

MOLIERE AND THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE NUMBER</u>
ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I - HISTORY OVER THE CENTURIES	4
- THE RISE OF THE SALONS AND THE PRECIEUSE MOVEMENT	
CHAPTER II - <u>LES PRECIEUSES RIDICULES</u>	15
CHAPTER III - <u>L'ECOLE DES MARIS</u>	29
CHAPTER IV - <u>L'ECOLE DES FEMMES</u>	39
CHAPTER V - <u>LES FEMMES SAVANTES</u>	60
CONCLUSION	74
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	79
REFERENCES	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY	83

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the social problems connected with the system of education for women as Molière saw them in his day. To determine what these problems were, the history of women's situation in society and their intellectual development have been traced from the times of ancient Greece to the seventeenth century. Attention has been paid to the rise of the salon in the beginning of the century, with its emphasis on manners, conversation, and the nurturing of literature. Certain women in these salons were prominent in exerting considerable influence on the intellectual climate of the day. These women, together with currents of contemporary thought, have been investigated with a view to determining how they may have affected Molière's ideas.

The plays investigated are Les Précieuses Ridicules, in which Molière attacks the reading of novels, and préciosité, that phenomenon which, while not peculiar to the seventeenth century, flourished remarkably, and spread from the salons of Paris in the first half of the century, and which Molière saw as a threat to the stability of marriage and family life in the bourgeoisie. In L'Ecole des Maris and L'Ecole des Femmes, Molière is concerned with the dangers of keeping girls and young women divorced from the world in their formative years, while Les Femmes Savantes written a decade later, is concerned with the question of to what extent women can demand education without disrupting the harmony of the home. Brief relevant references have been made to other works of Molière.

Molière would enlighten women in the ways of the world

to afford her a protection to her virtue, and to help her mind to expand sufficiently to fulfil her place in society. His attitude towards a formal education held to the "juste milieu". Education had its place; a woman needed first to keep the harmony of the house, and to fulfil her natural destiny.

We are inclined to believe that the problems which involve us in our century or period are peculiar to us. However a glimpse into history soon corrects this view. There we see the same struggles for power and influence and relief from oppression that are with us today. The movement for women's education, which caught up with us dramatically after the mid-twentieth century, appears in the light of history as an ongoing phenomenon which had its origins at least as far back as ancient Greece, if not in the Garden of Eden. This movement has ebbed and flowed in the recorded history of France since the time of Charlemagne. Intermittently through the centuries some lone voice male or female is raised in the championing of the education of women and the freeing of her mind. In the mid-seventeenth century in France the voice of Molière speaks through the characters of his plays and alerts us to the social forces which were influencing the society of his time. The tide was running strongly for the enlightenment of women, and they were ready to grasp their opportunities.

For all his exposure of their foibles and shortcomings Molière has portrayed his women with sympathy and understanding. The women of his era existed in their own special milieu as of course they do in every age. In their famous salons where he sometimes read his plays, Molière had opportunities of studying at first-hand intelligent women who took a lively interest in manners, literature, and current affairs. Eventually the salons were not confined to the aristocracy alone. Mlle de Scudéry whose bourgeois salon was famous, gave a lead to other middle-class women.

Thus the influence of the great ladies percolated through to the bourgeoisie who were constantly aping and striving to identify themselves with, the upper classes, to which they aspired entrance. The manners, modes of dressing, habits of reading, and new attitudes to education and marriage, were copied, not without distortion. All this was observed minutely by Molière, himself a member of the bourgeoisie and about whom his plays are written.

This era also saw the rise of thinkers of the calibre of Descartes, who crystallised and systematised the tangled philosophy of over a hundred years. The age of reason was dawning - discipline, moderation, and natural good sense reigned. True to his age, it is these principles which Molière respects. It may be that he is preoccupied with maintaining the status quo. For instance his livelihood more or less depended on Louis XIV, how much could he risk? Intelligent women took an interest in current trends, and moreover their daily lives involved interaction with prominent thinkers and writers. Molière's own personal relationships with women, the cause of much controversy, and speculation, are thought to have exerted much influence on his ideas especially in L'Ecole des Femmes.

When Louis XIV assumed the power of France in 1661, a young man of twenty-two years, destined and determined to become an absolute monarch, with a brilliant court of young aristocrats to be kept under control, Molière found himself with an important role to play. As a provider of entertainment he delighted Louis' court and the Parisian bourgeoisie. He always claimed that his aim was to please and amuse, but at the same time he held up a mirror for the spectators to see their strengths and weaknesses not merely reflected, but

magnified and burlesqued. Thus while amusing, he was criticising the manners and customs of the society of his day. His women were ridiculed in a good huoured fashion to divert, but at the same time some social problems were brought out into the open for recognition and inspection. One of these problems was the system of education of women which Molière clearly shows left much to be desired. For all his exposure of them, Molière is on the whole kind to his women. Indeed many of them are wholly admirable and virtuous characters.

Thus questions are posed. What type of woman was Molière holding up to ridicule? Some women are not ridiculed. To what extent do they reflect Molière's views on woman's place in society? Her place seems to be directly related to her education, or lack of it. In the same way marriage and the seventeenth century woman seems to be similarly related. How much influence has Molière exerted on future educationists, for example, Madame de Maintenon and Fénelon, thus ameliorating any wrongs as Molière exposes them? To what extent has he concerned himself with women outside marriage? Perhaps the following study will throw some light on these questions.

CHAPTER IEDUCATION OVER THE CENTURIES

As the women of seventeenth century France were not living in a vacuum, it might be useful to investigate their previous history regarding education and social status generally. A woman in ancient Greece lived apart in the gynécée, in inertia and ignorance. Although conditions varied somewhat, in the main this was her lot. She kept house, and obeyed her parents or husband, was disposed of in marriage, and left the house only to take part in the choirs on the days of religious fêtes. Plato recognised the equality of the sexes:

"... the only difference between men and women is one of physical function - one begets, the other bears the children. Apart from that, they both can and should perform the same functions (though men will, on the whole, perform them better), and should receive the same education to enable them to do so; for in this society will get the best value from both".¹

Through the centuries Plato's advice has apparently gone unheeded except for the odd champion. Inspired by the great Christian writers such as St. Augustine and St. Jerome, the state of virginity was glorified and valued above all else. However St. Jerome had this advice for a particular man on his daughter's education. He recommended that she read the Bible and recite passages each day in Latin, and learn to weave, spin, and sing, that she play games, and, it is interesting to note, emphasised the importance of maternal influence, very sound, but only for a single application and not for women in general. By and large only a few women living in convents could read and

write up to the ninth century. Charlemagne in 789 established schools in monasteries and dioceses, mostly segregated and catering for the nobility. The twelfth century found the bourgeoisie practically without education. In the thirteenth century however interest in the education of women seems to be quickening.

In the middle ages courtly literature, for example, that of Chrétien de Troyes, elevated women for a period. Love was idealised and elevated to a state of divination. While at the same time another current of thought shows her fallen from her pedestal. The influential literary groups involving Elinor of Aquitaine, Marie Comtesse de Champagne, Marguerite de Flandres, received wandering minstrels and troubadors in their manors. 'Fablieux' were related, 'lais' composed and 'chansons d'amour' were sung. At the same time reactionary currents satirised women in realist literature. She is dethroned from the place accorded her in courtly literature. Sensual love is described with obscene details, and woman is maligned as malicious, a dissimuler, full of hatred and deceptive. Even courtly literature while idealising legitimate love, nevertheless deals with illicit love, which, though ingeniously veiled, leaves a vivid impression, as in Chrétien's Cliges and Lancelot. The continuation of 'Roman de la Rose' compares a woman under the yoke of marriage to a caged bird. Naturally the church would not tolerate the undermining of the sacraments, particularly that of marriage. Consequently moralists were concerned only with rules of conduct for the 'honnête femme', thus ignoring intellectual instruction to emphasise the religious aspect. As the girls were married

very young, at fourteen to fifteen years, and marriage was considered their destiny, the married women were the target of these writers, who concerned themselves first and foremost with chastity. Religion occupies the most important place and particularly behaviour in church - no chattering, no fidgeting. In public she was allowed to look at her husband only, urged to keep herself covered modestly, and to discourage amorous advances. In dress she was to avoid ostentation, painting of face and dyeing of hair; jewellery was to be simple. This 'juste milieu' has been recommended down through the centuries and seems to have met with general consensus. Bourdaloue has preached emphatic sermons in Molière's time condemning ostentation and immodest behaviour. One writer condemns co-education; girls must be kept separate from boys. Women were considered feeble and needed the support of a husband or parents. Public functions and fêtes were frowned on for women, who should be strictly temperate.

In the view of these moralists then, marriage was considered the destination of young women, and happiness (for whom?) was equated with the good wife and family. The important thing, it appears then, is to keep domestic harmony, to hush angry voices and to silence boisterous children. A good wife was a good counsellor and support to her husband, kept his secrets, honoured his parents, and loved any children of another marriage. To complete the perfection, this wife needs to be always good and amiable, and to permit no quarrelling. Later in the thirteenth century, and in the earlier part of the fourteenth, one opinion would hold extreme ignorance to be the most precious asset in a wife, she should spin and sew, but writing and

reading are blacklisted. Later in the century reading and writing would be permitted by a more progressive moralist, who recommended that woman should broaden her education. The reading permitted, only by some, was to consist of the Holy Scripture and Lives of the Saints. Later it will be seen that Molière endows Arnolphe in L'Ecole des Femmes , with the narrower view of these alarmed moralists, who apparently see any liberation or education of women as a threat to the institution of marriage.

A woman, Catherine de Pisan, emerges in the fifteenth century as an advocate for education for women. Educated herself, married to an Italian, and widowed early with a family of young children, she lived in France at a time when the country was experiencing the troubled political times of the Great Schism and the Hundred Years War, which meant, as always in times of war, that woman was denigrated. Catherine wrote two books, Cité des Dames , and Livre de Trois Vertus . Catherine held the revolutionary idea that a woman's virtues were strengthened by education, that intellectual development led to moral development. She too could see no reason why a woman's intellect should not equal that of a man. She would also include a knowledge of matters relating to her lands and possessions, which together with a chaste and virtuous life would avoid much misery. Fénelon too has similar ideas; he suggests a girl needs a knowledge of arithmetic and also some acquaintance with the workings of the law, as she will have a household and estates to manage. Mme de Maintenon similarly sees a need for a woman to know what her rights are as regards the law. Catherine also considers she should be aware of duties

and obligations according to social status, as this prepares her to be a more able help-meet to her husband. That Cathos and Magdelon in Les Precieuses Ridicules had no conception of house management and economy is obvious, Gorgibus is infuriated at the wastage of good food. This view of Catherine de Pisan would cancel out women's inferiority in the eyes of the Church. Unfortunately Catherine allows her less dignity when she recommends that in cases of a brutal, quarrelsome, faithless husband, she submit herself, be agreeable and winning. By acting thus she will at least save her soul. Anne de France a hundred years later in urging women to keep themselves humble and inferior, offers no notion of companionable dignity and equality.

Vives, a popular writer at the outset of the renaissance and the flourishing of the universities, was influenced by the Greek idea of women living apart from men. Segregated and watched carefully at puberty they would receive no presents from males, and go to no public functions, always be accompanied by a husband and speak to no other man. All very reminiscent of Arnolphe again, and his list of maxims. Obviously woman is not advancing in this area. On one point however he is firm. In his view no marriages should take place until a girl has reached the age of seventeen years. Agnès in L'Ecole des Femmes, just finished her convent days, would be about that age. Vives does emphasize the very great importance of the role of the mother in the life of the young girl as St. Jerome. This is noticeable in Molière's work too, as we shall see. As regards actual study, Vives is not exactly liberal. Reading is confined to religious books, as a safeguard against sloth and idleness; those concerning love and chivalry not considered at

all, which of course would banish all Greek and Latin poets, especially Ovid and his writings of love. However that reading is even favoured, shows some progress. He too confines her to managing her household, being humble and discreet, silent, devout, and agreeable. Vives has advice for the widow, which was to redouble her efforts in the care of house and children, and to seek any advice from her husband's male relatives. No mention is made of acquiring any knowledge of, for instance the legislation of the time, feudal law, or rules of war, all of which would be useful when a husband is not present, such as Catherine de Pisan suggested. Women can claim little independence apparently.

Those who were bold enough to advance the cause of any liberation were the object of criticism and satire from the writers of the day. Erasmus² was an exception to a certain extent. One of his female characters complained about the treatment women received from men. However he apparently considered the subject to merit little attention. Henri Corneille Agrippa also comes out as a champion of women.

"N'est elle pas aussi intelligente que les représentants de l'autre sexe? Elle a même plus de finesse et de pénétration; éclairée pas un instinct que est un privilège de sa nature, elle voit plus juste que les philosophes et les savants. Elle a de naissance, la parole facile, et le don de éloquence".³

She is denied freedom by custom, education, chance, and principally by violence and oppression. He too exhorts men to make companions of their wives. Here is a more sympathetic tone. On the whole though, it seems that little progress has been made by this time, in bringing some light into woman's mind. Any slight improvement that might have been made was lost in the unsettled state of France during the sixteenth century. During the period of

the religious and civil wars woman was again reduced to a state of inferiority and powerlessness, for it is in times such as these that the dignity, standing, and estimation of woman is dragged down. The men themselves are uncouth, brutalised and lacking in refinement, when social life is missing.

However, several intelligent and instructed women, Marguerite de Navarre, Marguerite de France, Diane de Poitiers, Catherine de Medicis, gathered round them at the Académie du Palais, a group of women of a superior culture, with a taste for 'galanterie', conversation, and a little literature. There too, came men of letters, and poets. Earlier days had seen Ronsard and du Bellay. Here Marguerite de Valois marked the progress women had made when she spoke of them as being the most worthy offering which could be presented to God through their perfection and dignity. A préciosité developed in these court circles around 1600, which increased to unwieldy proportions. The salon was to substitute the court circles.

THE RISE OF THE SALONS AND THE PRECIEUSE MOVEMENT

There are yet fifty years or so before we meet the women of Molière's bourgeois world. These fifty years saw a certain progress towards women improving their minds and status in society. An active part in politics was taken by some, and current affairs occupied their interest. With the turn of the century the peaceful political and social conditions which Henry IV brought to the country, afforded a breathing space for culture to flourish, until the King was assassinated in 1610. Civil unrest again slowed down

the civilising movement until the advent of Richelieu. In the meantime the period of quiet gave rise to the first of the famous salons of seventeenth century Paris, and the development of the précieuse movement. Here in the salons were formed and moulded those types of women with whom Molière was to come in contact, some of whom were so vastly to entertain the theatre-goers of Paris in the middle of the century. These salons which play such an important part in laying the foundations of "l'honnête homme" and "l'honnête femme" were given their impetus by the thirty years' reign of Catherine de Vivonne and her Hôtel de Rambouillet. Daughter of an Italian ambassador in Italy, she planned her hôtel with its suites of flower-filled rooms opening into a lovely garden. In this civilising atmosphere, roughness and coarseness were modified and regulated by a discipline which yielded the "bon ton" and good taste, so much a mark of the period. Conversation was developed and perfected, literature, science, etiquette, amongst other things were discussed, and the art of letter writing was born through the genius of Mme de Sévigné. For the cult of the salon spread rapidly, and many famous high-born ladies opened their doors to their own circles of habituées. Men of letters and learning were attracted to these salons, and welcomed. Frequently they read their current literary efforts to these intelligent and critical women before launching them further afield. In fact often the salon women were responsible for the success or otherwise of the launching. New plays were tested, Molière read several of his, in various salons.

It is small wonder if these charming and intelligent

women might not have given Molière pause to ponder the education of women in general. It was through Ninon de Lanclos that Molière gained entry into this society. Two years older than Molière, Ninon was a beautiful, brilliant courtesan whose father had brought up to think for herself. She evolved a philosophy based on Epicurian principles and the precepts of Montaigne. This tolerant freethinker felt keenly the social inferiority of women, and decided to live as a man, preferring independence to marriage. She appears to have been one of the first of the moderns, a leader of the feminine revolt. Here she shows a definite advance on Catherine de Pisan, for she espoused the cause of liberating women from the domination of husbands and parents, and advocated the equality of the sexes in marriage. Conceivably Ninon exerted much influence on Molière. As a "précieuse galante" she had previously given birth to a child and lived the very free life that accords with that of most of the "précieuses" of her day. She was indeed not of the type of Cathos and Magelon. Her influence could have been more of a negative type as Molière consistently shows himself as a preserver of family life.

Ninon appears to have been in the vanguard of the précieuse movement, which had begun burgeoning towards the end of the last century. Certainly it was not new in the seventeenth century. It exerted great influence at this time in literature, manners, and modes. In 1610 L'Astre, a romance by D'Urfe, drew together currents of chivalry, love and platonism. The gentle manner of expressing ideas suited the cultivated people of the time, who were looking for a style less rough, as a reaction to the vulgarity of the

court and town of Paris, which had led to the opening of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. This mode was followed by Madeleine de Scudéry. Her novels were a mixture of fiction, and modern manners, in portraits of people who met in Paris salons, criticisms of books, and sentiments, - in other words, a mirror of Paris society. The result of all this was that manners came to model themselves on fiction. Heroes of novels served as ideal types to be imitated or even surpassed.

Boileau criticised the sentimental complications of platonic love, and the relaxed moral tone in general in Le Grand Cyrus, Mlle de Scudéry's novel in ten volumes. The code of the laws of love found in this work became the bedside book of the précieuses. The second, ten volume work Clélie contained the famous Carte de Tendre, which was a game Mlle de Scudéry evolved to entertain her friends in her bourgeois salon. It consisted of a map of an allegorical journey which is undertaken in order to be subjected to tests of friendship, and to acquire certain qualities, so as to be received at the destination, which represents the true friendship of the person sought. This map served as a code of honour for a generation of "galants" and "précieuses".

A complex phenomenon, préciosité was marked, in practice, by a desire to distinguish oneself from the vulgarities of common life. The important thing in its narrow aspect was to give novelty to a new idea, to cultivate a taste for the unusual and rare.

Robert Jouanny notes various forms of préciosité. The old préciosité of the court of Henry IV, the aristocratic préciosité of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, the "bas bleu" of Mlle de Scudéry, and that with which Molière was chiefly concerned

in Les Précieuses Ridicules. This is the préciosité of the fashionable set, coquettish, and somewhat foolish; happy to find a fashion to distinguish themselves, exaggerating fashion, adorning themselves with ribbons and beauty spots, rolling their eyes to make them appear big, brandishing a little cane with a sportive air, expressing themselves in languishing tones and riddles, and a dozen other different kinds of officially catalogued sighs.⁴

These affected manners developed in the ruelles, stimulated by what was less desirable in Mlle de Scudéry's romances. Georges Montgredien commenting on the Carte de Tendre notes that one loses oneself in this allegorical geography; a précieuse discerns nine different sorts of esteem; another has classed the sighs in twelve categories. He quotes Saint-Evremond as follows:

"Se font distinguer les fiertés des rigueurs,
Les dédains des méprises, les tourments des langueurs;
On y sait démêler la crainte et les alarmes,
Discerner les attraits, les appas et les charmes".⁵

Much adverse and satirical criticism was directed at these novels and their effect on the morals of the day. It is this social climate to which Molière returns after his many years of touring the provinces with his troupe of actors.

CHAPTER II

When Molière returned from the provinces to Paris in 1658 after his thirteen years spent working out his "apprenticeship", at the age of thirty-nine years, he had not yet frequented the court, nor the Parisian society. Under his protection, and as the troupe of Monsieur the King's only brother, Molière presented before the King, the Queen Mother, and all the court, a play Nicomède, followed by Le Docteur Amoureux, which so pleased the King that he made available to Molière, now well on the way to success, the "Petit Bourbon", to be shared with the Italians. Among the friends who helped him in Paris were Ninon de Lanclos, l'Abbé d'Aubignac, who had criticised préciosité in 1654 in Histoire du Temps ou Relation du Royaume de Coquetterie. Chappelle, La Mothe le Vayer, and his son, L'Abbé le Vayer. Consequently, as one might imagine, many doors were opened to him, enabling him to observe at first hand the habits, language and manners, and to acquire the refined polish of this brilliant society, to familiarise himself with their preoccupations and turn of wit. Thus after the successful presentation of L'Etourdé and Le Dépit Amoureux, Molière produced on 18th November 1659 Les Précieuses Ridicules.

To what extent was Molière at this time concerned with the social questions of the day? Les Précieuses Ridicules undoubtedly attacked this fashionable phenomenon; Molière was not the first in this field. Molière depended on Monsieur for his livelihood, and his aim must be to please the people. After the first presentation the play was not performed for a fortnight. During the period 1656-1659 satire had been

directed against the précieuses not only to mock. Mlle de Scudery's portraits had caused Monsieur to take umbrage, and also after the departure of Condé from France, she had ranged herself on the side of Focquet. The enemies of Focquet were anti-précieuse and faithful to Retz, d'Aubignac, Boileau, Cotin. Thus it could appear that Molière's apparently mild ridicule ranged him on his protector's side. At all events the second performance of Les Précieuses Ridicules showed the satire directed at the "pecques provinciales". However, whether he intended to or not, Molière certainly succeeded in airing a social problem which had the potential of assuming significant proportions.

This stage of Molière's career marks the beginning of his success, fame and wealth were not far off. He may have been keeping in favour to support his troupe, or he may have realised just what harm the romantic literature could cause, how it could strike at the heart of the family. In the preface to Le Tartuffe, he underlines the usefulness of the theatre:

"...et nous avons vu que la théâtre a une grande vertu pour la correction. Les plus beaux traits d'une sérieuse morale sont moins puissants, le plus souvent, que ceux de la satire..."

Les Précieuses Ridicules paints us a picture of the bourgeois society of this time. Charles Sorel, a writer of the "roman réaliste", enlightens us on the strengthening attitudes of the bourgeoisie in Le Berger Extravagant, published in three parts between 1627 and 1633. The success of L'Astrée, a model of good language, and widely read, penetrated even to the fashions:

"il a pour les rubans une nuance astrée et l'on porte des jarretières 'à la Celadon'".

Sorel's good sense revolts against such infatuation -

"recueils de folies", which he sees spread out in bookshops, reduce the "le prix de lettres", and, he maintains, distract the public from the serious literature which is useful for the conduct of life. Sorel ridicules the novels of the day and questions their usefulness if they remove from young men the desire to work, and from young women the desire to retain their modesty. He claims that good sense is ruined.⁶

"Gorgibus: Ces pendants là avec leur pomade, ont je pense desiré de me ruiner. Je ne vois partout que le blanc d'oeufs, lait virginal, ... elles ont usé... le lard d'une douzaine de couchons... et quatre valets vivoient tous les jours des pieds de moutons qu'elles emploient".

Scene III, Les Précieuses Ridicules.

This tirade of Gorgibus is a reflection on an education system which allows young girls to grow into womanhood lacking in responsibility. The bourgeois father of Molière's day was hardworking, thrifty, devout in religion, and imbued with a shrewd commonsense and caution. He was renowned for his parsimony, respectability, and love of good order. They were worried to see persons of good family compromising the reputation of their solid bourgeois body. Molière himself was the son of Jean Poquelin, honest bourgeois, rising in social class by purchasing a position as a court upholsterer and "valet de chambre" to Louis XIV. Molière identified himself with the Béjart family, lower bourgeois, and the bourgeoisie generally. Obviously he is well qualified to cast a critical eye on the waste of good food which rouses Gorgibus's thrifty blood.

"Il est bien nécessaire vraiment de faire tant de dépense pour vous graisser le musseau".

Scene IV, Les Précieuses Ridicules.

Gorgibus is probably rightly indignant at the waste, but

how is it that these young girls are so heedless and irresponsible towards parents' hard-won earnings? Beekom has pointed out how the convent system of education sent young girls away from a warm, affectionate, natural family life into a coldly disciplined, cloistered environment, from the age of as young as five to seventeen or eighteen years. They had had no chance of appreciating the daily life of the father and bread-winner of a family. What knowledge had they of a business life? Separated from parents at critical periods, the girls missed not only the solicitude, warmth, and affection of a mother when it was most necessary, but also the intimacy of a family group.⁷ They certainly learnt at the convents obedience and submission to parental authority, but parents and children remained strangers.

Convent education was practically the only one available to girls of middle-class parents. Jacqueline Pascal indicates the scope of a convent education in her Réglements pour les Enfants de Port-Royal. Religion is the basis of the curriculum and only religious books are read. French literature is not considered. Saint Francis de Sales' Introduction à la Vie Dévote was available, and Le guide de Pécheurs of Luis de Grenada of Spain had been popular since translation in 1574. Jacqueline Pascal's object was never to accustom the girls to read from pleasure. The remainder of their curriculum consisted of writing, and the elements of arithmetic. Not all convents taught arithmetic. This is quite a contrast to Catherine de Pisan who would educate girls to stand by their husbands as helpmeets, and manage affairs when their husbands were away. The home of the seventeenth century bourgeois was a

very complicated affair requiring much skill and technical knowledge on the part of the lady who directed it. Mme de Lafayette speaks of the thousand and one duties of the housewife.

The girls were taught that the world was a wicked place, but were not shown how to deal with it. Consequently when they finally emerged from their convent they had received an excessive amount of religious instruction, and scarcely any of an intellectual nature, while their understandings of the realities of the world were practically nil. Fénelon, a decade or so later, recognized the shortcomings of the convent education when he remarks in

Education des Filles that a girl leaves a convent like a person coming out of a deep cave, who suddenly is carried up into broad daylight. Pierre de la Chase considered a girl to be better educated by persons of the world. While Mme de Sévigné thought it barbarous to put a girl into a convent.

The unrealities of the convent are emphasised in Les Précieuses Ridicules.

"Et quelle estime, mon Pierre, voulez-vous que nous faisons du procédé irrégulier de ces gens-là?"

Scene IV, Les Précieuses Ridicules.

Cathos and Magdelon, in spite of the strict surveillance of their convent life, have managed to lay their hands on the popular novels of the day. Gorgibus sees in the direct approach of La Grange and Du Croisy a testimony of their honest intentions. Not so Cathos and Magdelon. Mlle de Scudéry finds ten volumes necessary to bring lovers to the point of marriage. The girls have received their two suitors with an air of boredom and fatigue which La Grange perceives as a mixture of précieuse and coquette. Heads

filled with romantic nonsense, the girls are not prepared to accept a proposal of marriage in the light of a business arrangement:

"Mon père, voila ma cousine qui vous dira, aussi bien que moi, que la mariage ne doit jamais arriver qu'après les autres aventures".

Scene IV, Les Précieuses Ridicules.

Then follows a long account of how a proposal of marriage should be arrived at, according to the rules of Mlle de Scudéry in Le Grande Cyrus, which offers an amazing reflection of the contemporary life of the French aristocracy. The picture is not altogether inexact; wars, intrigues and elopements, such being the life of the youth of the Fronde.⁸ Young heads sopped up all these notions of how a woman should be sought in marriage. Gorgibus and his charges are talking on different levels. Cathos bewails the fact that the suitors have not seen the Carte de Tendre, and know nothing of "Billet-Doux", "Petits-Soins", "Jolis-Vers", and "Billets-Galants". The girls disapprove of the young men's clothes. Cathos remarks on the lack of ribbons, badly cut reverses, and narrow breeches. By contrast they are enraptured by Mascarille's fantastic garb which they consider the only clothes at all suitable to their précieuse's notions of distinguishing themselves.

"C'est Perdrigeon tout pur".

Scene IX, Les Précieuses Ridicules.

Magdelon dissolves in exaggerated praise of Mascarille's "Petite-oie". His 'canons', gloves, perfume, feathers, stockings and so on are criticised in the language of the up-to-the-minute précieuses. The perfume of his gloves affects Magdelon "délicieusement". Cathos finds his feathers "effroyablement" beautiful. The suitors are criticised for

not only their manner of courtship, and lack of modish attire, but also for their matter of fact conversation, quite lacking in the frivolous inanities which Mascarille will shortly pour into their ears:

"Quelque vol de mon coeur, quelque assassinat de ma franchise".

Scene IX, Les Précieuses Ridicules.

Mascarille produces the style 'galant'.

It is obvious that the girls' heads are filled with romantic notions, leaving them with an irresponsible attitude, which encourages them to follow blindly, extremes of fashion not only in conversation, modes and manners, but also in the more serious considerations such as marriage. Where does the blame lie? We have seen that the convents have accustomed their pupils to a highly organised day. The girls are now faced with long days to fill in, and parents who are practically strangers. How much do parents and children appreciate each other's point of view? In Scene IV Cathos and Magdelon are talking a different language from Gorgibus who, with his practical bourgeois outlook sees marriage as a simple, inviolable affair, a business which takes no account of romance. In this respect he is not a grasping bourgeois but a typical father who is keeping his family from disintegrating, so matters of financial status, age, education, are all questions to be considered when choosing suitable husbands. Gorgibus is satisfied that he has produced two suitable husbands for his charges.

Magdelon's declamation of romance "à la Scudéry", Gorgibus greets as a diabolical affected jargon, and finds the girls quite foolish with their unintelligible gibberish, and refuses to accept the précieuses fashion of adopting

names after the manner of current fiction. This protest against their baptismal names indicates that they are ashamed of their bourgeois background. Shocked by their parents' use of the word 'concubinage', which ranks Gorgibus's mode of expressing himself as the lowest of the low, they protest about Gorgibus's plain blunt speech sometimes interspersed with gallicisms, and which grates on their sense of propriety.

"...je n'entends rien a toutes ces balivernes: je veux être maitre absolu..."

Scene IV, Les Précieuses Ridicules.

Gorgibus admits that he understands nothing of what the girls are saying, or does not want to understand. In asserting his paternal authority, unquestioned, and consigning his girls to marriage or a convent, he betrays the fact that the notion of questioning why they are behaving in this way has not occurred to him, much less that the responsibility for it may be laid at his door. His daughter and niece have duly spent their allotted twelve or thirteen years in a convent most probably, and no strong bonds of affection have been built up. So that not only are these young women lacking in responsibility, but their father is also. No doubt many fathers of the day were measuring up to their responsibilities satisfactorily, and regarded their children with affection and sympathy. However Molière ridiculing one portion of society as he sees it, succeeds in arousing our awareness that all may not be well with an education system which produces such grotesqueness. He shows us the extremes which it might be better to avoid. In the first instance we have Gorgibus, who has arranged the matches.

"...ces monsieurs...je connais leur famillies et

leur biens; et je veux résolûment que vous vous disposiez à les recevoir pour maris. Je me lasse de vous avoir sur les bras..."

Scene IV, Les Précieuses Ridicules.

Gorgibus has eyes to husbands from a suitable family, well endowed with worldly goods. This is not altogether undesirable, but the girls have not been consulted. What is disturbing is that he wishes to be free of his responsibilities as soon as possible, with no thought for the girls' happiness. Any deep concern for his nearest and dearest is lacking. In L'Ecole des Femmes Agnès was a child by a secret marriage. Was this an elopement to avoid a forced marriage? Is this state due to deprivation of contact with a family during those critical years that there is no communication between parents and children, when families are being bonded together? Molière leaves us to ponder. It is significant that there is no mention of wife or mother. She is apparently not her husband's helpmeet as Christiane de Pisan portrayed what the role of a wife might be, a collaborator, associate, and substitute for her spouse. Nor does her role appear to be of any importance in the life of a young girl. Was she, too, educated in a convent, thus setting up a vicious circle? Was she aware of how the girls were filling in their days, or did she turn a blind eye? Where is the example for them to follow?

Mme Jourdain in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme is an excellent mother who looks after the interests of her children, manages her household in thrifty bourgeois fashion, and is more than a helpmeet to her husband. Whatever Lucile's education is, she is living in a responsive environment and is fitted for her station in life. Lucile has found herself a suitable husband, in age, character, social status. If Lucile has

read the romantic novels, she has had sufficient intelligence to discriminate in a way of which Mme de Sévigné would approve.

We have seen how convent education may have affected these young people's conception of the world, and how the idealistic life of the imagination has left their heads empty of rules for coping with the realities of daily life, their spare time, courtship, marriage, managing a household. So that they actually believed that romantic literature such as Mlle de Scudéry's Le Grande Cyrus portrayed life as it is lived or should be lived. This is the other extreme to the arranged marriage, and the danger is apparent of elopements, abductions, and natural births.

La Bruyère and Mme de Sévigné make similar criticisms on the reading of novels. Mme de Sévigné enjoyed reading them:

"Pour moi, ... je trouverais...qu'une fille devenait honnête et sage en lisant Cléopâtre.⁹ Quelquefois il y en a qui prennent un peu de travers; mais elles ne feraient peut-être guère mieux, quand elles ne sauraient pas lire: Quand on a l'esprit bien fait, on n'est pas aisée à gêner. Mme de Lafayette en est encore un exemple".¹⁰

La Bruyère finds that the novel would be as useful as harmful.

"...l'on y voit de si grands exemples de constance, de vertu, de tendresse..."

He would say that the bad impressions only come from the evilness of our nature.¹¹

Arnauld and Bourdeloue both censure the novel with equal vigour. Arnauld maintained that it was wicked to make a god of love and to inspire young persons to believe that there was nothing more sweet than to love.

"Peut-on avoir un peu de zèle pour le salut des âmes, qu'une ne déplore le mal que font dans l'esprit d'une infinité de personnes les romans?"¹²

"Ce que je puis encore compter parmi les divertissements criminels", s'écrit Bourdaloue, "ce sont ces histoires fabuleuses et romanesques..."¹³

Fénelon comments on novel reading in 1687 in Education des Filles. Unlike Mme de Sévigné he deprecated the reading of Italian and Spanish for it might lead to the reading of dangerous books.

"...les filles mal instruites et inappliquées ont une imagination toujours errante...leur curiosité se tourne avec ardeur vers les objets vains et dangereuses. Celles qui ont de l'esprit s'érigent souvent en précieuses, et lisent tout les livres qui peuvent nourrir leur vanité".¹⁴

They give way to empty ideas, he holds, and grow accustomed to the high-flown language of heroes of fiction. This well describes Cathos and Magdelon. Their ideas have no relation to the motives which hold sway in real life, and which decide actual events. Fénelon and Molière agree here. Girls are out of touch with reality and everyday living. Mme de Maintenon hoped to broaden her girls' minds at Saint-Cyr, but reading at Mme de Maintenon's girls' schools of Saint-Cyr was restricted to religious books or those of an edifying nature.

Who should be guiding these girls, developing and forming their minds, so that they are able to recognize and utilise the good which Mme de Sévigné finds in the novels and discard the pernicious which concerns Arnauld and Bourdaloue. J.-C. Tournand in the review L'Astrée finds beings in its marvellous countryside who reconcile a lively sensuality with a scarcely believable chastity.¹⁵ This in actual real life would be extremely difficult, one would think, for a young mind to reconcile.

The novel played an important part in the diffusion of the ideas of the précieuses; there are other aspects to con-

sider of this "Esprit précieuses". Through Cathos and Magdelon, Molière has shown us how young girls lacking guidance in reading can carry to excess a code of behaviour as found in Mlle de Scudéry's Le Grand Cyrus and Clelie. As préciosity is an effort towards distinction and is concerned with language and is fundamentally of a moral order affecting ways of thinking and feeling, the précieuse strives to give an air of novelty or unusualness to an idea. She wishes to dissociate herself from the vulgar or common.¹⁶ Magdelon begs her father to call herself and Cathos by names other than baptismal ones, as was noted earlier, and Cathos was shocked to hear him mention the word "concubinage".

Gorgibus betrays no interest in how they pass the time, apart from being dismayed at their extravagance. Mascarille later will ask them how they fill in their leisure.

"A quoi donc passez-vous le temps?
A rien du tout
Nous avons été jusqu'ici un jeune effroyable de divertissements".

Scène IX, Le Précieuses Ridicules.

What better to do than to read romances? Apart from Mlle de Scudéry's twenty volumes, Cléopâtre by La Calprende occupied twelve volumes, D'Urfe's L'Astrée five volumes, Cassandre also by La Calprende, ten volumes, another twelve volume effort by La Calprende, Pharemont, and the Polexandre by Gombreville, five volumes. Gorgibus, had he realised what were the dangerous ideas with which they were filling their heads, he may have thought it his duty to take some action, but he was anxious to get them off his hands. That they were absorbing a mass of ideas about love and marriage which demanded reasoned and intelligent answers would never have occurred to him. They had no-one to help supply them.

The people Magdelon and Cathos were associated with in real life are identified by the characters in Le Grand Cyrus. The precipitate proposals of du Croisy and La Grange are unacceptable because Cyrus would never have married Mandane nor Arance Clelie in Clelie, without all the preliminaries as set out by Mlle de Scudéry.

"Ma chère, c'est le caractère enjoué.
Je vois bien que c'est un Amilcar".

Scene IX, Les précieuses Ridicules.

In Clelie Amilcar has the character of a gay and witty lover. His opposite is Horatius Coclès, the lover violent and ill-bred. Mascarille is identified with Amilcar in the girls' minds.

The moral aspect of the "affeterie" was criticised by the satirists as being quite alarming in the ruelles and alcoves. Magdelon and Cathos have quickly adopted the turns of phrase and exaggerated adverbs by which the précieuses distinguished themselves. They provoke laughter. A mirror is called a "conseiller de graces"; chairs the "commodités de la conversation"; scorn for Gorgibus is expressed in "dernier bourgeois" and Cathos' ear suffers "furieusement" when it hears vulgar words pronounced. However the "galanterie" is underlying in Mascarille's "Quelque vol de mon coeur, quelque assassinat de ma franchise", with the threat of the demoralisation of innocent young girls. Molière appears to regard the "sonnet", "vers", "chanson", "impromptus", and so on with lighthearted ridicule, making the point that they are ephemeral, something with which one keeps up to be in the mode. There appeared to be nothing sinister in Mascarille's "impromptu" with which he kept himself well supplied beforehand.

Les Précieuses Ridicules signals Molière's success. In this satiric criticism of the manners and customs of the précieuses, Molière has exposed a problem of the education of the young girls of his time, and the threat it can be to family life and marriage. Girls are receiving no education worthy of the name. They spend long years separated from their families and finally on returning are faced with long melancholy hours with a family they scarcely know. Their lack of education leaves a void which they fill by reading romances. They live their lives in a fanciful world out of touch with reality. Parents and children are not communicating. Girls are left in a dangerous situation, incapable of making reasoned moral judgments. However in Sganarelle, Gorgibus the father absolutely resolves to marry his daughter off to the wealthy suitor of his choice, and roundly condemns the reading of novels, recommending in their place the Quatrains of Pibrac and other serious moral works of the day. From this we might conclude Molière approves of neither of these choices of reading, as both are extremes.

CHAPTER III

L'ECOLE DES MARIS

As the title suggests, this work of Molière concerns the "éducation conjugale". Produced about eighteen months after Les Précieuses Ridicules", Molière again looks at the education of girls. Sganarelle and Ariste represent two diametrically opposed currents of thought on this question. One has ideas which belong to the middle ages, combined with absolute paternal authority. The other favours more the liberty of the recent new ideas with their more generous conceptions.

Two brothers (Ariste is twenty years older than Sganarelle) have had confided to their care two sisters, with all the authority of a father, and the additional right of making them wives as well. We meet the sisters as they approach marriageable age. Lénor, Ariste's ward, is free to come and go as she pleases, but Isabelle is closely watched - if necessary, under lock and key. She never goes out unless accompanied by her guardian Sganarelle. Sganarelle himself wears outdated clothes, and his turn of language is somewhat primitive.

Ariste announces after Sganarelle has finished his tirade on the fantastic fashions of the day, that although one should not follow the fashions excessively it is bad to go to the other extreme and be old-fashioned. Thus Ariste shows himself to be of a reasonable turn of mind, and Sganarelle extreme and obstinate.

"Que d'une serge honnête elle ait son vêtement,
Qu'enfermée au logis, en personne bien sage,
Elle s'appliqué toute aux choses du ménage,

A recoudre mon linge aux heures de loisir,
Qu'aux discours des muguetse elle ferme l'oreille..."

Scene I, L'Ecole des Maris.

"Serge honnête" has a ring of the austere convent dress. Mme de Maintenon, born 1635, would at this time have been about twenty-six years of age. The experiences she had of convent life would have been roughly at the time of which Molière writes. She preferred the deformed playwright Scarron, to going back to a convent. Her memories of her convent days are not hard to imagine. No doubt she remembers the clothes she was obliged to wear when she allowed the young girls to blossom a little in her famous school of Saint-Cyr, that is before its reform in 1694. The plain brown dress designed for them might be changed from year to year according to the fashions outside. They adorned their costumes with knots and bands of ribbon. Mme de Maintenon also allowed them a little concession to a fashion fad, a rosette in the hat last year, a pocket book this year. As Barnard points out,¹⁷ her attitude, like Molière's, is typical of the mean between the extremes. She sought for neither the soul destroying austerity of the convent nor the vanity of the world. Mme de Maintenon would know personally through her experience of the life in these institutions, that the enforced wearing of drab attire would tend to send a young girl to the frivolous extremes of fashion when she was free to make her own choice. Molière bears this out in Les Précieuses Ridicules. Cathos and Magdelon go into raptures over Mascarille's attire.

In condemning Isabelle to "honnête serge" Sganarelle is betraying an attitude of the middle ages. He allows no concessions to fashion, and restricts the wearing of the

fashionable black as far as he can. In actual fact a fairly moderate view was held by some. Modesty was the chief requirement. Sganarelle's views are equal to or harsher than the most severe of moralists. As a recreation Sganarelle allows Isabelle the pleasure of mending his linen and knitting his stockings.

Of the needlework and other 'oeuvres utiles' mentioned in the Abbess Agnès's 'Constitutions' for Port-Royal Schools for girls the chief occupation of the kind seems to have been the knitting of worsted gloves, (gants d'estame); the children were encouraged to devote any odd spare time to the task, and for this purpose to carry some work of this kind with them wherever they went. No kind of art needlework was allowed, not even for vestments or church decorating;¹⁸ such things were eyed askance by the almost puritanical Jansenism of Port-Royal.¹⁹

Not only has Isabelle to wear drab clothes, but she is also kept at home under lock and key. She has gone back further than the middle ages; she is back in Greek women's "gynécée", where the women kept house separated from the world, obeyed their parents or husbands, dressed to please their husbands, and entertained no visitors. There was no chance of sweet nothings being whispered in to receptive feminine ears.

"Mais vous, je vous défends, s'il vous plaît de sortir".

Act I, Scene 2, L'Ecole des Maris.

Women in Greece also never went into public places. However Arnolphe may show some advance here as he does take Isabelle out with him. It is clear that Arnolphe has no trust whatsoever in Isabelle. Why? Because he fears she will betray him. She must be submitted entirely to his will, and he

refuses even to answer her at this stage.

Earlier it was remarked that religion occupied a large place in the views of the moralists of the middle ages. They were engaged in combatting the effect that satirical realist literature might have had on the institution of marriage. Even the courtly literature suggested the illicit, while idealising the courtly. The virtue of chastity was highly regarded, which would account for the obsession with rules of conduct, particularly in church, which was possibly the only public place these young women were seen in. No chattering, no fidgeting; they were urged to listen. The women of the court of Louis XIV at this period were noted for their not too modest dress, extravagance of jewellery and ornaments, and their chattering. However Lisette speaks up for her mistress:

"Qui nous gêne se met en un peril extrême,
Et toujours notre honneur veut se garder lui-même.
C'est nous inspirer presque un désir de pêcher".

Act I, Scene 2, L'Ecole des Maris.

In keeping Isabelle in this way separated from the world and ignorant of its ways, Sganarelle will not achieve what he hopes for. The proud independence of young French women will assert itself. However instead of being protected by an education which has prepared her to discriminate, and make balanced moral judgments, she will be driven simply by the lack of trust in her natural good sense and virtue to turn the tables on her would-be protector.

After presenting Sganarelle's side, Molière then poses Ariste's formula for an adequate education for young women. Not for him are "les verrous et les grilles". Ariste does not believe that such confining will ensure virtue in Lénor. Her sense of duty must spring from self-respect, and this

will not be achieved through severe treatment and constraint but through winning her affection. He who fails to do this will fail also in keeping her from temptations.' In complete contrast to Sganarelle's restraining austerity he allows her a measure of liberty. He recommends making learning a pleasure, and any punishment should be such so as not to inspire fear. Fénelon echoes this advice:

"...Ne prenez jamais sans une extrême nécessité un air austère et impérieuse qui fait trembler les enfants... la confiance et la sincérité leur sont plus utile que l'autorité rigoureuse".²⁰

"...il faut chercher tout les moyens de rendre agreable les choses que vous exigez de lui..."²¹

Ariste continues:

"L'Ecole du monde, en l'air dont il faut vivre
Instruit mieux, à mon gré que se fait aucun livre".²²
Act I, Scene 2, L'Ecole des Maris.

Currents of ideas perceptible since Plato and Saint Jerome were flowing up from the renaissance. Erasmus had advocated affection for teachers. Montaigne would instruct more by seeing and experiencing, with no violence. Unfortunately, these philosophers were hostile to the education of women. Mlle de Gournay in the 1620s battled for wider horizons for women. One of society's greatest injustices in her eyes was the discrimination against women, of social and intellectual freedom.²³ Ariste's views are very liberal. Let her have some choice in her desires. If a bourgeois family has wealth let her have fashionable clothes if she would like them. Ariste sees the wisdom of companions, but he stipulates that they must be suitable.

"Je ne suivrois jamais ces maxims sévères,
Qui font que les enfants comptent les
jours des pères".

Act I, Scene 2, L'Ecole des Maris.

Rousseau one hundred years later allows Sophie the pleasures

of the world, and lets her follow her natural tendencies, which should be nurtured. Ariste believes Lénor's mind will be formed by such diversions as balls and comedies. Molière of course maintains that the stage is an excellent place to teach people, through having them laugh at their faults. With a well-formed mind a young woman will be capable of choosing a husband for herself from which will follow a marriage of love and tolerance. She is capable of this free choice of whom she wishes to marry, therefore let her have it. Rousseau's Sophie was urged to use her right to choose a husband. Lucile chooses her own husband in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. If her father had actually chosen a husband for her, the outlook for her future happiness doubtless would have been poor. Angélique in George Dandin is said to be educated; she has not married the man of her choice, her moral standards are far from satisfactory, and the marriage is a disaster.

The doctrine of the church was founded on ancient right, legislated by the state. Francis de Sales, whose books formed a part of the hard core of the religious books which the girls read in the convents, upheld the principles of the church. The clergy had always held women as inferior, and the end of their education was a moral one. Briefly, they taught that all authority came from God. Girls were moulded in obedience and docility, and respect for absolute paternal authority. According to law they were resigned to an inferior position. On top of all this, the bourgeois always clung to their aversion to new theories, and a rule of not interfering with what they considered natural and logical. In this light the views which Molière advances through Ariste appear almost heretical. In fact Ariste's ideas are so

liberal that, remembering Molière's own bourgeois background, it might be reasonable to suppose that Molière is once again pointing out the two extremes, and actually advocating moderation and a measure of good sense.

For liberal Ariste certainly is. To Sganarelle's scorn, Ariste will allow Lénor, when she is his wife, the same liberties as now, even to her displaying beauty spots and ribbons at balls in public. The elegant young men about town will not be denied, with their sport and 'cadeaux' and whispered sweet nothings. Why?

"Je veux m'abandonner a la foi de ma femme".

Act I, Scene 3, L'Ecole des Maris.

Ariste knows that because she can trust him, then he will be able to trust her. This line is possibly one of the most significant in L'Ecole des Maris. Lénor will freely wish to please her husband because he wishes to please her. Behind this word "trust" lie the shadows of centuries of suspicion and unhappiness for both men and women. The codes of behaviour compiled so carefully by those moralists of the middle ages betray a lack of confidence in women playing a part in a world of which they comprise a half. Lénor needs no compulsion to marry Ariste, and he in his turn is confident that she will have no need of beauty spots and "cadeaux". Perhaps Molière had learned about trust in marriage from painful experience, and realised that it is the most important thing in a marriage. He was involved in the education of Armande, so some of his ideas he would arrive at first hand. Whatever he learnt from her it seems abundantly clear that above all else a woman needs to be trusted. This means that she be allowed to become aware of pitfalls to be avoided and worthwhile goals to be aimed at.

The outcome of Sganarelle's extreme precautions is that Isabelle against her true nature is forced to resort to lying and subterfuge. Molière here draws it to our notice through Isabelle that she is pushed to extremities, and is far from happy about what she has to say.

"O ciel' sois-propice et seconde en ce jour
La stratagème adroit d'une innocent amour".

Act II, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Maris.

Isabelle deceives and double-crosses Sganarelle in the hilarious comedy which follows and Sganarelle is duped into assisting Isabelle's lover to bring about his own betrayal. So great is his egotism and the confidence he has in his method of the education of Isabelle that he boasts of it to Valère's valet:

"...Elle montre le fruit
Que l'education dans une âme produit".

Act II, Scene 2, L'Ecole des Maris.

The irony of this statement underlines the extent to which Sganarelle's egotism can lead him astray.

Molière, by smoothing so much Ariste's path with Lénor, and caricaturing that of Sganarelle's and Isabelle's, dramatically reveals the dangers of keeping a young and impressionable girl shut away from contact with the world. Sganarelle has deliberately tried to remove from Isabelle any opportunity to circulate with any degree of freedom, and associate with people in the world. She has had the equivalent of a convent education, an absolutely authoritative father, and a jealous husband. Two points emerge here. Firstly that by keeping Isabelle isolated, lies, deceit and trickery can be expected, leading to unhappy and disrupted marriages. Secondly, by announcing that he intends to marry Isabelle

forthwith, and against her will, Ariste assumes the full rights of parental authority. It was at this time that Louis XIV was consolidating his absolutism, and had greatly strengthened parental authority. To marry without parental consent, a young woman needed to have attained the age of twenty-five years. The effect of this restriction must have been soul destroying to many girls.

Molière, in exaggerating both systems of education, has pointed the way to the "juste milieu". Sganarelle, a selfish, jealous egotist, in educating his ward for his own ends, failed to realise that this was not the answer, in spite of having the evidence laid in front of him. When finally his eyes were opened, his world had crumbled about him. In failing to educate Isabelle for her own benefit, he has failed as a father. He has pushed his powers of paternal authority to the last limits. As a jealous lover, fearful of betrayal, he has forced Isabelle into a situation which is contrary to her nature. On the other hand, Ariste has treated Lénor with consideration, allowed her freedom to develop and experience life, in such a way that she is capable of discerning those qualities which are required for a satisfactory marriage relationship.

"S'il faut que par l'hymen il receive ma foi
 Il s'y peut assurer; mais sachez que mon âme
 Ne repondit de rien, si j'etois votre femme".

Act I, Scene 3, L'Ecole des Maris.

The lesson to be learned from Ariste's system of education is that kindness will inspire confidence and produce good results, that in allowing the freedom to follow the natural bent, the voice of authority may be pitched lower. If women are not trusted, and return no trust, then they will

be forced into the unnatural ways of lies and deception.

CHAPTER IV

L'ECOLE DES FEMMES

Molière continues his criticism of an education system which is aimed at isolating women under the pretext of protecting their honour. In L'Ecole des Femmes he exposes more explicitly than in L'Ecole des Maris the custom of sending daughters at an early age to a convent, there to spend their formative years "behind barred windows", far from the family circle and that warmth and expressive affection so necessary to the satisfactory development of the young. There cloistered in a segregated environment they had no interaction with the world in general.

Arnolphe, forty years of age, bourgeois, practical and powerful, vain and egotistical, intends to marry Agnès, a young woman whom he believes to mould like wax in accord with his own theories on education. He has no intention of losing his own liberty, but at the same time he is doing his best to guard himself against any danger of having an unfaithful spouse. In both L'Ecole des Maris and L'Ecole des Femmes, the fears that a husband has of being betrayed by a wife are much in evidence. Some opinions consider that this is due, to some extent at least, to certain aspects of Molière's own private life. L'Ecole des Femmes was performed for the first time in December 1662, and in February of that year Molière had married Armande de Béjart, when he himself at forty was twenty years older than his wife. Arnolphe also is about twenty years older than his Agnès.

These were momentous times in the history of France,

and in the social life of the aristocracy. Louis had assumed the power of France in 1661, with ruthless determination to consolidate his absolutism. His courtiers, when not away fighting for the "gloire" of Louis XIV and France, were obliged to fill in their days with an incessant round of trivial detail. To stay away from the court, wherever it happened to be, spelt disaster, as the only hope of obtaining a pension, or some sort of pecuniary recompense, was to please, and be noticed by the King during his daily routine. They were reduced to complete dependence on the King's favour. Small wonder then that with all this leisure on their hands, and a shortage of ready money, the court was a hotbed of intrigue. Ambitious young ladies placed there by mothers equally ambitious, knew that it would be disastrous to show any timid virtue. Mothers and daughters were ready to sacrifice anything in order to achieve their ends. The young pleasure-seeking nobles threw themselves into love affairs and intrigues with an equal passion.²⁴

Arnolphe discusses the moral tone of the town with Horace:

"Ils ont en ce pays de quoi se contenter,
Car les femmes sont faites à coqueter:
Et les maris aussi les plus bénin du monde:
C'est un plaisir du prince".

Act I, Scene 4, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Molière had a first hand opportunity of observing the King and his court, being as he was the King's entertainer and favoured by his attention and conversation. The fashion at the court was fêtes, carousels, mistresses and scandalous adulteries. We know Arnolphe's thoughts about these "faites à coqueter". Earlier, in the opening lines of the play, he informs Chrysalde of his approaching marriage. He points out

to Chrysalde how husbands are too complaisant. Wives squander their husbands' wealth on lovers, and what is scarcely better, receive presents from admirers. Husbands are deceived and defeated at every turn:

"L'autre, pour se purger de sa magnificence,
Dit qu'elle gagne au jeu l'argent qu'elle dépense;
Et le mari benêt, sans songer à quel jeu".
Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Molière, with ironic ambiguity, suggests what other game they may be playing.

The King himself felt the necessity to distract his courtiers, the slaves of his "gloire". "Le jeu" was, amongst other distractions, one of the means he adopted. Bourdaloue comments on "le jeu", and the immoral life women were leading at the time:

"Un jeu sans mesure et sans règle, dit il, qui
n'est plus pour vous un divertissement, mais une
profession, mais un trafic, mais une attache,
mais une passion si j'ose ainsi parler,..."²⁵
Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Bourdaloue allows an honest game and "borne", for relaxation.

He condemns only the excess. He wants to correct a world elegant and leisured, where salvation is so difficult, and temptations so refined, the fall is easily excused. He attacks above all with zealous care the perfecting and improving of women of whom he was knowing the influence irresistible and sometimes pernicious:

"...l'oublie des devoirs, le dérèglement de la maison,
la dissipation des revenus, des tricheries indignes,
des friponneries que l'avidité du gain, des emportements,
des jurements, des désespoirs".²⁶
Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

People listen and carry on as before.

Molière has little to say about the "le jeu", but here it seems obvious that he is of the same mind as Bourdaloue, more especially perhaps in the areas of "l'oublie des devoirs", "le dérèglement de la maison". There are echoes

of this in Les Femmes Savantes, where the obsession is not with the game, but with learning everything there is to know. Arnolphe is resolved to keep his own domestic comforts:

"Je sais les tours rusés et la subtiles trames
Dont pour nous en planter savent user les femmes,
Et comme on est dupé par leurs dextérités.
Contre cet incident j'ai pris mes sûretés;
Et celle que j'épouse a toute l'innocence
Qui peut sauver mon front de maligne influence".

Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Arnolphe, as Sganarelle before him, shows a complete lack of trust in women, and fears their infidelity to such an extent that the woman he wishes for a wife must be completely innocent and ignorant. Chrétien de Troyes in the twelfth century concludes his tale of Cligés:

"Therefore, every empress...is guarded in Constantinople as in a prison, for the emperor has no confidence in her... nor is there ever allowed any man in her presence...in case of such there is no fear or doubt that Love will ensnare them in his bonds".²⁷

Arnolphe exhibits the lack of security of the middle ages outlook. Sarah Pomeroy notes that a fully realised female tends to engender anxiety in the male. Unable to cope with a multiplicity of powers united in one female, men from antiquity to the present have envisioned women in either/or roles.²⁸ As the threat to civilisation lost its urgency, women were expected to remain in the role of homemaker. With the rise of Christianity the virginity of women was valued above all else. The worth of a faithful wife was above rubies. They were carefully guarded. Arnolphe makes doubly sure of Agnès's isolation. He has been entrusted by her parents with the little girl since she was four years old, when he was impressed by her sweet and calm appearance, which inspired him with love. At that time the thought

occurred to him of bringing up Agnès to be completely dependent on, and submissive to him:

"Dans un petit couvent, loin de tout pratique,
Je la fis élever selon ma politique,
Pour la rendre idiote autant qu'il se pourrait".

Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

So complete is Arnolphe's mistrust in women, so gripped is he with the fear of being made a fool of through their "tours rusés et les subtiles trames", not only has he isolated her from the world, but he has also, now that she has finished at the convent, kept her still from social intercourse:

"Je l'ai mise à l'écart, comme il faut tout prévoir,
Dans cette autre maison ou nul ne me vient voir".

Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Arnolphe's intention is twofold. Firstly he intends to keep her from all contact with the world, which a convent will achieve most efficiently. Secondly he thinks to keep her in as much ignorance as possible. This is Molière's comment on the education available in convents of the day.

Arnolphe now has her in a second house of his, where no-one visits him, and will continue to isolate her physically and mentally. She is being looked after by two uneducated peasants, who allow no-one past the door. Arnolphe's view of a woman's education is that of the thirteen and fourteenth centuries, when extreme ignorance was the most prized asset in a woman, and any kind of liberation was a threat to his own self-esteem and liberty. Arnolphe boasts to Chrysalde of Agnès's ignorance, and thinks it amusing. Arnolphe says she asks him:

"Avec une innocence à nulle pareille,
Si les enfants qu'on fait se faisaient par l'oreille".

Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Arnolphe is too imperceptive and stupid himself to realise

the dangers of ignorance of this kind. On his return to his cottage Arnolphe sees with satisfaction the sewing in Agnès's hand, congratulating himself that he has such a modest ignoramus. Arnolphe asks:

"Quelle nouvelle?
Le petit chat est mort".

Act II, Scene 5, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Agnès's lack of news betrays her isolation. With no companions, no intellectual stimulation, reading, play-going, the most important piece of news refers to her cat; but she is not bored. She has sewn six shirts and six caps. So conditioned do they become to the lack of stimulation, that the girls are quite contented, like inmates in institutions for retarded children, Molière has the word "idiote". The famous "tarte à la crème" episode amply demonstrates that Agnès with her modest and honest ignorance, would never grace a salon to be a "savante", and to compose "vers", "lettres", "romans", Billet-doux". This is penetrating criticism of cloistering in a convent, on Molière's part.

When Chrysalde questions Arnolphe's intentions of marrying a "sotte", he replies that a clever wife is a bad omen:

"Mais une femme habile est une mauvaise présage".

Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Molière stresses the paucity of education the girls are receiving at convents at this time. For the bourgeoisie this was to all intents and purposes the only one available. Mme de Maintenon, who preferred almost anything to a convent, established Saint-Cyr, a school for the daughters of impoverished noblemen. Until its reformation in 1696 it was run on very different lines from a convent. Louis XIV,

under his wife's influence by this time, in 1684, had undergone a change of heart in involving himself in Saint-Cyr. When he was establishing his absolutism in the early years of his reign he took no interest in methods of education, and even less in those of instruction. He left the establishment and control of the "petites écoles de paroisse" to the bishops and parish priests. We could assume that this indifference would extend to the convent schools. At that time there was no higher education for girls, either secondary, or much less university. Mme de Maintenon was born in 1635, married at an early age and would have finished her education at about the age of sixteen years in 1661. L'Ecole des Femmes, performed in December 1662, would reflect the state of the convent schools at the time when Louis' retrenching and disciplining measures were well under way. If Mme de Maintenon found the convents intolerable before Louis' ascension, the chances are that at the time of Molière's writing their decadence and inefficiency was becoming alarming, so alarming that he felt the bourgeoisie should realise the situation.

Before looking at the convent education of this period, it would be interesting and informative to determine how girls of the aristocracy were educated. Mme de Maintenon herself spent her childhood in difficult and impoverished circumstances. Her early education was received in Ursuline convents where harsh methods were used to convert her from Protestantism to Catholicism. After her convent days she entered Paris society, and, in marrying, Scarron Mme de Maintenon was intelligent enough to gain a wide education in the salon life now open to her. Mme de Sévigné, born in 1626

and Molière's junior by four years, received an education in a convent. This was considered insufficient for a girl destined for a high place in society. She was further educated by private tutors, namely Ménage and Chapelin. She learnt Italian early, could read Spanish fluently, and Latin in the original. Chapelin trained her in good principles of eloquence, and taught her the art of letter writing. Mme de Lafayette, a relation by marriage of Mme de Sévigné, and a friend of long standing, also was a pupil of Chapelin and Ménage. Both these women were influenced by the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

Ninon de Lanclos had a pious mother who would have shut her daughter up in a convent. But Ninon's father, although a profligate himself, showed a taste for literature and music, which Ninon inherited. She was an excellent lute player. Her father had no intention of placing his daughter in a convent, to subsequently enter the world with the mind and demeanour of a nun, and brought her up to think for herself. Ninon's experience of convent education with her mother, whose aim was to instil in her daughter a taste for piety, succeeded merely in driving her to submit herself to her father's teaching. She studied the sciences, learnt Spanish and Italian, as did Mme de Sévigné and Mme de Lafayette, was a devotée of Montaigne, and was passionately fond of music. Mlle de Scudéry who, as she says, belonged to a long and illustrious family, was about ten years old when her mother died, and she and her brother were looked after by an uncle who "fit éclore les semences naturelles que les soins de la mère avaient si bien cultivées qu'elles étaient, par manière de dire, toutes prêt a fleurir".²⁹ Very accomplished in many

areas, she learnt Spanish and Italian, and the art of conversation with her uncle - in short, an education which not many girls even highly born received. Once again there is, significantly, no convent education.

These were all women with whom Molière came into contact. To some he read his plays in the salons. A group at Ninon's salon helped Molière to amend La Malade Imaginaire from a play of three acts to one of five. Molière himself had received a top flight education at the Jesuit College of Clermont, and studied law at Orléans.

The girls who were educated by governesses were less fortunate. Mme de Maintenon's opinion of governesses was low. She found that they were mostly peasants or "petites bourgeoisies", who could only teach their charges to stand straight, lace tightly and curtsy. Their main worry was to see that the pupils kept their aprons clean, as the governesses had to launder them, and to look like little dolls in company. The cleverest of them knew four lines of Pibrac and recited them like a parrot. Fénelon's opinion of governesses likewise was not very high:

"quoi que la difficulté de trouver des gouvernantes soit grande!"³⁰

At this stage it might be illuminating to look into the type of education a girl like Agnès was receiving in a convent at this time. The Ursulines were the largest and most influential teaching order in France. The end of the sixteenth century had seen an increase in convents aimed at educating particularly young girls, which offered the only education available, for the daughters of the impoverished nobility and the middle-classes.

The Port-Royal schools for girls were reformed in 1608 by the Abbess Angélique. She revived the educational work of the community and drew up a Constitution du Monastère de Port-Royal. In 1655 Jacqueline Pascal was given charge of the education of the girls. She left the Règlement pour les enfants de Port-Royal.³¹ In these Jansenist schools intellectual education was sacrificed completely to moral education. The girls were encouraged to become nuns, and marriage, motherhood, and raising a family were considered inferior to a religious life. Parents were required to renounce all authority over their children. The books read at this school were all of a religious nature. The list makes interesting reading. The names are as follows: Fontaine's Translation of the Imitatio Christi, Father Louis of Grenada's Guide des Pécheurs, La Philothée, the Ladder of S. John Climacus, the Tradition of the Church, Saint-Cyran's Lettres, Familiar Theology, Christian Maxims from the Book of the Hours, Letters of a Carthusian Father, Meditations of Saint Theresa on the Pater Noster, and certain passages from her Way of Perfection, selected letters of S. Jerome Christian Charity, and the lives of the Fathers and other saints.³² As noted previously, the only books which they could keep to themselves were the Book of the Hours, the Familiar Theology, the Sayings of Christ, an Imitation and a salter. Certainly they discussed the books and thus would have learned the French language, while it is possible that at the same time the reason and the intellect may have been developed, the lack of which Molière deplores. How much Latin they knew is a little obscure, but in lieu of any systematic teaching of the language, probably the girls' knowledge was confined to

what they learnt parrot fashion. There was no wide education, reading of the classics, or discussion of ideas.

Their curriculum consisted almost entirely of reading theological books, and the performance of religious exercises. No new teaching methods were introduced by Jacqueline Pascal. They remained inspired by the Jansenist theology of Saint-Cyran, founder of the Little Schools in 1635, and were not mitigated by Cartesianism and warmhearted good sense, as were the boys' schools. Other convents must have varied to a certain extent. Bourdaloue speaks out on the convent, which he criticises as being ignorant and worldly, and we read of abesses living very lavishly, joining in the "divertissements" of the day. Apart from the reading of theological books, about three-quarters of an hour was spent in writing, in silence, a set copy. So it is likely that as they grew older, they could compose in French, but one might imagine that the subject matter would not be very varied. To this was added the singing of plain songs and an hour's arithmetic on festive occasions as a treat.

The general daily routine is informative of the conditions of life. The oldest rose at four A.M., the youngest at five A.M., and on rising they kept a complete silence, broken by a short recital of prayers, then more silences. At breakfast one pupil read aloud from a religious book. They worked, and if the little ones played it was separately. Various devotional exercises, and church services occupied much of the day. In the mid-morning a three-quarter hour writing lesson was followed by a very short singing lesson. Afternoon school lasted from one-thirty p.m. to two-thirty p.m., making two-and-a-quarter hours all told. Two one hour

periods of recreation were allowed them, one after dinner, which was at eleven-thirty a.m., and one after supper, which was probably at six p.m. These were the only two hours in the day when the girls could converse among themselves. In actual fact the girls spent most of their days in silence, and a very great part of it in religious and devotional exercises. During the recreational period they were encouraged to knit, and they carried this work about with them.

"Qu bien à tricoter quelques bas par loisir".

Act I, Scene 2, L'Ecole des Maris.

Sganarelle was prepared to allow Isabelle a little recreation of a similar kind. Agnès enjoyed sewing her shirts and making caps. Molière was apparently well aware of the life girls were leading in convents and not particularly satisfied that this kind of approach to their education was ideal. Boys were given an excellent education in France, inferior to none in Europe, and the universities were open to them. Racine, who was educated at Port-Royal, it seems was not quite so well acquainted with the facts. He speaks of the excellent education which the girls receive there, that they were taught to reason and to use their intellects, and were trained to become both excellent mothers or nuns, when actually the accent was confined to turning them into nuns. Boileau, Clemencet and Du Fossé all share this opinion.

"The explanation is that the education of girls at Port-Royal was essentially conventual, but it was good of its kind".³³

Another aspect of the Port-Royal schools was quite alarming. The constitution stated that

"they (the sisters) will not show any tenderness that they may feel for them, and they will make a

sacrifice of it to God to obtain from His goodness that these children may benefit by the good education that will be given them".³⁴

These girls entered the convent at the age of four, and parents renounced all authority over them. They remained there till at least sixteen years of age, almost all their most formative and impressionable years. The sisters were bound to love them not for themselves alone, but for God. Any friendly relationship between teacher and pupil was out of the question. The mistresses were devoted to their charges:

"...because they are children of God and we feel our selves obliged to spare nothing to make them worthy of this holy estate".³⁵

Any affection the mistresses felt for their pupils should be offered to God. Barnard concludes from his researches that teaching became regarded in the light of a penance, so that in actual fact the nuns were concerned more with the spiritual welfare of the teacher, than that of the pupil. Physically the children's needs were well provided for, and they received constant care and attention from the nuns, especially when ill.

With little or no parental contact, and a detached relationship with the nuns, these girls must have suffered from emotional deprivation, aggravated by lack of youthful boisterousness and camaraderie. These Port-Royal schools were small, and not strictly typical, but by and large all convents must have conformed to a certain pattern. It seems these children had no contact with their parents. Would reciprocal visits have been paid? How much affection had they to offer? Was any given to them? How much influence would parents have over them apart from their legal authority? Molière's own mother died when he was about nine,

and not a great deal is known about his relationship with either her or his step-mother. However he was apparently on cordial terms with his father, who gave him an excellent education and always stood by his son even though he pursued his own theatrical bent and not that of a tapissière.

Molière in his affluent days is known to have made an anonymous loan to his father. He was involved like a son with the Béjart family, lower middle-class. He watched Armande grow from a baby to womanhood. It cannot be denied that he had a first-hand opportunity of appreciating the value of close family ties and support, and of realising its constructive value to society, especially in the middle-classes.

One of the most important things to emerge from this short study of the convent of the mid-sixteenth century is the separating of the family. The mothers of the aristocracy took little interest in the education of their daughters, which was left to governesses. The second wife of Gaston d'Orléans saw her girls for a quarter of an hour morning and evening, when she exhorted them to hold themselves straight and lift up their heads. The middle-class parents really had no choice of schooling for their daughters. There was only the convent.

Apparently there was a consensus of contemporary opinion on conventual education of this period. As already remarked, prominent representatives of the Church, Fénelon and Pierre de la Chaise prefer other education to that of the convent. Mme de Maintenon's opinion of a girl brought up in a convent is that she will naturally not have a great deal of intelligence. Mme de Sévigné considers that even religion is better taught at home. Bourdaloue, speaking out on the convents of

the day, censures them for their ignorance and worldliness. Mme de Maintenon feared worldly convents because they gave an erroneous enchanted picture of the outside world, while those full of conventual fervour painted it in grim and forbidding colours.³⁶

"Mais une femme habile est une mauvaise présage".

Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

In L'Ecole des Maris and L'Ecole des Femmes Molière has exposed the dangers of separating from social intercourse in the world, a young girl whose destiny is to be married and raise a family. He is more explicit in L'Ecole des Femmes in attacking the stultifying lack of education offered in the convents. Arnolphe goes further than Sganarelle; he would keep Agnès in a convent to render her stupid, not from fear of betrayal only. He had no wish for her to learn too much and become too clever. It has cost some of his friends dear to have a clever wife. They have dwindled to the stature of the husband of "Madame", with no identity. Chrysalde on the other hand points out how boring his life would be with a stupid wife.

"Outre qu'il est assez ennuyeux, je croi,
D'avoir toute sa vie une bête avec soi".

Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Underlying Arnolphe's complaint about clever women who talk and write is the fear of the social conditions of the day.

"Qui de prose et de vers feroit de doux écrits,
Et qui visiteroient marquis et beaux esprits,
Tandis que, sous le nom du mari de Madame,
Je serois comme un saint que pas un ne réclame?"

Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Many of the women of this period were attending salons to escape the watchful eye of a husband, who was not interested in being a wit, and were adopting the manners practised there.

These were not authentic précieuses. Most of the women who opened salons, quite a few did so, were of the middle-class, or "petite noblesse" who were emancipating themselves. They lacked the judgement, good taste and education generally of the women of the more famous salons, such as Mme de Rambouillet and Mlle de Scudéry.

"...je sais ce qu'il coûte à de certaines gens
Pour avoir pris les leurs avec trop de talents".

Act I, Scene 1, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Although Molière is not inviting our sympathy with Arnolphe as a character, nevertheless he is making a thrust at those précieuses, married perhaps, who were priding themselves on their platonism and finding themselves not in harmony with their husbands' ideas of more physical women. Not all of them were reconciling themselves to making a harmonious marriage. Then there were single women who were disdainful of marriage and preferring their liberty. Young priests and lawyers fluttered about them with their fawning flattery.³⁷ Molière is attacking préciosité from a slightly different angle from that of Arnolphe, whose wife might be a frequenter of alcoves and ruelles.

"Héroïnes du temps..."

Act I, Scene 4, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Here again Molière places the facts before his spectators, who would be in the midst of this movement, not realising the full implications as Molière's vision does. The intellectual superiority which these women believed their sex in general was enjoying, led them to adopt disdainful ways independent of masculine domination. Here indeed was a threat to the peace and harmony of family life in the middle-classes. Marriages were tottering shakily - separations, divorces, multiple

marriages, all unsuccessful, or lived outside the meaningful relationship of man and wife were prevalent. This picture is leading swiftly on to a few years and Les Femmes Savantes.

Arnolphe prefers his wife to avoid the social life. His views on women's place in society are in accord with those of the harshest moralist, and are propounded to the innocent Agnès, waiting trembling in terror the return of the notary who will marry them. Arnolphe has sent his bribed servants to summon him faster. In this important scene Arnolphe emphasises what she owes to him as a husband.

"Le peu que vous étiez sans ce noed glorieux,
Afin que cet objet d'autant mieux vous instruire"

Act III, Scene 2, L'Ecole des Femmes.

He reminds her that he has taken her an orphan and penniless, and that she owes everything to him. Kept from all experience which may have developed her intellectually and morally, her lot is strictly duty as a wife; obedience, humility, and profound respect are what a wife owes to her husband, who has supreme power over her. Arnolphe explicitly states that it is his honour, his reputation which is at stake. It has not occurred to Arnolphe that Agnès might be better able to defend her own and Arnolphe's honour if she were allowed to develop her intellectual faculties, so as to be aware of the moral dangers in the world, and be prepared for them. Elmire in Le Tartuffe knows how to repulse the concupiscence of a hypocrite. Arnolphe too recognizes the dangers waiting for young women unprepared by education, learning the rules of the game of intrigue, but he is applying the wrong remedy. It is for a man's wounded honour that a woman may be threatened with a hell of boiling cauldrons for eternity, if she is unfaithful. How would Agnès know that

this was not the ordained order of affairs in marriage, completely lacking as she is in education. The eleven maxims which follow echo the life of the Greek women in the gynécée. The harsh note of the Christian moralist sounds through them all. Arnolphe has left nothing out.

Mlle de Scudéry in Le Grand Cyrus Vol.10 confirms how women were kept in ignorance:

"Je ne sache rien, écrivait-elle de plus injurieux à nôtre sexe que de dire qu'une femme n'est point obligée de rien a prendre... Sérieusement, y-a-t-il rien de plus bizarre que de voir comment on agit pour l'ordinaire en l'éducation des femmes? On ne veut pas qu'elles soient coquettes ni galantes, et on leur permet pourtant d'apprendre soigneusement tout ce qui est propre à la galanterie, sans leur permettre de savoir rien qui puisse fortifier leur vertu ni occuper leur esprit...

Vu la manière dont il y a des dames qui passent leur vie, on dirait qu'on leur a défendu d'avoir de la raison et du bon sens qu'elles ne sont au monde que pour dormir, pour être grasses, pour être belles et pour ne dire que de sottises".³⁸

Mlle de Scudéry is in agreement with Catherine de Pisan, who expressed the same revolutionary idea that women needed educating so that they could defend their own virtue, and children and property if necessary, Catherine would add.

The position is now that Arnolphe and Agnès await with rising tension the arrival of the notary who will marry them. Arnolphe believes that he has almost within his grasp a wife moulded to his specifications - obedient, submissive, and dutiful. Although Arnolphe as yet is unaware of it, Agnès has already embarked on a different education from that which she has received from him.

"... l'amour est un grand maître
Ce qu'on ne fut jamais il nous enseigne à être;
Devient, par ses leçons, l'ouvrage d'un moment;
Et ses effets soudains ont de l'air des miracles".

Act III, Scene 4, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Love sharpens the wits, claims Horace. He shows Arnolphe the

letter which he has received from Agnès, pointing out the skilfully turned words. Agnès expresses herself with a natural dignity, gentleness and reserve not found in the unrestrained effusions of those readers of romances. From now on love begins to tear away the veil of her ignorance. She learns, contrary to Arnolphe's teaching that all young men are not liars and deceivers, ready to ruin a young woman's virtue. Any prosperous bourgeois in Molière's audience might well have paused to wonder if the marriage he was arranging for his daughter was more suitable than the one she would prefer to arrange for herself, if she were afforded the opportunity. He might remember his Harpagon friend ready to marry his daughter off to anyone who would take her without a dowry, or Orgon, eager to give his daughter to a sickening religious hypocrite. Perhaps he had heard of the sensitive and intelligent Henriette who preferred a convent to the odious Trissotin who would try to make a "savante" of her. Perceptive parents might see Molière urging them to allow nature to take her own path. If two suited young people wish to marry, then leave them to their own choice. For a young woman under the influence of love will rapidly expand and find the true potential of her nature. After all, is this not what education is about?

"Et n'est-ce pas sans doute un crime punissable
De gâter méchamment ce fonds d'âme admirable,
D'avoir dans l'ignorance et la stupidité
Voulu de cet esprit étouffer la clarté".

Act III, Scene 5, L'Ecole des Femmes.

Through Horace Molière is censuring a system of education which condemns a middle-class girl to a stultifying life in a convent, from which she emerges a mindless ignoramus, to be kept first under the all-powerful authority

of parents, and then a husband. Implicit in this, is that this mindless creature will be responsible for the children of her marriage, and the vicious circle will be perpetuated.

L'Ecole des Femmes attacks more openly than L'Ecole de Maris, the question of education offered girls at convents in the mid-seventeenth century. The Port-Royal schools provided no preparation for household management and marriage. Girls, Mme de Maintenon found, blushed at the mention of the word "marriage". She provided at Saint-Cyr for the teaching of domestic work, and the older girls gained experience in helping with the younger. Other convents were perhaps not as harsh as Port-Royal, it is difficult to generalise. Bourdaloue censures them for their ignorance and worldliness. Mme de Maintenon feared worldly convents, for they gave the impression of enchantment to the world, while those full of conventual fervour painted it in forbidding colours. It speaks for the convents that they could be used as a threat for disobedient girls. Gorgibus in Les Précieuses Ridicules threatens Cathos and Magdelon with "ou vous mariées...ou vous seriez religieuses...". Béline would use a convent immorally as a means of ridding herself of Angélique, a stumbling block to Argan's fortune in "La Malade Imaginaire".

The convents, in an emotionally detached atmosphere, removed most effectively from the girls the warmth of family relationships and communication. No training of intellect and reason was received by the girls. They finally emerged into a tumultuous society full of the intrigue and "galanterie" of the alcoves and ruelles, which was seeping down from the aristocracy, and where the feminists of the

now decadent précieuse movement were shaking the foundations of marriage.

Molière, in L'Ecole des Femmes, continues his defence of love's being the best master. Arnolphe the moralist of the middle ages has been completely outwitted by the highly intelligent and practical Agnès, who has been quick to turn the tables on him now that love has torn aside the veil of ignorance. Arnolphe has taken the wrong steps. In realising the dangers to the young woman of contemporary society, instead of preparing her to deal rationally and discriminately with the situations which will beset her, he has gone to the extremities of keeping her in complete ignorance, under the pretext of protecting her honour, when in reality it was his own honour that he was protecting.

CHAPTER V

LES FEMMES SAVANTES

Almost ten years elapsed after the production of *L'Ecole des Femmes*, a most successful and controversial play. During this time the intellectual climate of the educated people of France had undergone a change. In 1666 Colbert created the Academy of Sciences. This event was a sign of the times. The new "Age of Reason" was dawning. Descartes had published his Discourse de la Méthode in 1637. Women decided that they too had this intelligence that Descartes said was found in everyone. The renewed political stability under Louis XIV after the Frondes saw the salons flourishing. Notable women such as Mme de Sablé and Mme de Sablière, attracted to their salons men of the calibre of La Rochefoucauld and La Fontaine. The salons had taken on a new look since Mme de Rambouillet. Many more salons had opened, the topics of discussion reflecting the new scientific trends.

Les Femmes Savantes is a complex satirical play, aimed at pedantry, Molière scores off old enemies, but at the same time it sheds light on the current trends of education and women. Up to this time odd voices had been persisting in championing women's rights. Mlle de Gournay had struggled to awaken women to a realisation that they were worthy of more than being kept in ignorance, stupidity, and service. P. Duboscq in L'Honnête Femme had given wise and precise directions. He disapproved of pedantry, but women are wives and mothers who should be capable of understanding and interesting themselves in everything.³⁹

There was much talk in France of Queen Christine of Sweden who could speak several languages, interested herself in abstract matters and showed preferences for the sciences. Anne de Schurman of Holland knew Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Arabic, nearly all the modern languages, was a mathematician, theologian, and philosopher, filling in her spare time with painting and sculpting. Women were becoming dissatisfied with their restricted salon conversation. Naturally intelligent women in France were prepared to answer the call. Mlle de Scudéry pleaded the cause for intellectual liberation for women. She argues in Le Grand Cyrus that it is extraordinary that a girl should spend ten or twelve years learning accomplishments which are of use to her for only five or six years. Yet this same person must talk and make judgments till the day she dies. "Savants" such as Chapélin, Ménage and L'Abbé d'Aubignac frequented the salons, and brought fragments of knowledge and ideas, thus whetting the appetites of the high-born habituées.

Up to date their means of instruction was through reading, Mme de Sévigné being renowned here, and through conversation. Their curiosity was met to some extent by popularisers. René Bary offered a volume entitled "La fine philosophie accommodée à l'intelligence des Dames". Another author explained "les causes et les admirables effets des météores".⁴⁰ Women felt the need of live, verbal instruction. The university was not open to them. Earlier in the century Renaudet, who had created the first daily newspaper in the vernacular, turned his office into a sort of free university to which women flocked to hear lectures on many different subjects. Later numerous little "cercles or

academies opened. Teachers expounded on physics and chemistry, political science, and Aristotle. The women sat in front rows and understood what was going on.

So opportunities for women to learn the new ideas were available, and had been for some years when Molière came to produce Les Femmes Savantes in 1672. They took their studies seriously. Mme de la Sablière held discussions in her salon on scientific questions, and particularly physics. Many women were visiting the observatory which had been built in Paris, and could explain eclipses and comets. Mme Deshoulières had been taught the philosophy of Gassendi by Henault. Mme de Sévigné's daughter Mme de Grignan was an ardent disciple of the great Descartes. The list of names of illustrious salon women lengthens, and one is conscious of all the lesser women who haunted the little academies and lecture rooms.

Another aspect of the social life in this time of the reign of Louis was the rise in wealth and power of the bourgeoisie, and what it spelt in terms of leisure for the middle-classes. The wives and daughters of prosperous lawyers and merchants now had spare time on their hands. They looked to the upper classes and saw an education explosion among the women whom they were always busy emulating. Molière, deeply rooted in this milieu, recognizes another threat to the stability of the family life of this backbone of the nation. While he allows that it is quite acceptable for a woman to have "la clarté du tout" at the same time he is incensed by the spirit of pedantry and coterie, and the desire to shine in society above all else. This was a contradiction to their true character, and false to nature. Modesty in women was esteemed. A compliment on

her learning was customarily followed by one on her modesty. It seems likely that these pedants were in a minority. One poet in his verse counted sixty-seven. However in Molière's view they apparently constituted a threat. He was not the first to ridicule. In 1662 Samuel Chapuzeau in a play Académie des Femmes, criticises the stuffing of the minds with Greek and Latin while neglecting household duties. "Les Femmes Savantes" are a trio of learned women whose characters are drawn in a most unattractive light. Philaminte, dominating her husband, is irritable, proud, vain, and blind to her daughters' happiness. In short an unnatural wife and mother. Armande, her elder daughter, is a somewhat unpleasant, envious, dessicated type of précieuse prude, also a denatured woman. Béline of Philaminte's generation, unbelievably naïve despite her undisputed knowledge, insists on remaining a précieuse. No doubt Molière's comic art exaggerates their weakness. Henriette portrayed as the ideal woman, likeable, wise and modest, speaks to her sister of the two sides of their mother's nature:

"Nous saurons toutes deux imiter notre mère:
 Vous, du côté de l'âme et nobles désires,
 Moi; de côté de sens et de grossières plaisirs;
 Vous, aux productions d'esprit et de lumière,
 Moi, dans celles, ma soeur, qui sont de la matière".
 Act I, Scene 1, Les Femmes Savantes.

It is obvious that Henriette is following her own nature in choosing to imitate the more earthy side of her mother. Philaminte therefore at some time must have been a good example for her daughter. Now Chrysale, Henriette's father, esteemed Clitandre's father in his youth, which speaks somewhat for Chrysale, as Clitandre is the "bon raisonneur" Henriette will choose to marry with her father's blessing. Chrysale is not lacking in judgement when he comments on

Clitandre:

"Il est riche en vertu, cela vaut des trésors".

Act II, Scene 5, Les Femmes Savantes.

That Chrysale is prepared to agree to Henriette's choice of husband is another point in Chrysale's favour, and would seem in some part to set a seal of approval on him.

Molière's unpleasant fathers often abuse parental authority in arranged marriages. Chrysale is also concerned for other human beings when he sympathises with Martine, who has been dismissed by Philaminte for daring to be guilty of grammatical mistakes. Later Chrysale has his way when he reinstates Martine surreptitiously, one feels not only because he needs her, but because he thinks of her as a human being. Martine and Chrysale's outbursts on the education of women need not necessarily be taken at their face value. Martine was the last straw. Compare Chrysale's outburst with Arnolphe's in L'Ecole des Femmes. Chrysale gives the impression of a mild-tempered man, driven at last to an unaccustomed outburst and he scarcely seems responsible for what he says:

"...une femme en sait toujours assez
Quand la capacité de son esprit se hausse.
A connoître un pourpoint d'avec un haut de chausse".

Act II, Scene 9, Les Femmes Savantes.

Arnolphe is cold and calculating and means every word he says.

Henriette is not the daughter of a man who prefers a woman to have "clartes peu sublime". It must not be concluded from Chrysale's words that he thinks all study is fatal to a woman. The point about the foregoing discussion is that Henriette has a good relationship with her father. She is not only a dutiful daughter, but also an affectionate

one:

"Ah, ma fille! je suis bien aise de vous voir".

Act V, Scene 2, Les Femmes Savantes.

Her father is a tolerant man, understanding, and not lacking in judgement. We are not told how Henriette received her education, but it seems reasonable to suppose that Chrysale has lent a sympathetic and tolerant ear to his daughter, perhaps in the fashion of Ariste with Lénor, for she has certainly been exposed to experiences which have enlightened her.

Bordonove⁴¹ points out the different tone in Molière's dedication to L'Ecole des Femmes. Madame (Henriette d'Angleterre) was then aged twenty years, and represented for Molière a new type of woman:

"... de quelque côté qu'on vous regard, on rencontre gloire sur gloire, et qualités sur qualités... des graces et de la esprit, et du corps qui vous font admirer de toutes les personnes qui vous voient... cette douceur pleine de charmes...cette bonté obligeante...cette affabilité généreuse..."

A Madame. L'Ecole des Femmes.

Bossuet eight years later in his funeral oration remarks on her ability and subtle intelligence, her modesty, discretion and generosity. She had successfully accomplished important political work for Louis XIV in England.

Madame was a new discovery for Molière. Her sweet charm envelopped a straight and strong soul; her exquisite politeness covered a profound perspicacity, a comprehension not sublime, but enlightened on life, hers was a delicate beauty exempt for once from coquetry. Her aristocracy was founded on simplicity and accompanied a care for others and a wish to help them.⁴² This new image of woman, unfolding in Isabelle and Agnès, although Madame was not then in

France, reveals itself more fully in Henriette. Which Henriette is being alluded to in Clitandre; words to Henriette, his hoped for future wife?:

"Je consens qu'une femme ait des clartés du tout".

Act I, Scene 3, Les Femmes Savantes.

Probably Clitandre finds those qualities in Henriette which Molière found in Madame.

Armande displays a somewhat soured and envious nature, lacking the naturalness of Henriette. Armande, an extreme précieuse prude of the type which renounces marriage for philosophy, is a coquette at the same time. She would prefer to keep Clitandre, her one-time lover, still in her power. Marriage she looks on with disgust. Molière is drawing attention to the fact that précieuses were wanting to reform, amongst other things, marriage. Generally they considered it desirable not to marry, as there was little chance of happiness to be found there. Ninon de Lanclos was one of those individuals, free thinking, with no mind to lose but her beauty, elegance, and wit. Their long term view was a trial marriage, and the marriage would finish at the birth of the first child, the father keeping the child, the mother being free. This was indeed a social revolution, which would shake the family unit to the foundations, and certainly paternal authority so much a part of the structure of French family life since the time of the Roman occupation, was contestable. This threat may not have been so urgent at the time of which Molière was writing, as the height of the précieuse movement was past, and Molière is more concerned with the spirit of coterie and pedantry in Les Femmes Savantes, and the effect of the scramble for learning on the women's part, with the subsequent possible disruption to the household.

The situation which develops out of Armande's spurning of Clitandre, who then turns to Henriette, further underlines the latter's qualities. Clitandre has had enough of Armande's game of love, enough of sighing and proving his love during two years, only to suffer in turn under her scorn. He turns to the compassion and humility which he finds in Henriette. Armande rather spitefully reminds Henriette of her filial duties to her parents, while Henriette gracefully agrees with her.

Molière's intention here in contrasting the two women seems to be to approve a woman of Henriette's type. Her mind is open to expansion and refining judgement, so as to come to a realisation of her place in society, as opposed to a narrow mind channelled away from what society expects in a woman.

This scene shows the results of two different ways of education, once again. Armande, devoted to her philosophy, has become rather less than Clitandre's ideal woman. She has rendered herself learned, while remaining uneducated.

"De se rendre savante afin d'être savante".

Act I, Scene 3, Les Femmes Savantes.

Clitandre's standards are those of the court, which he defends against those of Trissotin as being not stupid, but those of commonsense and good taste. The wit found there is worth far more than the obscure learning of pedantry. Clitandre's portrait is not flattering to Trissotin. Both he and Henriette see through Trissotin:

"La constante hauteur de sa présomtion,
Cette intrépidité de bonne opinion
Cet indolent état de confiance extrême...".

Act I, Scene 4, Les Femmes Savantes.

Henriette's reply:

"C'est avoir de bons yeux de voir tout cela".

Act I, Scene 4, Les Femmes Savantes.

explains in fair measure Molière's meaning of "clartés du tout". Here is the hint of the profound perspicuity, a comprehension not sublime, but lucid, that Molière perhaps saw in Madame. Henriette estimates Trissotin's worth because her taste and judgement have been formed. She is in a far better position than Philaminte, Armande and Bélise, who, all three are completely deceived by a worthless scoundrel lacking in good taste and good sense. This of course in turn is a reflection on the good taste and good sense of the three "savantes".

Bélise is a précieuse, both coquette and prude, whose novel reading in her younger days has permanently filled her head with foolish visions. She might be a representation of the fate that was awaiting Cathos and Magdelon, if they continued to believe that the reality of life was found in novels, for she believes every male to be languishing from his undeclared love of her. Philaminte, while not a précieuse, nevertheless is denatured in that she has given herself over to the acquiring of knowledge to such an extent that she neglects the management of her household and has taken over, or is attempting to take over the paternal authority of the family.

Philaminte's and Bélise's performance with Martine's grammar reveals the futility of the pedant who lacks the commonsense to deal effectively with daily life. Martine protests:

"Quand on se fait entendre, on parle toujours bien,
Et tous vos biaux dictons ne servent pas de rien".

Act II, Scene 4, Les Femmes Savantes.

Martine at least uses language for what it is primarily intended, that is a means of communication. There is no communication between Martine and the two "savantes". They talk pedantically of the finer points of grammar, of which Martine understands nothing and moreover has no wish to understand. Bélise and Philaminte show firstly a lack of common-sense in thinking to give a lesson in grammar to a servant. Furthermore they are guilty of bad taste, because Martine has no wish to learn.

In the salon scene, he draws in a few swift strokes, even more clearly, their foolishness. Philaminte asks L'Epine:

"...Est ce que l'on doit choir,
Après d'avoir vu l'équilibre des choses?"

Bélise

"De ta chute, ignorant ne vois-tu les causes,
Et qu'elle vient d'avoir du point fixe écarté
Ce que nous appelons centre de gravité?"

Act III, Scene 2, Les Femmes Savantes.

This puts the whole question in a nutshell. The "savantes" have been filling their heads with academic facts and theories, and have quite lost the balance of things. Common sense has flown, the meat burns in the oven, and the stability and harmony of the family is shattered.

In contrast Henriette shows good sense in plenty. She would quietly excuse herself from the salon, modestly disclaiming any book knowledge. At the same time she expresses herself well:

"Je sais peu des beautés de tout ce qu'on écrit".

Act III, Scene 2, Les Femmes Savantes.

She refuses to be drawn into a situation which is false to her. She admits she is not listening to Trissotin's reading, and repulses the unwelcome embraces of Vadius, is unimpressed

by the fact that he knows Greek, takes no part in the general fawning over his platitudes, and the twittering discussion. Preferring the everyday language, she admits to having no ambitions of being a "savante". The "savantes" are roundly ridiculed while Henriette's ideal qualities are quietly and persistently underlined. Henriette is presented as a modest, quiet, natural girl, who appears to be aware of more than she admits.

Philaminte is in the vanguard of the movement for the equality of the sexes. Here she is in accord with Mlle de Gournay, who published in 1622 Egalité des Hommes et des Femmes and Grief des Dames in 1626, and which were republished in 1634 and 1641.⁴³ Poulain de la Barre was to publish his De l'Egalité des Deux Sexes in 1673. Philaminte intends to carry on where Plato left off:

"Et je veux nous venger, toutes tant que nous sommes.
De cette indigne classe où nous rangent les hommes".

Act III, Scene 2, Les Femmes Savantes.

La Bruyère a few years later is to reply to Philaminte. Women he claims have no-one but themselves to blame that they have not had access to learning; this has come about through their own habits, laziness, or feebleness.⁴⁴

Bélise sees a need for women to lift themselves out of their shameful lot, and emancipate their minds. While Armande believes that it is an offence that women's intelligence extends no further than judging the appearance of clothes or the beauty of lace or brocade. From the foregoing, Molière seems to be expressing dissatisfaction with women's education as it then stood, as a tone of ridicule is absent. The ridicule returns after the finish of the women's intelligent discussion of current scientific ideas. Each has her

favourite topic, as the great ladies of the more famous salons had theirs. However the absurdities of Philaminte seeing men on the moon, thus making discoveries from her private observatory in the attic, and Bélise adding bell-towers, give rise to a mocking tone:

"Par nos lois, prose et vers, tout nous sera soumis".

Act III, Scene 3, Les Femmes Savantes.

One hears the women's voices rising in the excitement of planning the total subjugation of the men. Once again Molière contrasts the two extremes. Women's intelligence should not be confined to stultifying trivia, nor should they dominate the whole field of learning.

Through Philaminte, Molière shows us what a disastrous effect an ambitious, obstinate, and dominating "educated" woman can have on the family life. In the first place she has encouraged one daughter to scorn the so-called baser, material aspects of life in marriage and children, and search for fulfilment in the loftier realms of the mind. In turning aside from fulfilling her natural destiny, Armande has become soured. She is estranged from her father, and has no recognition of his authority. Chrysale speaks only once to her, and then it is to silence her for reminding him that Philaminte as well as he is due obedience from his daughters. The second daughter, she is resolved to turn into a "savante" by forcing her to marry a man whom Henriette has discerningly judged to be a hypocrite. She has reduced a good-natured, if perhaps too tolerant man into a husband and father with no standing, and too feeble to assert his will. Philaminte has shown herself to be lacking in judgement. She has been deceived by Trissotin, who turns out to be a

hypocritical fortune hunter. To Clitandre's worth, on the other hand, she is blinded by her pride.

"Et jamais il ne m'a prié de lui rien lire".

Act IV, Scene 1, Les Femmes Savantes.

Philaminte, the "savante" who shines in the salons, is not flattered by Clitandre and accordingly would never consider him to be suitable as a son-in-law.

Henriette is not isolated from her father. Her good sense has protected her from following Philaminte in her lofty aspirations. She and Chrysale speak naturally and with affection to each other, and she expresses filial obedience with dignity. Her father accepts Clitandre from his heart, and at the same time supports his daughter's choice of husband. Henriette has all the qualities of the ideal woman, shows intelligence and discernment:

"Elle sache ignorer les choses qu'elle sait".

Act I, Scene 3, Les Femmes Savantes.

Her reactions in the salon give ample proof of her dislike of pedantry, while her interactions with others display that what she has learnt is related to her daily life and conduct of living. Her knowledge is not separated from nature, but shows itself in a wise conception of life.

Clitandre might represent Molière's middle-of-the-road stance.

"Et mon âme et mon corps marchent de compagnie".

Act IV, Scene 2, Les Femmes Savantes.

It reflects on Henriette that as a man of "bon sens" and "bon gout" he chooses her as a wife. For he too has the discernment to judge correctly the despicable character of Trissotin.

"La science est sujet à faire de grands sots".

Act I, Scene 3, Les Femmes Savantes.

He supports the judgement of Montaigne, in declaring that a clever fool is more stupid than an ignorant fool. In summing up Trissotin he also emphasises the stupidity of the three "savantes", who in their heedless pursuit of learning have stupified their natural commonsense.

In Les Femmes Savantes we are conscious that Molière is again contrasting two different types of education. One ends in the unnatural women who have carried ambition in learning to excess. The result is a foolishness, and lack of understanding of ordinary everyday living, which disrupts the life of all in contact with them. The other produces a woman of sensitivity and an understanding of the needs of others. The women being ridiculed are those who have taken their acquiring of knowledge so seriously that all sense of proportion is lost, reasoning has banished reason. Molière has shown us the extreme. Nor is Philaminte always lacking in judgement, when she can remark to Henriette on discussing the mind:

"La beauté que les ans ne peuvent moissonner".

Act III, Scene 4, Les Femmes Savantes.

Molière then is not against all learning. He attacks taking it to excess. The wisdom of a woman should spring from her own nature and unfold in natural social contacts. Henriette, who has the "clartés du tout", has a natural good sense and taste. She has grace, affection, devotion, and will provide a helpmeet to her husband, in a marriage in which the two partners will be on an equal footing. The raucous demanding of "equality" will bring only ridicule and scorn.

CONCLUSION

Molière, in these four plays which have been studied, has succeeded not only in amusing but also in pointing out inadequacies and problems inherent in the system of education of girls and young women whose destiny at that time was marriage and raising a family.

In ridiculing préciosité in Les Précieuses Ridicules he has uncovered the dangers of the contemporary fashion of women in the aristocracy, and hence in the bourgeoisie, of modelling their lives on the example set by the idyllic lives of the characters in the novels of the day. From being mirrors of the modes and manners of the day, the novels became dictators. For the girls who have spent long years in convents learning nothing which will equip them for living, these novels fill an empty void, giving them an erroneous impression of life. They learn to scorn their parents, while at the same time they are in no position to judge a suitable marriage. The result is a spate of elopements, kidnappings, and similar irregularities that threaten the institution of marriage. While some of the educated women thought that the reading of novels, as well as being enjoyable, would cause no harm, a mind well-formed would discriminate. Unfortunately the girls' minds were not well-formed. Fénelon believed differently, later, and so apparently, Molière. Bélise in Les Femmes Savantes is an example of an adolescent girl grown mature, still living in a world of fantasy.

Apart from leaving a void to be filled in with novel reading, the convents appeared to provide no training for

the girls' future role of managing a household and family. What was worse, the girls were growing up in ignorance of what it meant to be a member of a family unit, for they were losing contact with their parents. This could spell the setting up of a vicious circle, in which the meaning of family life might be lost, and girls no longer would be interested in raising children. Rousseau echoed these sentiments later, as St. Jerome had emphasised the importance of the role of the mother in the earlier centuries.

Molière continues his concern in women's education in L'Ecole des Maris and L'Ecole des Femmes. The court of Louis XIV was rapidly becoming a "den of iniquity"; a trap for the innocent and virtuous young. This was the time of the ascendancy of "l'amour propre". Marriages were tottering under the onslaught of scandalous intrigues and adulteries. Again Molière re-emphasises how complete is the ignorance of a young woman on the threshold of life, after her convent sojourn. He points out how wrong it is to allow her no experience of life, so that she may obtain a broad and enriching education in the school of the world. In holding up two extremes, complete ignorance accompanied by harsh authoritarian methods, and almost complete freedom, he emphasises the "juste milieu". An important fact to emerge is that Sganarelle's lack of trust is directly related to Isabelle's lying and deceit. One might interpret Molière as implying that if a woman is enlightened and trusted, she will feel obliged to stoop to those lies and subterfuges for which she has accumulated such a reputation over the centuries.

The salon women undoubtedly exerted considerable influence over Molière. How direct this influence was is difficult to determine. He apparently was fairly closely

associated with Ninon de Lanclos, who was a good friend to him. Mlle de Scudéry in the days of Les Précieuses Ridicules was somewhat entrenched in the opposing camp to Monsieur Molière's protector. The conclusion come to in lieu of further information is that their influence was indirect, although he actually read several of his works in their salons.

Underlying the action one detects currents of renaissance thought flowing. Erasmus looked for affection in the pupil-teacher relationship. This was taken up later by Fénelon, and Mme de Maintenon. A part and parcel of love's being the best teacher is the idea of following nature. Instead of trying to force, allow her a little freedom in following her bent, Fénelon would have a child learn through pleasure. Rousseau later urged that a child conform to his natural tendencies.

The ten years from 1662 to 1672 saw a movement towards education for women tied to a liberation movement in France. In Les Précieuses Ridicules and Les Femmes Savantes, Molière ridicules the women who aspire to learn for learning's sake. His idea of the ideal woman has been evolving, and comes to fruition in Henriette. He would not prevent her from developing her mind. However it should be unobtrusive and free from pedantry, in showing a wise conception of life, in which knowledge is not separated from nature. Commonsense and good taste are the guiding principles. The vision of Molière sees a disordered society, if women forsake the hearth for the halls of learning, in such a way that the harmony of the household is disrupted.

In the increasingly faster flowing currents of renaissance

sance, ideas and new scientific thought, Molière sees the danger to marriage and society, of women rushing to liberate their minds too fast. On the other hand he would condemn any reactionary measures of not allowing her to enter society to receive an education which would teach her to discriminate and to make moral judgements. In allowing her a measure of freedom she is better equipped to expand her mind, and to develop into the type of ideal woman which Molière draws, and also to protect her own honour, thus ensuring a more firmly based and satisfactory marriage. Molière, as Mme de Maintenon and Fénelon would later agree, believed intellectual and moral education were inseparable. However one doubts whether Molière would agree with Simone de Beauvoir and her more militant methods, in achieving enlightenment. Molière had in mind, one feels, a subtle changing of the attitudes of partners towards each other, in a marriage relationship of their own choice, which would percolate through to children in contact with their own parents.

As the destiny of women in the seventeenth century was marriage, Molière in the works studied has considered their education from that point of view. Bélise presumably was unmarried, and appeared a foolish nonentity, held up to ridicule as a woman who has failed to achieve her destiny because she read too many novels in her youth. Gorgibus offered the convent to Cathos and Magdelon as an alternative to marriage. Henriette would prefer a convent, rather than marry Trissotin. Presumably the convent was the only alternative to marriage.

The role of the mother is also a little difficult to assess. She is absent in L'Ecole des Maris and L'Ecole des

Femmes, apart from having been the mother of Agnès in a secret marriage. This raises the question of how many girls like Agnès were virtually orphans in a convent. The mother's absence in Les Précieuses Ridicules is meaningful, as she is not acting as any support to her husband, and appears not to have been supervising them in domestic duties. While Philaminte is held up as an incompetent mother who is pursuing her ambitious path ruthlessly. The only conclusion to be arrived at is that the average bourgeois mother of Molière's time has been to all intents and purposes brought up in a convent, and is simply not equipped for the position which she is occupying. Whether Molière influenced Mme de Maintenon, Fénelon, and future educationists, is a matter of conjecture. He was a man of his times and in exposing certain trends no doubt offered food for thought for future minds.

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