but her overriding loyalty to herself nevertheless

⁴⁷ Gethner notes how Elvire in her role as an inconstant character truly represents a social construction of the court as opposed to a more traditional and natural version found in pastorals: "Unlike the usual proponents of inconstancy in love, she never appeals to nature as her justification. Instead, she proclaims the need for the court as a place to show off her attractions, and for men (who fail to touch her heart) to admire her" ("Self-Love" 408). Elvire thus loves the court for its own sake and as a substitute for all other kinds of love (409), perhaps with the exception of her own self-love that motivates her entire being.

⁴⁸ As she says, "Mais je crains la disgrâce, et j'aime fort la cour" (4.1, p. 107).

⁴⁹ Elvire's lack of ambition stands in contrast to her male counterpart Clotaire who does indeed seek to take over Moncade's favor: "De grâce, envisagez le rang qui nous attend, / Il n'est point de faveurs dont on ne nous accable, / Et nous pourrions remplir la place du coupable" (4.4, p. 109). While Elvire does recognize that their choice to denounce the couple is a political move, she is motivated more by a fear of *losing* what she has than a dream of *gaining* anything: "Est-ce un crime aujourd'hui que d'être politique? / Savez-vous quels malheurs et quelle adversité / Traîne le nom d'ami d'un sujet révolté?" (4.4, p. 110). Though they commit the same crime of disloyalty toward Moncade and Lindamire, their divergent motivations cause them to be punished differently: Elvire evades punishment while Clotaire runs from the stage humiliated, an embarrassment to his princely rank.

translates into a loyalty to the crown.⁵⁰ Coquetry therefore lends itself to supporting the monarchy in the play but only because the coquette's and the king's values align.

The play's ending helps prove Desjardins' fidelity to the monarchy because both the king of Barcelona and Elvire emerge triumphant. The king demonstrates his monarchical wisdom by devising the ruse of tyranny that not only reveals his subjects' allegiances but also reinforces that he (the "real" king) is a wholly benevolent figure who makes a conscious choice to be good.⁵¹ He appears hurt that several of his subjects mistook him for a true tyrant, which in turn allows him to play the role of a victim who deserves better. As Royé concludes, "le dénouement de la pièce constitue une véritable apologie d'un roi intelligent, aimant et honnête, qui suscite l'admiration et le dévouement de tous ceux qui l'entourent. La pièce s'envisage alors davantage comme un simple avertissement portant sur les dérives condamnables de certains sujets ambitieux et hypocrites" (169). Elvire, for her part, ostensibly belongs to the faction of the losers given her exclamation of defeat ("Qu'ai-je fait!" 5.6, p. 124) once the king confesses his performance. Moreover, the king pushes for the marriage of her enemies Moncade and Lindamire before he officially sides with the values of the older generation in his final declaration: "Il n'est jamais

⁵⁰ Certain parallels run between Elvire and the king of Barcelona that strengthen their overall association with one another. For one, Lalande remarks how the monarch (in his tyrant form) mirrors Elvire's coquettishness: "In much of the same manner and for the same reasons as Elvire, the king is jealous of Lindamire. For him, too, there is a pressing, self-centered need to be desired...Most important, the king and the coquette are implicitly linked through their whimsical manipulation of sexual politics of pleasure" ("Villedieu" 240). Similarly, Elvire and the king occupy different scenes in the play until the end, as if to suggest that she continues to survey the stage in his absence up until the moment she approaches him to denounce Lindamire in Act IV. In the final act, the king summons Elvire to witness his revelation of the ruse: "Venez, vous pouvez approcher, / Votre présence ici nous sera nécessaire, / J'ai besoin de témoins pour ce que je veux faire" (5.6, p. 122). Here, it seems as though the king wants his faithful servant to observe his sovereignty and his handling of her insubordinate peers.

⁵¹ Gethner aptly remarks how Desjardins altered elements of her source, Tirso de Molina's *El Amor y el amistad* (1634), in order to celebrate the king figure. Her king not only appears less corrupt ("Conspirators" 40) but she gives him (instead of the favorite minister character) credit for the clever charade and happy ending ("Tirso" 122). Furthermore, Gethner finds that she artfully sidesteps a subversive position when dealing with the subjects of tyranny and conspiracy by presenting them in an ironic, even comic manner that dismisses their seriousness ("Conspirators" 31). Likewise, Amelia Sanz notes how Desjardins rescues Elvire from punishment, unlike her coquettish counterparts in Molino's play (104).

rien tel que d'être généreux" (5.7, p. 126).⁵² Still, he never openly condemns the new court mentality nor its representatives, including Elvire who has the honor of pronouncing the play's last lines: "Tout cela ne vaut pas la peine d'en parler, / Et Dom Lope m'attend qui m'en va consoler" (5.8, p. 126).⁵³ With her dismissal of the recent action Elvire confirms that life at court will not change for her in spite of the king's public adherence to the old ideals, and that she will adapt to her loss by forming a coquettish bond with her newest lover. Her victory may be somewhat hidden under the events of the plot but she nevertheless finishes with a loyal stance to the king and an open, unfettered future.⁵⁴

What renders Elvire's navigation of the Spanish court even more interesting is the fact that *Le Favori* was performed before Louis XIV and his court in near-perfect correspondence of its reality: "elle fut jouée à Versailles, devant le roi, à l'occasion d'une fête qui s'apparente en tout point à un rituel ludique, social et politique, où les frontières entre acteurs et spectateurs sont poreuses et où le morcellement du spectacle crée une forte interactivité" (Evain 147). The actors on stage are mimicking (if not satirizing) the behavior of the courtiers in the audience, creating a mirroring effect in which actor-spectators seem to be able to cross the barrier at any moment, as demonstrated by Molière in the play's (lost) prologue in which he played a "marquis ridicule" on stage conversing with a "marquise ridicule" planted in the audience (156). The king figure too

⁵² Ekstein remarks that throughout the play the female characters defend their respective views on love: Lindamire believes in perfect love while Elvire prizes convenient love. However, Elvire has the advantage of speaking last when she undermines the exalted love between Lindamire and Moncade just before they are given permission to wed: "Que le parfait amour est une sotte chose! / Vive l'amour commode et la bonne amitié!" (5.6, p. 123) (122).

⁵³ Elvire's counterpart Clotaire leaves the stage in despair as a sign of defeat but the king does not officially punish him. Furthermore, Clotaire suffers worse than Elvire due to his political ambition, as discussed in footnote 49.

⁵⁴ Elvire undoubtedly represents a good subject but Gethner argues that Desjardins still permits the coquette to free herself from being completely dominated by patriarchal control through her genuine friendship with another woman, Léonor: "female friendship contributes to a greater sense of personal autonomy and personal worth...[and allows] for greater personal space in a private sphere not controlled by men" ("Female" 40-41).

appears to step out of the play and into the spectator-king's body: Louis XIV participated in a court ballet immediately after the tragicomedy, thereby demonstrating that the two wise and good-hearted monarchs are really one and the same (155). This constant "aller-retour" between the real space and the fictive one grants a keen actuality to the work for the spectators who watch in a palatial garden much like Moncade's imposing country villa.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the "fête publique" that is referenced in the penultimate lines of the play can only make the courtly audience members reflect on their own surroundings and social positions. Desjardins thus participates in the positive *mise-en-scène* of Louis XIV's political apparatus in which the nobles (like Moncade and Lindamire) are symbolically castrated by diversions (such as his ruse) and limited to using gallant language in order to express their devotion to the monarchy (157). As Gethner argues, Desjardins "aims to present a world in which absolutist doctrine is simply taken for granted. There are no challenges to the king's power; he has been on the throne for at least ten years; his realm is stable and at peace; he is an acknowledged model of benevolence and justice" ("Conspirators" 40). Not coincidentally, the king's loyal subject Elvire is the last figure

⁵⁵ Dom Alvar and Moncade discuss the beauty of their surroundings in some of the first lines of the play:

D. Alvar

Vous êtes dans un lieu, dont l'art et la nature
 Ont à l'envi formé l'admirable structure,
 Et le roi vous comblant d'un si rare bienfait,
 Vous fit le plus beau don que prince ait jamais fait.
 Cette diversité de coteaux et de plaines,
 Ces superbes jardins, ces marbres, ces fontaines...

Moncade

Il est vrai qu'à juger de ce lieu par nos yeux,
 On le croit le séjour des anciens demi-dieux.
 Jamais avec tant d'art on n'assembla peut-être,
 La splendeur de la pompe et la beauté champêtre. (1.1, pp. 73-74)

to be seen on stage as she pays no heed to the political implication of the play and perseveres in her frivolous pursuit of fun and flattery.⁵⁶

Le Favori stands apart from all other coquette plays in its unification of the affective dimension and the political field. Coquettes are normally excluded from the political realm due to their typical status as bourgeois women (and comic characters) but as a noblewoman Elvire gains access to this highly exclusive sphere and thrives. While it is certain that Desjardins' play offers no true hero to its audience, Elvire's lack of moral ambition may be exactly why she attracts the support of the king and succeeds: She earns the validation of this royal spectator who then provides meaning to her performance of the monarchy's triumph over the aristocracy. Thus, this unfaithful character type faithfully serves her king during the propagandist festival at Versailles, thereby proving that she is neither an old-fashioned idealist nor a "garden-variety" coquette.

No Ball in Her Court: Célimène's Passive Coquettishness in Molière's *Le Misanthrope ou l'Atrabilaire amoureux* (1666)

Whereas Desjardins depicts Elvire navigating a timeless Spanish court, in *Le Misanthrope* (1666) Molière uses a contemporary French setting to showcase an even more complex coquette, the young and enigmatic Célimène. Indeed, Célimène fascinates reader-spectators as much as she does the aristocratic members of her fictional salon because the character's elusive discourse and behavior defy our decisive comprehension beyond that of her most basic categorization: a sharp-tongued coquette. However, her outward persona as a strong-willed woman who uses her wit to besmirch foolish courtiers and her beauty to toy with multiple

⁵⁶ The uneasiness of the denouement, in which Desjardins blurs the line between hero and villain, is characteristic of the play's tragicomic genre. Because tragicomedy was much less popular in the 1660s than it had been decades earlier, perhaps Desjardins chose this genre as a way to put her protagonists' motives and success into question while simultaneously rescuing the coquette figure from ultimate condemnation.

suitors belies a more passive and sentimental figure that emerges upon closer readings of the text. In this light, Célimène remains a cryptic character but certain aspects of the play allow us to interpret her coquettishness as a rational strategy for safeguarding her prime social position.

The society depicted in *Le Misanthrope* is formed by members of the relatively young aristocracy who have contact with the court and who thus mirror its values and practices in semi-private spaces, such as Célimène's salon. As a privileged space for sociability, the ideal salon fosters harmony and discussion in theory, but what Molière more often demonstrates in practice with his characters is an idle group of nobles jockeying for positions of admiration and supremacy now that the king has limited their political power.⁵⁷ In short, their actions involve seeking out new allies through mutual, indiscriminate flattery and/or mockery of common enemies, and such that this egoism keeps them occupied with trivial matters and out of the king's sight.⁵⁸ Thus under Molière the court and its constituents represent more of a breeding ground for

⁵⁷ For example, Molière shows that even the basic tenet of conversation in the salon is negated when someone monopolizes the floor in the goal of admiration, which most readily happens when Célimène "performs" her portraits for the group in the fourth scene of Act II. She even goes so far as to interrupt Acaste as he begins sketching Arsinoé's portrait in the third scene of Act III, after which his character silently exits.

Interestingly enough, Célimène's salon likely resides within the home of her cousin, Éliante, with whom she merely shares the space. The play only definitively indicates that the setting is "à Paris" but several clues throughout suggest that the home belongs to Éliante as much as the presiding coquette. For one, Oronte names Éliante first when describing how he got into the salon: "J'ai su là-bas que pour quelques emplettes / Éliante est sortie, et Célimène aussi" (1.2, p. 657). Secondly, upon Arsinoé's visit one of the servants tells Célimène that once again Éliante is on the ground floor receiving guests as if she were the true hostess: "Éliante, là-bas, est à l'entretenir" (3.3, p. 688). Lastly, and perhaps most convincingly, Philinte refers to the stage as her home ("Montons chez Éliante" 5.1, p. 715). If we are to assume then that this is true, Célimène somewhat usurps the space that is to be shared with the complaisant Éliante, thereby confirming her amour-propre as she creates her own court-like space.

⁵⁸ As Stephen Fleck notes, Célimène's salon resembles an extended family but one without a father in an otherwise patriarchal society: "Au contraire de tout le reste du théâtre moliéresque, cette comédie n'a aucun personnage d'âge mûr, ni de marié" (67). Without a divine father-monarch figure present to establish a more defined hierarchy, the nobles are left to create their own arbitrary power dynamic in which cronyism (or perhaps this family's "nepotism") reigns supreme. Molière perhaps illustrates this best with Arsinoé's reference to political machinations that could help Alceste if only he would choose her over Célimène (3.5, p. 695).

ridiculous behavior than a paragon of “galanterie” and “honnêteté,” and as several critics have agreed, no character escapes without some degree of blame.⁵⁹

In this peripheral microcosm of the court, Célimène fills the most prominent seat of power because like the king she acts as the locus of attention who attracts admirers and creates the social space.⁶⁰ While it is generally agreed that the main action of the play resides in Alceste fighting off inopportune visitors and civil suits in order to clarify his commitment to Célimène in private, it is Célimène herself who provides the framework for displaying questionable gallant habits with her ability to retain an audience for her charms.⁶¹ More specifically, she seduces but holds at bay at least four men: the intransigent Alceste, the doltish Oronte, and Acaste and Clitandre, two unctuous *petits-marquis* who eventually join forces to expose her unfaithful calumny in the end. She likewise battles against false friends such as the prude Arsinoé, but spares any harsh words for obliging non-lovers such as the reasonable Philinte or her deferential cousin Éliante. In this sense Célimène acts as the bond that links all of the characters together and she uses her web-like sphere of influence to uphold her dominance.

While this positioning of Célimène’s tends to make her appear highly manipulative and aggressive, her behavior within the play appears passive in that she receives more than she pursues, reacts more than she attacks, and proposes more than she undertakes. This passivity

⁵⁹ See Forestier and Bourqui (1434) and Vernet (169).

⁶⁰ Jean Mesnard summarizes Célimène’s overarching strategy: “Pour la coquette Célimène, le personnage le plus avide de plaire, il s’agit, non plus de faire sa cour, mais de s’entourer d’une cour. Elle se garde bien de se jeter à la tête des hommes; son charme suffit à les attirer. Ce qui importe pour elle, c’est de ne perdre aucun des soupirants qu’elle a ainsi gagnés, c’est de plaire au plus grand nombre... Autrement dit, chacun doit se croire le plus favorisé à l’insu des autres... Pour plaire comme elle l’entend, Célimène doit éviter par-dessus tout de se déclarer” (873).

⁶¹ “Le rayonnement de Célimène, l’empire de son charme, le nombre et la qualité de ses chevaliers servants—voilà quelques-uns des faits qu’il faut comprendre en termes d’action. Le ‘drame,’ en ce sens, ne dépend ni d’une idylle ni d’un mariage. L’action la plus éclatante, la plus spectaculaire, réside dans la capacité de Célimène à retenir autour d’elle son cénacle d’amis” (Zuber 267).

emerges in part because Célimène has already established herself as the center of attention before the curtain rises and spectators only witness her delicate maintenance of this system. Her best strategy lies in doing as little as possible because in pursuing any of her suitors she risks favoring one over another and disrupting the equal rivalry between them.⁶² Withholding approval thus preserves a certain degree of social agitation amongst her suitors while promoting a static image of herself as a locus of desire and judgment.⁶³

Célimène's passive reception of various devotees is evident in the play's progression, and Alceste even comments on her indiscriminate welcoming of people: "C'est que tout l'univers est bien reçu de vous" (2.1, p. 669). In a strictly physical sense Célimène neither seeks nor refuses company, unlike her peers who predominantly exhibit one behavior or the other.⁶⁴ As Jackson shows in his study of the play's stage movements Célimène remains relatively inert, allowing her to observe the action from a privileged position akin to that of the spectator: "One would have thought that she would be the one in particular to seek the company of others. She certainly does so, but through discourse. She is the least mobile of the characters in the play. But it is she who,

⁶² Vernet agrees and finds that Célimène operates in a space of perpetual transition: "S'il semble au premier abord que ce système est fragile parce qu'il suffit que l'un prenne l'avantage sur l'autre pour que tout s'écroule, il faut voir la nécessité pour Célimène de ne rien donner à ses amants. Privilégier l'un serait provoquer le départ des autres, certes, mais aussi celui de l'élue... Célimène se définit entièrement par un lieu intermédiaire: tout son effort est de faire du passage un lieu de séjour" (168).

⁶³ Célimène takes her non-committal strategy so seriously that she appears to forget the more routine tenets of social interaction. When confronted by Alceste and Oronte to choose a preferred lover in the final act, Célimène turns to Éliante to see if they even possess such a power: "Ils veulent l'un et l'autre avec même chaleur / Que je prononce entre eux le choix que fait mon cœur, / Et que, par un arrêt, qu'en face il me faut rendre, / Je défende à l'un d'eux tous les soins qu'il peut prendre. / Dites-moi si jamais cela se fait ainsi" (5.3, p. 719).

⁶⁴ The best example of a character refusing company is undoubtedly Alceste. He only truly wishes to engage with Célimène and so he is seen leaving the stage in order to flee Philinte (1.3, p. 667), Acaste and Clitandre (2.3, p. 672), and eventually the entire salon (5.4, p. 726).

In contrast, Arsinoé pursues inopportune meetings with Célimène (3.4, p. 688 and 5.4, p. 720) but also less directly with Alceste (3.5, p. 694) whom she loves and wishes to impress. In this sense, Arsinoé most prominently opposes Célimène's strategy because she values aggression over passivity, as Mesnard aptly remarks: "La cour la plus singulière est sans doute celle qu'Arsinoé fait à Alceste, car il n'est pas habituel aux femmes de prendre l'initiative en ce domaine: il faut toute l'impétuosité de ses désirs pour lui faire rompre les usages" (872).

more than any other character, and by far, comments upon, validates and devalues the entrances, the exits and the movements of others” (quoted in Lalande *Intruders* 155). Indeed, Célimène waits for others to approach her or summon her, as seen in her first arrival on stage (“C’est pour me quereller donc, à ce que je voi, / Que vous avez voulu me ramener chez moi?” 2.1, p. 668) or when Alceste startles her entry before revealing the letter that Arsinoé gave him (4.3, p. 703), to name only a few examples. Célimène relinquishes agency even with regard to important matters such as her impending trial: She relegates the task to her fawning suitor Clitandre who has friends at court to indirectly handle it off-stage (2.1, p. 669). Thus, her centrality to the other characters places her in a convenient position for awaiting earnest guests, thereby masking her own desire for their attention and aid.⁶⁵

The coquettish salon leader may wait to be approached by others but she certainly knows how to react to assaults from those who challenge her superior position. Célimène uses polite gestures and civilized language to deflect overt aggression (Lalande *Intruders* 146) but she unleashes direct reprisals when sufficiently provoked. Molière best illustrates this quality during her encounter with Arsinoé, the hypocritical prude who comes to the coquette under the guise of friendship but who really wants to smear Célimène’s reputation and take Alceste for herself.⁶⁶ As noted by many scholars, Arsinoé’s transparent critique of Célimène is met with a mirrored attack in the way that the coquette mimics the structure and fork-tongued language of the harangue, but

⁶⁵ Lalande expounds on the coquette’s passive strategy in which Célimène must modify her availability to men: “It is the heroine’s accessibility that fuels [Alceste’s] jealousy, but it is concurrently the only stratagem that allows her to retain control of the situation by presenting an image, a fleeting presence that is only an illusory reflection, an absence drawing others into its void. As a woman, her value is dependent on her inaccessibility as an object of desire and possession, and also, paradoxically, on her accessibility to the masculine gaze that valorizes her” (*Intruders* 151).

⁶⁶ Forestier and Bourqui find that Arsinoé acts as a beneficial foil to Célimène given the relativity of their respective social crimes: “[L]es torts bien réels de Célimène au regard de la société galante se voient effacés par les vices de la prude, au point que Célimène se retrouve du côté de la raison et de la justice en se donnant comme un rempart contre les horreurs de l’hypocrite pruderie” (1440).

more eloquently.⁶⁷ Arsinoé argues that Célimène has more success with men only because her own “virtue” forbids her from offering her body in exchange for their attention as she surmises the coquette does: “Qu’on n’acquiert point leurs cœurs sans de grandes avances, / Qu’aucun pour nos beaux yeux n’est notre soupirant, / Et qu’il faut acheter tous les soins qu’on nous rend” (3.4, p. 693). In other words, Arsinoé does not believe that Célimène’s passive beauty alone can retain her adoring suitors but that promiscuity is the cost of such popularity since in her opinion people do not give without receiving in return. This is very telling of Arsinoé’s own social strategy because in contrast to Célimène she relies on aggression and action, most of which comes in the form of moral judgment.⁶⁸ In the logic of the play, as an older woman Arsinoé can no longer passively attract men and because the coquette knows this she dares the false prude to copy her presumed promiscuity, thereby forcing the hand of her bluffing rival.⁶⁹ In this sense, Célimène does not shy away from taking a more active approach to interaction if it means subduing threats and protecting her social dominion.⁷⁰ Her willingness to pass from a rhetoric of passivity to one of activity thus shows that her behavior is decidedly strategic as it adapts to the circumstances.

⁶⁷ “Ainsi l’adversaire [Arsinoé] balbutie, et c’est Célimène qui sait parler... La parole d’Arsinoé s’est perdue dans les sables de l’équivoque et des circonlocutions. Celle de Célimène, pareille à un flot calme, brille d’un éclat doux, à la fois égal et toujours varié” (Zuber 272).

⁶⁸ Célimène accuses Arsinoé of tending to others’ (mis)conduct more than her own: “Et leur conclusion fut que vous feriez bien / De prendre moins de soins des actions des autres / Et de vous mettre un peu plus en peine des vôtres; / Qu’on doit se regarder soi-même un fort long temps / Avant que de songer à condamner les gens” (3.4, p. 691).

⁶⁹ “Ayez-en donc, madame, et voyons cette affaire; / Par ce rare secret efforcez-vous de plaire” (3.4, p. 693). Ironically, Célimène’s challenge to Arsinoé leads the way to the coquette’s downfall. Whereas Arsinoé relies solely on threatening words during her first encounter, she subsequently turns to action by offering an incriminating letter of Célimène’s to Alceste (3.5, p. 697). Though this letter does not have as damaging an effect as the ones that Acaste and Clitandre later reveal, it casts great doubt on Célimène’s love for Alceste and causes an important confusion to be discussed further on. Moreover, it places Arsinoé in league with the two marquises who triumph over Célimène in the end, even if Alceste rejects the false prude just as bitterly as the coquette (5.4, p. 723).

⁷⁰ A similar battle of wits occurs between Célimène and Alceste in the third scene of Act 4. In short, he ambushes her with the letter that Arsinoé gave him and makes accusations of infidelity. Célimène, while neither defending nor denying the facts, takes control of the dispute by returning the accusations toward Alceste who had been so quick to believe what he heard from others. She reprimands him for not taking her declarations of love seriously and emerges victorious as the victim of the situation (4.3, p. 707).

Célimène likewise values the versatility of speech over concrete actions because the former less clearly exposes her hidden motivations.⁷¹ As such, she relies on equivocal language to avoid conviction in her words, as seen in her cautious declaration of love for Alceste:

Alceste

Qu'ai-je de plus qu'eux tous, madame, je vous prie ?

Célimène

Le bonheur de savoir que vous êtes aimé.

Alceste

Et quel lieu de le croire a mon cœur enflammé ?

Célimène

Je pense qu'ayant pris le soin de vous le dire,
Un aveu de la sorte a de quoi vous suffire.

Alceste

Mais qui m'assurera que dans le même instant
Vous n'en disiez peut-être aux autres tout autant ?

Célimène

Certes, pour un amant, la fleurette est mignonne,
Et vous me traitez là de gentille personne.
Hé bien ! pour vous ôter d'un semblable souci,
De tout ce que j'ai dit je me dédis ici,
Et rien ne saurait plus vous tromper que vous-même :
Soyez content. (2.1, pp. 669-670)

⁷¹ Similarly, Célimène's dialogue often downplays her agency or responsibility in potentially compromising situations. For instance, upon Alceste accusing her of having too many lovers she at first blames her own charms that involuntarily cause people to like her, then appeals to the laws of decorum: "Des amants que je fais me rendez-vous coupable? / Puis-je empêcher les gens de me trouver aimable? / Et, lorsque pour me voir ils font de doux efforts, / Dois-je prendre un bâton pour les mettre dehors?" (2.1, p. 668) Because there is a great deal of bad faith in what Célimène says here (given that she truly enjoys the admiration), Alceste sees through her "reluctant" welcoming of men as an obliging hostess-lover. As Mesnard notes, "C'est son charme...qui attire d'abord les soupirants, mais ensuite il lui faut conserver ceux qu'elle a gagnés" (886). Thus, her beauty acts as a lure but she owns some responsibility in keeping them interested. Nevertheless, that does not stop Alceste from occasionally defending her flawed rhetoric of faultlessness by passing the blame on to those who feed her amour-propre, such as the salon audience that laughs at her cruel portraits: "Non morbleu! c'est à vous; et vos ris complaisants / Tirent de son esprit tous ces traits médisants; / Son humeur satirique est sans cesse nourrie / Par le coupable encens de votre flatterie, / Et son cœur à railler trouverait moins d'appas / S'il avait observé qu'on ne l'applaudît pas. / C'est ainsi qu'aux flatteurs on doit partout se prendre / Des vices où l'on voit les humains se répandre" (2.4, pp. 677-678).

Here, not only does Célimène offer a timid understatement of her love through ambiguous language, but she almost immediately resorts to sarcasm (in which she bitingly says the opposite of what she really means) and maintains her right to retract her words, as if to say that words are truly malleable and erasable in significance.⁷² This oblique way of speaking likens Célimène's discourse to that of preciosity, a highly coded social aesthetic popular among women in the 1650s and 1660s for its elegance, wit, and association with "galanterie" and pure love.⁷³ Therefore, by leaning on a feminized linguistic strategy and cultivating a certain ambiguity in her language, Célimène is able to strike a balance between subtly expressing her amorous feelings and evading the potential trap of commitment.

This coquette's penchant for evasive verbal discourse transfers similarly into her written expression. Célimène sends letters to many suitors but, as revealed by Acaste and Clitandre in the fourth scene of the final act, they are not so much love letters as derisive portraits of the recipient's rivals meant to maintain her state of non-commitment. In this sense, Célimène keeps a suitor interested not by directly affirming her love for him but rather by disparaging his competitors and suggesting a *lack* of love for *them*.

However, a more mysterious letter reveals significant (and often misunderstood) details about Célimène: that she truly loves Alceste and is capable of honest passion.⁷⁴ More

⁷² As Lalande remarks, "Célimène views language playfully. Speech is not binding, but can be altered at will and according to the situation at hand" (*Intruders* 152). As it were, Célimène makes comical use of ironic language throughout the play. For one, she uses it to highlight her role as a victim to Alceste's harsh words, as seen in the citation above and after he likens her to a figure beyond even the devil's wicked creation: "Voilà certainement des douceurs que j'admire" (4.3, p. 703). Secondly, she uses sarcasm to prevent the exposure of her feelings for Alceste, as we will see further on during the same scene about the mysterious letter.

⁷³ While scholars seldom note that Célimène is a *précieuse*, Richard Goodkin argues that she exhibits precious behavior in restricting the expression of her love for Alceste (as argued further on) ("Between" 562). He also assumes that Molière downplays the explicitness of her preciousness in order to avoid a more typical parodic representation that the playwright himself had perpetuated earlier in a play such as *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659).

⁷⁴ For this portion of my argument, I rely heavily on Goodkin's perspicacious article "Between Genders, Between Genres: Célimène's Letter to Alceste in Molière's *Le Misanthrope*." I do my best to summarize a complex

specifically, Arsinoé possesses a letter penned by Célimène that does not denigrate suitors as the other letters do but rather shows an outpouring of love.⁷⁵ In an effort to ruin the coquette's delicate management of her suitors, Arsinoé gives the unsigned letter to the ever-jealous Alceste and tells him it is intended for Oronte. Upon being confronted, Célimène confirms that it is her handwriting but shows no embarrassment that he holds it, intimating that it is intended for him in truth even if she provocatively circumvents a direct answer.⁷⁶ Alceste nevertheless assumes that Célimène's reluctance to admit the intended recipient's identity means that it is indeed for Oronte, at which point she becomes angry and characteristically lashes back by playing into his unfounded suspicion: "Non, il est pour Oronte, et je veux qu'on le croie; / Je reçois tous ses soins avec beaucoup de joie, / J'admire ce qu'il dit, j'estime ce qu'il est, / Et je tombe d'accord de tout ce qu'il vous plaît" (4.3, p. 706).⁷⁷ Given her inclination for sarcasm, the atypical excess of attachment in her vocabulary, and the demonstrated odiousness of Oronte in the first act, Célimène's declaration can only be a lie and a result of Alceste hitting a sensitive spot. In other words, her feelings are visibly hurt because Alceste has completely missed the meaning of her

presentation of facts that convincingly elucidates Célimène's underlying feelings toward all of her suitors, but I suggest reading the article for a more in-depth exploration of such an innovative reading.

⁷⁵ As Alceste describes it, "Tous les mots d'un billet qui montre tant de flamme" (4.3, p. 706).

⁷⁶ Alceste does not recognize Célimène's writing in the letter and must solicit her confirmation that it belongs to her, a sign that he has never received another letter with which to compare it (4.3, p. 705). While all the other suitors have letters from Célimène to reveal in the final act, Alceste has none, suggesting that he is indeed a singular man in her eyes. As Goodkin argues, Célimène cannot adeptly express her love for him and so she writes undeliverable letters "simply as an exercise in self-expression... This kind of letter is midway between a *brouillon* of a letter she might send if it ever came out just right... and an entry in a *journal intime* that simply records her ongoing private thoughts and feelings. Might such a 'letter' not be more likely to be left lying around where it could be picked up by an inquisitive visitor like Arsinoé than a letter addressed and sent to a particular individual?" ("Between" 554-555).

⁷⁷ Fleck aptly remarks how Alceste, akin to earlier moliéresque fools such as Arnolphe and Sganarelle, is assuredly at fault in his assumptions of Célimène's infidelity: "Le plus raffiné dans la ligne des 'cocus imaginaires,' il est à la fois jeune premier et obstacle à la réalisation de son amour... Sans être barbon, il est plus rigide que tout *pater senex*. Obstacle de lui-même de par son caractère, non à cause d'une folie récemment survenue comme chez Orgon, il n'a pas l'excuse non plus du vieillissement" (67).

unique letter and it becomes a failed dialogue in which her genuine love is misconstrued as brazen infidelity.

Thus upon careful reading Célimène emerges as the truly sentimental lover in the play but she demonstrates that she has good reason to employ coquettish tactics nonetheless.⁷⁸ In short, coquetry not only bolsters her social dominance but it helps protect her heart from Alceste who is a dubious lover not to be taken at his word: As Goodkin argues, “Alceste is not a misanthrope, but rather a fundamentally social creature playing the role of misanthrope...Alceste desires Célimène as an object of *others*’ desires...[and] pursues Célimène because of, and not in spite of, her other suitors” (“Between” 558-559).⁷⁹ His unrelenting performance of misanthropy dutifully causes Philinte, Éliante, and Arsinoé to pursue him much in the way Célimène’s suitors chase her, but whereas Célimène chooses a central focal point to attract admiration, Alceste opts for a marginal, fragmented one that requires more attention-seeking on his part. Because Célimène is the only character that does not actively pursue Alceste, thereby foreclosing rejection by him, he wishes to extract her approval one day so that he may finally refuse her and assert his supremacy.⁸⁰ As noted earlier, Célimène writes undeliverable letters to Alceste and

⁷⁸ As Goodkin writes, “the play takes on an entirely new dimension, and a surprising coherence, if one rereads it with the idea that Célimène is more or less leveling with Alceste at all times, her seeming ambivalence a product of reticence rather than duplicity” (“Between” 563).

⁷⁹ If Alceste desires only women who are desirable, this also explains why he does not pursue Éliante (who is only desirable to Philinte): “Alceste realizes that her admirable qualities would force his begrudging recognition and deflect admiration from his own person, whereas Célimène’s stubborn independence of spirit not only provides him with fuel for his self-righteous ire, but allows him to envisage a more challenging project” (Lalande *Intruders* 148).

⁸⁰ Alceste exhibits his insecurity with Célimène’s dominant position in the salon when describing her inability to be “saved” by his love: “Oui, je voudrais qu’aucun ne vous trouvât aimable, / Que vous fussiez réduite en un sort misérable, / Que le ciel, en naissant, ne vous eût donné rien, / Que vous n’eussiez ni rang, ni naissance, ni bien, / Afin que de mon cœur l’éclatant sacrifice / Vous pût d’un pareil sort réparer l’injustice; / Et que j’eusse la joie et la gloire, en ce jour, / De vous voir tenir tout des mains de mon amour” (4.3, p. 708). In other words, Alceste wishes he had some form of leverage over Célimène in order to keep her faithful. In the end, his ironic use of chivalrous and Cornelian language here makes him appear old-fashioned and foolish. As Pierre Force notes, “Le magnanime est l’homme qui fait briller une vertu parfaite...On ne peut donc pas imaginer de personnage qui prête moins à la satire

tests the sincerity of his devotion through ambiguous declarations of love, illustrating that she wants to commit to him but is conscious of some risk within, such as the loss of her position of power (or even his planned rejection).⁸¹ Only after having been ruined by Acaste and Clitandre does she find the opportune moment to accept Alceste's marriage proposal, at which point he shows his true colors and rejects her declared devotion (and *not* her refusal to leave the court).⁸² Coquetry therefore allows Célimène to keep Alceste's own quest for dominance in check until the moment that her suitors disarm her of it.

It henceforth becomes clear that it is not Célimène's coquettish management of men that causes her to leave the stage defeated, because on the contrary coquetry is her best defensive strategy. Instead, Célimène reveals her mortal flaw through the other label that she commonly receives, that of "médisante," because it is the scornful (and loveless) letters that she writes to Acaste and Clitandre that cause her true downfall.⁸³ In other words, had Célimène not sent those letters in the first place, none of the suitors would have discovered her secret disdain and abandoned her, consequently stripping the coquette of her desirability and opening the window

que le magnanime. Ainsi, en faisant d'Alceste un magnanime ridicule, Molière participe à l'entreprise de démolition du héros qui caractérise les *Maximes* de La Rochefoucauld" (109).

⁸¹ Éliante highlights the incertitude of Célimène's love for Alceste: "Comment pouvoir juger s'il est vrai qu'elle l'aime? / Son cœur de ce qu'il sent n'est pas bien sûr lui-même; / Il aime quelquefois sans qu'il le sache bien, / Et croit aimer aussi parfois qu'il n'en est rien" (4.1, p. 699).

⁸² Goodkin explains in more detail the intricacies of Alceste's rejection: "Alceste claims to base his rejection of Célimène on her refusal to go into social exile with him. But the real source of his rejection is not her *refusal* to leave society behind ('ce refus'), but rather her *acceptance* of his offer of marriage, for no sooner is the word 'hymen' out of Célimène's mouth than Alceste jumps on it and voices his own refusal. As Gossman explains, Alceste wants Célimène only as long as she has the power either to accept him or reject him and choose another: 'Had she accepted his offer, he would have ceased to 'love' her, since, having renounced her freedom, she would no longer be in a position to give it up for him' (75). Consequently, when Célimène does in fact try to accept Alceste's offer, he ceases to 'love' her...The timing of Alceste's own refusal makes it clear that what he is reacting to is Célimène's acceptance, not her refusal" ("Between" 561).

⁸³ Scholars often label Célimène "une coquette médisante" perhaps in light of her initial characterization by Philinte: "Tandis qu'en ses liens Célimène l'amuse, / De qui l'humeur coquette et l'esprit médisant / Semblent si fort donner dans les mœurs d'à présent" (1.1, p. 565).

for Alceste to entrap her. Even if her portraits are confirmed by others to be accurate, her ruin by slander (rather than by coquetry) comes across as better deserved since “*médiance*” represents a more contentious vice and an affront to the “*galant*” atmosphere that is supposed to reign within the salon.⁸⁴ Moreover, the malicious letters, with their capacity to be circulated and traced, exemplify a largely immutable medium for communication and do not belong with the array of elusive tactics that make Célimène so brilliantly coquettish, such as her retractions and precious enunciations that avoid a language of commitment. Thus, she makes a strategic error in writing down undeniable attacks rather than relying on her typical illusory techniques.

Célimène may not be any less wrong than her peers for the way she operates within the salon but that does not mean she faces ultimate defeat. It is often surmised that her retreat from the final scene indicates that Alceste and the other suitors have ejected her from her courtly throne and have ruined her reputation for good. But as many scholars have noted, Célimène is still young and beautiful and she can likely reestablish her dominance elsewhere: “we know that she will resurface in one form or another, for she owes her resilience to her mutability” (Lalande *Intruders* 167).⁸⁵ In truth, part of her hidden success stems from her evasion of marriage given

⁸⁴ Forestier and Bourqui underscore Célimène’s true social crime: “en tant que ‘*médiane*,’ elle dévoile l’idéal galant de l’honnête raillerie en satire universelle et la pratique mondaine du portrait en exercice exclusivement satirique” (1439). However, Mesnard touches on a valid point: “qu’est-ce que la misanthropie, sinon une *médiance* généralisée?... Sans doute Alceste, dans la grande scène des portraits, blâme-t-il la *médiance* autant que la flatterie... Mais au fond, seule la flatterie est visée, en tant qu’elle est incluse dans la *médiance*: dire du mal d’autrui est, pour un misanthrope, chose normale” (870). In this light, Alceste is no less guilty than Célimène when it comes to badmouthing people. In truth, even a more “reasonable” character such as Éliante is culpable of *médiance* by association in that she enjoys hearing her cousin’s slanderous portraits: “Ce début n’est pas mal; et contre le prochain / La conversation prend un assez bon train” (2.4, p. 674). In short, Molière spares no character in this play, allowing Célimène to avoid bearing the majority of the blame and folly.

⁸⁵ Vernet agrees about Célimène’s resilience but notes that she can only employ her strategy as long as she is still attractive, meaning that she cannot evade punishment forever: “La coquetterie est structuraliste avec Célimène, en ce qu’elle reconstitue chaque fois, et avec plaisir, les mêmes relations avec des éléments différents. Célimène ne serait donc pas elle-même si les petits marquis ne disparaissaient pas, et croire que nous avons dans leur départ une ‘punition’ semblable à celle qui frappe les personnages qui ont usurpé quelque chose... serait une erreur. Je crois que Célimène va s’employer gaiement à reconstituer son salon. Mais qu’elle le fasse le cœur léger ne veut pas dire qu’elle échappe à la conduite qui est chez Molière le lot de ceux qui ont perdu contact avec la nature: la répétition et

that it would limit her ability to be effectively coquettish in the future (and transfer the power of her widowhood into the hands of a husband). The only marriage to take place will occur between Éliante and Philinte, but its rushed nature and their typical conciliatory attitude suggest that the union is a “somewhat dreary compromise” (167) that stands in contrast to the passion and dynamism exchanged between Célimène and Alceste. Lacking warmth and profundity, the two “reasonable” characters are not as endearing to spectators as the main couple (Mesnard 885), and thus Célimène still emerges as the most interesting woman in the play.⁸⁶

Molière retains our attention on Célimène because she is imperial and enigmatic on the surface yet, if we delve deeper into her character, human and logical at her core. While her passive strategy within the salon may not render her a paragon of feminine agency in comparison to other theatrical coquettes, Molière nevertheless positions her as the leading figure of the “galant” aesthetic that has overtaken courtly manners and consequently triumphed over the old-fashioned heroics that Alceste rigidly espouses. In this light, the playwright offers a certain theory of the coquette in which she perfectly embodies the new “feminine” style of communicating under Louis XIV’s regime, and though its use of ambiguous, inconsistent, and

l’agitation. La punition est bien loin au-delà du dénouement: ce qui la guette, puisque de cercle en cercle elle va dissiper sa jeunesse, c’est de devenir Arsinoé, comme elle l’envisage elle-même” (169).

⁸⁶ Furthermore, Éliante and Philinte may not be as good-hearted as they appear, confirming that there are no perfect perspectives in *Le Misanthrope*. For Éliante, she claims to be in love with Alceste and desires to marry him (4.1, p. 699) because she finds his self-proclaimed slavishness to sincerity noble and heroic (4.1, p. 698). But as Vernet remarks, her heart easily disobeys this love in the face of a more reasonable courtship with Philinte, and thus such a hypocritical character cannot be the source of the play’s wisdom (163).

Similarly, though Philinte’s philosophy of compromise often marks him as the most gracious and reasonable character in the play, his attraction for Éliante perhaps belies a more underhanded motivation in his constant pursuit of Alceste. Early on Philinte makes bold mention of Éliante to Alceste in a way that slyly communicates his interest in her (1.1, p. 657). Next, he makes his feelings known to Éliante herself and indicates his interest in marriage should Alceste one day belong to Célimène (4.1, pp. 699-700). Given that Philinte continually tries to advise Alceste on how to function within the salon and thus procure Célimène’s love, Vernet speculates that the “reasoner” is secretly hoping to pair the two so as to render Éliante available for himself: “Dans cette chaîne amoureuse qui ressemble tant à celle d’*Andromaque* (Philinte aime Éliante qui aime Alceste qui aime Célimène), pourrait-on imaginer Philinte travaillant au bonheur d’Alceste uniquement pour assurer le sien?” (176)

insincere language may not be very righteous or even guarantee success, it nevertheless appears more intelligent than clinging to outdated morals and bygone power structures.

The Mercurial Gallant: How to Lose a Cad, a King, and Cupid in Baron's *Le Rendez-vous des Tuileries ou le Coquet trompé* (1685)

As in *Le Misanthrope*, Michel Baron's *Le Rendez-vous des Tuileries ou le Coquet trompé* (1685) takes place in the private home of the leading coquette where she receives a number of aristocrats, many of whom are potential lovers. But, whereas Célimène ultimately finds herself ambushed and ushered out of her own salon, the coquettish Marquise sets the traps herself and more importantly creates a female-centric environment where she is able to resist patriarchal order and authority until the very end. Because it was performed twenty years after the previous two coquette plays, Baron's work draws upon a different historical context in which women appear to have an even stronger handle on court sociability, but speculative strategies and unpredictable games nevertheless influence the amorous adventures of all characters. Behind this backdrop of feminine ascendancy and anarchy, the play showcases a debauched nobility that destabilizes the absolutist values of the Ancien Régime as they near the end of the century and Louis XIV's reign.⁸⁷

What renders Baron's dissolute characters all the more interesting is his metatheatrical approach in which he blurs the line between the stage and the audience in the Hôtel de Guénégaud where the play was first performed.⁸⁸ The author achieves this porosity through his play's prologue, a quasi-independent opening act that casts the actors (including Baron) as

⁸⁷ Baron performed his play before the king at Versailles and for Louis XIV's brother Monsieur at Saint-Cloud, plus an additional performance at Anet near the end of the play's run (Hostiou 17-18). With this in mind, it is unlikely that the playwright sought to deliver a treasonous message wherein a sort of anarchy is preferred. Instead, I suggest he merely paints a cynical portrait of noble society during this period and subtly highlights the lack of reliable order emanating from the state, as explained further on.

⁸⁸ The play enjoyed a modest success until 1687, with eighteen representations in Paris and three more at court (Hostiou 17-18).

themselves on stage discussing the imminent performance of *Le Rendez-vous*.⁸⁹ Jeanne-Marie Hostiou argues that the prologue's references to realistic elements, such as backstage ambiance and the performance time, establishes a jovial "connivance" with the audience, acknowledging the public's presence and preparing them for a smooth transition between the social reality within the theater and the fictional theatrical experience to follow (26-28).⁹⁰ Baron likewise places "spectators" on the stage as models for good and bad behavior, further blurring the barrier between the characters and the audience.

As seen through this distorted mirroring effect, the play's characters are indeed the creations of an author who was cynical about his society, and in particular the idle nobility. La Marquise and La Comtesse are best friends who sleep during the day and spend their nights playing cards with a brood of undignified aristocrats. As young widows, they shun the idea of remarriage and entertain several suitors at once.⁹¹ Nevertheless, they each fall in love with an impoverished nobleman whom their families refuse to acknowledge. La Marquise's preferred choice, Éraste, rivals her in coquettish behavior and seeks to make his fortune through marriage as he hedges his bets on La Marquise and an unseen woman, Dorimène.⁹² Due to her

⁸⁹ Jeanne-Marie Hostiou remarks how Baron pioneered this metatheatrical technique as a prologue (as opposed to an entire play, such as Molière's *L'Impromptu de Versailles*) in that it was the first one to be staged by the Comédie-Française, after which approximately sixty others followed until 1750 (24).

⁹⁰ Perhaps of foremost significance to the metatheatrical metaphor was the inclusion of two well-known figures, Champagne and La Crosnier, who were real-life employees of the playhouse, thereby exposing the mechanical element of theater in favor of promoting the tenets of illusion.

⁹¹ Baron never makes specific reference to the ages of the coquettes but they are attractive enough to seduce many suitors. Furthermore, Hostiou notes how La Marquise and La Comtesse were undoubtedly interpreted by La Dancourt and La Raisin respectively, two actresses around the age of twenty who were known for their beauty (19).

⁹² Éraste's simultaneous courtship of these women is reminiscent of the coquettes of Chapter 3 because they all let their financial interests supplant their sentimental ones. However, whereas the coquettes' motivations are explained in order to attenuate their greed, Éraste is given no backstory and demonstrates no real need for money. Éraste may be capable of love given his ardent declarations to her (1.8, p. 93), but like La Marquise his vanity and jealousy make him incompatible with love. The only difference that separates them is that La Marquise finds a way to cure herself and Éraste leaves the stage in perpetual despair, crying "Ah ciel!" (3.11, p. 127).

perspicacious suspicions, La Marquise sets a trap in the Tuileries to unmask him as a coquet and succeeds. Despite Éraste's backpedaling and seemingly genuine adoration, La Marquise rejects him forever and exorcises herself of love for him, the one obstacle to her desired fate: to continue enjoying life as a liberated widow. Her plan works doubly well because it scares off another suitor, Le Vicomte, who was abusing her family's approval of him to coerce her into marriage.

The above plot summary demonstrates how La Marquise exhibits some typically coquettish traits, including unfaithfulness and artfulness, and other moments in the play further confirm her identification with the character type. She is shown to be fickle, specifically in the way that she changes company often and seeks novelty (1.3, p. 84). She also thrives on attention if not scandal (as shown in the epigraph of this chapter), and thus her actions revolve around attracting people to her house, particularly gamblers and fawning men.⁹³ La Marquise's servant Du Laurier acts as her harshest critic but she also recognizes how her mistress is no different from other Parisian women: "elle est coquette, injuste, railleuse, avare, médisante...il faudrait que les messieurs cherchassent un autre climat où les dames fussent autrement qu'elles ne sont ici" (2.2, p. 97).⁹⁴ Here, Du Laurier enumerates commonplace behaviors of literary coquettes and remarks how La Marquise is not alone, underscoring the impression that the noblewoman represents only one coquette of many. In this sense, La Marquise appears to symbolize an extreme case of coquetry that embodies traits typical of theatrical coquettes as well as real-life Parisian peers. Without even a first name to provide a more unique identity, La Marquise

⁹³ La Marquise most clearly achieves this goal of attracting visitors by turning her home into a gambling den at night. This is reminiscent of Flavie in Raymond Poisson's *Les Pipeurs ou les Femmes coquettes* (1671) who invites card sharks into her home to stave off the woes of domestic married life (as discussed in Chapter 3).

⁹⁴ Du Laurier is full of resentment because she works both day and night to serve La Marquise: "Il y a trois jours que je ne me déshabille point" (1.3, p. 85). Nevertheless, the servant fails to serve as a reliable voice of morality because her tirade ends with complaints about her mistress not sharing her ill-gotten gambling profits (1.3, p. 86).

convincingly represents both a noble character type on stage and an entire noble rank in the audience, thus reinforcing the metatheatrical nature of the play.

La Marquise does however differ from other courtly coquettes, and most significantly in her capacity to love one man.⁹⁵ Although she aims to remain a free and playful widow La Marquise truly loves Éraste and thus her feelings for him have evidently muddled her plans.⁹⁶ She expresses sufficient bitterness to explain her distaste for living under male authority and so it is telling that she appears ready to give up widowhood for him.⁹⁷ As such, the only legitimate obstacle to their marriage lies in his coquettish behavior: La Marquise refuses to compete not only with Éraste's vanity but with his second lover Dorimène as well: "[Il] se trouve pour le moins aussi coquet que je suis coquette. Je ne m'accommode point du tout de cela, et je veux l'être seule" (1.4, p. 88). In other words, she would marry him if he were truly compatible, but she suspects that he is not and finds herself in an impasse of non-negotiable love.

However, La Marquise does not passively accept her dilemma but rather acts to fix it, further separating her from earlier coquettes such as Elvire and Célimène who favor discussion over action.⁹⁸ As mentioned earlier, she devises an elaborate ruse to finally put Éraste to the test:

⁹⁵ As discussed earlier in this chapter, Elvire denies loving anyone and never proves contrary, whereas Célimène seems unable to declare her love in total clarity even if the text suggests that she does love Alceste. In *Le Rendez-vous*, La Comtesse sincerely loves Dorante but is unable to ever put it into words, unlike La Marquise who mocks her friend for her prudence and admits her love for Éraste: "Je ne ferai pas comme vous, et je vous avouerai de bonne foi que c'est lui-même" (1.4, p. 88).

⁹⁶ La Marquise states early on that Éraste is the only man in the world capable of overcoming her refusal to remarry (1.4, p. 88), and later reiterates her point with an unequivocal avowal of love: "Car enfin je veux bien vous l'avouer une seconde fois, je l'aime" (3.1, p. 114).

⁹⁷ "Ma chère Comtesse, que vous me parlez bien en femme qui voudrait encore vivre sous les lois d'un époux! Je ne suivrai pas votre exemple si je puis, et ce doit être assez d'avoir été mariée une fois pour ne vouloir plus l'être" (1.4, p. 87).

⁹⁸ In other words, spectators do not see La Marquise philosophize about coquettish tenets (such as pleasure) or lambast her enemies with an acute wit. Instead, they witness coquettish behavior in the way that she lives a carefree life of leisure and trumps her enemies through ruses.

If he passes she will marry him the next day, but if he fails she vows never to see him again (3.1, p. 114).⁹⁹ Predictably, Éraste fails by proving his forbidden association with Dorimène and thus his intolerable coquettishness. Having doubtless learned of his infidelity, La Marquise deems her plot a success because it has “cured” her of her obstructive feelings for him: “de semblables procédés me guérissent si absolument, que vous ne remarquerez plus rien que de fort indifférent dans tout ce que vous m’allez voir faire” (3.8, p. 125). By triumphing over her lover/enemy Éraste, La Marquise has found a convincing reason to stop listening to her heart and to continue trusting her wits that tell her not to pursue remarriage. As this process shows, Baron chooses to have La Marquise face an internal obstacle that she is able to adeptly resolve on her own, thus showcasing a feminine agency that brings rewards in this theatrical era.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, several external obstacles that derive from patriarchal power emerge during the play, but the way in which the coquettes easily sidestep them helps prove their dominance over their socio-political milieu. For one, in spite of their status as widows both La Comtesse and La Marquise face familial resistance to their preferred marital partners.¹⁰¹ La Comtesse complains of an uncle who will not accept Dorante because he is too poor (1.4, p. 87) but after the young couple wins a large sum during a card game (3.6, p. 118), the objection disappears

⁹⁹ La Marquise’s ruse entails several steps. First, she writes an anonymous letter to Éraste’s other lover, Dorimène, telling her that La Marquise will be holding a rendez-vous in the Tuileries at five that afternoon. Then, she dresses her servants Du Laurier and Dumont to resemble herself and a mysterious suitor, respectively, and sends them to the gardens at that time so as to give the impression that she truly is cheating on Éraste. Ever the jealous lover, Éraste indeed shows up to fight the suitor, thereby proving that he met with Dorimène who told him the exclusive information about La Marquise’s whereabouts.

¹⁰⁰ In a metatheatrical moment, La Marquise assures the more naïve Comtesse that she is in full control of her fate and knows the result of her ruse before it even happens: “Le dénouement vous éclaircira du reste” (1.6, p. 90). La Comtesse lacks this perspicacious nature, preferring to trust a lover implicitly in spite of all evidence to the contrary. She warns La Marquise against her ruse for Éraste because she fears her friend will regret knowing the truth: “je crois qu’il serait bien mieux d’ignorer les choses qui ne sauraient que vous donner du déplaisir à apprendre” (3.1, p. 114). Thus, in contrast to her friend, La Comtesse believes in passivity and finds that ignorance is bliss.

¹⁰¹ The theme of families controlling young widows returns in the other Baron play that I examine in Chapter 3, *La Coquette et la fausse prude* (1686).

without further mention and they decide to wed in the final scene. In this sense, the hazardous nature of gaming overcomes the strict rules of the classical order, demonstrating that speculative behavior may ironically foster stable relationships. As for La Marquise, she too must make bluffs of her own in order to prevail: She tolerates the courtship of the aged and brutal Vicomte so that she appears to be working toward a respectable marriage as her meddlesome family demands (1.4, p. 90). While this threat seems serious early on, later it suddenly becomes irrelevant as La Marquise vows to resist their authority and marry Éraste within a day (should he pass her test). Her only remaining task, then, is to “cure” Le Vicomte of his love for her by making sure he witnesses how cruelly she fools Éraste.¹⁰² She subsequently asks for his hand in marriage, and as planned, he becomes frightened and refuses her offer:

Le Vicomte

Dieu m'en garde, Madame, Éraste est en allé. Si vous en savez tant contre les gens que vous aimez. Je suis tout étourdi. Que feriez-vous donc contre moi ?

La Marquise

Je vous conseille de garder de pareils sentiments. (3.11, p. 128)

¹⁰² As another tactic for repulsing Le Vicomte, La Marquise falsely demonstrates her willingness to marry him but confesses her preference for Éraste: in this way she appears to obey her family's wishes while secretly undermining Le Vicomte's devotion to her (3.2, p. 116). She also extracts a declaration of love from him but she artfully turns it into another trap that is reminiscent of a Cornelian dilemma: “Prouvez-le-moi en ne m'épousant pas” (3.5, p. 118).

Although it is uncommon for a heroine to remain unmarried at the end of a comedy, here Baron gives his character the happy ending that she desires: freedom from both marriage and love.¹⁰³

She never speaks of remarriage again and thus she endures as a threat to the social order.¹⁰⁴

Just as La Marquise dispenses with husbands and fathers, the troublesome widow turns her back on the masculine rhetoric of the absolutist monarchy by conducting her life on the periphery and inverting patriarchal values. Because she has long been excluded from court due to her widowhood (2.15, p. 112), she uses her home as her own peripheral palace where she may receive guests and become the center of attention as if she were the monarch. However, La Marquise rejects the court's masculine order in favor of female-led disorder, as Du Laurier remarks: "Pour moi, il m'est impossible de concevoir comment elle peut faire tant de choses à la fois, et comment tant d'ordre peut s'accorder avec tant de désordre" (2.3, p. 98). La Marquise thus establishes her own topsy-turvy (but functional) way of life, including her nocturnal habits

¹⁰³ Scholars have sometimes misinterpreted this ending to mean that La Marquise is so misguidedly coquettish that she has tricked herself out of all viable marriages.

For one, Guy Spielmann finds Le Vicomte to be an acceptable partner for La Marquise in that his refusal at the end costs her a victory: "Si Éraсте perd contre son amante, la marquise, au jeu qui consiste à prendre l'autre en flagrant délit de tromperie, cette dernière n'en sort pas pour autant victorieuse, car celui par qui elle consent finalement à se faire épouser refuse de donner suite, dégoûté par le cynisme de cette jeune veuve qui joue avec les cœurs et les esprits sans plus de scrupules que lorsqu'elle joue à la bassette ou au pharaon—parallèle souligné par son entrée au début de la pièce, au sortir d'une nuit blanche passée à jouer" ("Mise(s) en jeu" 199). To read Le Vicomte's refusal as a lost advantage for the coquette is to disregard not only his contemptible behavior (as demonstrated in every scene in which he appears), but also La Marquise's reply in which she proves her contentment over his decision.

Barbara Sommovigo makes a similar error in trusting the worth of a traditional marriage ending: "Mais pas de dénouement heureux pour la Marquise, vouée à la solitude, en punition exemplaire d'une vie discutable en dehors des règles et des conventions" (137). Of course, "punishing" La Marquise with eternal widowhood only continues to support her status as a rebellious figure, something the coquette has promoted for herself since the play's first act.

Additionally, Baron demonstrates the ridiculousness of marriage by ending his comedy with a metatheatrical coupling of the servants Du Laurier and Dumont. These two show no affection for one another throughout the entire play, but in the final scene they agree to marry in order to avoid the work seeming like a tragedy after Éraсте shed blood by beating Dumont. They conclude their loveless match-up with a mercantile gesture ("touche-là" 3.11, p. 128) that cynically underscores the financial element behind most marriages.

¹⁰⁴ The pastoral number that closes the prologue creates a conspicuous link to the principal play by foreshadowing the coquette's triumph. In the pastoral, the shepherdess denies marriage to two lovers in order to preserve her status as the center of male attention (Prologue, scene 14, p. 72). By withholding her final choice and thus perpetuating her availability, the shepherdess retains her position of power and clearly bears a strong resemblance to La Marquise in the final scene when she safeguards her own happiness in loveless singlehood.

that reject the brilliance of the sun and consequently Apollo, the divine counterpart to Louis XIV (Hostiou 39).¹⁰⁵ La Marquise likewise mocks the church's rigorous expectation of virtue in women, as seen by her irreverent thirst for a scandalous reputation and her disregard for Du Laurier's impression of public opinion: "Croyez-vous enfin qu'ils pensent que c'est pour prier Dieu que vous passez chez vous les nuits avec des hommes?" (1.3, p. 85). In short, by leading a life of unbridled pleasures La Marquise dismisses the three pillars of the absolutist regime (the father, the king, and God) (Hostiou 39) in order to foster a chaotic environment where women can thrive.¹⁰⁶ While certain men such as Éraсте may imitate her coquettish strategies and even temporarily outwit her, she ultimately proves her feminine superiority via her ruse: "Rien n'est plus difficile à tromper qu'une coquette. Hé croyez-moi aujourd'hui, je le convaincrai d'une manière qu'il ne pourra pas s'en défendre" (1.6, p. 90).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Half of the play does in fact take place at night. It begins before dawn with the brandy vendor awakening the servants (1.1, p. 75) and hits nightfall in Act II as indicated by the first "bonsoir" from Le Vicomte (2.13, p. 108).

¹⁰⁶ Baron's femino-centric environment even fosters a genuine female friendship between La Marquise and La Comtesse, a rarity in the theatrical world for male authors (Gethner "Female" 31). The women exhibit a desire to spend time together (1.3, pp. 83-84) and never malign one another in spite of their different temperaments.

¹⁰⁷ In addition to questioning absolutist ideals, Hostiou remarks how Baron frames his anti-establishment play in a way that questions its overbearing theatrical heritage, in particular the glory days of Corneille and Molière against whom all subsequent theater was judged (42). She suggests that the title, with its flashy reference to the well-known gardens, was likely meant to mirror (if not mock) the strategies of Corneille who had been criticized for naming plays after popular Parisian sites when they had no bearing on the action of the play, such as *La Galerie du Palais* ou *l'Amie rivale* (1633) and *La Place royale* ou *l'Amoureux extravagant* (1634) (34). Baron goes further by not even including the Tuileries in his play, instead only referencing them in an account of what happened there off-stage.

As for Molière, *Le Rendez-vous* enters into an obvious intertextual relationship with *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (1663) wherein Baron copies scenes from his mentor's play but changes them slightly to reflect a distancing from the crown's influence on theater (29). This occurs during the play's prologue, and most notably when Baron excises the role of the king in his version by changing the annoying spectator's question in Molière from "C'est le roi qui vous l'a fait faire?" to "C'est vous qui l'avez faite?," establishing the authority of the playwright over that of the royal patron and addressee (30). In a similar reference where the king's judicial role is denied, the character Baron learns that a cabal is coming to boo his play and his fellow actors wish to alert the king. Baron stops them on the grounds that they should learn to regulate their own petty affairs without bothering the king: "il ne faut pas mettre comme cela le roi à tous les jours. Il nous importe de savoir mieux ménager l'honneur qu'il nous fait de nous écouter" (Prologue, scene 7, p. 58). Hostiou remarks that this subtle jab at Louis XIV may have been in response to the king delegating the care of all theaters to the Dauphine in 1684, which allowed more interference within the troupe and may have felt like a theft of control (31). Thus, whereas Molière uses his work to show his enemies that he is the favored leader of the king's troupe, Baron underscores how the monarchy's growing interest in *controlling* the arts rather than *promoting* them causes the new troupe to fall apart (32).

La Marquise thus reigns supreme in spite of her behavior. Baron places his coquette on a figurative throne where she may govern over a functioning chaos without the aid of a king (figurative or otherwise). In her peripheral position to court, La Marquise is able to create a quasi-courtly space where she passively receives attention from her subjects but also actively desires and achieves her goals herself. In her realm, women are not at the mercy of public opinion and outdated morals but rather they can find a happy ending whether that includes a marriage or not.

With his play Baron addresses a different public from that of Desjardins and Molière, one that is perhaps just as decadent and distracted as his characters, and he recognizes the growing complicity between comedy and the “galant” way of being. Unlike the coquettes Elvire and Célimène whose mischievous behavior predicates their placement on the losing side of the denouement (or at least in an ambiguous state between defeat and triumph), Baron creates a new narrative wherein the coquette not only escapes all forms of punishment but finally finds a heroine’s status among her peers of the fin-de-siècle period. Furthermore, *Le Rendez-vous des Tuileries* signals a change in the characterization of the coquette as courtier because her idleness and self-interest no longer support the absolutist monarchy’s will to keep the nobility distracted and apolitical. While she may indeed remain idle in her daily (or nightly) practices, the coquette’s dissolute behavior now reaches such great heights that she may reject the king’s patriarchal ideals and found her own political sphere with the author’s and audience’s approval.

Conclusion

These plays include some of the earliest examples of coquettes in French theater, and given that they were also penned by well-known authors, it is not surprising that the characters have endured within the genre as quintessential models for coquettish behavior. While it could

be surmised that subsequent coquettish characters would be somewhat mimetic or derivative of their innovative forerunners (in particular Elvire and Célimène), this initial group of coquettes remains decidedly unique due to their noble rank and their exclusive proximity to court, both of which give distinct meaning to their social practices.

More specifically, authors highlight the privileged social position of the courtly coquette largely by presenting coquetry as if it were merely a frivolous habit of the idle nobility. Unlike her bourgeois counterparts whose stories suggest that they use coquetry to solve compromising social situations (as we will see in Chapters 3 and 4), the aristocratic coquette faces no true external obstacles to her goals because she is free from paternal and marital ties and does not seek to enter a subsequent family structure through (re)marriage. Furthermore, despite the glaring charges of betrayal, slander, and infidelity that stand against her, the courtly coquette faces no disciplinary action that may serve as a lesson to spectators at the end of the play. Certainly, the courtly coquette's fate is ambiguous in each author's work and this lack of moralizing closure tends to underscore what is missing from a traditional comic ending: the marriage of all young characters (no matter how coquettish). However, this type of *dénouement* clearly does not mesh well with the aristocratic coquette's regal lifestyle because it would sentence her to a husband's control and remove her from the spotlight. Therefore, in denying her marriage the authors appear to be rewarding her with an open-ended, unknowable future that is truly befitting of such a versatile dissembler.

If the coquette figure in these plays enjoys a unique privilege by mimicking power structures and evading accountability for her actions, she may reveal the authors' understanding of kingship under Louis XIV. In other words, because the courtly coquette perpetuates duplicitous absolutist tactics that work (unfairly) to her advantage, authors seem to be subtly

commenting on the unjust system of their own real-life monarchy that has increasingly enslaved them to the only true social currency: royal favor. Therefore, spectators may delight in the coquette's strategic seduction of her coterie due to her comic affiliation and overall benignity, but the analogous subjugation of courtiers by Louis XIV that is covertly staged emerges as less agreeable to its victims.

If the courtly coquette has lost a good degree of noble "honnêteté" in maintaining such underhanded behavior, she is merely echoing moralist literature on courtiership as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. In particular, the excessive flattery that courtiers perform to please others comes under harsh scrutiny because it is secretly rooted in self-interest. Foremost in this critique may be La Rochefoucauld who frequently ridicules such practices in his *Maximes* (1664-1678): "C'est plutôt par l'estime de nos propres sentiments que nous exagérons les bonnes qualités des autres, que par l'estime de leur mérite; et nous voulons nous attirer des louanges, lorsqu'il semble que nous leur en donnons" (Maxime 143, p. 27). Blaise Pascal, too, unremittingly treats the hidden element of self-interest in society's everyday complaisance in his *Pensées* (first published in 1669): "il y a toujours quelque intérêt à se faire aimer des hommes. Ainsi la vie humaine n'est qu'une illusion perpétuelle: on ne fait que s'entre-tromper et s'entre-flatter" (fragment on amour-propre 978-100, p. 199).¹⁰⁸ Years later, Jean de La Bruyère satirizes the extremely calculated nature of courtiers in his chapter "De la Cour" from *Les Caractères* (1688-1694) and finds in contrast that their amour-propre holds no strategic worth: "Un homme qui sait la cour est maître de son geste, de ses yeux et de son visage; il est profond, impénétrable; il dissimule les mauvais offices, sourit à ses ennemis, contraint son humeur, déguise ses passions,

¹⁰⁸ Pascal's assessment continues: "L'union qui est entre les hommes n'est fondée que sur cette mutuelle tromperie; et peu d'amitiés subsisteraient, si chacun savait ce que son ami dit de lui lorsqu'il n'y est pas, quoiqu'il en parle alors sincèrement et sans passion" (199).

dément son cœur, parle, agit contre ses sentiments. Tout ce grand raffinement n'est qu'un vice, que l'on appelle fausseté, quelquefois aussi inutile au courtisan pour sa fortune, que la franchise, la sincérité et la vertu" (283).¹⁰⁹ For La Bruyère, then, courtly manners at the turn of the century have become mechanical and may not be as deliberate or strategic as they appear since nobles are caught in an obsessive cycle of pleasing fed by amour-propre.

Amour-propre may indeed represent a ruinous force for theatrical characters who suffer from it, a theme to be further explored in the next chapter on "aging" coquette figures. Unlike the courtly coquette, whose narcissistic desire for attention incites her to rise within her aristocratic social sphere, the aging coquette's selfishness inversely causes her to lose control of her bourgeois household to the benefit of the younger generation. Here, the implicit commentary of the plays has unanimously changed to disfavor the figure of the coquette due to her status as a bourgeois mother/widow: Authors demonstrate that she must remove herself from the sexual economy and place her children's marital needs before her own. In this light, within the more family-oriented structure of a bourgeois comedy, the matriarchal coquette figure necessarily betrays her unique autonomy and suffers the consequences for disrupting the patriarchal social system, thereby tainting the otherwise empowering and efficacious qualities of coquetry.

¹⁰⁹ He goes on to write several more skewering portraits in "Des Grands" that underline the weakness and idiocy of great noble types, such as Théogenis whose courtly gestures are so perfunctory that he cannot help performing them even when no one is present (333-334).

CHAPTER 2: AGING COQUETTES

Introduction

ISMÈNE

De quel œil puis-je voir, moi qui, par mon adresse,
Crois pouvoir, si j'osais, me piquer de jeunesse.
Une fille adorée, et qui, malgré mes soins,
M'oblige d'avouer que j'ai trente ans au moins?
Et comme à mal juger on n'a que trop de pente,
De trente ans avoués n'en crois-t-on pas quarante?

LAURETTE

Il est vrai que le monde est plein de médisants;
Mais on peut être belle encore à quarante ans.

ISMÈNE

On le peut, mais enfin c'est l'âge de retraite,
La beauté perd ses droits, fut-elle encor parfaite;
Et la galanterie, au moment qu'on vieillit,
Ne peut se retrancher qu'à la beauté d'esprit.

LAURETTE

Vous êtes trop bien faite, et c'est une chimère.

ISMÈNE

Une fille à seize ans défait bien une mère.
J'ai beau par mille soins tâcher de rétablir,
Ce que de mes appas l'âge peut affaiblir,
Et d'arrêter par art la beauté naturelle,
Qui vient de la jeunesse, et qui passe avec elle.

--Philippe Quinault, *La Mère coquette ou les Amants brouillés*

As seen in my first chapter, in order to merit her comic label a “coquette” generally relies on her beauty and wit for navigating her socio-political environment. This often engenders flirtatious, hedonistic, cryptic, and non-committal behavior that she performs to manipulate others (and particularly men). However, a certain subset of coquettes demonstrates a different approach to coquetry: These women exhibit similar desires for attention and agency but attempt

to satisfy them without truly possessing the typically coquettish arsenal that they need to support their behavior. In essence, they are no longer young enough to make coquettish tactics appear socially acceptable or endearing, and their lack of lucidity about this makes them into the dupes of their respective plays. Furthermore, their version of coquetry does not emerge as a reactive strategy for combatting male dominance in early modern French society, but rather as an inherent vice that overpowers their reason and has no redeeming feature. In this light, authors willfully ridicule and punish their aging coquettish characters for their erroneous senses of desirability and their destructive ambitions to maintain a youthful appearance at all costs.

The plays present the aging coquette as a condemnable figure because she continues to pursue personal desires at an age when society deems she should be out of the sexual economy and focused on supporting the next generation.¹¹⁰ Her status as mother/widow seemingly places her in a position of power in that she alone directs her life and the futures of her children, but it more realistically robs her of agency as an erotic being: Not only has she lost her feminine pureness in marriage, but now society expects her to deny her own aspirations in order to focus on the next generation's well-being and preservation.¹¹¹ Because the older coquette cannot resist putting her own interests before her maternal commitments, playwrights vilify this character and distance her from her younger (yet equally self-serving) counterparts who may still playfully

¹¹⁰ Though the plays do not explicitly clarify the ages of these coquettes, they often hint that they are around forty years old. Ulrich's Madame Argante is the only coquette to be perceived by other characters as substantially older, but this may simply play into her extreme vilification by the author.

¹¹¹ Widowhood in seventeenth-century France granted women equal juridical ranking with men, whereas under the laws of marriage they were considered the property of their late husbands (Biet "Quand la Veuve" 17). Liberated from all claims of patriarchal ownership, an early modern widow was able to engage in newly-developing behaviors for women, which in turn posed a threat to masculine dominancy and thereby earned her a dubious reputation (19). Indeed, Spielmann notes that the widow's acquired freedom meant that society expected her to assume new responsibilities for which her minority status could not have prepared her, and as such playwrights often characterized her as eternally naïve in the way she prodigiously spends her money and chases unsuitable mates ("Viduité et pouvoir" 333).

avoid obligations and seduce as they please. In addition, authors challenge the character's vanity by mocking her immoderate efforts to validate her beauty and youthfulness, as well as her pretensions of marrying much younger men. Here, early modern comedy's somewhat typical recourse to ageist rhetoric transforms into a more specific form of misogyny. The aging coquette thus represents a ridiculous mismatch between self-fulfillment and (what social norms deem as) inappropriate behavior for a woman of a certain age, and she becomes a figure who disturbs social conventions but who does not earn respect for her subversive stance.

By isolating this subgroup of coquettes who represent an intersection of maturity, maternity, and widowhood, I emphasize one explicit way in which authors satirize coquettish behavior. Whereas a younger unmarried coquette may shun bourgeois expectations for women and still remain a likeable figure to the audience (as discussed in other chapters), the aging coquette has already crossed a boundary into wifedom and motherhood and so her family's needs must supersede her "aberrant" desires for love and attention. Because she seemingly cannot help but put her interests first, the senescent coquette exhibits an uncontrollable fixation that harms her family (and society) and solicits little empathy from the audience, including when authors acknowledge the cold reception given to aging women in early modern society.

The four plays considered in this chapter feature similar plots in which aging coquettes are ridiculed and lose their position of power. Two of the plays even share identical titles and, more or less, identical plots, due to an evident plagiarism between authors Jean Donneau de Visé and Philippe Quinault (the latter being almost assuredly at fault). Their versions of *La Mère coquette ou les Amants brouillés* (1665) showcase a middle-aged mother attempting to jealously outdo her daughter by marrying the girl's young fiancé. Both plays' widows find their maternal authority checked when their long-lost husbands return and restore "natural" marriage matches.

In Molière's *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* (1671), a widowed mother from the lower nobility puts on airs in her provincial home after having visited Paris. Despite her supposed conquest of many urbane men in the capital, La Comtesse entertains men of lower status in Angoulême before begrudgingly taking a husband to support her costly lifestyle. In Ulrich's *La Folle Enchère* (1691), Madame Argante opposes her son's marriage out of fear that it will make her a grandmother one day, but she falls for a young man who is none other than her son's lover dressed in men's clothing. Madame Argante buys the girl/boy's hand in marriage in a staged auction and then her son absconds with both the girl and his mother's pledged money.

Thus, in each play authors force the mother/widow character to renounce her feminine independence and submit to patriarchal power.¹¹² Whereas younger coquettes in other plays may make willing transitions from daughterhood to wifehood in a way that both satisfies their ultimate desires and does not deprive them of female self-determination (see primarily Chapters 3 and 4), the aging coquette becomes a wife a second time against her will. The irony of this situation is that throughout the plays marriage remains a leading goal for the aging coquette but marriage that takes place in the denouement confines her power: Marrying an attractive man would publicly confirm her youthful appeal whereas all other marriages only limit her social power and reinforce her senescence. Interestingly, the marriage-mindedness of the aging coquette means that she, perhaps more than any other coquette figure, embraces fidelity, yet she receives no praise in the plays for exhibiting this traditional virtue. Thus, she desires a standard happy ending—faithful marriage to a beloved suitor—but her age and status make this conclusion unimaginable, reflecting older women's exclusion from the economy of desire.

¹¹² In the case of *La Folle Enchère*, Madame Argante never marries (due to total incompatibility) but she must nevertheless yield to her son's quasi-patriarchal restoration of the marriage couple once his ruse works to entrap her.

At the same time the plays suggest that aging coquettes should not have their own desires and interests, they also circumscribe the subjectivity of these figures by characterizing them as static types devoid of backstory. By presenting a clearer view of the coquette's motivations, a playwright might justify her actions and desires, excusing her unorthodox and scandalous behavior as she manoeuvres through her difficult social circumstances. For the aging coquette, however, authors offer no explanation and as such her vanity and self-interest emerge as innate flaws that are too deep-seated to be curable or pardonable, and in particular because they go against natural maternal principles.¹¹³ With no apparent incentive or victimization on which she can rely to exonerate her, the aging coquette fails to win the audience's sympathy and she remains the villain that she appears to be on the surface. Nevertheless, she remains a compelling figure because she eschews the enigmatic personality of a typical coquette in favor of letting her full-fledged desires be known.

Missies, Vamps, and Thieves: When Mothers (and Playwrights) Steal in both Donneau de Visé's and Quinault's *La Mère coquette ou les Amants brouillés* (1665)

Performed only weeks apart from one another, both Jean Donneau de Visé's and Philippe Quinault's versions of *La Mère coquette ou les Amants brouillés* (1665) highlight the truly maniacal and destructive nature of coquettish behavior when a mother forsakes her maternal duties in the name of vanity. In both plays, a widowed woman worries that her daughter's beauty has begun to overshadow her own fading allure. She plots to steal the girl's fiancé and marry her off instead to his elderly father, but the mother/widow's long-lost husband suddenly returns and demands that the young lovers wed as promised.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Authors may comment on the coquette's difficult situation as an aging woman living in a society preoccupied with youth and beauty, but this does not give an indication of when her coquetry began so much as allow for compassion.

¹¹⁴ For clarification, I have included a table that helps distinguish between correlating characters in each play.

Table 1

Author	Donneau de Visé	Quinault
Coquettish Mother/Widow	Lucinde	Ismène
Beautiful Daughter	Belamire	Isabelle
Scheming Servant of Mother	Jacinte	Laurette
Young Male Lover	Arimant	Acante
Elderly Father of Male Lover	Géronte	Crémante

Both authors illustrate the “problem” of the aging coquette through this mother-daughter rivalry which contrasts a mature widow and a young, unmarried woman. In fact, in neither play is the “aging” coquette especially old. As Virginia Scott has shown, the roles of Lucinde and Ismène were likely played by young actresses, a break from the tradition of using cross-cast “travesti” actors to play grotesque “vieille coquette” types (“Conniving” 198).¹¹⁵ Because the predominantly young pool of actresses across the troupes seemed unwilling to play older, unattractive roles, Donneau de Visé and Quinault presumably adjusted the mother characters to please them, and as such the parts were not only more ostensibly feminine than a burlesque cross-cast role, but also younger than a grandmotherly widow type (198).¹¹⁶ Therefore, what emerges as problematic and absurd on stage is not each older woman’s chronological age or

¹¹⁵ Scott asserts that an actress played each role for *La Mère coquette* given that there is no evidence of a cross-cast actor in either company at the time (“Conniving” 198). She cites the thirty-two-year-old La Marquise Du Parc as the probable interpreter of Visé’s Lucinde, while the definitive identity of Quinault’s Ismène is unknown. However, because the Comédie-Française assigned Mlle La Grange the role of Ismène in 1684, Scott feels certain that the original casting also called for an actress.

Julia Prest asserts that playwrights seldom cross-cast aging feminine roles in French theater during the latter half of the seventeenth century despite Molière reintroducing the concept in part with certain stand-out roles (25) (see footnote 137). She remarks that cross-casting was more commonly exploited as a comic device for secondary actors (9), and Scott seconds this claim, adding that an actor’s age was not a factor when casting since it was traditional in theater for actresses to retain the roles that they premiered (e.g. a young ingénue) and thus they did not “dwindle to mothers and maiden aunts” (“Conniving” 195).

¹¹⁶ In his preface to the play Donneau de Visé claims to have invented the character type of the coquettish mother (vii). Given the long-standing presence of coquettish mothers in prior comedies, it is more accurate to say he *reinvented* the type that had not only been absent from the stage for several decades but had also been exclusively cross-cast (e.g. in the anonymously published *Alizon* (1637)).

Scott refers to the cross-cast character role of the flirtatious mother as “la vieille coquette” (“Conniving” 200) because it was a variation of the “vieille” role (*emploi*) as recorded in contemporary theatrical castings. The playwrights’ choice to instead dub the same role (played by an actress) as “la mère coquette” signifies less emphasis placed upon the character’s age and more stress on her status as a woman who has been married and had children.

appearance but rather her failure to accept the reality that she is different from what she once was. These mothers are characterized as “old before their time” as they share similar erotic desires (and possibly attractive looks) with the younger generation to which they desperately try to belong.

While the similarities between the plays make it difficult to deny some degree of plagiarism (as underlined in Donneau de Visé’s accusatory preface to *La Mère coquette*), the subtle differences between them reveal how the authors aim to vilify the aging coquette to varying degrees.¹¹⁷ More specifically, Donneau de Visé stresses tragic nuances of his aging coquette, whereas Quinault characterizes the mother unsympathetically, as the ridiculous target of the comedy’s humor. Quinault does mimic aspects of Donneau de Visé’s quasi-pathetic rhetoric but redeploys them within standard plots and themes to reinforce the patriarchal logic of early modern comedy.¹¹⁸ They also differ in their treatment of the mother in the end: Donneau de Visé’s (Lucinde) sees the error of her ways and gives her blessing to the marriage of the reconciled couple, whereas Quinault’s widow (Ismène) is punished by her spouse for not pursuing his rescue during his disappearance. Thus, neither mother satisfies her desires but Donneau de Visé allows for redemption instead of seeking a more traditional chastisement.

The widows differ most substantially in their observable attractiveness, and the emphasis that Donneau de Visé puts on Lucinde’s beauty and youth mitigates the apparent disconnection between her self-perception and how others view her. During the very first lines of the play the

¹¹⁷ The story behind the plays explains their overall similarity. Donneau de Visé was an aspiring writer who scheduled his version to be performed by Molière’s troupe in late October at the Palais-Royal. General scholarly opinion agrees that Quinault, already highly acclaimed as a playwright, caught wind of Donneau de Visé’s play and quickly wrote his own version for the Hôtel de Bourgogne before Molière could mount his production (Brooks 44). William Brooks also asserts that today “such rivalries appear strange and the methods employed unfair” but that they were not unusual nor was the foul play one-sided (44).

¹¹⁸ Even as one of Quinault’s greatest proponents, Brooks notes that the playwright was not a groundbreaking contributor to the comic genre as he was to tragedy (54).

servant Jacinte enumerates her mistress' blessings: "Madame, d'où vous vient cette langueur mortelle? / Vous êtes, quoique veuve, et jeune, et riche, et belle" (1.1, p. 1).¹¹⁹ Lucinde's desired lover, Arimant, also finds her acceptably attractive despite their age difference ("Pour lui faire dépit, je crois que dès ce jour, / Je pourrais bien passer de la feinte à l'amour," 1.6, p. 14). Donneau de Visé, in other words, depicts the mother as a plausible rival to her daughter and thus Lucinde's insistence on her own erotic appeal is not entirely absurd.

In contrast, Quinault's aging coquette, Ismène, receives no validation about her beauty and as such her coquettish sense of vanity becomes worthy of ridicule.¹²⁰ For example, when the valet Champagne jokes of Ismène using makeup, her servant Laurette must reprimand him (1.2, p 11) because making up one's face was "a dead giveaway in this period that one is older than one wishes to be thought" (Scott "Conniving" 199). Likewise, Ismène coquettishly consults her pocket mirror (as indicated in one of the few stage directions in the play, 2.2, p. 24), a habit that Champagne mocks along with the aging mother's "beauté d'emprunt" (2.3, p. 27). As the most faithful character to Ismène, Laurette continually tries to assuage her mistress' fears of losing her allure but even she admits in private that the only aspect about her that a young man would find appealing is her money:

...ma maîtresse
Tente moins que sa fille, et n'a pas sa jeunesse,
Son éclat, sa beauté : mais, au lieu de cela,
Si vous saviez, monsieur, les beaux louis qu'elle a,
Les écus d'or mignons, et le nombre innombrable

¹¹⁹ Though this immediate portraiture undoubtedly assists reader-spectators with their initial judgment of Lucinde's physical assets, Jacinte's status as a servant does signal the possibility of mere flattery. Indeed, Jacinte recognizes the utility of serving one's mistress faithfully for the sake of self-interest ("Toujours au gros de l'arbre on se doit attacher, / Et c'est le seul appui que l'on doit rechercher," 1.5, p. 9), but she nevertheless finds Lucinde to be a kind person overall as she candidly states in the same monologue: "Elle a pour tous les gens une grande tendresse" (1.5, p. 9). Additionally, she never speaks ill of her mistress behind her back as most servants in comedy (including Quinault's Laurette) tend to do.

¹²⁰ The young Acante does compliment Ismène once ("Votre mère étant veuve avec tant de beautés," 4.6, p. 63) but he is undoubtedly trying to make Isabelle jealous and so it cannot be considered a genuine observation.

De grands sacs d'écus blancs. (4.7, p. 65)

Even Ismène's wealth, however, cannot seduce Acante who only loves her daughter Isabelle.

While Donneau de Visé's Lucinde is more attractive than Quinault's Ismène, both mothers are surpassed by their daughter who is portrayed as the proper object of the young male lover's desires.¹²¹ In Quinault's play, the father figure Crémante establishes Isabelle's beauty:

Ensuite elle s'est coiffée:
J'ai goûté le plaisir de voir *ses cheveux blonds*,
Tomber à flots épais jusque sur ses *talons*,
Et même si bien pris mon temps et mes mesures,
Que j'en ai finement ramassé *des peignures*.
S'étant coiffée enfin, comme avec mille appas,
Pour prendre un corps de robe elle avançait *les bras*,
Par bonheur tout-à-coup une épingle arrachée,
Qui tenait sur *son sein* sa chemise attachée,
M'a laissé voir à nu l'objet le plus charmant. (1.4, p. 19, emphasis added)¹²²

Echoing a classic *blason*, the corporeal vocabulary here stresses the importance of the young woman's status as an erotic object.¹²³ This fetishizing of the youthful female body stands in contrast to the effacement of the mother/widow as a convincing sexual being, in spite of her perceived beauty in the case of Lucinde. Furthermore, the authors stress how loving such a gorgeous young woman rejuvenates the senescent father's body whereas the mother feels that

¹²¹ Both daughter's names indicate their inherent beauty: Belamire (or "*belle à mire*") and *Isabelle*.

¹²² Donneau de Visé showcases a parallel analysis involving Géronte and Belamire, and though he likely wrote his version first that Quinault then copied down to the finest details, it is much less succinct for the purposes of including an example. Notable instances that strongly suggest plagiarism include Donneau de Visé's mention of Belamire's blond hair down to her heels, Géronte's collection of her combings, and her revealed breast caused by a missing pin (1.8, p. 22).

¹²³ Although the son figure occasionally echoes his father in his synecdochical admiration (e.g. Arimant's involuntary cry for strength against Belamire's charms: "Mais faut-il que toujours je rencontre ses yeux? 2.3, p. 35), he does not comment much on her appearance throughout the play save for some isolated remarks about her being generically "*belle*" (Donneau de Visé 2.6, p. 44; Quinault 3.3, p. 51). The young man's adoration thus transcends his beloved's physical beauty and demonstrates a love based on a natural, mutual inclination rather than interest or ulterior motives.

her daughter's presence inversely drains her of her youth and beauty.¹²⁴ The daughter figure thus functions within the play as a passive lure for attracting the regard of all men, which in turn marginalizes and desexualizes the mother whose subsequent failed petitions for admiration make her seem fanatical and ineffective.

In this context, when Lucinde or Ismène behave like desiring, sexual beings, other characters interpret their actions as coquetry, and this attention to looks connotes vanity.¹²⁵ The coquettish characters are aware that their daughters have replaced them as appropriate objects of desire. They lament that the state of motherhood marks them as old and undesirable when in their own eyes they still have the capacity to be attractive. In fact, each tries to dissimulate her age, claiming to be thirty-year-old mothers of daughters of fifteen or sixteen years (instead of twenty-three). Here, the mother figure proves that she is merely giving a performance of beauty and must fully concentrate her talents in order to compete with natural youth and attractiveness.¹²⁶ The coquetry of the older woman consists primarily of such fussiness over

¹²⁴ Both fathers comment on the onset of their second youth thanks to the love they feel for a young woman. For Donneau de Visé's Gêronte, he feels "un reste de jeunesse" and his body becoming filled with "feu" and boiling blood (1.7, p. 21) while Quinault's Crémante claims that all his sicknesses caused by old age have been cured: "Je suis vieux, mais exempt des maux de la vieillesse, / Je me sens rajeunir par l'amour qui me presse" (5.5, p. 81). As for the mothers feeling inversely robbed of their vitality, Donneau de Visé's Lucinde mentions "Des enfants qui nous font vieillir plutôt que l'âge" (1.3, p. 5) and Quinault's Ismène says that Isabelle destroys her beauty just by association: "Ma fille détruit tout dès qu'elle est près de moi: / Je me sens enlaidir sitôt que je la vois" (2.2, p. 24).

¹²⁵ Interestingly enough, the authors dub the mother a coquette in the title but nowhere within the play. The prominence of the title leads spectators to form an opinion about the mother before she ever appears on stage, at which point her actions and speech must confirm her coquetry because it is no longer explicitly labeled as such. Brooks notes that one of Quinault's trademark theatrical devices was holding back the appearance of his heroine character to build the audience's impatience and, in the case of daughter Isabelle, "to create in detail the deceptive environment into which this innocent young woman is plunged" (47). Given that Ismène likewise does not emerge until the second act, Quinault allows the play's title and his characters to preemptively frame the audience's perception of his villainess, much in the way that Molière does with his titular character in *Tartuffe*.

In contrast, Donneau de Visé's character Le Marquis is the only one to use the term "coquette" in either play and he uses it derogatorily toward Belamire in order to incite anger in Arimant: "Il est vrai, tu devrais quitter cette coquette" (1.7, p. 18). Besides its use for the daughter rather than the titular role as one would expect, it is odd that Le Marquis accuses her of coquettishness before Jacinte has revealed Belamire's false infidelity to Arimant.

¹²⁶ Besides lying about their age, the mothers' tactics include physically distancing themselves from their daughters, and what Ismène calls "mon art, mes soins, et ma parure" (Quinault 2.2, p. 24).

appearance, and largely excludes the wily infidelity of younger coquette characters (such as those examined in other chapters). In fact, the mother/widow only wishes to possess the love of one man and uses the promise of fidelity as a tool of seduction: in each play the mother accentuates her maturity over her daughter's in an attempt to convince the young man that only older women know how to love faithfully.¹²⁷ Thus, the mother walks the line between consciousness and ignorance of her fading appeal as she simultaneously evokes both fear and arrogance when faced with the effectiveness of her beauty.

Given her own obsession with self-perception, the aging mother is keenly aware of how her daughter's relative youth and beauty depose her as the prime sexual object and this engenders maternal resentment and consequently the main action of the play. From this point, the two aging mothers differ in their interactions with their daughter and they face different fates accordingly. Donneau de Visé's Lucinde suffers more in her dilemma about rivaling her daughter and thus she comes across as a more appealing character. She abhors labels that necessarily age her, including those of mother (1.3, p. 4) and grandmother (1.1, p. 3), and so she

¹²⁷ Quinault's *Ismène* makes her case to Acante that older women do possess some advantages:

La jeunesse, monsieur, n'est que légèreté:
Au sortir de l'enfance, une âme est peu capable
De la solidarité d'un amour raisonnable;
Un cœur n'est pas encore assez fait à seize ans,
Et le grand art d'aimer veut un peu plus de temps.
C'est après les erreurs où la jeunesse engage,
Vers trente ans, c'est-à-dire, environ à mon âge,
Lorsqu'on est de retour des vains amusements
Qui détournent l'esprit des vrais attachements;
C'est alors qu'on peut faire un choix en assurance,
Et c'est là proprement l'âge de la constance.
Un esprit jusque-là n'est pas bien arrêté,
Et les cœurs pour aimer ont leur maturité. (4.8, p. 67)

Of course, the irony of *Ismène*'s claim to fidelity is that she is simultaneously betraying her daughter. While Donneau de Visé's *Lucinde* never makes a similar declaration to *Arimant*, the aged father *Géronte* applies the same rhetoric to *Belamire* in defense of all mature lovers: "C'est à mon âge aussi, qu'on aime davantage, / Et que l'on peut aimer même plus constamment" (3.6, p. 58).

aims to prevent Belamire from having children by either sending her to the convent or by breaking off her engagement to Arimant. The latter plan ultimately has more appeal to her because she not only fancies Arimant for herself, but then she also does not have to send her daughter away. During the only monologue in the play, she illustrates both this compulsive egotism along with her maternal desire to keep her daughter at her side:

Je l'aime, mais aussi je m'aime un peu plus qu'elle,
Je ne la puis souffrir, parce qu'elle est trop belle.
Plût au Ciel qu'Arimant lui trouvât moins d'appas,
Je pourrais me résoudre à ne l'éloigner pas. (1.2, p. 4)

Here, Lucinde's early declaration of selfishness seals her fate as the author's main antagonist. However, Donneau de Visé continues to contrast this contemptibility with traces of motherly love. Lucinde undergoes an internal battle between her obsessive vanity and her instinctive motherliness. For example, when Lucinde considers that she will have to endure a life of seeing people compliment Belamire rather than herself, she struggles with the alternative: "Ah! devais-je souffrir qu'elle prît l'habit noir? / Ce penser me chagrine, et me rend inquiète" (1.4, p. 8).¹²⁸ In this light, Lucinde's multifaceted and underlying humanity attenuates the repugnance of her mania and demonstrates that she truly suffers from her position as mother/widow/lover. Upon the return of her husband, she once again feels torn because she has lost Arimant but also regained a beloved husband and a loveable future son-in-law:

J'en ressens de la joie, ensemble, et de l'ennui,
De revoir un époux, j'ai beaucoup d'allégresse,
Et de perdre un amant, j'ai beaucoup de tristesse.
Adieu, je vais songer à mes secrets ennuis:
Mais j'espère, dans peu, vous embrasser en fils. (5.10, p. 69)

¹²⁸ This same struggle arises later when Jacinte tries to solve Lucinde's worry about potentially having more children with Arimant after they marry. The servant mentions the brilliance of another woman who sent her daughters to the convent and her sons to school or the army. Worse yet, she never cared if they died of disease because she assumed her sons would die serving their country! To this long tirade Lucinde responds with two dismissive remarks ("C'est assez, Jacinte, j'entends," and "Laissons là," 3.1, p. 51-2) as if to suggest that as a good mother she gives them no consideration.

As her final words in the play show here, she graciously admits defeat while hinting that she will never conquer her all-engrossing vanity. Stealing an attractive man from a formidable rival such as her daughter represents her last chance to validate her youth and prove to society that she is still an erotic object even in middle age, and so her equivocal fate reflects her own mixed sentiments. Lucinde never escapes her role as the antagonist of the play because she is cruel and ridiculous, but Donneau de Visé chooses to attenuate her faults with details that explain her motives and soften her harshness. However, even if the audience recognizes her precarious situation as an aging woman in a patriarchal society, the influence of her angst cannot supplant the public's expectation that youth triumphs over old age and that fate punishes the wicked.

Whereas Donneau de Visé makes his mother character appear horrible before he presents her humanity, Quinault takes the inverse approach by soliciting pity for Ismène and then revealing her villainy up until her rightful punishment. After Ismène sends daughter Isabelle out of her sight, her servant Laurette comments on how uncharacteristic her anger is: "Quoi! Vous, pour qui tout le monde et si douce et si bonne, / Pour votre fille seule être rude à ce point?" (2.2, p. 23). This earnest compliment not only allows Quinault to suggest Ismène's usual tenderness but sets the stage for Ismène to explain her underlying resentment as an aging early modern woman (as shown in the epigraph to this chapter). In short, she claims that despite her efforts to hide her fading beauty and her age, her daughter's relative beauty reminds everyone that Ismène is at the age of social retirement according to social rules (2.2, pp. 23-4). Unlike Lucinde who could have sent Belamire to a convent, Ismène does not have the same option because her role as chaperone to Isabelle represents her only justifiable access to public interaction. Ismène's lamentation underlines the powerless position of aging women in early modern society, but her lack of concern for her daughter's well-being proves her underlying selfishness and

coquettishness in her desire to be admired above all.¹²⁹ Ismène later forsakes all maternal protectiveness when she vows revenge on the naïve and innocent Isabelle:

Acante, tel qu'il est, n'est pas à négliger;
Et quand ce ne serait qu'afin de me venger,
Que pour punir ma fille, épousant ce qu'elle aime,
Cet hymen m'est toujours d'une importance extrême. (4.9, p. 69)

Here, in her unjustifiable wish to punish her daughter, Ismène's amorous desires and obsession with self-perception begin to lose the ability to attract compassion even in her continued position as victim. These vindictive words also act as Ismène's last impression on the spectator because she does not appear at all in the final act. Silenced by the author and betrayed by her only ally Laurette ("Je n'ai qu'exécuté l'ordre de votre mère" 5.8, p. 86), Ismène in the end has no voice to redeem herself nor to demonstrate that she has overcome her mania. Instead, her long-lost husband vows to punish her by making good on the children's marriage promise that will surely ruin her (5.8, p. 87).

The return of the husband figure in both plays causes several important changes and helps reveal the authors' overall assessment of widowhood.¹³⁰ Under Donneau de Visé, Lucinde rants against the imprisonment of marriage and the treachery of men (1.3, pp. 4-5) but spectators know that it is all a show to goad Belamire into choosing convent life over raising a family. In fact, Lucinde disproves her own anti-marriage rhetoric by speaking of her love for her late husband and her sadness upon his death: "Quand le défunt mourut, je crûs absolument, / Que pour d'autre

¹²⁹ Though she later attempts to spare her daughter from marrying the sickly Crémante, she once again lets her own self-interest dominate when the old man threatens to refuse his son Acante from marrying Ismène if she does not capitulate (1.6, p. 36).

¹³⁰ Brooks remarks that early modern spectators know that the husband figure will return by the end of the play given that "anyone reported dead in Act I is going to turn up alive (46). This is indeed true for both versions of *La Mère coquette*, along with many clues left along the way, such as Jacinte's knowing depiction of theatrical tropes: "Mais on revient souvent, d'un aussi long voyage; / On peut ressusciter, quand on a fait naufrage, / Quoiqu'un homme ait été blessé mortellement, / Et qu'un ami l'ait vu porter au monument, / Il en revient encore, et souvent dans l'histoire, / On voit des incidents moins faciles à croire" (Donneau de Visé 2.1, pp. 25-6).

jamais, je n'aurais le cœur tendre / Cependant, Arimant me force de me rendre" (2.1, p. 26).

Indeed, Lucinde's ardent quest to marry Arimant shows that she has no strong desire to remain a widow, nor does she relish having power over her beloved yet scorned daughter. In this sense, the return of the father lifts the burden of responsibility off of the mother who has proven both unfit and unwilling to run a family. The final verses of the play, voiced by the aged G ronte as he reluctantly acquiesces to Belamire and Arimant's marriage, summarize the lesson to be learned by a woman such as Lucinde who resisted assuming her mature role as mother and who let her emotions dominate her rationality: "La Raison me l'ordonne, aussi bien que mon  ge, / Et malgr  mon amour, je veux para tre sage" (3.11, p. 71). Paternal "reason" has triumphed over Lucinde's irrational attempt to pursue her own desires at the expense of her daughter's, and the way that the comedy restores order shows the spectators what the proper (circumscribed) role of the mother should be.

Quinault's Ism ne takes a much different approach to widowhood in the way that she revels in her freedom and consequently abuses it. She embodies the merry widow who feigns sadness over her husband's disappearance but laughs in private while she lives out the best years of her life according to the valet Champagne: "Enfin qu'apr s sept ans d'espoir d'un doux veuvage, / Un vieux mari chagrin viendrait troubler le cours / De ses plus doux plaisirs et de ses plus beaux jours" (1.1, p. 7). Unlike Lucinde, Ism ne shows no love for her late husband and his return would mar her happiness.¹³¹ She appears to live in fear that he will come back, and although she has waited the appropriate number of years to be considered a lawful widow (2.2, p. 26), her inability to prove his death definitively places her in a state of limbo. Her insensitivity,

¹³¹ Laurette points out that Ism ne's late husband was old and that she deserves to have a younger one the second time around (2.5, p. 32). Of course, this situation is highly ironic given that the middle-aged Ism ne is forcing a young man to marry her and forgo his true love.

however, renders her a very unsympathetic character, as does her surprising desire to end her widowhood with Acante given that she seems to be marrying solely for revenge and validation of her beauty.

Though the long-lost father checks the widow-mother's power in the end, her reign for most of the play still signals an innovative change in classical comedy in that the main rivalry is between a mother and daughter rather than a father and son (or a husband and wife). Mother-daughter rivalries were not frequent in comedies of the seventeenth century because women did not carry lineage and as such their marriages had less consequence (Suignard 4-5). However, a widow disposes both economic power and the right to choose her husband, meaning that Donneau de Visé and Quinault could invent a new gender power dynamic with their characters.¹³² Indeed, both Lucinde and Ismène use money to bribe their respective servants into breaking up the young couple, and, worse yet, Ismène hoards her riches by refusing Isabelle a dowry (5.4, p. 78).¹³³ Without financial or parental obstacles to bind them the mothers may marry for love rather than convenience, mirroring the motivations of the younger generation that they try to emulate in beauty as well. Suignard asserts that this in turn underlines reflections by the authors on the right to individual happiness as the mother-rivals put their needs before those of their child in the hope of discovering their second youth (10). However, because the early modern woman's primary occupation was to care for her children, the mother must submissively

¹³² While both playwrights include a rivalry between the fiancé and his aged father, it is secondary to the mother-daughter rivalry, in particular because the father cannot compete with his son as an erotic rival given his infirmity. Thus Géronte and Crémante, with their incessant coughing, act as convenient foils to the relatively appealing mother/widows. Furthermore, Cécile Suignard suggests that the authors rendered the classic father-son rivalry so basic in both versions in order to draw more attention to the more interesting female characters (4).

¹³³ Ironically, it is the widow's access to money that robs her of agency and so the wealth of the aging coquette emerges as a negative factor in her characterization since cunning and inventiveness help shape the younger coquette's likeable nature in contrast.

accept the husband's patriarchal logic and renounce her capacity as an amorous rival to her daughter.

While both authors present ridiculous aging coquettes, Donneau de Visé more fully interrogates the complexity of the mother-daughter rivalry by probing the suffering of his title character and revealing her humanity.¹³⁴ As Scott remarks, "her obsessive anxiety combined with the possibility that the actress playing the role was still relatively young and beautiful makes the play more of a character study than a comic attack on a *vieille ridicule*" ("Conniving" 199).¹³⁵ Though Quinault's more classic characterization of Ismène as an excessively absurd person helps identify negative commentaries about aging women, mothers, and widows during the early modern age, his coquette cannot escape her one-dimensionality and she fails to solicit much sympathy from the audience. Nevertheless, the acuteness of Quinault's alleged plagiarism could point to what may have been an exciting prospect of putting an aging coquette on the stage because her story had not yet been told except in burlesque form.

Both versions of *La Mère coquette* examine the complex status of mature women who refuse to accept their fates as bygone sexual objects and passive parents. As women who are not quite young but not quite old, and as widows who possess a degree of power for the first time in their lives but are not respected for their decisions, they exist in a state of uncertainty that evokes both mocking and fear in others. Their struggles to remain relevant may strike a chord with reality (including today's) but they are largely presented under comic auspices that undermine the gravity and authenticity of their claims.

¹³⁴ It is worth noting that Donneau de Visé's Lucinde is present in half of her play's scenes and delivers the only monologue of the play, whereas Ismène is largely absent from the stage outside of the second and fourth acts. The former was clearly the centerpiece of the work and something of which Donneau de Visé was proud enough to call his invention in his preface.

¹³⁵ Scott praises Quinault's version as "more skillful if less original" ("Conniving" 199), citing its traditional nature as one reason why it may have succeeded over its competitor.

Coquettishness as embodied by these characters emerges as a synonym for disproportionate vanity that does not function as a social tool but rather a liability: It bestows no inner guile nor lucidity and consequently does not earn the audience's approval as it might in younger hands. In fact, authors present most younger coquettes as the heroines of their plays but temper their protagonist status with obvious faults and impish behavior, whereas the inverse appears to be true for the coquettish mothers who are maniacal antagonists with few redeeming qualities. In the moralizing frame of comedy, the aging coquette, even if humanized in some respects, must be punished for obstructing the marriage of young lovers. She is removed from a position of familial authority because her self-interested abuse of power arrests the reproduction of the family line and stymies the next generation before the husband returns and upholds the logic of lineage. Without enduring youth and beauty on her side, the aging mother/widow has no choice but to obey patriarchal logic and step aside for the next generation of young women so that they may redefine coquetry and revive its allure. Thus, in spite of her unique position of power and her disregard for expectations placed upon older women, the coquettish mother/widow ultimately fails to seduce both on and off the stage.

Putting the Coquette out to Pasture: Rural Redemption in Molière's *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* (1671)

In contrast to the previous two plays, *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* shifts its focus away from mocking aging coquettes alone and moves toward ridiculing the provincial nobility for the way that they try to import Parisian manners to their towns.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, the titular character's coquettishness provides an interesting case because her situation differs greatly from

¹³⁶ This theme appears again in Dufresny's *La Coquette de village ou le Lot supposé* (1715) to be discussed in Chapter 4. Their shared target is perhaps not surprising given that these two works are the only coquette plays of my corpus that take place outside of Paris. As I discuss more in Chapter 4, playwrights inextricably link the phenomenon of coquetry with the capital but even when it is reproduced outside of the city the authors make sure its origin traces back to Paris.

the other coquettes of this chapter: Not only does she reintroduce the element of infidelity to coquetry, but she also earns a degree of redemption through her strategic execution of it.¹³⁷

Although Molière may frequently lampoon her incongruous behavior, La Comtesse achieves at least an equivocal success at the end of the play and avoids true vilification.

Like Ismène and especially Lucinde, La Comtesse is not especially old or unappealing. Though Molière was known for using cross-casting in many of his plays surrounding *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, he chose to cast the thirty-two-year-old Mlle La Grange in this role.¹³⁸ Given her relative youth, it is clear that Molière did not want to focus on the physical grotesqueness of the aging coquette but rather on her coquettish manners and allure (see Figure 1).¹³⁹ Indeed, La Comtesse stands apart from her mature peers in that she alone proves worthy of

¹³⁷ Often considered the “female version” of Molière’s *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669) for its similar satire of the uninformed provincial nobility, *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* nevertheless differs greatly in plot and also introduces the element of coquetry that helps to give the main character a distinct characterization. The same author’s *George Dandin* (1668) likewise targets provincial noble airs as portrayed by The Sotenville family, as does his *Précieuses ridicules* (1659) that mocks poorly imitated preciousness by provincials. In spite of its earlier publication, the latter play may hold the closest similarity to *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* in that the overzealous preciousness of the young women begets quasi-coquettish manners, as discussed in the introduction of this dissertation.

¹³⁸ Surrounding plays include the roles of Madame Pernelle in *Tartuffe ou l'Imposteur* (1664/1669), Madame Sotenville in *George Dandin ou le Mari confondu* (1668), Lucette in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669), Madame Jourdain in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1670), and Philaminte in *Les Femmes savantes* (1672). A character actor named André Hubert interpreted each of these roles save for Madame Pernelle who was played by Louis Béjart. Mlle La Grange, née Ragueneau but who also went under the family name L’Estang, also played one of the sisters in *Psyché* (1671) and Bélise in *Les Femmes savantes*, which along with La Comtesse would play a significant part “in the creation of the *caractère emploi* [of the *vieille ridicule*] and were played by actresses in that *emploi* at the Comédie-Française after 1680” (Scott “Conniving” 201). At the end of her citation, Scott is referring to Mlle Desbrosses and Mlle Du Rieu who joined in the mid-1680s and played older women’s comic roles alongside Mlle La Grange (207).

Theories vary as to why Molière inexplicably gave a leading role to a minor actress in the troupe, but Virginia Scott notes that *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* was a simple one-act comédie-ballet in prose (as opposed to a grand five-act verse comedy) and very idiosyncratic in consideration of its genre (“Conniving” 203), and as such it may have allowed for some novelty. Scott laments how even in modern high-profile productions of the play, such as the Comédie-Française’s 1992 revival, male actors are cross-cast in what was originally Mlle La Grange’s progressive female role (“Conniving” 205).

¹³⁹ Unfortunately for scholarship, no information about La Comtesse’s costuming appears to have survived. Molière did not choose to publish *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* during his lifetime (perhaps because he considered it more of a quickly-wrought sketch than a complete comedy) and the earliest known publication dates from 1682 by Jean Sauvé. This edition did include one engraving (in the form of a frontispiece by Pierre Brissart, see Figure 1.1., commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=55006162) in which several male characters surround two women, La Comtesse and Julie, both of whom display equally feminine appearances. Naturally, this engraving arrives

amorous attention from men, including Monsieur Tibaudier, a town councilor and amateur poet who perseveres for La Comtesse's affection, and Monsieur Harpin, a wealthy tax collector who attempts to woo her with extravagant gifts. However, she is unable to effectively seduce the young and handsome Le Vicomte who only courts La Comtesse to gain access to her much younger acquaintance, Julie, a sophisticated marquise. Molière thus contextualizes La Comtesse's appeal by making her appear sufficiently attractive to provincial bourgeois men yet less tempting than a young, elegant woman to someone with refined taste.

Figure 1



approximately eleven years after the first performance of the play and thus offers no definitive proof of the productions under Molière, but it nevertheless encourages the play's reader to imagine La Comtesse as a fairly young and attractive woman. Scott concedes that in Brissart's frontispiece for *George Dandin* the typically cross-cast character of Madame de Sotenville appears identifiably feminine despite being played by male actor Hubert, but then asserts that Hubert was a special case in that he "seems to have been a plausible female impersonator whose roles could be and were played equally by actresses" ("Conniving" 206).

Because La Comtesse lacks this truly noble demeanor, Molière satirizes her as an example of the rural gentry who are eager to recreate the fashionable and urbane spirit of Paris in their modest towns.¹⁴⁰ Two groups of characters judge her pretensions: First, aristocrats who know what constitutes real sophistication (having been to Paris themselves), and second, the servants who do not understand their mistress's grandiose language. Le Vicomte and Julie discuss how La Comtesse's dramatic nature makes her more fit for the stage than the real world:

Notre comtesse d'Escarbagnas, avec son perpétuel entêtement de qualité, est un aussi bon personnage qu'on en puisse mettre sur le théâtre. Le petit voyage qu'elle a fait à Paris l'a ramenée dans Angoulême plus achevée qu'elle n'était. L'approche de l'air de la Cour a donné à son ridicule de nouveaux agréments, et sa sottise tous les jours ne fait que croître et embellir. (1.1, p. 1021)¹⁴¹

They focus on La Comtesse's great delusion in perceiving and presenting herself as something (in this specific case, a cultured person) she is not. She betrays her lack of worldliness, for example, when her son recites a harmless Latin verse and she mistakes it for a vulgar joke.¹⁴² In contrast to La Comtesse's pedantry, a truly noble character such as Le Vicomte tries to downplay his erudition and wit after Julie compliments his love poetry: "il est dangereux dans le monde de

¹⁴⁰ In La Comtesse's case, she has returned to her humble rural estate in Angoulême, located approximately 275 miles southwest of Paris (or "near nowhere" as Scott notes, "Conniving" 203).

Henry Lancaster stresses Molière's aim to mock manners above all else in *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*: "In none of Molière's plays, indeed, is a larger place given to manners, if we take into consideration the brevity of the work, for there is scarcely any plot and the characters are not discussed in detail" (*Dramatic Literature* 736). While it is true that Molière does not greatly develop even his titular character, La Comtesse remains an interesting figure for her marked differences (however simple) from other aging coquettes.

¹⁴¹ Julie's comment about La Comtesse's theatricality is one of many references to meta-theater in the play. Many occur while La Vicomte's interior ballet is being staged for the characters, including Monsieur Harpin's interruption: "je souhaiterais que ce fût un théâtre public, pour vous dire avec plus d'éclat toutes vos vérités" and "Voilà ma scène faite, voilà mon rôle joué" (1.8, pp. 1036-7). The most explicit allusions to meta-theater emerge during the final scene in which Le Vicomte points out that, with the letter allowing his marriage to Julie via *deus ex machina*, it is time for their play to end: "Ma foi! Madame, voilà notre comédie achevée aussi" (1.9, p. 1037).

¹⁴² Le Comte correctly recites his Latin grammar lesson: "Omne viro soli quod convenit esto virile. Omne viri..." (1.7, p. 1034), meaning "Only nouns pertaining to men shall be masculine." However, as Scott remarks, La Comtesse believes her son's recitation refers "to the crude French 'vit' meaning penis" ("Conniving" 204).

se mêler d'avoir de l'esprit. Il y a là-dedans un certain ridicule qu'il est facile d'attraper" (1.1, p. 1022). La Comtesse, in contrast, believes her pretensions give her an air of intelligence.

Her servants Andrée and Criquet, on the other hands, draw out her absurd manners and latent maliciousness. La Comtesse confuses her provincial servants with the esoteric language of Paris, substituting refined words such as "garde-robe" for "armoire" and "garde-meuble" in lieu of "grenier" (1.2, p. 1024). She insults her uncomprehending servants and even orders Criquet to be whipped for having understood "antichambre" to mean the front steps (1.2, p. 1025).¹⁴³ Molière heightens the irony of her meanness by preceding her harangues with a call for goodwill in which she demands "de l'honnêteté et de la complaisance pour les autres" (1.2, p. 1023). In this way, Molière emphasizes La Comtesse's sense of delusion regarding her manicured self-image and casts her as the play's fool.

In addition to her Parisian airs and graces, La Comtesse affects youth and beauty like the other aging coquettes of this chapter. For one, she still finds herself young and desirable: "Je crois être en état de pouvoir faire naître une passion assez forte, et je me trouve pour cela assez de beauté, de jeunesse, et de qualité, Dieu merci" (1.2, p. 1023). She likewise makes absurd statements about her age being less advanced than it is, such as when she claims that she was still playing with dolls when she first became a mother (1.7, p. 1033). Lastly, Monsieur Harpin accuses her of characteristically coquettish frivolity after discovering how heedlessly she received his genuine affection, which she in turn confirms by failing to see the seriousness of the

¹⁴³ Among the terms she uses to belittle them, La Comtesse calls either Andrée or Criquet "maladroite," "oison bridé," "butorde," "animaux," "fripon," "bouvrière," "incorrigible," and "tête de boeuf" (1.2, pp. 1023-6). She also threatens to fire Andrée, a frightened new hire who is the daughter of La Comtesse's wet-nurse, over her own embarrassment of not being able to afford nice candles to impress Julie (1.2, p. 1025).

situation: “Cela est merveilleux, comme les amants emportés deviennent à la mode” (1.8, p. 1036).¹⁴⁴

But La Comtesse’s affectations are only one dimension of her coquetry as she also flirts with multiple suitors for financial gain.¹⁴⁵ La Comtesse lacks the economic power that she needs to keep up appearances and remain an attractive marriage prospect. Whereas in the other plays of this chapter the aging coquettes use their influential status as wealthy widows to entice (or really, coerce) younger suitors to wed them, La Comtesse looks to marry for money. Two of her three suitors are distasteful but rich bourgeois men, and the more generous of the two, Monsieur Harpin, makes it clear that he has been supporting her extravagant lifestyle: “je ne suis point d’humeur à payer les violons pour faire danser les autres” (1.8, p. 1036).¹⁴⁶ La Comtesse’s relative poverty thus plays an important role in encouraging her to court several men and yet Molière only hints at this motivation, preferring instead to play up her coquettish manners in which excessive flirtation seems to be a natural complement to her vanity.

Upon analyzing further, La Comtesse’s coquettish inconstancy emerges as coldly strategic. She appears much less emotional than her peers in other plays, showing no amorous desire for any of her suitors. For example, she volunteers to show Le Vicomte a love letter from his rival Monsieur Tibaudier as a reminder that other men desire her (1.4, p. 1029) and that she

¹⁴⁴ Monsieur Harpin’s exact words are “Madame, quittons la faribole” (1.8, p. 1036), with *faribole(s)* describing something frivolous. As Furetière defines it: “Plusieurs choses vaines qui ne méritent aucune considération.”

¹⁴⁵ The “material coquettes” of Chapter 3 help to more closely examine the financial underpinnings of coquetry that Molière largely sidesteps in *La Comtesse d’Escarbagnas*.

¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, Scott notes that La Comtesse must be relatively impoverished given that her household only consists of three peasant servants and that she agrees to marry the lowly Monsieur Tibaudier in the end (“Conniving” 204).

does not fear losing one jealous lover over another.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, she would even share Le Vicomte with other women: “quelque amour que l’on ait pour moi, j’aime que ceux qui m’aiment rendent ce qu’ils doivent au sexe; et je ne suis point de l’humeur de ces femmes injustes qui s’applaudissent des incivilités que leurs amants font aux autres belles” (1.2, p. 1023). Whereas most inconstant coquettes become infuriated when their lovers court other partners, La Comtesse possesses a more fluid understanding of fidelity where no heart fairly belongs to one person. As noted in the citation above where she attempts to impress Julie with her devotion to chivalrous courtship, her obsession with ambition and refinement allows her to take a singular stance on coquetry that is less passionate and more rational.

Indeed, La Comtesse demonstrates that her version of coquetry stems from a premeditated philosophy. When she explains her flirtations to Julie, she uses a logic that offsets her folly:

Ce sont des gens qu’on ménage dans les provinces pour le besoin qu’on en peut avoir ; ils servent au moins à remplir les vides de la galanterie, à faire nombre de soupirants ; et il est bon, Madame, de ne pas laisser un amant seul maître du terrain, de peur que, faute de rivaux, son amour ne s’endorme sur trop de confiance. (1.2, pp. 1027-1028)¹⁴⁸

Here she discloses that her coquetry is a strategy for combatting boredom and ensuring her dominance in the marital pool by maintaining male competition. Unlike the other aging coquettes who bend over backwards to possess their lovers, La Comtesse reverses the power dynamic by

¹⁴⁷ La Comtesse also speaks of a “cassette” (1.2, p. 1027) filled with letters from rejected lovers at Court but specifically fails to mention any names, a comic device that Molière uses to suggest her likely delusion over being a desirable party among the Parisian nobility.

¹⁴⁸ Upon hearing La Comtesse’s lesson, Julie exclaims, “Je vous avoue, Madame, qu’il y a merveilleusement à profiter de tout ce que vous dites ; c’est une école que votre conversation, et j’y viens tous les jours attraper quelque chose” (1.2, p. 1028). The transmission of coquettish knowledge among females appears in several plays and constitutes a larger theme in Chapter 4. Admittedly, Julie’s tone here as the “student” is facetious but her lines nevertheless highlight the presumably learnable nature of coquetry within seventeenth-century theater.

fueling men's interest in her.¹⁴⁹ As a result, La Comtesse comes across as a reasonable and pragmatic character for the first time in the play despite her status as the target of the play's ridicule. In other words, Molière does not remonstrate her for being a coquette but it is in fact her calculated coquettishness that finally brings her some redemption. Molière does not portray her as a lovesick fool who falls for a younger man that she cannot logically attract.¹⁵⁰

La Comtesse's status as a not-entirely-foolish-fool is evident in the play's ambiguous denouement. She loses her richest prospect Monsieur Harpin because he discovers her coquettishness and does not share her tolerance for inconstancy.¹⁵¹ Le Vicomte receives permission to marry Julie and they finally reveal their shared love to La Comtesse, at which point he urges her to follow suit to tidily end the play: "Cela veut dire, Madame, que j'épouse Julie, et, si vous m'en croyez, pour rendre la comédie complète de tout point, vous épouserez Monsieur Tibaudier, et donnerez Mademoiselle Andrée à son laquais, dont il fera son valet de chambre" (1.9, p. 1037). La Comtesse feels slighted for a moment ("Quoi ? Jouer de la sorte une personne de ma qualité ?") but then agrees to marry the town councilor "pour faire enrager tout le monde" (1.9, p. 1037). Though La Comtesse certainly favors Monsieur Tibaudier the least of her suitors, his bourgeois wealth makes him somewhat attractive and advantageous. Still,

¹⁴⁹ Molière best demonstrates this dominance over her lovers with Monsieur Tibaudier: He not only refers to himself as her "esclave indigne" (1.4, p. 1030) but also sits at her feet during the ballet according to the stage notes (1.8, p. 1034).

¹⁵⁰ One could surmise that ambition and wealth motivate La Comtesse more than pure coquetry. While there is no textual evidence to concretely support this, La Comtesse does appear to entertain lowly bourgeois men only for their money, and Lancaster notes that her first marriage to Le Comte likely gave the boorish woman her noble title: "She claims that her deceased husband had a 'meute de chiens courants' and appeared as a count in all of his contracts. If this is true, the late count probably married beneath him, for her insistence upon her aristocracy, her ignorance of good usage, and her speech mark her as a *parvenue*" (*Dramatic Literature* 735).

¹⁵¹ Monsieur Harpin's speech is the only place in the play where the term "coquette" is used: "mais ne trouvez point étrange aussi que je ne sois point la dupe d'une infidélité si ordinaire aux coquettes du temps" (1.8, p. 1036). The plural use of the term only highlights the fact that this is a comedy of manners rather than of character since La Comtesse is far from being the only coquette in Paris.

Molière makes La Comtesse lack agency in her choice. Like the other aging coquettes, La Comtesse is forced to give up her freedom as a widow. The playwright pairs her with the worst available suitor, one she does not truly love. Although she gains wealth, the marriage is one of convenience: La Comtesse has both won and lost. Given her role as the play's target of ridicule, however, even this ambiguous fate seems like a reprieve from comic punishment.

La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas presents a unique case among aging coquettes because she does not wholly conform to the type who is usually love-stricken, jealous, wealthy, and a bad mother. Likewise, her penchant for pretension outweighs her coquettish tendencies and as such her author does not attack her for being a coquette but rather offers her some redemption through its logical enactment. By retaining some control of her coquettishness, La Comtesse performs in strategic ways that more closely resemble her younger, more likeable counterparts in comic theater. Her coquetry nonetheless appears ridiculous because she is past her sexual prime and also stuck in the pastures far from the Paris city limits where coquetry seemingly belongs.

Molière's character thus shares elements with both the aging coquettes and the younger, more traditional variety. The play shows how a coquettish character can bridge the gap between comedy's older generation, whose predestined defeat privileges the rival young woman's marriage and the continuation of the family line, and its younger generation that typically succeeds by obtaining a befitting marriage. Although she is certainly presented as absurd for the way that she fails to conform to the social norms of her acquired rank, La Comtesse does not face ridicule for her coquettish habits in the way that the other aging coquettes do because she retains control of her emotions and, more importantly, her "abnormal" desires do not impede her most important function: her maternal duty. In this sense, the play demonstrates that a coquette's

age may be much less of a factor in her comic downfall than her rejection of idealized roles for women.

Old Biddies and High Bidders: The Vilification of the Delusional Mother in Ulrich's *La Folle Enchère* (1690)

The last play of this chapter, *La Folle Enchère* (1690), once again stages a ridiculous and aging mother but in this instance her ultimate failure to remain appealing and socially relevant does not solicit even the slightest pity. Ulrich's old coquette never redeems herself through reasoned justifications or introspective capitulation to the rising younger generation, but rather she proves herself fully deserving of punishment for forsaking her maternal duties in the name of self-interest. Here, with an amplified absurdity and disconnection from reality, the figure of the old coquette shows signs of having developed into a parody of itself during post-moliéresque comedy.

In keeping with the cynical tone of turn-of-the-century theater, Ulrich takes a satirical look at the morals of her society and exaggerates prevalent vices, in particular coquetry but also egotism.¹⁵² In the one-act play, Madame Argante refuses to let her son Éraсте marry out of fear that his passage into adulthood will only confirm her relative slip into middle age. However, she has fallen in love with the very girl that he intends to wed, Angélique, who masquerades as a count as a part of the youths' ploy to acquire the mother's consent. Both the young lovers and their servants use Madame Argante's weakness for the count to their advantage by devising an

¹⁵² Originally thought to be the work of Dancourt, *La Folle Enchère* has since been attributed to Ulrich, one of his protégés and mistresses (Evain et al. 191). Scholars know little about Ulrich's life (including her first name) and they deem most of what they have read about her to be specious information given the tone of their only known source, a satiric pamphlet entitled *Le Pluton maltôtier* (1708). In the text, contemporaries depicted her as "une courtisane débauchée, une mère indigne et une muse vénale" (Evain et al. 187) for her scandalous liaisons with Dancourt and other notable libertines, but she nevertheless emerges as having been a cultivated and free-thinking woman, and only one of two women (Villedieu being the other) to have had a play performed by the Comédie-Française in the seventeenth century. It is likely that she collaborated with Dancourt and used his name as author in order to get her play staged more easily, but scholars have definitively credited *La Folle Enchère* to her in light of both grammatical indicators of gender and stylistic nuances that distinguish her from her mentor.

impromptu auction in which they prompt her to “buy” his hand in marriage and thus secure the funds that they need to marry. Afterward, they stage the count’s kidnapping and flee, leaving Madame Argante alone and irate. The coquette is thus anything but respectable because she completely misreads her own circumstances (as an undesirable woman) and those of her entourage that is exclusively comprised of people deceiving her.

As in other plays, the coquette’s unwillingness to age presents the primary obstacle for the young protagonists because it impedes them from marrying and satisfying the conditions for a happy comic ending. Her son’s valet Merlin points out that Madame Argante is trying to defy both the natural order by refusing to accept her inevitable senescence, as well as the social order by resisting established kinship terminology given to women: “elle veut être jeune en dépit de la nature: en vous mariant, vous la feriez grand-mère, et le titre de grand-mère vieillit ordinairement une femme de quinze bonnes années des plus complètes” (1.2, p. 195).¹⁵³ Moreover, in denying her son the right to marry and produce heirs, she effectively puts an end to their family line, thereby opposing the natural propagation of the species and the honorable practice of safeguarding one’s family legacy. As such, Madame Argante proves herself a self-serving figure whose rebellious behavior does not garner praise but appears illogical and disdainful.

Madame Argante’s selfish behavior appears even more loathsome because she is a bad mother to Éraste. Before authors began to depict young adults having the right to choose their own marriage partners in the early eighteenth century, early modern theater encouraged good

¹⁵³ Here, the neutral kinship term “grandmother” (meaning the mother of one’s father or mother) holds a pejorative connotation that more deliberately stresses a woman’s age (perhaps in the manner of calling an unrelated older woman “granny”). Later in the play, Merlin calls Madame Argante a grandmother to her face in order to mock her insecurity and showcase his earnest irreverence. Naturally, she has yet to earn the title rightly and it represents more of an agist slur, as she demonstrates when probing her servant if she truly fits the offensive description: “Est-ce que j’ai l’air d’une grand-mère?” (1.5, p. 201).

parents (both on and off the stage) to choose suitable marriages for their children.¹⁵⁴ Madame Argante, for her part, abuses her power to control Éraste's marital fate and in the height of unfairness will not even listen to the name of his chosen fiancée.¹⁵⁵ As mentioned above, Madame Argante puts her own desire to marry above that of her child's and thus reorganizes the traditional linear marriage timeline to her sole advantage. Ironically, she views Éraste's reciprocal opposition to her marriage as aberrant and believes he purposely goes out of his way to make her look old: "C'est un petit dénaturé, qui ne veut pas que je me marie... Il porte exprès des perruques brunes, et il dit partout qu'il a trente-cinq ans, pour m'empêcher de paraître aussi jeune que je la [sic] suis" (1.5, p. 201).¹⁵⁶ Whether Éraste deliberately aggravates his mother or not is unknown, but given the strength of her delusions (as witnessed here in her believing she is in fact still young) she does not show herself to be a reliable judge of character.¹⁵⁷ Worse yet, Merlin detects in Madame Argante a deep-seated antipathy towards Éraste that may better explain why she scapegoats her son: "C'est une étrange mère, franchement, et la noble aversion

¹⁵⁴ Within my dissertation, we see one such case in which a parent does not oppose his child's choice of suitor in *La Coquette de village* (1715), discussed in Chapter 4. Another well-known example would be Marivaux's *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* (1730) whose later date only emphasizes this evolution in early modern marriage traditions. In contrast, most any of Molière's plays portray parents stupidly resisting the natural inclinations of their children.

¹⁵⁵ As the young male lead, Éraste's indignation can easily call into question the older generation's entitled sense of injustice: "Avec quelle dureté, avec quelle prévention ma mère a refusé de consentir à mon mariage, sans vouloir apprendre même ni le nom, ni la famille de la personne que j'aime! (1.2, p. 195). Merlin seconds his master's right to a happy life by enumerating all that is wrong with Madame Argante's plan: "Une mère, parce qu'elle est maîtresse de tout le bien, se croira en droit de faire enrager Monsieur son fils? Elle lui refusera son consentement pour un mariage honnête? Elle ne voudra lui faire aucune avance sur sa succession? Et moi qui fais profession d'être le vengeur des injustices, je verrai cela d'un œil tranquille? Non, je ne ferai point ce tort à ma réputation, et la bonne dame apprendra à se connaître en gens, sur ma parole" (1.3, p. 197).

¹⁵⁶ Evain et al. note that Ulrich's use of the "la" pronoun in the citation was not technically a grammatical error but a stylistic choice often made by female authors: "Les grammairiens au début du XVIIe siècle établissent comme règle l'emploi du pronom "le" invariable, mais il faut plusieurs générations pour qu'elle s'impose, et ce sont les femmes qui y résistent le plus" (201).

¹⁵⁷ Lisette openly mocks her mistress for constantly subtracting years from both Éraste's age as well as her own: "Et quoique Madame soit sa mère, elle est pourtant aussi jeune que Monsieur son fils" (1.10, p. 222). Naturally, Madame Argante is so far-gone in delusion that she does not show embarrassment over this utterly absurd notion.

qu'elle a pour vous mérite assez la petite friponnerie que nous allons lui faire" (1.2, p. 196).

Indeed, Madame Argante confirms his suspicions by declaring war on her own progeny: "Je me vengerai de son ingratitude" (1.5, p. 202). In this sense, from the very beginning of the play Ulrich invites her spectators to look upon Madame Argante as a terrible mother and thus a woman deserving of punishment.

Ulrich further implicates Madame Argante in villainy by reinforcing the discrepancy between the old woman's physical appearance and her self-perception. While we are never given any indication of her true age, several details indicate the difficulty with which Madame Argante conceals her aging. For one, her close servant Lisette hints at her mistress' bad hearing, a play on the traditional association between deafness and seniority: "Elle pourrait avoir écouté sans avoir entendu, la salle est grande, et la bonne dame n'a pas l'oreille fine" (1.8, p. 205). Secondly, she and Merlin discuss Madame Argante's wrinkles:

Lisette

Elle est vieillotte et très coquette. Un jeune garçon...lui dit qu'elle est jeune et jolie : y-a-t-il rien de plus facile à persuader ? Elle est bien contente d'elle depuis quelque temps.

Merlin

Et les miroirs ne troublent-ils point un peu son petit contentement ?

Lisette

Bon, les miroirs ! Je parierais qu'elle s'est mis en tête que le goût change pour les visages, et que les plus ridés deviennent les plus à la mode.

Merlin

Mais en effet, il y a mille coquettes à Paris qui n'en portent point d'autres. (1.4, p. 199)¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ "Vieillotte" is an interesting term for Lisette to use (as opposed to strictly "vieille") because as Furetière notes in his *Dictionnaire* (of the same year as the play) it draws more attention to the beginning of the aging process and is strictly used for mocking: "Qui commence à avoir l'air vieux, à vieillir...Il ne se dit qu'en raillerie."

Here, Madame Argante's lack of beauty draws mockery because she and the plethora of aging coquettes within Paris do not adhere to accepted standards of beauty, or at least they do not "correctly" perceive the same physical traits as others do.¹⁵⁹ By making it seem as though delusional coquetry has become a veritable epidemic in the capital, Ulrich emphasizes that her comedy is one of manners more than of character since Madame Argante clearly represents just one coquettish fool out of many.¹⁶⁰ As such, the playwright primarily criticizes women who are so out of touch with reality that they cannot accept their changing status in society.

Whereas the other coquettes of this chapter are somewhat piteous in light of their mindfulness of early modern society's treatment of older women as bygone sexual objects, Madame Argante seems fairly confident of her own desirability and yet mocks her aging coquettish peers; as she says in all earnestness: "Sans vanité, il y a quelque différence" (1.22, p. 226). In the play, Merlin orchestrates this mirroring effect by having another valet, Champagne, dress up as an old marquise who comes forth with a prior marriage claim to the "count." Madame Argante confronts her new rival and fails to see the irony of her own accusations:

¹⁵⁹ This conversation is also the only instance in which Ulrich formally labels Madame Argante as a coquette, which is not a given for authors writing what I consider to be "coquette" plays.

¹⁶⁰ Later in the play, Ulrich reinforces the widespread existence of foolish, old Parisian coquettes when Angélique, dressed as a man, complains about being hounded by them:

Angélique

Le déplaisant animal qu'une vieille amoureuse!...justement, c'est une marquise qui m'a tant ennuyé. La vieille folle !...

Lisette

On a fait entendre à Madame que vous êtes le héros de la coquetterie.

Angélique

Moi, le héros ! J'en suis le martyr !...Je suis accablé d'aventures. La plupart des jeunes gens sont à l'armée, toutes les coquettes de Paris me tombent sur les bras. (1.10, pp. 206-7)

Here, Angélique deflects a comment indicting her as a coquettish man and turns it back into a problem of feminine issue. Much like in Dancourt's *L'Été des coquettes* (1690) to be discussed in Chapter 4, the imbalanced ratio of the sexes in Paris seemingly contributes to the sexual fervor of women, including La Comtesse who represents his version of a ridiculous aging coquette.

En vérité, Madame, vous jouez un étrange personnage: courir après un jeune homme!...Il est vrai qu'il faut être étrangement entêtée de chimères...C'est une chose épouvantable de persécuter de la sorte un enfant, que vous voyez bien qui ne vous aime point. (1.18, pp. 218-220)

Here, Ulrich draws an unflattering parallel between older women and cross-dressing men.¹⁶¹ One can imagine how unconvincingly Champagne acts as a woman in light of his references (both literal and figurative) to facial hair that he freshly trimmed.¹⁶² Dorothy Keyser makes the important distinction between cross-casting that functions as a convention ("discrepant elements that the audience is expected to ignore," 46) and a device ("discrepant elements introduced deliberately to draw the audience's attention to some aspect of the production," 46), the latter of which applies to Champagne's costume: The spectators and all the characters (except for Madame Argante) are keenly aware of its falsity and grotesqueness.¹⁶³ This in turn enhances the

¹⁶¹ It is unknown who interpreted the role of Madame Argante but Scott asserts it was certainly a female actor because at the time of *La Folle Enchère*'s creation in 1690, cross-casting was not only rather outdated but the Comédie-Française took advantage of the presence of three character actresses, Mlles La Grange, Desbrosses, and Du Rieu, who were known for playing aging coquettes ("Conniving" 207). Scott likewise cites Dancourt as the playwright who made the best use of these actresses, from which one could extrapolate and make an educated assumption that Ulrich followed in the footsteps of her mentor.

The fact that this aging coquette appeared much later than the others in this chapter suggests that actresses grew to accept such a "character role" because they developed it themselves within the Comédie-Française (Scott "Conniving" 191-2). We witness characters candidly validating the enduring beauty of the first three coquettes whereas the physical appearance of Ulrich's Madame Argante receives the most criticism, and as such the ability to appear repulsive may have reinforced a degree of mastery within their craft. In this sense, authors and actors emphasized a specifically feminine form of ridiculousness through the aging coquette even if her performance sometimes bordered on the more traditional burlesque interpretation of female senescence.

¹⁶² Our first encounter with Champagne sets the mood of the play as he discusses his feminine costume before needing a reminder from Merlin to shave his mustache (1.1, p. 194). Upon battling with Madame Argante, he becomes so frustrated with the treacherous count that he cries, "L'insolent, à ma barbe oser s'expliquer de la sorte!" (1.18, p. 220). Naturally, this is a turn of phrase that Furetière defines as "Faire une chose à la barbe de quelqu'un, pour dire, la faire hardiment, malgré lui et en sa présence" but Ulrich renders it more comical and personal to Champagne with the use of the possessive "ma" that draws the audience's attention to his real whiskers.

Later in the play, Merlin exposes Madame Argante's gullibility by boldly pointing out Champagne's incongruous female impersonation: "Oui, Madame de La Tribaudière a le visage plus mâle, à ce qu'il me semble" (1.22, p. 226).

¹⁶³ Prest further discusses the complicity between the actors and their audience that enhances the humor and mockery of the cross-casting: "The comedy of cross-casting is therefore largely communicated directly from the male actor to the audience and not via the other characters on stage. Having said that, there is little doubt that, in performance, although not explicitly stated in the text, part of the comic effect of such characters was derived from the very fact that a female part, conspicuously played by a man, was apparently accepted as a woman by his/her

comedy of the situation and makes Madame Argante appear even more imperceptive and foolish as the obvious transvestitism raises no suspicion on her part.¹⁶⁴ In the role of the comic target, Madame Argante can do no worse than to prove her total lack of awareness, reason, and compassion, and Ulrich's novel employment of a reflective rival readily brings all of these faults to the audience's attention for condemnation.

Madame Argante's lack of self-awareness in criticizing Champagne for qualities and behaviors that she herself exhibits is an exemplary case of "misrecognition," one of the possible reactions felt by audience members under Molière's influential mode of satire that Larry Norman calls "The Public Mirror." Norman explains: "distorted identification—seeing one's double in the comic mirror and not oneself—is in fact one of the mechanisms that allows an audience to bear, even enjoy, satiric comedy" (129-30) and as such the target's innocence works as "the comedy's shield" (131) against public outcry. Here, during a meta-theatrical scene within the play, Madame Argante behaves as a quasi-spectator: She experiences such a "distorted identification," fails to see herself as the object of satire, and avoids a so-called "wrathful recognition" (134) in which self-admission of fault produces anger. The aging coquette suffers no shame and seeks no corrective action, rendering her eternally clueless, maniacal, and prone to a downfall. Through Madame Argante's misrecognition, Ulrich easily demonstrates how little the coquette possesses in lucidity and defensive strategies since she can hardly recognize her enemies, let alone outsmart them.

coperformers. The scope for dramatic (and comic) irony in this situation is great: there is direct complicity between actor and audience and there is a subtler complicity between the actor, his coperformers, and the audience" (27).

¹⁶⁴ As Richard Parish notes, the principal goal of this classical cross-casting is "to enhance the audience's comic appreciation of the roles by the fact of their being cross-dressed" (56).

Of course, Madame Argante's poor perception is most evident in the case of Angélique dressed as the count.¹⁶⁵ The old woman finds him/her very attractive (1.5, p. 202) but as Lisette points out, the girl does not portray a convincing man: "une fille n'est point faite comme un homme, et je m'apercevrais fort bien de la différence" (1.3, p. 197). In this sense, Angélique represents the antithesis of Madame Argante because she is still clearly young and feminine, and as such she could never be likened to a man in the way that Champagne's proximity to the old coquette draws comparisons.¹⁶⁶ Here, Ulrich emphasizes the association between youth and femininity in that all of her characters regard Angélique as the only sexually viable woman of the play, in spite of her performance as a man. Madame Argante's parallel channeling of flirtatious, feminine youth fails to elicit the same reaction but instead maps out a contrasting relationship of maturity onto masculinity. In other words, the aging woman more closely resembles a wholly desexualized cross-dressing man than a member of her own sex because for Ulrich women have no feminine identity once they have lost their sexual appeal. Angélique, for her part, does her best to perform masculinity but her interpretation largely means being selfish, rude, and inebriated.¹⁶⁷ The fact that Madame Argante and many other aging coquettes find this

¹⁶⁵ Ulrich's use of the comic device of cross-casting helps to set *La Folle Enchère* apart from the other aging coquette plays in plot because it rearranges the traditional gender dynamic between mother and either son or daughter. In both versions of *La Mère coquette*, a mother competes with her daughter for the same suitor, whereas in *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* this is not possible because her child is male. Given that Madame Argante also has a son, one would expect Ulrich's play to follow the same scheme as Molière's. However, Ulrich introduces cross-casting in order to reestablish the mother-child rivalry while simultaneously turning the comic convention on its head by having a woman compete for the hand of another woman.

Evain et al. also note Ulrich's originality in the reversal of sex roles, with the height of its irony stemming from both the purchase and kidnapping of a supposed "male" character by "women" (191). Though Ulrich seemingly conforms to Romanesque stories in which men abscond with young women, the playwright blurs the lines of propriety given that the kidnapped individual here is merely the pseudo-female Angélique.

¹⁶⁶ Madame Argante's perpetual adherence to unreality could be contrasted to Angélique's declared desire to renounce artifice: "...j'aurais voulu pouvoir être heureuse sans le recours de tous les artifices dont nous servons" (1.8, p. 205).

¹⁶⁷ Angélique describes her repulsive interpretation of a typical young man that somehow attracts every old Parisian coquette: "Je les copie d'un bout à l'autre: je n'ai de la complaisance que pour moi, des égards pour qui que ce soit, un "palsambleu" ne me coûte rien devant des femmes de qualité, même je brusque de sang froid la plus jolie

objectionable behavior alluring points to either one of two intriguing conclusions: one, that men, in direct contrast to women, become more appealing the further they stray from established aesthetic norms, or two, that out of desperation older women will find even the worst suitor charming as long as he pays them some attention, however ill-mannered. In either interpretation, Madame Argante proves her lack of good judgment because she mistakes not only a feminine woman for a man, but also a disagreeable suitor for an ideal match.

Madame Argante pursues no marriage party other than Angélique but her lack of true affection for the count robs her of any sympathy.¹⁶⁸ More specifically, she seems very interested in his title (“je veux me dépêcher de devenir comtesse” 1.5, p. 202) and Lisette warns of her mistress’ greed (1.4, p. 200), both of which hint at Madame Argante’s ambition. Later in the play, she engages in a rigged bidding war with the marquise (Champagne) over who can purchase the favor of the count’s father (Merlin), ultimately spending a fortune before the marquise suddenly abducts the count (Angélique) with the intention of eloping.¹⁶⁹ Although Madame Argante’s great expenditure may seem to disprove her supposed avarice, the tyrannical way in which she purchases the count’s hand sullies the purity of her love.¹⁷⁰ Further, she claims

personne du monde. Je suis insolent avec les personnes de robe, honnête et civil pour les gens d’épée; pour les abbés, je les désole; je prends force tabac d’assez bonne grâce, et je serais parfait jeune homme si je pouvais devenir ivrogne” (1.8, p. 204).

¹⁶⁸ Ulrich gives her character the label of coquette due to her excessive vanity and not because she is unfaithful or fickle. In this sense, Madame Argante more closely resembles the love-struck mothers in both versions of *La Mère coquette* than la Comtesse d’Escarbagnas who entertains two potential husbands for practical gain.

¹⁶⁹ Deborah Hahn notes that coquettish mothers become comic targets because of their symbolic economic power (69). Though money has a rather inconsequential role in the other three plays of this chapter (save for La Comtesse’s lack thereof), Madame Argante makes her fortune known and uses it to acquire what she desires. In keeping with other rich widows of classic comedy, her children dupe her out of her money and presumably compromise her power.

¹⁷⁰ A similar situation arises earlier between the count/Angélique and the marquise/Champagne who tries to convince everyone that the count owes her marriage in recognition of all the money she has spent on him/her:

Champagne

to be dying of chagrin in her final lines but then immediately leaves on a quest for information (1.25, p. 232), suggesting that her heartbreak was fairly superficial. Without evidence of true love motivating her rebellious desire for a younger man, the coquette fails to produce a convincing reason as to why she is a victim of society's prejudices against amorous older women, and consequently she remains a self-interested villain.

Madame Argante thus never marries but her eternal widowhood does not represent a place of power as much as a state of limbo.¹⁷¹ Unlike the other aging coquettes, whose authors create situations that coerce the women into giving up their sovereign widowhood, Ulrich denies her character marriage because it would satisfy the villainess's greatest desire: to be validated as a beautiful woman worthy of a handsome man's attention. Ulrich could have coupled Madame Argante with a more fitting match (such as an unpleasant older man) but the author included no such character in her play, emphasizing the aging coquette's total incompatibility with reality. Instead, Madame Argante lives in a perpetual state of delusion and egotism where her longings cannot be feasibly gratified.¹⁷² The aging coquette never learns her lesson and so Ulrich must

Je ne l'épouserai pas, moi? J'aurai tout fait pour lui ! Dis le contraire, petit ingrat, dis le contraire ! Argent comptant, pierreries, et ma vaisselle même ! J'ai sacrifié tout à tes folles dépenses, et je te souffrirais après cela dans les bras d'une autre ?

Angélique

Eh bien, Madame, sont-ce là des titres pour me forcer à devenir votre époux malgré moi ?

Lisette

Bon ! Si on épousait d'obligation toutes celles qui font ces extravagances, il y a mille jeunes gens qui auraient plus d'une douzaine de femmes. (1.18, pp. 220-1)

Having already seen the way in which Angélique and Lisette artfully defend against Champagne's flawed reasoning, the spectators would certainly look upon Madame Argante's purchase as questionable and absurd as well.

¹⁷¹ In fact, nowhere in the play does Ulrich make specific mention of Madame Argante's widowhood. I interpret this as the author's way of inhibiting Madame Argante's powerful stance in the eyes of the audience given the widow's relative power in early modern society. Because Madame Argante is the villainess of the play, the retention of her unmarried status should not lead any spectator to believe that she has remained in control or triumphed.

¹⁷² In contrast, Merlin stresses the happiness of the other characters to Éraste in the final lines of the play: "Ne songez qu'à votre bonheur. Vous allez posséder Angélique, vous devez être content. Je voudrais de tout mon cœur

punish her with isolation for being such an ill-fitting character in a world highly concerned with good appearances.

By mocking the maniacal Madame Argante, Ulrich joins the ranks of other classical comic authors who mirrored society's foibles on stage as a way of encouraging spectators to correct their foolish behavior. What sets Ulrich apart from contemporary playwrights is that, as a woman herself, one may have expected her to show empathy toward the struggles of older women, and yet she goes to the opposite extreme and makes her aging coquette the most villainous of any, as if to suggest that as true equals to men women should never be delicately spared on the stage. For her, then, both poor parenting and a strong disconnect with reality are worth ridiculing and punishing before an audience, regardless of the offender's sex.

Ulrich's aging character is deficient of all of the qualities needed to be an effective coquette: She lacks beauty for charming men, intelligence for devising schemes, and lucidity for accurately assessing her situation (in this case, as a mature woman and mother who should encourage the happiness of her children above her own). Without this fundamentally coquettish shrewdness underlying her motivations, the old woman's desire to remain relevant among the younger generation does not appear respectably rebellious but rather impossibly optimistic and obsessive. In this respect, she represents a foil to the younger coquettes and consequently affirms the endearing aspects of their portrayal.

Conclusion

In an age where contemporaries frequently discussed the worrisome entanglement of fact (*être*) and appearance (*paraître*), the usual targets of theatrical critique were those who presented

que la compagnie le fût aussi" (1.25, p. 232). Whereas Madame Argante wanted to satisfy her desires alone, Merlin remarks how the actual ending was superior in that it satisfied a "greater good."

themselves as something they were not, including religious bigots, overly refined aristocrats, and the bourgeoisie attempting to mimic noble manners. Female character roles became more widespread during the latter half of the seventeenth century in conjunction with the rise of actresses on the French stage, and among these the aging coquette represented a favored choice by playwrights as it allowed them to satirize a burgeoning feminine mania in which women obsessed about their beauty beyond an appropriate age. In other words, authors were eager to demonstrate a mature woman's ridiculous sense of self-perception by drawing attention to the discrepancy between the physical evidence (her maturity and fading looks) and her delusion (eternal youth and beauty).

Whereas younger women labeled as coquettes could effectively use coquettish tactics to attract amorous attention confirming their beauty, the aging coquette seemingly loses this socially-ordained right to seduce and must face this reality or suffer ridicule. Most ostensibly due to her status as mother/widow and thus a desexualized being, authors consistently place this developing character type in the camp of the ridiculous, in other words a group who cannot accept their (erotic) shortcomings. In this sense, the aging coquette lacks lucidity, a celebrated trait among younger coquettes who use their acumen to attain their goals and typically by making fools of others rather than themselves. In French classic comedy, then, wisdom does not readily accompany maturity, and the aging coquette must consequently join the "older generation" whose customary defeat by the young only hurts worse because she yearns to belong to the victorious youth.

The aging coquette's role as mother plays a large factor both for the structure and characterization of the play. Whereas these authors could have written plays about old spinster women who believe that every man is pursuing their hand (such as Molière's quixotic Bélise in

Les Femmes savantes (1672)), they chose to stage maternal figures with similar delusions of grandeur. This could be explained, for one, by the way classic comic structure favors the younger generation triumphing over the older as stated above, and hence a mother character presumably accompanies her own ready-made rivals that are her children. The children may be active deceivers (*La Folle Enchère*), unknowing competitors (*La Mère coquette*), or mere markers of age (*La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*), but in each case they present an assumed threat to the mother in achieving her goals. Secondly, her status as mother within the comic realm may carry with it suppositions that she is inherently absurd, as Deborah Hahn notes with respect to both seventeenth- and eighteenth-century comedy: "Mothers in comedies are characterized as inept and foolish: She's often represented with a ridiculous fault that is so exaggerated that she is rendered incapable of healthily judging a situation or individual" (68).¹⁷³ In this light, a mother figure in comedy becomes her own character type that easily lends itself to obsession and misperception in the manner of the common comic maniac.¹⁷⁴

The status of widowhood likewise sets these aging coquettes apart from married women who must channel their sexual desires toward being faithful wives and mindful mothers, however

¹⁷³ Hahn's observations stem from scholarship on maternity and eighteenth-century literature researched by Isabelle Brouard-Arends. For more, see *Vies et images maternelles dans la littérature française du dix-huitième siècle*. Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 291. Oxford: The Alden Press, 1991.

¹⁷⁴ Notable characters such as Elmire in *Tartuffe* and Madame Jourdain in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* ostensibly represent more reasonable mothers during this period of comedy, however, nuances within their characterization set them apart from the coquettish mothers that I examine. For Elmire, her status as a step-mother within Orgon's family strongly suggests that she did not give birth to his grown children Mariane and Damis and thus she is not a biological mother but rather a surrogate parent. Furthermore, Tartuffe's great attraction for her suggests that she is arguably young and beautiful. In this sense, her inherited motherhood coupled with her presumed youth and beauty allows her to remain a desirable object who may act intelligently and ultimately triumph. As for Madame Jourdain, she is indeed the biological mother of Lucile and yet she still represents a fairly reasonable figure in contrast to her husband. However, what keeps Madame Jourdain from joining the ranks of the most lucid characters (such as the servants Nicole and Covielle and the young suitor Cléonte) is Molière choosing to cross-cast the role: No matter what reasonable remarks Madame Jourdain says, she is still a man in a dress and not to be taken too seriously. With her grotesque appearance, she does not possess the physical allure that seemingly lends itself to devising schemes and winning the audience's approval for trickery. As such, she is the last character to join in staging Cléonte's fake "mamamouchi" ceremony because she too falls for the ruse at first glance.

attractive they may still be. Dramaturgical propriety forbids the on-stage portrayal of an unfaithful wife, and so a woman's last opportunity to become an active desiring subject resides in widowhood. The widow, more sovereign and less pure than she was before marriage, has the power to choose a new mate or remain unmarried but her choices do not come without increased scrutiny. More specifically, society tacitly dictates that her life requires the guidance of a masculine figure, that her pool of acceptable suitors has shrunk, that her social life comes to a close in her forties, and that her duties as a mother take precedence over her own needs if she has children. Although a modern audience may find these rules to be fraught with unjust and unfounded standards, they are exactly the restraints that the aging coquette breaks in a proto-feminist manner. Yet she cannot emerge as the heroine of her play.

What keeps the aging coquette from earning even a modern reader's complete support and sympathy is her characterization as an egotistical, ruthless, and imperceptive fool. Her authors could have framed her struggle as an early modern woman in the way other playwrights did with the younger coquettes, and yet they found it more fitting and comical to make her the conniving antagonist rather than the sly heroine. Judged solely on her maturity, her status as widow-mother, and her (lawful) pretention to authority, the aging character is endowed with the normally powerful tool of coquetry but cannot harness it. In other words, coquetry more appropriately belongs only to those who can convince others of their appeal because such a duplicitous and self-serving skill must be counterbalanced by some degree of wit and charm to encourage the audience's acceptance.

The aging coquette's inability to endear herself to spectators makes her an excellent figure for valorizing the behavior of younger coquettes, however unprincipled the latter may appear itself at times. Indeed, these more typical coquettes display aberrant forms of desire (for

money, freedom, multiple suitors, and amour-propre) and a high degree of self-interest that pervert bourgeois expectations for women and yet they emerge among the victorious more often than not. The key difference between the two generations resides in comedy's favoritism of the young whose scheming and resistance make sense in the context of them being powerless before their controlling elders. Early modern French society certainly did not favor aging women given the manner in which their conduct and appearance were scrutinized, but within the plays the mother/widows nonetheless face no true obstacles to getting what they want other than the lack of reciprocal desire from the younger men that they wish to possess. Without an obvious oppressor or compromising situation to justify her rebellion against societal expectations for older women, the aging coquette assumes the role of oppressor herself and jeopardizes her lineage's future while on this unredeemable path toward failure. Though her authors may confirm her youthful and pleasant appearance, their ultimate truth is that she must separate herself from the young and assume the responsibility of her maternity and age group, thereby allowing the next generation of women to have a chance at chasing their budding desires.

CHAPTER 3: MATERIAL COQUETTES

Introduction

FLAVIE

...où sont ces chevaux gris,
qu'avant votre départ vous m'aviez tant promis ?

FLAVIO

Je n'avais point d'argent.

FLAVIE

Je ne saurais que faire,
Et que n'en cherchez-vous, est cela mon affaire,
C'est à vous d'en trouver, lorsque j'en ai besoin,
Cependant, j'ai reçu par votre peu de soin,
Dans le milieu du cours, la plus grade avanie,
Des Dames me voyant, 'C'est Madame Flavie,
Elle a,' se cria l'une, 'encore ces chevaux noirs,'
Jugez si j'étais lors dans de grands désespoirs.

FLAVIO

Vous en aurez, il faut laisser passer la Fête,
Ne sortez pas les soirs.

FLAVIE

Vraiment vous êtes bête !
Je ne sortirais pas les matins ni les soirs,
Pour tous les biens du monde, avec des chevaux noirs,
Il me ferait beau voir ! Hé bien, faites en sorte
Que j'en aie au plus tôt, car il faut que je sorte,
Et que je sois au Cours en attelage gris.

--Raymond Poisson, *Les Pipeurs ou les Femmes coquettes*

Flavie badgering her husband for a more stylish “attelage” may remind readers of certain early television sitcoms in which husbands controlled the family purse strings and doled out the money they earned to their wives as they saw fit, preventing any screwball expenditures borne out of whims and schemes marked as feminine. Despite nearly three hundred years separating these two timeframes, our familiarity with this situation should not be entirely shocking: A

modern consumerist culture was already emerging in the proto-capitalist urban centers of Europe during the late seventeenth century.¹⁷⁵ On account of economic programs guided by ministers such as Jean-Baptiste Colbert, and the growing mercantile society in large cities, French nobles and particularly the bourgeoisie experienced an increased affluence that allowed for greater economic freedom and class mixing.¹⁷⁶ In light of this growth of bourgeois consumerism and newly commercialized social relations, playwrights found an opportunity to make light-hearted moral commentaries about the new culture through the inclusion of coquettish female characters who are both its emblem and its (unfortunate) by-product. In other words, the coquette is the quintessential consumer and yet looked upon as an entirely deviant one because her disreputable traits (such as fickleness, vanity, and acquisitiveness) are encouraged by the hungry market in order to feed it continuously. Functioning in this way as a sign of the modern world, she is a caricature of the motor of progress. However, along with her flashy “gears and belts” comes an eternally restless and distracted consumer base who is always looking for the next big innovation, in particular with regard to visual displays of fashion, *savoir-faire*, and public entertainment. The coquette is thus a figure who is constantly in motion, flitting from one man or boutique to another, and one who also propels herself forward by consistently occupying spaces in which she can garner more attention and fuel her unwinnable quest for satisfaction.

Contrary to typical literary tropes in which coquettes position themselves in public arenas (e.g. theater boxes, balls, gardens) to better attract attention, the coquettes of this chapter are only seen occupying private spaces. Although this coincidence may simply have been the result of a

¹⁷⁵ My understanding here of this period’s economics is informed by the works of Grussi, Kavanagh (*Dice*), Newman, and Reith.

¹⁷⁶ Despite being legally barred from earning a wage through their own labor, the aristocracy was nevertheless allowed to participate in overseas trading that not only brought great profit but prestige within their community.

common respect of the theater's unity of space, it is nonetheless in sharp contrast to "city plays" of earlier decades by Pierre Corneille in particular in which public commercial spaces highlighted the emerging shopping spaces of seventeenth-century Paris, such as the *Galérie du Palais*. As Karen Newman remarks, the plays depicted "members of a young, urban elite in search of romance, intent on urban pleasures, on fashion, entertainment, and amatory adventure" (93). She further explains that they reflect the budding consumer revolution that affected the Parisian mentality as a whole in that inhabitants of areas steeped in commercialism began to employ a language of exchange and value in the realm of human relations. For example, in Corneille's *La Galérie du palais* (1632), the characters make a trip to la Galérie to make purchases as much as they go to look at other buyers and be seen in return. In this sense, they are "appraising" one another's qualities and "negotiating" gestures and fashions to acquire love and attention (97).

The newer coquettes, rather than venturing out under the assumption that the world is at once their marketplace as well as their stage, remain within their residences and receive their admirers. Their homes thus develop into gambling houses, salons, and boutiques, or spaces that nevertheless encourage the trend of coquetry because they still allow them to practice their art of drawing attention to themselves. The plays do indeed make mention of some outside spaces of public interaction (e.g. Flavie is laughed at for her unfashionable horses on the Parisian streets, or Cidalise and Éraste go to the fair where they spot another attractive couple and commence quarreling), but otherwise the private subsumes the public entirely, as is the case for Mme Thibaut's boutique where she finalizes deals with financial and/or amorous ends.

The figure of the consumeristic coquette also reflected the hedonistic exercise of choice afforded to elite women through France's recent influx of wealth and a thriving market full of

luxury goods and fleeting fashions. Whereas young women were normally part of a socially disempowered group under the protection of their fathers and husbands, the playwrights show that their coquettes resist constraints put upon their choices in seeking situations that offer them the most options. By drawing attention to herself with fancy accoutrements and making appearances at public forums such as the theater or a ball, the coquette can attract more suitors and therefore increase her range of influence as a “chooser” among men within a predominantly patriarchal marriage structure that had previously relegated her to the “chosen” party. That being said, her power might in fact be maximized by increasing her options but *not* by choosing one of them: If she refuses to choose a suitor, she retains her relative position of power as the object of courtship and avoids the risk of her husband assuming a legal position of tyranny. Given this conflation of sexual agency and increased consumer power, the coquette begins to emerge as a worrisome figure whose new power to choose invites her to withhold making decisions about marriage while courting several men, as well as to indiscriminately bestow her love upon non-male objects of affection, namely other women and money itself. These non-(hetero)sexual relationships are evidently not ideal for the defenders of patriarchal values and yet they are still culturally preferable to sexual promiscuity in that they preserve virtue. In this sense, the coquette’s non-traditional affinities pose less of a threat and may even be regarded as charming foibles that the author treats with an indulgent tone.

If, however, the coquette does indeed actively choose to trade in the advantageous role of the unmarried temptress for the less versatile role of wife, she may still provide herself with further options down the line (e.g. entertainment, protection, love) if her new husband can provide her even greater wealth, respect, and stability. This way, the potential domestication of the coquette is not always the marker of her defeat as it may occur of her own volition rather

than as acquiescence to male authority. My thinking in this manner is indebted to Theresa Braunschneider's work on eighteenth-century British novels depicting coquettes. Similarities abound between the coquettes of the two different time periods, nations, and genres and here I extrapolate upon the fruits of Braunschneider's research in the areas that I see as the most pertinent and applicable.¹⁷⁷ For characters whom Braunschneider categorizes as "reformed coquettes," it may simply be an instance of a "reorientation of desire" (102) in which the heroines get what they want in the end (heterosexual love) after the events of their story reveal to them what they *no longer* want (radical eroticism). What is ultimately important for Braunschneider is the willing transition from daughterhood to wifhood and thus an ongoing expression of her own power and desire that reveals her newly discriminating pleasure in the act of choosing an exclusive relationship with one man. Thus, both patriarchal power and female self-determination are suddenly able to produce a mutually satisfying result and allow for a true "happy ending."

With these ideas in mind for this chapter, I would like to focus on three plays in which the coquettish protagonists highlight the comic theater's growing interest in a more explicitly economic dimension of daily Parisian life. This includes the gambling craze that took root near the beginning of Louis XIV's reign, the "all-consuming" desire to own the latest fashionable goods on the market in an effort to keep up appearances in the cultural capital, the inner workings of a lively yet corrupt boutique, and the repercussions of a civil judicial system that constrained litigants' finances. The negotiations analyzed, however, are not limited to exchanges

¹⁷⁷ Interestingly enough, Braunschneider mistakenly denies the possibility of French literary coquettes emerging as similar touchstones for modernity due to her erroneous impression that all French coquettes are aristocrats who accordingly participate less in the developing global commerce and bourgeois consumerism (14). I imagine her analysis was limited to purely novelistic representations of coquettes and she merely failed to draw upon the rich resources of the French theater in forming her opinion. For more see *Our Coquettes: Capacious Desire in the Eighteenth Century*.

of money for goods and services: There are several cases in which the coquettes, in need of additional financial resources, must resort to offering immaterial tokens as social currency, in particular their beauty and their sharp wit. In this sense, without accepted capital of their own they exploit the developing exchange economy of early modern Paris and become refined traders, both honest and unscrupulous alike. They rely on the capital's urban setting for its dense population that serves to admire them, as well as its numerous public and private arenas in which they may showcase themselves. Paris also acts as a magnet for luxury goods and international styles that suit the coquettes' need for novelty and a dynamic working environment.

Nevertheless, because every play needs an ending, the perpetual turnover of money and attention is bound to abate and bring with it an authorial interrogation about what to do with an ultimately vicious character, in this instance a materialistic coquette. Whereas traditional comedies typically see the protagonists' (amorous) desires met at the end of the play by arranging for their marriage, these particular coquette plays eschew most forms of consummated love and instead use material goods to restructure the characters' desires, shifting the focus toward more contemporary economic concerns even if they do in fact finish the play heading toward an exclusive heterosexual relationship. As a character type who often held the reputation for disrupting the logic system of her surroundings, the coquette was aptly suited to become a heroine who could induce such a paradigm shift in the dramatic world and illuminate the widespread vices of her increasingly consumerist peers. Although coquettish characters are often reformed or punished in these plays' *dénouements*, they are not vilified to the full extent because their ruthless scavenging is routinely justified.¹⁷⁸ In short, were coquettes to have equal access to

¹⁷⁸ That is to say, punished in a more irreparable manner, such as the destruction of Célimène's carefully built reputation, or the vengeful wrath of a husband toward his wife (in particular with regard to Ismène and Céphise). These genres of coquettes generally have few redeemable qualities and do not elicit much pity from the audience in consequence.

money as her male counterparts, they would not need to resort to coquetry to sneakily draw it out of them. Coquettes' avarice is likewise downplayed when their varied manifestations hint at a loftier goal once they acquire the money: possessing the freedom to be themselves.

The coquettes' apparent greed thus operates as a deliberate, logical strategy for navigating their oppressive (if not entirely sexist) environment that is already saturated in superficiality and well-defined markers of status. In other words, their trajectories are often circular in that they rely on tangible and external symbols (such as a conspicuous cash flow and/or the latest fashions) that aim to open further paths of financial opportunity through men's desires. They often resort to false identities in order to trick their targets, and with the presence of a mask comes the dramaturgical promise of a revelation in either the form of an undesired exposure or a calculated disclosure. In either case, the use of a mask points to an active attempt for agency that in turn unmasks the inequitable structure of early modern gender roles in which these women have not been allowed to operate successfully as non-coquettes.

The coquettes that I have chosen to analyze in this chapter all share an ardent desire for money, but their communal similarities end there. In Raymond Poisson's *Les Pipeurs ou les Femmes coquettes* (1671), Flavie desires to have fun and gamble all day, but her husband Flavio and uncle Docile will not fund her lavish lifestyle. She must toy with Flavio's heart and play the role of the charitable women before Docile in order to finagle the desired sums so that she may attract company to her gaming table and be seen. Between her heartless invectives against all mankind and her base strategies for acquiring cash, she is portrayed as the most outwardly depraved of these coquettes. Flavie's veritable greed is unsurprisingly exposed to Docile by her husband at the end of the play, and she is punished through exile to Italy.

In Michel Baron's *La Coquette et la fausse prude* (1686), Cidalise, a young widow, has been forbidden to see her on-and-off lover Éraсте because her aunt Céphise, a married woman who touts her own inimitable virtue, secretly lusts for him as well. Céphise is able to keep her niece in check by feeding lies about her criminally coquettish lifestyle to Cidalise's father and uncle who control her estate. To make matters worse, Cidalise's assets are frozen in a lawsuit, meaning that she must artfully entertain two repulsive gentlemen of the courts until her trial is won and she can dismiss them. She finally finds a way to unmask her hypocritical aunt and pursue marriage with Éraсте. Thus, in this case the overtly coquettish character Cidalise is not the one punished, but rather her falsely prudish aunt. This particular coquette takes on the role of exposé, turning the tables on her accusers and gaining the respect of her theatrical audience. Though it may seem as if she has been domesticated by her sudden interest in a man she previously rebuffed, the decision to marry is her own and most evidently comes from an internal desire rather than a lack of options.

Lastly, Dancourt's *La Femme d'intrigues* (1692) showcases Mme Thibaut, an indebted and unmarried woman who must tirelessly use her resourcefulness and a vast network of interpersonal connections in order to earn a (mostly dishonest) living. In an effort to end her strenuous working days once and for all, she puts on an act as a wealthy widow and subsequently attracts the attention of a seemingly rich military man who is himself an indigent imposter. Once both ruses have been uncovered, Mme Thibaut escapes arrest for one of her scams by promising that she will pay back all of the stolen money. Much like her predecessor Flavie, Mme Thibaut is a rather dishonest character whose schemes deserve exposure in the end. However, she escapes real sanction and is left unmarried at the close of the play, hinting at a new age for coquettes who eschew consummated love and marriage and who are convincingly better off for it. Without a

known family to control her, Mme Thibaut has nothing but the law to limit her operations, and she does not need to reevaluate her desires as Cidalise does because she is sure of her goals in her insatiable quest for money.

These plays illustrate the consequences of depriving clever women of financial security and monetary power, and likewise emphasize how coquetry masked as greed is a deliberate, reactive strategy used primarily for reappropriating agency against those who abuse their positions of authority. Authors thus represent the material coquettes as victims of the larger economic system that treats them as objects of consumption or currency itself when what they truly want is to fill the position of a buyer who operates in a “freer” market.

Betting Against the House: Gambling and Conjugal Discord in Poisson’s *Les Pipeurs ou les Femmes coquettes* (1671)

This first play stages one of the most unappealing coquettes of all the plays that I examine. The protagonist’s ambition and cruel candor go beyond the ridiculous and parodical nature of the older coquettes discussed in the previous chapter, and furthermore, her inability to love (a man) makes her appear more mercenary and inhumane. However, once her position of inferiority in relation to her husband and uncle is revealed, her ostensible greed begins to take on a more justified dimension and the audience is invited to pity this woman who is too powerless to warrant true contempt. Stuck in a loveless marriage with few options for novelty in her life, she turns to fashion and gambling for fleeting thrills that must be sustained by a regular and hefty allowance. This in turn leads her to worship cash and materials goods, as well as to rely on the element of chance rather than her own agency before her eventual downfall.

Much like his female protagonist, Raymond Poisson was attune to the fashions of his time and necessarily so given the commercial savvy expected of dramaturges who wanted to make it in the competitive theater industry. He garnered much success as both a comedic actor

and playwright at the Hôtel de Bourgogne but saw his work consistently overshadowed by his more popular contemporary, Molière. Although Molière is often noted for being a revolutionary and rather rebellious author who pushed the classical proprieties to their limits, Poisson was not without his own creative verve: He was known as an adventurous playwright who undertook many different comic structures and subjects during his twenty-year heyday (1661-1681), including the topic of gambling that appeared in his 1671 play *Les Pipeurs ou les Femmes coquettes*.¹⁷⁹ These so-called “jeux d’argent” became the great passion of the upper classes at the end of the seventeenth-century, as is reflected in their frequent representation in the comedies of the age (Spielmann, “Mise(s) en jeu” 195).¹⁸⁰ On account of increased affluence brought about by the growing mercantile society as discussed in the introduction, more and more people were able to participate in these games previously played only by the very rich (Reith 58). However, at the time Poisson wrote his play about gaming, very few well-known authors had attempted to treat its growing popularity among the nobility and bourgeoisie.¹⁸¹

As usual, it is helpful to begin with a plot summary. Flavie and Flavio have been married for four years, most of which has been spent unhappily so because the couple does not agree on how to spend their money: Flavie feels she has a right to large sums in order to entertain herself gambling and keep up appearances on the fashionable Parisian scene, whereas Flavio fails to understand this need and detests her parasitic entourage, including two card sharks, two

¹⁷⁹ In fact, under his stage pseudonym, Belleruche, he is considered to have given his face to the character type of Crispin, an outspoken valet known for his transformations, large mouth, and stutter who would later be showcased in other plays in Poisson’s reinvented image (Navailles 287).

¹⁸⁰ Tom Kavanagh argues that gambling hit its prime in France between the ascension of Louis XIV and the Revolution (68). For more see *Dice, Cards, Wheels*.

¹⁸¹ *La Joueuse dupée ou l’Intrigue des Académies* (1664) by Jean de La Forge is the first play to be entirely focused on the practice of gambling (Alvarez-Detrell, “The Gaming Table” 23). It is also interesting to note that for all its topical fixation on money, Molière’s *L’Avaro* (1668) only lightly touches on the topic of gambling when Marianne mentions that unlike most women of her day, she never gambles (2.6).

coquettish cousins, and a coquettish friend. Despite regularly conceding to her demands in a vain effort to keep her satisfied, Flavio earns no sympathy from her and is only approached by his wife for more funds. In the meantime, she and her servant Aimée have been conning Flavie's uncle Docile into giving her thousands of francs under the guise of helping the poor and founding a convent. Flavio, for his part, has been trying and failing to convince Docile that Flavie is not as saintly as she seems, nor is Flavio as cruel as she has made him out to be. Thus, Flavio feels forced to exact revenge upon his wife by setting up several traps over the length of the play: asking Aimée and Colin to spy on her, allowing his valet Crispin to dress up as a wealthy viscount in order to test Flavie's faithfulness, and sneaking into his own house in an attempt to covertly observe his wife and her friends. He ultimately succeeds in ruining her by convincing Docile to spy on her wickedly feminine debauchery with him. Once discovered, Flavie receives her most feared punishment: social isolation through exile from Paris.

The play's title itself indicates a thematic of gaming and yet it is far from being the author's focal point as the plot summary shows.¹⁸² In fact, the title underwent several changes: At the time of its genesis, it was simply *Les Pipeurs* but before its performance at Versailles and subsequent publication in 1671, it had evolved into *Les Pipeurs ou les Femmes coquettes* and then *Les Femmes coquettes ou les Pipeurs* before Poisson finally settled on simply *Les Femmes coquettes* in 1680 (Fournel 406-7). As Tamara Alvarez-Detrell demonstrates, this continual revision makes clear that "[as] Poisson thought his play through, he decided and realized that it treated the domestic and social behavior of the coquette to a greater degree than the cheating of the gamblers" ("Poisson's" 143). Indeed, the two (occasionally) eponymous *pipeurs* of the play only figure in six scenes, most of which are incredibly short, whereas the four coquettes loom

¹⁸² A "pipeur" is a "Filou qui trompe au jeu, qui joue de la mauvaise foi" (*Dictionnaire universel* de Furetière).

large whether they are dominating scenes as a group or appearing individually, as is the case for the (anti-)heroine Flavie who is present in twenty-six of the play's forty-six scenes. This is not to say that gambling only figures into the play when the *pipeurs* are on stage; on the contrary, Flavie regularly illustrates her obsession with betting when requesting money from Flavio in order to pay off debts or to start a new wager, even expressing a sense of indignity at having been forced to spend four days without playing while he is away from Paris (2.4, p. 31). Furthermore, even when Flavie is not on stage, her servants Aimée and Colin give explicit accounts of their mistress's gambling practices, as well as the underhanded dealings of the *pipeurs* who bend their cards and keep the deck unshuffled to their advantage (2.7, p. 37). Consequently, gambling is never truly witnessed taking place on stage in Poisson's play.

There is a good reason for gambling's absence from the *mise-en-scène*: As Tom Kavanagh notes, the act of gambling lacks drama when its audience has little to no stake in what money is being won or lost (*Dice* 111). However, once its stakes extend beyond the gambling itself (and enter the affective realm in particular), a more familiar narrative (involving reputations being put on the line or excessive borrowing from friends, for example) begins to build around the risky behavior, sparking greater interest. In the case of *Les Pipeurs*, Flavie's losing streak and addiction to the thrill of playing fuels her need to abuse Flavio and Docile, and furthermore redirects the amorous feelings a wife is expected to "pay" her doting husband toward an ostensibly immoral worship of money itself. As the reasons behind the coquette's strategies and motivations are subtly revealed, Flavie and her cohorts capture the attention of their spectators who must decide for themselves whether the coquettes are the villainesses of the play, its misunderstood victims, or its anti-heroines.

Gambling as a topic is thus absorbed into Poisson's depiction of coquetry. Though *Les Pipeurs ou les Femmes coquettes* was not the first play to include the word "coquette" in its title (as evidenced in my earlier chapters), it is indeed the first to include it in the plural, which makes an important suggestion of a multiplying effect of coquetry that had not yet been seen on the French stage. As we have seen earlier, prior to this play the figure of the coquette had generally been isolated to one character per play, or had at best been doubled but given a new appellation to semantically distinguish her from her clone (i.e. Célimène is a plain coquette, whereas Arsinoé is a coquette under the category of *fausse prude*). Here we have four women who all fall under the shared label of "coquette," either by grace of a non-coquettish character (Flavio: "Elle est impertinente, et coquette, et joueuse" 3.7, p. 61) or by the author, as found not only in the play's title but also in several scenes near the end in which Flavie and her three friends are grouped together as "Les Coquettes" in the list of characters on stage (Act 5, pp. 8-10). This active conglomeration of similar-acting women by Poisson is interesting in that it not only aggrandizes the sudden threatening prevalence of coquetry in the reader's mind (as would the physical presence of a group of boisterous women on stage for the spectator) but also contrarily sublimates the individual women into a single, overarching epithet that undermines their identities as unique human beings. In this light, they have been reduced to a catch-all character type for rebellious women as the play comes to a close and their respective punishments loom.

The characters' relationship to the coquette label comes under scrutiny in Act I. As the observant reader notes, Flavie does indeed use the word "coquette" when speaking to her uncle: "Il [Flavio] vous dirait que j'ai tous les vices qu'il a, / Que je mange son bien, que je suis trop joueuse, / Que je suis trop coquette et trop impérieuse" 1.2, p. 11). True, Flavie is only repeating the words of her husband and is not identifying herself to be a coquette. In fact, nowhere in the

play do any of the women who are labeled as coquettes call themselves as such. Still, the observable actions of the play prove the veracity of the rest of the portrait (given here indirectly by Flavio) and thus bring an implication of truth to Flavie's supposed coquetry, which in this play subsumes many of the other actions (being a spendthrift, a gambler, and a woman who makes her presence well-known). It is doubtful that Flavie is denying these qualities as she delightfully plays up to her gullible uncle the litany of complaints made by her husband. Ever the actress, she ironically owns her vicious role while only pretending to be outraged. This is reminiscent of a scene much later in which Aimée tells her mistress that word of Crispin's failed disguise and beating will cause a societal commotion, to which Flavie responds: "Je pretends bien aussi faire parler de moi, / Mais c'est trop découvrir, rentrons que je m'apprête, / A terminer ce jour par cette belle fête" (4.13, p. 82). In other words, Flavie plans on throwing a scandalous party and yet wants it to be the talk of the town.¹⁸³ For Flavie, any form of attention is desirable (unless it gives her the disadvantageous reputation of an adulteress, as I demonstrate later on).

Thus, *Les Pipeurs* appears to possess a very straight-forward, black-or-white approach to telling the story of a vicious woman who finds her "demise" at the hands of her mistreated male guardians. Yet upon closer reading we are able to find in Poisson's subtext an apology for such women who turn to coquetry out of a lack of access to money and personal freedom, as well as a critique of men who hold the reins too tightly on the women over whom they have

¹⁸³ As Kavanagh remarks, both gamblers and libertines (such as coquettes) have a propensity for using the technique of bluffing (*Dice* 83). In essence, they both pretend to know their opponents as best they can, reading signs of attraction and performing accordingly. They then push them to their limits in an effort to up the ante and force their hand, which in a libertine context involves getting their undivided attention so as to feel flattered before pulling out and leaving them with a high bet and a bad hand. Of course, anyone who is at the gaming table must be wary not to fall dupe to another player's bluff, so even the shrewd coquette can be tricked by a target, as Flavio does when setting up his wife to frame herself before Docile.

jurisdiction.¹⁸⁴ Though the justification of coquetry is a somewhat regular theme that I bring forth throughout my dissertation, Poisson's case is a rather exceptional one in that all four of his titular coquettes are married women. In no other play of my corpus do we find a married coquette as they all depict either widows (both permanent and temporary) or unmarried women. As Christian Biet discusses, only widows and single women over twenty-five were considered "filles majeures" under the Ancien Régime:

Les femmes sont à considérer comme des sous-personnes... *Imbecillitas sexus*, le sexe féminin est généralement mineur et doit être protégé contre lui-même, contre sa propre faiblesse, comme l'enfant, et ne peut revendiquer aucun rôle pleinement social donc pleinement juridique. Ce faisant, la femme et l'enfant redeviennent en partie des corps qu'on manipule et qu'on dirige, qu'on possède sans qu'on puisse les abstraire sur le plan juridique et les élever au rang de personne. (18)

In other words, married women of any age were considered to be their husband's legal responsibility and were deliberately denied any legitimate power in the name of it being for "their own good." On the contrary, it nearly goes without saying that most traditional coquettes are depicted as young single women given that it is precisely their marital availability and desirability that furnishes them the power to entertain (or reject) any suitor and furthermore encourages them to tease many eligible parties.

It is true that for all of Flavie's apparent vices, she is not a cheat (at least not in love). She may adore the tales of Boccaccio's *Decameron* in which husbands are regularly cuckolded and punished (Alvarez-Detrell "Poisson's" 145) but she never applies fiction to reality. For instance, when Crispin attempts to woo her dressed as a rich viscount, she becomes indignant over his accusations that she would give up her virtue for a mere one hundred Louis d'or (4.12, pp. 78-

¹⁸⁴ This is a theme found in several earlier plays by Molière, with *L'École des maris* (1661) and *L'École des femmes* (1662) perhaps being the best examples. While the unfair oppression of wives by their husbands may not have been a new topic in 1671, Poisson develops the theme further by making the husband-figure appear reasonable and by masking the wife-figure's victimization to the point that some readers might take her for a true villain worthy of punishment.

79). We know that this is not the act of a *fausse prude* on her part because she later confirms that she did not recognize her husband's valet until his wig had accidentally slipped off near the end of the encounter. Although it could be said that it would be easy for anyone to rebuff Crispin disguised as a marred ex-soldier, missing two limbs and an eye, Flavie nevertheless asserts her fidelity in the face of her confidante Aimée's probing:

Aimée
Sa perruque est tombée heureusement, Madame,
Car cinq cents Louis d'or ébranlent bien une âme,
Là, dites franchement, qu'eussiez-vous fait enfin,
Si ce Vicomte-là n'eut point été Crispin ?

Flavie
Il aurait emporté son argent !

If even the promise of money, Flavie's weakness, does not shake her resolve to stay faithful, her virtue must be as true as she and Aimée claim. Her guardedness, however, can be read in two ways: as either part of a deliberate strategy to ensure that her reputation is never compromised by sexual advances, or as total obliviousness. Antoine Adam sees it as the former, commenting on Poisson's overall negative but somewhat appreciative portrayal of Flavie:

On y voit, sur une intrigue qui pourrait être celle d'une farce, une peinture très poussée de la Parisienne à la mode, sans cœur, sans scrupules, intéressée, vaniteuse, mais prudente et froide, et qui ne fera pas la sottise d'avoir une aventure. (*Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle* 416)

I agree that this strategic approach is more in keeping with the characteristics of the tactical coquettish type, but there is more evidence pointing to Flavie's unintentional disregard. Throughout the play it appears as though conjugal infidelity is so unimaginable to Flavie that she rarely even considers the risks she takes in being in potentially compromising situations with other men. For example, when Crispin first arrives in his costume, he asks if he should take the precaution of hiding his carriage on the street, to which Flavie innocently replies: "Non, s'il vous

plaît, Monsieur, ne la renvoyez pas, / Elle peut demeurer sans scandale là-bas” (4.12, p. 75).

Likewise, the servant Colin describes to Flavio how the two *pipeurs* played “à la bête” (2.3, p. 28) on her bed all day long, raising natural suspicion in Flavio despite the game’s innocence.

Looking beyond the obvious sexual innuendo, we see how uninterested Flavie is in physical encounters with men and how she cannot imagine gambling her virtue as a married woman. In this sense, Flavie does not resemble the portrait of the wanton woman who chooses too many men. Rather, her love of no man would be considered anti-coquettish (if not virtuous) were she not a spouse expected to submit to the heterosexual demands of patriarchal marriage structure.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, unlike her losing streak at the gaming table that she purposefully perpetuates in order to retain her entourage, Flavie unknowingly risks her reputation by platonically associating herself with men of ill repute. Whereas other coquettes characteristically place their virtues on the line for the sake of attention, Flavie understands that it is a unique quality never regained if lost, even if unjustly so.¹⁸⁶ In other words, coquetry is frowned upon yet bearable to men such as Flavio when it involves women making purely economic exchanges, but it is wholly abhorrent when occurring as a potential prelude to a sexual exchange. Flavie is thus only willing to risk money in return for respect and friendship because for her it is a transferable good that is easily renewable (insofar as she may count on Docile and Flavio to earn it and likewise yield to her demands).

¹⁸⁵ That being said, the audience never observes Flavie refusing tender advances from her husband because even Flavio appears to have renounced affection between them, save for the cash and luxury gifts he offers her. But these monetary symbols of love are not without motive either: within the timeframe of the play, we learn that the offering of his mother’s diamond is really intended to feed Flavie’s addiction as part of Flavio’s plan to entrap his wife in front of her uncle (2.6, p. 35).

¹⁸⁶ This is especially true of Cidalise, the coquette in the next play that I analyze. She lures powerful men into thinking they will benefit from helping her by receiving her hand in marriage when she has no such intention once she satisfies her material desire. Though she never officially promises them anything in exchange and yet “wins” her bet by gaining their services, her reputation nonetheless suffers because the characters know she has used her virtue as ante at more than one “table.”

Coquettish Conjugal Transactions: Marriage Equals Money Minus Men

Given that Flavio is Flavie's primary resource for money, one may then pose the question: why *does* Flavie detest loving her husband so much? The details of their marriage are rather contradictory and more convoluted than a simple case of "he said, she said." Flavio claims he loved Flavie too much during the first year of their marriage, showering her with gifts that resulted in her becoming spoiled:

Car je l'aimais, votre nièce, et l'ai trop bien traitée,
Mon trop d'amour pour elle, c'est ce qui l'a gâtée,
Lorsque je dis gâtée au moins entendez bien,
Que je ne veux toucher son honneur ni le mien,
Mais elle est trop coquette, et trop impérieuse,
Donne de grands cadeaux, fait la grande joueuse,
Et tient Académie, elle qu'assurément,
Le moins subtil au jeu tromperait aisément. (1.5, p. 16)

The latter half of this passage evokes entitled, aristocratic behavior in its extravagant generosity and ostentatious risk-taking with money, suggesting perhaps that too much pampering can lead to not only careless spending but a wasteful life in general. In Flavio's eyes, he has himself created an all-consumptive monster whose expenditures earn no reciprocal payoff in the long run. But if Flavio openly takes the blame for indulging her, does he also attribute his overabundance of love to be the root of her coquetry? By manifesting his love largely through the bestowal of material gifts, he perhaps believes that these objects eventually perverted Flavie's values and displaced him as the object of his wife's desires. The inclusion of "Mais" at the beginning of the fifth line creates a topical break between the first four lines about spoiling and the last four about coquettish behavior, so it is difficult to say if the first notion is causal of the second: Does being spoiled equal being a coquette in Flavio's eyes? Or are these two distinct ideas, separated by an apology for having called her "gâtée" in front of Docile? Although this may remain unclear, we do learn later in the text that for Flavio coquetry does not imply

infidelity: Whereas Crispin is sure that his disguise will cause Flavie to commit adultery, Flavio believes that she will not fall for his trap: “Je consens à goûter ce divertissement, / Pour te faire sortir de ton aveuglement, / Et pour te faire voir par ton expérience, / Que ma femme est coquette, et que c’est tout je pense” (3.2, p. 52). Though he may still question her fidelity during several scenes of the play as somewhat of a “cocu imaginaire,” it is important to note that Flavio finds a tolerable if not redemptive quality in coquetry here because it is relatively less offensive than a consummated extramarital affair.¹⁸⁷

As the typical jealous husband who schemes against his wife, Flavio functions as the play’s main antagonist. Yet Crispin aids and influences him. It is predominantly the abrasive valet who places fears of infidelity in Flavio’s mind (2.8, p. 43), who devises the plan to lure Flavie to bed and ruin her (“Je mettrai son honneur furieusement bas,” 3.2, p. 52), and who tries to convince Flavio that she was truly attracted to him despite the obvious failure of his disguise (5.1, p. 83). In some ways, Crispin is Flavie’s bigger enemy because he works behind the scenes of the powerful puppet-figure Flavio, and his hidden actions may help reduce the culpability of Flavio’s harsh conduct. In fact, they also indirectly serve Flavie in the reader’s eyes because she is able to justify her coquetry toward him to her benefit: “C’est Crispin, un rare personnage, / Un flatteur éternel, un complaisant à gage: / Je change exprès d’avis, dix fois en un moment, / Et dix fois le flatteur est de mon sentiment” (3.4, pp. 56-57). Crispin’s constant wheedling (which ironically reflects Flavie’s own) is rendered ridiculous, and furthermore, Flavie’s seemingly uncontrollable fickleness suddenly takes on a strategic dimension as she demonstrates it to be entirely deliberate. With this in mind, the harsh nature of Flavie’s addictions and unpleasantness

¹⁸⁷ Many of them being worthy of the scene with Agnès’s ruban in *L’École des femmes*.

is mollified as it appears it may all be faked: an elaborate performance she has devised in order to get her way.

Flavie's recurring penchant for performing (and thus strategically lying) is likewise difficult to decipher in her account of her marriage. She contradicts Flavio's account, rendering her contribution suspicious. She claims that Flavio, a native Italian, used to be prone to violent tantrums but recently quit them in order to mimic the stylish Parisian way of life (1.1, p. 5). Aimée responds that he nonetheless suffers through all of Flavie's foibles out of love, but Flavie rejects this notion. Instead, she justifies her own lack of love for Flavio by questioning the very idea that any wife could love her husband, as if to say that once any woman (coquettish or not) commits to a single man, she automatically loses interest in him.¹⁸⁸ One could compare this form of amorous/marital dissatisfaction with the coquette's insatiable thirst for interaction and entertainment that never contents itself upon gratification. Just when she believes that the acquisition of a trendy new item or a round at the gaming table will render her popular with her peers and bring her happiness, she has to buy another item or make another bet in order to keep up with appearances. In other words, traditional marriage is too rigid and static to be compatible with her mutable Parisian lifestyle. But does her statement go so far as to imply that marriage naturally leads to coquetry, since women must find entertainment in some other form if their

¹⁸⁸ This suggestion is later reinforced by the other coquettes who cannot fathom the idea of loving their husbands for very long after the marriage ceremony:

Flavie
Fut-ce un Ange,
Un Narcisse en beauté, je soutiendrai toujours,
Qu'on ne peut pas aimer son mari quinze jours.

Sainte-Hélène
Vraiment c'est tout au plus,

Sainte-Hermine
Quinze jours, que je meure,
Si je n'ai jamais aimé mon mari plus d'une heure. (3.3, p. 55)

husbands are not able to furnish it? While she does not imply that she seeks sexual gratification elsewhere, she and her coquettish friends all agree that gallant men and “favoris” bring much appreciated novel pleasures to their lives by adding a touch of romance: music, dances, bending down on one knee (5.5, pp. 92-93). It would appear that, in their theatrical universe, men stop trying to please the women they love once they have attained their hand in marriage. Yet the play presents the opposite view in the form of Flavio’s repeated efforts to make his wife happy, including his mother’s diamond he had hand-delivered from Italy.¹⁸⁹ Flavie, in her blinding desire to possess money for further social interaction, fails to see any shred of sentimentality and immediately decides to hawk the family heirloom (2.5, p. 33). She also forgets any other sweet gestures Flavio ever made toward her. In this way, despite his complaints, Flavio hypocritically enables Flavie’s vice because it keeps feeding her addiction and he illogically expects a different outcome every time.

Flavie sees her husband and her suitors as sources of money rather than as love objects.

In fact, all the coquettes would seemingly agree as evidenced in this dialogue:

Sainte-Hermine

Si bien que les maris servirent d’entretiens,
Qu’on quitta tous les jeux, et que cette matière,
Servît à les dauber d’une étrange manière.

Sainte-Hélène

Quand on prend un mari, ce n’est pas pour l’aimer.

Flavie

Vraiment non, l’on le prend pour se faire estimer,
Dessous ce nom de femme, et faire nos affaires,
Pour nous fournir enfin cent choses nécessaires,
Et nous donner l’argent, dont nous avons besoin.

Aminte

¹⁸⁹ Although the audience knows of Flavio’s ulterior motive in giving her the diamond, Flavie is too unaware of his dissatisfaction to suspect trickery on his part and thus should logically interpret this generous gesture as a sign of love.

On ne prend un mari que pour avoir ce soin. (5.5, p. 92)

As Flavie's contribution above shows, the coquettes utilize fashion to draw attention to themselves and be respected. With their indifference to earning male attention, their love takes on a narcissistic dimension in which they prefer the objects that adorn them to the gaze of men. In other words, although they may be highly concerned about outward appearances, their self-decoration may better function as a way to help them think better of themselves than as a way to garner erotically-charged compliments. Braunschneider argues that this "excessive female vanity and consumer-sexual desire reveal earnest anxieties about the potentially narcissistic and alienating nature of modern consumer culture" (43) from which men are largely subtracted. Flavie makes no secret of her obsession with self-image when demanding money from her husband, whether it be to pay off gambling debts or buy more fashionably-colored horses, but he lacks masculine agency in their interaction since she treats him more as an uncultured, sexless piggybank. She mocks Flavio for not understanding the ways of their society, one in which social interaction promises happiness to those who have the money to pay for entertainment and for expenditures that garner respect. She declares that even his valet is more educated on the subject (2.5, p. 33). Flavio may really be unconscious of the times (a possibility since he is born of a foreign culture) or merely acting in order to set up his plan to exact revenge upon his wife (2.6, p. 35). In contrast, as both the biggest breadwinner and most generous person she knows, Docile is Flavie's preferred financial resource: "Mon oncle est l'homme seul qui nous est nécessaire" (1.1, p. 6). Because he is a relative, Docile is excluded from ever requiring romantic love or sex in return, making him the perfect candidate to act as Flavie's private benefactor. Although Flavie and Aimée recognize their abuse of Docile in feeding him lies and saccharine doting, Flavie feels their actions are justified because "C'est par là qu'il en veut, il faut le

satisfaire” (1.3, p. 12). In other words, in Flavie’s mind it is a favorable situation for both parties brought on by Docile’s own unjust strictness.

Luck Be A Lady? Closing the Gap of Gender Inequality through Gambling

Therefore, in Poisson’s theatrical milieu, we do not find coquettes who are interested in collecting male lovers but rather who crave non-sexual social interaction in the form of gambling, formal balls, and private parties. The play most vividly illustrates the characters’ materialistic desires in Act 5, scene 8. In an eroticized, quasi-religious ceremony, Flavie presents her friends with a bowl of coins to be touched and worshipped: “...Ho! Celui-ci se touche, / Il s’empoche de plus, / ...Mais on ne l’a servi que pour être empoché, / Je sais que vos maris ne vous en donnent guère...” (5.8, p. 99). In other words, money truly has found a way to satisfy the coquettes in a way that husbands, lovers, or religion never can!¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, the fact that Flavie serves them coins in a bowl and refers to it as “un mets” and “un tel repas” (5.8, pp. 98-99) implies that money has also substituted food, another basic human need.¹⁹¹ Have the coquettes lost their humanity in the creation of this cult of money? In truth, they still eat pastries¹⁹² and drink a luxurious liqueur called “hypocras,” but they refuse to eat any meat Aimée serves them (5.6, p. 94), emphasizing their lack of attraction to the carnal.

¹⁹⁰ It could also be said that this shared, erotically-charged experience has homosexual undertones that pose a threat to patriarchy. Braunschneider likewise discusses in her fourth chapter eighteenth-century coquettes who have primary affinities for women. Along with amorous exchanges with multiple men, she shows how female homosexual desire is another alternative model of intimacy to heterosexual marriage that several authors present and subsequently “fix” by reorienting their desires to more traditional values.

¹⁹¹ Crispin foreshadows the meal of money when he warns his master not to give Flavie the diamond lest she metaphorically cook it up: “Gardez que l’on ne vous le happe, / Il est ma foi flambé si Madame l’attrape, / Elle a déjà mangé votre bien et le sien” (1.7, p. 22).

¹⁹² Again, it is likely that Poisson is making a play on words in having them eat *cornets* as this term meant a type of pastry as well as a cup for dice, an unsurprising accessory to see in Flavie’s home.

Though all four of the coquettes partake in partying, Flavie directs the operation through her generosity. It is she who provides the funds for entertainment as well as one of the regular locations for their meetings; as Crispin aptly puts it when describing her entourage: “Mais, tous sont devenus si lourds, si paresseux / Qu’ils ne mangent plus rien, qu’on ne paie pour eux” (3.8, p. 41). It is Flavie who liberally offers her most recent payoff to her friends, inciting them to take in as many coins as they can in the spirit of charity: “Ma favorite, allons, cela me désoblige, / Prenez donc / ...Oui vous, prenez tout vous dis-je” (5.8, p. 99). She is thus not a selfish, covetous coquette because money only serves her a purpose if it is used for bringing her company.

In fact, Flavie’s largesse brings her significant social power. Her extravagant generosity recalls Flavio’s complaints about her being “trop impérieuse” (1.5, p. 16) in that she wields her gifts much like an absolute ruler who seeks to inspire awe while indebting subjects with offerings they cannot possibly reciprocate.¹⁹³ In this sense, Flavie’s expenditures are not as frivolous and unprofitable as Flavio views them to be since he fails to see the benefits of a spectacle in which “losing to win” creates power. Her so-called “imperious” act of holding court in her home resembles the methods of Louis XIV who greatly encouraged gambling in order to earn prestige and assemble the royalty and nobility before him (Grussi 61), including the thrice-weekly parties held at Versailles in between the days the royal entourage went to the theater (63). While all of the royal castles were known to host gaming parties, le château de Marly was a special favorite after its opening in 1679. Its impressive “salon de jeu” attracted big spenders from both the nobility and bourgeoisie who were allowed easy access to the gaming tables unlike most other locations (66). Royal parties set the tone for the aristocracy’s impending addiction to gaming, but several of the most rich and well-bred families played at home, much like Poisson’s

¹⁹³ Jean Apostolidès makes such a case for Louis XIV in his works *Le Prince sacrifié* and *Le Roi-machine* that treat the politics of spectacle within the king’s court and its sanctioned entertainments.

Flavie. By imitating the court within Paris, nobles and bourgeois alike could make large amounts of money given that the hosts always acted as dealers.¹⁹⁴ Despite the gaming odds being against them, the guests themselves could profit from the situation by using it as an opportunity to integrate into high society where gambling was a social necessity and a sign of “un homme de mérite” (113). The wealthy bourgeoisie in particular sought to use gambling as a means of social ascension by attempting a “noble” appearance that required showing “disdain for any limit on personal prerogative by reason of cost” because showing concern for domestic finance was primarily associated with bourgeois occupations (Kavanagh, *Enlightenment* 41). Thus, to the noble and the imitative middle class, demonstrating independence from money by refusing to play for financial gain was a method of showing an impressively lavish prodigality and affirming his or her identity. The only time money in itself carried weight within this mindset was with respect to paying off personal debts: the courts had no jurisdiction over gambling payoffs and payment therefore relied on a noble’s word and honor (41-42). To this end, it was very important to obey one’s gentlemanly duty and prove the value of one’s word by acquiring the necessary funds through friends, family, or even usurious lenders.

We witness Flavie engaging in such behaviors throughout the play, from liberally gambling her allowance away to pawning a precious diamond to pay off her debts to the *pipeurs*: “Des dettes l’on s’en rit, mais rien n’est plus constant / Que pour l’argent du jeu l’on doit payer comptant” (2.5, p. 33). As this citation clearly shows, Flavie is concerned about her reputation and must be aspiring to a greater position in life where honor outweighs financial holdings.

¹⁹⁴ For most card and dice games of the Ancien Régime, odds favored the dealer (Kavanagh, *Enlightenment* 32). This is reported by contemporaries to have offset debts for approximately three quarters of the house of Paris, suggesting that holding gambling parties was an important source of revenue and a reason to invite as many people as possible to “jouer gros jeu” (Grussi 86-87). Flavie is evidently an exception to this rule given her predilection for losing, but her naiveté also illustrates another noted problem: the ease with which cheaters entered rich houses as long as they were willing to “jouer gros jeu” (89).

Therefore, money is just a means to an end that earns her more respect and consequently offers her more control over those who attend her gaming table and accept her hospitality. The *pipeurs* readily fall into her trap and Flavie even laughs at their boorish manners as if she were an aristocrat surveying rustic farmhands for the first time. Naturally, we do not find fault with her treatment of them because their shady motives are clearly elucidated in their pejorative label. In contrast, Flavie's fellow coquettes do not appear to grace her with their presence in the sole interest of earning money and free meals: There is a genuine sense of female camaraderie in their language as they remark one another as "cousines," "amies," "la Favorite," and "la Fidèle" in spite of the inequality that Flavie is constructing with her "royal" generosity. Additionally, the women never have a disagreement and they share the same radical and negative opinions on male authority figures.¹⁹⁵ Unlike their relationships with men that stem from familial ties and forced marriages, these women *choose* to be together and *choose not* to let men violate the sanctity of their private gatherings in which they worship Flavie's economic prowess. The three lesser coquettes do not receive or extort any money from their male relatives and thus rely on Flavie to give them a voice of which they would otherwise be financially deprived. However,

¹⁹⁵ Aimée, on the other hand, does not figure into this pact of female solidarity. She displays some coquettish traits and yet is not semantically grouped with the labeled coquettes, nor is she taken under their wing. For instance, Flavie's cohorts reject Aimée's meat dish and subsequently laugh at her indignation over the waste of food. This stems from her inferior status as a domestic because she is one of the few people the coquettes can control. Much like any man in possession of power in the play, the frustrated coquettes perhaps let their superiority go to their head and lash out on a weaker party, however innocent it may be. Flavie nevertheless admires her "esprit," and we learn that it was in fact Aimée's idea to defraud Docile using a religious pretext (1.3, p. 13). This revelation of Aimée's agency has a double effect: it simultaneously robs Flavie of some of her own coquettish ingenuity and exonerates her of being so corrupt! Much like the valet Crispin pulling the strings behind his master Flavio, we discover that Aimée may be the force that incites her mistress to do unsavory things. Ironically, Aimée foresees her own demise in one of the lies she tells in Flavie's interest. She claims to Docile that Flavie must go out late "pour passer la nuit près d'une agonisante" (1.2, p. 11) when Flavie is in reality headed to a ball. Crispin will later pick up this last term as Aimée faces punishment in the form of execution: "Voilà du changement, ma pauvre agonisante, / Si j'en suis cru, ta mort ne sera pas si lente" (5.9, p. 101). It is not entirely clear if Crispin is joking or not, but one would assume he is merely teasing Aimée, exaggerating a metaphor for a punishment. However, Crispin's comments are on the heels of Docile announcing the hanging of the thieving *pipeurs*, so it is difficult to say if Aimée will mount the gallows or not. Though she may not be accepted by the other coquettes because she is a domestic, she joins them in being sanctioned at the end nonetheless.

what is ironic is that Flavie tends to eschew her power of choice by frittering it away on games of chance. As a married woman, Flavie cannot benefit from the emerging range of options that Braunschneider posits for her coquettes (e.g. what to buy, what to read, whether to marry, whom to marry) because Flavie's choice of remaining single or married has already been made for her by the same men who currently control her access to money. She may choose to spend time with other women rather than her husband, but the male sex appears to gain the upper hand again once she loses all her money to the *pipeurs*. Of course, their games are rigged and there is no true element of chance, and so Flavie finds defeat no matter if she believes in fortune or feminine choice. Her unwitting attraction to the empty promise of the aleatory may be Poisson's commentary on the bad odds offered to women in a society that clearly favors the interests of men. The coquettes deem men, whether they are fathers, uncles, or husbands, as "tyrants" (5.5, p. 92) for their usurpation of power within gender relations. In other words, the natural, biological equilibrium that grants approximately 50/50 odds to infants in the creation of a sex quickly disappears once the children are socialized and thus gendered, leaving the majority of rights and choices to men who in turn guard this power from women in a vicious cycle.

Amongst women, however, Flavie stands out as the most commanding character. She acts as the ringleader of the coquettes and is the only one who actively collects money and gambles it away. But, as mentioned earlier, the game itself has little interest to her: she delights more in the strange countenances and uncouth techniques of the card sharks than in winning, as is evidenced in her continued acceptance of losing, according to Aimée: "Madame voit cela qui se tient les côtés / Et rit de tout son coeur, de voir ces hébétés, / Elle se plaît si fort de voir leur innocence / Qu'elle a joué dix fois d'un jeu par complaisance" (2.7, p. 37). "Complaisance" is an interesting term for Poisson to employ here since it can indicate both "indulgence" and

“kindness,” blurring the line between an unflattering lack of self-control and a commendable sympathy for those who appear naïve, in this case. Although I would argue that Flavie primarily loses in order to keep the hilarious faux-simpletons from leaving her gaming table, it is hard to ignore her charitable pity: “Et je n’ai jamais vu de pareils Innocents, / Mon argent raquitté, j’aurais, je le proteste, / Honte de les gagner, c’est un vol manifeste” (2.7, p. 36). Nevertheless, as Gerda Reith demonstrates in her analysis of Western gambling culture, gamblers are often indifferent to the possibility of winning and losing because their chief aim is “simply to experience the excitement of the game” and reach the impossible state of an “indefinite continuation of play” (145). This consequently leads to the devaluation of money because in order to play without reserve, players must be less concerned with money for its own sake than with the affective tension it generates by letting money represent their “opinions, judgment, their very identity” (146). Flavie playing before the *pipeurs* thus demonstrates her “attempt to sustain the fleeting sensation of the thrill” (155) of risk-taking and to preserve her emerging role as a noble-like figure who deserves attention and respect.¹⁹⁶

Whether we read her actions as a form of insecurity or soft-heartedness, Flavie earns the spectator’s sympathy and dispels the entirely dark portrait that her enemies have painted of her, particularly in consideration of her own apparent naiveté in blindly trusting the crooked *pipeurs*.

¹⁹⁶ Pascal treats a similar concept in his discussion of “Divertissement” in his *Pensées*. He asserts that man’s flaw stems from his preference of external stimuli to internal reflection in that the former prevents man from contemplating the important questions about his own mysterious existence. Men believe they want simplicity in their lives when in fact they cherish new obstacles to keep them mentally occupied. In preferring the “hunt” to the “capture,” men are essentially feeding their own insatiable desires without realizing it.

Pascal even makes specific reference to gambling and how the prize of money itself is both unnecessary in relation to the game itself and yet necessary as a subconscious lure, a trap to which Flavie herself falls prey:

“Tel homme passe sa vie sans ennui en jouant tous les jours peu de chose. Donnez-lui tous les matins l’argent qu’il peut gagner chaque jour, à la charge qu’il ne joue point, vous le rendez malheureux. On dira peut-être que c’est qu’il recherche l’amusement du jeu et non pas le gain. Faites-le donc jouer pour rien, il ne s’y échauffera pas et s’y ennuiera. Ce n’est donc pas l’amusement seul qu’il recherche, un amusement languissant et sans passion l’ennui, il faut qu’il s’y échauffe et qu’il se pipe lui-même en s’imaginant qu’il serait heureux de gagner ce qu’il ne voudrait pas qu’on lui donnât à condition de ne point jouer...” (909)

Despite multiple warnings from other characters, Flavie refuses to believe that her so-called friends are “gueux,” “fourbes,” and “pipeurs” because they bring her joy and give her money on credit (though in reality, this is only to render her even more indebted to them). As a woman of crafty coquettishness herself, it is surprising that Flavie falls victim to their acting and to such a strong degree, as we see when she throws an embarrassingly grandiose tantrum after her perspicacity is questioned: “Je suis dupe, et j’abandonne à mes sens? / Je n’eus jamais le don de me connaître en gens?” (4.7, p. 69)

This lapse of judgment is primarily unexpected because Flavie is an experienced actress and trickster herself and should (in theory¹⁹⁷) be able to read the markers of performance in others. Indeed, the first two scenes of the play showcase her talents in “faisant la Bigotte” (1.2, p. 7) while she fleeces her gullible uncle Docile. The irony is palpable when she tells him that she just arranged “un heureux mariage” (1.2, p. 9) for a girl in need, given that Flavie staunchly believes happy marriages do not exist. In order to cover her tracks as a materialistic coquette, she is able to quickly dress herself down and portray Flavio as a hotheaded husband who makes up lies about her spendthrift ways. Docile believes the entire act and, as if he were reading from a script, Flavio repeats the very same complaints against Flavie and loses credibility with the rich uncle.

Admittedly, this is not the most flattering first impression a spectator could have of Flavie, the woman who felt sympathy for accomplished gamblers and yet steals money intended for the poor. But when we begin to examine Flavie’s relationship with her uncle more closely,

¹⁹⁷ Tricksters (and particularly coquettes, who are considerably more discerning than the average comical monomaniac) seem to have an unspoken knack for seeing through the ruses of others if we examine comedy of the era as a whole.

her underhandedness is attenuated by the realities of her harsh past. We learn some backstory from the disguised Crispin while he pretends to have known Flavie as a twelve-year old girl:

Flavie
On connaît peu l'amour dans un âge semblable.

Crispin
Vous n'alliez pas alors vous chauffer à son feu ?

Aimée
Nous commençons pourtant à nous sentir un peu,
Et prenions grand plaisir à lire dans l'*Astrée*.

Crispin
Pour ce sujet aussi, Madame fût cloîtrée,
Votre oncle vous voyant y lire si souvent,
Le scrupuleux Bigot vous mit dans un couvent.

Aimée
Oui, Monsieur le Vicomte a fort bonne mémoire. (4.12, p. 77)

Here we learn that Docile put Flavie in a convent for reading too much. It is no wonder that Flavie quickly hides the *Decameron* when Docile enters during the play's first act; in truth, it is Aimée who is reading the scandalous text since Flavie claims to have already read it and even memorized it (1.1, p. 3).¹⁹⁸ Perhaps the harshness of her childhood punishment had taught her to keep books out of sight and in the security of her mind; Flavie even shows signs of trauma when she tells Aimée after Docile leaves: "Vraiment j'en ai tremblé" (1.3, p. 13). With this knowledge in mind, Flavie's lie to Docile about founding a convent in order to draw out his money begins to

¹⁹⁸ By referencing both *L'Astrée* and the *Decameron*, Poisson is guiding his audience into seeing the transformation Flavie has undergone since her uncle cloistered her. She originally takes pleasure in reading Honoré d'Urfé's novel that focuses on pastoral settings and an unending, perfect love between the main characters. Regardless of its innocent if not morally upright nature, Docile still determines literature of any kind to be unfit for his niece and denies her access to it. At some undetermined point Flavie changes her literary tastes and secretly reaches for Boccaccio's text that depicts urban settings (that might resemble Flavie's beloved Paris) and mercantile ethics along with stories of infidelity and earthy, authentic love. It is as if she has become disillusioned with fairytales and happy endings and has consequently plunged herself into everything that is material and modern in an effort to rebel against the men who shattered her girlish dreams. The vanishing promise of unique love that Flavio once offered is thus supplanted by more commercial values such as sophistication and societal exchange that drive Flavie in her daily life.

take an ironic turn in her favor for the observant reader. Furthermore, we see early on that Docile is a religious hypocrite himself: He cares little for the supposed poor that Flavie is helping and is only interested in buying his salvation: “En ces occasions n’épargnez point mon bien, / Ce serait négliger ton salut et le mien” (1.2, p. 9). Flavie has thus lived much of her youth under the overbearing gaze of her uncle whose own questionable morality leads us as readers to despise him and hope for his downfall at the hands of his longtime victim.

The play similarly shows Flavie to be subject to Flavio’s authority. Though he deems his wife “impérieuse” (1.2, p. 11) and she claims to her friends that she can “partout le mener par le nez” (5.5, p. 92), Flavie must still feel at a disadvantage in their relationship because she places him on the same plane as her odious uncle: worthy of drowning (5.5, p. 97). As her fellow coquettes explain:

Sainte-Hermine

De tous les animaux les plus fâcheux, je pense,
Et les trois qui le plus font perdre patience,
Qui sur les plus fâcheux, dis-je, emporte le prix,
Ce sont les oncles, les pères, et les maris,
Mais les maris surtout, car le plus agréable,
Devient bien l’animal le plus insupportable.

Aminte

Ce sont tous nos tyrans. (5.5, pp. 91-92)

For them, all male authority figures merit the death penalty because they keep the women under them on a tight leash. Aminte refers to them as “Nos Argus” (5.5, p. 96) in reference to the panoptic hundred-eyed giant of Greek mythology, while Sainte-Hermine feels that only in all-female isolation may they finally “breathe” and say what is on their minds (5.5, p. 90). In other words, women are always performing before men and can only be themselves in total privacy. It is in this oppressive atmosphere where female bonding is the only respite that the reader/spectator begins to understand the plight of these women who have no control over their

own destinies. Perhaps were they to have access to the purse strings, they would not have to go to such coquettish extremes to draw it out of men. To them, money offers them the power of hope and freedom:

Aminte

Il n'est rien avec lui dont on ne vienne à bout.

Sainte-Hélène

On ne résiste à l'or, c'est un passe-partout. (5.8, pp. 98-99)

Although these may be deceptive dreams since surely no amount of money would ever satisfy these insatiable coquettes, it is evident that men clearly wield their monopoly of power over women because they do not trust feminine judgment.¹⁹⁹

Piquer La Dame de 'Piques': Punishing The Callous Coquette Queen in Spades

The men of the play also possess the power to punish their wives and nieces. It is with Docile's blessing that Flavio exiles Flavie to Italy in the final scene, whereas her coquettish friends are sent to a local convent in Paris (5.10, pp. 102-3). Why is Flavie's punishment different? Of course, the most obvious theory is that she is the most immoral of the coquettes and must be dealt with separately, but I do not find this to be a sufficient answer. For one, Sainte-Hermine, Sainte-Hélène, and Aminte are sent to a *convent* in Paris, which to a modern audience would appear to be a worse sanction than simply being sent to Italy. However, Flavie protests her punishment and even requests to be placed in a Parisian convent so as not to be separated from her beloved metropolis:

Flavie

Pour vous contenter, je veux bien à Paris,
Être entre quatre murs,

¹⁹⁹ In this sense, money is a false solution to their problems as it never really offers them freedom, or at least a freedom from their desires. In other words, it may provide consistent access to new forms of entertainment (e.g. theater shows) and markers of success (e.g. trendy grey horses) but it is doubtful that they will one day find personal contentment while being slaves to the whims of fashionable society.

Crispin
Mais c'est une folie,
Quatre murs à Paris, ou quatre en Italie,²⁰⁰
C'est toujours quatre murs,

Flavie
Oui, mais l'éloignement. (5.10, p. 104)

In truth, it is difficult to understand Flavie's reasoning since she would not be able to profit from all that Paris has to offer her from within the convent. Perhaps she is merely counting on the company of her friends on the inside, but her logic undoubtedly goes deeper than that: Paris represents the coquette's playground, the source of her power, even if it is to be just out of reach. Nowhere else would a coquettish woman be able to show off the latest fashions, attend the theater and balls, and rub elbows with high-stakes gamblers. Flavio himself describes the capital as the seat of games and love but likewise complains that it is precisely the "strange" women who occupy it who ruin its charm (3.2, p. 51). He regrets having taken a wife in Paris and holds only himself to blame because his first ten years in the capital as a single man were pleasant. Thus, we learn that the characters hold a special spatial connection to Paris that draws them in despite its drawbacks and limitations.

Italy, in contrast, is seen as uncultured and a terrible place to live. As Crispin describes it, "Qu'on m'écartèle, / Si je retourne, allez, je l'ai échappée belle! / Ils sont italiens, si j'avais su cela, / Un beau garçon, Monsieur, ne doit point aller là, / Et vous ne deviez pas m'exposer de la

²⁰⁰ Though the "four walls" in Flavie's line are evidently meant to be a metaphor for a convent, I do not believe the same to be true in Crispin's references to "four walls" because no mention of a convent is made in Flavio's punishment. Here, Crispin is merely drawing a comparison between being inside any structure that acts as a prison, and for Flavie even a mansion in Italy would suffice as such.

sorte” (1.7, p. 22). It is perhaps with this foreigner’s mentality in mind that Flavio decides Italy makes the perfect location for curing Flavie of her folly.²⁰¹

Indeed, Poisson’s reference to Italy suggests a more deliberate attempt on his part to connect the French Flavie with her name’s Italian roots,²⁰² in particular because this was far from a staple name of contemporary French comedy.²⁰³ Not only is Flavie a name with a Latin root,²⁰⁴ but it is also the name of a famous Roman Catholic saint, Flavia Domitilla, with whom Flavie shares several parallels. For one, Flavia Domitilla married her cousin, Titus Flavius Clemens, a name whose similarity to Flavio is difficult to ignore.²⁰⁵ A second family connection can be found with Flavia Domitilla’s uncle, the emperor Domitian, who exiled his niece to a small Italian island where she lived until her death.²⁰⁶ Though the comparison is far from exact, I find Docile’s consent to send Flavie to a metaphorical “island” (that she considers to be a cultural wasteland) of some relevance. One has only to think of his treatment of her as a saint (1.1, p. 6),

²⁰¹ The idea for a cure for coquetry exists in a few of the plays that I discuss, including Michel Baron’s *Le Rendez-vous des Tuileries ou le Coquet trompé* (1685) and Dancourt’s *L’Été des coquettes* (1690). However, Flavie’s is not only the first case chronologically but also the only one that is not self-realized.

²⁰² It could even be suggested that Flavie’s coquettish character is more strongly linked with the original coquettes of the *commedia dell’arte* tradition due to this comparison across borders.

²⁰³ A search on the “Théâtre classique” database reveals only five characters named Flavie, all of whom were minor confidantes in seventeenth-century tragedies based on Roman or Medieval history. To be fair, *Les Pipeurs* did not appear in this search’s results, so the list is evidently not exhaustive. Nonetheless, it covers 650 of the most well-known theatrical works of the century, giving a fair assurance that during this period there could be few other comic Flavies at best. For the list, see: www.theatreclassique.fr/pages/programmes/personnagesNom.php?a=FLAVIE.

²⁰⁴ “Flavus” means “golden, blond.” Perhaps this is a humorous nod on Poisson’s part in recognition of her penchant for Louis d’or, or perhaps the name’s connection to the illustrious Roman family, the Flavius, is enough to associate her with refined taste and wealth.

²⁰⁵ Some sources state, however, that Flavius Clemens was her uncle, which also makes sense within the context of our story since Flavio is the one to have the final word in Flavie’s exile.

²⁰⁶ The reason for her banishment varies according to the sources: the fourth-century bishop Eusebius claims it was her conversion to Christianity (Pamphili *Historia Ecclesiae*, III, 18; Chron. ad an. Abrahami, 2110) whereas the Roman historian Cassius Dio wrote that it was due to her atheism (Dio VIII, 349). The latter would be in keeping with Flavie’s quasi-pagan worship of money in the final act of the play.

as well as Aimée's lie in which she tells him that her copy of the *Decameron* is really "la Cour sainte" (1.2, p. 9). As such, Flavie's parallel banishment to Italy takes on a religious and redemptive meaning that only adds to Poisson's forgiveness of coquetry.

But this spiritual transformation is not the final event of the play: the dramaturge goes on to include a formal apology in the last lines of the text, using Crispin as a mouthpiece:

Bon, point de quartier, voilà comme il faut être,
À cet emportement, je reconnais mon maître,
Oui, c'est être homme, là, que de n'écouter rien,
Il se venge un peu tard, mais il se venge bien,
Toutefois, je demande à tous tant que vous êtes,
Grâce, pour les Pipeurs, et les femmes coquettes. (5.10, p. 105)

On the surface, Flavio emerges as the hero-winner of the play who exacts his revenge in the way he wanted, but is he really the winner? Flavio's dream is either to earn back the affection of his wife, or to reinstate his manly reputation after years of being too lenient with her.²⁰⁷ In the play's conclusion, not only does he lose his wife whom he claims to have loved unconditionally (1.5, p. 16), but he also reverts back to his unstylish and bad-tempered Italian self. But is Crispin's apology to be taken seriously in any case? For one, he is a very unserious character type, but more importantly he asks for the pardon of the *pipeurs* when they have already been executed at Flavio's behest! Though his final plea for the "femmes coquettes" appears no less futile or meaningless, the muted compassion for the oppressed women that Poisson peppers throughout his play invites his readers to ultimately see the coquette's punishment/victimization in another light. In other words, Poisson's coquettes may not be capable of reform in consideration of the harsh correction he felt compelled to inflict upon them, but their missed opportunity for a life of integrity and satisfaction can be traced back to the abusive men who had the most influence on their lives and whose ultimate triumph dictated an uncomfortably posited subjugation of women.

²⁰⁷ "Tout ce que j'ai souffert sera lors estimé, / Et l'on approuvera ce qu'on avait blâmé?" (2.6, p. 36)

I find that this concluding ambiguity fits perfectly with the overall mood of the work because in a slight of hand the play appears to be lambasting one target (coquettes) while secretly sympathizing with it and lambasting another (power-hungry men). Poisson first and foremost illustrates Flavie's manipulative prowess in order to demonstrate her coquettish behavior as deliberate and amusingly underhanded. What comes to light in the details that the playwright offers is that with her trickery she is merely working through the difficulty of her social powerlessness in her position as a wife and niece who has no real authority over her life choices. With such a small degree of agency to call her own, Flavie thus feels obligated to pursue her deferred desires through prevarication (with her uncle) and waspishness (with her husband) that render her at first glance an unappealing character. Flavie's gambling habit likewise presents itself as an extravagant and destructive endeavor on the surface, but belies a deeper analysis of her uncontrollable, all-consuming desires for money, risk, and novelty. In continually jeopardizing her family's financial security at the gaming table, Flavie is betting against her steadfast yet unhappy domestic life (literally "the house") in favor of the unpredictability of chance, a capricious force that any frivolous coquette would understandably appreciate. In truth, she, like many of the other gamblers in Paris, is precisely able to recognize the value of chance because she cares more about the fleeting sensation of risk than about a successful outcome. With little of worth to lose at home, Flavie takes her chances at the gaming table where she is at least surrounded by peers who give her a sense of belonging and who comprehend her longings for public admiration and spending power.

Making Change from Within: The Reorientation of Coquettish Desire in Baron's *La Coquette et la fausse prude* (1686)

A coquette's prerogative to choose is most closely examined in *La Coquette et la fausse prude*. It depicts a widowed coquette (Cidalise) who not only has options for her future, but is

also unsure of what she wants: either to remain single with the potential to dictate her own choices in life, or to remarry and avoid the possible dangers that arise from a coquettish reputation.²⁰⁸ In the background of this dilemma is the role money plays in motivating her actions as she navigates a patriarchal realm that favors both men and the independently wealthy, from both of which she is excluded. Without traditional forms of currency at her disposal, the coquette bluffs her way through obstacles while simultaneously refusing to be the circulated object of exchange herself, a role that marriage would inevitably confer upon her. However, she ultimately turns to marriage as a solution, all the while satisfying her quest for freedom by reevaluating her desires and learning what she truly wants.

Among all the coquette plays that I analyze, Baron's is significant if not quite unique in its highly interiorized reorientation of feminine desire. Other coquettes undergo change brought about by external stimuli (e.g. news of an unfaithful lover, abandonment by a lover, a miseducation) but Cidalise's sudden about-face in favor of marriage represents a significant transformation of character.

In fact, Cidalise's reevaluation is largely a result of her economic status as a woman whose financial holdings are untouchable unless she remarries. Because a second marriage does not appeal to her, she makes an effort to win back her money on her own terms by circulating unfounded promises of marriage that hold no value because she never intends to follow through with payment. Without the presence of a mutual set of beliefs as to the promises' worth, Cidalise's "currency" holds no intrinsic value and thus her coquetry takes on an essentially

²⁰⁸ With her ability to choose, Cidalise differs from the other two coquettes of this chapter. Flavie's everyday choices are limited given that she already has a spouse, and one who makes decisions for her. Her desires are also more streamlined in that she desires no extramarital affairs and eliminates the possibility of love in her life. For Mme Thibaut in the following play, she reveals her strategic desire to marry during the first scene and it never wavers.

counterfeit dimension.²⁰⁹ In contrast, marriage embodies a more stable form of capital, in that its worth is both legal and provable: it will deliver Cidalise's fortune to her along with an added sense of security, both financial and emotional. The coquette thus opts to make this investment by way of a "conversion" from active currency to rooted capital in order to better her position and evade retaliation from her past suitors/bill collectors.

Michel Baron was a talented actor and playwright who entered into a theatrical career at a young age thanks to the guidance of Molière. Much as his first play, *Le Rendez-vous des Tuileries ou le Coquet trompé* (1685), was reminiscent of Molière's *Misanthrope* (1666) in consideration of the coquettish leading female and the contradictory nature of love, Baron continued to stage a more obvious yet complex mirroring effect with his mentor's oeuvre in the composition of *La Coquette et la fausse prude* (1686).²¹⁰ The title itself reveals its connection to Molière's work: the notorious battle of wits between Célimène and Arsinoé in the third act. However, Baron makes his own play all the more interesting for my discussion by not only focusing more extensively on this feminine conflict but also by retelling its outcome in which the coquette now triumphs. What had changed since Molière wrote his play twenty years prior that now favored the coquette against her prudish adversary?

This is of course a difficult question to answer, and all the more so because playwrights did not habitually place new manifestations of the coquette on the stage prior to 1685.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Of course, true paper currency was not widely introduced into France until John Law's banking system during the Regency, twenty years after the appearance of Baron's play, so my monetary analogy carries no deeper historical connection to the larger context of the fin-de-siècle era.

²¹⁰ One could likewise draw parallels to other plays of the same epoch, in particular either version of *La Mère coquette* (1665). In ways, they are more similar to *La Coquette et la fausse prude* than *Le Misanthrope* because, like Céphise and her niece, the coquettish mothers wield a familial authority over their daughters that Arsinoé does not possess over Célimène.

²¹¹ There are several cluster periods for the debuts of original plays featuring coquettes: 1665-1666 (four plays), 1671 (two plays), and 1686-1692 (eight plays).

Nevertheless, coquettish figures were still in the public's eye in consideration of their somewhat consistent appearance in performances of earlier plays.²¹² Of most interest is the lasting popularity of *Le Misanthrope* which was staged 70 times between 1666-1674 and 38 times between 1680-1685.²¹³ The resurgence of *Le Misanthrope* in August of 1680 after five years of absence is perhaps noteworthy in that it may suggest a renewed interest in the coquette, especially if we note that *Les Pipeurs* (at this point known solely as *Les Femmes coquettes*, Fournel 406-7) also reappeared in October of 1680 after a nine-year hiatus.²¹⁴ *Le Misanthrope* continued to have a healthy popularity until November of 1685, overlapping with the debut of Baron's *Rendez-vous* in March of the same year and creating a continuity of coquettish characters during the first half of the 1680s.²¹⁵

Nearly one year later, Baron debuted *La Coquette et la fausse prude* in December of 1686 at the Comédie-Française. Baron's ideological break from previous dramatic trends could possibly stem from a desire to distinguish himself in the dramatic milieu by recreating the character type in a wholly different manner. As is evidenced in all of the plays that I have analyzed (except Baron's *Rendez-vous*), even if the coquette is depicted as a likeable character

²¹² Using *le CESAR* as a database, we can see the documented performances of the earlier coquette plays that I discuss in my dissertation. Given that *Le Favori* and the two *Mères coquettes* all had limited runs that ended before 1668, and *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* ran for only twenty-seven performances between 1671-1674, I will exclude them from this discussion.

²¹³ Despite the reduction of overall stagings after 1674, these two periods possess nearly the same density of performances, roughly 7.5 stagings per year.

²¹⁴ Of course, one must not ignore the fact that la Comédie-Française also formed in October of 1680 by ordinance of the king, but I fail to find a connection between suddenly staging past coquette plays and the unification of the major Parisian troupes. It is true that Molière, along with the other great dramatists of the time (primarily Racine, Corneille, Scarron, and Rotrou), was unquestionably favored as an author to stage at this theatrical juncture, but what of Poisson's unforeseen reappearance, in particular a play that is known to only have been staged once before at its debut? I can only see the play's subject matter as being the reason it would be suddenly performed, especially in light of its title change that might reflect the public's increased interest in the phenomenon of coquetry.

²¹⁵ *Les Femmes coquettes* would make its final performance in November of 1683.

who deserves our sympathy in spite of her bad behavior, she is systematically punished for her coquetry in one way or another. Baron does away with this commonplace in particular by reversing the denouement of Molière's previously omnipresent play to which *La Coquette et la fausse prude* clearly alludes: Cidalise outwits her scheming aunt and marries the man of her choice.

Cidalise does indeed possess many of the qualities of her predecessor Célimène and yet she is more appealing overall.²¹⁶ As she is the protagonist of her play, Baron is able to furnish her with a greater depth that aids in justifying her coquetry in the same way that Poisson does with Flavie and Dancourt with Mme Thibaut. Although she is labeled as a coquette in the play's title and even given supremacy over all other coquettes by her servant Marton ("Vous raffinez sur les plus habiles coquettes," 4.5, p. 127), she is better classified as a "temporary" coquette²¹⁷ because her unequivocally coquettish behavior is repeatedly shown to be only a means to an end.²¹⁸ Specifically, Cidalise leads on two men who are able to help her while her trial's verdict

²¹⁶ E.J.H. Greene perhaps disagrees with my interpretation as he characterizes Célimène's coquetry to be practiced "mainly for the fun of it" whereas Cidalise is "quite brutally mercenary" (79). At first glance, the former characterization appears to be more innocuous than the latter, but is it not in fact less cruel to be coquettish for a purpose (in this case, financial gain) than for one's own amusement? Even though Cidalise's cause is less than noble, I believe her motivations are better justified than Célimène's and that, moreover, her enemies are made to look more deserving of manipulation and ridicule because they undeniably make the first "attack" against her, a chronology that is not made clear within the community of Célimène's salon.

²¹⁷ What I call a "temporary" coquette is different from a coquette who is "cured" of her ability to love as we see in Baron's *Rendez-vous* (1685) and Dancourt's *L'Été des coquettes* (1690). The primary difference in the latter two plays is that specific events make them unexpectedly decide to change whereas Cidalise knows when her coquetry needs to begin and end, coming to the decision at an undetermined time.

I would also distinguish a "temporary" coquette from a "reformed" coquette as discussed by Braunschneider with regard to eighteenth-century British novels (see Chapter 4 of her book). In truth, Cidalise has no reason to "reform" because most of her disreputable behavior is shown to be either invented by Céphise or so commonplace for her generation that it does not warrant the label of coquettish. The only veritable instances of her coquetting arise from her toying with Durcet, Basset, and Éraste, all of whom deserve this treatment for their erroneously self-proclaimed bestowal of Cidalise's hand.

²¹⁸ Even scholars such as Barbara Sommavigo have a tendency to dismiss Cidalise as a frivolous coquette who only leads on men "par caprice et/ou par vanité" (136). However, it is clear in the way that Baron belabors the point of Cidalise's powerlessness as well as her aggressors' injustice that she has nobler motives in mind and a right to free herself.

has yet to be decided.²¹⁹ The first is M Durcet, a magistrate who is known for his ability to win any case, and the second is M Basset, a financier who loans Cidalise money while all of her belongings remain seized due to the lawsuit (1.4, p. 18). In truth, Cidalise is rather honest with them, openly telling Durcet she is not in love with him (1.5, p. 22) and hinting to Basset that she strictly prefers non-serious love and that he has a way of twisting her words (2.3, pp. 48-49), but her refusals are delivered in such an artful way that it does not make them lose the hope of marrying her one day. In other words, she is able to pass the blame of miscommunication off on the men because it is due to their own stubbornness and lack of awareness that they misread her. Although Durcet and Basset pretend they are helping Cidalise out of the goodness of their hearts, in reality each feels that she is obliged to marry him out of gratitude for his services, and use this as leverage. An audience of any era would likely see the unfairness of their treatment of Cidalise, a woman who is singled out for her attractiveness and subsequently expected to give herself away for a service that these men would have rendered to another man for a lesser price.

In this way, the play exonerates Cidalise for her coquettish entertainment of both men by exposing their predatory techniques and overblown expectations. In the end, everyone is shown to be freed of obligations to one another. As Cidalise puts it: “Vous m’avez fait plaisir, et je l’ai reconnu en vous pardonnant l’audace que vous avez eue de vouloir m’épouser” (4.13, p. 142). As this citation illustrates, because she lives in an exchange economy but with no accessible money in her possession, Cidalise must resort to using coquettish language and behavior to obfuscate and dissimulate the terms of exchange. She has in a sense introduced a new currency

²¹⁹ Again, a parallel is drawn between Cidalise and Célimène with the mention of a trial that requires both women to stay on good terms with everyone in their salon even if they do not want to.

that holds no intrinsic value other than its ability to keep money collectors at bay until tangible funds are available.²²⁰

But renegotiating established economic norms is only one facet of Cidalise's supposed coquetry, and the one that prompts me to classify her as a "material girl." Like the other coquettes of this chapter, acquiring money is her prime objective for the sake of attaining freedom, but not to the point of being covetous, as noted when she refuses to entertain the idea of marrying a bourgeois like Basset despite his wealth (1.4, p. 18). She also plans on paying back the money that Basset had loaned her so as to finally free herself and rely on nothing but the fortune she herself possesses.²²¹ In contrast, Marton repeatedly shows her greedy nature: she urges her mistress to marry for money even at the price of happiness, regularly swindles Cidalise and Éraсте out of their possessions, and prefers a heavy beating to losing the stolen goods ("Cent mille coups de baton, plutôt que de rendre la moindre bagatelle," 3.1, p. 78). Unlike many crafty

²²⁰ The other material coquettes use similar strategies. In Flavie's case, she fabricates an entirely fake charity in order to convince Docile into funding her extravagant expenditures. Flavie even decides she is making Docile happier by defrauding him because he in turn believes he is helping the poor (and more importantly, guaranteeing his salvation). Though she never puts her sexual virtue on the line in the way that Cidalise does by flirting with several men at once, Flavie is indeed risking her moral reputation as a Tartuffe-like figure. Interestingly enough, Flavie does not play the same game in front of her husband because she believes he cannot jeopardize her financial claim even with the full knowledge of her libertine lifestyle. She openly demands that he give her money while offering him nothing in exchange, least of all her wifely body. Though this remunerative method is more "honest" than her coquettish playacting with respect to its faithfulness to Flavie's true character, the lack of mutual benefit for both parties renders it more akin to a theft. Furthermore, it likely mars the audience's esteem for her more than her religious hypocrisy because it makes her seem less ingenious as well as more menacing and militant.

Dancourt's protagonist Mme Thibaut (in the next play to be discussed) typically resorts to underhanded techniques for earning a living, all the while holding a legitimate boutique and a great renown. Because love and sex do not visibly factor into her personal life, her virtue is never at risk in the way that her business reputation is as she tries to dodge judicial sanction more than moral censure. As a businesswoman who handles cash on a daily basis, she firmly believes in the benefits of exchange between her clients/victims and herself so that each party leaves thinking they emerged with the better deal. Though Mme Thibaut decidedly benefits more often in reality due to her business savvy, she cannot control all of the variables within her unpredictable economy and must let fortune run its course. In this sense, once luck enters into the equation it is difficult to guarantee a fair exchange between parties whether they are honest or not.

²²¹ Though as E.J.H. Greene aptly points out, we never do see the loan repaid before the end of the play (79). I would still argue that because Cidalise twice shows an interest in repaying the loan, and given her strong desire to be free of any obligations to others, that she has every intention of doing so.

maids found on stage during this era, Marton fails to play any serious role in the plot and thus mostly functions as a foil to Cidalise whose desire to win back her *own* money becomes more legitimate when compared to her thieving and avaricious servant. By relativizing her vice with the juxtaposition of Marton, Baron demonstrates in a paradox that Cidalise can coquettishly desire money and yet not be an inherently greedy character.

Otherwise, Baron either justifies or downplays most of Cidalise's coquettish behaviors to such an extent that one would even question whether she is a coquette or just another Parisian woman. For instance, Cidalise is reprimanded for arriving back home at eight in the morning under the assumption that she was busy committing coquettish crimes, when in reality her carriage had broken down in the mud (2.1, pp. 44-45). Baron likely includes this example to show his audience how a typical problem (that they may very well have faced) can be interpreted negatively without any shred of evidence. Furthermore, through a conversation between Cidalise and Marton, we learn that her uncle Damis accuses her of many seemingly coquettish behaviors that she is able to explain in terms that make them appear more benign:

Marton

Vous ne vous levâtes pas hier assez matin, et vous le fîtes attendre à dîner. Il querella deux heures, je ne vois pas pour moi.

Cidalise

Dîne-t-on devant trois heures à Paris ?

Marton

C'est ce que je lui dis. Il se plaint aussi que vous voyez trop de monde, et que...

Cidalise

Veut-il que je ferme la porte à tous mes amis ?

Marton

Quelle apparence ? Vous allez, dit-il, souvent aux Comédies, à l'Opéra, au Bal, et vous jouez gros jeu.

Cidalise

Le Carnaval, peut-on faire autre chose ?

Marton

J'en demeure d'accord. L'Été, vous aimez à vous promener, et vous ne revenez pas de bonne heure d'ordinaire.

Cidalise

N'est-ce pas une chose bien étrange de se promener l'été ?

Marton

Rien n'est plus naturel sans doute. Vous avez des amants, et le nombre peut-être pourrait...

Cidalise

Est-ce un crime d'avoir des amants ?

Marton

Bon un crime. Voilà un plaisant crime de ma foi. C'est un crime bien plutôt de n'en avoir pas aujourd'hui. (1.4, pp. 11-12)

Admittedly, it is clear that Cidalise is suffering from a bit of bad faith, but she is nonetheless able to posit her actions as mere customs that any reasonable person could understand. In this way, she is both banalizing her own behavior and causing the audience members who identify with her to question themselves as being unconsciously coquettish. We are left feeling unsure whether coquetry only exists in the minds of those who fail to see that it is a perpetuated myth of bad morals, or whether it is indeed real but so widespread it has become a veritable pandemic throughout Paris (and perhaps the world).²²²

²²² Éraсте and his valet Pasquin accuse all women of being unfaithful and propose to find a land where true fidelity exists:

Pasquin

...nous allons chercher, mon maître et moi, un pays où l'on ne trompe point.

Marton

Et où le trouveras-tu ce pays ?

Pasquin

Partout où il n'y aura point de femmes.

Marton

Mais tu trouveras des femmes partout.

Éraste undoubtedly belongs to those who perceive coquetry in situations where it does not necessarily exist because for him it provides an easy solution to his ever-present fear of infidelity. He cannot seem to let go of his prejudice against Cidalise in spite of his love for her, recalling the misanthropic Alceste. For instance, according to Éraste's valet Pasquin, the couple breaks up after Éraste sees her "flirting" firsthand: "Il passa un jeune homme que Cidalise trouva fort bien fait; aussitôt Éraste regarde une jeune personne qu'il trouva fort aimable. Cidalise redoubla les louanges pour le Cavalier, Éraste exagéra les siennes pour la jeune personne" (1.8, pp. 27-28). Although Cidalise is the subject of these actions, they do not appear to be an overtly disloyal gesture warranting reproach, especially since Éraste is willing to repeat the same behavior and feel innocent himself. Over the length of the play, we come to learn that Éraste is something of an exaggerator who may go so far as to speak in a tragic register ("Que tous les foudres du Ciel me tombent sur la tête!" 2.10, p. 70) and who assumes that Cidalise's contempt for him means she is necessarily courting several men at once.²²³ Marton even labels him a

Pasquin

Elles ne seront peut-être pas comme ici.

Marton

Elles seront partout de même. (2.6, p. 59)

As we can see in Marton's response, she implies that women are the same in Paris as they are in the rest of the world. Are we to interpret this as her saying all women are naturally coquettish, given that all Parisian women are supposedly coquettish? Or does she imply that no women are coquettes because coquetry exists only in the minds of men like Éraste who have an irrational fear of cuckoldry? Although Baron's stance is not explicitly clear, I would lean more toward the latter interpretation due to the singularity of Cidalise's case: because her label as a full-fledged coquette is mostly a misnomer, Baron shows that it is all a question of perspective. For example, Marton teaches us that Cidalise has been leading the same life for two years and never once did it bother her uncle. However, for the three months leading up to the play's beginning it appears Damis has suddenly developed a distaste for her conduct, which Cidalise can only explain by her aunt's jealousy and control over her husband. In this light, Cidalise's supposed coquetry is merely circumstantial, a product of one specific person's vendetta and not a generalized condemnation by society or the author.

²²³ This is indeed true in consideration of her entertainment of Durcet and Basset, but Éraste never learns of these schemes nor would we expect him to understand her reasoning behind them due to his irrational behavior. Thus, Éraste is correct in his suspicions but for the wrong reasons.

“mauvais plaisant sur certaines choses” (4.5, p. 126) in recognition of his lack of humor amid the amusing antics of the play.

For all his bluster, however, Éraste is ultimately a weak character, subject to Cidalise’s manipulations. Cidalise, in contrast, rarely takes anything in all seriousness and *underplays* her emotions. She laughs at Éraste’s highly dramatic farewell letter (2.6, p. 63) and regularly brushes off his cloying words of love, thus appearing insensitive to him but understandably aloof to her audience, which comprehends her characteristically coquettish desire for levity and detachment. She likewise teases him over his propensity for jealousy, to which he responds: “Je ferai un effort pour n’en plus avoir, mais vous, de votre côté, essayez autant que vous pourrez d’éviter les occasions qui pourraient m’en donner” (4.11, p. 137), implying that Cidalise deliberately provokes it at his expense. While this is not entirely true (in light of her ulterior motives for fleecing Durcet and Basset), she does indeed play with his heart occasionally in order to strengthen his love for her. Her young cousin Lucille witnesses this veritable art of coquetry in which less is sometimes more:

Lucille

Ma cousine, cet homme-là est donc votre amant ?... Vraiment je l’aime bien, d’être si affectionné pour son maître ; mais il me semble que vous ne prenez pas grand peine à l’apaiser.

Marton

Oh ! C’est une méthode qui passe les jeunes filles comme vous.

Lucille

Je ne veux point l’apprendre. Monsieur le Comte n’aimerait pas cela.

Marton

En enrageant il vous en aimerait davantage.

...

Cidalise

Mais, ma cousine, il faut un peu se contenir ; il est bon quelquefois de ne pas laisser voir tant d’empressement.

Lucille

Oh ! Ma cousine, je ne suis pas si savante que vous. (2.7-8, pp. 65-66)

Cidalise's strategy of understatement renders Éraсте "plus fou, plus enragé, et pourtant plus amoureux que jamais," (3.1, p. 76) as we learn from Pasquin in the next act.²²⁴ He is clearly under her control despite his efforts and, like Alceste, his attempts at fleeing Cidalise's presence never seem to last.

One might then pose the question: if Éraсте is mostly a plaything to Cidalise, why does she declare her love for him before everyone and agree to marry him in the end? She plainly explains earlier on that marriage with him would be a bad idea (3.2, p. 83) and that he tires her in his predictability (4.6, p. 130). Furthermore, she highly values the liberty that widowhood promises once she reaches majority, and cannot stand the thought of being under any man's power. Is Éraсте, like Alceste, to be understood as a very handsome man whose attractiveness ultimately outweighs his personality faults? We are not given any such indication by Baron.²²⁵ Much like Célimène's impenetrable intentions in courting so many men at once,²²⁶ Cidalise is unsure of her heart and does not want to commit to any one object of affection:

²²⁴ One could contrast Cidalise's underplaying with Céphise's overacting and clinginess that drives Éraсте away, much like his own over-attachment that is repugnant to Cidalise. Lucille likewise tries her hand at rebuffing le Comte in an effort to act like her wily cousin, but she does such a poor job that her lover is merely confused and Cidalise scolds her for being childish (2.9, p. 68). In this sense, finding the perfect balance between charm and cruelty is one of the coquette's best talents.

Nonetheless, Cidalise finds herself victim to the same game of entrapment in the play, albeit at the hand of men who tease her unwittingly. For example, though she claims to not be interested in Éraсте, she becomes upset when he fails to call for her, as if her strategy of aloofness had not worked. If Éraсте storms off the stage in another instance, she pretends not to care but then soon follows suit in order to see what has become of him. Le Comte piques her interest even more since he truly has no love for her out of preference for Lucille. Although Cidalise never attempts to seduce him out of respect for her beloved cousin, she nevertheless tells Marton that she is "piquée... de son indifférence" and wishes he loved her in return "Pour le punir de ne m'avoir pas aimée d'abord" (4.5, p. 127). Evidently this is not about her feeling love for him but rather indignity over him having appropriated her own coquettish strategy and succeeding in attracting her.

²²⁵ This stands in contrast to the young Comte who attracts Cidalise's eye several times during the play.

²²⁶ To recall, even Éliante, the person who likely knows Célimène better than any of the characters, believes her cousin to be confused with regard to her own desires and objectives:

Marton
Vous ne l'aimez donc plus, lui [Éraste] ?

Cidalise
Je ne sais.

Marton
Aimeriez-vous déjà ce petit Comte ?

Cidalise
Je ne sais, te dis-je. Laissons cela, songeons au plus pressé. (3.2, p. 84)

Cidalise's responses are evasive and indeterminate, suggesting that she genuinely cannot answer Marton's questions. It is not until the play's final act that Baron opens up a more profound part of Cidalise's heart that perhaps provides her coquettish root. In this scene, she is finally at her most vulnerable and transparent because she believes Céphise to have officially won the battle in convincing her uncle to banish her to her father's castle outside of Paris:

Je suis la plus à plaindre, Éraste. On trouve ici de quoi dissiper ses chagrins ; mille plaisirs, qu'on ne peut éviter, consolent de n'être pas auprès de ce qu'on aime, et bien souvent une conquête nouvelle ne vous en laisse pas le moindre souvenir : mais moi qui vais passer une année entière à la campagne, que la plus belle saison ne pourrait me rendre agréable, qui, pour objets les plus plaisants... Ah ! je vous prie, laissez-moi m'étourdir là-dessus ; les réflexions me tuent. (5.2, p. 155)

Once again, the theme of Paris as the pole of coquettish pleasures returns here in Baron's text, only this time it not only shows the power Cidalise derives from the capital but more importantly it excavates the deeper reason she is coquettish. Pleasure functions to erase the memory of a former love object, as do new amorous conquests in a cycle of unending flirtation.²²⁷

C'est un point qu'il n'est pas fort aisé de savoir.
Comment pouvoir juger s'il est vrai qu'elle l'aime ?
Son cœur de ce qu'il sent n'est pas bien sûr lui-même ;
Il aime quelquefois sans qu'il le sache bien,
Et croit aimer aussi parfois qu'il n'en est rien. (4.1, p. 64)

²²⁷ Cidalise's internal struggle to escape her sad thoughts echoes a larger early modern philosophical discourse about *divertissement* as distraction. In his essay "De la diversion," Montaigne discusses his own personal utilization of love as a helpful shield against his melancholy following the death of his good friend La Boétie:

Cidalise's sudden attachment to Éraсте and resignation of her power can be interpreted as an active choice. Moreover, this choice represents a change in Cidalise's strategy. The typical coquettish strategy—the one that Cidalise embraces for much of the play—entails rejecting the feelings of love that she elicits in others, constantly seeking out new objects of affection and leaving an ever-growing trail of suitors behind them. Coquettes thus indefinitely defer their decision to marry because there is danger in choosing the wrong man to have control over them. For much of the play, Cidalise embraces this approach and wards off the pull of marriage by entertaining the men she needs in a way that keeps their hopes up without accepting their offers: in other words, she is simultaneously provocative and unattainable. Nothing is consumed but flattering words (and perhaps a few hours of company enjoyed) and thus after she is forced to reveal her lack of interest, she escapes without having cost them anything but their time and their sense of pride. Furthermore, she does not manipulate male authority for the cheap thrill of it but

“Ayant besoin d'une véhémence diversion pour m'en distraire, je me fis par art amoureux, et par étude, à quoi l'âge m'aidait. L'amour me soulagea et me retira du mal qui m'était causé par l'amitié. Partout ailleurs de même: Une aigre imagination me tient; je trouve plus court que de le dompter, la changer. Je lui en substitue, si je ne puis une contraire, au moins une autre: Toujours la variation soulage, dissout et dissipe. Si je ne puis la combattre, je lui échappe, et en la fuyant, je fourvoie, je ruse: Muant de lieu, d'occupation, de compagnie, je me sauve dans la presse d'autres amusements et pensées, où elle perd ma trace, et m'égare. Nature procède ainsi, par le bénéfice de l'inconstance. Car le temps, qu'elle nous a donné pour souverain médecin de nos passions, gagne son effet principalement par là, que fournissant autres et autres affaires à notre imagination, il démêle et corrompt cette première appréhension, pour forte qu'elle soit” (*Essais* 90).

Montaigne finds that inconstancy, the characteristic tool of the coquette, gives him the continued diversion he needs to forget his woes and make progress in his life. Like Cidalise, he chooses to ignore his gnawing problem and focus on what is good rather than that which would have otherwise left him emotionally paralyzed and useless.

Pascal takes a contrary approach to *divertissement* nearly a century later in his *Pensées*, explaining that all men, including kings, seek constant entertainment because it provides them small parcels of happiness that trick them into believing they are always veritably content and have escaped their miserable condition as mortals: “Qu'on laisse un roi tout seul sans aucune satisfaction des sens, sans aucun soin dans l'esprit, sans compagnie, penser à lui tout à loisir, et l'on verra qu'un roi sans divertissement est un homme plein de misères” (910). For Pascal, men who avoid their God-given sadness by occupying their minds with ideas about work, education, friendship, and honor are only offering themselves a short-term remedy and truly making their sadness greater in the end. His solution is to do away with all these societal forms of dressage and look inward: “Il ne faudrait que leur ôter tous ces soins, car alors ils se verraient, ils penseraient à ce qu'ils sont, d'où ils viennent, où ils vont” (911). As seen earlier, Cidalise seems aware of the self-reflective pain that awaits her in the solitude of her father's country estate but does not find a similar strength as Pascal does, preferring the rehabilitative escapism that Montaigne supports.

rather to guarantee her independence, even if the suitors perhaps view her as egocentric and a failure within patriarchal society due to the allotted function of wife-mother that she shuns.

Cidalise's desires are thus reoriented in a way that does not show acquiescence to the men she used to easily manipulate but rather an ongoing expression of her desire: She gets what she wants but only after reevaluating what she wanted at the onset of the play. In other words, she begins to find pleasure in the act of *choosing* rather than *deferring*, and she happily transitions to wifehood without cost. But what exactly causes this epiphany that leads to a reversal of desire? As Braunschneider shows, British coquettes of the eighteenth-century novel generally "reform" in reaction to a terrifying experience while coquetting that simultaneously instills doubt in the possibility of their leading a safe life as a single woman and produces love for one man, in particular the one that may have saved her from potential ruin (114). After facing a jilted suitor's retaliation or a blow to her virtue, for instance, the danger of selecting a tyrannical husband suddenly vanishes as she has grown intolerant of men's (unwanted) solicitations and seen the repercussions of her coquettish actions. Cidalise likewise faces attacks on her reputation from her aunt, uncle, and Éraste throughout the play, but it is not until she overhears her aunt and uncle discussing her imminent banishment to the countryside that Cidalise begins to understand the reality of her possible "ruin." This occurs at the beginning of Act V, at which point Cidalise opens her heart and begins to lament all that she will be leaving behind in Paris as quoted earlier. As the act unfolds, these beloved comforts presumably cease to present viable and safe alternatives to the protection that marriage would offer her, and since Éraste is the person who aids her in unmasking her aunt, she naturally gravitates toward him (and him alone) at the moment of her grandiose acceptance of her counter-intuitive fate: "J'aime Éraste, il est vrai, et je tâcherai par toutes sortes de moyens honnêtes de n'en épouser jamais

d'autre" (5.10, p. 175). In this sense, Cidalise learns a valuable lesson on "social legibility" (Braunschneider 152) in which a person's established reputation may unjustly overshadow her true character, the latter of which Cidalise asserts is innocent.

In recognition of the power of choice that Cidalise evidently possesses, Damis, as her acting chaperone in Paris while her father lives out in the country, grants his niece the marriage she desires after having lamented her potential sexual ruin throughout the play. In the beginning, we learn that a busy social life bothers him and he thus wants his niece to refrain from receiving guests into their home since he assumes, never having been invited, that they are all "fainéants de la Cour et de la Ville" who are attending solely for the purpose of holding amorous meetings and not for intellectual conversation (1.1, pp. 8-9). At the same time as he forbids social interaction, he also expects her to meet someone to marry in the desperate hope that marriage would act as a solution to her wild behavior. Much like in *Les Pipeurs*, uncles as a whole are described as being irritable, horrible men²²⁸ for the way they try to control their families.²²⁹ Whereas Cidalise might appear at times to be too rebellious a woman for the way she refuses all of Damis' commands, it is not without good reason: she had previously been forced by her family to marry a man she detested, and now no longer trusts their judgment in the interest of her happiness: "Ah je sais trop ce qu'il m'en a coûté pour avoir obéi aveuglément!" (1.4, p. 16). We are regularly reminded of Cidalise's sad plight as a woman "en tutelle" (1.3, p. 10) who initially has no say in her

²²⁸ As Marton says, "La maudite nation que les oncles!" (1.4, p. 11)

²²⁹ In contrast, Cidalise never makes as strong claims as Flavie, who wishes to drown all uncles and husbands. In fact, Cidalise even feels compassion for her uncle when he loses his temper over her late arrival in the broken coach (2.1, p. 45). She understands his perspective (however flawed) and his innocence under the manipulations of Céphise and therefore never dehumanizes him in a way that causes us to question her morals.

future²³⁰ and who is made to live in fear of what her guardians will do to her (2.1, p. 44) until she gains leverage on them and proves the worth of a young woman's right to choose.

Although at first Damis may appear to be Cidalise's main antagonist, we soon learn that her aunt Céphise is secretly behind his rampages because she feeds false information to her husband. We discover that she also spreads lies to other people such as Cidalise's cousin Lucille, who gives details of Céphise's latest sermon against Cidalise:

Mais elle dit que vous ne la voulez point croire ; que vous ne faites rien qu'à votre tête ; qu'elle s'est bannie de chez vous, parce que vous vous moquiez de ses corrections : que cependant elle avait pour vous toutes sortes de complaisances ; que vous la traîniez dans tous les plaisirs qu'elle prenait comme autant de mortifications. (2.5, pp. 52-53)

Céphise seems outraged to have been sucked into her niece's vortex of hedonism, and yet Cidalise knows her anger principally stems from being regularly left out of any revelry (2.1, pp. 45-46). In fact, Céphise often arrives uninvited to Cidalise's salon with the sole intent of meeting Éraste, the man she pines for behind her husband's back.²³¹ Ironically, her lectures claim to teach how all men are unfaithful and how love is a crime worthy of punishment (2.5, pp. 54-56), and yet she does little other than cheat and fall in love herself. Céphise is thus a consummate hypocrite, the *fausse prude* of the play's title.²³² Like her predecessor Arsinoé,²³³ Céphise attacks

²³⁰ Perhaps the only instance in which Cidalise is pleased to have no control over her life is when Basset urges her to repay his loan with "tendresse" (2.3, p. 48) and she declines on the grounds that his patience will pay better dividends once she is able to choose her own husband in a year's time at the age of her majority. This method of stalling a lover's advancements and avoiding commitment is very coquettish at heart but we see that her empty promise is justified in response to his unprofessional lubricity.

²³¹ If we recall, Damis accuses Cidalise's guests of only attending to pursue love interests, never realizing his wife is one of those very people!

²³² Arguably, the title of *La Coquette et la fausse prude* could refer entirely to Céphise since fausses prudes are coquettish in their own way as discussed in my chapter on *Le Misanthrope*. This interpretation would likewise downplay the characterization of Cidalise as a coquette since she would no longer figure in the title necessarily.

²³³ Parallels with other works abound. For example, in another corollary with Arsinoé, Céphise is only on stage in the third and fifth acts. One could also draw a parallel between Céphise and Tartuffe given that they are both hypocrites who are prone to give sermons and who make their grand entrance in the third act after much has been

her rival out of jealousy, with the idea that if she upsets Damis sufficiently with stories of Cidalise's immoral antics, he will send his niece to the country and remove her as the only foreseeable obstacle to gaining Éraste's love in return.

Céphise thus relies on unfounded gossiping to tarnish the reputation of her opponent. Once strongly associated with Célimène as much as Arsinoé, *médiance* has now primarily become the weapon of the *fausse prude*, leaving Baron's coquette in a less disagreeable light since Cidalise rarely speaks ill of others (unless it is to retaliate against her known enemies).²³⁴ It would furthermore do Cidalise no good to try to smear her aunt's reputation since Céphise has carefully crafted her image to be wholly virtuous, especially in the eyes of her husband; as Marton says in regard to Damis: "Il la verrait dans les bras de trente hommes, qu'il n'en prendrait aucun soupçon" (1.4, p. 15). Céphise is therefore the mistress of illusions who, through her slanderous attacks on others as well as her own virtuous shield, culls power derived from the influential role appearances play in their society.²³⁵ She makes Cidalise an easy target because society's prejudice has already taken hold of her reputation, judging her late outings and frequentation of multiple men as proof of coquettish libertinism.²³⁶ Only the written word, in the form of a love letter to Éraste composed by Céphise, is able to provide the necessary evidence to

said about them. Additionally, the seventh scene of Act III in which Céphise flirts with Éraste is reminiscent of Tartuffe attempting to seduce Elmire, with the major difference being that Éraste is an unwilling actor, and a poor one at that. In this sense he is like Alceste, too genuine and emotional to ever play a role he does not like. This is quite the change from the Éraste in Baron's *Rendez-vous* who is unfaithful to the Marquise and caught in her trap; only one year later and the coquette Cidalise is *forcing* her lover to cheat on her! Men appear to become more disposable as the coquettish tactics evolve with time.

²³⁴ Even so, when Marton suggests that they spend all their free time badmouthing Céphise while stranded in her father's castle, Cidalise replies, "On ne peut pas toujours médire" (5.2, p. 153). This is certainly a sign that the coquette has matured since Célimène's heyday.

²³⁵ As she points out to Éraste, "...vous savez qu'aujourd'hui on juge sur les apparences, et comme deux personnes seules peuvent faire tout ce qu'il leur plaît, on peut d'elles aussi dire tout ce qu'on veut" (3.7, p. 95).

²³⁶ "...les apparences sont terriblement contre vous" (3.4, p. 87).

dismantle her pious façade because its permanence prevents Céphise from masking her true identity at will and affixes her before the light of truth. Whereas the role of the letter had been previously used to discredit the coquette Célimène, Baron structures his play so that in the denouement it could do no harm to her counterpart Cidalise because she no longer has anything to hide: she has already cut Durcet and Basset loose, and Éraste has long considered her to be unabashedly coquettish, or “la plus franche coquette de Paris” (2.6, p. 60).²³⁷ By allowing Cidalise to drop her mask of her own accord, Baron has avoided the typical scene of exposure that brings about the downfall of most dishonest characters of comedic theater, such as Céphise who is not a “coquette franche” but a “coquette mensongère,” a woman with the same motives but a different, more underhanded strategy. In this way, Céphise becomes a beneficial foil to Cidalise who against all odds is now to be respected for being openly coquettish yet also brutally direct with the men in her life.²³⁸ She apologizes to Damis for having caused him pain with the truth about his treacherous wife, but she tells him that his chagrin is not worth the expense of her honor (5.10, p. 176), as if to reinforce the coquette’s newfound concern for honnêteté in the face of false accusations.

²³⁷ I would further note that as an unwed, non-committal coquette, Cidalise never breaks a marriage vow unlike Céphise with her love letter to Éraste. This is not to say that Cidalise is entirely innocent since she too is unfaithful to the three men she courts, but there is no legal sanction (fictional or real) for single people who “play the field.” Her “crimes” thus exist only in the realm of the *potential* were she ever to commit to one man and continue seeing others.

This bears especial relevance because Baron makes a note of discussing the reigning logic of criminal intentions of his day in a scene in which Marton and Pasquin fear beatings for the thefts they nearly committed. Pasquin is sure that “On ne punit pas les intentions” to which Marton counters “Cela ne devrait pas être, Pasquin, mais cela sera” (3.1, pp. 79-80), injecting a moral judgment into the play of how unfair it is to be blamed for what one has not yet done. This indirect example is likely a subtle defense of coquetry and its inclination for existing in the intentional rather than the committal.

²³⁸ This important side-by-side comparison is strongly suggested by Cidalise’s following lament: “Si l’on approfondissait son cœur et le mien, malgré cette vertu dont elle fait tant de bruit, on y trouverait de terribles différences” (2.5, p. 54).

Cidalise urges her family to forego forming opinions based on what others say in favor of examining the facts (5.10, p. 175), a lesson that benefits not only coquettes but any member of a society steeped in *le paraître*. Baron astutely supplies his audience with these facts throughout the play in order to gradually exonerate his coquette and call societal prejudices into question. Most importantly, the playwright works to establish a bond of trust between his audience and Cidalise by including scenes in which they know that she has dropped her coquettish mask and is acting naturally, a luxury we as spectators are not afforded in *Le Misanthrope* given that Célimène is never alone or in the sole presence of a true confidant on stage. Whereas Célimène always remains somewhat of an enigma due to the ambivalence she instills in her audience,²³⁹ Cidalise's representation is another author's attempt to make a connection with the public and to explain coquetry in a way that is more grounded in material concerns than in light-hearted frivolity.

It is thus the preeminent placement of a real-world economy in Baron's play that makes the most striking difference between the two works. Whereas Célimène's coquetry and Arsinoé's *fausse-pruderie* appear largely as social tactics in an environment where wit and reputation function as more valuable currency than money itself, Cidalise is forced to reckon with her disadvantaged economic and judicial status as a woman who is neither in control of her fate nor her finances. A pithy portrait or *bon mot* does not hold the same weight for Cidalise's milieu as it does for Célimène's salon and thus Cidalise must make do in an arena that favors wealth over social prestige. This is not to say that amassing a fortune is her goal per se, but rather a gateway to her freedom. Nor is it true that words are without value to Cidalise, in light of her careful entertainment of Basset and Durcet. However, we observe how financial power speaks much

²³⁹ An evasive and thus coquettish tactic that may have been Molière's very aim.

louder than words ever do in Baron's play, given that Cidalise's opinions and protestations are rarely heeded by her suitors and family members who think they know what is best for her. Only through aptly channeling her coquettish vocabulary can she outbid her opponents and regain the tangible evidence ("cold, hard cash" as it were) she needs in order to prove both her strength and her worth in a fundamentally materialistic world.

Nevertheless, at the play's end, the more profound shift in Cidalise's life does not come from her recovered financial stature but from her internal reorientation of desire that allows her to pursue her goal of stability and freedom. Because a coquette is in large part defined by her lack of allegiance to any man, an author hastily staging her happy marriage in the denouement would seem disingenuous (or perhaps improbable) and would likely cheapen the integrity of the character type. Baron avoids this flaw by illustrating a credible conversion within Cidalise's motivations that both keeps her endearing signature avarice intact and likewise solves the riddle of what to do with a dangerous female protagonist who seemingly will not submit to the obligatory marriage vows of comic theater. This compromise renders her one of the rare characters of the theatrical world to whom both love and greed are attributed. Her unification of two traditionally opposed desires demonstrates that one does not preclude the other, and furthermore, that there is indeed a place in the rising consumer economy for those who have a "heart of gold." Cidalise thus does not finish as a subjugated victim worthy of pity but rather as an active determiner of her own fate who takes hold of the proverbial purse strings and makes her own "change."

The Coquette's Curiosity Shop: Love For Sale in Dancourt's *La Femme d'intrigues* (1692)

The last play to be analyzed in this chapter is the one most deeply imbued by the material world as well as the most devoid of sentiment, a reverse correlation that appears to suggest an

impossible co-existence between love and greed. In truth, theatrical characters throughout the seventeenth-century almost always reflect this dichotomy because those who love must show that their intentions are disinterested and wholly sentimental, whereas avaricious tricksters feign tenderness when they wish to woo a rich party. Because coquettes often walk the line between love and self-interest in searching for attention, wealth, and freedom through men, they act as important sites of convergence for discussing the consequences of choosing the path of money over that of love, all without renouncing the use of affective language and gestures for their own means.

Florent Carton, better known as sieur Dancourt, is represented three times²⁴⁰ in my corpus, which speaks in part to his productivity.²⁴¹ Dancourt's repeated inclusion in my corpus is also representative of his oeuvre's interest in coquettish characters.²⁴² By the time he was feverishly writing plays in the late 1680s and early 1690s, the coquette had become an established figure in the comic repertoire but was still evolving from its archetypal beginnings; under his pen in particular they were becoming more cynical and coquettish by profession. Indeed, since his heyday Dancourt has been the target of critics who have blamed him for depicting characters of questionable virtue, including the coquette. Those who had wished that

²⁴⁰ One could argue the number is more accurately read as three and a half given his supposed involvement in Ulrich's play, *La Folle Enchère*, as discussed in the previous chapter.

²⁴¹ Between the beginning of his career in 1683 and his death in 1725, Dancourt wrote some eighty plays, of which approximately fifty have survived for today. Although he started as both a tragic and comic actor to only moderate success, he discovered his talent in authoring plays soon after joining la Comédie-Française in 1685 and would write for the troupe for the rest of his career (Hilgar 64). His greatest legacy lies perhaps in what would become to be known as "la dancourade," a series of one-act comedies that were individually staged after lengthier, more well-known works of the time in an effort to draw larger audiences during the theater's off-season in summer and fall. Because *La Femme d'intrigues* is not a part of this series, I will wait to further discuss "la dancourade" when two of its plays, *L'Été des coquettes* (1690) and *La Parisienne* (1691), are featured in chapter 4.

²⁴² In truth, my corpus could have included other plays by Dancourt that included coquettes, such as *Le Moulin de Javelle* (1696) and *Les Fêtes nocturnes du cours* (1714), but their inclusion would have been somewhat redundant with relation to the other texts. Additionally, these coquettes are often not as fully developed as the ones I have chosen to include and do not necessarily warrant further discussion on my part.

the theater would play an edifying role in the lives of its spectators were disappointed to find a commitment to egoism and chaos in his texts. But as Judith and Ross Curtis note, the upheaval of good order is so habitual in Dancourt's theater that it becomes a veritable system, an important dramatic technique of his that would have fallen short of its goal had the audience not felt "agréablement scandalisé" (*La Fête de village* 14). The scandalizing propensity²⁴³ of his plays belies the traditional critical consensus depicting Dancourt as a mere observer or 'recenseur' of his society's morals of his time.²⁴⁴ It is likely that the ambitious people he depicts on stage existed in his society (if not in his very audiences), but to reduce him to an onlooker is to rob Dancourt of his role as a "peintre de mœurs" who recognized that comedy feeds off of the follies of its society (Blanc *La Maison de campagne* xxvi).

One of the primary follies in question in *La Femme d'intrigues* is that of being, as the title suggests, something of a mediator one who meddles in the business of others (and presumably profits from it).²⁴⁵ In the play, Mme Thibaut is an indebted and unmarried woman

²⁴³ One would not have to look far to find the perfect models for Dancourt's vicious characters: he and his family had quite the notorious reputation! Both he and his wife, the actress Thérèse de la Thorillière, were terrible spendthrifts despite their accruing debts. Nonetheless, they managed to amass a fortune and possess luxurious property by the end of their lives, though by what means it is not known. André Blanc, basing his theory off of numerous rumors attesting to the loose morals of the Dancourt women, hints at the possibility of Thérèse and her daughters using their bodies to pay debts and ascend the social ladder, though he recognizes the unfounded prejudices against actresses of the time. Dancourt himself was very ambitious and a renowned philanderer (as noted in his affair with Madame Ulrich), thus coquettish behavior might have been closer to his heart than one might know. See Blanc *La Maison de campagne* for more on Dancourt's biography.

²⁴⁴ Another method of interpreting the debate surrounding Dancourt as either a depraved playwright or a simple observer of his time comes from Marie-France Hilgar: "Il est tentant, comme l'ont fait certains critiques, d'expliquer [la différence entre le théâtre de Molière et celui de Dancourt] par le fait que les mœurs allaient en se dégradant vers la fin du règne de Louis XIV, et que l'argent devint omniprésent et omnipotent. Que Dancourt ait donné une vision plus réaliste du monde, nous n'en doutons point, mais il y a aussi, de la part des deux auteurs, une optique dissemblable. Molière choisit un type et l'a rendu universel tandis que Dancourt a sauté à pieds joints dans l'universalité" (72). I agree that we cannot simply dismiss Dancourt as being the victim of a debauched time period that he was merely transposing onto the stage because his work is more purposeful than that. However, I do find his main characters to be show more humanity and individuality than Hilgar allows, rendering them less similar to one-dimensional, universal character types who fail to grab our attention.

²⁴⁵ Furetière defines "entremetteur" in the following manner: "Médiateur entre deux personnes qui ont quelque différent à vider, quelque négociation ou marché à faire. Ce qui facilite les transactions, c'est l'adresse et l'habileté

who must tirelessly use her resourcefulness and a vast network of interpersonal connections in order to earn a living. In an effort to end her strenuous working days once and for all, she puts on an act as a wealthy noble widow who subsequently attracts the attention of a seemingly rich military man who is an indigent imposter himself. Once both ruses have been uncovered, Thibaut is nearly arrested for one of the scams she had been running before being let go on the promise that she will pay back all of the stolen money.

The plot is indeed thin, but what my summary fails to include is the never-ending stream of entrances and exits by supporting characters who have little to no effect on Thibaut's main intrigue. Philip Koch places this type of dramatic work into a category he calls a "revue" play "where, between a rather arbitrary exposition and a casual denouement, the audience is treated to a series of discrete sketches whose number depends on how many acts Dancourt had to fill" (217).²⁴⁶ We rarely see characters a second time once they exit the stage, leaving little room for development, but in truth there is no need because they are generally grotesque characters types who are easily identified by their clothes, occupations, or mannerisms. Among this "défilé cynique de types pittoresques" (Blanc, *La Maison de campagne* xviii) we find a précieuse; two teachers; a drunken coachman; a magistrate; a poet; soubrettes and valets; several couples looking to marry, to divorce, or to stay together; and of course, a femme d'intrigues.

des *entremetteurs*. Il faut faire un présent à l'*entremetteur* qui a moyenné l'achat de cette charge. *Entremetteuse* au féminin se prend d'ordinaire en mauvaise part, d'une négociation d'amour." Although *entremetteuse* is never used in this play, other literary critics and I use it as a synonym for a *femme d'intrigues* without the negative connotation attributed to the feminine version in the above definition. Furthermore, I would argue an *entremetteuse* is not relegated to affairs of the heart (as Furetière describes it) given Mme Thibaut's involvement in business negotiations, but it is likely true that there are few literary females of the time as skilled as she.

²⁴⁶ Because this particular work is five acts long, Dancourt is able to fit in a remarkable twenty-eight character cast, more than any other of the plays in my corpus.

As the titular character's epithet implies, she is a woman involved in numerous schemes typically of a dishonest nature. "Intrigue" itself has six different (though very closely related) definitions in Furetière's dictionary, with the most applicable to this play reading as such:

...se dit aussi de cette cabale de gens qui par leurs avis, leurs connaissances, leurs adresses, savent embrouiller ou débarrasser les affaires, et en tirer du profit. Il y a à Paris bien des gens d'*intrigue*, qui vivent d'*intrigue*, qui font des mariages, qui donnent des avis, qui font des affaires à la Cour. Cette affaire a réussi par l'*intrigue* d'une telle personne, c'est une femme de grand *intrigue*.²⁴⁷

As one can see here, "une personne d'intrigue" is interested in receiving money for any number of services, and not in searching for her own marriage, lovers, or personal advancement.

Is being a "femme d'intrigues" then the same as being a coquette?²⁴⁸ It is true that they both prize money as a key to freedom, share the same tricky nature, are praised for their intelligence, and do not seek out love as an ultimate goal. But I would argue that Furetière's definition of a femme d'intrigue lacks the fundamental self-love that truly makes a woman coquettish; in other words, she does not draw attention to herself, but rather deflects it in an attempt to aid others. However, specifically in Dancourt's example, Mme Thibaut's desire to help others opens back on itself in that through her deeds she is able to develop a reputation that precedes her across the capital, even as far as the royal court (3.10, p. 53). Furthermore, the money she earns in helping others is put toward creating more links with people and thus widening her web of connections in a self-perpetuating system. Unlike the spendthrift coquettes (such as Raymond Poisson's Flavie), we do not witness Mme Thibaut spending her money unless it is to give a reward or a loan, implying that she is solely feeding her earnings back into

²⁴⁷ "Cabale," as defined by Furetière, does not necessarily have a negative connotation as it does in English and may simply point to a group of people with shared interests, so it is difficult to say whether a femme d'intrigues is meant pejoratively or not in the play's title. Regardless of preconceived notions about the eponymous term, I argue that Dancourt shows it in a mostly positive light through use of backstory and personable characterization.

²⁴⁸ Dancourt's play only mentions the word "coquette" one time and it is in reference to Ardalise, not Mme Thibaut (5.11, p. 108).

the growing business, or possibly saving them.²⁴⁹ Her sense of fiscal responsibility also implies that Mme Thibaut is not at all frivolous as one would expect from a coquette, and yet the comical method with which she handles the various personalities makes it difficult to take her business dealings in much seriousness, preserving her characteristic coquettishness.²⁵⁰

Thus, Mme Thibaut happens to be a coquettish femme d'intrigues, one who aims to keep her beloved freedom beyond the constraints of marriage by tapping into the liberating potential of wealth.²⁵¹ She prizes Cléante/La Ramée's supposed riches over his status as a gentleman, his appearance, or his personality because only money will be able to rid her of her debts and tiresome responsibilities at the boutique, and it is clear that La Ramée feels the same about Mme Thibaut in her role as a rich widow. Both characters let the promise of wealth guide their convincing performances in which they fawn over one another as real lovers do, revealing what Kavanagh refers to as the "financial underpinnings of sentiment" (*Dice* 119) and the reason why conflating money and love can be a confusing if not dangerous act for all parties involved after truths are typically revealed in the play's ending.

²⁴⁹ Given that Thibaut tries to trick La Ramée into marrying her using the luxurious possessions of others and not her own potential nest egg, her *cassette* is most likely not worthy of Harpagon's. In fact, when DuBois implies to Gabrillon that her mistress must turn a great profit with her skills, she tells him, "Tout lui coûte, Monsieur, et vous ne sauriez croire combien de gens elle tient à ses gages" (4.11, p. 82). Thus, between paying her employees and her money being tied up in loans, she is far from retirement.

²⁵⁰ To cite only one example, in Act III, scene 10 the Marquis is in need of money and Mme Thibaut accordingly proposes her usual solution to any indebted young man: marry a rich widow. While she is hesitant to recommend a particular widow because she is a sixty-year old fish merchant, the Marquis is in fact disappointed that she is not *older*, a rare occasion in seventeenth-century comic theater! Although it is clear he is interested in the imminence of the widow's death and not her appearance, it is quite the change from the reactions to the aged coquettes discussed in chapter 2. Mme Thibaut is likewise rather flippant and matter-of-fact in her daily dealings, treating her clients as if they were a mix of puzzle pieces to be matched (in either an amorous or business sense) rather than as human beings, for which we forgive her given their grotesque, one-dimensional natures.

²⁵¹ Despite her title of "Mme" we do not know if she was previously married because she makes no mention (maudlin or gleeful) of a past husband, a highly rare occasion for any dramatic manifestation of a widow at the time. Referring back to Furetière, "Madame" may refer to any woman, regardless of her marriage status, so it is likely safe to assume she is an unmarried woman who is old enough to run her affairs without the authority of a male guardian.

It is also a cliché to conclude any comedy with a marriage, and yet in *La Femme d'intrigues* we find none, least of all between Mme Thibaut and La Ramée whose wedding plans are known to be a sham as early as the first scene. In truth, Mme Thibaut is in good company because Dancourt creates an atmosphere that is highly cynical about marriage, each couple being dysfunctional in its own way. For example, Ardalise abuses her husband Orgon's devotion to her by making him buy her something from Mme Thibaut's boutique every time he loses his temper with her. Although the couple appears deeply in love in light of their tender words to one another, Ardalise's true financial interest is made abundantly clear to the audience when she and Mme Thibaut agree behind his back to share the money he uses to buy her a piece of overpriced lace (5.5, p. 99). Similarly, Dorante and Mélinde are married but currently separated, and upon meeting again, Dorante gives her the ultimatum of returning to their home or being sent to the convent. Mélinde surprises him by choosing the former, but with the caveat that she will make his life hell if he forces her to return: "Je crierai nuit et jour, je chasserai vos valets, j'engagerai vos meubles, je déchirerai vos papiers, je mettrai feu dans votre logis, et peut-être je ferai pis encore" (4.7, p. 73).

Additionally, even the classically sacred cases of new love are threatened by revenge and greed in Dancourt's dramatic world. Le Jeune Comte and Mlle Gogo wish for Mme Thibaut to marry them off in spite of their young age, unfamiliarity with each other, and lack of parental consent. Mlle Gogo, one of the minor coquettes of the play, asserts—much to her beau's chagrin—that even though they are in dire need of money, as a woman she will be able to get whatever she wants for them from other men, just as her mother does when her father refuses her gambling money (2.7, p. 35). After the children storm off in the face of Mme Thibaut's refusal to help them, the latter praises the girl's shrewd yet innocent position on love, though it is clear

their romance is doomed even before it begins. In another instance of young love, Angélique plans to enter her cheating lover's game room dressed as a man in order to catch him in the act and destroy her rival's reputation. Although she is clearly going to great lengths to separate the new couple, she denies her love for Le Chevalier in the name of revenge, almost as if to be in love were a shameful thing. When Mme Thibaut explains that Le Chevalier is not likely to forgive her after such a nefarious scheme, Angélique says it would be over between them whether she lets him go or not, but the advantage of carrying out her plan is that it offers a sort of consolation (2.7, p. 35). For the play's characters, clever strategies offer a greater potential for self-satisfaction than love ever does, suggesting perhaps that in the long run self-love and cerebral stimulation are more effective in bringing happiness than mutual attraction.²⁵²

Mme Thibaut would appear to subscribe to this reasoning since no real form of love awaits her, only financial gain through the manipulation of love. In other words, true love, an object that many coquettes evade in order to preserve their freedom from commitment and preference for multiplicity, does not figure in Mme Thibaut's equation for bolstering her reputation or making her money and is therefore superfluous. Without a man in her life, Mme Thibaut is free to conduct herself as she sees fit: namely, in the pursuit of money. In reality, the entire play feels very steeped in the material realm as we are given details about fine coaches and lists of inventory, and everyone (including the clergy) can seemingly buy what they desire, or else be bribed (1.2, p. 8). Mme Thibaut herself is unable to comprehend that others would ever

²⁵² Indeed, as Éraсте shows after being twice duped by widows he intends to marry, he values his freedom as a poor bachelor more than he does being a rich prisoner of marriage: "Voilà deux aventures dans le même jour qui me persuadent, et malgré le désordre de mes affaires, j'aime mieux vivre garçon mal-aisé, que d'avoir obligation à une vieille ou à une coquette" (5.11, p. 108). Clearly, the comparison between an old, presumably unattractive woman and a coquette is not flattering, and it is the only mention of the word "coquette" in the play. Though he may openly condemn coquetry in an instance such as this, Dancourt renders coquettish behaviors appealing throughout the work without naming them as such in order perhaps to lull his audience into liking coquettes in spite of society's prejudices.

be uninterested in earning an easy franc. For instance, when the dance teacher refuses to work for half his normal wage and the singing teacher protests against working for clients due to their preference for opera over his own compositions, Mme Thibaut deems their sensitivity an “extravagance” (1.4, p. 15) because she cannot understand turning down any paying offer based on principle. This is not to say she is completely blinded by avarice: At several points in the play she shows signs of generosity toward her “employees” that differentiate her from a purely greedy maniac like Harpagon. Her generosity stems partly from respect for the talents they bring to her operation,²⁵³ but I would also argue that it makes for better public relations and keeps her team intact in the interest of longevity.²⁵⁴ As Gabrillon points out, Mme Thibaut is only as good as her network of spies and actors with whom she works in a symbiotic relationship, as is the case with La Brie: “Monsieur de La Brie est un trésor pour Madame Thibaut, et Madame Thibaut est un petit Pérou pour Monsieur de La Brie, et je ne sais pas comment ils pourraient se passer l’un de l’autre” (1.1, p. 6).²⁵⁵

Of course, Mme Thibaut only expects the best in her employees because she works herself hard as well, as we see during her first entrance in the play when she appears exhausted

²⁵³ None of which the teachers receive since they fail to carry out most of the tasks she assigns to them. She pays them in “vieilles nippes” (1.3, p. 12) and keeps the remainder of the money for herself, perhaps because she knows they do not sufficiently appreciate the value of wealth or perhaps because she enjoys deceiving such difficult employees.

²⁵⁴ This is implied during the brief truce Mme Thibaut has with the singing teacher: “Je ne suis pas fâchée de son retour, et si mon mariage avec Cléante ne réussit pas, j’ai intérêt de ne point perdre mes créatures” (61, IV, 1). Not only does this reveal her sensible propensity for having backup plans, but perhaps also her inclination that her employees are her own “creations.” Although Furetière does not include the term in his 1690 *Dictionnaire universel*, we do find a definition in the 1694 edition of *le Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* that would support my claim: “Il se dit fig. d’une personne qui tient sa fortune et son élévation d’une autre.” Does this make Mme Thibaut appear more as a queenly figure, or as a motherly one? In either case, she clearly pulls the strings and it is suggestive that she places herself above her underlings.

²⁵⁵ “Pérou:” “C’est le nom d’une Province de l’Amérique, riche en or, et en argent. Il est passé en usage dans la langue en cette phrase: C’est un *Pérou*, en parlant d’une affaire fort lucrative, où il y a à faire des gains inconnus” (Furetière).

and ravenous (1.2, p. 7).²⁵⁶ Clients (and unwanted company) will consistently walk in and out of her store as if it were fitted with a revolving door that no doorman could effectively guard. More specifically, Mme Thibaut runs a Parisian boutique that deals in all sorts of affairs that bear enumerating due to their amazing variety, as detailed by La Brie:

Il se fait ici les plus belles affaires de Paris : voulez-vous des charges, des offices, des emplois ? On vous en fera voir de tous les échantillons. Êtes-vous dans le goût de vous marier ? On vous y fournira des femmes de toutes tailles, de tous âges, et si vous plaidez, vous y trouverez des solliciteuses depuis une pistole jusqu'à trente : voilà ce qu'on appelle une bonne boutique ; il n'y a point ici de nenni. (1.1, p. 4)

Ironically, La Brie's account of the boutique's dealings fails to mention its primary function: selling used clothes, furniture, jewelry, and other miscellaneous household items for clients in need of money, making it a pawnshop of sorts.²⁵⁷ However, we witness Mme Thibaut using these items more as a warehouse of props for her own personal intrigues than for commercial purposes, including her deception of La Ramée and other unsavory negotiations. We learn early on that she is involved in activities she does not want to be publicly known. After La Brie fails to receive a letter from Mme Thibaut that gives details of her latest scheme, her faithful servant Gabrillon worries it could harm her reputation: "On pourrait la décacheter, et l'on y verrait trop le caractère de ma maîtresse, et le tien" (1.1, p. 6).²⁵⁸ Fortunately for Mme Thibaut, she knows

²⁵⁶ Mme Thibaut's hunger might remind us of Poisson's coquettish soubrette Aimée who similarly works so diligently that she is unable to nourish herself properly.

²⁵⁷ Because goods of all kinds converge upon her boutique during a time of international trade expansion, she and her business take on a "global valence" as Braunschneider notes in similar British coquette plays, highlighting her "nation's participation in international networks of commerce, finance, labor, and travel" (86-87) and explaining the quotidian metropolitan experience of early modern imperialism. She argues that "the globe becomes another social space whose rise is determined (or strongly influenced) by the organizing presence of the coquette, much like her getting attention in her drawing room" (86).

²⁵⁸ La Brie's response to Gabrillon is also worthy of note because it emphasizes the dangers of the written word for coquettish characters: "Tu as raison, cela me décrierait à l'Auberge. De quoi diantre s'avise-t-elle de confier ces choses au papier?" Like Célimène who finds her many secret affairs confirmed in letters she carelessly let circulate among her enemies, and Céphise who writes a love letter that gets intercepted by her rival Cidalise, Mme Thibaut risks providing evidence of her own culpability in criminal activity in writing it down. Because she and other

her reputation is never in too much danger because she has allies to call on at the Palais de Justice (3.1, p. 37), l'Académie Française (1.6, p. 20),²⁵⁹ and perhaps even Louis XIV's court as mentioned earlier.²⁶⁰

Nevertheless, as a resourceful coquette who has honed her improvisational talents, this femme d'intrigues is highly capable of handling difficult situations on her own. The art of improvisation is an important tool of Mme Thibaut's arsenal because it allows her to mediate the difficulty of running a boutique that primarily relies on haphazardness and duplicity. In other words, she is not able to foresee the diverse group of clients who will enter her store that day and must therefore switch roles and devise plans immediately upon their arrival in order to avoid entrapment and derive the greatest benefit for herself (and others in the process). In this sense, not only must her preparation and performance before her clients be quickly delivered, but her identities are rather fleeting as well since she typically cannot remain the same personage from scene to scene. This deliberately performative mutability of being begins to redefine the stereotypically fickle nature of the coquette, who is often portrayed to be at the mercy of her own biological whims if not the fluctuating fashions of her surrounding (and often urban) environment. In this new light, she is attempting to harness the power of life's natural

deceitful characters (La Brie included) manage a precariously woven web of relations, it is imperative to keep the constituents compartmentalized and unknown to one another in the event they would ever convene and compare experiences. This is clearly a task that is more easily accomplished when unproven hearsay is the only ammunition enemies could use to discredit the trickster, as if the case for Arsinoé before she obtains the damaging letters from Célimène's suitors, and Cidalise before Éraсте hands her the unwanted love note.

²⁵⁹ Dorise the précieuse asks Mme Thibaut to put in a good word for her so that she may have a seat in one of the Académies, regardless of the fact that they did not yet accept women. Dorise is clearly meant to appear foolish as she promises to bring gallantry to the courts of law if elected, and Mme Thibaut rightly treats her as an "extravagante." This not only takes an old-fashioned jab at préciosité but also reinforces Thibaut's grounding in the Material as opposed to the (risibly) Intellectual.

²⁶⁰ Despite her well-received reputation at court (according to the Marquis), Mme Thibaut admits she rarely goes "en ce pays-là" (3.10, p. 55). As she is a rather poor and lowly bourgeois woman, it is interesting to ask oneself what business she would have had there previously, or how her status must have succumbed to Fortune's wheel in this unpredictable theatrical world (as I will expound upon in the coming paragraphs).

inconstancy by allowing herself to be a different person or use a different strategy as she sees fit while tricking others into thinking that her whimsical desires are born out of external and causal contact with them rather than purposefully plotted beforehand.

Improvisation likewise allows Mme Thibaut to be represented as a freethinker and a creator. Though the play is evidently scripted in consideration of the text as it exists today, the situations that Dancourt stages are made to seem as though impromptu inspiration is driving their action and that Mme Thibaut follows her own path. It is as though she is the divine inventor of her own fate who is able to produce novel outcomes once the author feeds her another stimulus or obstacle. Much like the real-life comic actresses of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition who improvised their roles based on a mere framework, Mme Thibaut is often allowed to defy the authority of her author's written word and stray from the mundane task of being herself in the presence of other characters by writing her "own" lines. In this sense, she perhaps supersedes the author as the producer of her role in that the audience witnesses firsthand her on-stage improvisational techniques that need to be effectively portrayed as coming from within and not from an invisible hand puppeteering her actions. This auctorial intelligence may best be observed in her brilliant retaliation against the singing teacher across the play's length. In short, the singing teacher is suddenly expected to care for an illegitimate daughter after the mother dies. Mme Thibaut understandably refuses to clean up his mess by taking on the child for him, resulting in a volleying of the infant as the acts unfurl. She ultimately finds a use for the child as a replacement for another five-month old girl who had died under the care of her father DuBois, thereby preventing him from collecting his dead wife's inheritance in the absence of a blood heir. The coquette's stroke of genius occurs when she invents a convincing backstory to fool the greedy DuBois into paying nearly the entire amount of the baby's inheritance in exchange for the

singing teacher's daughter. In other words, Mme Thibaut is able to transform an attack from one of her enemies into a profitable occasion, and all while improvising. Whereas Gabrillon is willing to forgive the singing teacher out of respect for his clever ploy (4.9, p. 78),²⁶¹ Mme Thibaut vows revenge and exacts it upon her opponent, escaping both richer and unscathed.

The coquette's exceptional talents, however, are not able to render her completely immune to all misfortune, as witnessed in La Ramée's successful deception as well as her capture by Le Commissaire at the end of the play for having resold Dorante's fine dishes. Dancourt nevertheless resolves these two issues in such a simplistic way that one wonders if Mme Thibaut feels any regret over her misbehavior. In regard to La Ramée, the biting end of his ruse is attenuated by his imminent detainment, after which Mme Thibaut clearly wants nothing to do with him. She can only muster a light-hearted "Quelles aventures!" (5.15, p. 111) in response and shows no real signs of despair or heartbreak. While it is assumed that La Ramée will be severely sanctioned for impersonating his captain Cléante, Mme Thibaut simply promises to return the stolen dishes and the money she made from them, to which Le Commissaire responds: "Allons, Monsieur, il faut que chacun vive" (5.15, p. 112). In other words, even the Law understands the shady means to which people have recourse in order to survive, and as long as the crime is reversible, there is no need to punish someone for merely eking out a living.

Rather than punish or demonize Mme Thibaut, Dancourt portrays her as a sympathetic victim deserving of pity in light of her challenging social position. More specifically, as a single bourgeois woman with no fortune, she must fight however she can in order to survive, even if that means resorting to a notable level of thievery and human trafficking. Her reputation for benevolence, occasionally observed throughout the play, enhances her status as a sympathetic

²⁶¹ The singing teacher has the baby delivered to Mme Thibaut's house hidden in a cello.

figure. As Angélique marvels about her: “Comment diable, on dit que la fortune et vous, vous êtes les deux doigts de la main, qu’elle vous met à même des emplois, et que vous rendez heureux qui bon vous semble?” (2.6, p. 31). Whereas Hilgar believes that Dancourt’s characters do not elicit sympathy from the audience because his theater lacks heroes and heroines (72), I would disagree in the case of Mme Thibaut as she is not only a compelling protagonist but also very human in her struggles. Gabrillon reveals near the play’s end that the courts stole nearly half of Mme Thibaut’s profits and it is due to this injustice that she must continue to work so tirelessly (4.11, pp. 81-82). It is impossible to know whether Mme Thibaut was a con artist before or after these events, but it may be Dancourt’s subtle way of explaining why she ever turned to crime; as La Ramée says, “A fourbe, fourbe et demi” (5.15, p. 111). Blanc remarks that Dancourt is not the moralizing type and is somewhat akin to La Bruyère in presenting an amusing “vérité superficielle” (*La Maison de campagne* xxvi) rather than a whole truth meant to instruct. Dancourt’s form of satire betrays a mischievous complicity with the scandalous morals he persistently presents, in particular with regard to his coquettish characters who never face punishment for their misdeeds.²⁶²

If anything, Dancourt’s moral in *La Femme d'intrigues* points more to a lesson on the precariousness of good fortune and the randomness of life than to a condemnation of scheming. Gabrillon remarks on this general philosophy in the first scene, as if to say that chance has a better grip on our destinies than we believe: “Ne connaissons-nous pas tout le monde par

²⁶² Perry Gethner comments on the use of “divertissement” in Dancourt’s plays, including songs, dances, and vaudevillian fêtes. In *La Femme d'intrigues*, the only divertissement included is a satirical song composed by the singing teacher in which the last lines praise the abundance of nature except in the case of fertile mistresses: “Une vigne fertile enchante tout le monde, / L’abondance plait en tous lieux, / Mais il n’est rien de plus fâcheux / Qu’une maîtresse féconde” (4.1, p. 61). In consideration of the teacher’s unwanted bastard daughter, it is no surprise he writes these lyrics. While such an example of callous fatherhood would normally incite moral outrage, its placement within the context of a song minimizes its scandalous nature and even renders vice entertaining (“Le divertissement” 107-8).

aventure, nous autres?” (1.1, p. 5). We find many characters who make references to the hazards of fortune, including La Ramée who used to be rich but was sued to the point of poverty (2.1, pp. 24-25), a playwright who finds himself reduced to rags after having his plays repeatedly booed (5.2, p. 89), and a coquettish widow who has the bad luck of coming to Mme Thibaut’s boutique with her lover at the exact moment her fiancé is there (3.2, p. 25). Their dramatic world is thus a chaotic space in which “the powers that be” give and take at will.²⁶³ In addition, chance events bear no relation to the characters’ moral standing. Not only does Mme Thibaut’s hard work not pay off in the end,²⁶⁴ but good deeds often go unrewarded. For instance, after a marquise is criticized by her heirs for having been too charitable during her lifetime, Mme Thibaut points out that even goodness is entirely subjective: “Gabrillon, l’étrange chose que le monde! Quelque bien que l’on puisse faire aux uns, on est presque toujours blâmé par les autres” (3.1, p. 38). Furthermore, the economy of goodness is not a fair or closed system, as we witness when Orgon buys his wife a lace shawl that she demanded in order to excuse him from having lost his temper, at which point he learns from her that only a new bureau could have veritably resulted in his forgiveness (5.5, p. 99). Thus in this nearly anti-meritocratic environment, helping others holds little allure in comparison to the more immediate benefits of serving oneself, though in truth neither selfless nor interested actions promise better returns than the other, rendering every conceivable undertaking a veritable gamble.

²⁶³ Men are perhaps just as unreliable as fate, a notion that Mme Thibaut knows all too well. She feels that were she able to depend on others, she would no longer need to exercise such a strenuous and meddling profession: “La fatigante chose que le métier dont je me mêle! Si j’étais bien sûre de Cléante, je prendrais le parti d’y renoncer, mais dans l’incertitude de pouvoir réussir dans mes affaires, il est toujours bon de continuer à me mêler de celles de tout le monde” (3.10, p. 58). Similarly, in chapter 4 we will see that the unreliability of male lovers is a theme used to justify coquetry, including in two plays by Dancourt.

²⁶⁴ Consider Gabrillon’s assessment of her mistress’ plight: “...ceux qui se donnent le plus de peine ne sont pas ceux qui gagnent le plus” (4.11, p. 82).

Like Flavie, Mme Thibaut acts according to the risk and reward profile of the options available to her. Unlike Flavie, who thrives on the ever-continued pursuit of play in the form of gambling, Mme Thibaut is not interested in having her con-game last forever and she looks to a concrete, beneficial outcome. Though it is arguable that she does indeed enjoy the thrill of working in her boutique and taking on new clients even when she does not need them (“Quoique je n’aie plus guère besoin de pratiques, il est toujours bon d’expédier les vieilles...” 4.9, p. 78), she makes her intentions to marry strictly for money very clear and asserts that she will renounce her career as soon as she is certain of her projected conjugal cash flow. But therein lies the rub: how can she be absolutely sure of anything in a fledgling economy increasingly based on speculation and risk? Not only are lovers of any sex shown to be extremely unfaithful and unreliable, but every underhanded transaction she negotiates is a financial gamble. Whereas Flavie is unconcerned with losing all her money to the *pipeurs* because her addiction to perilous excitement outweighs her desire for money (Reith 148), Mme Thibaut does not buy into what Gerda Reith refers to as early modern society’s “practical enjoyment of the ‘aleatory’” (58), a western European phenomenon born in the wake of international trade expansion and the rapid development of a money economy. This relatively new and probabilistic worldview presents too much danger to Mme Thibaut’s operation to give her comfort, and this is precisely because the element of chance limits her direct agency in the execution of her business deals. In other words, she does not like putting herself at risk unless she is aware of the possible consequences and can likely avoid any negative ones. This is most easily seen in her dealings with Dorante’s son Léandre in his scheme to resell the stolen dishes. She initially doubts the plan’s feasibility and, seeking reassurance that she will be able to escape punishment in the event the scam fails, inquires, “Mais si l’affaire vient à être sue, à quoi m’exposez-vous?,” to which Léandre replies:

“Je prends tout sur moi, ne te mets pas en peine” (4.3, p. 64). Given that he never steps in to rescue Mme Thibaut during the final scene, he evidently lets her take the fall all by herself despite his promise, thus confirming that her nervous intuition was correct. Without the overarching agency with which she normally conducts affairs, Mme Thibaut loses control and consequently loses the game.

With her fall from greatness being so blatant, Mme Thibaut consequently seems unworthy of her oft-mentioned renown in hindsight. Her merit as a resourceful femme d'intrigues may indeed be called into question by the audience after the bad business with the dishes, because as John Lyons demonstrates with respect to Jean de La Bruyère's *Caractères*, in this era merit “as recognized by the world is simply the result of chance, since...it is only randomly that a person with real talents is able to put those talents to good use,” (181) all of which depends on the right path opening up due perhaps to the death of another in a superior position or a marriage with a connected family. This privilege of chance over human desires and virtues is in keeping with the more traditional representation of Fortune's wheel in which a person slowly works her way upward in the world before reaching the unstable topside and experiencing a quick descent due to even the smallest error. Nevertheless, Lyons demonstrates that in his work La Bruyère downplays the more mechanistic features of the wheel in favor of allotting humans a degree of agency in their own successes and failures:

An alternate view of the wheel of fortune would make it largely or wholly a figure of the immanent pattern of human conduct. On this later account, the circular pattern of rise and fall and possible reascension would occur because of the typical sequence of such behavior as diligent striving, persistent cultivation of the powerful, austerity and sacrifice, followed by success and then, after a period of reasonable enjoyment of prosperity, over-reaching, complacency, negligence, ingratitude and so forth, leading to a fall. Thus humans would retain a considerable amount of agency and responsibility for either avoiding or committing the frequent mistakes that the wheel describes. (185)

Dancourt exhibits a similar understanding of Fortune with regard to his characters as coincidence figures minimally in the fabric of the happenings at Mme Thibaut's boutique: clients arrive with a certain purpose, Mme Thibaut executes a plan to help them with this purpose, and then they leave, never to be mentioned again. In fact, her numerous triumphs far outweigh her singular failure in trusting Léandre, demonstrating that skill and a good record of success give her great odds overall. But because Fortune's wheel is an inert object destined to thoughtlessly repeat the cycle of success and failure, in other words, a self-perpetuating social system of "intricate coordinated group activity that ostensibly draws attention to potential merit but that actually displaces and even replaces it" (Lyons 186), Mme Thibaut is essentially destined to make a misstep at some point, which perhaps explains why at the onset of the play she is still not free from the burden of her boutique in spite of her famous industriousness. At the moment when she is about to reach her goal of marrying a rich man (at least in illusion), she becomes too confident in her business savvy and forgets to regulate her practices, allowing herself to fall for both La Ramée's ruse and Léandre's unfounded assurance. She is thus thrust back to the bottom of the wheel to start the process again, this time with an even greater understanding of her environment as a consolation.

Still, this topsy-turvy and highly mutable environment has its benefits: For every person who loses his or her wealth or prestige in the manner of a minute, another goes from rags to riches. Philip Koch notes how Dancourt consistently allows for social permeability in his theater, a realm wherein characters marry outside of their class and "everyone is in pursuit of money, the great equalizer" (221). In fact, Dancourt capitalizes upon his era's uncertainty of class distinctions (Curtis 14) in which the nobility waned in power and the bourgeoisie wielded their

newfound prosperity by buying prestigious titles and entertaining at influential parties.²⁶⁵ One particular question seems to have loomed in the collective mind of the fin-de-siècle: which took the superior position, bloodlines or wealth? As *une boutiquière roturière* with all her money tied up in negotiations, Mme Thibaut does not need to wrestle with this question concerning her own status, but she understands very well her generation's zeitgeist in which ambition and greed appear to rule.²⁶⁶ As she fights her way up from the bottom of the heap, she participates in this circus of follies as best she can, slowly gaining ground while making mistakes along the way.

Mme Thibaut's practices are therefore not always strictly legal but given the vicious world in which she works we are able to understand her motives and find her to be an overall endearing character. Dancourt leaves behind clues that provide his audience with the hope that Mme Thibaut will quit her criminal ways once she attains her financial freedom and will "sortir avec honneur" (4.9, p. 78). She likewise retains her unmarried status, which indicates refusal on the playwright's part to compromise his coquette's unfettered feminine agency in the face of tradition. In other words, were she to marry even a legitimately wealthy suitor, her long-desired freedom and sense of control might slip away under a domesticity governed by patriarchal logics. As this seems like an unworthy end to a so-called femme d'intrigues, perhaps Dancourt preferred to let her "sell" love to others rather than "buy" into it herself. In this way she dodges the entrapment of marriage and remains at large as a chooser of deals, a businesswoman who makes the calls but on a small, non-threatening scale. At the same time, he also hints at her

²⁶⁵ "*Les charges vénales*" were one of the main sources of income for the royal treasury as early as the sixteenth century: "Pour le bourgeois, c'était le moyen d'élever sa famille, d'office en office, des plus basses aux plus hautes strates de la société...[Entre] 1689 et 1715 seulement, la somme d'un demi-milliard de francs aurait été dépensée par la bourgeoisie dans l'acquisition des charges" (*Ibid.* 17). Let us not forget that Mme Thibaut participates in this plutocratic market!

²⁶⁶ She would have either qualified for the bottom rung of the bourgeoisie or the first rung of "le people" according to Curtis (14).

mischievous coquettishness living on through her apprentice Gabrillon who will take over the boutique once Mme Thibaut retires (4.11, p. 81). Is coquettishness thus a transferable and teachable trade? The answer to this question is perhaps best kept for the following chapter on acquired coquetry and the methods through which coquettes learn their tactics.

Conclusion

As characters who are greedy are typically opposed to the young heroes who choose love at all costs, one would expect the material coquettes to be the villainesses of their respective plays, or at best the unsympathetic targets of a comedy of character such as Harpagon in *L'Avare*. Once the circumstances of their thirst for money are explored, however, they emerge as the likeable stars whose underlying victimization outweighs their lack of total righteousness, thereby drawing upon the sympathy of the audience. It is their strategic subterfuge that makes them appealing characters because the audience understands how they have renegotiated the terms of their inferior position in society. Without being able to use money as a tool for exchange in the increasingly consumer-driven economy, the coquettes must devise their own currencies: firstly, their bodies, which function as a sort of “IOU” that represents an empty promise of repayment upon services being rendered, and secondly, their wit, which is used to extort money or defer payment. Because these intangible currencies can only be temporary solutions, the coquettes demonstrate the necessity of a more long-term plan that will erase all debts. Whether she is married like Flavie, a chaperoned widow like Cidalise, or an emancipated single woman like Mme Thibaut, the material coquette recognizes the limitations of her social status and realizes that direct access to money can offer the most viable route to a position of freedom in which she becomes the decider of her own fate (that is, unless like Flavie she prefers to let Fortune make the decision for her at the gambling table).

The villainy of the coquettes is likewise relativized by their authors in their juxtaposition to other morally ambiguous (if not outright depraved) characters who appear as equally or more debased. For instance, Flavie cons Docile under a religious guise while promising charity for the poor, and even wishes death upon all husbands and uncles in a manner that would be unpardonable were it not placed in the context of a comical song. Though her husband and uncle are consistently on the losing end of whatever extortion or disrespect she has in store for them, Flavio and Docile nonetheless emerge as the true villains of the play because they are finally seen to play the role of unjust punishers. Despite her varied accounts of their injustice found throughout the play, it is their harsh treatment of Flavie that best incites the audience to perceive her as a victim because it is not only witnessed firsthand but utterly final: In the isolation of the Italian hinterland, she will never again be given the opportunity to eke out a bit of happiness through gambling amongst the company of her friends. Her scheming is further attenuated by the similar strategies of the titular *pipeurs* themselves who cheat Flavie out of her conned money and who deserve death in the end. Their punishment is presumably less offensive to audience members because their motivations are not developed past the point of simple greed and they are thus not deserving of pity in the way that an underdog such as Flavie is, a woman trapped in an unhappy marriage with no control over her income.

Cidalise also faces two male authority figures (her uncle and her absent father) and yet it is rather her aunt Céphise who provides her the best foil through which Cidalise's reputation may be rehabilitated in the eyes of the audience. Coquetting is overtly condemned in the play by several characters but Cidalise avoids punishment for it by settling down with someone who pleases both her family and her own reevaluated desires as well. Céphise evidently did not heed the same advice after her marriage to Damis as she continues to seek out lovers. Beside the fact

that she is legally bound to a spouse, Céphise's coquetting appears much worse than Cidalise's because she hypocritically denounces coquetry in others while pretending to be virtuous herself. In this sense, the audience is nearly forced to appreciate the relative honesty of Cidalise's flirting because although she denies that it is in fact coquetry (since she is only a product of her urban surroundings in which everyone partakes in entertainment and socializing), she never denies her actions in the way a fake prude would to save face. Céphise is thus the most "masked" villain of the play, and one who goes on the attack against her niece (the victim) before receiving a fitting punishment from her nearly-cuckolded husband. What is ironic is that Céphise's motivations in trying to court Éraste are wholly amorous and worthy of any dramatic heroine (particularly if her love were ever to be returned), and yet Cidalise, who is more interested in financial reward and personal gain than any man's well-being, emerges as the protagonist whom the audience wishes to see succeed. Love thus fails to guarantee redemption or victory to a wicked heart, a truth demonstrated before by Molière with Arnolphe, but in contrast, Baron's play includes no love-struck, heroic rival to whom Céphise should logically lose her would-be lover since Cidalise is mostly indifferent to Éraste.²⁶⁷ In this regard, Cidalise embodies a new type of dramatic heroine who eschews the need for a tender heart in favor of a more pragmatic penchant for what is convenient, secure, and liberating.

Mme Thibaut, for her part, faces no real villains in the play but her reputation does nonetheless benefit from a comparison to her con artist double, La Ramée. Both characters engage in a scheme to marry a would-be rich partner (each other), but because La Ramée's disguise requires him to assume Cléante's identity and steal his money, he is presumably punished dearly upon his captain's return at the end. In contrast, Mme Thibaut invents her

²⁶⁷ Such as Horace and Britannicus, respectively, in the examples cited.

persona and only has to answer to the separate crime of reselling Dorante's dishes, which she easily escapes due to the clemency of the commissary. In light of the Law's soft-hearted dismissal of her transgression, the audience feels similarly obligated to forgive Mme Thibaut, particularly because she promises to restore balance to the system by paying back the money she stole. Between her immediate apology and promise of reparations that win over Le Commissaire, Mme Thibaut manages to transform her capture into a moment of triumph in which she emerges as the victim of her environment and even gains sympathy for having been driven to committing petty crimes in a world that does not favor honest working women.

Depending on their specific situations, the coquettes in this chapter look for varying degrees of stability in their common goal. On the extremes are Flavie and Mme Thibaut, with the former looking for eternal excitement (outside of infidelity) in the unknown realm of chance, and the latter desiring an end to all risky business and speculative living from the onset of the play. In between we find Cidalise, the young woman who enjoys the new and ever-changing entertainments of Parisian life but who ultimately sees the hollowness behind her insatiable desires and realizes the dangers associated with leading even a seemingly dissolute lifestyle. She is thus incited to choose the constancy of marriage after redefining her priorities. In this sense, Mme Thibaut and Cidalise both appear to eschew coquettish lifestyles in the end, and yet this is not entirely accurate: Mme Thibaut never succeeds in gaining her desired wealth and thus presumably continues to coordinate "intrigues" and seduce rich men, and Cidalise chooses Éraste with the assurance that she will be able to control her estate while being married to a man she has easily manipulated throughout the play. They both seek positions in which they are no longer in danger of losing all their possessions, whereas Flavie needs money precisely for stimulating financial risk and pursuing the ephemeral tastes of high society; for her, the sensation of reaching

for a goal is more satisfying than the goal of winning itself. By inherently lacking a more steadfast strategy to win satisfaction, Flavie finishes by being the only truly punished coquette of the chapter, as if to suggest that it was not coquetry alone that caused her ruin but rather a poorly implemented plan (if not squandered talent). Money is thus not the root of all evil but a conduit to a better life—if the coquette can attain it.

Though the coquettes of this chapter differ greatly from one another within the given contexts of their respective plays, their authors use these character types in similar fashion for treating various economic questions. Coquetry becomes a figure for commerce in which transactions are concluded, and most commonly by way of precarious gambling, threats, and empty promises. The plays examine constant exchange (of currency, of promises, of desires) as a tactic for evading subjection or constraint, which speaks to the characteristic fickleness and resourcefulness typically displayed by coquettes. In this light, these plays explore the performativity both of coquetry and commerce in which honest dealings are rarely the most profitable venture. Nevertheless, their authors attempt to rationalize coquettish behavior (in market-driven terms) and valorize characters' desire for financial and social freedom. They likewise use financial themes to highlight female characters' risk-reward calculations in social and amorous interactions, adding an economic (and thus typically masculine) dimension to what would normally be considered as simple feminine affairs of the heart. The materialistic coquettes are thus complex theatrical figures whose moral and social transgressions are meant to entertain audiences while subtly justifying their own ambitious motivations, living as mis-fortunate women in a material world.

CHAPTER 4: ACQUIRED COQUETRY

Introduction

GIRARD

Reparlons de Lisette et reprenons querelle :
Se peut-il qu'ayant pris tant d'empire sur elle,
Par droit de voisinage et droit de parenté,
Au lieu de l'assagir par votre autorité,
Vous travailliez encore à la rendre coquette ?

LA VEUVE

Langage de Paris ; c'est la rendre parfaite.

GIRARD

Belle perfection ! hélas ! bien mal lui prit,
Quand vous vîtes ici lui raffiner l'esprit,
Et lui rendre le cœur plus faux et plus superbe.

LA VEUVE

A neuf ans, elle était déjà coquette en herbe ;
Je n'ai fait que tourner son naturel en bien,
Afin que sa beauté ne tournât pas à rien,
Qu'elle lui profitât par un bon mariage.
Je veux que Lisette ait le moyen d'être sage.
Elle a pour la fortune un naturel exquis,
J'ai joint à ses talents tout ce que j'ai d'acquis.

--Charles Dufresny, *La Coquette de village ou le Lot supposé*

The question of “nature versus nurture” plays a central role in the examination of coquetry throughout this dissertation. Authors generally treat coquettishness as either women’s essential character or as the feminine *zeitgeist* of their early modern society. In some cases, as La Veuve’s defense above shows, both nature and training play a role in the coquette’s creation. Some authors give their protagonists a backstory that presents a clearer view of the coquettes’

motivations and sentiments, which in turn help justify their coquetry. These justifications include the desire for freedom (either the freedom to marry whom they wish, the freedom to remain single and non-committal, or the freedom to lead a life of leisure, however they see fit), the need for protection from love and heartbreak, and the pleasure of soliciting attention and power over admirers. I have examined how these rationalizations fit into the plot and point to an apology for otherwise powerless women who choose to adapt to their oppressive surroundings by using cunning and beauty to get what they want. The coquettes' methods are generally far from morally correct. Yet, the audience is led to forgive them and even admire their triumph over socially-imposed restrictions. The spectator understands that these characters develop coquettish practices to better navigate their social circumstances.

In other plays, dramatists neglect such environmental justifications of coquetry, but rather focus on the ridiculousness of the coquette's nominal vice. These coquettes appear repugnant, even maniacal, and fail to win the spectator's approval. Coquetry, in these plays, is an innate flaw, too ingrained to be curable and too essential to be forgivable. Such were the cases of the aging coquettes in the second chapter.

Although the nature-versus-nurture question is implicit in all coquette plays, it comes to the forefront in turn-of-the-century plots. Works debuting in the 1690s-1710s by playwrights including Dancourt and Dufresny more deliberately examine the rationale behind coquetry. In Dancourt's *L'Été des coquettes* (1690), three women discover that they have all been romanced by the same man and they agree to ensnare their mutual suitor in a trap in spite of their rivalry. In the same author's *La Parisienne* (1691), Angélique loves Éraste but upon her exit from the convent she discovers that he has left for the army and she has no dowry, leaving her vulnerable to marriage with Éraste's sickly father. Out of fear, she quickly finds two younger men to

entertain whom she must then chase off after Éraсте's sudden return. In Dufresny's *La Coquette de village ou le Lot supposé* (1715), a Parisian widow deliberately raises Lisette to be coquettish. Lisette applies her upbringing for seeking a rich husband, but her least wealthy suitor Girard dupes her into marrying him with a fake lottery ploy. His ruse causes her to renounce coquetry and accept that her inclination was for him all along.

The plays do not stage the "making of a coquette." Rather, as in most classical comedy, the exposition establishes the coquette's vice as being present before the first events seen on stage.²⁶⁸ We learn that the coquettes have acquired their follies through personal experience or learned it from the instruction of a teacher-figure, and the plays recount and analyze their practice on the stage. Moreover, authors demonstrate that coquetry is acquired rather than innate by depicting it as ephemeral: Young coquettes ultimately modify their approaches to courtship by reverting to pre-coquettish selves or momentarily dropping their coquettish façade before each play's end. These plays dramatize the application of coquettish educations and the "undoing" of the coquette, analyzing their characters' formations rather than issuing moral castigation.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ François Moureau makes an important distinction between monomaniacs, those found in comedies of character who interpret their intimate selves as being attacked by their more reasonable entourage, and less extravagant characters found in comedies of manners who demonstrate vicious behaviors but do not necessarily live by them (363). As such, none of the featured coquettes in this group should be classified as monomaniacs in that they are not victims of their own psychological constitution but rather of fashionable vices and unfortunate affairs of the heart. For more see *Dufresny, auteur dramatique*.

²⁶⁹ The lack of finger-wagging at the coquettes is unsurprising to those who know the libertine reputation of the fin-de-siècle period. The dramatic scene had never been more permissive or cynical in its staging of scoundrels that indulged the public's taste for debauchery (Blanc *F.C. Dancourt* 147). Audiences likely appreciated the mischievous liberality of comedy from approximately 1685 to 1723 as a contrast to the famine, war, and uncertainty that marked these decades between the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the end of the Regency, respectively.

Despite governmental measures to censor theater in these decades, playwrights still succeeded in staging risqué comedies. Closer to the end of his reign Louis XIV made more of an effort to both appear virtuous himself and to control vice in his subjects in a rather sudden change that Philip F. Riley calls the king's "lust for virtue" (1). Among his more prominent targets was the theater, an art form that he had once enthusiastically supported but rarely attended after 1685 (154). In 1697 he banished the racy Italian actors from France and by 1701 the king's police were censoring all plays to be staged in Paris (159). Riley notes the influence of the king's mistress and wife, Mme de Maintenon, whose strong religious faith likely bolstered Louis's decisions, but primarily argues that the

This analysis of coquetry as a socially acquired practice intersects with several contemporary dramatic and cultural developments, including the emergence of satire in theater, a burgeoning discourse on girls' education, and the increasing prominence of Paris. Rather than display and target specific compulsions in the style of Molière, the playwrights moved toward a broader depiction of society's mores in general, such as the obsession with fashions and the rising order of bourgeois financiers (Blanc *F.C. Dancourt* 146). The coquette plays greatly participated in this larger shift toward contemporary satire: By exploiting the humorous and titillating aspects of the flirtatious character type, authors solicited a deeper analysis of the social structures that encouraged women to act in coquettish ways.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the question of a female's capacity to learn was explored more seriously by educators beginning in the late seventeenth century, around the time that these plays were composed.²⁷⁰ Most curricula supported teaching basic math, reading, and composition skills to girls for their future roles as wives and mothers. In his 1687 treaty *De l'éducation des filles*, François Fénelon made a revolutionary push for broader female education; yet he still believed that most anything beyond domestic knowledge would only nourish a young girl's vanity and thus make her discontent with her given lifestyle (Sonnet 15). At the same time, he worried about the effects of denying women the same opportunities as men, with one of the

monarch's actions were the product of his upbringing as well as his new plan to craft a better image for himself: "The cumulative effect, then, of early moral training and two decades of adultery was a simple faith heavily laced with a superficial piety and a conscience that recognized the necessity of performing specific acts of worship in order to remain within the pale of Catholicism" (97).

²⁷⁰ According to Martine Sonnet, the first genuine attempt to examine female education was by ecclesiastical historian Claude Fleury in 1686 with his *Traité du choix et de la méthode des études* in which he devotes an entire chapter to the studies best designated for women. She suggests that Fleury was conscious of his audacity and thus attempted to draft a logical curriculum that could only serve girls better in their daily lives, including religion, reading, light writing assignments, practical mathematics, basic medicinal practices, and a bit of jurisprudence in the event they were ever widowed (15).

largest risks being the development of coquettish behaviors. Fénelon included a chapter entitled “La vanité de la beauté et des ajustements” in which he makes this remark:

Mais ne craignez rien tant que la vanité dans les filles. Elles naissent avec un désir violent de plaire: les chemins qui conduisent les hommes à l'autorité et à la gloire leur étant fermés, elles tâchent de se dédommager par les agréments de l'esprit et du corps: de là vient leur conversation douce et insinuante; de là vient qu'elles aspirent tant à la beauté et à toutes les grâces extérieures, et qu'elles sont si passionnées pour les ajustements; une coiffe, un bout de ruban, une boucle de cheveux plus haut ou plus bas, le choix d'une couleur, ce sont pour elles autant d'affaires importantes. (102-103)

While this passage does not outright resort to using the term “coquetry,” it nevertheless evokes a coquette’s characteristic vanity, her eagerness to please, and her wit. It also draws parallels to the coquettes that I examine in that Fénelon describes their tactics as a way of making a path for themselves upon facing some sort of prohibition, which in all three cases is their natural inclination for certain men. Nevertheless, while Fénelon may believe that societal obstacles encourage an already nascent coquetry in girls given that their pleasing appearances become their only apparent key to advantageous social opportunities, Dancourt and Dufresny demonstrate their coquettes’ personalities to be solely social constructs.²⁷¹

As the national seat of social interaction and culture, Paris plays a central role in forming the coquettish experience.²⁷² *L'Été des coquettes* and *La Parisienne* take place within the city’s walls where the coquette’s environment appears to directly influence her behavior. In these plays, Paris serves as the symbolic “school for” coquetry since its unique socio-economic space has the ability to provide irresistible opportunities to flirt, for both the protagonists and their

²⁷¹ Much like the conservative viewpoint observed in Dufresny’s text, Fénelon recognizes the vicious threat that coquetry presents to established patriarchal structures and wishes to extinguish it, whereas Dancourt prefers to let coquetry’s usefulness run its course as his heroines finally satisfy their desires.

²⁷² Judging from his entire oeuvre, Dancourt’s favorite region for the setting of his plays was indeed Paris and its neighboring villages, which Blanc believes strategically gave his theater “un accent de vérité” amidst the eccentric characters and dialogue (*F.C. Dancourt* 177).

desired male partners. In *La Coquette de village*, a provincial village becomes a figurative “charter school” of the capital after a Parisian lady decides to instill her knowledge of coquetry in a local farm girl. Because the girl adeptly imitates this model, we learn that coquetry can be successfully transmitted outside of Paris in the sense that, as an implement of social mobility, it troubles both the affective and social orders in the milieu where it is replicated.

Thus, the coquettes of this genre have developed their behaviors through their interaction with their immediate space and with other people. As André Blanc remarks, Dancourt “semble beaucoup moins persuadé de la liberté pratique de l’homme: dans son théâtre, l’individu est d’abord une émanation du groupe socio-familial auquel il appartient... La société n’est plus seulement un mode accidentel d’existence, elle pénètre la nature de l’homme” (*F.C. Dancourt* 237).²⁷³ In other words, for Dancourt people cannot escape their upbringing and environment, and those of similar backgrounds should typically begin to resemble one another as their innate personal characteristics are effaced by jointly-learned behaviors. Dancourt turns his dramaturgical focus away from correcting vices through ridiculous depictions in favor of simply analyzing society by showing how social structures shape behavior. In eschewing a more traditional didactic function for his theater, he is helping to remove the blame from his comic heroines (whose faults are not to be imitated nor denounced) while directing his criticism more heavily toward the collective social machinery that forms them. François Moureau notes that Dufresny demonstrates similar concern for acquired conduct in that he mainly analyses conflicts of social origin (337). Each young woman in this chapter follows a similar trajectory in which she begins (at an unobserved but referenced moment) as a faithful non-coquette, then becomes perverted by external events based on her gender and social status. The texts portray these

²⁷³ This is in contrast to a playwright such as Molière, who demonstrated more often that human nature expresses itself through individuals rather than society’s collective practices.

women as more confused than amoral: Had they not been led down a path of coquetry by the inherent inconstancy of their environment, they would have chosen one lover. Thus, their comparable social experiences produce nearly identical results in a funneling effect.²⁷⁴

Though this chapter's main characters encompass some of the traits of other coquettes that I examine, its cohesion derives from what I believe to be a more deliberate attempt by authors to show that coquetry is an acquired technique and not simply a physiological response that women cannot control.

Women for All Seasons: Summer School in Session in Dancourt's *L'Été des coquettes* (1690)

L'Été des coquettes belongs to a series of light-hearted comedies of the fin-de-règne period known then (as it is often now) as “La Dancourade” in recognition of the playwright's revitalization of comic theater.²⁷⁵ After several years of languishing theater attendance following the death of Molière, Dancourt pioneered a method for drawing in audiences during the summer off-season: By creating a short, simple play to follow a more famous tragedy or five-act comedy, he could attract spectators who had grown tired of the longstanding repertory of the Comédie-Française and lift their spirits just before they exited the theater (Blanc *La Maison de Campagne*

²⁷⁴ The coquettes of this chapter do differ from one another in some fundamental ways, however. Dufresny's Lisette sets her sights on the most advantageous condition she can find within her small village in accordance with La Veuve's teachings. The coquettish Angéliques, on the other hand, are not motivated by ambition or financial gain but by uneasiness with their social situations, which is in stark contrast to the rest of Dancourt's oeuvre as Blanc notes (*F.C. Dancourt* 230). The scholar explains that money often makes even dramatically unnecessary appearances in the subplots of Dancourt's plays to better capture the saturated existence of greed during the fin-de-siècle period, and yet a small fraction of his surviving plays do manage to avoid this fate, with the first two of these (chronologically speaking) being *L'Été des coquettes* (1690) and *La Parisienne* (1691)! I interpret this coincidence, given that they were his first treatments of coquettish characters, as a means for Dancourt to focus on the reemerging interest in coquettes on stage without muddying their motivations through the introduction of a financial slant as he does in *La Femme d'intrigues* in 1692. It could further be said that the titular character of the latter play, Mme Thibaut, is a different genre of coquette given her contrasting label.

²⁷⁵ Blanc further discusses “La Dancourade” (also called “les dancourades”) in his introduction to *La Maison de Campagne* (ix-xxviii). *La Parisienne*, another one-act play by Dancourt, also belongs to La Dancourade among the works of my corpus. In contrast, his *Femme d'intrigues* (1692) was a grander attempt at a stand-alone, five-act comedy that was not performed on the heels of any primary representation.

xix). These short plays contained provocative elements to pique the Parisian society's attention and reflected contemporary settings or fads to give the comic theater a current satirical edge (xxii).²⁷⁶

L'Été des coquettes represents a perfect example of this alluring freshness. Indeed, the presence of the word "coquettes" in the title itself denotes stylishness and a preoccupation with amusement. Moreover, Dancourt inserts the play's current year in the dialogue, when Angélique reads the date of a letter.²⁷⁷ This deliberate dating of the play is not common for the era because authors hoped to have their works represented after their debuts. But here, Dancourt is clearly more interested in creating a play that lives in the moment than writing for posterity.²⁷⁸ The playwright further embeds his work in current affairs by setting it in the summertime (when it was performed in July) and referencing the ongoing Nine Years War (1688-97), a major conflict between France and the majority of the western European powers. The war plays an important role in the main plot as it siphons all the handsome soldiers off to Holland, leaving behind in Paris only men who are too old, too delicate, or too cowardly to fight.

In this context, three women unknowingly pursue the same man, Clitandre, who pretends to be a soldier in order to win affection and to have a legitimate excuse to part ways and float between lovers. In his absence, the lead character, Angélique, deals with boredom and loneliness

²⁷⁶ Blanc notes that *La Dancourade* was audacious but not to the level of the Théâtre italien, the latter of which could dabble in the scatological and the pornographic. The two branches of comedy contained most of the same characters but in Dancourt's theater the servants never act as protagonists but rather foils to other roles who more principally constitute the mores of the society he wished to illustrate: "...jeunes premiers peu scrupuleux, parfois cyniques, amoureuses lucides, souvent assez libres, jeunes adolescentes séduisantes et spirituelles, mais singulièrement délurées, paysans goguenards...tout une faune, assurément plus pittoresque que vertueuse" (*La Maison de Campagne* xxiv).

²⁷⁷ "Fait à Paris, en mon bureau, l'an de grâce 1690, et du bail courant le troisième" (1.2, p. 69).

²⁷⁸ Indeed, *L'Été des coquettes* was a financial success for Dancourt but in reality even the best off-season plays brought in very little money. It saw only ten more immediate performances after its debut, finding a greater legacy during its nearly two hundred representations before the end of the Ancien Régime (*F.C. Dancourt* 44).

by leading on undesirable men who ask for her heart, and she soon convinces her friend Cidalise to do the same. Upon the discovery that they are rivals for the same man's affections, Cidalise feels triumphant because Clitandre had left Angélique sooner than herself, but then she too discovers how he subsequently left her for the company of La Comtesse. The coquettes vow revenge against Clitandre and expose his faithlessness before allowing the possessive Comtesse to claim the trickster, at which point they enjoy their triumph and the play ends happily.

Though all three women are interesting in their own way for their different approaches to coquetry, Angélique is the central character and bears the most discussion.²⁷⁹ Her name alone suggests this prime role because it was one of Dancourt's most used for his female leads.²⁸⁰ Of particular note is how Dancourt inextricably links all of his Angéliques with the city of Paris and its neighboring towns. As Philip Koch notes, Dancourt's young heroines always have different names in plays that take place anywhere else (213) and thus the author firmly associates Angélique with an urban lifestyle. I argue that Dancourt uses her character to exemplify a woman who thrives on fast-paced and frequent interactions, and Paris serves as the perfect environment to display her intelligence at handling a variety of encounters. Though she may not find success at every turn (as we will see in both *L'Été des coquettes* and *La Parisienne*), her strength lies in learning from her mistakes (and the tricks of others) and subsequently adopting a

²⁷⁹ I will indirectly discuss the second coquette, Cidalise, but she mostly serves as a foil to Angélique. The last coquette, La Comtesse de Martin-Sec, brings little if anything new to the category of aging coquettes discussed in Chapter 2 and so I will largely gloss over her small contribution to the play's worth.

²⁸⁰ In fact, Angélique was by and large the most reused name of Dancourt's entire repertory, having been used twenty-five times out of the surviving fifty-two plays of his (Koch 211). Though Dancourt does tend to typify his characters with respect to their place in society as discussed in the introduction, he also gives them greater nuances that help to individualize them (Blanc *F.C. Dancourt* 238). For instance, one Angélique will be decidedly less coquettish or naïve than another. Blanc refers to *L'Été des coquettes* and *La Parisienne* as "comédies de rassemblement" (*F.C. Dancourt* 151) to differentiate them from the more narrowly focused comedies of character, as well as from broader, less personal procession comedies in which a one-way parade of characters passes on stage and avoids eliciting any attachment from the audience.

more successful strategy than before. This conspicuous process of correction in the plot helps prove that she is not innately gifted but rather an apt observer of her bustling social surroundings. As such, Paris acts as a training ground wherein young people may gain experience at a rapid pace given the many social opportunities it presents. In turn, they may develop typically coquettish behaviors (such as infidelity and adaptability) because numerous options and constant stimulation only encourage further longing for novelty in everyday life, and especially when young men and women face an obstacle to their initial desires. In *L'Été des coquettes*, this insatiable thirst for social entertainment plays out when the war suddenly deprives the women of their lover and drives them to seek alternatives to stable forms of love.²⁸¹

The name “Angélique” in Dancourt’s oeuvre has another common significance: She always represents a young unmarried woman who faces opposition in love from a parental figure, but what separates her from traditional ingénues is that she solves her own problems (Koch 215).²⁸² Angélique always leads the stratagems used to overcome her obstacles (as opposed to letting her servant fix the issue for her), and she consistently succeeds thanks to her calculating acumen.²⁸³ The Angélique of *L'Été des coquettes* is no exception as she exercises

²⁸¹ Dancourt does not treat the unique economic situation of Paris in either of the plays of this chapter as he typically does: These Angéliques do not speak of any desire to improve their financial or social status, only their goals to satisfy their amorous inclinations. With the question of wealth being purposefully omitted, I argue that Dancourt focuses on Paris’s bustling atmosphere to highlight coquetry’s newfound place in the social fabric.

²⁸² The only instance in which I wholly disagree with Koch’s characterization of Angélique is his stance on her uninterest in love: “Instead of moderate affection, this Angélique displays total indifference toward the men in her life” (220). As we will see, Angélique’s inescapable attachment to Clitandre will betray her outward apathy several times through the play, but it is true that these moments are easily missed if the reader does not pick up on cues that a spectator could easily notice while watching an actress play the role faithfully.

²⁸³ Koch notes that many of Dancourt’s comedies rely on the help of clever servants to overcome obstacles placed in the way of the leading young couple, and thus Angélique does not appear in them because her type is somewhat “fated” to act on her own account. For him, she must become “the driving force of the play, in a sense, its principal grotesque, as she does in *La Folle Enchère* (1690), *L'Été des coquettes* (1690) and *La Parisienne* (1691)” (217-8). I find Koch’s attention to these three “early exceptions” (218) to the typical Dancourt scheme to be telling of the playwright’s association of coquetry with a liberating sense of agency.

exemplary agency several times throughout the play. In the opening scenes, she reveals how she will get out of being forced by her mother to marry an (unseen) elderly cousin:

Lisette
Quoi! vous l'épouserez?

Angélique
Nullement.

Lisette
Et madame votre mère ?

Angélique
Je serai toujours complaisante et soumise à ses volontés, je me ferai un devoir de lui obéir aveuglément ; mais je prendrai si bien mes mesures que monsieur mon cousin ne voudra point de moi.

Lisette
Il n'y a rien de mieux imaginé. (1.1, p. 64)

Here we learn a couple of interesting pieces of information: One, that Angélique has circumvented the typical problem of an oppressive parent by cleverly feigning obedience while sabotaging in secret; and two, that Lisette was not a part of the strategizing process. Already, Dancourt sets the stage for Angélique to find remedies to her own problems even when she is not necessarily in a position of relative power.

Her first observed display of agency occurs during the meeting with the Abbé Cheurpied.²⁸⁴ Dancourt frames the religious man to be highly unappealing: He is cowardly (“il n’a pris le petit collet que pour ne point marcher à l’arrière-ban” 1.8, p. 84), he is coquettishly vain (“avant qu’il ait consulté son petit miroir de poche, mordu des lèvres, arrange les boucles de

²⁸⁴ Blanc remarks that this spelling of the Abbé’s name is in every surviving edition and yet it is nonsensical. Instead, he asserts it should read as “Chevr(e)piéd. Ce nom de satire prend alors toute sa saveur” (*F.C. Dancourt* 191). By using a name that alludes to a hoven, lubricious beast, Dancourt is preemptively framing the Abbé’s offensiveness and rendering his undoing by Angélique all the more acceptable to the audience. Perhaps more specifically, his name evokes the devil’s goat feet and even better positions the “angelic” heroine to banish him from her home.

sa perruque, et pris l'avis de tous ses laquais sur sa parure, il en a pour un bon quart-d'heure sur l'escalier" 1.8, p. 85), and he is too old to be courting a young woman ("Jeune, madame ? Celui-ci a cinquante bonnes années..." 1.8, p. 85).²⁸⁵ Angélique normally tolerates his company for lack of better entertainment but because Cidalise fears that he will recognize her as his brother's ward, Angélique agrees to drive him away without a specific plan of attack in mind. But ideas come easily to this ingenious coquette: She pretends that the Abbé's favorite fragrance, "la poudre de Chypre," gives her "des vapeurs" (1.9, p. 89) that require he leave her presence at once.²⁸⁶ Upon his departure, Angélique and Lisette discuss the beauty of her ruse:

Lisette

Ah! ah! et les vapeurs sont-elles passées ?

Angélique

Les vapeurs ! Ah ! que tu es bonne ! Est-ce que je suis sujette aux vapeurs, et m'en as-tu jamais vu ?

Lisette

Quoi ! la poudre de Chypre ?

Angélique

Il fallait se débarrasser de cet importun. L'idée des vapeurs m'est venue, je m'en suis servie.

Lisette

²⁸⁵ In truth, at the moment Cheurpied appears in Angélique's house he is no longer dressed as an abbé but as a soldier because he thinks that his new regalia will impress her more. Lisette comments on the Abbé's chameleon-like unctuousness: "Monsieur l'Abbé dans cet équipage n'a l'air ni d'un bénéficié, ni d'un homme d'épée, et il n'y a personne qui ne le prenne pour un animal amphibie" (1.9, p. 87). This amphibious nature recalls La Bruyère's highly critical portrait of the ambitious courtisan added in the 1689 edition of his *Caractères*: "L'on remarque dans les cours des hommes avides qui se revêtent de toutes les conditions pour en avoir les avantages : gouvernement, charge, bénéfice, tout leur convient ; ils se sont si bien ajustés, que par leur état ils deviennent capables de toutes les grâces; ils sont amphibies, ils vivent de l'Eglise et de l'épée, et ils auront le secret d'y joindre la robe" ("De la cour," VIII, p. 104). The resemblance is too close to ignore, and Dancourt continues in his playful comparison by having his abbé ironically declare, "Une personne de mon caractère! Ah! madame, je n'ai point de caractère" (1.9, p. 88). In this sense, Dancourt further implants his work within the latest cultural events of his primary audience and thus adds to the zest of his comedy.

²⁸⁶ According to most versions of Greek and Roman mythology, the island of Chypre (or Cyprus) is the principal abode of Aphrodite/Venus, the goddess of love, beauty, and procreation. Angélique's false claim that the island's fragrance makes her sick perhaps reinforces her current distaste with love (and the abbé's lack of erotic appeal).

La jolie chose que l'esprit d'une femme ! Par ma foi ! J'ai si bien cru vos vapeurs véritables, qu'il a pensé m'en prendre par compagnie ! (1.10, p. 91)

Spectators again witness Angélique's cleverness and Lisette's admiration that firmly establish the coquette's control over her environment. Further, in this example, Angélique demonstrates her capacity for improvisation, a crucial talent for adapting to her surroundings. Moreover, her improvisation manipulates stereotypes of femininity: Angélique begins the scene on the defensive against the aggressive Abbé and finishes by harnessing the power of her seemingly inferior femininity in the form of "vapors," a form of hysteria attributed to women whose mental stability was questioned.²⁸⁷ In this sense, Angélique manipulates a negative stereotype about women to avoid victimization and to get her own way.²⁸⁸

Angélique's final display of creative agency comes at the end of the play after all three coquettes have discovered Clitandre's infidelity. As he is about to enter her house, Angélique

²⁸⁷ No French medical texts on vapors are known to exist before the mid-eighteenth century, the earliest being published in 1756, twenty-eight years after the death of its author, Pierre Hunauld, in 1728. Although it is unknown at what point in his career he wrote his *Dissertation sur les vapeurs et les pertes de sang*, the term "vapors" had been in documented use since the early seventeenth century and was likely borrowed from Antiquity after having lost favor centuries before. Symptoms included sudden tears, headaches, fainting, and shaking and were typically considered a mixture of hypochondria and true affliction. While the illness became specifically attributed to the uterus by the end of the eighteenth century, for Hunauld it was located throughout the body and could affect both men and women even if he considered it an essentially feminine disorder. For more information, see Arnould.

Interestingly enough, we find a second reference to vapors in the play at the end of this chapter, Dufresny's *La Coquette de village ou le Lot supposé*. When the coquettish Lisette tells Le Baron, the man she has been seducing, that she no longer loves him, he responds as follows: "Sans doute il vous est survenu, / Quelque vapeur qui trouble et bon sens et mémoire. / Car enfin, sans cela, comment pourrais-je croire, / Qu'après l'ardent amour que vous m'avez montré?" (2.7, p. 243). In other words, Le Baron cannot fathom that a woman of her lowly condition could not love him, that she could be so clever as to have fooled him, or that she could be capable of knowing her own heart better than a man, and so he immediately jumps to the conclusion that there is something biologically wrong with her feminine constitution. Here, vapors function as a patriarchal tool of female oppression whereas under Dancourt's pen the affliction empowers his coquette.

²⁸⁸ Coquetry, as a figurative corollary of vapors, appears to be fully transferable if not contagious in that a woman who observes coquetry firsthand nearly acquires it through vicarious learning. More specifically, Lisette jokes about mirroring her mistress's condition even though she truly suffers no physiological symptoms. The plurality of coquetry suggested in the title of the play thus situates itself within a social cause rather than a biological one as we witness the potential multiplying effect before our eyes.

bids M Patin, a suitor she entertains solely for his largesse, to hide so that she may adeptly deal with the cheating Clitandre on her own terms:

Entrez, monsieur Patin, vous aurez votre part de la comédie. Ah ! fourbe, fourbe ! tu m'as trompée ; tu te livres bien heureusement à la vengeance que j'en veux prendre. (1.16, p. 103)

With her invitation to “la comédie,” Angélique has fashioned herself to be a playwright who pulls all the strings and directs the fates of the other characters. She subsequently succeeds in embarrassing Clitandre during this apogee of her authority before commanding everyone to end their mutual grudges: “Allons nous mettre à table: nos différends s’y termineront mieux qu’ici, et nous irons tous ensemble souper ce soir chez monsieur Patin” (1.20, p. 110). The play seemingly resolves all the issues at hand and finishes with a celebratory meal as per common comic tradition. Angélique’s continued ingenuity and activeness have demonstrated her understanding of how to survive and even flourish using a coquettish strategy in the new social battleground that is wartime Paris in summer.

Moreover, Angélique’s status as a self-directing protagonist allows Dancourt to present coquetry as a socially adaptive behavior in that we witness her capacity to learn from her initial mistake of trusting the deceitful Clitandre. Dancourt constructs his play in such a way that we do not learn of the young woman’s difficult past with love until nearly the end when she vows revenge against the “fourbe,” as cited above. For this reason, it is helpful to return toward the beginning of the play and rely on the text to reconstruct Angélique’s mentality as it becomes articulated across the comedy. This step backwards will also permit us to more clearly trace her coquetry back to a social cause and to catch glimpses of her unaffected character.

As we saw in the first scene, Angélique has no desire to marry her cousin; however, her distaste for marriage runs deeper than this specific partner. In fact, she confides her fears in

Lisette: “Je ne regarde le mariage qu’avec frayeur; ce que j’en entends dire me fait frémir: c’est un engagement que mille personnes se repentent d’avoir pris, et dont aucune n’est satisfaite. Il n’est point de femmes qui s’en louent, et les plus modestes croient beaucoup faire de ne pas s’en plaindre” (1.1, p. 64). Lisette reminds her mistress that she has not always been “dans ce goût-là” (1.1, p. 65) to which Angélique agrees, saying that she might have married Clitandre had he not been called off to war. At this point Lisette launches an uncomfortable inquisition:

Lisette

Mais vous l’aimez ?

Angélique

Je ne sais. Il ne m’ennuie pas tant qu’un autre : je lui trouve plus d’esprit, des manières plus tendres et plus insinuantes, la conversation plus enjouée, le cœur mieux fait...

Lisette

Vous aviez du plaisir à le voir ?

Angélique

Oui.

Lisette

Vous receviez ses lettres avec joie ?

Angélique

Oui.

Lisette

Son absence vous fait peine ?

Angélique

D’accord.

Lisette

Les dangers où il peut être exposé vous causent de l’inquiétude ?

Angélique

Beaucoup, je te l’avoue.

Lisette

Et vous ne savez si vous l’aimez ?

Angélique

Non ; il me semble que je n'aime personne. (1.1, pp. 65-66)

The disconnect between Angélique's words and her feelings is comical, but her curt responses and vocabulary of doubt suggest inner confusion. Angélique is unsure of her heart and has difficulty expressing it. She clearly does not like to appear weak before anyone, which is perhaps why she overcompensates for her visible uncertainty by declaring her pragmatic interest in controlling men:

Non, de bonne foi, je n'aime personne ; mais je suis ravie d'être aimée : c'est ma folie ; j'en demeure d'accord... Cependant je ne suis point coquette, et tout ce que je fais n'est que simple curiosité... je me plais à connaître les différents effets que l'esprit et la beauté peuvent produire dans les cœurs. (1.1, pp. 66-7)²⁸⁹

In this regard, Angélique describes herself as a sort of scientist who objectively experiments with the hearts of those who court her.²⁹⁰ This posture in turn helps clarify to others that she supplies no emotional investment when receiving the wagered hearts of men and thus she runs no risk in entering the game of love as they do.

Angélique and Cidalise debate the ethics of leading men on and flattering their lack of talent or charm, and their resulting justification places the blame on their environment. For one, we saw how Angélique fears marriage due to societal evidence of unhappy marital arrangements,

²⁸⁹ Other than the title, this is the only instance in the play where Dancourt uses the term "coquette" and its evocation is decidedly negative. In fact, Angélique fights the label even before it is suggested, implying that she already feels insecure and defensive. She is treading a difficult line in that she wants to appear strong and manipulative but without pushing her agenda to the point of it being labeled coquetry. Unlike Villedieu's Elvire who ultimately accepts the title of "coquette," Angélique dislikes her potential association with the term because she is not a coquette at heart but rather a coquettish-acting product of her environment.

²⁹⁰ Angélique's quasi-scientific mission takes on an even larger social objective as she believes herself to be civilizing Paris' least-eligible bachelors: "J'y trouve une espèce de mérite même : on polit un homme de robe, on apprend à vivre à un abbé, on met un jeune homme dans le monde..." (1.1, p. 68). Blanc remarks how it is usually the role of the young male lead to "elevate" the ingénue to his level since he almost always comes from a superior social condition: "...c'est à lui que revient la charge d'élever, de 'décrasser' l'ingénue" (*F.C. Dancourt* 198). Dancourt's civilizing ingénue thus represents an exceptional case who appropriates this commonplace for herself, as we see during the description of one of Angélique's charity cases: "César-Alexandre Patin est un financier fort bon à décrasser, madame" (1.2, p. 69).

and how she has confused feelings for an absent Clitandre and accordingly takes out her discomfort on his male counterparts in Paris. As Angélique states, she feels that they are merely adapting to the harsh times in which they live: “Ne suis-je pas heureuse de savoir me divertir de toutes sortes d’originaux?...Il est bon de s’accommoder aux temps et aux situations où l’on se trouve” (1.1, p. 67).²⁹¹ She couches her daily struggle to stay entertained in terms that liken it to the dangers faced by men at war: “Tant que durera la guerre, si l’on ne s’humanisait un peu, on mourrait d’ennui tout l’été...Il faut se faire une occupation dans la vie” (1.1, p. 68). For the women abandoned in Paris, the frontlines of the war are located within the city walls where they battle their political climate (and each other) to stay socially relevant, which in their eyes means remaining worthy of (male) attention.²⁹²

By describing their behaviors as an amusing pastime for the dull summer months, the play’s characters justify coquetry as a response to their social environment. Dancourt reinforces the idea that coquetry is a learned response rather than an inherent characteristic in the snippets of dialogue that reveal Angélique’s backstory. In other words, Angélique’s cunning, theatrical agency, and fluent manipulation of men do not constitute an essential character trait but a set of “tactics” as defined by Michel de Certeau’s theory in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Here, Angélique acts as a de Certeauian “consumer” in her attempts to exercise control over the

²⁹¹ Angélique and Cidalise also reason that if the men have no idea they are being mocked, then they do not risk having their feelings hurt and thus their coquettish games really are “plaisirs innocents” (1.7, p. 83). Judging by the reactions of both the singing teacher (Lisette: “Monsieur Des Soupîrs est content comme un petit roi, madame” 1.8, p. 84) and the Abbé (“Eh! laissez-la dire, madame; ces petites libertés font plaisir” 1.9, p. 87), the men do indeed seem happy with their mistreatment, so the spectators observe no evident foul play. They do, however, hear about how Angélique keeps her singing teacher Des Soupîrs out in the freezing rain all night as he sings love songs to her, and her claims that she will not be satisfied with his progress until he is ready for the mad house (1.1, p. 67).

²⁹² La Comtesse later makes a similar comparison between boredom and war upon her arrival on stage: “Mais, vraiment, si [la guerre] continue, je prévois que, pour ne pas s’ennuyer tout l’été, il faudra prendre le parti de faire un voyage sur la frontière” (1.12, p. 92). Of course, she is not truly showing signs of noble bravery as much as she simply desires to chase Clitandre down on the frontlines where he told her he would be.

immediate social environment by infringing on the socio-political power structure of Paris, the city whose role as a “producer” uses a “strategy” that in turn expects her to conform to established societal behaviors, in particular those that seek passivity in women.²⁹³

The play also depicts coquetry as a mask that Angélique adopts to conceal her love for Clitandre and evade the weakness that might result from her emotions. For her, an indifference to love is not coquetry but a camouflaged tactic that aims to convince others that she finds love to be shameful and ridiculous. Angélique’s actions suggest that she is refusing to allow her feelings to betray her true sentimentality, as the following examples show.

We have already seen that Angélique shows subtle signs of stress with regard to her phobia of marriage and unwillingness to admit romantic attachment. Her friend Cidalise shares in her distaste for marriage (“Le ciel m’en préserve!” 1.3, p. 70) but she openly loves one man, to the extent that she would consider marrying him were she not already betrothed to another by her father. Angélique continues her overzealous (yet telling) tirade against love upon learning of Cidalise’s “error” in allowing such feelings to get the better of her:

Angélique
Quoi ! tu t’amuses à aimer ? Es-tu folle ? À ton âge aimer ! tu n’y songes pas...Je
ne m’étonne pas que tu te trouves malheureuse.

²⁹³ De Certeau expands on this reappropriation of space and how the improvisational brilliance of an individual such as Angélique may bring about small victories as she temporarily fulfills her ever-changing personal needs: “I call a ‘tactic’...a calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The ‘proper’ is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing.’ Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities.’ The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them. This is achieved in the propitious moments when they are able to combine heterogeneous elements; ...the intellectual synthesis of these given elements takes the form, however, not of a discourse, but of the decision itself, the act and manner in which the opportunity is ‘seized.’

Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many ‘ways of operating:’ victories of the ‘weak’ over the ‘strong,’...clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, ‘hunter’s cunning,’ maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike” (xix).

Cidalise
Est-ce que tu n'aimes pas, toi ?

Angélique
Non, vraiment. Je souffre qu'on m'aime ; et quand je ne me fâche point de me
l'entendre dire, je prétends qu'on m'a grande obligation. (1.4, p. 72)

Only a few scenes earlier Angélique asserted to Lisette that she adores being loved and that it is her “folie” (1.1, p. 66), and now she has changed her story to say she only tolerates it. Angélique clearly struggles to tell Lisette the obvious truth about her love for Clitandre and so her coquettish testimony to the servant reads very false.²⁹⁴ Cidalise, for her part, does not represent a reliable confidante, either due to the competitive relationship she has with Angélique throughout the play as they engage in snide repartee and delight in each other's romantic failures.²⁹⁵ Thus, Angélique's inconsistent stance on her coquettish desires does not represent a deep-rooted, intrinsic conviction but rather a set of lies that she has learned to perform (even if somewhat poorly). In other words, while trying to act strong by resisting emotion, she changes her viewpoints to suit her audience and undermines the validity of her arguments.

The real proof that Angélique operates under an acquired coquettish mask reveals itself only when she is overcome with emotion. Upon learning of Clitandre's infidelity with Cidalise, her calm demeanor shows no cracks at first:

Angélique
Cela est fort passionné ; et que faisait-il dans cette maison ?

Cidalise

²⁹⁴ Blanc notes the dramaturgical advantage of Dancourt's servants: “En outre, elle est la confidante nécessaire de l'ingénue...[parce que] les bienséances exigent que la jeune fille, plus timide, n'avoue pas volontiers son amour” (*F.C. Dancourt* 169). The Lisette of *L'Été des coquettes* typically fails in her role as she never extracts a clear response from her mistress, unlike her counterpart in *La Parisienne* as we will see.

²⁹⁵ For example, this exchange during their “friendly” debate over the risks of deluding men belies underlying, mutual resentment: Angélique: “Ah! que la morale a bonne grâce dans ta bouche, et que tu fais bien des réflexions! Nous verrons, l'hiver qui vient, de tes maximes sur les écrans.” Cidalise: “Fort bien, et l'on fera peut-être un tableau d'almanach de tes aventures” (1.7, p. 83).

Il passait les jours à m'écrire, et les nuits à m'entretenir.

Angélique

Ah ! je n'en appelle plus. Je suis la sacrifiée. Voilà filer le parfait amour.

Cidalise

Tu vas être en colère contre moi ?

Angélique

Moi, mon enfant ? je donnerais tous les hommes du monde pour une amie. Un amant de moins n'est pas une affaire, et ma cour n'est que trop nombreuse. (1.4, p. 75)

Angélique offers a coquettish dismissal of men and a call for female solidarity, but in the next scene Cidalise reads through Angélique's ruse:

Cidalise

Clitandre te tient au cœur ; quelque mine que tu fasses, tu es fâchée contre moi.

Angélique

Eh ! fi ! fi ! tu te moques; moi, fâchée pour la perte d'un soupirant ! J'en ai tous les jours une vingtaine de renvoi dans mon antichambre. (1.5, p. 76)

Here, Cidalise has perceptively hit a weak spot: Angélique's exclamations and interjections betray her feelings as anger erupts before she can defend it with words.²⁹⁶ Moreover, Angélique's recourse to exaggeration points to overcompensation for having been rattled by her rival.

From this moment forward, the rest of Angélique's somewhat ambiguous actions begin to clarify as they routinely suggest her underlying motivation to conceal her true feelings for Clitandre and, later, to exact revenge against him. After learning that Clitandre is also courting "l'ennuyeuse créature" (1.11, p. 92) that is La Comtesse, Angélique can no longer contain her

²⁹⁶ Whereas another coquette such as Cidalise can read her true sentiments, her clueless suitors cannot detect any false tactics. As the Abbé says: "Vos sentiments sont impénétrables, madame: on ne sait jamais comme on est avec vous" (1.9, p. 87).

hatred: She lets the mask drop and declares him a “fourbe” worthy of her vengeance.²⁹⁷ She never stops caring for Clitandre despite her coquettish attempts to keep occupied with other men. In this regard, Angélique is just as guilty as Clitandre for lying to others throughout the play, but her lies are motivated by a desire to protect her carefree appearance rather than by pure coquetry.²⁹⁸

Because she ultimately fails to possess Clitandre, the singular object of her desire, Angélique never unlearns her coquettish strategy that helps her cope throughout the play. Clitandre threatens to have his revenge against her for the trap that she laid him, but she quickly defuses his right to vindication: “Oh! ne prenez pas votre sérieux. De quoi plaignez-vous? Vous nous avez joué les premières: demeurons bons amis, et ne parlons plus du passé” (1.20, p. 110). Once again, Angélique reverts to masking emotion in her speech in order to appear unfazed to her audience. Further, Angélique overcompensates by suddenly seeking friendship with her declared enemy Clitandre and by turning to one of her undesirable lovers, M Patin, for company.

²⁹⁷ Cidalise likewise shows a thirst for revenge as a result of Clitandre’s infidelity: “Non, je déteste tous les hommes, et je n’en verrai de ma vie que pour les mépriser et me moquer d’eux” (1.12, p. 97). Clearly, the woman who earlier claimed that she welcomes the attention of any suitor (“...je sais toujours gré aux personnes qui m’aiment... mais je n’en aime qu’un ; et s’il m’aime toujours je l’aimerai toute ma vie” 1.4, pp. 72-73) has now given up on coquetry and turned to cruelty against all men. Though we have no definite indication of when or why her coquetry began as we do with Angélique, Dancourt demonstrates that her coquettishness has a definitive end and thus presents it as a temporary social strategy rather than an entrenched biological disposition.

²⁹⁸ It is interesting that Angélique makes a distinction between types of lies when squaring off against Clitandre:

Clitandre

Il m’était impossible de vivre plus longtemps sans vous voir. Un mois entier éloigné de vous ! Si vous saviez avec quelle impatience l’amour m’a fait voler ici...Que vous dirai-je, madame ? il semblait qu’il m’eût prêté ses ailes, et j’ai fait une diligence incroyable.

Angélique, *à part*

Il n’est pas permis de mentir si effrontément. (1.17, pp. 103-4)

For her, it is unacceptable for someone to tell another that he loves her when he does not mean it, which is why she goes to great lengths to avoid declaring her love in concrete terms with any of the suitors, consistently stalling with distracting comments and ruses. However, in a contrary sense, Angélique finds it fair to deny love for another when she really feels it, making her illusion-based relationship with Clitandre rather complementary. But whereas his prevarication stems from trickery and egoism, hers is born from a more commendable desire to protect herself.

As Blanc notes, there is a certain nobility in Angélique's stoic and self-assured behavior, and Cidalise's analogous meltdown only acts to affirm her friend's brave composure.²⁹⁹ She may continue to lie in order to save face but more importantly she refrains from being read by other characters and from appearing ridiculous now that she has mastered her coquettish lesson.

In this way, Angélique emerges as a coquettish heroine in spite of her vindictive conduct. As mentioned earlier, Dancourt presents Angélique in the final scenes as the most triumphant of the characters because she takes on an authorial tone of her own by calling everyone to dinner to end the comedy.³⁰⁰ Of especial interest is the way that Dancourt deliberately constructs his comedy so that the audience discovers Clitandre's multiple infidelities at the same time the cheated women do, resulting in a double effect: Firstly, it places the spectators on a level field of omniscience with the three protagonists. In this sense, we watch Angélique court several men and unscrupulously ridicule them for her own entertainment, leading us to believe that she exudes wickedness. But upon being surprised about her masked emotions, the second effect takes place and we are forced to reevaluate our prejudices and acumen: Suddenly, Angélique gains humanity and her coquettish skills become more justifiable. She is no longer a cruel tormentor but a thinking woman, one who artfully uses coquetry to mitigate heartbreak and to

²⁹⁹ "Angélique et Cidalise...qui apprennent, non sans humiliation ni souffrances, leur métier de parisiennes mondaines, dont l'apparente indifférence en amour demande parfois un héroïsme discret et une maîtrise de soi à laquelle la jeune Cidalise arrive moins bien que son aînée !" (F.C. Dancourt 240)

³⁰⁰ At the end of the play, Cidalise is alone, heartbroken, and vociferous, and La Comtesse leaves with Clitandre in an intergenerational relationship that comic tradition promises will end unhappily. Blanc remarks that Dancourt is "Rigoureusement fidèle au couple traditionnel jusqu'en 1691 – à l'exception de *L'Été des coquettes* --, si nous jugeons par les pièces conservées..." (F.C. Dancourt 169). What made this play so special that he diverted from his typical comic formula? It is true that with the focus being laid upon multiple coquettes the subject matter does not lend itself easily to arranging happy marriages for all. Furthermore, Blanc posits elsewhere in his study of Dancourt that "*L'Été des coquettes* donne la vision d'une société en quelque sorte idéale malgré ses inconvénients: les chagrins de l'amour qu'entraîne la coquetterie sont préférables à ceux du mariage...Que l'on s'introduise un mari dans cette société charmante: immédiatement, ce serait la crise, les grincements et les querelles, l'enfer..." (251). Angélique has already felt the first pains of love during courtship and thus the finality of marriage holds too many risks for her to ever feasibly make the commitment.

reign over the wartime environment. Angélique seems keenly aware of people's misguided perceptions of her and her kind as she comments to Lisette during her first lines of the play: "Oh! Ma chère enfant, laisse-moi en repos, je te prie; le seul mot de raison me fait mourir. A mon âge, faite comme je suis, je passerais pour folle dans le monde si l'on me soupçonnait seulement de savoir ce que c'est que la raison" (1.1, p. 64). In other words, no one in Paris expects a woman to be as reasonable as she is beautiful and so Angélique once again adapts to her surroundings by playing into their erroneous suppositions.

The last lines of the play belong to Angélique's servant Lisette, the woman who has stood in awe of her mistress' talents since the beginning: "Ma foi, vivent les femmes de bon esprit ! toutes les saisons leur sont égales, rien ne les chagrine ; et jusqu'aux moindres bagatelles, tout leur fait plaisir" (1.20, p. 110). Lisette's words perform a choral function, commenting on the action of the play as a whole while using the vocabulary of pleasure to remind the audience of their own enjoyment in having just viewed one such "bagatelle" on stage. Once again, she marvels at the coquettes and their insistence on being perpetually occupied so as to avoid the worst fate of all: solitude. As Angélique states herself when defending her right to let the Abbé visit: "Veux-tu que je demeure seule? Faute de meilleure compagnie, on s'accoutume à ces messieurs-là" (1.8, p. 84). Angélique believes that other men, however horrible, can serve to prevent her from thinking about Clitandre who succeeded in winning her love before abruptly taking leave. She henceforth mocks those like Cidalise who openly fall in love because Angélique knows firsthand that desire places the lover at the mercy of the beloved. Thus, before the play begins she has already decided to close her heart to further vulnerability and we subsequently witness her attempts to maintain her position as desireless yet desired object while she suffers the attention of undesirable men. She adapts to her surroundings and becomes a

“woman for all seasons,” one that is a true lover at heart but also a warrior capable of defending against Cupid’s arrows when the cruel summer arrives.

Dancourt’s focus on adaptive strategies brings to light the acquired nature of Angélique’s coquetry. Without having been influenced by the external stimulus of Clitandre abandoning her for the war, it is hard to believe that she ever would have set out to entertain and abuse the unappealing men who stayed in Paris during the summer, and this is true because Dancourt goes to some lengths to demonstrate how his main coquettish character hides a more vulnerable side. Angélique is a contradiction, a young woman caught between her natural inclinations for monogamous love and her learned tactics needed for regaining her composure and agency.

The play thus rejects the idea of the coquette as a predator and instead views it as a figure on the defensive who reacts to her surroundings. Parisian society expects young women to show their emotions in order to render them more socially legible, but the coquette fights this vulnerability with a mask that confuses men and gives her the upper hand. Dancourt draws attention to the circumstances and events of her social ascension so as to highlight Paris’s role in supporting the coquettish institution wherein she is merely a gifted student.

The City of Rites: Capital Growing Pains in Dancourt’s *La Parisienne* (1691)

In *La Parisienne*, the title character’s municipal affiliation seemingly subsumes typical coquettish behaviors, as if to say that being a Parisian woman is indistinguishable from being a coquette.³⁰¹ But as we will see, her environment proves to be no match for her inner innocence as nature triumphs over nurture, debunking the “Paris-coquette” correlation in the process. The capital instead serves as a training ground that tests her ability as a young woman to navigate the

³⁰¹ Dancourt showcases a clever flirt without ever resorting to the use of the term “coquette,” thus conflating the demonym and the dramatic type.

social politics of courtship and to stay true to herself among coquettish temptations. In other words, Dancourt's provincial girls may never be as quick-witted as their Parisian counterparts (Koch 215), but the latter's skill is the result of imposed practice at social survival rather than a case of innate acumen.³⁰² The title character Angélique thus portrays the difficulties of growing up in a society that tries to control women's desires and behaviors when in truth her happiness depends on following her instincts and completing her sentimental rite of passage into adulthood.

In the play, Angélique has lost contact with her lover Éraste and finds herself involved with three other men: Éraste's old and sickly father Damis to whom she is forcibly engaged, and two other ridiculous suitors whom she secretly entertains as alternative marriage options despite her lack of feelings for them. Guided by her servant Lisette and her natural inclination for Éraste, Angélique gradually rids herself of obligations to any man except the one that her heart chooses.

As in *L'Été des coquettes*, *La Parisienne* depicts coquetry as an acquired behavior rather than an essential trait and the audience witnesses the eponymous character's education on the Parisian scene over the duration of the play. Coquetry represents one step on a path toward a happy marriage, as Angélique progresses from veritable naivety to coquetry, and finally to a heroic sense of fidelity that proves that the coquettish life never suited her.³⁰³ Dancourt's

³⁰² Unlike how Dancourt steeped *L'Été des coquettes* in current affairs to give his play an enticing modern appeal, *La Parisienne* fails to mention any cultural or temporal events that anchor it in its present. Éraste indirectly refers to the Nine Years War when he recounts his regret at leaving Angélique in order to join the French army in Italy (1.3, p. 233), but this is such a casual remark that it barely bears remembering for the purposes of the plot in comparison to the heavy-handed treatment of war in *L'Été des coquettes*.

³⁰³ The conspicuous evolution of a character such as Angélique was not entirely new, as is evidenced in the example of Molière's Agnès who goes from childlike innocent to adept trickster in the matter of a few acts thanks to her first encounter with love. Blanc recognizes this stimulus but misses any such reference to Angélique's similar awakening, instead placing her within her Parisian social context and assuming she learns her coquetry in stride without any particular stimuli: "À la différence d'Agnès, en qui la nature s'oppose soudain d'une façon naïve et irrésistible à toute l'éducation... l'Angélique de *La Parisienne* [semble] n'éprouver aucune révélation et se [place] d'emblée dans le courant de morale sociale qu'elles illustrent, sans la moindre obscurité ni la moindre contradiction... Si elles paraissent aussi vivantes, c'est parce qu'en elles se manifeste le mieux la contradiction structurale nécessaire au personnage, dans l'opposition entre le caractère conventionnel de l'Ingénue et la hardiesse, voire l'effronterie, la liberté en tout cas des pensées et des propos" (*F.C. Dancourt* 238). Perhaps Blanc was merely

innovation emerges from his satirization of fundamental social structures instead of passing social phenomena that appear more often in Molière's works.³⁰⁴ As such, Angélique embodies more of a collective figure because her particular "vice" of coquetry results from her inferior social status as a young, unmarried woman who lives in a bustling capital full of enticing amorous options. Paris offers Angélique choices that her mother denies, as well as alternatives to Éraste that entertain her during his absence. She is thus caught between a socio-political lack of power and an environment that tantalizes her with opportunities for more control.

As Lucette Desvignes aptly remarks, seventeenth-century comedy typically shows adolescents (and particularly females) on the threshold of social adulthood and in rebellion against the older generation's control (394). This plot would have been familiar to spectators by 1691, notably due to the great success and scandal of Molière's *L'École des femmes*, first performed in 1662. Like Molière's Agnès, Angélique has only recently left a cloistered space (the convent) where she was raised without much knowledge of Parisian society.³⁰⁵ Curious but unprepared for their initiation, these young women embody the type of the ingénue whose lack of experience renders them confused at the same time it produces condescension in those watching their social blunders. For example, Éraste's valet L'Olive characterizes her as "une petite personne, qui n'a pas encore apparemment l'esprit de réfléchir sur ce qu'on lui fait faire"

referencing the fact that we never witness any revelation and thus it is unprovable if not unimportant, but given the amount of indirect backstory that Dancourt provides I would disagree. However, I do agree with Blanc's remarks on Dancourt's characterization of the "ingénue effrontée" in that Angélique perfectly houses an innocent essence while ironically performing mischievous coquettish acts that never ultimately contaminate her overall purity.

³⁰⁴ One could cite well-known comedies of manners for examples, such as *Tartuffe* and *Les Femmes savantes*, in which Molière ridicules an aspect of seventeenth-century life (here, religious hypocrisy and hyper-preciousness, respectively) but allows some of his characters to see the fault in their ways. It is the maniacs of the comedy of character who do not evolve because their obsessions are too deep-seated, such as Harpagon's greed in *L'Avare*.

³⁰⁵ Olympe initially has a negative impression of her daughter's convent education: "...tout le monde lui déplaît; c'est le couvent qui lui a donné cet engourdissement de cœur et d'esprit qui la rend insensible à tout" (1.7, p. 242). The text later proves through Angélique's own confession that it is Olympe herself who causes Angélique's depression by giving the girl's hand away to Damis.

(1.5, p. 238), whereas her own mother Olympe believes “qu’elle n’a point encore assez d’esprit pour faire des réflexions” (1.7, p. 243).³⁰⁶ Although other characters perceive Angélique as an ingénue, she is already courting two suitors when the play begins. She thus more accurately embodies an ingénue *transformed into* a coquette as a temporary strategy for taking back power from her oppressors, both parental figures and suitors alike.

The testimonies of characters who knew Angélique prior to her recent exit from the convent act as a primary lens for discerning her initial innocence. Éraste recounts how he met the sweet and charming Angélique there while visiting a relative, and how Angélique openly reciprocates his love: “Elle est sensible à ma tendresse, et j’obtiens d’elle la permission de la demander en mariage” (1.3, p. 235). While this could be another coquettish ruse on her part to lure in an additional marriage option, Éraste’s valet L’Olive confirms that had her mother not disapproved of the marriage, Angélique would have happily accepted.

Moreover, Angélique exhibits a degree of fidelity more characteristic of the ingénue than the coquette. She confides to her servant Lisette that she continues to love Éraste even during his absence: “Oui, je l’aime; mais je n’ai point de ses nouvelles” (1.8, p. 247). Angélique’s heartfelt confessions rationally explain how she ends up awkwardly entertaining several lovers at once, and they more convincingly allude to her innocence, anxieties, and true desires:

Angélique

...J’ai donné ici un rendez-vous à Dorante...Sa sœur était avec moi dans le couvent, et c’est elle qui m’a priée de l’aimer. [...] Sans l’absence d’Éraste, je ne l’aurais jamais aimé. [...] J’ai aussi fait dire à Lisimon qu’il pouvait venir...C’est ce qui m’inquiète, et je crains qu’ils ne viennent tous deux en même temps.

Lisette

Et pourquoi ne leur pas marquer des heures différentes ?

Angélique

³⁰⁶ Though these characters comment on her lack of know-how, they see at least the potential for improvement with the understanding that she is merely showing her age and not overall unintelligent.

Que veux-tu ? je n'y ai pas songé ; et la crainte d'être Madame Damis me trouble si fort l'imagination, que je ne sais ce que je fais. Mais le temps et les réflexions m'empêcheront dans la suite de faire de fausses démarches. (1.8, pp. 247-248)

Angélique blames her lack of fidelity (and perhaps her skill at juggling men) on an altered mental state caused by fear, indicating that she still has some scruples, unlike several coquettes in other plays. Angélique's dialogue also highlights that she stays true to her friend in the convent, dispelling her coquettish crime of romantic infidelity.³⁰⁷ As Lisette points out later in the play ("Avec tout cela, il y a une espèce de fidélité dans cette manière d'inconstance" 1.11, p. 252), Angélique exhibits a "kind of faithfulness" to certain people.

Additionally, the idea that men's undependability causes women to behave coquettishly resurfaces throughout the play. Angélique asserts in the previous citation that she never would have resorted to coquetry had Éraste not left her in the first place. Later, Angélique also blames Dorante's unreliability for her dalliance with Lisimon, creating a hierarchy among the men and their level of dependability: "Fi! c'est un Gascon, un extravagant, que je ne souffrais que parce que je ne comptais pas trop sur Dorante!" (1.11, p. 252) In other words, Lisimon, the least desirable of the men, is a back-up plan for Dorante who in turn acts as a poor substitute for Éraste, the most desirable man to Angélique. It is thus not a wish for attention or an innate infidelity that drives her to court several men, but her informed mistrust of their reliability.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Desvignes accuses Dancourt's young female leads of not giving heed to their reputation (409), and yet several times throughout *La Parisienne* Angélique shows concern for what others think of her. For one, we have seen how her coquettish predicament bothers her immensely and how she coyly replies to Lisette during her interrogation, showing a "pudeur" (1.8, p. 246) not found in amoral women. She is likewise quick to defend herself when her mother assumes the worst upon discovering that her daughter was hiding a man in her bedroom: "Ne me condamnez point avant que de m'entendre, Madame, deux mots suffiront pour me justifier" (1.24, p. 269).

³⁰⁸ Dorante demonstrates no obvious signs of infidelity toward Angélique so it is unclear why she mistrusts him so much, suggesting that she may be merely shifting the blame on him as a projection of her own infidelity to Éraste. However, the manner in which Dancourt characterizes Dorante shows that he is otherwise an unstable and unsavory person. For example, the first description we receive of him informs us that he is a social chameleon: "Il n'est de robe que les matins; et les soirs, il porte une épée" (1.8, p. 247). While his refusal to adhere to one type of nobility is more ridiculous than incriminating, it nevertheless suggests that he cannot bring himself to commit to one or the other as proud aristocratic characters typically do. We also witness him trying to bribe Lisette in order to gain a

The play also depicts female infidelity as the result of male unreliability in the case of Lisette's engagement to La Vigne after the presumed death of her husband L'Olive. She too seeks out another companion to replace the one she lost and becomes distraught upon learning of his voluntary desertion: "Abandonner ainsi sa femme!...Me laisser sur le pavé, comme une malheureuse!...Me réduire à la nécessité de me mettre en condition!" (1.6, p. 240). However, Lisette does not appear coquettish in the way that Angélique does for giving up on Éraste: The general opinion would have considered her commitment to L'Olive null and void upon his sudden disappearance, and only his return complicates her status as a wife about to remarry.³⁰⁹

The women of this play thus suffer at the fickle hands of men and yet bear the brunt of the blame once they take action to ameliorate their situations. As such, it could be said that Angélique's ostensible coquetry reflects her cynical attitude in regard to stable companionship with men.³¹⁰ In the only monologue of the play, Angélique reveals her true feelings about Éraste's undependability as well as her own irresponsible actions:

En vérité, c'est pourtant une chose embarrassante, que plusieurs amants à la fois ;
et si j'avais pu compter sur le retour d'Éraste, je n'aurais point donné de rendez-
vous à Dorante et à Lisimon. Une fille d'esprit ne tomberait point dans ces

forbidden private audience with Angélique, which Angélique refuses, demonstrating a true commitment to driving him away in favor of Éraste.

³⁰⁹ Lisette ultimately finds herself in an even more scandalous position than her mistress upon L'Olive's return given that she is a married woman about to marry another man: She is consequently on the brink of committing both adultery and bigamy, and all without truly being at fault! Lisette on the whole works as a foil to Angélique in her role as the typically base and greedy servant. In a scene where Dorante offers Lisette money in order to keep her from meddling in his courtship of Angélique, Lisette clearly appears tempted even though she is supposed to be playing the role of the overprotective governess. She eventually accepts the large sum, to which Angélique responds in private: "As-tu perdu l'esprit, Lisette, d'avoir accepté la bourse de Dorante?" (1.13, p. 255) Once again we notice that Angélique, unlike the material coquettes, is not willing to compromise her love-driven goal for the sake of money and emerges looking more virtuous thanks to her avaricious entourage.

³¹⁰ Blanc notes that cynicism was a common component of Dancourt's theater in which most characters reveal at least some immoral aspect of themselves. He remarks the same phenomenon in *La Parisienne* in that Angélique "explique avec une inquiétante candeur comment elle se réserve des amants de rechange (sc. 8) : même en tout bien tout honneur, ce n'est pas une preuve de fidélité ni d'amour" (*F.C. Dancourt* 259). While I agree that from an outside point of view it appears Angélique is a common coquette, Dancourt offers enough concrete evidence and emotional weight to Angélique's story that he exonerates her sufficiently if one reads closely enough.

inconvenients ; mais, il me semble, pour moi, que dans l'incertitude, il est toujours bon de ne pas manquer de précaution. (1.10, p. 251)³¹¹

Angélique was thus only doing what was best for herself in a time of uncertainty: providing stable recourse. She knows that as a woman in her society she needs a male companion to keep herself out of jeopardy, and if one man cannot maintain her security to the degree desired, it is in her best interest to entertain several at once. The play thus analyzes coquetry as a feminine defense mechanism to compensate for men's infidelity.

Dancourt further develops his rationalization of coquetry in his treatment of the traditional forced-marriage plot. Lisette perceptively warns Angélique's mother Olympe that pushing her daughter into marriage with Damis runs the risk of desperate retaliation from Angélique: "Oui, mais l'esprit vient aux filles, comme vous savez: elle réfléchira dans la suite, et ces réflexions tardives mènent quelquefois à de très dangereuses conséquences, et qui sait si elle n'a point déjà quelque secrète inclination?...Eh! mort de ma vie, Madame, ce n'est pas l'esprit qui donne de l'amour, c'est l'amour qui fait venir l'esprit!" (1.7, p. 243). Lisette declares that all young women eventually give in to love's charms and that "il n'y a point de filles qui ne pensent quelque chose" (1.8, p. 244). In this sense, Lisette posits the strategy of coquetry as a reaction to parental constriction of a woman's amorous desires. Thus, the play highlights both male infidelity and social conventions as external factors that drive young women to coquetry.

If *La Parisienne* demonstrates that coquettes are made and not born, it also shows that coquettes can be reformed. Throughout the play, Lisette serves as a mentor to Angélique, showing her alternative (non-coquettish) ways to determine her own fate. Lisette first instructs Angélique to speak her mind clearly: "Vous allez pleurer? je m'en vais. Et de quoi vous sert-il de

³¹¹ It is noteworthy that in her monologue Angélique separates herself from "femmes d'esprit" because it is true that she does not excel as a coquette. Instead, her cleverness eventually stems from her love for Éraste and her goal to possess him at all costs. In this sense, she is more like a "coquette manquée."

gémir, de soupirer? On ne sait point au juste ce que cela veut dire. Parlez, on vous entendra” (1.8, p. 244). Lisette’s “tough love” approach incites Angélique to finally explain her predicament so as to allow taking steps toward its resolution. Then, adopting a motherly tone, the servant comforts her mistress with the wisdom that love is appropriate for a young woman: “Vous aimez quelqu’un apparemment, et ce serait une chose honteuse que vous n’aimassiez personne à votre âge; je me moquerais de vous la première, si vous ne saviez pas ce que c’est l’amour” (1.8, p. 246). In this sense, Lisette treats love as a rite of passage for growing up and unlike Olympe, she understands that a young woman such as Angélique is bound to have her own amorous inclinations. The servant’s last piece of guidance encourages Angélique to be direct with her mother in spite of her usual deference:

Lisette

Oui, je sais bien les conseils qu’il vous faut. Madame votre mère est bonne personne, déclarez-lui la tendresse que vous sentez pour Éraste ; pleurez, priez, embrassez ses genoux, elle n’aura jamais la force de résister à vos larmes.

Angélique

Et moi, je n’aurai jamais celle de lui faire un pareil aveu.

Lisette

Eh bien ! je parlerai : avouez-moi de ce que je lui dirai seulement... (1.19, p. 263)

Angélique does not hesitate to reveal her feelings upon next seeing her mother. While she still leaves the final decision in the hands of Olympe out of respect, she asserts her will with a threat upon Damis’ happiness: “Je satisferais au devoir de fille, en vous obéissant, Madame, et je remplirais les devoirs de femme, en donnant à Monsieur tous les chagrins imaginables” (1.23, p. 266).³¹² Angélique has thus learned the value of her voice and earned the respect of her mother

³¹² The language of this citation is interesting in that it ironically implies that wives necessarily make their husbands unhappy as a part of their spousal duties. In contrast, Lisette and Olympe accept nothing short of contentment for Angélique after she marries (“Voudriez-vous la rendre malheureuse en forçant son inclination?” 1.23, p. 266), suggesting that women have a monopoly on happiness in marriage should they make the right choice in a husband.

who no longer questions her daughter's emotional judgment and who capitulates to Angélique's desires once she learns the reason behind the girl's depressive state.³¹³ At the end of the play, Angélique has shaken off both her mother's dominance and her need for coquetry as she settles back into a more comfortable state of monogamy with Éraste.

Judging from Lisette's contribution, it may appear, as Desvignes argues, that the servant is the ringleader when it is in fact the ingénue-coquette herself.³¹⁴ We first witness the student surpassing her teacher when Angélique faces the bothersome situation of juggling her two unwanted lovers:

Angélique

C'est Dorante : tâchons de nous en débarrasser avant que Lisimon survienne.

Lisette

Eh ! dites-lui naturellement les choses : faut-il tant de ménagement pour un soupirant du Palais ?

Angélique

Non, Lisette ; fais la gouvernante incommode : c'est un moyen sûr pour faire bientôt finir la conversation.

Lisette

³¹³ In Olympe's words: "Approchez, Angélique, et ne me déguisez rien; vous n'avez point à vous plaindre de mes manières, et je ne vous faisais violence que parce que je ne croyais pas vous la faire" (1.23, p. 265). In this light, Olympe is a sweet but clueless mother, guilty of only misunderstanding her daughter's conflicting values. In fact, Olympe is a remarkable character within comic theater given that she allows her child to go against her own values (i.e. marrying for stability rather than love) without having been subjected to a revelatory ruse to correct her misconceptions of the world.

³¹⁴ Desvignes makes this error in calling Lisette the "meneur de jeu" who acts in tandem with Éraste's valet L'Olive (399). It is true that Lavigne first gives readers this inaccurate impression when discussing Angélique's forced marriage to Damis: "La chose n'est pas encore bien conclue. Il y a, dans le logis, une certaine fille de chambre, qui n'est pas contente d'un assortiment si bizarre, et qui prendra soin des intérêts de la petite fille en dépit d'elle-même" (1.5, p. 238). From this early characterization, one would expect the servant to eclipse her mistress in cunning in the manner of *Tartuffe*'s Dorine and *Le Malade Imaginaire*'s Toinette, and yet Lisette meddles very little and acts more as a confidante for Angélique who gives the girl the confidence to fight for her right to love. L'Olive, for his part, plays an even more minimal role with regard to the main plot, serving as a comic parallel to Éraste in that the return of both master and valet disturb the amorous strategies of Angélique and Lisette.

Admittedly, the act of the ingénue surpassing her servant is not a typical event of Dancourt's theater (Blanc *F.C. Dancourt* 169) but particular to the plays I discuss, most likely in recognition of the coquette's characteristic shrewdness that is evidently one of the main foci of the play. Hilgar notes that Dancourt's heroines no longer resemble the "jeunes filles tendres et gracieuses" from Molière's days because they go further: "La jeune fille qu'il met en scène plus tard se présente déniaisée depuis longtemps, effrontée et quelque peu cynique" (71).

Ma foi, vive Paris ! L'esprit ne vient point si vite aux filles de province ! (1.11, p. 252)

From this short dialogue we see how Angélique goes against the straightforward advice of her “coach” in favor of a ruse, eliciting deferential awe from Lisette who then marks the significance of the play’s title in the process. A similar episode occurs during Angélique’s handling of Damis in scene sixteen: Angélique spearheads the performance while Lisette must take time to process her mistress’ superior craftiness as she interjects her appreciation with compliments such as “La petite rusée!” (1.16, p. 259) and “La fourberie est bien naturelle aux filles!” (1.16, pp. 260).³¹⁵ Given the manner in which Dancourt deliberately showcases the disparity between their intellects, it is clear that Lisette is not intended to be the strategic genius of the play: She never teaches Angélique the art of deceit, only the worth of her heart and intuition.

What allows Angélique to develop her superior guile is in fact a faithful love for Éraste: It motivates her to bring the action to its denouement through a ruse that disentangles her from her other suitors. Although Koch asserts that the very concept of love is “neither a deep nor durable feeling for Dancourt” (217), Angélique ultimately proves otherwise with the undeniable vitality of her devotion to Éraste, as observed in the overflowing emotional response of the lovers during their first meeting since Éraste’s departure for the army (1.9, p. 249). Desvignes aptly comments on this uncommon outpouring of love within comic theater, as well as the resurgence of power that it brings:

cet amour dépasse l’expression scénique habituelle de l’attachement de futurs époux, et de l’une à l’autre il convient de remarquer la persistance de cet élan passionné. D’ailleurs...l’amour se manifeste comme une explosion. Pour la

³¹⁵ Lisette confirms her naivety here in assuming that Angélique is naturally tricky because she contradicts the textual evidence showing how the girl’s experiences (and not her essential character) have informed her evolution. Desvignes likewise makes this wrong assumption (400) and underplays Dancourt’s attention to Angélique’s social interactions. We must not forget how we observe Angélique’s badly executed deceitfulness when she makes the same appointment for two rival lovers, and thus there must be some important event in between her error-laden coquetry and her rise to cleverness. I argue in the following paragraphs that this event is her reaffirmation of love.

Parisienne, il s'agit d'une redécouverte de l'amour après une période de stagnation sentimentale et de résignation au pire ; faute de mieux, elle se décide à passer le temps en galanteries. Mais le retour d'Éraste est celui du vainqueur : il n'y a pas l'ombre d'une hésitation chez Angélique. (396)

When prompted, then, Angélique cannot help but follow the powerful magnetism that she feels for Éraste. Her flawed yet very human approach to growing up gives Angélique an atypical depth versus most young female comic leads who never waver from their love and are altogether defined by it. Though Angélique may not be an exemplary lover in consideration of her coquettish history, she still has the potential to charm her audience with her latent virtue of fidelity, her talent for adaptation, and her conspicuous humanity.

In this way, the play redeploys the tricky, manipulative behavior associated with coquetry to empower a faithful heroine.³¹⁶ Blanc notes with regard to Dancourt's theater as a whole that those on the side of "good" always win but that their methods are far from pure (*F.C. Dancourt* 365). In his view, Dancourt is not very concerned with questions of vice versus virtue because his theatrical world lives by a "survival of the fittest" mindset:

Si les vices ou les travers sont parfois punis, la vertu n'est jamais vraiment récompensée. Le monde de Dancourt est un monde sans Dieu, une foire d'empoigne où règne la loi de la jungle ; si d'ordinaire, pour les besoins de la cause, les personnages les plus sympathiques – ou les moins antipathiques – l'emportent, c'est parce qu'ils sont en fin de compte les plus rusés et qu'ils trompent sans vergogne les méchants au moment où ceux-ci, sûrs de leur triomphe, relâchent leur garde. La justice de ce théâtre est tout humaine. (*F.C. Dancourt* 262)

In this light, Angélique may still retain a sense of heroism for her journey even if she is not the innocent ingénue that the majority of the characters (and perhaps the audience) expect her to be. We see that she only does what she thinks is best to survive her new environment, giving rise to

³¹⁶ In this sense, she is more like Molière's Agnès than most other coquettes that I discuss because her talent for deception derives itself from her desire to love one man and not her will to attract many.

“un réveil dangereux” (Desvignes 402) in herself that makes her audience more likely to question the weak support system she had rather than her own morality.

La Parisienne affirms an idea of true love in conformity with other traditional comedies because it not only ends in a planned marriage, but the protagonist’s actions are motivated by a singular desire. Angélique’s methods are unconventional in that she turns to coquetry rather than the typical strategies of young comic women (such as traveling or duping her parents) for obtaining a happy ending. In truth, coquetry fails her but the experience allows her to develop an aversion to it that effectively sets her on the traditional marriage track.³¹⁷ Her rekindled devotion for Éraste (under the guidance of Lisette) then permits Angélique to reach her full potential by pursuing her desires. Molière’s Agnès illustrates how educated women are viewed as being inherently unfaithful and yet Angélique in contrast learns monogamous commitment in her tutelage under Lisette and Love.³¹⁸

Whereas most playwrights keep their coquettish characters as such from beginning to end, Dancourt reforms his coquette to show that coquetry is no more infinite than it is inherent. As spectators we may not witness firsthand the root or onset of it but by watching coquetry’s culminating cessation, the play undermines stereotypical notions that women feel coquetry so deeply that they cannot exist without it. The play strongly suggests the presence of underlying social phenomena that create coquettes out of ordinary women, but it also provides proof that these pressures may be voluntarily overcome as well.

³¹⁷ In reality there are three more convincing reasons to explain her failure to play the coquette successfully: her fear of marriage to Damis that incites her impulsive decisions, her poor execution (e.g. inviting two suitors to the same rendezvous), and her love for Éraste that compromises her commitment to coquettish principles.

³¹⁸ In fact, when Lisette warns Damis not to take Angélique for his wife because she is too intelligent, she ironically implies that cleverness and infidelity go hand-in-hand, at which point Angélique corrects her by assuring them that it is her “antipathie naturelle” (1.23, p. 267) and not her acquired knowledge that would subsequently drive her to another man.

A Whole Lot of Love: A Jackpot of Coquettishness in Dufresny's *La Coquette de village ou le Lot supposé* (1715)

The last play of this chapter, *La Coquette de village ou le Lot supposé* (1715) most strongly demonstrates a formal instruction of coquettishness and the way in which coquetry manifests as a purposefully acquired tactic. It is rather typical of Charles Dufresny's oeuvre in that his plots often focus on issues of money, and in particular on situations of financial inequity and gambling practices.³¹⁹ The author's choice of title and subtitle draws an interesting parallel between coquetry and lotteries and how the two schemes may potentially enrich those who are deemed undeserving.³²⁰ Though Dufresny may condemn both for their complicity in upsetting the established rural social order, he nevertheless pays compliment to coquetry as a nearly successful tactic for bettering oneself in contrast to the lottery that forever remains a false hope.

Unlike most of Dufresny's Paris-centric plays, this work takes place in a provincial village, but one corrupted by Parisian trends. Dufresny uses this dramaturgical opportunity to ridicule the coarse manners of country life, but more importantly he employs the village as a virgin territory for receiving coquetry and then comments on its (limited) impact.³²¹ Whereas Dancourt never dared to stage coquetry far beyond the edges of Paris, Dufresny demonstrates that coquetry can be effectively replicated in the countryside. In fact, the provincial Lisette, with her ability to entertain several men at once, puts the bungled attempts of *La Parisienne*'s

³¹⁹ Like most playwrights of his era, Dufresny, also known as sieur de la Rivière, both acted in and wrote comedies. Additionally, he composed music, designed royal gardens, directed *Le Mercure galant* for several years following Donneau de Visé's death, and enjoyed a number of privileges at court under Louis XIV. He began writing plays after choosing to leave his comfortable court life in 1692 (Moureau *Dufresny auteur* 33) but never ceased leading an epicurean lifestyle in Paris despite the pressure on his pocketbook (34).

³²⁰ As discussed in Chapter 3, coquetry mirrors aspects of speculation and gambling, entailing risks and rapid changes of fortune.

³²¹ "Parisien et fort satisfait de l'être, Dufresny n'oublie jamais, on le voit, de se gausser de l'esprit provincial" (Moureau *Le Mercure galant* 37).

Angélique to shame. Her instructor La Veuve, the most knowledgeable figure on coquetry in the play, remarks that there is hardly any difference between the cunning she has observed in the capital and in the village: “Coquettes de Paris, et coquettes des champs, / À quelque jargon près, quelque minauderie, / Ma foi tout est égal pour la coquetterie” (225). Since we never observe Lisette’s capacity to survive the actual Parisian scene as a coquette, it may be safer to categorize her exactly as the author does in the play’s title, “une coquette de village.” This more justly estimates Lisette’s talents at masterminding her social ascension within her “natural habitat” without overselling her potential to contend with Parisian coquettes. I argue that Dufresny shows coquetry to be just as efficacious for challenging the socio-economic system of a rural environment as it was for Dancourt in Paris, but in contrast Dufresny undermines its success because for him the provinces are not ready for coquetry’s “civilized” sense of feminine agency.

In this three-act play, La Veuve has abandoned Paris to reside in the village where her noble status gives her influence over a relative, Lisette, a farmer’s daughter whom she teaches to be as coquettish as a Parisian. The young woman blossoms under La Veuve’s tutelage and subsequently wins the attention of local men who can offer her a higher standing in life. In the process, Lisette’s ambitious strategies attract opposition from those who would profit from her failure: Girard, the local tax collector who pines for Lisette but cannot compete with richer suitors, and La Veuve herself after she discovers that her protégée intends to marry Argan, the man whom she loves. This disruption to the village’s social stability is corrected by Girard who tricks Lisette and her father Lucas into rejecting all marriage proposals by convincing them that a fake lottery prize has made them independently wealthy. Upon learning that they have been duped, Lisette accepts Girard’s “magnanimous” yet modest offer of marriage and realizes that coquetry is a waste of time: Girard had always been the object of her affections.

As this synopsis shows, Dufresny's comedy forgoes comic conventions (such as the parent opposing a child's chosen suitor) and demonstrates his oeuvre's evolution toward a more serious analysis of contemporary social issues, in this case the underlying opposition between members of different social orders (Moureau *Dufresny auteur* 336).³²² The author pits two groups against one another, one a land-owning nobility in decline and the other composed of peasants who attempt to free themselves from the last remnants of the feudal system (377). Both groups model ambitions to either retain or usurp control of the local economy in a time of transition.

Dufresny ultimately privileges the status quo and stability in favor of the upper class even if he shows some sympathy for the hardworking peasants.³²³ He most clearly demonstrates his

³²² Moureau expounds upon the dark nature of this play: "*La Coquette de village ou le Lot supposé* (1715) appartient ...aux pièces noires où le génie ironique de Dufresny fait place à un comique grinçant. [Cette] campagne n'est rien moins que bucolique, les nobles y sont gueux, les villageois intéressés et cyniques" (*Dufresny auteur* 331).

³²³ Unlike peasant comedies of the past in which music and traditional dances posited a happy rustic life, the playwright illustrates the hardships of rural living through the suffering of a farmer:

Lucas

Ô fortune, ô fortune, est-c' baintôt que j't'aurai ?
Tu t'enfuis toujours d'moi, quand est-c' que j't'attraperai ?

La Veuve

Toujours fortune en tête ?

Lucas

Oui ; c'est qu'a m'fait envie.
Je sis si las, si las, de labourer ma vie !
Labourer pour stici, labourer pour stila !
J'ai labouré trente ans ; après trente ans me vla.
Labourer pour autrui ; c'est un ptit labourage.
Faut labourer pour soi, c'est ça qui donn' courage.
Pour égaliser tout, faudrait-il pas, morgoi,
Que les autre' à leur tour labourissent pour moi ? (1.2, p. 203)

Lucas's fruitless servitude makes his pursuit of riches seem rational rather than avaricious. Nevertheless, spectators easily note the rural dialect used by Lucas that firmly marks him as both a provincial and a peasant. This works to undercut his intellect and knowledge of the modern world even though it may add charm and local color (if not humor) for Parisian audiences. More importantly, his dialect stands in stark contrast to that of his own daughter Lisette who speaks clearly and without provincial jargon in the manner of cultured Parisians, such as La Veuve.

Further, Moureau notes that the playwright, in consideration of the nobility's economic decline and their last-ditch efforts to assert their waning power, likewise solicits more pity than derisive laughter for the character of Le Baron,

conservative stance by making Lisette and Lucas unfit for a luxurious lifestyle: Once they believe themselves rich they become mad with power, treating their former superiors with cruelty (2.9) and putting on badly imitated airs (3.2). In this sense, Dufresny uses the play to make a statement about the unmerited wealth of individuals whom he considers to be parvenus because they were not born into money but rather acquired it themselves.³²⁴ He thus sets a trap of his own invention for Lisette and Lucas, a representative pair of non-nobles who confirm his beliefs that they cannot measure up to people of his own standing.³²⁵

In addition to the conflict between nobles and peasants, Dufresny's play sets up a second conflict between Parisian trends (specifically, coquetry) and provincial traditions. Here, the urban influence alters the social landscape by giving an advantage to the disenfranchised. As the title suggests, "la coquette de village" (and not "*du* village") represents a new species of coquetry that is not particular to one village but may reflect any rural socio-political setting.

Throughout much of the play, Lisette follows La Veuve's instruction and uses coquetry to give herself options for a better life. In the first scene, La Veuve offers a rather explicit definition of what being a coquette means to her and how it can be regarded in a positive light:

Par coquette, j'entends une fille très sage,
Qui du faible d'autrui sait tirer avantage,
Qui toujours de sang-froid, au milieu du danger,
Profite du moment qu'elle a su ménager,
Et sauve sa raison, où nous perdons la nôtre.

a man who otherwise capitalizes upon the hard work of his peasants and holds sexual privileges over Lisette (*Dufresny auteur* 378).

³²⁴ In a study on gaming in this period's comedy, Guy Spielmann argues that Dufresny opposed any speculation or gaming that easily enriched those not ready to assume their new economic stature ("*Mise(s) en jeu*" 202).

³²⁵ Spielmann agrees with this conservative thrust of the play, believing it to be primarily a political exploration of what happens when a man of modest condition suddenly wins an enormous sum of money, a case in which he affirms that Dufresny cynically answers as follows: "les roturiers ne sont pas prêts à assumer le poids des responsabilités que confère la fortune, surtout lorsqu'elle est si subitement acquise – et sous la loterie on sent se profiler la spéculation qui a enrichi de façon immodérée des personnages d'extraction modeste. Par contraste, le baron, maître de Lucas, reste parfaitement digne face aux brimades que lui fait subir son ancien employé, prouvant par là qu'il lui reste supérieur" ("*Mise(s) en jeu*" 202).

Une coquette sage est plus sage qu'une autre,
 Puisqu'étant exposée elle a plus combattu.
 On ne le peut nier ; la plus forte vertu,
 C'est celle qui soutient l'épreuve la plus rude.
 La coquette a des droits bien plus beaux que la prude :
 Le beau droit, que celui de faire des heureux !
 Une prude en sa vie épouse un homme, ou deux ;
 Mais l'habile coquette, en n'épousant personne,
 Flatte, fait espérer, promet, jamais ne donne,
 Et laissant à chacun l'amour et ses désirs,
 Par sa sagesse enfin fait durer les plaisirs. (1.1, pp. 200-201)³²⁶

Of particular note in this passage is Dufresny's repeated use of the terms "sage/sagesse/savoir" that emphasizes the learned nature of coquettish intelligence.³²⁷ In contrast, La Veuve downplays any emotional component of the coquette's strategy in favor of Reason, insisting on how she never gives nor receives love. La Veuve also cites experience as being a powerful instructor for the coquette, suggesting that women who educate themselves broadly and actively are more fit than those (such as the prude) who do not entertain a diverse pool of men. In this sense, she clearly regards their social environment as dangerous and competitive, thereby permitting a ruthless approach to engaging with others. As such, though it may appear callous and oversimplified at first, La Veuve's definition of coquetry has a serious claim: to radically change the milieu in which it is applied.

³²⁶ As Moureau had observed, this passage displays Dufresny's portrayal of coquetry as an ability to render men happy by never wholly satisfying their desires. Lisette certainly masters this art of deferment as seen in Argan's hearty yet foolish appreciation of her half-promises: "C'est ce qui m'a charmé: / Vous m'avez presque dit, non que je suis aimé, / Mais que vous m'aimerez bientôt" (1.8, p. 219).

Then again, Girard openly declares his displeasure over his treatment by her: "Lisette, à mon avis, fait trop durer ma peine; / J'ai beau m'en plaindre au père; hélas! Ma plainte est vaine" (1.1, p. 201).

³²⁷ Furetière's most fitting definition for "sage" describes it as meaning "skilled" or "educated." Furetière also defines "sage" as a generally good quality that changes its meaning depending on the recipient: "Si c'est un vieillard, *sage* signifie prudent, qui agit avec circonspection... Si c'est un enfant, il signifie modeste, posé, bien instruit. Si c'est une femme, il signifie chaste et honnête." Although Lisette could represent either of the latter two categories, her coquettish behavior precludes her from fitting any of the provided adjectives except for "bien instruit" for the way in which it highlights her cleverness without alluding to any assumed goodness.

Lisette pleases La Veuve with her prowess but nevertheless possesses her own approach to coquetry. Whereas for La Veuve the coquette amasses strength with each unconsummated conquest, Lisette understands power to be derived from the end goal of a beneficial marriage.³²⁸ Although Lisette never speaks any lines that develop her own philosophy of coquetry, her discussions about potential husbands always come back to questions of acquiring money and status (“Vous allez voir comment je veux faire fortune” 1.4, p. 208) and thus she does not make lofty claims about coquetry in the way that her teacher’s definition uses a vocabulary of virtues and rights. In order to explain this disparity, I suggest that Lisette realizes the greater efficacy of investing in a stable marriage since only then does she acquire a noble title and/or fortune, whereas “playing the field” with multiple suitors only functions temporarily to give herself the most marital options possible. For her, then, coquetry represents a more pragmatic means to an end and not a lifelong project. Lisette mimics exactly what La Veuve has taught her to do by taking advantage of any situation and profiting off the weakness of others, but, in true coquettish style, she improvises and adapts its use to better serve her own intentions.

The following scenes stage the application of Lisette’s education in coquetry and reveal the differences and similarities between La Veuve’s Parisian coquetry and more natural, provincial innocence. Early on, Lucas remarks the potential for his daughter’s talents to blossom (“A cmence à s’éguiser” 1.2, p. 204) and then we witness this circumstance immediately afterward upon Lisette’s arrival on stage. Here, La Veuve gives Lisette tips for attracting Le

³²⁸ Even though Lisette may surprise La Veuve from time to time (“Quel est donc son dessein? / Rêve-t-elle? est-ce moi qui rêve?” 2.5, p. 236), La Veuve never questions her student’s opposing motives as she helps Lisette attain the best marital position. Moreover, she shows adherence to Lisette’s plan elsewhere in the play (1.1, p. 200).

Baron by urging her to appear as natural as possible in order to avoid arousing any suspicion of coquettishness.³²⁹ Lisette in turn speaks of doubt in her capacity to be deceitful:

Lisette

Vous m'avez bien appris, me parlant de ces mines,
Que celles qui les font, sont des femmes bien fines ;
Mais moi, qui ne suis pas fine comme elles sont,
Je ne pourrais jamais faire comme elles font.

La Veuve

Ah ! que vous irez loin; vous savez plaire et feindre.

Lisette

Vous vous trompez ; en rien je ne puis me contraindre.
Si je plais au baron, sans feindre je lui plais ;
S'il fallait le tromper, je ne pourrais jamais.
Quand je veux dire un mot, contraire à ma pensée,
On le voit à mon air, je suis embarrassée. (1.3, pp. 206-207)

La Veuve ironically attempts to teach simplicity to an ingénue, a person who would presumably act natural and guileless without any instruction. Here, the underlying difference between charming coyness and coquettish manipulation depends on whether the person delivers the gesture naturally or consciously, and thus coquetry relies strongly on mimicking good and genuine actions, thereby perverting their goodness into underhanded plays of artifice. In fact, La

³²⁹ Interestingly enough, La Veuve's counterattack against Lisette for stealing her lover involves revealing the secrets of her coquettish "playbook" to Argan, who should be unaware of this insincerity according to coquetry's tenets:

Je vous prouve qu'ici tantôt en un moment,
Au baron comme à vous elle a tendu le piège,
Simplicité traîtresse, et mensonges naïfs ;
Par les tours les plus fins, par les traits les plus vifs,
Elle a su lui donner de l'amour sans en prendre,
Elle fait de sang-froid le discours le plus tendre,
Et feint effrontément un timide embarras,
Pleurs qui vont droit au cœur, et qui n'en partent pas.
Elle abuse en un mot de son faible et du vôtre,
Vous offrant une main elle lui donne l'autre ;
Ainsi coquette franche et marquée au vrai coin,
Prise par les deux mains, la perfide au besoin,
En trouverait encore une pour un troisième. (3.1, p. 257)

Veuve sees no difference in the act of “pleasing” or “feigning” since she assumes that Lisette pleases disingenuously and that people only bother feigning in order to please others. Lisette contradicts her instructor to her face by differentiating the terms (“Si je plais au baron, sans feindre je lui plais”), but once La Veuve leaves the stage the student reveals to her father that she too was actually pleasing-feigning by telling the older woman only what she wanted to hear:

Si je suis sotte encore, je ne le suis plus guère.
Je sais feindre bien mieux que la veuve ne croit,
J’ai de la ruse encore, bien plus qu’elle n’en voit ;
Si je lui dis toujours que je suis innocente,
Que malgré ses leçons je suis une ignorante,
C’est tout exprès, afin qu’elle se fie à moi. (1.4, p. 208)

Lisette has perfected the art of feigning to the point that even her teacher cannot detect her lies. Lisette directly attributes her talent to La Veuve’s tutelage: “Mais elle m’a donné mes leçons de fortune, / Qu’il faut bien profiter de ma jeunesse; et d’une, / L’autre [sic] leçon qu’encore hier elle me fit; / C’est que l’on doit aimer d’abord pour son profit.” (1.4, pp. 211-12). The ability to dissimulate is a fundamental element of coquetry and Lisette has mastered it by seducing her own instructor’s beloved Argan. Lisette’s flawless absorption of La Veuve’s lesson helps prove that feigning and other coquettish tactics are acquired skills and not inherent in femininity.

La Veuve, on the contrary, erroneously believes that Lisette was born a coquette. As quoted in the beginning of this chapter, La Veuve tells Girard that Lisette was already coquettish when she came to her: “A neuf ans, elle était déjà coquette en herbe / Je n’ai fait que tourner son naturel en bien” (1.1, p. 200). Besides the likelihood that she is merely trying to absolve herself of any misdoing in the face of his accusations, her assumption of Lisette’s proclivity for coquetry is a misinterpretation of the girl’s original innocence, if not a projection of her own coquettish habits. As such, when she first observes Lisette acting innocently as a child, she chooses to read her behavior as coquettish rather than natural. Lisette confirms her authentic guilelessness with

the language of her confession cited above in which she states: “Si je suis sottre encore, je ne le suis *plus* guère” and “Si je lui dis *toujours* que je suis innocente...” (1.4, p. 208, emphasis added). Thus, Lisette has unlearned her true shyness and replaced it with an indistinguishable false modesty that La Veuve has taught her, but her instructor only sees a continuum of coquettish behavior as informed by her longtime experiences in Paris.

In this regard, Dufresny portrays coquetry as a concept exotic to the provinces and thus it becomes an unfair advantage capable of facilitating the undesirable social ascension of a farmer.³³⁰ He shows that La Veuve no longer supports her pupil’s success upon learning of Lisette’s underhanded ploy, and she drastically modifies her definition of coquetry so that it no longer resembles a virtue but an indomitable, opportunistic weed (2.1, p. 225).³³¹ La Veuve’s situation is very reminiscent of Arnolphe’s in *L’École des femmes* in that they both teach their students the concept of duplicity, at which point the girls grow wildly out of their control and soon punish their instructors.³³² Barbara Johnson shows how Arnolphe wishes to keep Agnès ignorant for fear of what an education means for women:

It is interesting to recall that the governing purpose behind Arnolphe’s pedagogical enterprise was the fear that a learned wife would make him a cuckold. Ignorance, it seemed, was the only way to ensure fidelity. What this implies, paradoxically enough, is that education is an apprenticeship in unfaithfulness. The fear of giving women an education equal to that of men is

³³⁰ While Moureau acknowledges the revolutionary slant that some critics have attributed to the peasants’ desire to be free of their feudal masters, he believes that Dufresny would have most likely overlooked such a potentially inflammatory message in light of his largely conservative political outlook (*Dufresny auteur* 377).

³³¹ La Veuve even holds coquetry responsible for Lisette’s failure in the end because it gave her false aspirations, as stated in the final words of the play: “Voilà le sort d’une coquette. / Après de hauts projets, on la voit tôt ou tard, / Confuse, confondue, et réduite à Girard” (3.5, p. 273).

³³² Admittedly, the circumstances are not quite the same given that La Veuve’s lesson is wholly voluntary whereas Arnolphe’s is the indirect result of his attack on his rival Horace, as Johnson notes (170). Further, Love never manages to teach Lisette cleverness like it does for Molière’s Agnès, since she never culls her inner devotion for Girard to further their progress together. Although she claims to Argan that her intellect has benefitted from his affection (“D’esprit? Je n’en ai guère. / L’amour m’en a donné plus qu’à mon ordinaire” 2.6, p. 241), it is clear she has no true feelings for him and Dufresny must be mocking this theatrical topos of the ingénue.

clearly a fear that educated women will no longer remain faithful to the needs of patriarchal society. (174)

This implied paradox is exactly what we witness occurring in Dufresny's play: Lisette's education is entirely based on the tenets of infidelity and it gives her the sufficient power she needs in order to break free not only from patriarchal norms but also from economic limitations stemming from her inferior condition. Coquetry was presumably unknown to Lisette's village before La Veuve's arrival and thus the environment cannot cope with the new threat in order to maintain its structure.

Though Dufresny may not support coquetry's impact on the status quo, his work does not denounce the coquette's strategy in itself but rather justifies her behavior by attenuating the blame that should seemingly fall on his protagonist.³³³ One of the strategies he mimics from other authors involves finding a more fundamental fault with the men that the coquette courts. In Lisette's case, she would prefer to marry Le Baron and be done with coquetry given that this marriage satisfies her desires to be both noble and rich. However, Le Baron has promised to marry her for some time but never draws up the contract, telling Lisette he will not consider marriage for another ten years, clearly as a way of keeping *her* enticed while maintaining *his* freedom.³³⁴ This coquettish strategy of his own indicates to Lisette that waiting for his commitment is not a solid bet, and so even though he finally agrees to draw up the contract upon

³³³ Moureau agrees in that Lisette earns redemption through her allure, her endearing faults, and her lack of maliciousness: "Ce ne sont pas des êtres méprisables: la Lisette de la *Coquette de village* a de la grâce, du charme et du caractère, et si elle manifeste un cynisme et une ambition regrettables, ce sont précisément ces défauts qui attirent Girard... La coquetterie n'est pas un vice condamnable, c'est tout au plus une malhonnêteté qu'excuse la fin qu'elle se propose : donner par le simulacre de l'amour l'illusion passagère... du bonheur." (*Dufresny auteur* 404-405) In fact, all characters within *La Coquette de village* display a reverential awe toward Lisette's coquettish intelligence and no one holds her in great contempt even if she mercilessly spurns them.

³³⁴ Le Baron reveals his true intentions after hearing of Lucas' fake winnings, suddenly showing serious interest in marrying Lisette: "D'accord; cent mille francs acquitteraient mes dettes; / Ce motif et l'amour feront tout excuser" (2.3, p. 231). In an ironic reversal, we discover that Le Baron is not as wealthy as Lisette had thought and has been a terrible match all along.

her threatening to leave the village, she employs her own form of coquetry in turning to Argan as a back-up. In this regard, Le Baron's coquetry pushes her to become La Veuve's rival against her will, for as Lisette says, "J'en suis au désespoir; au fond, j'ai le cœur bon. / J'aimerais mieux pour elle épouser le baron" (1.4, p. 212). Mistrustful of men and wary of their promises, Lisette tells her father that Girard still stands a chance if marriage with Argan does not work out.³³⁵ Consequently, the coquetry of men breeds coquetry in women, the latter of which emerges as essentially a defense mechanism in reaction.³³⁶

Dufresny thus shows respect for Lisette's coquettish strategy but as a conservative he must ultimately sabotage it because she uses it for social ascension, much in the way that he would not agree with the national lottery enriching a person of any standing and upsetting the established social order.³³⁷ In other words, Lisette is on the verge of apparent success with attractive marriage offers from Le Baron and Argan when Girard gives her family the news of

³³⁵ Lucas summarizes the hierarchy built within his daughter's plans as follows:

Lucas

En cas des tras amans, v'la c'ment l'trio s'arrange.
L'baron vaut mieux qu'Argan, il a six fois pu d bien.
Argan vaut mieux qu'Girard ; Girard vaut mieux que rien.

Lisette

C'est comme rien, oui... (1.4, p. 212)

³³⁶ Though it may not be intentional, Dufresny renders coquetry a non-factor in the overall scheme of the plot, consequently robbing it of any verifiable culpability. At the end of the play, Lisette blames coquetry for perverting her primary inclination for Girard, which serves two functions: First, it confirms that for Lisette coquetry is an acquired trait as stated earlier, and secondly, it undermines La Veuve's final condemnation of coquetry ("Voilà le sort d'une coquette. / Après de hauts projets, on la voit tôt ou tard, / Confuse, confondue, et réduite à Girard" 3.5, p. 273) given that Lisette would have evidently ended up with Girard even if she had not been taught to reorient her desires. In this sense, La Veuve introduces coquetry into the system but causes no change in spite of the many convolutions it triggers in between. I argue later that coquetry shows a strong potential for success until the fake lottery enters the equation in a parallel manner and defuses Lisette's social ascension before it can affect her fate.

³³⁷ Spielmann expands upon this idea of using *le jeu* as a metaphor for the new socio-economic order of the late years of Louis XIV's reign and the Regency: "...la problématique du jeu d'argent transcende la couleur locale ou le goût du 'détail vrai' pour exprimer à la fois la fascination et la crainte des contemporains face à cette 'nouvelle économie' dont les règles paraissaient mystérieuses, et l'évolution imprévisible. La mise en jeu, métaphorique ou littérale, sous-tend ainsi des comédies qui, sous des abords légers, expriment une authentique angoisse – et qui nous rappellent aussi que le théâtre est l'un des lieux privilégiés de la prise de risque" ("Mise(s) en jeu" 202).

the fake lottery winnings, a plot device that runs parallel to her social climbing due to its sudden and “unfair” access to power. Even though the fake prize is the veritable cause of her social downfall, Dufresny shifts all of the blame on coquetry by simultaneously uncovering the coquettish façade of his heroine and defusing any empowerment she had gained by using it:

Lisette
Que je vous veux de mal, madame! Car c’est vous,
Qui mettiez mon esprit tout sens dessus dessous,
En me disant qu’il faut de la coquetterie.

La Veuve
De mes mauvais conseils la peur m’a bien punie,
J’en conviens, j’avais tort.

Lisette, à Girard
J’écoutais ses discours :
Il vous faut un baron, disait-elle toujours.
Non, je n’aurais jamais pensé qu’à vous sans elle :
Et si j’avais suivi ma pente naturelle,
Par tendresse d’abord, je vous aurais choisi. (3.5, p. 272)

Coquetry here surfaces as the defeated obstacle to the play’s happy ending.³³⁸ In contrast, the natural inclination for Girard compensates for Lisette’s loss of riches and mobility and makes her content to be a farmer’s daughter once again, to the relief of conservative fears. The traditional comedy ending reaffirms that stability has been safeguarded and provides comfort against the opportunistic parallel threat of the coquette-lottery, restoring the economic and political equilibrium of the (still quasi-feudal) system.

Furthermore, the lottery ruse underlines two rival sets of priorities for marriage. On the one hand, at the beginning of the play *La Veuve* and Lucas presume that Lisette’s match should ideally bring money and status to the family. La Veuve’s urban experiences in Paris as well as her own quest for status evidently inform her opinion since she left the capital for the village in

³³⁸ This is similar to the ending of *La Parisienne*. Angélique realizes that she should have listened to her heart from the beginning and rejected the lure of coquetry that only got her into trouble.

order to gain a more respectable title (1.1). Lucas, for his part, dreams of fortune to take him away from the hardships of farm life, though he may also be influenced by La Veuve's lofty promises for when Lisette marries well. In contrast, Girard advocates marriage based on youth, beauty, and love (or at least his own version of it), which are values that seem to favor fertility over material prosperity. These could be seen as not only more rural values but also as more natural ones, in the sense that they are tied to fundamental human needs as well as to less social aspects of life. In this way, Lisette's genuine selection of Girard as the ideal husband amongst the suitors is in keeping with the logic of the play in which "nature" dominates over "nurture." Taking money out of the equation through the lotto ruse highlights these basic values and reminds us that natural inclinations have a way of overcoming learned strategies that may undermine them.

La Coquette de village represents coquetry as a teachable practice. Whereas in the other two plays of this chapter the heroines deduce the power (and perhaps necessity) of their coquettish practices on their own, La Veuve explicitly instructs Lisette with the intention of giving her the tools to circumvent any such predicament *before* she transitions into adulthood. In other words, what used to be essentially a self-exploratory rite of passage for young women has been condensed into packaged lessons aimed at empowering girls entering the marriage pool. La Veuve thus successfully exports coquetry from Paris and implants it in the countryside, at which point it takes root and causes internal strife due to its "unnatural" aims of accessing wealth and status. In this sense, coquetry may indeed be an acquirable good but it is not always welcomed outside of the capital's walls, where a new set of social rules are at play.

By staging the "secret" lessons of the coquette, Dufresny emphasizes how early-modern urban relations have socially constructed coquetry and marketed it to the underprivileged, and in

particular young women. Coquetry presents itself more as an exotic, enticing *lure* than as an intrinsic *gift*, furthermore suggesting that it can make trouble for women who adhere to it overzealously. By correlating the well-known national lottery to the ostensibly enigmatic concept of coquetry, Dufresny further reminds his audiences that these are two new and clearly inorganic phenomena that only bring tumult to the “natural” order of good French society.

Conclusion

These three plays demonstrate how young female characters acquire coquetry through their personal experiences without being inherently coquettish from birth. They either absorb it during the haphazard trial and error of their adolescence or more deliberately through an explicit education. Coquetry generally develops as a skill to help young women cope with amorous or social difficulties that they might be facing in a world that consistently submits them to men’s wills and whims. Parisian girls may show a certain predilection for coquetry given that their bustling urban milieu favors more interaction (both positive and negative) with men and thus a greater degree of mutability in their daily lives, but provincial girls are just as susceptible if taught the same lessons less organically. Whether coquetry stays with a young woman once she learns it is variable: There appears to be a natural inclination that pulls her back into an Edenesque innocence in which she loves only one man, but not all coquettes give up their newfound social prowess at the end of the play. In this sense, coquetry may be just as forgettable as it is learnable once the young woman decides that it no longer renders her any service.

Futhermore, the plays inform our understanding of how comic theater was reflecting on the nature of subjectivity, and in particular feminine subjectivity. In comparison to many of the coquettes in my first two chapters, the depiction of coquetry in this chapter has now moved away

from an essentialist model, in which the coquette is merely a theatrical type imbued with a one-dimensional trait or folly, toward either a performative or constructivist model.

In the performative model, an author favors coquetry as an improvisatory technique that reacts to a stimulus and has an explained cause, unlike the essentialist model which emphasizes innate characteristics and solicits assumptions from the audience. Both Dancourt and Dufresny focus on their coquettes' unmet desires for attention and economic security which lead them to coquettish unfaithfulness (and not vice versa). Their coquetry is a reactive behavior that shows adaptability and resilience in the face of adversity and helps them regain their footholds in courtship. The adversity that they encounter mostly stems from their lovers' unreliability: In this sense, coquetry often begets coquetry.³³⁹ Thus, men are often the triggers of coquetry and yet the focus of these plays still lies with the women and their infidelity. These prejudices against them perhaps make coquettes easier targets for criticism, but Dancourt and Dufresny go to great lengths to explain their roots and exonerate their coquettes of total blame, an advantageous treatment that the unfaithful male characters never receive.

In the constructivist model, an author emphasizes coquetry as a wholly acquirable technique. Though we may never witness the coquettes in a "natural" and innocent state in which they would resemble a typical comic ingénue, Dancourt and Dufresny nevertheless allude to their pre-coquettish days or demonstrate their simple reversion in such a way that the audience cannot reasonably conclude that they are born coquettes. All three plays stage instances in which a

³³⁹ Clitandre abandons Angélique to court an uncountable number of women, making it seem as though the play really should be titled *L'Été du coquet*. Le Baron in *La Coquette de village*, for his part, refuses to give Lisette the marriage that she so desires until he decides in ten years that he is ready to settle down with one woman. *La Parisienne*'s Éraste, while not exactly coquettish or unfaithful to Angélique, still lacks dependability for having left for Italy so unpredictably.

coquettish character teaches some facet of coquetry to another less knowing woman, and thus the educational (and social) aspect of the art becomes clearer.

Coquetry is not a run-of-the-mill instinct known to all women but rather a learned technique worthy of admiration to those not in the know. In fact, the young girls in these plays stand out *because* their skill at coquetry sets them apart from most women, and their authors demonstrate how their initiation into coquettish expertise warrants entire plays devoted to the subject. Dancourt and Dufresny thus give proper recognition to the art of the coquettish playbook, a text carefully inscribed upon a woman's *tabula rasa* by grace of her experiences and not the hand of God.

CONCLUSION

The figure of the coquette played an important part in the French cultural imagination of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as evidenced through the number of coquettish characters emerging on the stage in this period. The thirteen plays that I have selected to analyze in my dissertation demonstrate both this frequent and consistent interest in her representation as well as the sheer mutability of the figure within comedy. As a part of my project I have aimed to “sort” coquettes into several sub-categories that help organize their typical characteristics and bring forth patterns in their portrayal. Even so, their variable representations prove that authors continually nuanced the character type to make it a unique creation in each work. Furthermore, the coquette emerged as a complex enough figure to transcend the status of character type and become something closer to a multi-dimensional, life-like character who might resemble an early modern woman in the audience of her performance. In other words, by acting as a comic lens through which playwrights could observe and dramatize contemporary women’s behaviors, the coquette represents a fascinating (yet distorted) window into a rather specific moment of French society when this social type appeared.

At the most basic level, authors portrayed the coquette as a flirtatious and manipulative woman who is overly concerned with her image in society. This characterization highlights several fundamental aspects of the type, including her affinity for amorous scenarios, her cleverness, and her narcissistic search for attention. Together, these elements formed the majority of the traits that expressed how playwrights, such as Molière or Dancourt, saw the new

generation of fashionable women in Paris during the personal reign of Louis XIV, and in particular how they perceived these women as socially successful in spite of their flagrant frivolity. Indeed, the excessive consideration that these women must have given to their appearance, their desirability, their relative eminence, and their own entertainment evidently manifested itself to such a degree that authors took note of a certain social prowess and reinterpreted its enactment on the stage in their favor. In other words, in their plays dramatists acknowledged the subtle social utility of observed coquettish behaviors and chose to emphasize it over coquetry's more apparent ridiculousness by having their characters succeed in their theatrical plots and emerge as fun-loving heroines.

Nevertheless, the theatrical coquette consistently navigates between heroism and villainy. She most often represents a protagonist in search of a reasonable goal but her extreme self-interest causes her to resort to an immoral approach that may involve lying, betrayal, and/or theft. On the whole, her coquettish tactics may be viewed as highly unfaithful to any established moral codes thereby rendering her a dissolute character. In fact, certain representations of the coquette even revel in their scandalous behavior and reputation. However, playwrights situate the character type in a way that positions her as a subjugated woman in the face of some larger patriarchal obstacle so as to give her a justifiable reason to rebel, including through morally questionable methods. In this light, coquetry provides female characters with the performative tools for overcoming societal hurdles.

Given the preconceived notions of what it means to be a "coquette" for today's readers, the coquette figure from early modern French theater has long been misunderstood. Its status as a comic character type frequently leads readers to assume that it adhered to contemporary theatrical conventions and thus inherently embodied a simple and absolute idea. Perhaps worse

yet, they erroneously infer that it was meant to represent a flirtatious (and therefore promiscuous) woman who foolishly cannot overcome her vanity. Without having delved deeper into the character type, these readers fail to see that the coquette is a sophisticated and versatile creation, one that uniquely captures many different facets of early modern life for women and even rebels against patriarchal values through her (oft-condemned) egotism. As a significant literary figure of the seventeenth century, the coquette demands a certain degree of decoding on the reader's part so as to resist oversimplification and, more importantly, to earn the attention that she deserves (and so loves).

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