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THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE SERVANTS IN COMEDIES FIRST
PERFORMED AT THE COMEDIE-FRANÇAISE BETWEEN 1685 AND 1732
(plays by Regnard, Dufresny, Dancourt, Lesage, and Destouches)

by

Kenneth John Steele Gibson

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Glasgow
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SUMMARY

Servants figure prominently in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French comedies, but there remain many gaps in our knowledge of these figures. The object of the present study is to go some way towards remedying this situation by subjecting the servants in the mainstream French comedies of five of the more important authors in the period after Molière's death to detailed critical analysis, concentrating on their nature and their dramatic function, rather than on their literary origins or their relationship to their real-life counterparts.

Part I examines the extent to which the characteristics of the fourbe (previously the most memorable male servant type) are to be found in the valets of the plays being considered. Chapter 1 establishes the principal features of the fourbe by reference to Molière's most famous tricksters, and shows that while many of Regnard's servants have elements of the stage trickster in them, none is a supreme fourbe. Chapter 2 shows that in Dufresny the servants lack the basic instincts of the fourbe, while Chapter 3 reveals that although the servants in Lesage's La Tontine and Crispin rival de son maître show fourbe characteristics, in the latter play these are counterbalanced by aspects untypical of the fourbe, while in Turcaret the principal servant is the antithesis of the fourbe. In Chapter 4 it is demonstrated that Destouches's servants generally show no fourbe characteristics and are used merely as confidants, while in Chapter 5 Dancourt's servants are also shown to be no fourbes. Overall, therefore, it appears that in the plays under review the servants are extremely varied, with the fourbe no longer constituting the predominant male servant type.

Part II focusses on the ethos of the male servant. In Chapter 1 it is shown that although Regnard's servants are attracted to fashionable society, and may dream of advancement, they are motivated more by the love of fun, and the desire to show themselves superior to others, than by ruthless self-interest. Moreover, questionable though their activities may be, the servants are perceived as amoral rather than immoral, partly because the audience is caught up in their tricks and disarmed by their comedy, but principally because their behaviour creates a world of fantasy in which there is no moral dimension.

Chapter 2 shows that Dufresny's servants have no views on society, and pursue only short-term self-interest; moreover, because they inhabit a world largely devoid of fantasy, they are judged to be moral or immoral depending on the nature of those whom they support. In Chapter 3 Lesage's servants are seen to share the interest in advancement shown by Regnard's figures, but pursue it more ruthlessly. However, a number of factors prevent them from emerging as evil creatures. Chapter 4 reveals that Destouches's servants are unusually upright, and support conventional moral values. But although they have a part to play in the promotion of a moral view, they are not alone in this, as other 'decent' figures also throw their evil opponents into relief. Finally, Chapter 5 demonstrates that Dancourt's servants are essentially amoral figures who show an amused and uncritical acceptance of dubious behaviour. They are developed neither as individuals nor as social types, however, which may explain why, despite allusions to their disreputable past, they do not in fact behave with ruthless self-interest. In these authors, therefore, variety is the hallmark of the servants' ethos, both in terms of their outlook on the world and their motivation.

Part III concentrates on the nature and function of the female servants. Chapter 1 reveals that in outlook and behaviour Regnard's figures range from a servante de bon sens or servante dévouée to a soubrette perfide, while their contribution to the mechanics of the plays shows similar diversity. Chapter 2 demonstrates that Dufresny's servants are less varied in outlook and more consistent in their functional role. Chapter 3 shows that Lesage's servants, each of whom displays a unique blend of personality and functional utility, are so varied as to defy categorisation, while Chapter 4 suggests that it is mainly by acting as confidants and creating comedy through their outspokenness that Destouches's servants contribute to his plays, although, despite their forthrightness, they are not traditional servantes dévouées. Finally, Chapter 5 shows that in outlook Dancourt's servants fall between the servante dévouée and the soubrette perfide, while it is by acting as confidants that they contribute most to the functioning of the plays. Overall, the servants emerge as extremely varied individuals who can only rarely be categorised as soubrettes perfides or servantes dévouées; their functional roles are also varied, although the majority of them have an important part to play as confidants.

Part IV examines the comic function of both male and female servants. Chapter 1 concentrates on situational comedy, focussing in particular on the many ways in which valets reverse the normal pattern of dominance, and, in getting the better of their nominal superiors, cause the audience to direct its laughter at the latter. Chapter 2 looks at conscious humour, especially the ways in which the agile-minded valets and soubrettes are able to react wittily to circumstances - usually at the expense of their superiors. And in Chapter 3, where linguistic comedy comes under scrutiny, the various laughter-provoking ways in which servants express themselves are examined. Finally, it is emphasised that the servants' comic activities must be seen as an integral part of the plays as a whole, and that the key to this lies in the servants' tendency to make the audience laugh with them at other figures, for it is in this way that they persuade the audience to share the author's comic vision.

The study ends with a number of conclusions being drawn. It is observed that the nature of the servants examined is so varied that it is dangerous to generalise about their outlook and behaviour. However, as the prominence of their roles might suggest, they have an important part to play in the functioning of most comedies, with the female servants in particular being used by the authors to facilitate the mechanical development of the comedies (although the ways in which they do so may vary widely), and with virtually all servants making a significant contribution to the generation of laughter and the projection of the authors' comic vision. Nevertheless, the importance of servants to the plays of the period can only fully be appreciated if one imagines the effect which their removal would have, for as well as destroying those plays in which servants are the focal point, and inflicting structural damage on those in which servants are of less obvious significance, this would - except in the case of Dancourt - deprive the comedies of their principal enlivening element.

INTRODUCTION

Servants, as dramatic figures, have a long and distinguished history, having appeared on stage countless times between their early occurrence as slaves in the drama of ancient Greece and Rome, and their virtual disappearance from new plays in the first part of the twentieth century. Yet although, in the course of their long career, they can scarcely, if ever, have appeared with greater regularity than on the comic stage of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, the critical attention which the servants of that period of French comedy have attracted, whilst not insignificant, is in no way commensurate with the frequency of their occurrence.¹

Moreover, those writings on the servant in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French comedy which do exist leave considerable gaps in their coverage of the topic - gaps which are attributable not only to the restricted number of such writings, and to their frequent brevity and superficiality,² but also to more fundamental limitations in their approach. For many of them - as their titles often make clear - either focus their attention so firmly on major authors (particularly Molière) that they all but ignore the numerous servants who are the creations of less well-renowned playwrights, or confine their attentions to stage servants of one sex only, while others tend to neglect the all-important matter of the servants' dramatic function in the plays in which they occur, either because they concern themselves primarily with the dramatic ancestry of the stage servant

¹For details of the comparatively limited number of books and articles all or part of which are specifically devoted to this topic, and some of which are discussed in the paragraphs which follow, see my Bibliography.

²Most writings on the servant are brief articles, the shortest being Eugène Noël's 'Les Valets de Molière', which extends to only two pages. Although brevity and superficiality are by no means synonymous, many of these articles are in fact superficial in their approach, as, indeed, are some of the larger works on the subject: Maria Ribaric Demers's Le Valet et la soubrette de Molière à la Révolution, despite its promising title and its 223 pages, consists of little more than quotations from the mouths of servants, strung together by a text which is, at best, loosely structured and almost devoid of analysis, while Gérard Gouvernet's Le Type du valet chez Molière, et ses successeurs Regnard, Dufresny, Dancourt et Lesage: caractères et évolution is also primarily descriptive, rather than analytical.

(as is the case with Lâmia Kerman's Un Personnage du théâtre classique: le valet de comédie: évolution du type, du valet antique au valet de Molière and Léon and Frédéric Saisset's 'Un Type de l'ancienne comédie: le valet'), or because they concentrate heavily on the relationship between the stage servant and his or her contemporaries in the real world (as is the case with John Van Eerde's 'The Historicity of the Valet Rôle in French Comedy during the Reign of Louis XIV'), or because they favour a sociological approach and attempt to find social trends reflected in the servants' behaviour (as in Nicole Bandez Rapoza's 'Le Valet dans la comédie française du XVIIIe siècle'). Indeed, in some cases a single work may be subject to a number of such limitations: thus, Paul Theodore Kreiss's thesis, 'The Valet in French Comedy from 1670 to 1730', ignores the role of the female servant; is extremely diffuse despite (or perhaps because of) its length of some 985 pages; lays considerable emphasis on the servants' 'socio-economic situation' (illustrating the latter by referring indiscriminately to theatrical and historical writings); and, although not entirely neglecting their dramatic role, frequently categorises stage servants on the basis of their names, a procedure which, in the period concerned, is fraught with danger, and can lead only to distortion.

There is, however, one major work on the stage servant, Jean Emelina's Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre comique en France de 1610 à 1700, which avoids most of the limitations outlined above, and seeks to be as comprehensive in its approach as possible; but although it deals with both minor and major authors, as well as addressing itself, in part at least, to the dramatic role of stage servants, in some respects it is the victim of its own attempted comprehensiveness, since, in striving to cover virtually all extant comedies within its specified period, irrespective of the stage for which they were written³ (just under five hundred plays in all), and

³Plays written for, or in the tradition of, the Théâtre Italien are, for instance, juxtaposed in Emelina's study with those created for the substantially different Comédie-Française; tragi-comédies, comédies pastorales, comédies héroïques, and opéras-comiques are, however, excluded on the grounds that they are 'fort éloignés de ce que l'on entend ordinairement par "comédie"' (p.9).

in defining servants in the broadest of terms,⁴ it embraces such a large and disparate body of plays and of characters that its observations are perforce of a general nature, and can shed little light either on the detailed contribution which servants make to the workings of particular plays, or on the more subtle variations which exist between one playwright's treatment of the servant and that of another.

It is clear, then, that the current state of scholarship leaves many gaps in our knowledge of the stage servant in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French comedy. My aim in undertaking the present study has been, therefore, to fill some of these gaps, and to do so in three main ways: first, by focussing attention on the nature of the servants and their dramatic function (that is, the part played by them in the economy of the plays in which they occur), rather than on their origins, or their relationship to their congeners off stage;⁵ second, by engaging in a detailed, in-depth analysis of the subject, thus avoiding the superficial or general approach which is a feature of most existing studies; and, third, by concentrating on a part of the literature whose servants have not hitherto been subjected to detailed scrutiny of the type proposed, namely, mainstream French comedy in the period extending from just after Molière's death to the decline of the Moliéresque tradition with the rise of the more serious comédie larmoyante.

To define the scope of the present study in broad terms, as the previous paragraph does, is not difficult; to explain the criteria on the basis of which individual plays and servants have been selected is, however, less straightforward: it is, therefore, appropriate at this point to explain the principles of selection which have been applied.

⁴In the context of his study, Emelina uses the terms 'valet' and 'servante' to cover 'tous les personnages qui, sous quelque aspect que ce soit, à quelque degré que ce soit, quels que soient leur caractère, leur rôle, leur habit ou leur style, et quel que soit le milieu social représenté se trouvent, par rapport à d'autres personnages de la pièce, dans une position de dépendance autre que celle déterminée par des liens familiaux ou passionnels' (p.16).

⁵It follows that in the present study the social and historical dimensions of the plays are not explored as such.

First, in order to restrict the study to comedies belonging to the main stream of the French comic tradition (thus rendering more meaningful any comparisons which may be made between the various treatments of the servant figure in different plays), certain categories of play, which can be seen as peripheral to that tradition, are excluded from consideration: namely, tragi-comédies; divertissements; intermèdes; opéras-comiques; plays in the opéra-ballet genre; those featuring essentially mythological or fantastic creations, such as gods, génies, or fairies; critiques or prologues dependent on other plays; and comedies which, like many of those by Lesage, are primarily translations, or close adaptations, of non-French works.

Second, since it is in plays written for the Comédie-Française that mainstream French comedy after Molière finds its greatest expression, only comedies first performed at the Comédie-Française are normally considered.⁶

Third, from among the mainstream comedies performed at the Comédie-Française, attention is focussed upon those written by five of the more important authors who flourished in the period after Molière, namely, Dancourt, whose prolific output dominated the French stage of the time, and whose first play for the Comédie-Française - Le Notaire obligeant, first performed in 1685 - is taken as the starting point for the present study;⁷ Dufresny, who, although less successful in terms of performances, had an important number of plays accepted by the Comédie-Française; Regnard, seen in his day as Molière's principal literary heir;⁸ Lesage, whose plays for the Comédie-Française remain among the best known comedies of the period; and Destouches, whose comedies constitute a transition from the Moliéresque tradition to the

⁶ Dufresny's Le Chevalier joueur and La Malade sans maladie, both plays of a kind normally written for the Comédie-Française but first performed at court shortly before being performed in public, are, however, included (see Appendix I, Table 2, notes 4 and 5).

⁷ H. C. Lancaster, A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, Part V, p.136, observes that Dancourt was 'next to Hardy the most prolific dramatist who wrote in the seventeenth century', adding that 'among all French authors who devoted themselves chiefly to comedy he stands next to Molière in the number of times his plays were acted at the Comédie Française'. Le Notaire obligeant was later known as Les Fonds perdus, and is hereafter referred to as such.

⁸ As Alexandre Calame, Regnard: sa vie et son œuvre, p.5, puts it: 'Au XVIIIe siècle, on disait Molière et Regnard comme on dit Corneille et Racine'.

sentimental comedy which was to follow it,⁹ and whose masterpiece, Le Glorieux, first performed in 1732, only three years before the new genre became firmly established with the appearance of La Chaussée's Le Préjugé à la mode, marks the finishing point of the present study. Unless excluded by the criteria discussed above, all extant comedies written by these authors and first performed by the Comédie-Française between 1685 and 1732 are considered, save those which are the product of collaboration with another author whose contribution is generally considered to have been the major one. A list of the comedies examined is given in Appendix I.

Fourth, although, as is amply demonstrated by Emelina,¹⁰ the range of stage characters whom it is possible to see as servants is enormous, in accordance with the practice adopted by most students of the servant in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French dramatic literature - Emelina being the most notable exception - I have, in the present study, confined my attention to those servant figures who generally occur with the greatest frequency, and who are noted both for their intimate association with their masters and mistresses, and for their active participation in the events of the plays in which they occur: that is, individuals of the type most commonly described in the distribution of their plays as valets, in the case of males, and as servantes, suivantes, and femmes de chambre in the case of females. The study, therefore, includes within its scope only figures who might reasonably be seen as belonging to the categories noted above, whether or not they are so described in their play's distribution.¹¹ Consequently, certain categories of individuals who might be seen as servants - since they either constitute part of the domestique of a household or are in some other way dependent upon others for their living - have been excluded from the study. However, because, in the

⁹Désiré Nisard, in his 'La Comédie après Molière', p.292, puts it thus: 'La comédie de Destouches avait cessé de faire rire; c'était une transition naturelle à la comédie qui allait faire pleurer'.

¹⁰See p.9, note 4, above.

¹¹Where a servant-like figure is not so described in the distribution, the decision on whether or not he or she should be included in the present study is based on a number of factors, most notably any designation given to him or her in the course of the play; the name by which he or she is known; the pattern of tutoiement which surrounds him or her; and his or her behaviour in relation to other characters.

present study, attention is focussed on mainstream comedies written for the Comédie-Française - a kind of play in which servant-type figures other than valets, servantes, souvantes and femmes de chambre occur only infrequently -, the number of such exclusions is small, being limited largely to minor laquais, whose infrequent appearances are usually associated with the announcement of other characters or the movement of stage properties; individuals such as Signolet in Dancourt's La Loterie, who are described as domestiques and may resemble laquais; jardiniers (frequently peasant-like individuals) such as Lucas in Dufresny's L'Esprit de contradiction; cochers such as the one in Dancourt's Le Chevalier à la mode; apprentices or assistants such as the garçon du moulin in Dancourt's Le Mari retrouvé; gouvernantes such as Mme Isaac in Dancourt's La Foire Saint-Germain; nourrices such as the one in Dufresny's Le Faux Instinct; and the intendants, suisses and maîtres d'hôtel of more elevated households such as are found in Dufresny's Le Double Veuvage or Regnard's Démocrite. An annotated list of the servants selected for study is given in Appendix II.

The scope of the present study thus defined, it now becomes necessary to say a few words of a practical nature.

In the course of the study, references to plays are given in the form 'Sc.3' (that is, scene 3) if the play referred to is a one-act comedy, and in the form 'I,6' (that is, Act I scene 6) if it is greater than one act in length. The titles of plays are normally given in full, but are occasionally reduced to a recognisably abbreviated form. For example, Crispin rival de son maître may be referred to as Crispin rival, and La Malade sans maladie as La Malade. For ease of consultation, references are to commonly-available editions of the authors' works, details of which are given in Section 1 of my Bibliography, but in the course of the discussion account is taken of the earliest edition of each play available to me.¹² Irrespective of

¹²In all but a very few instances this is the edition commonly regarded as the first edition, and, where it is not, it is an edition post-dating the first by only a year or two and unlikely to differ significantly from the former. Details of the first editions of the plays (and of the earliest editions consulted, where different) are given in Appendix I. Only in the case of Destouches do the early editions of the plays differ to any extent from the editions to which references relate, but the revisions and refinements introduced by the

the edition cited, in all quotations - both from plays and other works - the typography and orthography are modernised unless the exigencies of verse demand otherwise, or unless it is the author's clear intention to use dialect or forms of speech for which no standard modern form exists. Names, too, are standardised: for instance, both 'L'Olive' and 'Lolive' are rendered as 'L'Olive'; and punctuation is modified if the original punctuation could be misleading.

Finally, a brief word about the approach adopted in the present study. The pre-eminence of the trickster or fourbe type of male servant in the history of comic drama before 1685 is taken as its starting point, and in Part I an attempt is made to establish the extent to which the superficial characteristics of the fourbe, with his active involvement in the affairs of the play, are still to be found in the male servant of the period under consideration. Then, in Part II, an examination is made of the ethos of the male servant in the plays being investigated, with particular emphasis being placed on his attitude to life, his apparent motivation, and the extent to which the audience is made to see him as moral, immoral, or amoral. In Part III, attention is focussed on the nature and function of the female servant in the plays in which she occurs, and finally, in Part IV, the study is concluded with an analysis of what is arguably the most important role of both male and female servants, namely, their contribution to the creation of comedy.

As the authors being considered all wrote in the shadow of Molière, it is inevitable that reference should, from time to time, be made to the latter's treatment of the stage servant; it must be stressed, however, that there is no intention in the present study specifically to make close comparisons between Molière's servants and those under investigation except where this is particularly helpful in shedding light on the latter (most notably when, in Part I, consideration is given to the fourbe). It must also be stressed that while the study highlights differences in the treatment accorded to servants by the various authors whose plays are examined, no attempt is

author do not fundamentally alter the character of the plays, and certainly do not impinge to any significant extent on the role of the servants.

made to see in such differences evidence of progressions or trends in the development of the stage servant, since - quite apart from the danger of generalisation and oversimplification which such an approach would entail - all the playwrights whose works are analysed are close contemporaries of each other. The approach adopted is not, therefore, chronological, and, as a consequence, in Parts I, II, and III, where a separate chapter is devoted to each of the selected authors, the latter are treated not in a strict chronological sequence but in descending order of interest, since this allows comparisons between them to be presented with greater clarity. Similarly, in order to facilitate comparison - and to avoid unnecessary repetition -, conclusions are drawn not at the end of each individual chapter but very briefly at the end of the parts as a whole. In Part IV the arrangement is somewhat different, since it is felt that because comedy, wherever it occurs, tends to arise from a limited range of basic devices (although the elaboration and interaction of these may lead to situations of great complexity), any attempt to discuss in separate chapters the contribution made to comedy by the male and female servants of the various authors would inevitably lead to fragmentation and repetition. Instead, therefore, Part IV is divided into three chapters, each devoted to a different source of comedy - namely, situational comedy, conscious humour, and linguistic comedy - and within these the contribution of the servants (both male and female) to that particular type of comedy is discussed, with very brief conclusions once again being drawn, not at the end of each chapter, but at the end of the part as a whole.

PART I

THE MALE SERVANT AS FOURBE

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In the long history of the male servant before 1685, there is one predominant figure, and that is the fourbe: the trickster who, since the time of his first appearance as a scheming slave in classical Greek drama, has had countless reincarnations, successively featuring on the stage of ancient Rome, and in Italian comedy, before finally emerging in a France strongly influenced by the commedia dell'arte. It is appropriate, therefore, that when one turns one's attention to the male servant in the period after 1685 one should begin by investigating the extent to which he resembles his fourbe ancestors.

On undertaking such an investigation, it is clearly necessary to establish a picture of an archetypal fourbe for use as a touchstone against which the figures under examination may be measured, and the approach adopted in the present study is to use as such a touchstone the fourbe as presented in the comedies of Molière. There are two compelling reasons for adopting this approach. The first is that since all the authors under consideration wrote in Molière's shadow they are likely to have derived their conception of the fourbe as much from him as from any earlier source. The second - and more important - is that critical opinion tends to favour the view that it was in creating his servants that Molière drew most heavily on theatrical tradition,¹ and that if some of his fourbe servants, particularly Scapin in Les Fourberies de Scapin, are exceptional figures, they are, nevertheless, eminently representative of their type, their exceptional nature lying more in the concentration (and perfection) of traditional fourbe characteristics within them than in their possession of traits which are wholly uncharacteristic of the fourbe. Monnier, for instance, not only sees in Scapin 'le type immortel de cette rouerie subalterne qui avait été le principal ressort de l'ancienne comédie', but underlines that servant's representative nature when he adds that:

Pour désigner ce type, on pourrait choisir entre vingt noms d'esclaves anciens et dire indifféremment les Parménon, les Tranion, les Stichus, les Epidique, les Liban, les Syrus, les Dave; mais dites les Scapin, et aussitôt tous ces esclaves apparaissent devant vous, avec tous ceux qui les ont suivis

¹This view is, for example, given forceful expression by Mollie Gerard Davis, 'Masters and Servants in the Plays of Molière', p.133.

en Italie et en France, avant Molière et jusque chez Molière; ils se résument en Scapin, qui leur donne son nom et qui peut leur dire 'Je suis vous tous!'.²

In the first of the chapters which follow, therefore, the principal characteristics of the fourbe are illustrated by reference to Molière's comedies, and an assessment is made of the degree to which these characteristics occur in the male servants of Regnard. And in the remaining four chapters the male servants of Dufresny, Lesage, Destouches and Dancourt are in turn examined, and an attempt is made to determine how far - if at all - the fourbe characteristics identified in the first chapter are to be found in them.

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²Marc Monnier, Les Aïeux de Figaro, p.187.

Chapter 1

REGNARD

One of the most characteristic aspects of the fourbe is that he can flourish only in certain circumstances, most notably when the master whom he serves is relatively helpless, and in some measure dependent upon him for assistance in achieving his desired goal. Usually, this means that the fourbe serves a master who is in love, but whose youthfulness - occasionally compounded by a character defect - makes it difficult for him to overcome the obstacles which are placed in the way of his happiness. In Molière, for instance, this is the situation in which the more fourbe-like servants most commonly find themselves. Thus, in Le Médecin volant, Sganarelle is the servant of young Valère, whose love for Lucile is not approved of by the latter's father; in L'Etourdi, Mascarille serves Lélie, who is in love with Célié, but whose scatterbrained nature would make it difficult for him, whatever his age, to outwit, without his servant's help, those who stand between him and his love; in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, the minor fourbe, Covielle, serves young Cléonte, whose desire to marry Lucile conflicts with her father's plans; in Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Sbrigani - an homme d'intrigue or freelance fourbe rather than a servant proper - acts in support of Eraste, the young lover of Julie, whose father has other plans for her; and in Les Fourberies de Scapin, Scapin, the supreme fourbe, effectively acts for two young lovers, namely, Léandre, his master proper, and Octave, the latter's friend. Indeed, that the possession of a master in need of assistance is almost essential if a servant is to develop as a fourbe is further confirmed by Molière's Le Sicilien, since in that play the master, Adraste, although in love, is more resourceful than the usual young lover, and is able to conduct his own campaign to win the hand of Isidore, with the result that his servant, Hali, who in the first half of the play gives some sign of being a fourbe, is gradually eclipsed by him, and eventually fades from the scene altogether.

In Regnard, most of the male servants find themselves in a position similar to that occupied by Molière's fourbes, supporting masters who may broadly be described as young lovers, even if some of them, with their petit-maître leanings and worldly airs, may lack

the relatively innocent simplicity of comparable figures in Molière.¹ Thus, in La Sérénade, Scapin assists young Valère,² who is in love with Léonor; in Le Bal, Merlin aids another young Valère, in love with another Léonor; in Le Joueur, Hector supports a third young Valère, who seeks the hand of Angélique; in Le Distrain, Carlin assists young Léandre, who is in love with Clarice, and whose need for assistance arises not solely from his youthfulness, but, like Molière's Lélie, from a character defect (in this case, as the play's title suggests, absentmindedness); in Le Retour imprévu, Merlin helps young Clitandre, who is in love with Lucile; in Les Folies amoureuses, Crispin does his best for young Eraste, the lover of Agathe; in Les Ménechmes, Valentin assists the youthful Chevalier Ménechme, who loves Isabelle; and in Le Légataire universel, Crispin acts for young Eraste, who again loves a girl named Isabelle. Indeed, of the male servants of Regnard being studied, only three do not find themselves in the position traditionally occupied by the fourbe: Champagne, the minor of the two valets in La Sérénade, who serves the elderly usurer, Mathieu; Jaquinet - again the minor of two valets -, who serves Clitandre's father, Géronte, in Le Retour imprévu; and Strabon, in Démocrite, who serves (but does not support) Démocrite the philosopher, whose avowed contempt for all things temporal marks him out as the antithesis of the conventional young lover.

It is clear, then, that there is a tendency for Regnard's male servants to find themselves in a situation similar to that traditionally occupied by the fourbe. But the similarity between many of Regnard's servants and the conventional fourbe does not end there,

¹For a more detailed examination of the lack of innocence of Regnard's masters, see below, pp.126-7.

²That a master is in love can readily be ascertained by reading the text of the play in which he occurs, but to determine his age on textual evidence is less easy. In this and other examples cited, it is assumed that masters are to be taken as youthful (or at least not old) when they bear names - such as Valère, Léandre, Eraste or Clitandre - which, in the period under consideration, are conventionally assigned to young lovers, and/or when their father or uncle is either still alive or has only recently died (as in La Sérénade, Le Joueur, Le Distrain, Le Retour imprévu, Le Légataire universel, and Les Ménechmes), or when the heroine prefers them to an older rival (as in Les Folies amoureuses).

for closer examination soon reveals that these figures also resemble the fourbe in a number of other respects.

One finds, for instance, that considerable pride in their own ability is a feature both of the fourbe as depicted by Molière, and of many of Regnard's male servants. In Molière, such pride emerges most clearly when, feeling that his reputation is at stake, the fourbe gives expression to what Jouanny variously terms 'l'orgueil professionnel' and 'la conscience professionnelle'.³ The minor fourbe, Hali, for example, exhibits this type of pride when, early in Le Sicilien, he responds in the following terms to a suggestion by his master that they will never be able to outmanœuvre Dom Pèdre, who stands between him and his love, Isidore:

Non; le courroux du point d'honneur me prend; il ne sera pas dit qu'on triomphe de mon adresse; ma qualité de fourbe s'indigne de tous ces obstacles, et je prétends faire éclater les talents que j'ai eus du ciel.⁴

Likewise, in Le Médecin volant, when the minor fourbe, Sganarelle, seems on the point of failing in his enterprise, it is a similar feeling of pride which drives him on to new heights of achievement:

Puisque j'ai tant fait, poussons la fourbe jusqu'au bout.
Oui, oui, il en faut encore sortir, et faire voir que
Sganarelle est le roi des fourbes.⁵

And, in L'Etourdi, Mascarille shows evidence of having a not dissimilar outlook when, in the parody of a Cornelian monologue, he considers the consequences of abandoning his efforts to assist his master:

Et que deviendra lors cette publique estime
Qui te vante partout pour un fourbe sublime,
Et que tu t'es acquise en tant d'occasions,
A ne t'être jamais vu court d'inventions?⁶

However, in Molière, expressions of pride are not restricted to occasions when the fourbe fears that his reputation may be in danger, for even when his ability is not in doubt he may still, spontaneously,

³Molière, Ouvres complètes, edited by Robert Jouanny, I, 39 and 881. All references to Molière's plays are to this edition of his works.

⁴Sc.5.

⁵Sc.14.

⁶III,1. For a more detailed consideration of the extent to which the fourbe's outlook in Molière resembles that of the Cornelian hero, see Karolyn Waterson, 'Du héros guerrier au fourbe héroïque: la transmutation des valeurs héroïques cornéliennes dans le théâtre de Molière'.

refer with evident pride to his skills. Such, for instance, is the case in Les Fourberies de Scapin, where Scapin, responding to a request for assistance from Octave, outlines his capabilities in terms which resemble a nineteenth-century Frontin's 'Le mot impossible n'existe pas pour Frontin':⁷

A vous dire la vérité, il y a peu de choses qui me soient impossibles, quand je m'en veux mêler. J'ai sans doute reçu du ciel un génie assez beau pour toutes les fabriques de ces gentilles d'esprit, de ces galanteries ingénieuses à qui le vulgaire ignorant donne le nom de fourberies; et je puis dire, sans vanité, qu'on n'a guère vu d'homme qui fût plus habile ouvrier de ressorts et d'intrigues, qui ait acquis plus de gloire que moi dans ce noble métier.⁸

In Regnard, many of the male servants are also proud of their ability. It is only occasionally, however (as when Valentin in Les Ménéchmes, reflecting on the success of one of his tricks, exclaims 'Parbleu! vivent les gens pleins d'imaginative!'⁹ or when, in Le Bal, Merlin turns to Lisette, and, referring both to himself and the non-servant intriguer, Fijac, asks 'Ne sais-tu pas encore quelle adresse est la nôtre?'),¹⁰ that they come near to giving open expression to their pride. Instead, their pride normally emerges from the way in which they deliberately behave in a manner designed to draw their skill to the attention of others.

One obvious way in which Regnard's servants draw attention to their skills is by revealing to their adversaries, at the end of the play, their part in deceiving them. In La Sérénade, for example, Scapin quite unnecessarily reveals to Grifon his part in the action, clearly wishing him to know that it was he who performed all the necessary impersonations:

Vous voulez bien, monsieur, que je vous fasse aussi mes petites excuses, et que je vous dise que le borgne à qui vous avez tantôt donné deux cents louis, c'était moi; que je ne suis qu'une façon de musicien.¹¹

⁷Cited by Georges Doutrepoint, Les Types populaires de la littérature française, I, 189.

⁸I, 2.

⁹IV, 1.

¹⁰Sc. 4.

¹¹Sc. 26.

And in Le Retour imprévu, although it is Clitandre who discloses to his father that the tales of madness and ghosts, with which Merlin had plied him in order to keep him out of his own house, were merely inventions of the servant ('Tout ceci est un effet du zèle et de l'imagination de Merlin pour vous empêcher d'entrer chez vous'), Merlin himself, clearly delighted to be identified as the author of the deception, emphasises the point, when, in response to further questions from the old man, he points to his head, and explains that 'tout cela part de là'.¹²

But another - and perhaps more surprising - way in which Regnard's servants draw attention to their skill is by outwitting not their adversaries, but their allies, and then revealing to them what they have done. On such occasions, the deceptions in which they engage serve neither to advance the cause which they are supporting nor to line their own pockets, and are hard to explain except in terms of the servants' love of trickery for its own sake,¹³ and their desire to impress everyone around them - not least their masters¹⁴ - with their cleverness.

One notable episode of this type occurs in La Sérénade,¹⁵ where Scapin, disguised as a certain Champagne in order to further his master's plans by defrauding Grifon of some money, is encountered, in Grifon's absence, by his master, his master's love, and the latter's maid-servant, none of whom has prior knowledge of the plot. In such circumstances, there is nothing to prevent him from immediately revealing to the new arrivals his true identity, but he does not; instead, he continues to play the part of Champagne long enough to deceive his friends, and only then identifies himself to them, thus bringing very forcibly to their attention, by allowing them to experience it at first hand, his skill in deception. And, in Le Bal, there occurs a similar episode,¹⁶ when Merlin, disguised as a maître

¹²Sc.23. Although the edition of 1700 contains no stage direction to that effect, it is likely that the edition of 1823 is correct in suggesting that the servant's words are accompanied by a gesture towards his head.

¹³The servants' love of trickery - and tendency to 'overact' (that is, to indulge in gratuitous elaborations) - is examined below, pp.118-22.

¹⁴This is in some measure related to the servant's desire to show himself superior to his master, discussed below, pp.114-18.

¹⁵Sc.20.

¹⁶Sc.10.

de musique in order to smuggle his master into Léonor's presence in an instrument case, continues for quite some time to play his assumed role in front of Léonor and her servant, Lisette. In each case, the implication is that the servant is proud of his abilities, and wishes others to admire them.

Like the fourbe as depicted by Molière, Regnard's servants may, then, show pride in their ability, even if the form in which this finds expression is different in the case of each author. But, from what has already been said, another point of resemblance emerges, namely, that the abilities in which both Molière's fourbes and Regnard's male servants show pride are primarily the intellectual abilities of imagination and ingenuity, for these figures are never strong-arm men, but characters whose principal weapon is their intelligence, and who clearly share the view of Crispin in Les Folies amoureuses that 'la tête doit toujours agir avant le bras'.¹⁷ Indeed, that Regnard's servants possess the conventional fourbe's imaginative inventiveness is underlined not only by the fact that, like the fourbe, they may be begged by their masters to devise solutions to the latter's problems, but also by the way in which the terms used by young masters in Regnard when begging their servants for assistance, and those used by the masters of Molière's fourbes in comparable circumstances, resemble each other in stressing the inventiveness of the servants. Thus, when Valère, in Regnard's La Sérénade, informed by Scapin that they require money if their plans are to succeed, responds by exclaiming 'Ah! mon pauvre Scapin, cherche, imagine, invente des moyens pour en trouver',¹⁸ his words are an echo of those used by Lélie, when, in Molière's L'Etourdi, he begs Mascarille to help him win Célie:

Cherche dans ta tête
Les moyens les plus prompts d'en faire ma conquête;
Trouve ruses, détours, fourbes, inventions,
Pour frustrer un rival de ses prétentions.¹⁹

While in Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin, Octave's request for help to Scapin has a similar ring about it:

¹⁷I,7.

¹⁸Sc.11.

¹⁹I,2.

Ah! Scapin, si tu pouvais trouver quelque invention, forger quelque machine, pour me tirer de la peine où je suis, je croirais t'être redevable de plus que de la vie.²⁰

What is more, not only are Regnard's male servants, like Molière's fourbes, seen as inventive providers of solutions to problems, but, as with Molière's fourbes, when they turn their minds to devising a solution to a particular difficulty, the ideas which come to them may first appear as vague, half-formed notions, as though the servants were priests or mediums drawing their power from a supernatural source. Here, for example, is Crispin in just such a trance in Regnard's Le Légataire universel:

Attendez ... Il me vient ... Le dessein est bizarre;
Il pourrait par hasard ... J'entrevois ... Je m'égare,
Et je ne vois plus rien que par confusion.²¹

And here is Mascarille in Molière's L'Etourdi:

MASCARILLE:
J'ai trouvé votre fait: il faut ... Non, je m'abuse.
Mais si vous alliez ...

LELIE:

Où?

MASCARILLE:

C'est une faible ruse.²²

In fact, on occasion, both the male servants of Regnard and Molière's fourbes may express themselves in such a way as to imply that there is something supernatural about their gifts. Such is the case, for instance, when Crispin, in Le Légataire universel, asserts that he will produce a plan which 'passera l'effort de tout esprit humain', or when, a little later in the same scene, he uses the term 'enthousiasme', as, fearing that Eraste and Lisette may disrupt his train of thought, he turns to them with a comically imperious 'Ne troublez pas l'enthousiasme où je suis'.²³ And such, too, is the case when Hali, in Molière's Le Sicilien, talks of his abilities as 'les talents que j'ai eus du ciel',²⁴ or when Scapin, in Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin, similarly sees his genius as having celestial

²⁰I,2. The tendency of masters to beg their servants for assistance, and the position of dominance in which this places such servants, is further discussed below, pp.115-16.

²¹IV,2.

²²I,2.

²³IV,2.

²⁴Sc.5. The passage is quoted more extensively above, p.20.

origins.²⁵

Furthermore, not only may the male servants of Regnard and the fourbes of Molière mischievously suggest that their powers are almost supernatural, but they also resemble each other in boastfully - not to say euphemistically - portraying their activities as noble or heroic. In Regnard's Les Ménechmes, for instance, Valentin talks of his 'hauts projets',²⁶ while, in Le Légataire universel, when Lisette suggests that Eraste needs someone to divert Géronte from his intention of bequeathing substantial sums of money to relatives who are complete strangers, Crispin volunteers in heroic terms: 'Je serai ce quelqu'un'.²⁷ And in Molière, Scapin, in Les Fourberies de Scapin, refers, in a passage already cited, to his 'noble métier',²⁸ while, in L'Etourdi, Mascarille - albeit in his parody of a tragic monologue - alludes to his 'nobles travaux'.²⁹ Indeed, just as in Molière, where not only the fourbe himself but also his associates may pretend to see his activities as noble or heroic, so too in Regnard the male servant's master and friends may make much of his heroism, particularly when such flattery will arouse his pride and give impetus to his activities. Thus while in Molière's Monsieur de Pourceaugnac Nérine may introduce Sbrigani to Julie as 'le héros de notre siècle pour les exploits dont il s'agit', and may refer to the 'actions honorables qu'il a généreusement entreprises',³⁰ in Regnard's Le Légataire universel, when Crispin's plans appear to be thwarted by Géronte's supposed death, Eraste seeks to spur his servant on by appealing to his heroic image of himself:

Ne saurais-tu, Crispin, parer ce coup fatal,
Et trouver promptement un remède à mon mal?
Tantôt tu méditais un héroïque ouvrage:
C'est dans les grands dangers qu'on voit un grand courage.³¹

²⁵I,2. The passage is quoted above, p.21.

²⁶II,1.

²⁷II,8.

²⁸I,2. The passage is quoted above, p.21.

²⁹III,1. For a detailed examination of the way in which Mascarille assumes the outlook of a Cornelian hero, see Carlo R. François, 'L'Etourdi de Molière ou l'illusion héroïque'.

³⁰I,2.

³¹IV,1.

And later in the same play, when the revelation that G ronte is not in fact dead poses a problem of similar magnitude, Eraste once more seeks to revive the flagging spirits of his servant by reminding him of his heroic nature:

Toi, que j'ai vu tant t si grand, si magnanime,
Un seul revers te rend faible et pusillanime!
Reprends des sentiments qui soient dignes de toi:
Offrons-nous aux dangers; viens signaler ta foi.³²

From all that has been said so far, it is evident that many of Regnard's male servants resemble the fourbe not only in the position which they occupy, but also in the nature of their abilities and in their attitude towards the latter. But these figures also have a tendency to resemble the fourbe in the manner in which they behave, and it is to their behaviour that we now turn.

A distinctive feature of the fourbe's behaviour - one which is not unrelated to his considerable belief in his own abilities - is the calmness with which he confronts difficult situations. In Moli re's Les Fourberies de Scapin, for instance, although the news that his father has returned leads to much hand-wringing on Octave's part, and prompts no more positive response from the latter's un-fourbe-like valet, Silvestre, the reaction of the fourbe, Scapin, is quite different, not because he does not care about Octave's fate, but because his own self-assurance tells him that a way will be found to overcome the difficulty: 'Est-ce l  tout?', he exclaims, on hearing of the very considerable problems which confront Octave, 'Vous voil  bien embarrass s tous deux pour une bagatelle. C'est bien l  de quoi se tant alarmer'.³³

In Regnard, this calmness, which is so typical of the conventional fourbe, and which helps to put such figures in a position of dominance vis- -vis their masters,³⁴ is also to be found in the male servants. A clear example is furnished by Le Bal, where Lisette, evidently in a panic, reveals to Merlin that her mistress's marriage to the unwelcome

³² IV, 8.

³³ I, 2.

³⁴ For an examination of the ways in which fourbe-like servants place themselves in a position of dominance vis- -vis their masters, see below, pp. 114-18.

Sotencour is about to be solemnised:

Tout est perdu, Merlin; Léonor se marie.
Monsieur de Sotencour, pour nous faire enrager,
De Falaise à Paris vient par le messenger:
Il arrive en ce jour; et, pour lui faire fête,
Hors ma maîtresse et moi, tout le monde s'apprête.

But Merlin, swigging from a recently-appropriated bottle of wine, is unruffled, responding with a simple 'Que j'en ai de chagrin!'. And when Lisette seeks further to impress upon him the urgency of the situation, adding that 'pour faire un plein régal/Ce soir, avant la noce, on donne ici le bal', he remains unperturbed: 'On donne ici le bal! L'affaire est donc finie?'.³⁵ Such calmness stems not from any lack of concern for the situation (since he does intend to help his master, and subsequently goes about seeking a solution to the problem in a businesslike manner), but from the fact that, possessed of the fourbe's self-confidence, he sees no reason to panic: if no solution to the problem presents itself spontaneously, he will devise one.

And in Le Joueur Hector behaves in a not dissimilar way when Nérine launches a stout verbal attack on young fops like his master, whose marriage to her mistress she seeks to prevent:

Ne verrai-je jamais les femmes détrompées
De ces colifichets, de ces fades poupées,
Qui n'ont, pour imposer, qu'un grand air débraillé,
Un nez de tous côtés de tabac barbouillé,
Une lèvre qu'on mord pour rendre plus vermeille,
Un chapeau chiffonné qui tombe sur l'oreille,
Une longue steinkerque à replis tortueux,
Un haut-de-chausse bas prêt à tomber sous eux;
Qui, faisant le gros dos, la main dans la ceinture,
Viennent pour tout mérite étaler leur figure?

For far from launching into an equally wordy defence of his master, he limits himself to a cool, laconic reply:

C'est le goût d'à présent; tes cris sont superflus,
Mon enfant.

And when Nérine continues, in forthright terms, to make clear her opposition to his master, he consistently replies - as in the following lines - with the calm self-assurance of one certain of success:

³⁵Sc.4.

Ton sermon me paraît un tant soit peu brutal.
Mais, tant que tu voudras, parle, prêche, tempête,
Ta maîtresse est coiffée.³⁶

Sometimes, however, the fourbe's coolness in time of stress may assume a more positive aspect, allowing him to take control when those around him panic or are thrown into confusion: such, for instance, is the case when Scapin, in Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin, attempts to coach the trembling Octave in how best to meet the onslaught which he is expecting at any moment from his father.³⁷ And once again this traditional fourbe situation is repeated in Regnard, where its occurrence is, if anything, more frequent than in Molière. A minor example is to be found in Le Distrait, where the servant, Carlin, his master, Léandre, the latter's love, Clarice, and her uncle, Valère, are discussing how best to outmanœuvre Mme Grognac when suddenly they are interrupted by the latter's arrival. The potential for confusion is considerable, and there is a hint of panic in Valère's voice when he exclaims 'J'entends venir quelqu'un. C'est Madame Grognac'; but the servant remains calm, announcing his intention of putting their scheme into motion, and instructing the others to support him, before leaving the stage:

Je vais tout préparer pour que la mine joue;
Et vous, ne manquez pas de pousser à la roue.³⁸

But the best examples of the servant calmly taking control are to be found, not in Le Distrait, but in Le Légataire universel, where, in the words of Fournel, Crispin 'enlève ses troupes, marche à leur tête, déploie en face du péril l'ardeur et le génie d'un grand capitaine'.³⁹ Thus when the prospect of the imminent death of Geronde, intestate, throws the ranks (in this case Eraste and Lisette, who had hoped to gain from his will) into confusion, Crispin gives them a pep talk:

Allons, mes chers enfants, il faut agir de tête,
Et présenter un front digne de la tempête:
Il n'est pas temps ici de répandre des pleurs;
Faisons voir un courage au-dessus des malheurs.

And when such generalities fail to have much effect, the servant moves

³⁶I,2.

³⁷I,3.

³⁸V,8.

³⁹Victor Fournel, Le Théâtre au XVIIe siècle: la comédie, p.366.

on to issue more specific orders, his use of the term 'invasion' making it sound as if he were indeed commanding a military operation:

Il faut premièrement, d'une ardeur salutaire,
Courir au coffre-fort, sonder les cabinets,
Déménager la maison, s'emparer des effets.
Lisette, quelque temps tiens ta bouche cousue,
Si tu peux; va fermer la porte de la rue;⁴⁰
Empare-toi des clefs, de peur d'invasion.

If one aspect of the fourbe's behaviour is that he remains calm in adversity, and on occasion directs the activities of those who do not share his imperturbability, a considerably more important aspect of his behaviour is the willingness, not to say eagerness, with which he himself participates in any necessary action. For the fourbe is not only the author of schemes, but also an actor who performs in them, or, in a phrase used by Hankiss to describe the relationship of Crispin to Le Légataire universel, but which could equally well describe the relationship of the fourbe to almost any scheme which he initiates, 'il en est l'architecte et le maçon'.⁴¹

The fourbe's participation in the action of the play in which he occurs is characterised, above all, by his ability to extricate himself or his master from a difficult situation, or, more frequently, from a whole series of difficult situations, for, as Emelina observes, in plays containing a fourbe,

on ne trouve guère ... d'intrigue reposant sur une seule machination qui dure toute la comédie La tendance générale consiste soit à multiplier les ruses, leurs prolongements et leurs rebondissements contre un même obstacle, soit à multiplier les obstacles, à les faire surgir l'un après l'autre devant le fourbe.⁴²

Thus in Molière's Le Médecin volant, when Sganarelle, dressed once more in his everyday clothes, suddenly encounters Gorgibus, before whom he has previously appeared in the guise of a learned doctor, he quickly escapes from the embarrassing situation in which he finds himself by explaining that he is, in fact, the supposed doctor's

⁴⁰ III, 10.

⁴¹ Jean Hankiss, Philippe Néricault Destouches: l'homme et l'œuvre, p.302.

⁴² Jean Emelina, Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre comique en France de 1610 à 1700, p.204.

estranged twin brother.⁴³ But although this explanation may solve the fourbe's immediate problem, it leads, in the scenes which follow, to a whole series of difficulties, since Gorgibus sets his heart on reconciling the 'twins', ultimately wishing to see them embrace, and it is only by using great skill, employing both argument (explaining why he should not meet his brother) and clever tricks (such as embracing his own hat to make it appear that he is in fact two people) that the fourbe can extricate himself from these subsequent embarrassments.

Likewise, relatively near the beginning of Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin,⁴⁴ Scapin, using arguments of considerable subtlety, extricates himself from more than one difficulty. First, he assuages Argante's anger by skilfully persuading him that the marriage into which his son, Octave, has entered without his authority was forced upon him. But although this explanation may overcome his initial problem, which was Argante's anger, it itself creates a further embarrassment, since Argante then proceeds to ask why, if the marriage was indeed entered into under duress, it should not now be declared null and void in the courts. Again, therefore, Scapin finds himself in the proverbial soup, and has to produce a fresh series of arguments aimed at persuading the old man that the whole affair had better be left as it stands. In extricating himself from one difficulty only to find himself in another, Scapin is behaving in a manner typical of the fourbe, who engages in endless balancing acts of this type, in which he tries to see how long he can remain in a vertical position.

In Regnard, similar situations occur, although they vary considerably in their intensity. At one extreme, there is Scapin in La Sérénade who, finding himself in a difficult position when his master passes him off as a musician, adapts himself reasonably well to his new, unsought role.⁴⁵ Also at the lower end of the scale is Merlin in Le Bal, who escapes none too skilfully from the difficulty in which he finds himself when, disguised as a musician, and bearing an instrument case in which his master is concealed, he is confronted by

⁴³Sc.11.

⁴⁴I,4.

⁴⁵Sc.7.

his master's rival, Sotencour, who expresses a desire to play the supposed instrument. Merlin's excuses are weak, and luck plays a large part in his escape: 'Vous seriez trop longtemps, monsieur, à l'accorder', he tells Sotencour, before adding, clearly as an afterthought, 'Et de plus mon valet a la clef dans sa poche'.⁴⁶

Slightly more fourbe-like in the way in which he is capable not only of arguing his way out of corners, but also of forcing himself into others, is Crispin in Les Folies amoureuses, who, while reconnoitring for his master, is challenged by the latter's rival, Albert. On this occasion (unlike the situation in La Sérénade, referred to above, where the servant is given a supposed occupation by his master), he himself justifies his presence in the vicinity of Albert's home by assigning to himself a new occupation:

CRISPIN:

Tandis que le hasard dans ce séjour m'arrête,
Ayant pour bien des maux des secrets merveilleux,
Je m'amuse à chercher des simples dans ces lieux.

ALBERT:

Des simples?

CRISPIN:

Oui, monsieur. Tout le temps de ma vie
J'ai fait profession d'exercer la chimie.

But this ingenious explanation, although it may plausibly account for Crispin's presence, in turn creates other problems, since - as Albert is quick to point out - the servant's mode of dress is scarcely in accord with his declared profession. Once again, therefore, the servant finds himself in difficulties, and, to account for his valet's uniform, is obliged to devise ingenious tales of the misfortunes which have supposedly reduced him to servitude.⁴⁷

At the other extreme, however, there are servants in Regnard who, either in the greater ingenuity of their arguments, or in the way in which they are able to withstand a whole series of crises without giving up the struggle, come close to matching the best of Molière's

⁴⁶ Sc.11.

⁴⁷ I,5. That the servant's explanations are couched in terms which, realistically, might be expected to do little to reassure Albert is discussed below, p.121 (in the context of an examination of the tendency of servants to overact), and the passage is there quoted in full.

fourbes. One such figure is Valentin in Les Ménechmes, who serves the Chevalier, and who, when Lisette encounters the latter's twin, Ménechme, and mistakes him for his brother (with whom she is well acquainted), succeeds in concealing the nature of the misunderstanding from both of them - something which is essential if his master is to succeed in his plan to win his twin's inheritance - by on the one hand explaining to Lisette that his 'master' has gone mad, while on the other hand reinforcing Ménechme's suspicions that Lisette, whom he does not know, yet who behaves so familiarly with him, is some sort of agente d'amour.⁴⁸ But the supreme example, in Regnard, of a servant possessed of the fourbe's ability to extricate himself from difficult situations is undoubtedly Merlin, in Le Retour imprévu, who is able to sustain a lengthy series of justifications in an extended balancing act which spans ten scenes towards the end of the play, and which, more than usual in Regnard, becomes the central focus of the comedy.

The crisis which Merlin faces is a simple one, centring on the unexpected and unwelcome return of Géronte, whose son, Merlin's master, has, in his absence, been leading a life of profligacy. Indeed, the servant himself neatly summarises the situation in a brief soliloquy in which he summons up his courage to face the task which lies ahead of him:

Allons, Merlin, de la vivacité, mon enfant, de la présence d'esprit. Ceci est violent: un père qui revient en impromptu d'un long voyage; un fils dans la débauche, sa maison en désordre, pleine de cuisiniers! Il faut se tirer d'embarras.⁴⁹

Given the situation, the priority is, clearly, to prevent Géronte from entering his home, and this Merlin initially does simply by barring his

⁴⁸II,3-4. Valentin also employs a similar approach later in the play when the Chevalier's creditor, Coquelet, encounters the former's twin, and takes him for his brother. The passage in question, from Act III scene 11, is examined in some detail below, pp.285-7. It is worth noting that Valentin's counterpart in Plautus's Menaechmi, Messenio, is no fourbe, and never produces arguments of the type deployed by Regnard's servant; nor, indeed, could he, since - unlike Valentin, who from the second scene of the French play is aware that two identical twins are in circulation in the same city and thereafter devotes his time to ensuring that this fact does not become generally known - he himself is one of those deceived by the similarity between his master and the latter's twin, only realising the true situation at the end of the Latin play.

⁴⁹Sc.10.

way and prolonging their door-step conversation, using terms the ambiguity of which serves in some measure to arouse a feeling of connivance in the audience:

Que vous vous portez bien! quel visage! quel embonpoint!
il faut que l'air du pays d'où vous venez soit merveilleux
pour les gens de votre âge. Vous y deviez bien demeurer,
monsieur, pour votre santé, (à part) et pour notre repos.⁵⁰

However, the prolongation of the conversation itself creates further difficulties for the servant, since G ronte proceeds to enquire not only about his son, but, in particular, about whether or not the latter⁵¹ has, by putting his deniers to good use, made a profit in his absence, and it is only by replying in terms of considerable ambiguity⁵¹ that Merlin is able to avoid having to admit that almost everything has been either sold or pawned:

Oh! pour cela, je vous en r ponds; il s'en est servi d'une
man re ... Vous ne sauriez comprendre comme ce jeune homme-l 
aime l'argent; il a mis vos affaires dans un  tat ... dont
vous serez  tonn , sur ma parole.

But G ronte again creates difficulties for the servant when he asks if, in the light of the latter's reply, he can expect to find a considerable sum of money awaiting him. Forced to confess that this is by no means the case, the servant nevertheless succeeds in gaining the upper hand by claiming, once again in ambiguous terms, that any profits have in fact been put to work (which they have, but not as G ronte would wish):

Et non, vous dis-je: ce gar on-l  est bien meilleur m nager
que vous ne pensez; il suit vos traces, il fatigue son
argent   outrance; et sit t qu'il a dix pistoles, il les
fait travailler jour et nuit.

At this point, G ronte seems well satisfied with the servant's explanations. Once again, therefore, he seeks to enter his own house only to be stopped by the arrival of the usurer, Andr , whose revelation of his son's debts seems to contradict Merlin's earlier assertions. However, undaunted by this new crisis, the servant engages in a whispered conversation with G ronte in which he insists

⁵⁰ Sc.11. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotations are from this same scene.

⁵¹ The use by servants of ambiguous or equivocal statements - also a feature of Lesage's plays - is further discussed below, pp.303-6.

that his master has borrowed money only to purchase a property costing ten thousand écus, and when G ron te, echoing his words in a mixture of anger and disbelief, seems on the point of rejecting his explanation, he reinforces it with a further ingenious elaboration:

GERONTE:

Une maison de dix mille  cus!

MERLIN, bas,   G ron te:

Qui en vaut plus de quinze: et comme il n'avait que vingt-quatre mille francs d'argent comptant, pour ne pas manquer un si bon march  il a emprunt  les deux mille  cus en question de l'honn te fripon que vous voyez.⁵²

Once again, G ron te is satisfied, and Merlin can relax. But not for long. For the old man naturally enquires about the location of the house in which his son has invested, and Merlin, finding himself increasingly embroiled in his own fiction, clearly has difficulty in giving an adequate reply:

MERLIN:

Tenez; voyez-vous bien cette maison couverte d'ardoises, dont les fen tres sont reblanchies depuis peu?

GERONTE:

Oui. Eh bien?

MERLIN:

Ce n'est pas celle-l ; mais un peu plus loin,   gauche, l  ... cette grande porte coch re qui est vis- -vis de cette autre qui est vis- -vis d'elle, l  ... dans cette autre rue.⁵³

But then G ron te himself suggests that the house in question is perhaps Mme Bertrand's, and the servant, clutching at straws, is happy to agree that it is. Immediately, however, G ron te returns the ball to Merlin's court by asking why Mme Bertrand should have wished to sell her house. But the quick-witted Merlin has a ready answer:

Sa famille l'a fait interdire; et son fils, qui est un dissipateur, a donn  sa maison pour moiti  de ce qu'elle vaut.⁵⁴

Even this explanation, however, is not without its pitfalls, for G ron te observes that Mme Bertrand has no son, but only a daughter, and Merlin is obliged hastily to revise his initial statement.

Apparently satisfied with Merlin's explanation, G ron te yet again attempts to enter his home, whereupon the servant, whose ingenuity

⁵²Sc.12.

⁵³Sc.13.

⁵⁴Sc.13.

seems inexhaustible, adopts a new tack, insisting that the house is haunted, and even maintaining that it was for this very reason that the decision had been taken to purchase Mme Bertrand's house. G ron te is sceptical about the servant's tale, but, when pressed by Merlin to say whether or not he had left in the house anything of value which might attract devils, he admits that there is a cache of gold in the cellar, and then, having departed briefly to see to his luggage (thereby giving Merlin the opportunity to tell his associates of the hidden gold), he announces that he has decided to have his belongings taken direct to his new house⁵⁵ - a proposal which again places Merlin in an extremely awkward situation. The servant's response is to argue that such a move would be unwise, since, because of her madness, Mme Bertrand has not yet been forced to vacate her house, and becomes furious at the mention of its sale; G ron te, however, insists on seeing her; and once more the servant seems on the brink of disaster. Again, however, his fertile mind comes to his rescue, for when G ron te and Mme Bertrand eventually meet,⁵⁶ Merlin, who has already told G ron te that Mme Bertrand is insane, proceeds to inform Mme Bertrand that G ron te is mad, with the result that in the ensuing exchange both G ron te and Mme Bertrand attach little importance to the statements which the other makes.

Finally, however, the emergence from G ron te's own front door of a drunken Marquis makes it obvious to him that he has been duped by Merlin,⁵⁷ and the servant's skilful balancing act is forced to come to an end - but not before the time gained by his heroic efforts has been put to good use by his associates, who, by stealing G ron te's newly-revealed cache of gold, have acquired a lever with which to force the old man to accede to his son's demands.

The ability to extricate himself or his master from difficult situations is, however, only one of two main features which characterise the fourbe's participation in events: the other is his predilection for disguise and impersonation. The more fourbe-like of Moli re's characters, for instance, almost invariably take delight in

⁵⁵Sc.17.

⁵⁶Sc.18.

⁵⁷Sc.20.

role-playing of this kind. Thus Sganarelle, in Le Médecin volant, disguises himself as a learned doctor;⁵⁸ Sbrigani, in Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, acts the part of a Flemish merchant;⁵⁹ Covielle, in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, pretends to be a friend of Jourdain's father, and a virtual emissary of the supposed fils du Grand Turc;⁶⁰ Mascarille, in L'Etourdi, disguises himself first as a masquer,⁶¹ and later as a Swiss who rents out accommodation;⁶² and even Hali, in Le Sicilien, pretends at one point to be a Spaniard;⁶³ while Scapin, in Les Fourberies de Scapin, not only instructs Silvestre in how to act the part of a ferocious brother of Hyacinthe,⁶⁴ but himself induces Géronte to believe first that he is a hired assassin from Gascony, and then that he is a comparable figure from the Basque Country, simply by counterfeiting the appropriate accents.⁶⁵ Yet in this respect too, the male servants of Regnard bear the mark of the fourbe, for many of them take evident delight in concealing their true identity.

In Regnard, perhaps the most rudimentary example of a servant concealing his identity occurs in Le Bal, where Merlin, mistaken by a wine-seller and rôtisseur for the majordomo of the house which he is in fact only visiting, decides, on the spur of the moment, to pretend that he is indeed such a person, thereby inducing the two men to hand over to him the goods which they are delivering:

⁵⁸ Sganarelle's first appearance as a doctor is in scene 4. It must be pointed out, however, that it was not without reluctance that he initially agreed to assume the role - originally proposed for him by Sabine, the cousin of his master's love (Sc.1) -, although he clearly warms to it once his act is under weigh.

⁵⁹ II, 3.

⁶⁰ IV, 3.

⁶¹ III, 8.

⁶² V, 3.

⁶³ Sc. 12.

⁶⁴ I, 5. 'Enfonce ton bonnet en méchant garçon. Campe-toi sur un pied. Mets la main au côté. Fais les yeux furibonds. Marche un peu en roi de théâtre', he tells him, adding, 'Suis-moi. J'ai des secrets pour déguiser ton visage et ta voix'.

⁶⁵ III, 2. These episodes occur in the famous scene in which Scapin persuades Géronte to hide from his supposed enemies in a sack, so the servant's verbal disguise need not be reinforced by any physical disguise.

Ils me prennent sans doute ici pour l'économe;
Profitons de l'erreur; faisons le majordome.⁶⁶

Later in the play, however, the same Merlin adopts a more carefully thought-out disguise, playing the role of a Breton musician as part of the plan to smuggle his master into his lover's house in an instrument case,⁶⁷ while in Le Distrain Carlin furthers his master's cause by pretending - again as part of a carefully thought-out plan - to be an emissary arrived hot-foot from the latter's uncle, and in that guise leads Mme Grognaç to believe that his master has been disinherited.⁶⁸ Similarly, in La Sérénade, Scapin adopts a disguise in order to bring to a successful conclusion his plan to acquire money from Grifon, his master's rich father, for, having learned that a certain Champagne is to collect money from Grifon on behalf of the usurer, Mathieu, he promptly acquires the necessary letter of authorisation, and, with little more physical disguise than an eye-patch, but with much verbal disguise (including the use of legal and financial terms), presents himself to Grifon as Isaac-Jérôme-Boisme Rousselet, a compère of Mathieu, and in this way is able himself to collect the cash.⁶⁹

Skilful though Scapin may be at concealing his identity, he cannot, however, compare with Regnard's supreme impersonator, Crispin in Le Légataire universel, for the latter servant not only conceals his identity more frequently than Scapin, but also adopts disguises which are unparalleled in their audacity and ingenuity. Thus, when it seems likely that G ronte, by bequeathing sums of money to two provincial relatives whom he scarcely knows, will reduce the size of his legacy to his nephew, Eraste, whom Crispin serves, the servant averts the danger by disguising himself first as one provincial relative - a gentilhomme campagnard - and then as the other - a widow - and, when

⁶⁶Sc.2.

⁶⁷Sc.10-11.

⁶⁸V,10. In this episode Carlin does not necessarily conceal his identity, but does adopt the demeanour of one who has just arrived after a long journey.

⁶⁹Sc.18-21. That this and the other disguises assumed by Regnard's servants successfully dupe those whom they are designed to deceive, while remaining transparent to the audience, creates in the latter a sense of complicity which alleviates any tendency which it might have to make moral judgements on the servants' activities. The tendency for the audience to identify itself with the servants is further discussed below, pp.127-8.

disguised, behaves in such an uncouth way as to discredit the supposed relatives in G ron te's eyes, with the result that the old man resolves to exclude them from his will.⁷⁰ And when death appears to strike G ron te down before he can put his resolution into practice by making a will entirely in Eraste's favour, the servant again resorts to disguise in order to surmount this new obstacle, this time impersonating G ron te himself, and, in the guise of the old man, dictating to the latter's lawyers a will favourable not only to his master, but also to himself and his female counterpart and future wife, Lisette.⁷¹

So far, our investigations allow us to say that characteristics typical of the fourbe are very much in evidence among the male servants of Regnard. Such a statement could, however, be misleading if it were taken to imply that Regnard's male servants are, without exception, fourbes, and are so to the same extent; for these are figures of considerable diversity, ranging from those whose credentials as a fourbe are almost impeccable, to those - albeit a tiny minority - who cannot properly be seen as fourbes at all.

Among the more fourbe-like of Regnard's male servants, five are particularly prominent. First, there is Merlin in Le Bal, who retains his composure in difficult situations, exhibits a fair measure of pride, and makes use of disguise, although some of his glory is stolen by the presence, in the same play, of a professional, non-servant trickster, Fijac, whom Lisette describes to him as 'un fourbe, un fripon,   peu pr s comme toi'.⁷² Second, there is Scapin in La S r nade, who also makes use of disguise and is proud of his abilities. Third, there is Merlin in Le Retour impr vu, whose virtuoso performance in keeping his master's father at bay clearly marks him as a fourbe, even if, lacking the consummate self-assurance of Moli re's fourbes, he may, throughout his brilliant act, continually express doubts as to his ability to bring his undertaking to a

⁷⁰III,2 and III,7-8 respectively.

⁷¹IV,6.

⁷²Sc.4.

successful conclusion.⁷³ Fourth, there is Crispin in Le Légataire universel, who, although he may have the occasional doubt about his ability to succeed in his enterprises,⁷⁴ possesses in large measure the fourbe's ability both to devise and implement schemes, and is justifiably recognised as a major fourbe by many critics. Gazier, for example, suggests that the play in which Crispin features might well have been entitled 'Les Fourberies de Crispin',⁷⁵ clearly implying that there is a strong affinity between Regnard's servant and Molière's supreme fourbe in Les Fourberies de Scapin, while another, anonymous, commentator is more explicit, observing that Crispin is a 'digne successeur des Scapin et des Mascarille de l'ancienne comédie'.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it is worth observing that Crispin differs from his fellow fourbes in La Sérénade and Le Retour imprévu in one significant respect, namely, in his conscious decision, at the end of the play, not to take the opportunity to advertise his part in the trickery which has gone before. For when Géronte alludes to his rural nephew and niece, the servant seems to find the success of his trickery sufficient reward, and, rather than taking the opportunity to draw attention to his skill by telling the old man that it was he who had impersonated these relatives, simply turns to Lisette, and comments: 'Laissons-le dans l'erreur; nous sommes héritiers'.⁷⁷

⁷³ Examples of such remarks (all expressed as asides) include: 'Nous voilà gâtés' (Sc.12); 'Cela va mal' (Sc.12); 'Je m'embourbe ici de plus en plus' (Sc.13); 'Que lui dirai-je?' (Sc.13); 'Nouvel embarras!' (Sc.17); 'Oh! pour le coup, tout est perdu' (Sc.17); and 'Je ne sais pas comment je me tirerai de cette affaire' (Sc.19). Molière's fourbes normally take reversals in their stride, and rarely make remarks of this kind, although in Le Médecin volant Sganarelle momentarily shows some pessimism when, finding himself in a corner, he exclaims 'Ma foi, me voilà attrapé ce coup-là; il n'y a plus moyen de m'en échapper' (Sc.14). Such expressions of pessimism may, however, have a purely dramatic function, keeping the audience in suspense, and making the fourbe's ultimate success seem all the greater.

⁷⁴ On one occasion, for instance, he admits, in the following terms, that he has run out of ideas: 'Oui, je croyais tantôt réparer cet échec; Mais à présent j'échoue, et je demeure à sec' (IV,1).

⁷⁵ Augustin Gazier, 'La Comédie en France après Molière: Regnard', p.116.

⁷⁶ 'La Comédie après Molière: Regnard', p.177.

⁷⁷ V,9. The tendency of Regnard's more fourbe-like servants to advertise their skill is discussed above, pp.21-3.

Finally, in this group, there is Valentin in Les Ménechmes, who is proud of his abilities, shows the fourbe's cleverness in handling difficult situations (particularly, as we have seen, when Lisette encounters Ménechme and mistakes him for his twin),⁷⁸ and whose occasional ineptitude - such as when, pretending to Démophon that he was acquainted with his master's recently-deceased uncle, his enthusiasm leads him to make a number of blunders which threaten to reveal that he and his master are impostors⁷⁹ - does little to detract from his fourbe-like nature. For not only is it normal for the extent of a fourbe's control over the situation in which he finds himself to fluctuate,⁸⁰ but ineptitudes of this particular sort are common among strongly fourbe-like servants both in other plays by Regnard, and in Lesage.⁸¹

There is, however, a second group of male servants in Regnard who, although perhaps less fourbe-like than the five discussed above, nevertheless show unmistakable traces of fourbe ancestry. Crispin in Les Folies amoureuses, for instance, shows early promise as a fourbe when he gives a good account of himself in his initial confrontation with Albert, in the course of which he pretends to be a man of science,⁸² and he later exhibits fourbe-like qualities when, towards the end of the play, he contributes to the successful outcome of events by resuming his assumed role.⁸³ On the other hand, however, he is frequently overshadowed by the remarkably fourbe-like young heroine of

⁷⁸II,3-4; discussed above, p.32.

⁷⁹III,2. The episode is given more detailed consideration below, pp.284-5.

⁸⁰The tendency for fourbes to extricate themselves from one awkward situation only to find themselves in another is demonstrated above, pp.29-35.

⁸¹As has been shown above, p.34, Merlin in Le Retour imprévu finds himself in similar difficulties when he pretends to have had dealings with Mme Bertrand's son, only to be told that she has a daughter, but no son (Sc.13). And in Lesage's Crispin rival de son maître, Crispin, disguised as Damis, also embroils himself in a similar manner when he attempts to discuss the affairs of his supposed father (whom he does not know) with Oronte, who is acquainted with the man in question (Sc.10). The latter scene is discussed more fully below, pp.283-4.

⁸²I,5. The episode is discussed above, p.31.

⁸³II,11 onwards.

the play, Agathe,⁸⁴ and, on one occasion, is overshadowed by his own master; for when a ruse is urgently needed to get Albert out of the way long enough to allow the young lovers to elope, although Crispin, fourbe-like, may exclaim 'Reposez-vous sur moi, je réponds de l'affaire', it is Eraste who first finds a solution to the problem, announcing it with an equally fourbe-like 'J' imagine un moyen des plus fous'.⁸⁵

Also in this second group is Hector in Le Joueur, who is marked as a fourbe more by his calmness and his general attitude to life⁸⁶ than by any exceptional ability to devise and implement ruses. For although Hector may be begged by his master to extricate him from the awkward situation in which he finds himself when assailed by his creditors, Galonier and Mme Adam, his efforts in this direction, amounting largely to an unsubtle and blustering attack on his master's adversaries, are somewhat lacking in the brilliance that might be expected of a fourbe.⁸⁷ And when his master is asked by Angélique to show her the portrait of herself which she had earlier gifted to him (and which he has subsequently pawned), Hector is able only to offer a weak and unimaginative explanation for its non-availability, arguing that he has sent it to an artist to be copied.⁸⁸

Lastly, in this second group, there is Carlin in Le Distrain, who emerges almost as a hybrid creature. For although it would not be surprising if - given the degree of similarity between their two inept masters - he were to behave like Mascarille, the fourbe in Molière's L'Etourdi, he displays few of the fourbe's characteristics in the early part of the play. Thus, despite his declared intention of furthering his master's interests by working in conjunction with Lisette,⁸⁹ he

⁸⁴ Agathe conceives of a plan which will go some way towards extricating herself from Albert's clutches, and, in its furtherance, first pretends to be mad (II,7), and then, in her supposed madness, successively acts the part of a musician (II,7), an old woman (III,4), and a dragoon (III,10).

⁸⁵ III,8.

⁸⁶ Hector's attitudes, already touched upon above, pp.27-8, are further explored in Part II.

⁸⁷ III,7.

⁸⁸ V,7.

⁸⁹ II,1.

initially has no involvement in schemes of the kind normally associated with the fourbe, and it is in fact a non-servant figure, the Chevalier (prompted not by Carlin, but by the female servant, Lisette), who gives one of the most fourbe-like performances of the play, seeking at one point to escape from an awkward situation by pretending to be a teacher of Italian, and behaving quite outrageously in his assumed role.⁹⁰ Moreover, although Carlin is, like the fourbe, proud of his mental abilities, it is clear that his pride (like that of the un-fourbe-like Strabon in Démocrite)⁹¹ is somewhat misplaced, as is demonstrated by the fact that no sooner has he congratulated himself on his 'conception et légère et facile'⁹² than he fails effectively to counteract one of his master's foolish blunders.⁹³ However, with the eighth scene of the final act of the play Carlin becomes transformed into a much more fourbe-like figure, suddenly announcing, in characteristically fourbe-like terms ('Il me vient dans l'esprit un petit stratagème'), his discovery of a scheme to solve his master's problems, and subsequently implementing his plan - which requires him to pose as a newly-arrived courrier⁹⁴ - with all the vigour of a true fourbe.

All the servants falling within the two groups discussed above show at least some major fourbe characteristics; but in Regnard there are three male servants (significantly, they are the three who do not support young lovers)⁹⁵ who would appear to possess no such characteristics, or whose characteristics may even be the opposite of those which normally distinguish the fourbe. Two of these figures are extremely minor characters, whose personalities are scarcely developed: Champagne, in La Sérénade, who, despite Scapin's memory of him as 'le plus adroit grison, et ... le plus hardi coquin qu'il y eût en France', seems almost a lourdaud, easily succumbing both to drink and to Scapin's

⁹⁰ III, 3.

⁹¹ See below, p. 43.

⁹² IV, 10.

⁹³ V, 1.

⁹⁴ V, 10. The episode is referred to above, p. 37.

⁹⁵ See above, p. 19.

trickery;⁹⁶ and Jaquinet in Le Retour imprévu, who acts as little more than a herald for the arrival of his master, G ron te, and who shows the same propensity to drink as Champagne.⁹⁷ But the remaining servant, Strabon in D mocr te, has an extended role which allows his un-fourbe-like personality more fully to be explored.

One can see quite clearly, for instance, that in the case of Strabon his pride in his mental ability amounts to little more than self-deception, since despite his repeated allusions to his 'esprit',⁹⁸ and his attempts to associate himself, in the minds of others, with his philosopher master,⁹⁹ he is never seen to behave in a clever way, and certainly devises none of the imaginative schemes and arguments which are so often the product of the fourbe's intellect. Moreover, in other respects he may not only differ from the fourbe but may to some extent resemble either the traditional lourdaud (who might be considered the antithesis of the fourbe), or at least a servant like Sganarelle in Moli re's Dom Juan, who, while more intelligent than a dullard, is certainly no fourbe. Thus whereas the fourbe is, or at least claims to be, fearless, undertaking his schemes with little thought for the consequences,¹⁰⁰ Strabon, when he advocates that he and his master should avoid the strangers who come upon them in their rural retreat, shows evidence of cowardice, and in this is reminiscent

⁹⁶Sc.13. As a preliminary to the incident - described above, p.37 - in which he substitutes himself for Champagne in order to claim from Grifon the money which Champagne has come to collect, Scapin easily diverts Champagne from his task by persuading him to have a drink in an inn.

⁹⁷Sc.9. Jaquinet, on being instructed by Merlin to go into his master's house and get himself drunk on champagne, replies: 'J'ex cuterai tes ordres   merveille, ne te mets pas en peine'.

⁹⁸In the opening scene of the play, for instance, he refers to himself as 'un homme d'esprit', and later, delighted to find himself at court, exclaims: 'Quand on a de l'esprit, ma foi, vive la cour!' (II,2).

⁹⁹Introducing himself to Ag nor, he declares: 'Je m'appelle Strabon,/Philosophe sublime autant qu'on le peut  tre,/Suivant de D mocr te' (I,6). And on another occasion he describes himself to Cl  anthis as 'suivant de D mocr te, et gar on philosophe' (II,7).

¹⁰⁰In Moli re's Les Fourberies de Scapin, for instance, when Silvestre expresses the fear that his participation in one of the fourbe's schemes may put him on the wrong side of the law, Scapin exclaims 'Va, va: nous partagerons les p rils en fr res; et trois ans de gal re de plus ou de moins ne sont pas pour arr ter un noble c ur' (I,5).

of Sganarelle in Dom Juan, who, rather than showing eagerness at the possibility of disguising himself as his master, fears the consequences of such a deception.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, when Strabon, relishing the prospect of a move to courtly circles, exclaims 'Que je m'en vais manger!',¹⁰² he reveals a love of food which, although less profound than that of the traditionally gluttonous lourdaud, matches that displayed by Sganarelle,¹⁰³ and clearly distinguishes him from the fourbe, who derives pleasure primarily from the exercise of his intellect. And when Strabon, seeking to explain the intricacies of his master's philosophy to the peasant, Thaler, ties himself in verbal knots, his inarticulateness brings to mind the lourdaud's lack of fluency, and contrasts sharply with the high level of eloquence normally displayed by the fourbe.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ II, 5.

¹⁰² I, 6.

¹⁰³ IV, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Strabon tells Thaler that if the latter were to serve Démocrite he would learn 'Que rien ne vient de rien, et que des particules .../ Rien ne retourne en rien; de plus, les corpuscules .../ Les atomes, d'ailleurs par un secret lien, / Accrochés dans le vide ...', adding, helpfully, 'Entends-tu bien?' (I, 2). It must be stressed, however, that, as we shall see when we examine garbled speech and ideas (below, pp. 342-6), even fourbe-like servants may have difficulty in expressing themselves. The difference is that for them such episodes of ineloquence are only occasional, and are outweighed by their eloquence elsewhere, whereas, in Strabon's case, he never displays the fourbe's silver-tongued fluency.

Chapter 2

DUFRESNY

As authors, Regnard and Dufresny were closely associated with each other, for not only did they collaborate in the writing of a number of plays for the Théâtre Italien, but the strong superficial resemblance between two of their supposedly independent productions for the French stage - Regnard's Le Joueur and Dufresny's Le Chevalier joueur - led to the famous querelle in which each accused the other of stealing his original idea.¹ However, despite the close association of these authors, the comedies by Dufresny which fall within the scope of the present study - including Le Chevalier joueur - are fundamentally different in character from comparable plays by Regnard, and this difference is clearly reflected in the treatment which the two authors accord to the male stage servant.

There is, for example, a clear difference in the degree of importance which they attach to the male servant, for whereas, of the plays being examined, all of those by Regnard contain at least one valet, such characters feature in only about half of those by Dufresny, and, when they do occur, may have extremely limited roles.² But the main difference between Regnard's treatment of the servant and that of Dufresny is not that the latter makes use of the valet less frequently than the former, but that the male servants whom he does create are quite different in nature from most comparable figures in Regnard; for while the majority of Regnard's servants are, in some measure, fourbes, none of Dufresny's servants can so be described - a point which is perhaps best illustrated by turning, in the first instance, to the one servant in Dufresny who comes closest to being a fourbe, namely, Frontin in Le Dédit.

Frontin, who occurs in the short and highly stylised one-act play

¹For further information on the querelle, see Georges Jamati, La Querelle du 'Joueur': Regnard et Dufresny, which, although not devoted as much to that aspect of the two playwrights' relationship as its title would appear to suggest, gives a useful outline of the nature of the disagreement.

²For details of the occurrence of servants in Dufresny see Appendix II; among those whose roles are extremely limited in extent are L'Olive in Le Négligent and Flamand in Le Faux Honnête Homme.

which is Le Dédit, possesses a number of characteristics which are normally associated with the fourbe. First, the situation in which he finds himself is similar to that in which the fourbe usually flourishes, for he serves the interests of a young lover, Valère, who hopes to marry Isabelle, but whose love is thwarted by representatives of the older generation, in this case, two spinster aunts who refuse to give him any of their wealth unless forced to do so by the dédit of the title, which will only become operative in the unlikely event of one or other of them marrying.

Second, Frontin, like the fourbe, not only devises a scheme to assist his young master, but also implements it by disguising himself as a chevalier to woo one of the aunts and as a sénéchal to woo the other (thereby placing the aunts in a situation where they will either have to pay Valère in accordance with the terms of the dédit, or will have to buy it back from him). Indeed, his adoption of disguise in the furtherance of his scheme prompts Fournel to see him as following in the footsteps of figures such as Crispin in Regnard's Le Légataire universel.³

Third, Frontin appears to share the fourbe's belief in the importance of subtlety and ingenuity (as opposed to strong-arm tactics) in overcoming obstacles, for when he asserts that 'tromper finement, c'est vertu dans un valet',⁴ one is reminded of Crispin, in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses, with his 'la tête doit toujours agir avant le bras'.⁵

Fourth, like the fourbe, Frontin is proud of his abilities, as emerges quite clearly not only from the implied pride of his 'tromper finement' but also from the way in which, like the fourbes of Molière and Regnard, he may cast himself in a heroic role. Thus, while Crispin in Regnard's Le Légataire universel declares that he will produce a plan which 'passera l'effort de tout esprit humain',⁶ Frontin announces that he is undertaking 'un projet difficile, étonnant, hasardeux'.⁷

³Victor Fournel, Le Théâtre au XVIIIe siècle: la comédie, p.337.

⁴Sc.3.

⁵I,7. This aspect of the fourbe is discussed above, pp.23-4.

⁶IV,2.

⁷Sc.3.

Nevertheless, although Frontin may display a number of the fourbe's superficial characteristics, closer analysis reveals that in other respects, most notably in the manner in which his scheme is conducted, he differs significantly from the fourbes of both Molière and Regnard.

The distinction is perhaps best understood if one remembers that the fourbe is no Machiavellian intriguer anxious to shape events in such a way as to arrive at his goal with the minimum of trouble; on the contrary, he is essentially a short-sighted schemer who, partly because of his confidence in his ability to overcome any difficulty, does not take the trouble to look ahead.⁸ He tends, therefore, to tackle only the immediate problem facing him at any one time, with the result that he may solve one difficulty only to find himself in another.⁹ Moreover, far from resenting such reversals, he may seem almost to welcome them for the opportunity which they afford him to display his skills, and indeed, when obstacles do not otherwise present themselves, his love of fun and the challenge of an obstacle may lead him to jeopardise his own position by overacting.¹⁰ The effect of such attitudes is that a play in which there features a true fourbe does not normally follow a smooth course, but is strewn with crises and threatened reversals. What is more, because the emphasis in such plays is very much on the imaginative abilities of the servant, on the trickery in which he engages, and on the crises which he faces, rather than on his ultimate goal, it appears to matter little if it is chance, and not the servant's schemes, which eventually precipitates the successful outcome of events. Thus, despite the fourbe's formidable reputation as a clever inventor of schemes, servants who emerge as fourbes frequently have no direct

⁸Very occasionally, however, this lack of foresight is attributable not to self-confidence, but to slight dim-wittedness, as is the case with Sganarelle in Molière's Le Médecin volant, who, despite his later demonstration of fourbe-like skills, is portrayed, in scene 2, as something of a lourdaud.

⁹In Molière's Le Médecin volant, for instance, Sganarelle encounters a whole series of such obstacles, as does Merlin in Regnard's Le Retour imprévu, discussed above, pp.32-5.

¹⁰The tendency of the fourbe to overact is discussed below, pp.119-21.

responsibility for the happy ending of the comedies in which they appear.¹¹

In Le Dédit, however, the situation is somewhat different, for although Frontin's scheme may resemble that which any self-respecting fourbe might devise, his control over it is so perfect, and it is executed with such apparent ease, that he has little occasion to demonstrate that he is a fourbe, encountering, as he does, no major obstacle once his plan has been put into motion.¹² Moreover, far from voluntarily jeopardising his scheme, Frontin, when impersonating the chevalier and sénéchal, acts in a reasonably pedestrian or realistic manner, and shows neither the tendency towards exuberant and fantastic behaviour, nor the fondness for dramatic irony which, in figures like Crispin in Regnard's Le Légataire universel, make every 'acting' session a tightrope walk, with the servant balanced between the successful completion of his scheme and the disastrous revelation of his deception. Thus, whereas Molière's Le Médecin volant - an even shorter play than Le Dédit¹³ - sees obstacle after obstacle placed in the path of Sganarelle (many of them placed there by Sganarelle himself), and ends in a somewhat arbitrary fashion, the action of Le Dédit flows with uninterrupted smoothness from the start of the play to its finish, and it is the servant's activities which lead directly to its conclusion.¹⁴

¹¹In Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin, for example, the revelation that it is Géronte's daughter who has married Octave, which heralds the happy outcome of events, is not dependent upon any intervention by Scapin (III,7).

¹²Only on one occasion does Frontin encounter a slight problem, and that is when the second aunt arrives on stage hard on the heels of her sister - a problem which the servant easily overcomes by rapidly changing his disguise (Sc.6-8).

¹³Both are very brief one-act comedies, but Molière's play is marginally shorter than that of Dufresny.

¹⁴Le Médecin volant ends only after Sganarelle is unmasked in scene 15, and reveals to Gorgibus that his trickery has allowed his daughter to be alone with her lover. However, insofar as the young lovers' meeting influences Gorgibus's decision to agree to his daughter's marriage, the play could have ended almost at any time after scene 5, when Sganarelle persuaded Gorgibus to let Lucile have access to the garden (where she meets Valère). Le Dédit, on the other hand, draws to a close immediately after the servant's plan has succeeded in tricking the two aunts into handing over to Valère sufficient money for him to be able to persuade Géronte to let him become his son-in-law (Sc.11).

Moreover, in conducting his stratagem without resorting to inordinately fantastic behaviour Frontin gives the impression that he approaches his business with an earnestness untypical of the fourbe, so that although he allows himself the luxury of revealing his part in their deception to those whom he has duped, he does so only once he is certain that the young lovers whose interests he serves are secure in their happiness and cannot be harmed by his revelation.¹⁵ Thus, while there is evidence that Frontin has not totally lost the fourbe's sense of fun, it is equally clear that he does not allow it to come between himself and his goal, and there is the suggestion that, in the play as a whole, matters are too serious, and the logical working-out of the plot too important, for them to be endangered and obscured by the unrealistic antics of a fourbe. Despite his superficial resemblance to the fourbe, then, Frontin is no such figure: instead, he may more appropriately be seen simply as a diligent schemer who plans an effective campaign and executes it with meticulous care.

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In Le Dédit, as we have seen, certain fourbe characteristics may be associated with the servant, even although he does not emerge, overall, as a strongly fourbe-like figure. But elsewhere in Dufresny such characteristics are scarcely in evidence at all, while the diminution in the role of fantasy, observed in Le Dédit, becomes more marked.

One finds, for instance, that although the plot of Dufresny's Le Chevalier joueur is almost identical to that of Regnard's Le Joueur, the male servants in the two plays are quite different. For while, in Le Joueur, Hector - by no means the most fourbe-like of Regnard's male servants - displays a number of fourbe characteristics, Frontin, in Le Chevalier joueur, shows none.

¹⁵This he makes clear when, looking forward to the pleasure of revealing his identity to the two aunts, he exclaims: 'Nos amants sont contents; il faut nous divertir' (Sc.12).

Each play, for example, contains a comic episode in which the servant's master is confronted by creditors whom he has no intention of paying. However, whereas Hector's master, finding himself in this difficult position, clearly sees his servant as a possible provider of solutions to his problem, and is quick to beg him for assistance,¹⁶ Frontin's master evidently does not view his servant in the same light, and neither in this episode, nor elsewhere in Le Chevalier joueur, does he beg him, in time-honoured fashion, to provide a solution to his difficulties. Moreover, whereas the creditor scene in Regnard's play becomes increasingly dominated by the servant's unsubtle but boisterous interventions, until, in the end, the master is completely silent while the servant disposes of the unfortunate creditors,¹⁷ in the corresponding scenes in Dufresny's play,¹⁸ the servant takes no active part, and the focus of the comedy is not the servant, as it is in Le Joueur, but the contrasting nature of the two creditors, Mlle Babiche and Mme Brusquan. And while in Regnard's play it is the not entirely logical verbosity of the servant which brings the episode to its conclusion, in Dufresny the dispute is brought to an end by the much more realistic and straightforward intervention of the benevolent Dorante, who agrees to see that the Chevalier's debts are settled.

Another episode common both to Le Chevalier joueur and Le Joueur, that in which the male servant seeks to conceal from his female counterpart the fact that his master has not yet returned home after a night of gambling, also highlights the extent to which Frontin lacks the fourbe's strong sense of fun. For whereas Hector holds out against the female servant for a long time, cleverly using equivocal statements to conceal the truth from her, and, in the end, capitulating not so much because he is forced to as because he is tempted to make one last witticism (declaring, of his master, that 'avant qu'il se lève, / Il faudra qu'il se couche'),¹⁹ Frontin, apparently lacking both Hector's ability to brazen things out, and his irrepressible sense of fun, quickly gives in, and admits - albeit with a weak attempt at word-play - that his master

¹⁶ III, 7.

¹⁷ III, 7.

¹⁸ IV, 6-7.

¹⁹ I, 2. Hector's tendency, in scenes such as this, to jeopardise his own position because of his love of fun is further explored below, pp. 121-2.

has been gambling:

Il ne joue plus aussi, il ne fait plus que parier.²⁰

There is, however, one episode in which Frontin takes more positive action to advance his master's affairs, and that is when he attempts to persuade the rich Comtesse, who has hopes of marrying his master, to provide money, ostensibly to settle the latter's debts. The episode begins in a manner which might lead one to expect that Frontin is about to act as a fourbe, since, as soon as he sees the Comtesse approaching, he appears to take control, and quickly instructs his master in the behaviour which he is to adopt.²¹ But although Frontin then proceeds to put on quite an act - leading the Comtesse to believe that his master's supposed depression is caused by his need to marry her young rival, Angélique, in order to settle his debts²² -, his performance is essentially pedestrian, and (except, perhaps, when he summarises his master's debts)²³ lacks the outrageous extravagance that one would expect of a fourbe. Indeed, it could be argued that in Le Chevalier joueur the unrealistic excesses of the fourbe would, in any case, be out of place, for throughout Dufresny's play it is very definitely the actions of the characters which lead it, by a logical and realistic series of steps, to its ultimate conclusion, whereas in a play like Regnard's Le Joueur direct causation of this kind is much weaker, and when the end comes it can be seen simply as the result of chance.²⁴

In advancing towards its conclusion not by a series of chance movements, but by a progression which relies heavily upon cause and effect, Le Chevalier joueur is in fact typical of Dufresny's production, for Dufresny delights in first devising an unusual and

²⁰ I,1.

²¹ 'J'entends monter ... c'est la comtesse', he tells his master, adding, 'commencez votre rôle ordinaire; paraissez accablé, outré, hébété par le chagrin; surtout écoutez patiemment la mercuriale, songez que l'argent est au bout' (II,3).

²² II,4.

²³ II,5.

²⁴ The end of Le Chevalier joueur comes, for example, when Angélique deliberately tests her lover's goodwill by offering to marry him provided that her money remains in her own hands - an offer which he refuses (V,10). In Le Joueur, on the other hand, the dénouement is precipitated when Angélique discovers by chance that Valère has pawned the portrait which she has given to him (V,6).

complex situation, frequently one involving eccentric figures dominated by strange passions - psychological oddities - and then allowing the protagonists to work out a satisfactory solution, given the initial situation. The whole procedure can be likened to a vast chess game in which the pieces are figures who can only be moved in set directions, but which, by ingenious manipulation, can in the end be made to assume the desired pattern.²⁵ Even Le Dédit - which, because of the slightly fourbe-like nature of the servant, one might not be surprised to find progressing in the unrealistic or 'illogical' manner of plays which are dominated by fourbes - conforms to this general pattern, since, once one accepts that its servant's disguise is convincing, the progress of the play towards its conclusion can be seen as entirely logical, given the nature of the protagonists, and the situation in which they are placed. And of the seven remaining plays in which there occur male servants - Le Négligent, Attendez-moi sous l'orme, La Malade sans maladie, La Noce interrompue, Le Faux Honnête Homme, Le Jaloux honteux, and La Réconciliation normande - all develop in a similar manner. It comes as little surprise, then, that the servants in these remaining plays show none of the fourbe's characteristics, for in comedies such as these, with their essentially logical structure, there can be little room for a conventional fourbe who might interrupt the pleasures of the chess game with his episodes of fantasy.

One finds, for example, that while the servants in both Le Dédit and Le Chevalier joueur, although no fourbes, occupy the fourbe's traditional position, serving the young lovers of the plays,²⁶ the

²⁵ Although he does not stress it, it is probably to this feature of Dufresny's plays that Jules Lemaitre refers when he describes their action as 'toujours remarquable ... par l'ingéniosité et l'artifice' (La Comédie après Molière et le théâtre de Dancourt, p.240). The plays - both those which feature male servants and those which do not - tend to lay little emphasis on conventional love intrigue, and concentrate on rigid figures governed by passions and eccentricities which must be taken advantage of and manipulated if the desired end is to be reached. The extent to which this is taken can best be seen if one consults the synopses of Dufresny's comedies provided by H. C. Lancaster in his A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century.

²⁶ It should be noted, however, that in Le Chevalier joueur, as in Regnard's Le Joueur, the young lover whom the servant assists does not, in the end, win the hand of the heroine. Yet although these masters, ruled by their passion for gambling, may ultimately be rejected in favour of more stable rivals, they are, nevertheless, attractive to the heroines, unlike the disagreeable or evil masters served by many of the other servants in Dufresny.

servants in the remaining comedies - with the exception of L'Olive in Le Négligent, who assists Dorante - do not occupy such a position. The distinction is perhaps a fine one in La Noce interrompue, since although Adrien starts off as the servant of the Comte, rather than of Dorante, the young lover of the play, he does in fact support the latter in his attempts to win the hand of Nanette (whom the Comte intends to marry to a simpleton in order to keep her as his mistress), and eventually ends up as Dorante's servant;²⁷ and in Attendez-moi sous l'orme the distinction is again not exceptionally great, since although Pasquin is the servant not of an acceptable young lover but of the cynical and rakish Dorante, he does not support his master, but instead does all in his power to prevent him from marrying Agathe for her wealth, thereby facilitating the marriage of the innocent young girl to her true sweetheart, and in so doing accepting the fourbe's traditional role as the protector of young love. But elsewhere the distinction is very real. In Le Faux Honnête Homme, for instance, Flamand - a relatively minor figure - serves the deceitful Ariste who threatens the happiness of the young lover, Valère, and although he may not give his superior any significant assistance, neither does he make any positive attempt to further the interests of the young lover (although, in his naïveté, he may inadvertently assist the latter's cause).²⁸ Furthermore, in Le Jaloux honteux, La Réconciliation normande, and La Malade sans maladie the servants not only serve the opponents of young love, but do give them their positive support. Thus, in Le Jaloux honteux, Frontin is supportive of his master, the anti-hero of the play, who is the rival of the true young lover, Damis, and in La Réconciliation normande, where an eccentric Comte and his sister hate each other to the extent that each wishes that their joint charge, Angélique, should marry someone disliked by the other, it is their chosen suitor (the unscrupulous Procinville, who leads each of them to believe that he hates the other) whom Falaise supports, rather than Dorante, Angélique's true lover,²⁹ while in La Malade sans maladie La Valée

²⁷Sc.24.

²⁸In Act II scene 6, for example, he naïvely allows himself to be persuaded to hand over to Frosine an important letter addressed to his master.

²⁹It should be noted that Procinville does not himself appear on stage, but is made known to the audience principally through Falaise's allusions to him and through the reading of communications received from him.

serves the evil Faussinville, who is willing to force anyone to marry him (including Angélique) in a series of blackmailing schemes designed to bring wealth and power to himself.

The position occupied by the servants in these plays is not, however, the only feature which tends to distinguish them from the fourbe, for whereas the fourbe is normally seen as a provider of clever solutions to difficult problems, these figures are not generally so regarded. Unlike the male servants of Regnard and Molière, for instance, they are never begged by those whom they support to produce imaginative schemes, nor, in fact, do they usually devise such schemes. Indeed, of the male servants in these plays Pasquin in Attendez-moi sous l'orme, who engineers a situation which discredits Dorante in the eyes of Agathe, is the only one ever to devise a plan of any significance,³⁰ for it is usually those whom the servants support - true lovers or unwelcome intruders - who take the initiative.

In Le Négligent, for instance, Dorante takes charge of his own destiny, and uses his servant, L'Olive, merely in a supportive capacity - as when he details him to spy upon the intendant of his opponent, the Marquis.³¹ Indeed, that Dorante is to be seen as the moving force behind the unmasking of the Marquis, who had planned to ruin his lover's uncle, is clearly demonstrated by the way in which the latter, seeking towards the end of the play to thank him for what he has done, begins with the words 'sans vous, Dorante ...'.³²

Similarly, in Le Jaloux honteux, Argan may use his servant, Frontin, as little more than a tool - something which emerges quite clearly when, ordering his servant to remain behind in the Président's

³⁰ It is in scene 7 that the audience learns of Pasquin's plan to reveal Dorante's true nature to Agathe by having her eavesdrop on an encounter between Dorante and Lisette in which the latter will woo Dorante in the guise of a rich widow. Edward Alan Walker, 'Charles Rivière Dufresny (1648-1724): a Critical Study of his Life and Theatre', p.271, emphasises the general lack of initiative shown by Dufresny's servants when he comments that they 'have lost their importance as intriguers who guide the action and produce the result desired by their masters'.

³¹ Talking of the Marquis, he explains to Lisette: 'J'ai mis L'Olive aux trousses de son intendant, qui apparemment est en mouvement pour cette affaire, afin de tâcher à m'éclaircir mieux de certaines choses que je ne fais que soupçonner' (II,14).

³² III,15.

household, he explains: 'Je te laisse ici à dessein, pour achever d'irriter la jalousie du président contre Damis'.³³

Likewise, in La Réconciliation normande, Procinville's plan to gain the hand of Angélique is his own, and not a device of the servant, as is made clear when Falaise explains the ruse to Pyrante:

Mais de mon maître, il faut vous dire le manège.
Du couple fraternel il a gagné le cœur,
Au frère il écrivait qu'il haïssait la sœur,
A la sœur il disait qu'il haïssait le frère.³⁴

Similarly, in Le Faux Honnête Homme, Ariste's machinations are undoubtedly a product of his own mind rather than that of Flamand, who cannot even comprehend the implications of his hypocritical behaviour,³⁵ and in La Noce interrompue Adrien, although he may himself initially seek a solution to the young lovers' problems, is soon eclipsed by Dorante, who, on his arrival, takes firm control of the situation and proposes a plan of his own - one which will ultimately lead to the successful duping of the Comte³⁶ -, while in La Malade sans maladie it is abundantly clear that it is the evil mind of the intruder, Faussinville, which gives birth to the various nefarious schemes which he attempts to put into practice, while La Valée merely acts as a confidant, and, occasionally, an assistant.³⁷

It is evident, then, that the self-sufficiency of the masters in most of these comedies deprives the servants of any opportunity to

³³III,1.

³⁴I,8.

³⁵Flamand's inability even to understand his master's behaviour emerges clearly in his discussion with the female servant, Frosine, in Act I scene 11.

³⁶Adrien's plan is to prevent the Comte from marrying off Nanette by playing on the jealous feelings which the Comtesse has for her (Sc.6); Dorante's scheme, which he describes as 'le projet que j'ai imaginé' (Sc.9), but which he is able only partially to reveal in this scene, involves disguising himself as the type of naïve bumpkin whom the Comte would be willing to support as a match for his young charge, Nanette.

³⁷At one point the servant introduces his own conception of the situation with the words, 'Ça, monsieur, afin que je puisse vous seconder dans vos desseins, voyons si je suis au fait' (II,3), clearly indicating that he is not the originator of the projects. And even as an assistant his services are not always welcome, for when, in the same scene, it appears that there is about to be some action, his master quickly sends him packing.

play the role of architect, so beloved of the more fourbe-like servants of Molière and Regnard.³⁸ But that the masters have in this respect usurped the servants' role need not in itself prevent the servants from behaving as masons involved in the implementation of schemes, for we have seen that, in Molière's Le Médecin volant, Sganarelle implements with increasing enthusiasm and vigour the deception around which that play centres, even although it was not he who originally proposed it.³⁹ In these plays by Dufresny, however, there is no evidence that the servants feel any desire to participate unnecessarily in schemes, even when the latter might afford them the opportunity to engage in role-playing of the kind which is attractive to fourbes. Thus when Dorante, in La Noce interrompue, seeks to outline to Adrien his plan for deceiving the Comte, and boasts of his talent for acting, which he hopes to put to good use in implementing his schemes, the servant gives no indication that he sees this as an intrusion into his own domain,⁴⁰ nor does he, in subsequent scenes, show any strong desire to participate in the action. Similarly, when, on his master's instructions, Frontin in Le Jaloux honteux seeks to arouse the Président's jealousy, he plays as small a part in the action as possible, preferring to delegate specific tasks to others;⁴¹ and although episodes involving disguise have a significant part to play in the comedy, the servant is neither an instigator of, nor a participant in, such scenes.⁴²

Moreover, in those plays where the servants support the unscrupulous opponents of true love, they may not only exhibit none of the fourbe's desire to show off his ability by starring in the implementation of plans, but may actively avoid the limelight, preferring to work insidiously behind the scenes, and concealing their

³⁸That the servants of both Molière and Regnard are viewed by their masters as providers of solutions is shown above, pp.23-4; and that this is attractive to the servants, because it makes their masters dependent upon them, is discussed below, pp.114-16.

³⁹See above, p.36, note 58.

⁴⁰Sc.9.

⁴¹Frontin's exchange with Hortence in Act III scene 8 illustrates this tendency.

⁴²On one occasion, the dull peasant, Thibaut, plays the role of the Président at the latter's suggestion (V,1-3), while later in the play Lucie, on the advice of Lisette, disguises herself as the Présidente to test her lover's true feelings (V,5-7).

true nature from those around them. In La Réconciliation normande, for example, rather than welcoming open confrontation of the type upon which the fourbe thrives, Falaise - whose avowed aim is to 'prendre les souterrains',⁴³ - attempts to avoid an encounter with the Chevalier, whose plans he is attempting to confound,⁴⁴ and, throughout the play, rather than dazzling his opponents with the scintillating performances of a fourbe, lurks in the shadows, sometimes eavesdropping upon his adversaries,⁴⁵ while La Valée in La Malade sans maladie is also an essentially shadowy figure, only once being tempted into the limelight - by Lisette - to play the role of a doctor, and then only when the whole edifice of his master's deception is at stake.⁴⁶

Indeed, even in the one play - other than Le Dédit - in which the servants do take the initiative and implement a scheme of their own devising, they behave with none of the unbridled enthusiasm which leads the fourbe to introduce a measure of extravagance into his behaviour. For when Pasquin and Lisette in Attendez-moi sous l'orme dupe Dorante by having him believe that Lisette is a rich widow worthy of his attentions, they - even more than Frontin in Le Dédit - conduct themselves with little flamboyance, giving a relatively low-key performance which is clearly designed to arouse no suspicions on the part of their dupe.⁴⁷ Moreover, whereas the fourbe is normally eager to make known to his adversaries the part played by him in their deception, Pasquin goes out of his way to prevent Dorante from fully understanding his role, even pretending - by, for example, turning to his master and exclaiming 'Nous sommes trahis; on nous berne, monsieur' - that he too has been deceived.⁴⁸

⁴³I,9.

⁴⁴IV,5.

⁴⁵At one point, for example, he eavesdrops on an exchange between the Comte and Nérine (V,3-4).

⁴⁶Lisette persuades La Valée that if he is to prevent the Malade from ruining his master's plans by marrying Valère he must, in the guise of a doctor, advise the hypochondriac not to countenance marriage. This the servant does, performing his role satisfactorily and without undue exaggeration (V,4). What he does not know is that Lisette wishes to prevent the match for a quite different reason, namely, because Valère is in love with Angélique.

⁴⁷Sc.10-13.

⁴⁸Sc.24.

Such widespread lack of interest in the resolution of problems by extrovert behaviour points inescapably to the conclusion that these figures are not simply suppressed fourbes, but characters who lack the fundamental instincts of the fourbe, and it is clear that when Falaise in La Réconciliation normande is seen by those around him as a 'fourbe',⁴⁹ and when Frontin in Le Jaloux honteux admits his 'fourberie',⁵⁰ the word fourbe is being used in its original non-theatrical sense of 'knave', and in no way implies that these servants belong to the fraternity of stage tricksters whose representatives we have encountered in the plays of Molière and Regnard.

⁴⁹Nérine, for example, referring to Falaise, at one point observes: 'Comme un fourbe il est fait' (II,4).

⁵⁰V,9.

Chapter 3

LESAGE

The three plays by Lesage which fall within the scope of this study vary considerably in nature. On the one hand, there is La Tontine, a simple, stylised, and largely traditional type of comedy involving young lovers who encounter an obstacle to their love, and a servant who is willing to help them to surmount it; at the other extreme, there is Turcaret, a unique play of a largely new and unconventional kind, which is marked by the complete absence from it of the traditional young lovers of comedy; and between these two extremes there is Crispin rival de son maître, which, although appearing almost as conventional as La Tontine on the surface, contains within it, in rudimentary form, a number of the less conventional aspects of Turcaret. Not surprisingly, the differences between these comedies are to a large extent mirrored by corresponding variations in the male servants who feature in them, and it is upon these variations that the present chapter focusses. It begins, therefore, with an examination of the extent to which the servants in the more conventional plays - La Tontine and Crispin rival - conform to the most traditional of all male servant patterns, namely, that of the fourbe; attention is then drawn to those aspects of the servants¹ in Crispin rival which are untypical of the fourbe; and in a final section it is shown that in Turcaret so many of these un-fourbe-like features are associated with Frontin, the major servant in that play, that it becomes impossible to see him as belonging to the fourbe tradition at all.

If one begins by looking at La Tontine and Crispin rival, it is not difficult to see that the male servants in these two plays have many of the attributes of the most fourbe-like of Regnard's servants, and possess these conventional fourbe characteristics to a degree which is completely unknown in Dufresny.

First, one hears again in these plays the plaintive tones of young masters turning to their servants and begging them to solve their problems - something which is entirely lacking in Dufresny's

¹There are two principal servants of almost equal importance in Crispin rival: Crispin and La Branche. Turcaret also features two servants of whom only the more important, Frontin, is examined in the present chapter, his dim-witted fellow servant, Flamand, being considered in Part IV.

production. Thus, in La Tontine, when the eccentric doctor Trousse-Galant threatens to marry off his daughter, Marianne, to Bolus, his zany apothecary friend (an arrangement which is financially attractive to him, since Bolus has agreed to accept a share in the profits of a tontine on the life of his protégé, Ambroise, in lieu of a dowry), Eraste, Marianne's true love, immediately turns to his servant, Crispin, and begs him in time-honoured fashion to produce a scheme which will prevent the proposed marriage:

Crispin, je t'en conjure, cherche dans ta tête quelque stratagème qui puisse prévenir cette union funeste.²

Likewise, when Crispin, in Crispin rival, encounters his young master, Valère, after having been absent without leave, he too is begged for assistance by a master who is all too ready to forgive him in return for his help in preventing Angélique, his love, from being married off to another man:

Ecoute, Crispin, je veux bien te pardonner le passé:
j'ai besoin de ton industrie.³

And when it later appears that there is little hope of preventing the wedding, Valère again adopts the suppliant tone, this time turning not only to Crispin, but also to the latter's servant friend, La Branche (in fact the servant of his rival), with the plaintive cry of 'Ah! mes enfants, j'implore votre secours'.⁴ Such episodes are strongly reminiscent of those in which the fourbes of both Molière and Regnard are begged by their masters for help.

Second, as was the case with the fourbe-like servants of both Molière and Regnard, one finds again in the servants of La Tontine and Crispin rival a strong sense of pride in their own intelligence, and the frequently-implied belief that they are in some way extraordinary creatures.

Sometimes, the statement of pride can be quite direct. Crispin in La Tontine, for example, impatient of the female servant's inability

²Sc.14.

³Sc.1. There is an echo here of Valère's 'J'ai besoin de lui' in Regnard's La Sérénade (Sc.11). In each case, the master's need for his servant's services places the servant in a dominant position.

⁴Sc.17.

to produce an instantaneous solution to the young lovers' problem, cries: 'Peste soit de l'esprit bouché! Je ne rêve pas si longtemps, moi. J'ai déjà trouvé le meilleur expédient'; and when Eraste proceeds to compliment him on his suggested solution, describing it as 'bien pensé', the servant's reply provides further evidence of his pride: 'N'est-ce pas?', he exclaims, adding, 'Oh! les ruses ne me coûtent rien'.⁵ And in Crispin rival, although the context may be somewhat different (a fact which is not without significance, and which will be returned to later),⁶ Crispin expresses his belief in his own mental capacities with equal forthrightness when he muses on the waste of talent involved in his continuing to serve his master, and ponders on the success that could be his in the world of finance.⁷

On other occasions, however, the servants may express their belief in themselves in a less direct manner. Thus, whereas, as we have seen, Crispin in La Tontine shows his pride in his ability by emphasising the ease with which he can devise a scheme, his namesake in Crispin rival adopts the opposite technique, and, rather like Molière's fourbes, who may present their activities as in some way grand, heroic, or daring, lays stress on the difficult nature of the tasks which he undertakes. At one point, for example, he expresses doubts as to whether La Branche, who has recently had a nasty brush with the law, will be 'big' enough to help him in his difficult undertaking (thereby emphasising his own greatness both as the originator of the scheme and as someone eager to participate in it):

Ventrebleu! si tu voulais, il y aurait un beau coup à faire; mais après ton aventure du Châtelet, je crains que tu ne manques de courage.

But his doubts are unjustified, for La Branche, too, has the fourbe's pride, and, like a fourbe, sees himself in a heroic light, as is made clear by the tenor of his reply, which would not seem out of place even in Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin:

⁵Sc.14. It subsequently emerges, however, that his suggestion has not properly been thought through.

⁶See below, pp.65-6.

⁷'Avec l'esprit que j'ai, morbleu', he muses, 'j'aurais déjà fait plus d'une banqueroute' (Sc.2).

Le coup, je l'avoue, est un peu hardi; mais mon audace se réveille, et je sens que je suis né pour les grandes choses.⁸

Third, there is evidence that the servants in both La Tontine and Crispin rival share the fourbe's desire not only to devise plans but also to take part in the ensuing action: not content with being architects, they must be masons too. Thus, in La Tontine, Crispin, having responded to his master's request for aid by proposing a plan which requires that two supposed soldiers should confront Trousse-Galant, immediately proceeds to suggest that he himself should play the part of one of the impostors, while his master plays the part of the other.⁹ And in Crispin rival, Crispin not only plans the main scheme around which the play revolves (introducing it with the traditional 'Il me vient une idée'),¹⁰ but also participates in it by disguising himself in his master's clothes in order to play the role of the rival lover.

Fourth - and perhaps most important of all -, the way in which the servants in La Tontine and Crispin rival behave when they do put their plans into action conforms closely to the fourbe pattern. For - unlike Frontin in Dufresny's Le Dédit, who assumes a disguise to further his scheme, but nevertheless fails to emerge as a fourbe because his behaviour in disguise is relatively realistic and excludes the fantasy with which the true fourbe continually jeopardises his position¹¹ - the servants in both La Tontine and Crispin rival show the same strong love of fantastic behaviour as Regnard's fourbes.

Thus, just as Crispin in Regnard's Le Légataire universel, when playing the part of Géronte's widowed niece, may overact by making completely impossible claims about the number of children 'she' has borne,¹² so his namesake in La Tontine, confronting Trousse-Galant in the guise of a colonel, allows his love of fun to get the better of

⁸Sc.3.

⁹Sc.16. The plan is that two supposed soldiers should lead Trousse-Galant to believe that Ambroise (on whose life the tontine is based) is a deserter who must be executed.

¹⁰Sc.3.

¹¹See above, pp.47-9.

¹²III,8. The passage is discussed, and quoted in part, below, p.120.

him, and, by making ridiculous comments on the 'similarities' between Marianne and her aged father, overacts in a manner which, in a totally realistic play, could only serve to arouse the suspicions of his adversaries, upon whose acceptance of his role the success of his plot depends.¹³

In Crispin rival, the same love of fun can be seen in Crispin, although it takes the slightly less fantastic form of an excess of effusiveness in his flattery of Mme Oronte at a time when everything depends upon his being accepted as Damis, her intended son-in-law.¹⁴ In La Branche, however, the love of fun is more strongly present than in Crispin, and can be detected not only in the scene where, before delivering to Oronte a note purporting to come from the father of his future son-in-law, he produces a whole series of other highly improbable letters,¹⁵ but also, later on, in a lengthy exchange over whether or not the dowry which he and Crispin hope to receive from Oronte (as a result of Crispin playing the part of Damis, the genuine fiancé) is to be paid in cash. Since Crispin and La Branche intend to make off with the dowry as soon as possible, it is clearly in their interests that the payment should be made in cash, but, in the course of the exchange, La Branche's fourbe-like love of fun puts the whole scheme in jeopardy, and he and Crispin end up having to use all the ingenuity of a fourbe to argue their way out of the difficult situation into which they have been forced by their own exuberant behaviour.¹⁶

¹³Sc.21. The passage is quoted below, p.296.

¹⁴Sc.9. He pretends to take Mme Oronte for his bride-to-be, and, on being corrected, comments: 'Malpeste! la jolie famille! Je ferais volontiers ma femme de l'une [*i.e.* Angélique], et ma maîtresse de l'autre [*i.e.* Mme Oronte]'.

¹⁵Sc.8. The passage is cited below, p.341.

¹⁶Sc.15. Crispin's initial reply ('Je suis homme à tout prendre; mais, entre nous, j'aimerais mieux de l'argent comptant') is sufficient; but the irrepressible La Branche insists on adding a remark which is altogether too near the truth for comfort: 'L'argent, comme vous savez, est plus portatif'. Crispin is then tempted to take this unnecessary elaboration one stage further with his 'Oui, cela se met mieux dans une valise', but then he immediately reverses his role, and, rather than aggravating the situation, he now attempts to explain away the suspect statements with the invention of a purely fictional property at Chartres for which he would like to make an offer, and is followed in this by La Branche, who, rapidly grasping the situation, further elaborates on the investment value of such a purchase, and adds one or two nice points of his own - such as the presence on the estate of 'deux étangs où l'on pêche chaque année pour deux mille francs de goujon'. Indeed, so eloquent are the two servants that they are eventually given more money than intended, so that they can make this imaginary investment.

The ability to extricate himself from an awkward situation, whether he has been placed there by himself or by others, is in itself, of course, a major attribute of the fourbe, and if it is one which is not particularly strongly present in Crispin in La Tontine,¹⁷ this is amply compensated for by the behaviour of the servants in Crispin rival, for the skills of Crispin and La Branche in this direction are evident not only in the scene referred to above, but also on numerous other occasions. At one point, for instance, we find Crispin cleverly finding his feet in a discussion with Oronte after initially having been put at a disadvantage by his ignorance both of the old man's present state of knowledge and of the latest tack of La Branche's argument,¹⁸ while only two scenes later there occurs an even better example of the fourbe's quick thinking as Crispin skilfully (but untruthfully) explains to his master why it is that he is masquerading as the latter's rival, Damis: he is, he says, attempting to bring the real Damis into disfavour with his prospective in-laws by behaving boorishly. Similarly, La Branche, tackled by Oronte, who has learned that his master - the real Damis - is already married, first keeps calm, and then proceeds to turn the situation to his and Crispin's advantage by persuading the old man that this particular piece of intelligence is merely a stratagem invented by Damis's rival, Valère, and by Lisette, who is 'dans ses intérêts'.¹⁹ In short, when it comes to providing ingenious arguments to explain away an awkward situation, the servants of Crispin rival can again rank with the greatest of

¹⁷Although Crispin is not called upon to provide explanations in the usual way, the fourbe-like fertility of his mind is evident in the scene in which he first devises a solution to the lovers' problems (Sc.14); for when Frosine points out difficulties with his early suggestions, he is quick to provide further details, or to suggest alternative approaches.

¹⁸Sc.15.

¹⁹Sc.14. His opening words - 'Allons, éclaircissons-nous tous deux de sang-froid' - reveal the same fourbe-like coolness as is shown by Crispin when, confronted by his furious master after his long absence, he exclaims: 'Parlons sans emportement' (Sc.1). The entire episode is subjected to more detailed analysis below, pp.280-2.

fourbes.²⁰

It would appear, then, that the intelligent male servants in La Tontine and Crispin rival all conform fairly closely to the traditional fourbe pattern, and it is certainly true that this is the impression gained by any audience which witnesses their antics. Yet if this impression is entirely justified in the case of La Tontine, with Crispin rival some qualification is required, for in the latter play, even if they are largely submerged by the type of antics typical of a fourbe, there are present certain features which are less than fourbe-like, and which not only cut the servants of Crispin rival off from the most traditional of fourbes, but which point the way to the altogether un-fourbe-like servant in Lesage's Turcaret. In fact, Crispin rival can, in this respect, be seen to occupy a position mid-way between La Tontine and Turcaret, and, as a consequence, its male servants can be seen as to some extent hybrid creatures, sharing some of their characteristics with the figures of each of the other two plays.

The first of the somewhat discordant notes which occur in Crispin rival is struck by the servants' attitude to their abilities. It has been noted that both servants display a profound pride in their intelligence, and this attitude has been likened to the very similar expressions of pride so often made by the traditional fourbe. But, in fact, although this is superficially the case, closer inspection reveals that the conventional fourbe and the servants in Crispin rival are proud of their intelligence for very different reasons. For whereas the fourbe-like Crispin in La Tontine, with his 'les ruses ne me coûtent rien', sees intelligence as something to be proud of quite

²⁰This is not to say, of course, that these servants, like many strong fourbes, do not occasionally find themselves at a loss for words. Indeed, it would appear that the sight of the otherwise eloquent servant momentarily unable to provide his glib explanations is a comic spice which is occasionally added to the plays in which they feature. Crispin in Crispin rival finds himself in just such a position when his lack of knowledge of Damis's father (when he is playing the role of Damis) leads him into deeper and deeper trouble when he attempts to discuss the lawsuit in which his 'father' is engaged, insisting that the suit is against a man, when in fact the suit is with a woman (Sc.10). Extracts both from this scene and from a similar scene in Regnard's Les Ménechmes (III,2), where Valentin attempts, unsuccessfully, to discuss his master's uncle (of whom he knows very little), are cited below, pp.283-5.

simply because it enables him to produce the imaginative schemes so typical of the fourbe, the servants in Crispin rival see intelligence as something which finds its fullest expression in the social advancement of its possessor, rather than in the invention of fantastic schemes. Thus, Crispin in Crispin rival - revealing an attitude which is alien to the fourbe - does not dream of the subtle tricks that a man of his intelligence might devise, but merely of the series of dishonest bankruptcies which he might engineer to his own advantage.²¹

If the precise nature of the fourbe's attitude to his own intelligence strikes the first discordant note in Crispin rival, a second discord is struck by a consequence of the first: namely, the fact that the servants, seeing as their ultimate goal their own advancement rather than the mere production of fantastic schemes to assist their young masters, do not find themselves in the position conventionally occupied by the fourbe, who almost invariably supports young love. Thus, although there are young lovers to be helped in Crispin rival (something which is not always the case in Dufresny), the servants, while pretending to ease the course of the young lovers, are, in fact, intent on furthering their own ends - and in a way which can only harm the cause of young love.²² Again, such behaviour is completely untypical of the true fourbe.

Nevertheless, as has already been suggested, the servants in Crispin rival do still emerge, overall, as fourbes, and there are two main reasons for this. First, although the production of clever schemes may not be seen by the servants as the main purpose of their intelligence, they do nevertheless employ the fourbe's usual battery of devices in the pursuit of their ends; second, their true motives are

²¹Sc.2. His words are cited above, p.61, note 7. The preoccupation of Lesage's servants with social advancement is explored in detail below, pp.143-6.

²²Valère, Crispin's master, loves Oronte's daughter Angélique, but she has been promised to Damis, La Branche's master, who is already secretly married. Although Valère begs Crispin for help, and believes that Crispin is working for him, Crispin and La Branche are in fact furthering a project whereby Crispin, disguised as Damis, will wed the girl and share the dowry with La Branche. In the end they are both unmasked, but are forgiven by Oronte, who sets them up in finance. Since Damis is already married, Angélique is able to marry Valère. The implications of the servants working against the interests of young love are touched on below, p.147.

discovered before any damage can be done, and the fact that they are unmasked and then forgiven allows the audience to regard them with much the same sort of benevolence as that with which the fourbe who serves the cause of love is normally considered. Such, however, is not the case with the male servant in Turcaret.

When one turns to Turcaret, what one finds is, broadly speaking, that the un-fourbe-like elements present - but not prominent - in the servants of Crispin rival are much more strongly present in the male servant, Frontin, while the counterbalance of actual fourbe-like behaviour is now absent.

Like the servants in Crispin rival, Frontin does not, for example, assist innocent young love, and so he cannot be said to find himself in the position normally occupied by the fourbe. Indeed, whereas in Crispin rival there are young lovers to assist, in Turcaret it would not even be possible for Frontin to serve young love, since, in this far-from-conventional play, there are no figures who can be seen as innocent young lovers in the usual sense.²³

Moreover, if Frontin in Turcaret is like the servants of Crispin rival in not supporting young love, he also resembles them in his attitude to his own intelligence. Like them, for example, he is clearly proud of his mental abilities, so that when the Baronne suggests 'planting' an intelligent servant on Turcaret - 'quelque habile homme, quelqu'un de ces génies supérieurs qui sont faits pour gouverner les esprits médiocres, et les tenir toujours dans la situation dont on a besoin' - Frontin is quick to propose himself:

Quelqu'un de ces génies supérieurs! Je vous vois venir,
madame; cela me regarde.²⁴

²³A Baronne 'fleeces' the financier Turcaret, who is infatuated with her; but she in turn is being 'fleeced' by a Chevalier whom she loves, but who only pretends to love her. The Baronne's servant, Marine, objects to her mistress wasting her money on the Chevalier, and, on being dismissed, transfers her allegiance to Turcaret. The Baronne then 'plants' Frontin (the Chevalier's servant) on Turcaret, while Frontin himself 'plants' an associate of his, Lisette, on the Baronne, as her new servant. Frontin all along intends to dupe his master, who thinks he is working in his support, and in the end Frontin and Lisette are indeed able to make off with full purses when Turcaret goes bankrupt.

²⁴I, 8.

And when he does obtain his post with Turcaret the Baronne reminds him of his own belief in his intellect:

C'est à présent, Frontin, qu'il faut donner l'essor à ce génie supérieur.²⁵

Later, too, when Frontin's beloved, Lisette, gives him three years in which to acquire the money necessary to win her hand, remarking that 'c'est assez pour un homme d'esprit', Frontin immediately classes himself as just such a man:

Je ne t'en demande pas davantage ... C'est assez, ma princesse.²⁶

Indeed, when the curtain finally drops on Turcaret, it leaves the audience with the picture of a smug and self-satisfied Frontin, delighted at the trickery which has enriched him, extolling to Lisette the virtues of an agile mind:

Vive l'esprit, mon enfant! Je viens de payer d'audace:
je n'ai point été fouillé.²⁷

But if Frontin is proud of his abilities, it is clear, too, that this pride, like that of the servants in Crispin rival, bears little more than a superficial resemblance to the pride displayed by the traditional fourbe, for Frontin again sees intelligence not as something the chief goal of which is the invention of fantastic schemes, but as something which simply assists personal advancement. Indeed, even his revelation of his final deception - quoted, in part, above - lays no stress on the subtlety of the means used (nor can it, for no such means were employed),²⁸ but merely emphasises the audacity required, before going on to underline the extent of the fortune that is now his.

Nevertheless, despite these similarities between Frontin and the servants in Crispin rival, there is one crucial difference between the servants of these two plays, and that is, as has been suggested, the fact that while the servants in Crispin rival, despite their slightly

²⁵II, 5.

²⁶III, 11.

²⁷V, 14.

²⁸In Turcaret the end comes after a straightforward lie: Frontin pretends (V, 13) that he has been searched and the billet au porteur that he was bearing removed, yet in the following scene he admits that this was not the case, and that he has retained the billet for his own use.

un-fourbe-like attitudes, behave, in general, like fourbes, Frontin, in Turcaret, does not.

It has already been shown that the servants in Crispin rival do in fact use the conventional fourbe's battery of devices in their attempt to achieve their ends, and, indeed, in this respect at least they come close to the servant in La Tontine. Frontin in Turcaret, on the other hand, uses practically none of the fourbe's devices to achieve his goal, but, like some of Dufresny's servants, conducts a much less public campaign in which many of the elements which typify the fourbe are suppressed.

In Turcaret, for example, Frontin shows little of the fourbe's eagerness to put on extravagant acts. The audience may first encounter him in the second scene of the play as he vividly describes to the Baronne his master's supposed despair, in an effort to win from her yet more money, but although the scene bears some resemblance to that in Regnard's Le Joueur where Hector holds Nérine at bay by pretending that his master is asleep when he has not even returned home,²⁹ in Turcaret, Frontin gives little indication that a love of fantasy - or a love of self-revelation - might tempt him to sabotage his own efforts, and, unlike Hector, he does in fact maintain his posture to the end of the scene. Similarly, when he later counterfeits a naïve servant as part of the Baronne's plan to 'plant' him on Turcaret,³⁰ his 'acting' is almost as 'realistic' as that of the servant in Dufresny's Le Dédit - that is to say, none of his utterances displays the sort of fantastic absurdities with which the conventional fourbe appeared openly to court disaster - although, unlike Dufresny's servant, Lesage's Frontin does inject a strong element of dramatic irony into the scene by expressing sentiments which can (unlike many of the fourbe's statements) be accepted as sensible and appropriate by his opponents in the play, but which mean something quite different in the eyes of all those (including the audience) who are aware of his deceit.³¹

²⁹As in Act I scene 2 of Le Joueur, the servant begins by describing an imaginary situation.

³⁰II, 4.

³¹An example of this is Frontin's response to Turcaret when he asks him if he knows how to 'empêcher les fraudes, ou les favoriser'. The reply is clearly double-edged: 'Pas encore, monsieur; mais je sens que j'apprendrai cela fort facilement'. The tendency for Regnard's and Lesage's servants to employ double meaning is explored below, pp. 303-6.

Moreover, in Turcaret, the male servant does not disguise himself in order to act out his own schemes. Thus, where Crispin in Regnard's Le Légataire universel plans to bombard G ronte with objectionable relatives and then plays the part of these relatives, and where Crispin, in Crispin rival, plans to produce a substitute Damis and then himself becomes that substitute Damis, Frontin in Turcaret plans to tackle Turcaret with a false huissier but then commissions a certain Furet to play the part; and although Frontin is himself present at the encounter,³² he does not appear to be tempted in any way to jeopardise the scheme by the injection of fantastic remarks such as those which so tempt the fourbe, and which, indeed, tempt Frontin's fellow servants in Crispin rival.

In Crispin rival, too, the servants display the fourbe's ability to extricate himself from difficult situations which his own outspokenness, or the actions of others, have placed him in. But in Turcaret there is little evidence of Frontin ever being able to perform in this way.³³ Like not a few of Dufresny's servants, he seeks, rather, to avoid open conflict, and, instead, works patiently behind the scenes, manipulating - or attempting to manipulate - the action of the play in such a way that he will emerge triumphant in the end.³⁴ For him, the end is more important than the means, and the fourbe's love of the cunning device is now largely eclipsed by the love of the results that it may produce, so that if the traditional fourbe might have taken as his motto the words of the servant in Dufresny's Le D dit, 'tromper finement', the motto of Frontin in Lesage's Turcaret can only be, quite simply, 'tromper', and a figure with such a motto is clearly no fourbe.

³²IV,7.

³³See, for example, Frontin's initial encounter with the Baronne and her servant, Marine, in Act I scene 2. Frontin is seriously thrown off balance by the female servant's counter-arguments - as he himself admits when, in an aside, he exclaims: 'Maugrebleu de la soubrette!'. His reaction is in marked contrast to the controlled coolness of Hector in Regnard's Le Joueur when, in Act IV scene 2 of that play, he is confronted by N rine who, in her mistress's presence, seeks to undermine his arguments.

³⁴It should be noted, however, that while in Dufresny the outcome of the play is usually the result of a more or less logical progression, in Turcaret it is merely the result of a chance lie. Frontin may not indulge in the fourbe's fantastic tricks, but neither does he prove capable of developing a plan which will lead him steadily to his goal.

Chapter 4

DESTOUCHES

One feature which Destouches and Dufresny have in common is their interest in unusual - not to say eccentric - characters. Indeed, this interest is reflected even in the titles of many of their comedies, for while those of plays by Regnard and Lesage frequently refer either to the situations on which the comedies are based, or to the devices which will be used to overcome the obstacles to the young lovers' happiness, those of Destouches and Dufresny tend instead to indicate the kind of unusual behaviour which will characterise the protagonists.¹

Nevertheless, although these two authors have a common interest in unusual characters, each uses the presence of such figures in a different manner, and it is this difference in their approach to drama which makes Destouches's comedies even less hospitable to the fourbe than those of Dufresny.

The key difference in their approach to drama is that while Dufresny treats the presence of an eccentric figure as an obstacle to be circumvented by devious but essentially logical schemes² (which may even make use of the eccentric passions to achieve the desired end),³ Destouches views odd or exaggerated behaviour, such as is seen in the protagonists of plays like Le Glorieux, not necessarily as something to be overcome - indeed, it may scarcely be seen as an obstacle at all - but as the focal point for an examination both of the protagonists'

¹Of the comedies by Destouches being considered, L'Ingrat, L'Irrésolu, Le Médisant, Le Philosophe marié, Les Philosophes amoureux, and Le Glorieux all have titles which allude to unusual protagonists, while only Le Triple Mariage and L'Obstacle imprévu refer to a situation. Similarly, in Dufresny, many titles refer to distinctive protagonists - titles such as Le Négligent, Le Chevalier joueur, and Le Faux Honnête Homme. In Regnard, on the other hand, only the titles of Le Joueur, Le Distrain, and Démocrite refer to characters, while the titles of the remaining plays - such as La Sérénade, Le Bal, and Le Retour imprévu - make reference to situations or devices; and Lesage, with his Crispin rival de son maître and his La Tontine, presents a similar picture.

²See above, pp.51-2.

³In Le Jaloux honteux, for example, the opponents of the Président achieve their ends by manipulating to their own advantage both his jealousy and his refusal publicly to admit that he is subject to jealousy (V,9).

particular passion and of social and moral issues in general.⁴ As a result, whereas intrigue still plays a major part in Dufresny's comedies - although it may be somewhat different in nature from that found in plays where the only eccentricity, if it can be called that, is the traditional opposition of the senex figure to young love -, in Destouches, intrigue is often of little or no importance. Many of the latter's comedies, therefore, have no real obstacle, and hence no need for any significant action to precipitate their conclusion;⁵ others have obstacles which can only be overcome by unheralded revelations not unlike those which bring Shakespearean romances to a happy close (and not by intrigue);⁶ while of the few where positive action is required to produce a successful outcome, none features a major series of intrigues with this end in view.⁷

Given then, that intrigue does not in general have a major role to play in the comedies of Destouches, it is clear that it is highly unlikely that any of them should be dominated by a strong fourbe figure

⁴At one point in Les Philosophes amoureux, for instance, a character exclaims 'A nous la balle' (III,5). This is typical of many of these plays in which debating becomes a game which fills the comedy and forms much of its substance.

⁵Thus L'Irrésolu, which centres on the protagonist's inability to decide which of two women to marry, could end at any point, and in fact ends with the central figure expressing doubts as to the correctness of his final choice. Similarly, the problem of Le Philosophe marié is really a non-problem, since it is almost inevitable that the philosopher's attempts to conceal his marriage will, in the end, prove futile; and a similar situation occurs in Les Philosophes amoureux, where two young philosophers pretend to be immune to the call of love. Likewise, Le Triple Mariage requires no positive action to lead it to a conclusion, but merely the revelation that Oronte is wasting his time in proposing unsuitable matches for his son and daughter, since they are both already married.

⁶Unheralded revelations may be a conventional feature of comedy, but those which occur in not a few of Destouches's comedies are of a fairly extreme kind. In L'Obstacle imprévu, for example, Julie is able to marry Léandre after the revelation by her 'uncle', Licandre, that her mother (whom Léandre had previously married) was not in fact her true mother, and that he himself is her father. Similarly, in Le Glorieux, another aged Licandre first reveals that 'Lisette' is not of low birth, and can therefore marry Valère, before going on to explain that he himself is the father of the glorieux of the title, thereby demolishing his son's proud behaviour, and thus making him an acceptable figure for Isabelle to marry.

⁷The plays in this category are L'Ingrat and Le Médisant. Even in these plays, chance is a very important element in the production of a successful conclusion.

in the way that Regnard's Le Légataire universel is dominated by Crispin, for it is in the field of intrigue and mock logic, rather than in that of more serious debate, that the fourbe thrives. Indeed, in two of Destouches's more 'philosophical' plays - Le Philosophe marié and Les Philosophes amoureux - no major male servants occur at all. But that intrigue is not a major feature of Destouches's plays need not completely rule out the possibility that those servants who do appear in them may possess certain fourbe-like aspects, for the fourbe does not necessarily control the entire action of a play, but may reveal himself in the sudden production of brief imaginative schemes, or by momentarily succumbing to the attractions of fantasy and fun. In fact, however, a detailed examination of Destouches's comedies only confirms that the servants who occur in them show no signs of kinship with the conventional fourbe, for it quickly emerges that among these figures even minor manifestations of fourbe-like tendencies are almost completely absent.

One finds, for example, that when a scheme is required in any of Destouches's comedies (for even although intrigue is not of major importance, minor plots are sometimes hatched in them), those around the servant do not turn to him as a potential source of bright ideas. Nor, indeed, is the servant either the originator or implementor of those plots which are hatched. Thus, in L'Ingrat and L'Obstacle imprévu, which are similar to Regnard's Le Joueur in that their male servants serve the unacceptable lovers of the plays, neither Pasquin, who serves the ungrateful Damis in L'Ingrat, nor his namesake, who serves the petit-maître Valère in L'Obstacle imprévu, is begged for assistance by his master in the way that Hector is in Regnard's play.⁸ Indeed, with the masters showing a strength of will and resourcefulness unknown in the conventional young lovers of comedy, it is unlikely that they would wish to turn to their servants for assistance. But even if they were to make such a request, it is evident that the servants would be in no position to help, since they appear not even to understand the machinations of their devious masters: Pasquin in L'Ingrat, for instance, unable at one point to comprehend Damis's crooked behaviour, exclaims 'Oh! je n'y vois plus goutte',⁹ while in L'Obstacle imprévu

⁸The occasions when Hector and his fellow servants in Regnard are begged for assistance are documented below, pp.115-16.

⁹II,3.

Pasquin, referring to one of his unscrupulous master's projected schemes, asks: 'Et comment ferez-vous ce miracle-là?'.¹⁰

Pasquin in L'Ingrat does not remain permanently in the service of Damis, however, for early in the play he is dismissed by his master, whereupon he vows that he will seek revenge:

Congé pour tout salaire!
Me voilà bien payé; mais je m'en vengerai,
Et tout rusé qu'il est, je le démasquerai....
... Je conduirai sous main
L'intrigue, et nous verrons qui sera le plus fin
De cet homme ou de moi.¹¹

Yet despite Pasquin's stated intention of engaging in intrigue, and despite the fact that he goes on to serve the much less dominant Cléon and those who support him against Damis, the servant never emerges as a fourbe. He is not begged by his new associates to produce a scheme; he does not assume the leadership of those around him (neither maintaining the reins of control in his own hands with the fourbe's 'laissez-moi faire', nor, as the fourbe frequently does, behaving like a general commanding his troops); and, most important of all, he does not in the end contrive a coherent scheme, but, along with those around him, merely attempts to use the chance arrival of a girl whom Damis has jilted as a means of revealing to G ronte Damis's true colours. Moreover, even in his attempts to implement this policy he is outwitted,¹² and his general inability to shape events is revealed later in the play when he exclaims: 'Tout tourne autrement que je ne l'aurais cru'.¹³ In this inability to outwit others, and, indeed, in his

¹⁰V,4. There may be a hint of irony in the servant's question, for elsewhere in the play he can himself conduct arguments which leave his master behind (see below, pp.78-9). Damis's response to his servant's question shows how he differs from the innocent young lovers of conventional comedy, for when he points to his head and exclaims 'Cela part d'ici', he reminds one of the resourceful servant in Regnard's Le Retour impr vu with his 'Tout cela part de l ' (see above, p.22). In the edition of 1718 Val re boasts that he will attempt the impossible: to put Ang lique off him. To this the servant cuttingly replies: 'Je vous r ponds du succ s' (V,4).

¹¹II,8. In the 1712 edition Pasquin expresses broadly the same sentiments, but instead of using the term 'intrigue' says he will punish his master and show himself 'aussi fourbe' as he is.

¹²The wily ingrat, Damis, forewarns G ronte, insisting that the jilted girl is but a fake produced by Pasquin and his associates (IV,1). Damis is not a fourbe in the theatrical sense, but it should be noted that his behaviour resembles that of La Branche in Lesage's Crispin rival, who is successful in persuading Oronte that Damis's marriage is merely a fiction devised by Val re and Lisette (see below, pp.280-2).

¹³V,1. These lines do not occur in the edition of 1712.

admission of defeat, Pasquin reveals himself as the complete antithesis of the fourbe.

Most of Destouches's servants do not, however, serve the unacceptable young lovers of the plays in which they feature, but even those who serve the true lovers from the outset show no desire to take the initiative, and in such plays any schemes devised are usually not the product of the male servants, but of other figures, particularly the masters themselves, who, unlike the naïve young lovers of conventional comedy, may now be resourceful, and willing to act and think for themselves.

Thus, in Le Médisant, Frontin, far from being begged to assist in devising schemes, joins his master, Léandre, after the latter has already (and completely unbeknown to the servant) devised his own scheme, in which he disguises himself as 'La Fontaine' and obtains the post of valet to one of his rivals, Richesource, in order to gain access to his love, Marianne. Similarly, in Le Triple Mariage, Cléon, who has shown resourcefulness in contracting a secret marriage, further shows his resourcefulness by disguising himself and his servant, L'Epine, as dancers in order to gain access to his wife. Yet although this conventional device is one which also occurs in Regnard's Le Bal and La Sérénade, the situation in Destouches's play differs from that found in Regnard in that it is made clear that the plan is very definitely a product of the master's mind.¹⁴ Moreover, when the second master-servant pair in Le Triple Mariage - Valère and Pasquin - dress up as people returning from a hunting expedition in order to make the master's father believe that they have been at a remote hunting lodge when in fact they have been elsewhere, there is again nothing to suggest that it is the servant who is behind their scheme, for he is neither begged by his master to produce a plan, nor is he shown actually producing a scheme like a rabbit out of a hat.

It would appear, then, that, unlike the true fourbe, the male

¹⁴At one point, for example, Cléon refers to 'mes projets' (Sc.5). It is true that in Regnard's La Sérénade it is the master who first presents his servant as a musician (Sc.7), but this is done without forethought, and it is the servant himself who goes on to elaborate a plan based on this, without any prompting from his master: 'Laissez-moi un peu rêver tout seul. J'ai ma sérénade en tête' (Sc.11).

servant in Destouches is not generally responsible for the contriving of schemes. Yet it must be emphasised that if he does not normally devise schemes this is not because his natural tendencies are being repressed, but because he lacks much of the fourbe's love of fantasy. In other words, there is little evidence that Destouches's servants need to be held on a short rein to prevent the love of fun and fantasy from dominating their behaviour as it does in the case of strongly fourbe-like servants.

Thus, whereas the conventional fourbe eagerly grasps the opportunity to disguise himself, and, in the ensuing performance, driven on by his sense of fun, tends to overact, Destouches's servants show few such tendencies. Frontin in Le Médisant, for example, gives no sign of wishing to emulate his master, Léandre, when he finds that the latter has adopted a disguise.¹⁵ And when Cléon and L'Epine disguise themselves as dancers in Le Triple Mariage, although the servant jeopardises his master's scheme, he does so not by allowing his imagination to run away with him, as a fourbe might, but by drunken behaviour of a kind more usually associated with the dullard type of servant.¹⁶ Indeed, the only servant to show something of the fourbe's love of fun when in a disguise situation is Pasquin, the second servant in Le Triple Mariage, who, when he and his master are pretending to have just returned from a hunting expedition, runs around halooing with exaggerated vigour.¹⁷

Moreover, in addition to lacking the fourbe's love of fantasy and fun, Destouches's servants generally show no evidence that they possess the courage which typifies the fourbe and which allows him to engage in hazardous or unscrupulous enterprises with little concern for the consequences. Alone of the servants being considered, Crispin in L'Obstacle imprévu claims to be willing to undertake exploits which demand a degree of courage, as he makes clear when he explains to Julie how it was his master's reluctance to engage in such activities which made it difficult for them quickly to make their fortune: 'Je voulais

¹⁵I,7.

¹⁶Sc.8.

¹⁷Sc.10.

expédier', he tells her, 'Je savais de certains tours d'adresse, de petits jeux de main tout innocents Mais il ne suffit pas pour cela d'avoir de l'adresse, il faut avoir du courage'.¹⁸ Yet even Crispin can elsewhere behave in a less than bold manner - as when he and Pasquin attempt to engage in a duel¹⁹ - while signs of cowardice, an attribute more commonly associated with the dullard, also occur in the servants of L'Ingrat,²⁰ Le Médisant,²¹ and, to a lesser extent, Le Glorieux.²²

But even if Destouches's servants may normally lack the fourbe's initiative, his sense of fun, and his fearless spirit, there are nevertheless a few occasions when these figures may appear to be on the point of behaving like fourbes, although seldom is this promise fulfilled. In fact, such occasions may only serve to emphasise how un-fourbe-like these servants are.

In Le Triple Mariage, for example, when Nérine, Cléon, and Isabelle wring their hands over the decision by Isabelle's father to marry his daughter off to a certain Michaut (since he is unaware that she has already married Cléon in secret), L'Epine announces, in terms similar to those used by many a stage fourbe, that he has a solution to the problem:

Parbleu! vous voilà bien embarrassé! J'ai trouvé un moyen pour vous tirer d'affaire.²³

¹⁸III,6.

¹⁹IV,5. This immensely comic episode, in which the servants attempt to satisfy their honour by engaging in a duel, although each would clearly prefer to flee from his adversary, is given more detailed consideration below, p.298.

²⁰On one occasion Lisette teases Pasquin by pretending to summon up Nérine by supernatural means, whereupon Pasquin shows considerable alarm at what he takes to be a ghost-like manifestation of Nérine (III,5); elsewhere he shows cowardice on a more everyday level when he admits that 'la peur d'être battu' makes him tell lies (V,1).

²¹Frontin's fear of Léandre's wrath is evident in Act I scene 7.

²²Pasquin continually trims his sails to avoid coming into open conflict with his master, whose anger is easily aroused. When his master and Licandre argue over whether or not he should remain in their presence, for instance, he meekly obeys the former: 'Il y fait trop chaud. Je fais ce qu'on m'ordonne' (IV,6).

²³Sc.9.

Yet despite this statement, which might suggest that the servant is about to start directing those around him, as the fourbe does, and which would appear to give expression to the fourbe's traditional pride in his intellect (something not normally found in Destouches),²⁴ the drunken L'Epine in fact produces no subtle scheme, merely suggesting that Isabelle should tell her father that he does not know what he is doing, and that Cléon should throw the prospective husband out of the window if he refuses to leave forthwith. In view of this, it is hardly surprising that, far from turning to L'Epine as his saviour, Cléon should send him packing in order that the others can continue to look for a solution by themselves.

In a not dissimilar way, Pasquin, also in Le Triple Mariage, offers to rid his master, Valère, of the Comtesse who intends to force him to marry her. 'Laissez-moi faire', he tells his master in conventional fourbe terms, 'je vais lui donner son congé'.²⁵ Yet although Pasquin does in fact tackle the Comtesse, asking her to step aside for a few words with him (much to the concern of Valère, who, like the conventional fourbe's master, wonders what it is that his servant is up to),²⁶ rather than holding her at bay by ingenious argument, he merely attacks her with witty repartee, and ends up offering to marry her himself!

Indeed, the only figure to come close to the true fourbe in his ability to use eloquence or subtle argument when dealing with an opponent is Pasquin in L'Obstacle imprévu, who, when his master is tackled by his father about his refusal to marry his betrothed, again mutters, 'Laissez-moi faire', and launches into extensive explanations

²⁴ Pasquin in Le Glorieux is alone in showing strong signs of pride (although not necessarily pride in his intellect), as can be seen in his encounters with a laquais (II,8), and with his master's father (IV,4). But these manifestations of pride serve a primarily comic purpose - the servant is imitating his master, the glorieux of the title, in much the same way as Carlin imitates his master in Regnard's Le Distrain (IV,9) - and Pasquin himself admits the foolishness of his behaviour (II,9 and IV,4).

²⁵ Sc.13.

²⁶ 'Que diable va-t-il lui dire?', he asks, in an aside (Sc.14). For an examination of how situations such as this - where the master is alarmed by his servant's behaviour but must restrain himself because of the presence of others - put the servant in a dominant position, see below, pp.266-8.

despite his master's initial inability to comprehend his tack ('Que lui va-t-il conter?').²⁷ He eventually reveals to the father that his master is in love with another girl - Julie - and in a skilful discourse justifies this on the grounds that Lisimon himself is enamoured of the girl:

Le mérite de Julie vous égratigne le cœur; il perce aussitôt celui de votre fils. Vous voulez l'épouser; il la demande en mariage; et vous voyez bien que, s'il fait une sottise, ce n'est que parce qu'il vous imite de trop près.

Yet although this ability so eloquently to argue a point - an ability noticeably absent in most of Destouches's servants²⁸ - is normally a characteristic of the fourbe, Pasquin lacks the supreme fourbe's ability to devise a succession of arguments, each of which rises more or less from the ashes of its predecessor. Thus whereas in Regnard's Le Retour imprévu Merlin is able constantly to devise a new argument to allow himself to escape from the awkward situation into which a previous argument has driven him, Pasquin's argument 'blows his cover', as it were, and leaves him in a position from which there can be no recovery once he has put his case and had it rejected. Indeed, like his namesake's offer to marry the Comtesse in Le Triple Mariage, Pasquin's argument can justifiably be seen more as a joke than as a serious attempt to exercise the fourbe's powers of persuasion and argument.

It is very clear, then, that the male servants in Destouches are no fourbes. However, whereas Dufresny's male servants occur comparatively infrequently, those of Destouches appear with considerable regularity,²⁹ and this alone strongly suggests that even if they are no fourbes they may still have important functions to fulfil. But if they are not important as tricksters, what is their essential role in these plays? The answer to this question is suggested by two comedies which have scarcely been touched on so far: Le Glorieux - frequently seen as Destouches's masterpiece - and L'Irrésolu.

²⁷II,4.

²⁸Far from being eloquent, a number of Destouches's servants are noted for the awkwardness with which they express themselves. This is further explored below, pp.342-5.

²⁹Only two of the plays under consideration have no male servants, while Le Triple Mariage and L'Obstacle imprévu each feature two such figures.

In both Le Glorieux and L'Irrésolu trickery and disguise are never resorted to, yet the servants, Pasquin and Frontin, are relatively prominent, and the reason for this would appear to be twofold: on the one hand, the servants provide comic relief in plays which, with their emphasis on discussion and debate, could otherwise hardly be termed comedies at all; on the other hand, they act as confidants for their masters.

Thus, if one concentrates for the moment on the confidant role of these figures (for the contribution which servants make to comedy is examined in Part IV), one finds that in L'Irrésolu it is largely in the course of conversations with Frontin that Dorante discusses his inability to decide whom to choose as a wife and the reasons for this,³⁰ while in Le Glorieux a similar situation obtains, with the protagonist, the Comte de Tufière, revealing his thoughts mainly to Pasquin, and at one point admitting that he is using his servant as a confidant.³¹

But the servants of L'Irrésolu and Le Glorieux are not alone in acting as confidants: it is merely that their lack of involvement - however little - in other activities renders their confidant role more immediately apparent than is the case with many of their fellow servants. For if one examines with care Destouches's other valets, it soon becomes clear that they too fulfil this role - a role which is of particular importance in Destouches since his masters, unlike the shadowy young lovers of conventional comedy, are not only frequently enterprising and resourceful,³² but are also, in general, figures who discuss ideas and motives. In L'Ingrat, for instance, the lengthy

³⁰ Examples of such scenes include Act I scene 7, and Act III scene 2.

³¹ The servant can be seen behaving as a confidant in Act II scene 13, and Act III scene 1. It is in the latter scene that the Comte refers to his use of Pasquin as a confidant, stating: 'Oui, quoiqu'à mes valets je parle rarement,/Je veux bien en secret m'abaisser un moment,/Et descendre avec toi jusqu'à la confiance'.

³² Léandre in Le Médisant has set off alone to re-establish contact with his love; Valère in Le Triple Mariage has contracted a secret marriage, as has Cléon in the same play, who disguises himself in order to gain access to his wife. Less resourceful, but sure of their own minds, are Léandre in L'Obstacle imprévu, who has resisted his servant's dubious plans (III,6); Damis in L'Ingrat, who knows what he wants (money), and thinks he knows how to get it; Tufière in Le Glorieux; and, paradoxically, the protagonist of L'Irrésolu, who, although undecided, is never really open to suggestion.

final scene of the first act is almost entirely devoted to a discussion between Damis and Pasquin, in which the former's attitude to Isabelle and Cléon is fully explored, while in the third scene of the second act there is another long exchange between the master and his servant in which the former describes the philosophy of life which leads him to behave as he does, and reveals his plans for the future. And in L'Obstacle imprévu the very first scene consists of a far-from-brief conversation between Valère and his servant, Pasquin, in which the master describes with frankness his feelings for both Angélique and Julie, while in the opening scene of the second act Valère explains to Pasquin his reaction to the revelation that his father is himself in love with Julie. Moreover, and somewhat paradoxically, the importance of the male servant as a confidant is further confirmed by the two plays by Destouches which do not feature such characters, namely, Le Philosophe marié and Les Philosophes amoureux. For it is significant that a feature of these plays - and one which, it would appear, renders the presence of a male servant unnecessary - is the occurrence in them of major non-servant figures who act as confidants for the protagonists.³³

³³In Le Philosophe marié, it is his friend, Damon, who acts as a confidant for the protagonist, Ariste, while in Les Philosophes amoureux the two philosopher friends, Léandre and Damis, effectively act as confidants for each other.

Chapter 5

DANCOURT

In terms of his output, Dancourt differs in two respects from the other authors being considered: first, he is much more prolific than any of them, so that more plays by him than by any other author fall within the scope of the present study;¹ second, because he sought in particular to satisfy the demand for short plays to follow the main feature at theatre performances, his production contains a much higher proportion of one-act plays than is the case with the other authors.² An examination of his comedies soon shows, however, that his treatment of the servant is essentially the same in both his shorter and longer plays; nevertheless, because the number of comedies involved is so great, for the convenience of the argument these two categories of play are treated separately in the discussion which follows.

(a) The One-Act Plays

In A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, Lancaster expresses the view that Dancourt was the true creator of the comedy of manners in France, and justifies this by asserting that while Corneille, Molière, and Hauteroche had all written plays which could be called comédies de mœurs, Corneille had not gone into the same sort of detail as Dancourt, while in Molière and Hauteroche manners had been respectively overshadowed by character and intrigue.³ One may or may not agree with this general assessment of Dancourt's place in French literature, but it would be hard to deny that Lancaster's comments point to a feature of Dancourt's plays which distinguishes them from virtually all the comedies hitherto considered, and that is the status of intrigue within them.

¹Thirty-five plays by Dancourt are examined, compared with only sixteen by Dufresny, who ranks second to him in terms of the number of his plays which fall within the scope of the present study.

²Of the thirty-five plays relevant to this study, only ten exceed one act in length: Les Fonds perdus (3 acts); Le Chevalier à la mode (5 acts); La Femme d'intrigues (5 acts); Les Bourgeoises à la mode (5 acts); Les Enfants de Paris (5 acts); La Fête de village (3 acts); Les Trois Cousines (3 acts); Madame Artus (5 acts); La Comédie des comédiens (3 acts); and Les Agioteurs (3 acts).

³Part IV, p.768.

It is not that intrigue generally has no part to play in these comedies (as is sometimes the case in the comedies of Destouches), nor that the nature of any intrigue differs from that conventionally found in comedy (as is to some extent the case in Dufresny), for, as a rapid review of Dancourt's production soon shows, the majority of his comedies are based upon a conventional situation in which young lovers (usually bearing names traditionally assigned to such figures) are supported by a servant against representatives of the older generation.⁴ It is, rather, that in most cases the importance of the intrigue in relation to the play as a whole tends to be greatly reduced, with the emphasis, instead, being very much on the depiction of society.

This tendency can be seen in embryonic form even in the very early Angélique et Médor, which would not normally be considered a comedy of manners at all. For although, rather like Regnard's Le Bal and La Sérénade, the play uses the conventional device of a young lover and his servant disguising themselves as musicians in order to gain access to the loved one, unlike Regnard's comedies it uses the trick not simply as a means of advancing the young lovers' cause, but as an

⁴In Angélique et Médor, for instance, Isabelle's mother has promised her to Guillemain, while Isabelle loves Eraste, whose efforts to win her have the support of his valet, Merlin; in Renaud et Armide Angélique's father, Grognac, intends to marry her to Filassier, although she loves Clitandre (in fact Filassier's son), who is supported by his servant, L'Olive; in La Désolation des joueuses Angélique wishes to marry Dorante, who is backed by his servant, Merlin, while Angélique's mother intends her for another man; in La Maison de campagne Eraste, with his servant La Flèche, has been banned from Bernard's house because of his love for his daughter; in La Parisienne Eraste, with his valet, L'Olive, pursues Angélique, although his father himself hopes to wed the girl; in La Gazette de Hollande Clitandre, aided by his servant, Crispin, pursues Angélique, who is jealously guarded by her father; in Les Vendanges Claudine has been engaged by her uncle, Lucas, to someone she does not love, although she loves Eraste, who is accompanied by L'Olive, his servant; in Le Tuteur Dorante, whose servant is L'Olive, pursues Angélique, who is closely watched over by a guardian who himself hopes to marry her; in La Foire de Besons Griffard puts obstacles in the way of a marriage between his daughter and Eraste, who are supported by the latter's servant, L'Olive; in La Foire Saint-Germain the closely-chaperoned Angélique loves Clitandre, who is served by Le Breton; and in Les Eaux de Bourbon Babet's father, Grognac, wishes to marry her to the Baron de Saint-Aubin, whose valet is La Roche.

excuse for exploring the foibles both of musicians and of the opera.⁵

But elsewhere the tendency to concentrate on the depiction of society's idiosyncrasies is much stronger, with the result that the love intrigue may almost be forgotten while scenes only tenuously related to its progress, but illustrative of particular quirks of society, take over the stage. In La Désolation des joueuses, for example, the problems of Dorante and his love, Angélique, whose gambling mother wishes her to marry a card-sharper, occupy only the first three scenes and the two concluding scenes of the play, while the nine intervening scenes are devoted entirely to glimpses of the manner in which the mother and her gambling associates react to the outlawing of lansquenet. Similarly, in La Maison de campagne, the love-plot frames, but emerges as subsidiary to, an extensive series of comic episodes which occupies scenes four to thirty-one, and in which there is depicted a range of social types who call in at the country retreat referred to in the comedy's title. Likewise, in La Foire de Besons, episodes which are not strictly relevant to the plot, but which depict the visits of outsiders to the fair, occupy scenes five to eleven, while, in Les Eaux de Bourbon, although love-intrigue scenes are more prominent, they are themselves framed by episodes from life in a spa. Moreover, in some plays - and here one thinks of La Foire Saint-Germain, which, with its extensive depiction of scenes from the fair, is strongly reminiscent of Jonson's Bartholomew Fair - the love intrigue is so submerged by episodes largely unrelated to its development that it itself can almost be seen as an unnecessary elaboration. Indeed, it may have been plays such as this which prompted Fournel to observe that the action of Dancourt's plays is 'souvent mince ... et quelquefois nulle', and to add that 'on pourrait citer de lui telle bagatelle qui n'a ni intrigue, ni nœud, ni dénouement, mais qui n'en est pas moins un petit tableau plein de mouvement et de vie'.⁶

⁵In scene 11, for example, Merlin, in preparation for the duping of the senex figure, Guillemin, discusses with the latter the various operas which he might wish to have put on to entertain Isabelle, and in the course of the lengthy discussion both the absurd extravagancies of contemporary opera and the dubious social practices which account for good attendances at poor operas are highlighted.

⁶Victor Fournel, 'Un Auteur dramatique fin de siècle: Dancourt', p.21.

From what has been said so far, it is evident that, with their emphasis on episodes illustrative of the vagaries of everyday behaviour, and with the consequent reduction in the amount of time which they devote to intrigue proper (the area in which the fourbe traditionally shines), Dancourt's comedies cannot be expected to be particularly hospitable to fourbe-like servants. But whereas one might expect simply to observe among Dancourt's male servants a reduction in the level of fourbe-like activity proportionate to the reduction in the amount of time devoted to intrigue, what one in fact finds is an almost total absence of the characteristics normally associated with the fourbe. In short, even at times when intrigue is to the fore, Dancourt's male servants fail to emerge as fourbe-like figures.⁷

To some extent this is a surprising discovery, because, in Dancourt's comedies, servants are frequently referred to in a manner which implies either that it is normal for such figures to be engaged in trickery and deception, or that they already are engaged in such activities. In La Foire Saint-Germain, for example, Le Breton is roundly condemned for not being 'un valet zélé' when he is unable to devise a scheme to assist his master,⁸ while in Les Vendanges de Suresnes Mme Dubuisson, discussing with Clitandre the difficulty of getting rid of his provincial rival, asks him: 'Votre L'Olive, n'est-il point ici?', and, on being given a negative reply, laments his absence: 'Notre provincial entre ses mains aurait été bien régale'.⁹ Clearly, she is referring to one of Clitandre's servants - one who never does appear on stage - and, equally clearly, the implication is that the said servant is no stranger to the art of trickery. And in Le Moulin de Javelle L'Olive is on more than one occasion described in a manner which implies that he is an excellent trickster. At one point, for instance, the Chevalier observes that although he does not know precisely what L'Olive has in mind, he is sure that he will be successful because 'il a du monde et de l'esprit, et il sort fort bien de ce qu'il entreprend', adding, 'il faut le laisser faire',¹⁰ and this

⁷ Whether or not the servants have a significant role as contributors of social comment in scenes where intrigue is not of importance is a separate issue, and one which is examined below, pp.173-5.

⁸ Sc.7.

⁹ Sc.5.

¹⁰ Sc.26.

is reinforced by Finette's comment when she discovers that the Chevalier has the support of his servant: 'Vous êtes en bonne main', she tells him, 'ce garçon-là fait de bonne besogne'.¹¹ But the facts seem to be at odds with these statements, for evidence of servants actually behaving or being treated as fourbes is hard to come by.

One finds, for example, that whereas in Molière and Regnard the fourbe is distinguished by the way in which those whom he supports turn to him for solutions to their problems, in Dancourt's short plays the young masters do not in fact make a habit of begging their servants for assistance, even although the servants do support the cause of young love. This may stem in part from the fact that most of the masters are comparatively self-assured, and able to organise their own affairs;¹² but it is equally true that the servants would not normally appear to be portrayed even as potential devisers of tricks.

There are of course exceptions, but even some of the apparent exceptions are deceptive, since although the masters in certain plays, by turning to their servants for help, may give the impression that they view the latter as fourbes, both the servants' responses and their subsequent behaviour may not, in fact, be what one would expect of a fourbe. Two such plays are Colin-Maillard and Les Curieux de Compiègne, in both of which the servant's reaction to a request for help is not only untypical of the fourbe, but also serves to highlight certain attitudes which are prevalent among the servants of the one-act plays as a whole.

In Colin-Maillard, for instance, when Eraste, anxious to remove his love, Angélique, from the clutches of her guardian, Robinot, turns to L'Epine with his 'Comment la tirer de ses mains, mon pauvre L'Epine?', the servant (having had his first suggestion, that Robinot's aunt should give Angélique some advice, turned down on the grounds that the aunt would not know what to say) responds cautiously: 'Examinons un peu cela. Allons, de la vivacité, monsieur, rêvons chacun de notre côté, et nous rassemblerons ensuite nos idées'.¹³ And in Les Curieux

¹¹Sc.30.

¹²This is particularly obvious in plays like La Désolation des joueuses and La Maison de campagne.

¹³Sc.7.

de Compiègne, when Clitandre at one stage turns to his servant and asks, 'Mon pauvre Frontin, que ferons-nous? Parle', his servant's reply is a straightforward 'Ma foi, je ne sais'.¹⁴

The replies of the servants show, first, that these figures lack the fourbe's eagerness to produce tricks, and in this they are typical of the servants in Dancourt's short plays, who, whether begged or not, generally show none of the fourbe's willingness enthusiastically to grasp at any opportunity to devise schemes.

Second, L'Epine's reply shows that he is willing to work with others on an equal footing, whereas the fourbe is essentially a lone saviour who not only devises schemes by himself (thus maintaining his position of superiority vis-à-vis his master), but, if he has to involve other characters in the implementation of his schemes, acts as their leader, and not as an equal partner in the enterprise. And in this respect too, L'Epine is typical of a number of servants in Dancourt's short plays, for whenever these figures have any involvement with intrigue - and frequently they do not, being merely nonentities or mild confidants¹⁵ - they do not seek jealously to maintain a monopoly over the provision of schemes, but, rather, show a willingness either to assist others in the devising and implementation of schemes, or to adopt schemes first devised by others.¹⁶ Thus, when the Chevalier in Les Curieux de Compiègne proposes a course of action which differs from that suggested by Frontin, the servant is happy to encourage him:

¹⁴Sc.3.

¹⁵Servants who are largely nonentities as far as the action is concerned, or who act merely as simple confidants (that is, as figures to whom words are addressed in order that the audience may know the views of those speaking), include L'Olive and La Vigne in La Parisienne (L'Olive is even locked up while Angélique manipulates the action); La Flèche in La Maison de campagne; L'Olive in Le Tuteur; Frontin in Les Curieux de Compiègne; and L'Epine in Le Mari retrouvé.

¹⁶This is often obscured by the servants' use of the conventional fourbe's 'Laissez-moi faire' or equivalent phrases. In Angélique et Médor, for instance, Merlin seeks to allay his master's fears with the time-honoured 'Laissez-moi faire' (Sc.8); in Le Moulin de Javelle L'Olive similarly calms his master with his 'Demeurez ici seulement, et ne vous embarrassez pas du reste' (Sc.25); and in Renaud et Armide L'Olive, wishing to discuss matters alone with Lisette, turns to his master and exclaims 'Laissez-nous tête à tête' (Sc.14). In Dancourt such apparent self-confidence is, however, rarely justified by the actual production by the servants of effective and imaginative tricks.

'Je ne suis point jaloux de l'invention; parlez'.¹⁷ Similarly, in La Foire Saint-Germain, Le Breton - who is unable to produce a scheme of his own - declares himself willing to help those who can: 'Je ne suis point jaloux, monsieur; je cède l'entreprise, et je leur servirai de croupier même, en cas de besoin'.¹⁸ In La Foire de Besons, L'Olive is not afraid to turn to the intrigante, Frosine, to set the wheels of the device in motion,¹⁹ and in Angélique et Médor Merlin's idea of getting the young lovers to sing together as part of an opera performance is merely an elaboration of Lisette's initial suggestion - made in the opening scene of the play - that he and his master infiltrate the establishment by presenting themselves as musicians willing to participate in Guillemin's projected opera performance. While in Le Vert Galant, although the central device is proposed by Jérôme, and not by the servant, L'Epine, this does not prevent the latter from showing willingness to assist in its implementation when he and Eraste are asked to help: 'Nous attendrons vos ordres avec impatience', he tells Jérôme.²⁰ What is more, even in the area of physical disguise, where the fourbe traditionally takes matters into his own hands, Dancourt's servants show little initiative, and, if they disguise themselves at all, usually do so only at the behest of, or in conjunction with, someone else.²¹

¹⁷Sc.3.

¹⁸Sc.7.

¹⁹Sc.3.

²⁰Sc.9.

²¹Disguise is not a prominent feature in these plays, and its impact is much reduced by the fact that disguises have frequently already been adopted before the plays open. This is the case in Les Vendanges (where L'Olive and Eraste are from the start disguised as peasants); in Le Galant jardinier (where La Montagne and Léandre respectively play the part of a 'neveu du jardinier' and a 'garçon jardinier' from the start); and in Le Tuteur (where, from the beginning, L'Olive and his master pretend respectively to be a gardener and a painter). Elsewhere, if a servant adopts a disguise, it is usually not his own idea, and frequently he may be just one of a number of characters disguising themselves as part of a general scheme: in La Désolation des joueuses, for instance, it is only at his master's suggestion that Merlin dons the former's clothes as part of a plan to unmask the gambling Chevalier (Sc.3); in La Foire de Besons L'Olive, who disguises himself en marinier, does so only as part of a general plan which also sees his master, Eraste, and the latter's friend, Clitandre, disguising themselves as peasants (Sc.24); and in Les Eaux de Bourbon La Roche and his master similarly disguise themselves as part of a masquerade to gain access to the Baron (Sc.31). Only L'Olive in Le Moulin de Javelle, who surprises his master by suddenly appearing in the guise of the ferocious Vicomte de La Jugulardière, shows the fourbe's ability to take the initiative in matters of disguise (Sc.34).

There is, however, a third point that is highlighted by the servants' response to their masters' pleas for help in Colin-Maillard and Les Curieux de Compiègne, and that is the lack of the fourbe's imaginative ability in these servants; for L'Epine's suggestion to his master that they should both think about the problem before pooling their ideas, and Frontin's admission that he can see no way forward, show that neither of these figures possesses that particular imaginative quality which allows the true fourbe to produce, at the proverbial drop of a hat, ingenious and fantastic solutions to the most intractable of problems. Moreover, in this respect too these figures are typical of the servants in Dancourt's short plays.

Thus, while the true fourbe's imaginative abilities are so great - and so central to the play in which he occurs - that the moment of almost divine inspiration when he produces his first scheme is often accompanied by a metaphorical fanfare consisting of the master's plaintive requests for assistance, and the servant's expression both of pride in his own ability and scorn for his master's lack of inventiveness, in Dancourt's plays not only do masters rarely beg their servants for help, but the servants do not normally express pride in their ability: Merlin in La Désolation des joueuses, for instance, far from priding himself in his skills and looking forward to launching himself into difficult tasks, will undertake a task on his master's behalf only 'si elle n'est point trop difficile'.²² And even when expressions of pride do occur, there would appear to be little justification for them: L'Epine in Colin-Maillard, for instance, condemns his master with a condescending 'Pauvre esprit!', and disparages Mme Brillard with his 'Quelle faiblesse d'imagination!'.²³ yet he himself neither produces an instant solution to their problems, nor, in the longer term, proposes any stratagem worthy of a true fourbe. What is more, whereas, in plays which feature true fourbes, additional emphasis is frequently given to the servants' imaginative abilities by the way in which these figures are confronted by a whole series of obstacles and threatened reversals which allow them further to demonstrate their skills, in Dancourt the development of the comedies

²²Sc.3.

²³Sc.8.

is generally marked by an absence of serious obstacles.²⁴

It might be argued that this lack of emphasis on the imaginative abilities of the servants in Dancourt's short plays simply reflects the author's interest in manners as opposed to intrigue; but to do so would imply that his servants are still innately fourbe-like, even although circumstances may not allow them to give expression to their natural tendencies. In fact, however, this is not the case, for on the relatively few occasions when one of Dancourt's servants has the opportunity to suggest solutions to an awkward situation, his response is quite simply that of an ordinary mortal struggling with a problem, rather than that of a superhuman fourbe. For even when he does not admit defeat on the spot, but proceeds to propose a solution, his suggestions lack the audacious imaginativeness which typifies the fourbe's schemes, and are, instead, ordinary and earth-bound. Thus, in Les Curieux de Compiègne, Frontin, after his initial negative response, goes on to suggest the adoption of the blunt instrument which is highway robbery,²⁵ while L'Epine, in Colin-Maillard, for all his pride, can suggest no solutions other than persuasion and an enlèvement.²⁶ Clearly, figures who make suggestions such as these cannot subscribe to the fourbe's ethic of tromper finement.

Moreover, the ordinariness of Dancourt's servants is further underlined by the way in which their activities are sometimes explained in terms of their background, whereas, in the fantastic world inhabited by the fourbe, the ingenious servant can, apparently without explanation, turn his hand to anything. Thus, in La Désolation des joueuses, the unmasking of the Chevalier is in no way dependent upon the servant putting on an imaginative act, but is brought about by Merlin using the skills which he has previously developed as a card-

²⁴Augustin Gazier, 'La Comédie en France après Molière: Dancourt', p.696, praising the construction of Dancourt's plays, observes both that 'les expositions sont claires, simples, rapides', and that 'les péripéties sont peu nombreuses'. In general, Dancourt's plays develop smoothly and with ease, for it is not the points at which their plots take new turns that are important, but the intervening scenes in which, frequently, it is society and its peculiarities that are depicted.

²⁵Sc.3.

²⁶Sc.8.

sharper,²⁷ while in Le Vert Galant L'Epine's participation in the dyeing of Tarif, which leads directly to the latter agreeing to his niece's marriage to Eraste - since he will only be returned to his normal hue if he agrees to the match -, is explained in terms of his previous occupation as a dyer's assistant.²⁸ Furthermore, the impression that Dancourt's servants are mere mortals is given added strength by the fact that these figures - unlike fourbes, such as Scapin in Les Fourberies de Scapin, who claim to be unconcerned about the consequences for them of their actions - are to some extent preoccupied with thoughts of the punishments which participation in any questionable scheme might bring down upon their heads.²⁹

Clearly, then, not only does the nature of Dancourt's short plays give little scope for fourbe-like activities, but the nature of the servants themselves is such that any limited opportunities for fourbe-like behaviour are not grasped. Indeed, the role of the male servants in these plays is largely a minor one, and it would be possible to conceive of most of Dancourt's shorter comedies continuing to exist even if the servants were removed from them, whereas the fourbe tends to occupy a central position in any play in which he finds himself. There is, however, one servant in these plays who not only occupies a central position in the comedy in which he occurs, but also shows much of the fourbe's love of trickery, and that is Crispin, in La Gazette de Hollande. For when Crispin is obliged to assume the role of bookshop-assistant in order to give his master a chance to woo the daughter of the shop owner, he quickly warms to the task of fobbing off a stream of customers, and the resultant comic scenes become the central interest of the play. Indeed, were it not for the repetitive nature of these scenes, and the fact that his continual use of similar techniques gives the impression that he lacks the fourbe's amazing flexibility of approach, Crispin might well emerge as one of the most fourbe-like servants ever to appear on the French stage.

²⁷The Chevalier is unmasked in scene 13; Merlin's history as a card-sharper is revealed in scene 3.

²⁸L'Epine's previous involvement with dyeing is revealed in the opening scene; the dyeing episode takes place behind the scenes, but is reported by L'Epine in scene 22.

²⁹In L'Opéra de village, for example, La Flèche reflects on the possible consequences for him of being involved in an enlèvement. This and other similar examples are discussed below, pp.174-5.

(b) The Three- and Five-Act Plays

We have seen that in Dancourt's shorter plays only one male servant - Crispin in La Gazette de Hollande - comes near to being a fourbe; and when we turn to the longer plays we find that they present a similar picture, with only Merlin in the very early Les Fonds perdus showing any significant resemblance to the conventional stage trickster.

We find, for example, that, like Crispin in La Gazette de Hollande, and like the conventional fourbe, but unlike most of Dancourt's other male servants, Merlin finds himself occupying so central a position within the play in which he occurs that it could not conceivably exist without him, since not only does Les Fonds perdus differ from many of Dancourt's other comedies in that a love intrigue forms its main centre of interest, but Merlin is of crucial importance to that intrigue, as it is he, assisted by his female counterpart, who leads it to a successful conclusion. For, when it is discovered that Oronte and Mme G ronte each hope to marry the other's child, and that the children, Val re and Ang lique, are themselves in love, the servants first use various means to induce the elderly parents to give away their wealth to the youngsters, and then trick them into signing the young lovers' marriage contract.

Moreover, not only does Merlin resemble the fourbe in being of central importance to the play, but his behaviour, too, bears some resemblance to that of the fourbe, as is shown when his na ve young master's despair at the apparent impossibility of securing his happiness prompts the servant to reply in the following terms:

Oh bien, j'ai donc plus d'esprit que vous; car je vois clairement, moi, que pourvu que vous me laissiez faire, et que vous ne traversiez point mes desseins par vos impertinents scrupules; je vois, vous dis-je, monsieur votre p re et Madame G ronte dans la n cessit  de faire tout ce que nous voudrons.³⁰

Such a reply, as well as revealing that he shares the fourbe's eagerness to take matters into his own hands, shows that, like the

³⁰I,1.

fourbe, he has a certain pride in his abilities, seeing himself as superior to his master when it comes to finding solutions to difficulties; what is more, it demonstrates that - again like the fourbe - Merlin likes to be less than totally explicit when it comes to discussing his plans with his master, thereby maintaining his master's dependence upon him.

And when Merlin sets about implementing the plan which he has in mind, he again emerges as a fourbe-like creature, showing the stage trickster's ability both to manipulate his opponents and to counter potential reversals with ingenious if somewhat eccentric arguments. Indeed, in one scene, he even shows a certain resemblance to Scapin in Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin, for when he begins cunningly to arouse the interest of Mme Géronte by pretending, in her presence, to seek Oronte in order to relay to the latter a sad piece of news which he has supposedly been asked to conceal from the good lady,³¹ he reminds one of Scapin, who ensnares Géronte by pretending, in the latter's presence, to seek him high and low.³² Moreover, as the scene progresses and Merlin is 'persuaded' to reveal his 'secret', the resemblance to Scapin increases, for just as Scapin proceeds to spin a most amazing yarn, telling Géronte that his son is being held to ransom aboard a Turkish ship which set sail while he just happened to be aboard it, so Merlin claims, equally ingeniously, that his master is being forced to marry someone against his will. And when Mme Géronte objects that it is not normally possible to force someone into marriage, Merlin, fourbe-like, has a ready answer: his master has signed a promise of marriage. Like so many fourbes' explanations, this affords Merlin only temporary respite, however, for Mme Géronte counters by observing that if Valère signed such a document then he must indeed have been in love. Again Merlin responds, this time in terms which are so patently ridiculous that they constitute overacting on the part of the servant, since, in a realistic context, they would warn Mme Géronte that she is being duped:

Point du tout, madame, ce n'était que par manière de conversation;
et cependant, voyez la malice, on s'en sert aujourd'hui pour
l'inquiéter, et pour traverser la passion qu'il a pour vous.

What is more, this tendency of Merlin to engage in fourbe-like

³¹II,5.

³²II,7.

overacting becomes even more apparent when, using comical circumlocution and an incongruously elevated register, he proceeds to relate how his master, as a result of his supposed breach of promise, was imprisoned in the Châtelet. Here is part of his narrative:

Nous sommes arrivés à la petite porte d'un grand hôtel, on a ouvert une barrière pour nous faire plus d'honneur. Mon maître est sorti de sa chaise, deux de ces honnêtes personnes qui l'avaient amené, l'ont pris par la main, et lui ont servi d'écuyers. Il ne s'était jamais vu un si beau train.³³

Merlin in Les Fonds perdus is, however, an exception, and no other servant in the longer plays comes as near as he does to the true fourbe. Much more typical of the longer plays as a whole is Madame Artus, in which, despite some early signs to the contrary, the servant emerges as an essentially un-fourbe-like and insignificant figure who often acts as little more than a utilitarian bearer of messages.³⁴

Madame Artus is typical of these plays in a number of respects, most notably in that, as with most of the shorter plays, intrigue - normally the preserve of the fourbe - is not of central importance to it. In the case of Madame Artus, intrigue is pushed to one side by the exploration of character; in other plays, such as Les Bourgeoises à la mode and Le Chevalier à la mode, it is the depiction of the foibles of society which is central; but, whatever the reason, in all of the longer plays, with the exception of Les Fonds perdus - discussed above - and Les Enfants de Paris, intrigue is not a prominent feature.³⁵ As a result, whereas plays in which the fourbe thrives normally contain many threatened reversals, and have as their focus the servant's clever response to these crises, both Madame Artus and most of the other longer plays have few such incidents, developing, instead, with

³³The use of such euphemistic circumlocution by servants is further explored below, pp.326-7.

³⁴The early scene which might mislead one into seeing Merlin as a fourbe is the fifth scene in Act I, in which he displays some imagination in attempting to explain away his spendthrift young master's felling of his mother's forest, and skilfully counters the perceptive queries of Damis, his master's uncle, explaining, for example, that the trees were cut down to improve the view.

³⁵This is true even of La Femme d'intrigues, the title of which might lead one to expect otherwise, since the central position of the lady referred to in the title is not used to explore intrigue, but to provide opportunities for numerous social tableaux.

relative ease, and often coming to a conclusion as the result of chance.

But if Madame Artus is typical of the longer plays in that it lacks acute crises of the type which traditionally give the fourbe the opportunity to step into the breach and, by a piece of brilliant sleight of hand, save the situation, it is also typical of these plays in that its male servant is not looked to as someone capable even of guiding the play along its relatively smooth course.

In the case of Madame Artus, one finds that the non-servant figures - who have much of the self-assurance observed in the young masters of the shorter plays - are themselves willing and able to conduct their affairs in such a way as to ensure a steady, if unspectacular, development of the plot. Thus, when a solution has to be found to the problem of the Tartuffe-like protagonist who has poisoned the mind of the mother of Dorante (persuading her that she, Mme Artus, should marry the son while the mother herself weds Eraste, the daughter's young lover), it is to each other, and not to the servant, that the non-servant figures turn. Indeed, when the uncle, Damis, commenting to his niece on the strength of the family coalition formed to force his sister to change her mind, declares, 'Contre ses sentiments, s'il nous fallait combattre,/Soit, vous, Dorante, Eraste, et moi, nous serons quatre', he clearly discounts the servant's help, and it is left to Merlin to suggest that he and his female counterpart might have a role to play: 'Et Finette, et Merlin, sont-ils comptés pour rien?'.³⁶

Similarly, in Le Chevalier à la mode, the two main protagonists - a wealthy widow eager to acquire a titled husband, and the scoundrel Chevalier whom she would like to marry - have definite ideas of their own, and take action on their own initiative, so that for most of the time the male servant, Crispin, is reduced to playing a minor role, often as confidant,³⁷ his only impact on the course of the play being when he inadvertently allows a list of the Chevalier's mistresses to fall into the hands of Mme Patin.³⁸ And in La Fête de village there is

³⁶IV,3.

³⁷For example, in Act IV scene 1.

³⁸The list, which he has dropped, is picked up by Mme Patin's servant, Lisette, in Act II scene 11.

a similar situation, for the play centres on a group of determined social climbers who know their own minds and are capable of taking action by themselves, with the result that they do not turn for assistance to the servant. Consequently, the servant's rare appearances, although useful for reasons of utility and comedy, could be dispensed with without radically altering the structure of the play.

In other plays, however, the protagonists do seek the assistance of other characters, but, significantly, when they do, it is not to the male servants that they turn, but to what might be termed professional tricksters - fourbes in the non-theatrical sense of the word - who, while employing some of the servant fourbe's traditional weapons, such as disguise, engage in their exploits with an earnestness which does not allow them to jeopardise the outcome by overacting, since it is solely in the hope of gain that they undertake their commissions.

In La Femme d'intrigues, for example, the far-from-naïve lady referred to in the title, Mme Thibaut, whom Lancaster describes as 'a woman who combines the trades of a matrimonial agent, pawnbroker, lobbyist, and promoter',³⁹ calls for the assistance of a certain La Brie when it comes to persuading Cléante (himself an impostor) that she is in fact a rich widow whom it is worth marrying. But although La Brie helps her to deceive Cléante by playing the role of a lawyer who is managing her supposed inheritance,⁴⁰ he does not - like most servant fourbes - devise the scheme himself, merely implementing Mme Thibaut's own proposal. Moreover, the money which he is to earn by playing his part is of prime importance to La Brie (who, like a true businessman, spends an entire scene negotiating his fee), so that when he does put on his act he behaves with relative straightforwardness, avoiding the tendency towards extravagant behaviour which is the hallmark of the fun-loving fourbe, and which so often threatens to jeopardise the latter's schemes.⁴¹ And in Les Bourgeoises à la mode a similar situation obtains, with assistance for the bold non-servants who

³⁹H. C. Lancaster, A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, Part IV, p.777.

⁴⁰II,3.

⁴¹It is in Act I scene 6 that La Brie negotiates his fee. That his motivation, and that of other figures like him, differs from that of Dancourt's servant figures is discussed below, pp.177-8.

dominate the play - the social-climbing bourgeoises of the title, and a false Chevalier - coming not from a servant, but from a professional fourbe, Frontin, who sometimes acts as the Chevalier's servant, and who, like La Brie, is not only very insistent on specifying his share of any profits,⁴² but, when he does put on an act to persuade the besotted Simon to hand over more of his money, shows less of a tendency to overact than did the servant Merlin in a comparable scene in Les Fonds perdus.⁴³

It is clear, then, that Madame Artus is typical of the longer plays not only in that it lacks a brisk intrigue with recurrent crises, such as those upon which the fourbe normally thrives, but in that its servant is not even considered as someone capable of providing solutions to drive the comedy forward at an even pace. Madame Artus is, however, also typical of these plays in another respect: namely, in that the male servant, quite apart from not being looked to as a source of bright ideas, shows few signs of possessing the fourbe's fundamental character, and may even display characteristics which are the antithesis of those normally found in the fourbe.

In the case of Madame Artus, the servant's un-fourbe-like nature manifests itself primarily in his approach to difficulties, which, in its caution, resembles that of the servants in some of the shorter plays.⁴⁴ For whereas the fourbe is eager to engage in action, and will willingly devise schemes to surmount the most intractable of problems, Merlin, on the few occasions when his advice is sought, tends to recommend that chance be given an opportunity to throw up a solution.

⁴²In the play's second scene, Frontin says of the Chevalier: 'S'il ne fait ma fortune avec la sienne, je gâterai bien ses affaires'. And he later opens direct negotiations with the Chevalier (III,12).

⁴³In Act II scene 5 of Les Fonds perdus (discussed on pp.93-4, above), Merlin engages in not a little overacting when inducing Mme Gêronte to hand over money - supposedly to effect the release of his young master; in Les Bourgeoises à la mode, on the other hand, although Frontin, in undertaking the fleecing of Simon, may arouse his victim's curiosity in a manner similar to that employed by Merlin (pretending that he has been sworn to secrecy), he does not overact, but employs a much more straightforward argument, simply maintaining that if money is not forthcoming Simon's loved one will flee to a convent to escape from her creditors (IV,9).

⁴⁴See pp.86-7, above.

Thus, when Dorante wonders how he may explain his spendthrift behaviour to his mother, Merlin advises him that he should 'attendre avecque patience,/Et remettre au hasard toute sa confiance',⁴⁵ and when the young man subsequently learns that his mother is proposing to marry him off, Merlin again fails to recommend positive action, but, instead, advises him to wait and see if a solution will spontaneously present itself:

Voyons d'abord quel est ce parti qu'on propose,
On peut gagner du temps, et différer la chose,
Il arrive souvent par hasard, que sait-on? ⁴⁶
Sur tout ce qu'on voudra gardez de dire non.

Similarly, in Le Chevalier à la mode, Crispin, showing neither the fourbe's eagerness to confront difficulties, nor his disdain for those who are too feeble to grasp the nettle of action, advises his master, when the latter is caught in an awkward situation, to avoid trouble rather than to face it.⁴⁷ And when ordered to provide Mme Patin with an explanation of the connection between his master and the women named in the list of his master's mistresses (which he has allowed to fall into her hands), rather than eagerly grasping the opportunity to produce ingenious arguments, he shows a marked reluctance to offer any explanation, although, under pressure from his master, he does eventually produce explanations which are at least humorous, if not totally extravagant.⁴⁸

Moreover, whereas the fourbe's mental abilities usually put him at an advantage over his master, who may find it difficult to follow the leaps and bounds of his servant's imaginative mind, in Le Chevalier à la mode the reverse is the case, for although by no means a dullard, Crispin - much to the surprise of his master, who at one point exclaims, 'Quoi, tu ne vois pas cela tout d'abord?'⁴⁹ - has difficulty in understanding the cunning and devious reasoning of his self-assured master. Furthermore, this same un-fourbe-like tendency towards dullness is also to be found in other of the longer plays, such as

⁴⁵I,4.

⁴⁶I,6.

⁴⁷When the Chevalier is confronted by Lucile and Mme Patin, both of whom he has been wooing, Crispin advises him to flee: 'Sortons d'ici, monsieur, c'est le plus sûr..../Monsieur, encore une fois, sortons' (V,6).

⁴⁸III,4.

⁴⁹IV,1.

Les Enfants de Paris, where Merlin, on being asked by Finette if he has not already revealed their secret, replies, 'Non, par ma foi,/Et mon maître est encor bien plus discret que moi,/Il n'a jamais voulu l'entendre',⁵⁰ and where there is the suggestion that the servant may even share the lourdaud's intemperate love of drink.⁵¹

There can be no doubt, then, that in Dancourt's longer plays, as in his shorter comedies, the male servants are, in general, no fourbes. Rather, in both the longer and shorter plays, these figures emerge as relatively insignificant and unmemorable creatures who - unlike the fourbe - have little impact upon the comedies in which they occur. Indeed, so minor is their contribution to the comedies in which they feature that the character of these is, in the end, not noticeably different from that of the many plays by Dancourt in which there occur no male servants at all.

⁵⁰ III, 7.

⁵¹ I, 7.

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Despite the considerable diversity of the male servants, one general fact clearly emerges from the preceding chapters, and that is that whereas the fourbe may previously have been the predominant male servant type in French comedy, in the plays under consideration this is no longer the case. For although fourbe characteristics are very much in evidence in Regnard (the majority of whose servants show some fourbe elements), none of his servants emerges as a major fourbe comparable to Scapin in Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin. And even if fourbe characteristics are again strongly represented in Lesage's La Tontine and Crispin rival de son maître, it is only in La Tontine - the minor of the two plays - that these are not to some extent counterbalanced by aspects untypical of the fourbe, while in Turcaret, the third of Lesage's plays to fall within the scope of this study, the major servant is in many respects the antithesis of the fourbe. Moreover, in the remaining authors - Dufresny, Destouches, and Dancourt -, whose comedies together constitute well over three-quarters of the plays being examined, the male servants, with a few minor exceptions, are un-fourbe-like characters who lack the fundamental instincts of the conventional stage trickster.

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PART II

THE ETHOS OF THE MALE SERVANT

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The relationship between the male servants and their fourbe ancestors having been established, we now turn our attention to the ethos of the valets, and, in the chapters which follow (each of which deals with a different author), examine various aspects of their moral dimension. Particular attention is paid to their view of life and the world around them; to the considerations which motivate them; and to the extent to which, in the eyes of the audience, they emerge as moral, immoral, or amoral creatures. It must be noted, however, that although certain servants may give the impression of being either good or evil, this should not necessarily be construed as implying that they are advocates of a particular moral view, for, as we shall see, when they do show an awareness of the world around them, their attitude towards it is almost universally one of carefree and amused acceptance.¹ Only in the comedies of Destouches, which constitute a transition between conventional comedy and the comédie larmoyante which was to follow it, do the servants appear to have an identifiable, if limited, moralising function.

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¹This is in keeping with the character of the plays in which they occur. In French Comic Drama from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century, Geoffrey Brereton, in a chapter on 'the cynical generation' (Dancourt, Regnard, Dufresny and Lesage), contrasts the playwrights of the period with those who were to follow them, observing that 'unlike their successors, they make few moral judgements, even implicitly, but depict contemporary society with an easy acceptance.... Satire, supposing a basis of moral indignation, is either absent or innocuous' (p.165).

Chapter 1

REGNARD

When one turns to consider the outlook of the male servants in Regnard, the first general observation one might make is that these characters are essentially urban figures.¹ Thus, not only are they familiar with the ways of urban society,² but, like their masters, they tend actively to reject the countryside and anything associated with it. One finds, therefore, that in Les Ménechmes, where the Chevalier looks down on a twin brother who has never left the provinces and has remained what he considers to be a country bumpkin, his servant, Valentin, clearly shares his point of view, as can be seen from the way in which he describes the twin to his master:

Son esprit ... n'est pas semblable au vôtre;
Il est brusque, impoli; son humeur est tout autre.
On voit bien qu'il n'a pas goûté l'air de Paris;
Et c'est un franc Picard qui tient de son pays.³

Moreover, in Le Bal Merlin holds similar views on provincials, and expresses horror that Léonor's father should intend marrying her to such a figure,⁴ while in Démocrite Strabon is if anything less enamoured of rural society, and not only consistently looks down on Thaler (the peasant who provides Démocrite with food in his country retreat) as an animal - even when he himself is persuading Thaler that moral scruples are pointless⁵ - but, having sampled the delights of the court, refuses to countenance a return to the country with his master.⁶

But if Regnard's servants appear to favour urban society, they do so not merely as the result of a negative reaction to things rural,

¹Although city and court are by no means synonymous concepts, in the present chapter the term 'urban' is used to embrace both city and court life, since, in the eyes of the servants, both clearly share an aura of non-rural and non-provincial sophistication.

²Valentin in Les Ménechmes, for example, has a wide network of acquaintances in Paris (I,2), while in Le Joueur Hector is familiar with urban practices, such as the procedures for borrowing money (I,6).

³II,1.

⁴Sc.4.

⁵V,2.

⁶II,5 and III,4.

but because urban society itself is positively attractive to them, and is so in two particular ways. In the first place, urban society appears generally to attract them quite simply because it is fashionable and because they themselves wish to appear as fashionable individuals. Thus, where servants are possessed of masters who conform to the latest fashions of the sophisticated urban society in which they find themselves, they tend to approve of, or even to emulate, their masters' behaviour;⁷ and when a servant's master is not fashionable, the servant may nevertheless himself behave in accordance with the latest fashion, thereby demonstrating even more clearly his positive desire to appear as a fashionable urban figure. One finds, therefore, that when Valère in Le Joueur behaves as a petit-maître - a fact made clear by the female servant, Nérine⁸ -, Hector, far from criticising his master for conforming to this singularly silly fashion, uses its very fashionableness as a defence when he justifies his master's behaviour by maintaining quite simply that 'c'est le goût d'à présent',⁹ while in Les Ménechmes Valentin not only supports his fashionable master, but even claims to emulate his behaviour:

Je vous imite en tout. Vous, d'une ardeur extrême,
Buvez, jouez, aimez; je bois, je joue, et j'aime:
Et si je suis coquet, c'est vous qui le premier,
Consommé dans cet art, m'apprîtes le métier.¹⁰

Moreover, in Démocrite, Strabon, whose master scorns urban values, himself supports fashionable behaviour to the extent that when he woos his female opposite number, Cléanthis, he does so as a petit-maître who has left behind him a trail of broken hearts:

⁷ It should not be forgotten, of course, that, as Marguerite-Anne Sharon d'Obremer points out in Les Rôles des femmes dans la comédie française, p.14, the general emulation of masters and mistresses by their servants is a common device in comedy long before this period. Moreover, such behaviour on stage may to some extent reflect real life, since, as F. C. Roe (citing Fleury) demonstrates in his 'Les Types sociaux dans la comédie de Molière: le valet et la servante', p.173, it was not uncommon for servants to adopt the behaviour of those occupying a higher station in life.

⁸ Nérine describes his behaviour in a passage quoted in full above, p.27. For a brief discussion of the history and development of the petit-maître phenomenon, see Frédéric Deloffre's introduction to Le Petit-Maître in Marivaux, Théâtre complet, II, 145-9.

⁹ I,2.

¹⁰ I,2.

CLEANTHIS :

Ainsi donc votre cœur s'est souvent enflammé?

Vous aimiez autrefois?

STRABON :

Non; mais j'étais aimé.

Je me suis signalé par plus d'une victoire.¹¹

It is clear, then, that one of the reasons for urban society being so attractive to the male servants in Regnard's comedies is that it is perceived by them as a fashionable environment in which the most up-to-date and sophisticated modes of behaviour are able to flourish. But it is not only urban society's fashionable sophistication which makes Regnard's valets view it with favour, for its other main attraction for these figures is that they see it as a world where mental ability reigns supreme, and in which - possibly because mental ability holds such sway in it - they can imagine a happy future for themselves.

The first of these points is perhaps the more obvious, for it has already been noted that Regnard's fourbe-like servants are particularly proud of their mental abilities,¹² and it only remains to observe that it is, paradoxically, one of his least fourbe-like servants - Strabon in Démocrite - who puts most clearly into words the belief that non-rural society is the proper environment for those with mental ability, exclaiming 'Quand on a de l'esprit, ma foi, vive la cour!'.¹³

But the second point - the fact that the servants are happy to see a future for themselves in the urban jungle which surrounds them - is less immediately obvious, primarily because the servants, faced with behaviour which is presented as typical of urban society, may themselves make pronouncements which can be seen as critical of

¹¹II,7.

¹²See above, pp.21-3.

¹³II,2.

it.¹⁴ Thus, in La Sérénade, one finds Scapin uttering an ironic 'Voilà un motif fort charitable!' in response to Champagne's praise of money-lending ('Ma foi ... il n'y a rien de tel, quand on a de l'argent, que d'en aider des particuliers dans leurs nécessités pressantes'),¹⁵ and in Le Légataire universel Crispin responds with a quick 'J'ai cela de commun avec d'honnêtes gens' when Lisette observes that he is in debt,¹⁶ while criticism might also seem to be implied in the same Crispin's description of how he found the lawyers 'avec dames ... de bonne mine', where, in his estimation, 'ils passaient ... quelque acte à la sourdine',¹⁷ as well as in Hector's witty 'Et l'or devient à rien' in Le Joueur, when he replies to his master's praise of the gambler as someone in whose hands copper is transformed into gold.¹⁸ In fact, however, such comments by the servants occur only sporadically, and in no way constitute a sustained satirical attack on society;¹⁹ indeed, so unco-ordinated are they that they have no impact either on the play or on the personality of the other characters, and, in their context, must be seen as witty fireworks, or laughter-provoking devices, which are morally neutral in tone.²⁰

Moreover, even if, on occasion, servants appear genuinely to complain of a certain aspect of urban behaviour, they do so only when

¹⁴ Whether or not the social practices of the time are accurately reflected in the allusions to contemporary behaviour made by Regnard's servants - or by the servants of the other playwrights - is not a matter which falls within the scope of the present study. It should, nevertheless, be recognised that the servants' remarks on social customs may be less than objective, since they are made within a particular dramatic and comic framework and will to some extent be coloured by the servants' own prejudices and aspirations.

¹⁵ Sc.13.

¹⁶ II,8.

¹⁷ II,8.

¹⁸ III,6.

¹⁹ This point is supported by Gustave Attinger, who, in L'Esprit de la commedia dell'arte dans le théâtre français, compares the approach adopted by Regnard in his French plays with that of his earlier Italian comedies, observing that 'on chercherait en vain, dans son nouveau répertoire, l'équivalent des anciens morceaux satiriques' (p.261).

²⁰ Some commentators have, nevertheless, given undue weight to these witty remarks. It is, for instance, probably as a result of taking such comments by Hector in Le Joueur too seriously that Jules Wogue, in La Comédie aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles, comes to see that servant as 'philosophe et observateur' (p.241).

they themselves are victims of it - Hector in Le Joueur, for instance, only alludes to the hard-heartedness of usurers when he and his master wish to borrow money²¹ - and do not normally offer a reasoned criticism of the principle on which it is based. Indeed, it is impossible to see any complaints made by Regnard's servants as part of a serious social criticism not only because the servants frequently have adopted, or propose to adopt, behaviour similar to that which they may appear to criticise in others,²² but also because their own pronouncements make it clear that the future which they would like to see for themselves is to be found in a society based on the same principles as the one in which they already exist, but in which they will occupy a more elevated position, attained, it would appear, by employing the same disreputable tactics as those who have preceded them.

Thus, when Scapin in La Sérénade complains of having to invent 'mille fourberies' for his master's benefit, and vows that in the future he will work for himself and will himself become a master, he clearly implies that he recognises the necessity of intrigue for survival in urban society but is more than willing to accept this and to indulge in the intrigues necessary for his elevation,²³ while when Valentin in Les Ménechmes looks into the future he sees a society very similar to the one in which he finds himself already, but where, instead of being a servant, he himself will have made his way and will be able to boast servants of his own:

Devant qu'il soit deux ans,
Je veux que l'on me voie, avec des airs fendants,
Dans un char magnifique, allant à la campagne,
Ebranler les pavés sous six chevaux d'Espagne.
Un Suisse à barbe torse, et nombre de valets,²⁴
Intendants, cuisiniers, rempliront mon palais.

²¹II,14.

²²In Le Légataire universel, for example, Crispin's comments on the behaviour of the lawyers whom he has sought out (cited above, p.106) lose any critical impact which they might otherwise have when one remembers that the servant has already admitted to behaving in a not dissimilar manner himself. For, referring to the procureur for whom he previously worked, he has already made the following observation: 'Sa femme était jolie; et, dans quelques affaires,/Nous jugions à huis clos de petits commissaires' (I,1).

²³Sc.12.

²⁴IV,2.

And in Le Joueur, Hector, in his much-quoted opening soliloquy, likewise dreams of his future in terms of the established order:

Que servir un joueur est un maudit métier!
Ne serai-je jamais laquais d'un sous-fermier?
Je ronflerais mon soûl la grasse matinée,
Et je m'enivrerais le long de la journée;
Je ferais mon chemin; j'aurais un bon emploi;
Je serais dans la suite un conseiller du roi,
Rat de cave, ou commis; et, que sait-on? peut-être
Je deviendrais un jour aussi gras que mon maître.²⁵

Such strongly-expressed discontent with their present lot, linked to the dream of social advancement, has no real equivalent in Molière, where servants, as Mollie Gerard Davis points out, may complain about the behaviour of particular masters, but, with the exception of Sosie, do not complain about being servants;²⁶ however, if Regnard's figures have a much wider outlook than Molière's, and dream of a future when they may not even be servants any longer, this is not to say that they are revolutionary figures dreaming of a new era when social structures will have altered for the better: rather, they are merely fashionable figures, wedded to the urban society where fashion flourishes, and dreaming only of a time when they will themselves occupy a more comfortable position on the existing social ladder.²⁷

The attitude of Regnard's servants to society in general is essentially pragmatic: the existing order is accepted, and advancement, if it comes, will, in all probability, come through the manipulation of society's own rules; however, this pragmatism on the part of Regnard's servants is not merely limited to their view of society, but extends also to their views on their other major concern, namely, love

²⁵I,1.

²⁶'Masters and Servants in the Plays of Molière', p.147. That Regnard's servants are not the first such figures to exhibit a measure of social ambition is, however, demonstrated by T. E. Lawrenson in his introduction to Lesage's Crispin rival de son maître, pp.30-1, and by Maurice Baudin's 'Un Tournant de la carrière du valet de comédie'.

²⁷In this respect they resemble Lesage's servants, discussed below, pp.143-4. Indeed, T. E. Lawrenson, in his introduction to Crispin rival de son maître, specifically likens Lesage's Crispin to Scapin in Regnard's La Sérénade, when he observes that 'neither Scapin nor Crispin wants to abolish the class of masters; on the contrary, they wish to accede to it, with all its concomitant social prestige and advantage' (p.31).

and marriage. Indeed, while the majority of these figures assist their masters in their amorous pursuits,²⁸ they may not always share their view of love, and, if they do not, the reason often lies in the extent to which the masters' own outlook is either realistic and down-to-earth or romantic and idealistic; for the servant is the enemy of purely idealistic romance.

There are, for example, masters who are eager to look after their own interests by marrying or consorting with rich women, and with these the servants find little difficulty in agreeing. When, for instance, Valère in Le Joueur (who elsewhere may express a more disinterested love for her)²⁹ indicates that if he fails to win Angélique he will fall back on the rich Comtesse, Hector is enthusiastic:

Ce dessein me plaît fort;
J'aime un amour fondé sur un bon coffre-fort.³⁰

And in Les Ménechmes a variation on this theme occurs when Valentin, who has been unsuccessful in persuading his master to persist in his original plan to marry the ugly but rich Araminte,³¹ later joyfully grasps at the opportunity of helping his master both to marry the much more attractive Isabelle, and to trick his twin out of part of his inheritance:

Tout succède à mes vœux; et j'espère, en ce jour,
Servir utilement la fortune et l'amour.³²

But if there are, on the one hand, masters who would marry for money, there are, on the other hand, masters who might be seen as advocates of romantic love, and, indeed, even some of the more self-interested masters may at times - like Valère in Le Joueur - express themselves in such a way as to suggest that they are not immune to

²⁸See above, pp.18-19.

²⁹Torn between his love of gambling and his love for Angélique, Valère typically gives expression to the latter when his gambling has proved disastrous, as is the case in Act IV scene 13.

³⁰I,6.

³¹I,2.

³²III,13.

romantic love. When they do voice such sentiments, Regnard's masters are at their closest to the starry-eyed young lovers of traditional comedy, and, as such, their views differ most radically from those of society as expressed both by the money-orientated senex figures and by the cynical petits-maitres;³³ yet although the servants support their masters and give no sign of agreeing with their masters' fathers, they do not, on the other hand, completely support the concept of romantic love, but, rather, propose a view of love which, if it is not entirely influenced by financial considerations, is at least based on a down-to-earth and unsentimentally realistic view of life.

One finds, for example, that although, unlike the traditional senex figure, the servant does not see money as the central issue in match-making, he does recognise that money has its uses both in everyday affairs and in the promotion of love-affairs. Thus, in La Sérénade, Scapin, partly serious, partly teasing, having announced to his master that it looks as if he will have to give up any hope of marrying Léonor, adds:

Et le pis que j'y trouve, c'est que nous n'avons pas un sou
pour nous en consoler.³⁴

Moreover, when Valère shows him the letter which Léonor has sent, and asks his opinion of it, Scapin's response is equally unromantic:

VALERE:

Que dis-tu de cette lettre-là?

SCAPIN:

Je dis, monsieur, que ce n'est pas là une lettre de change.³⁵

This comparison - an unfavourable one - between love-letters and lettres de change is a favourite among male servants in Regnard, and it appears not only in La Sérénade but also in Les Folies amoureuses. In the latter play, Crispin expresses concern about where he and his master are to find money to enable them to engineer Agathe's elopement, but Eraste merely shows him the letter which he has received from his love, and intimates that 'l'amour y pourvoira'.³⁶ Crispin's thoughts on this, once his master has left, are predictable:

³³Society's attitude to marriage is summed up by Scapin in La Sérénade: 'C'est la raison et l'intérêt', he observes, 'qui font aujourd'hui les mariages' (Sc.8).

³⁴Sc.5.

³⁵Sc.5.

³⁶II,12.

L'amour y pourvoira!
Il semble à ces messieurs, dans leur manie étrange,
Que leurs billets d'amour soient des lettres de change.³⁷

And the same theme crops up once more in Les Ménechmes when Valentin eloquently praises the money which his master has just acquired by comparing it favourably with a different sort of billet - the billet doux:

De grâce, laissez-moi promener mes regards
Sur ces billets moulés, dont l'usage est utile.
La belle impression! les beaux noms! le beau style!
Ce sont là les billets qu'il faut négocier,
Et non pas vos poulets, vos chiffons de papier,
Où l'amour se distille en de fades paroles,
Et qui ne sont partout pleins que de fariboles.³⁸

Moreover, if the servant counters his master's effusive expressions of romantic love with suggestions that money is not altogether unimportant, there are also indications that the servant, with his down-to-earth attitude, shows a marked lack of appreciation of the foundations of romantic love, understanding only love's baser elements. Thus Valentin in Les Ménechmes, having helped to lose his master's love letters, mischievously offers him someone else's collection of letters:

Tenez, en voilà d'autres
Qui vous consoleront d'avoir perdu les vôtres.³⁹

While in Le Bal the servant, Merlin, shows a similar lack of appreciation of romantic love when - again not entirely seriously - he outlines his reasons for helping his master to save Léonor from the uncouth Sotencour, using terms which stress the girl's attractiveness as a purely physical object:

Morbleu! j'entre en furie
En songeant qu'un morceau si tendre et si friand ⁴⁰
Doit tomber sous la main d'un maudit Bas Normand.

What is more, a similar use of 'friand' occurs in Démocrate when the rather base Strabon, attempting to woo Cléanthis in the most eloquent of terms, nevertheless ends up comparing her to a tasty morsel.⁴¹

³⁷II,13.

³⁸IV,8.

³⁹I,2.

⁴⁰Sc.4. My italics.

⁴¹IV,7.

Strabon's interest in Cléanthis is important for another reason, however, for it draws attention not only to the fact that Regnard's male servants do have attachments of their own⁴² (unlike the fourbes of Molière, who, with the possible exception of Covielle, have no strong sentimental attachments), but also to the fact that the down-to-earth and almost base attitude of Regnard's servants towards the love-affairs of others is extended even to their own affairs. Indeed, the down-to-earth attitude towards love which characterises many of Regnard's servants can possibly be seen most clearly in the way in which they themselves approach marriage with their feet firmly planted on the ground. When, for example, in Démocrite, the already-married Strabon and Cléanthis decide to resume life together, they do so in the full knowledge of each other's faults,⁴³ and the whole approach of Regnard's servants to love and marriage is almost typified by a discussion in Les Ménechmes where Finette's reply to Valentin's proposal of marriage is far from an unthinking 'yes':

FINETTE:

A ne t'en pas mentir, j'en aurais grande envie;
Mais je crains ...

VALENTIN:

Que crains-tu?

FINETTE:

De faire une folie.

VALENTIN:

J'en fais une cent fois bien plus grande que toi,
Et je ne laisse pas de te donner ma foi.⁴⁴

Moreover, if Crispin and Lisette in Le Légataire universel marry, they do so in full knowledge of each other's faults, as becomes clear when

⁴²The servants in Démocrite, who are already married but separated, eventually decide to resume their life together (V,7); in Le Légataire universel the fact that Crispin and Lisette intend to marry is revealed in the first scene; in the closing scene of Les Ménechmes Valentin and Finette agree to marry each other; in Le Bal Merlin flirts with Lisette (Sc.4), although this is not subsequently developed; and in Le Distrain Carlin admits that he has been struck by Lisette's charms (II,1-2). One might also see evidence of sentimental attachment in expressions such as 'mon adorable' and 'ma chère enfant' used between servants in La Sérénade (Sc.3) and Le Retour imprévu (Sc.2), although it is not unlikely that such expressions are tinged with irony, and should, therefore, not be taken too seriously. In Les Folies amoureuses, there is no direct evidence that the servants are in any way sentimentally attached to each other, but only in Le Joueur is there open hostility between the servants.

⁴³V,7.

⁴⁴V,6.

Crispin alludes to the fact that Lisette's hand in marriage is to be his prize for successfully helping his master:

CRISPIN:

Car je dois t'épouser, si ...

LISETTE:

D'accord ... mais enfin ...

CRISPIN:

Comment donc?

LISETTE:

Tu m'as l'air d'être un peu libertin.

CRISPIN:

Ne nous reprochons rien.

LISETTE:

On sait de tes fredaines.

CRISPIN:

Nous sommes but à but; ne sais-je point des tiennes?⁴⁵

Such exchanges mark a profoundly pragmatic approach to life, which, after his commitment to the values of fashionable society, is undoubtedly one of the most important features of the servant's outlook in Regnard.

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Given that Regnard's male servants frequently express discontent with their lot, sometimes even dreaming of a time when they will have advanced to a higher position in society,⁴⁶ and given, too, that there is a certain practicality about their approach to love, one might be forgiven for assuming that their behaviour would be strongly motivated by self-interest in the normal sense of the word. Close examination reveals, however, that this is not the case, despite the frequently-expressed belief that self-interest is the hallmark of eighteenth-century servants.⁴⁷

Certainly, it is true that there are occasional suggestions by servants that the hope of straightforward gain does influence their actions (the most explicit of these being Crispin's assertion in

⁴⁵II,8.

⁴⁶In addition to the servants in La Sérénade, Les Ménechmes, and Le Joueur, who have already been examined (above, pp.107-8), and who see a future for themselves in society, the servants in Le Bal (Sc.1) and Démocrite (I,1) both express dissatisfaction with their present lot.

⁴⁷D. Ordinaire, 'Gentilshommes, bourgeois et valets de la comédie', asserts, for example, that 'au XVIIIe siècle, valets et maîtres ne sont plus unis que par le lien fragile de l'intérêt' (p.232).

Le Légataire universel that of all the reasons for getting G ron te to make a will the most important is the reward promised him by his master if he is successful),⁴⁸ while, on the other hand, only one servant explicitly states that it is disinterested love for his master which makes him act as he does,⁴⁹ but other points - such as the fact that, despite their complaints, the majority of servants, including almost all of the most fourbe-like figures, do not in fact desert their masters although it might be in their financial interests to do so⁵⁰ - suggest that many of Regnard's servants are motivated principally by considerations quite different from straightforward self-interest - considerations which differ but little from those which drive Moli re's fourbes.

In Moli re, as in Regnard, the fourbe-like servant may certainly not be averse to serving his own interests, as is clearly demonstrated by Sganarelle's positive response, in Le M decin volant, to the offer of ten pistoles if only he will disguise himself as a doctor.⁵¹ But after this initial financial inducement different considerations maintain even Sganarelle's impetus, and other fourbes, although eager to acquire money to further the schemes in which they engage,⁵² are clearly motivated by two major and indissolubly linked desires, both of which can be fully satisfied only if, like Regnard's servants, they continue to serve their masters. These are, first, their desire to show their superiority over their masters (as well as over other figures), and, second, their desire to give full expression to their love of fun, particularly by indulging in the hazardous art of trickery.

⁴⁸I,1.

⁴⁹This statement is made by the somewhat untypical Carlin in Le Disteint (II,12).

⁵⁰There is a suggestion at the end of Le L gataire universel that Crispin and Lisette are about to start life on their own (V,9), but all the other fourbe-like servants, despite their stated intentions, appear to face the future at the side of their masters, even although, as in the case of Hector in Le Joueur, they would be financially better off if they were to cut their losses and leave. In this, they resemble Moli re's servants and differ from those of Lesage. Only Regnard's least fourbe-like servant, Strabon in D mocr te, clearly abandons his master (V,7).

⁵¹Sc.2.

⁵²Mascarille in L'Etourdi (I,2) and Scapin in Les Fourberies de Scapin (II,4) fall into this category: the money which they seek is to further their schemes, and not to line their own pockets.

In Molière, one can, for example, see that great scope for the servant to reverse the usual pattern of dominance and show his superiority over his master is afforded him by his known ability to devise schemes which will help his master, for the master's not infrequent reliance on his servant in this area places him at his servant's mercy, and, in a sense, reverses the usual master-servant relationship.⁵³ In Molière, this reversal of the customary pattern of dominance can be extremely overt, with Léandre in Les Fourberies de Scapin on one occasion being forced to kneel before Scapin to beg his forgiveness in order to be assured of his continued assistance,⁵⁴ and with Lélie kneeling before Mascarille to obtain more help in L'Etourdi,⁵⁵ but although in Regnard signs of dominance on the part of the servants are perhaps less overt, an examination of his plays soon reveals that here too similar motivation exists.

In Regnard, for example, many of the non-servant figures, and particularly the masters, are reduced to beseeching the male servants for help, even although they are not necessarily forced to their knees in the process. In Le Légataire universel, for instance, Eraste is forced to beg for Crispin's help,⁵⁶ as is the female servant, Lisette,⁵⁷ and in Le Joueur even the otherwise strong-willed Valère is reduced to turning to Hector for advice on how to escape from his difficulties,⁵⁸ while in La Sérénade Valère not only begs Scapin to devise some means of acquiring the money which he thinks is necessary to prevent his own father from marrying his sweetheart, but he himself openly indicates that this places him in a position of dependence upon his servant:

⁵³ This is not to say that the outward appearance of subservience on the part of the servant is dispensed with (indeed, everything depends on the underlying master-servant relationship continuing unchanged), but it does mean, for example, that the servants will assert themselves whenever they can, while being willing - as Mollie Gerard Davis puts it in 'Masters and Servants in the Plays of Molière', p.143 - to 'play the role society expects and make the proper gestures of subservience'. A similar situation obtains in Regnard.

⁵⁴ II,4.

⁵⁵ III,8.

⁵⁶ IV,1.

⁵⁷ II,8.

⁵⁸ III,7.

'Il faut vouloir tout ce qu'il veut', he admits, 'j'ai besoin de lui'.⁵⁹

Moreover, the dominance which Regnard's servants may exercise over their masters is to be seen not only in the way in which they may reduce their masters to begging for their help, but also in the way in which they can, from their position as providers of solutions to their masters' problems, both tease and order around their masters with impunity; indeed, it is in such episodes that the servants' enjoyment of their dominant role is most obvious.

The ways in which Regnard's servants tease their masters are numerous, and these - and their comic impact - are explored more fully in Part IV,⁶⁰ but a few examples will serve to illustrate the evident relish with which these figures use the power over their masters which their knowledge or ability bestows upon them. One can, for instance, cite the mischievous way in which some servants keep their masters in suspense by not immediately providing them with all the information that they might. In some cases, they withhold only a small but significant item of information: in Les Folies amoureuses, for instance, Crispin tantalises his master, Eraste, by refusing to give an explicit account of his reception by Albert (who jealously guards Eraste's love, Agathe) until he has made a lengthy and comic digression,⁶¹ while in La Sérénade Scapin, on his first appearance with his master, drives the latter to distraction by assuring him that Marine has been unable to clarify the reason for her mistress's desire to discontinue her liaison with him - and then, at last, reveals that she has conveyed to him a letter which may explain all:

VALERE:

Quoi? Que dis-tu? Parle, explique-toi. Renoncer à Léonor?

SCAPIN:

Oui, monsieur.

VALERE:

Et Marine ne t'a point dit la cause de son refroidissement?

⁵⁹Sc.11. Elsewhere, even when servants are not begged, their superiority may be seen in the way in which they will undertake projects without reference to their masters. Merlin in Le Retour imprévu, for example, spontaneously devises all the explanations which fool the returning Geronte (see above, pp.32-5), while in Le Bal Valère may not formally beg his servant for help, but nevertheless makes it clear to Léonor that Merlin has things in hand (Sc.10).

⁶⁰See especially pp.265-9.

⁶¹I,7.

SCAPIN:

Non, monsieur.

VALERE:

Quoi! tu n'as pu pénétrer ...

SCAPIN:

Oh! monsieur, Marine est une fille impénétrable.

VALERE:

Que je suis malheureux!

SCAPIN:

Elle m'a seulement donné une petite lettre qui vous expliquera peut-être mieux la chose.⁶²

But in other cases the refusal to divulge information is developed further, with the servant specifically failing to reveal the precise nature of his own schemes and rescue operations, thus placing his master even more completely at his mercy. 'Laissez-moi faire', Scapin tells his master in La Sérénade, refusing to elaborate further on the outline of his scheme,⁶³ and this use of 'laissez-moi' becomes a distinctive characteristic of Regnard's fourbe-like servants, and a reminder both of their self-assurance, and of the dominant position which the use of their skills places them in.

On the other hand, rather than teasing their masters by withholding information, Regnard's servants - whose tendency to take command in moments of crisis we have already noted⁶⁴ - may take obvious pleasure in asserting their dominance over those whom they serve by issuing detailed information in the form of instructions. Thus, when the Chevalier in Les Ménechmes asks his servant, Valentin, about his plans, Valentin gladly gives details of his scheme to have his master disguise himself as his twin brother (who is in town to collect his inheritance), and does so with a confident and efficient briskness which makes it all too clear that it is he who is firmly in control:

Il faut premièrement quitter cette parure,
Prendre d'un héritier l'habit et la figure,
L'air entre triste et gai.⁶⁵

Indeed, so sure is the servant of his position of authority that when the embryonic scheme is threatened by the sudden arrival of the twin

⁶²Sc.5. Other instances of this type of situation - and their comic impact - are discussed below, pp.265-6.

⁶³Sc.11.

⁶⁴See above, pp.28-9.

⁶⁵II,1.

brother himself, he can send his master packing with a forthright 'Marchez, doublez le pas',⁶⁶ although, interestingly enough, the same Valentin may later revert to the threatened withholding of co-operation to bring his master to heel:

Paix donc, point tant de pétulance.
Je ne dirai plus rien, si vous parlez toujours.⁶⁷

It is clear, then, that in Regnard, as in Molière, the servants' behaviour supports the view that part of their motivation lies in their desire to show themselves better than others, and, in particular, superior to their masters.⁶⁸ But if they are partly motivated by such considerations they are also very strongly motivated, as are Molière's fourbes, by the love of the fun and trickery which their schemes involve (as well as of the risks which the latter entail), so much so, that this can, indeed, be seen as the dominant and overriding motivating force behind most of Regnard's servant figures.

To a large extent, it is the words of the servants themselves, in both Molière and Regnard, which first draw attention to their love of scheming and the reasons for this. In Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin, for instance, when Silvestre asks the fourbe-like Scapin why he should appear so ready to get himself into awkward situations which might have dire consequences for him, Scapin's reply is that he likes the challenge of undertaking risky schemes:

Je me plais à tenter des entreprises hasardeuses.⁶⁹

And this love of engaging in challenging schemes is also given unequivocal expression in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses, when Crispin, having discovered that Albert (the obstacle to his master's love) is a touchy and difficult character, makes it clear that he views the difficulties which are likely to arise from this not with dismay, but

⁶⁶ II, 1.

⁶⁷ IV, 9.

⁶⁸ This is a view supported by Carlo R. François in 'L'Etourdi de Molière ou l'illusion héroïque', p.89. In addition, François sees the desire of the servant to show himself superior to his master as a sort of revenge on the servant's part. It should also be noted that the expression of pride in his mental capacities which characterises the fourbe (see above, pp.20-3) is another indication of the servant's desire to show his superiority.

⁶⁹ III, 1.

with pleasure:

Le vieillard me paraît un peu sujet à l'ire;
Pour en venir à bout il faudra batailler:
Tant mieux; c'est où je brille, et j'aime à ferrailler.⁷⁰

But it is not simply the thrill of the risks involved - or even the sense of superiority which they may derive from undertaking projects which others would be fearful to attempt - which makes scheming so attractive to many of these servants, for their pronouncements also make it clear that scheming appeals to them because they love fun and trickery for their own sakes. Thus, in Le Légataire universel, when Crispin hesitates momentarily before engaging in his scheme to dictate a will in the guise of G ronte, fearing that by undertaking such a forgery he will be putting his neck at risk, what is important is not so much the fact that he has doubts (although it is unusual for a fourbe-like figure to have doubts at all), but that the terms in which he expresses his hesitation to act - 'Ma main alarm e/Se refuse au projet dont mon  me est charm e' - reveal not a conflict between the desire to save his own skin and the desire to feather his own nest, but a conflict between the desire for self-preservation and a much stronger desire: the desire to undertake a scheme which has captured his imagination.⁷¹

The irresistible appeal which the love of fun combined with the thrill of taking risks has for many of these servants is highlighted, however, not only by their own pronouncements, but also by the way in which they conduct themselves.

Thus, not only will the servant's love of fun tend - as we have seen - to override any inclination towards self-preservation which might inhibit him from undertaking schemes, but once a scheme is under weigh that same love of fun can be seen counteracting straightforward self-interest in a different way, namely, by tempting the servant deliberately to jeopardise his projects merely for the joy of it.

At its most basic, the servant's love of fun may lead him to jeopardise his schemes by indulging in overacting. That is,

⁷⁰I,6.

⁷¹IV,3.

the servant may introduce unlikely or improbable elements into a situation where a scheme is about to succeed, thus putting the success of the whole venture once more in the balance. Frequently, this involves the adoption of bravado poses or verbal exaggerations reminiscent of those associated with the miles gloriosus tradition, but differing from it in that Regnard's servants - unlike Matamore in Corneille's L'illusion comique, for example - do not dupe themselves, but, rather, attempt deliberately to deflate and make the audience laugh. For instance, when Crispin in Le Légataire universel disguises himself as Géronte's widowed niece in order to induce the old man to disinherit his relative, he jeopardises the whole scheme by going beyond what is necessary to convince Géronte of his assumed identity and by adding zany and unrealistic details. Thus, when Géronte comments that, having been widowed at the age of twenty, his 'niece' cannot have had many children, Crispin, rather than simply agreeing with him, makes the following improbable reply:

Rien que neuf; mais, le cœur tout gonflé d'amertume,
Deux ans encore après j'accouchai d'un posthume.⁷²

Similarly, in La Sérénade, the success of Scapin's scheme depends on him concealing his true identity from his young master's father, yet although the master explains Scapin's presence by saying that he is a musician, and although some of Scapin's initial statements are designed to substantiate this,⁷³ the servant later proceeds to vaunt his supposed skills in such an exaggerated manner that in everyday terms what he says is impossible, and in any realistic situation the aged Grifon would immediately be alerted to the possibility of his being duped:

Ce n'est pas pour me vanter, mais en cas de chanteurs, symphonistes, violistes, théorbistes, clavecinistes, opéra, opérateurs, opératrices, madelonistes, catinistes, margotistes, si difficiles qu'elles soient, j'ai tout cela dans ma manche.⁷⁴

⁷² III, 8. Agathe, the somewhat fourbe-like heroine in Les Folies amoureuses, makes similar claims, but only when, feigning madness, she is pretending that she believes herself to be an old woman (III, 4).

⁷³ 'Demandez à monsieur votre fils', he says, 'Je suis le premier homme du monde pour les sérénades', reinforcing this with a nice little realistic touch: 'Il m'en doit encore deux ou trois' (Sc. 7).

⁷⁴ Sc. 7. The contribution which lists make to comedy is discussed below, pp. 338-42. It is also to be noted that such behaviour, especially in the master's presence, again emphasises the master's dependence on the servant: the servant enjoys taking risks, and enjoys his master's discomfiture, while the master can only keep his fingers crossed and hope that all will be well in the end.

And in Les Folies amoureuses the aged Albert might well be suspicious of the colourful explanation offered by Crispin as to why he, who pretends to be a scholar and scientist, should be reduced to dressing as a servant, for while the explanation is comic in expression, in realistic terms it might be expected to do little to reassure Albert:

Certain jour, me trouvant le long d'un grand chemin,
Moi troisième, et le jour étant sur son déclin,
En un certain bournier j'aperçus certain coche:
En homme secourable aussitôt je m'approche;
Et, pour le soulager du poids qui l'arrêtait,
J'étais du magasin les paquets qu'il portait.
On a voulu depuis, pour ce trait charitable,
De ces paquets perdus me rendre responsable:
Le prévôt s'en mêlait; c'est pourquoi mes amis
Me conseillèrent tous de quitter le pays.⁷⁵

At one extreme, the servant's love of fun leads, then, to overacting, but at the other extreme it leads to a deliberate and overt destruction of the fictions which the servant himself has built up to achieve the desired end; that is, he abandons a trick when it appears to be succeeding, partly because the fun of bursting the bubble of his fiction appeals to him, and partly in order to place himself in a difficult situation which will once more tax his ingenuity.

In Le Joueur, for example, Nérine at one point tackles Hector in an attempt to get him to admit before Angélique that his master is at that very moment gambling. He denies it, or, to be more accurate, avoids the issue. Angélique then offers him money to tell the truth, and he responds by making a statement which, although possibly ambiguous, is taken by Angélique as a further denial:

Il est bien revenu de cette folle rage,
Et n'aura pas de goût pour le jeu davantage.⁷⁶

At this point, then, Hector has both defended his master in the eyes of Angélique and received payment from her. Yet, rather than accepting this highly satisfactory situation, Hector deliberately sets about destroying it, for no sooner has Angélique rounded on Nérine with a triumphant 'I-told-you-so' reply - 'Avec tes faux soupçons, Nérine, eh bien! tu vois' - than Hector freely volunteers an additional

⁷⁵I,5. The contribution which passages such as this make to the generation of comedy is discussed below, pp.326-7.

⁷⁶IV,2.

statement:

Il s'en donne aujourd'hui pour la dernière fois.

Clearly, Hector cannot resist the temptation both to amuse himself by demolishing his own carefully-constructed position and to place himself, once more, in a situation which will require him to exercise his ingenuity and his acting skills.

Similarly, when Nérine wishes to see Valère at the beginning of Le Joueur, Hector initially holds her at bay, concealing the fact that his master has not yet returned from a night of gambling by maintaining that the latter is still in bed, and reinforcing this contention by acting out the fictional situation, even supplying those little touches of detail which characterise the confidence trickster's art:

Paix! ne parle pas si fort.⁷⁷

Such behaviour (and one can imagine the finger raised to the lips, the hushed voice, and the feigned concern for a master who not only is not asleep but is not even at home) in itself suggests that the servant is not simply acting out of duty, but is someone for whom fun - in this case the fun of acting out a fictional situation - has an irresistible attraction.⁷⁸ But the attraction which fun has for him is revealed even more clearly in his subsequent behaviour, for when Nérine asks him to say when his master is likely to rise, the servant, who could without difficulty continue to sustain his deceit, is tempted by his love of fun to burst the bubble of his own fiction with a completely unnecessary witticism:

Mais avant qu'il se lève,
Il faudra qu'il se couche.⁷⁹

⁷⁷I,2. The confidence trickster's love of realistic detail can also be seen in La Sérénade, where the servant supports his master's story that he is a musician by stating that he is already owed for a few serenades (see above, p.120, note 73).

⁷⁸The pleasure which servants derive from acting out fictional situations is also revealed in the way in which they will at other times sustain their acts even after they have ceased to serve any useful purpose. See above, pp.22-3.

⁷⁹I,2. Interestingly enough, the failure to appreciate that it is the attraction of fun which causes Hector to behave as he does has led to some critics being puzzled by this scene. Georges Jamati, in La Querelle du 'Joueur': Regnard et Dufresny, for instance, referring to Hector, asks: 'Comment se fait-il que rusé comme il l'est, le drôle se laisse ainsi manœuvrer par une fille qu'il sait hostile à son maître dont, par ailleurs, il ne cesse de servir les intérêts?' (p.111).

It is evident, then, that for many of Regnard's servants the dominant passion and major motivating force is a love of fun and trickery which even overrides what would, in a realistic situation, be seen as self-interest. But before moving on to consider those few servants who are not motivated by a love of fun, it is perhaps appropriate to observe that, among those who are, there are some in whom the love of fun overrides not only everyday self-interest but also what has been seen as another potential source of motivation (one which has attracted some attention among critics since it does not occur in Molière's fourbes), namely, an embryonic conscience.⁸⁰ For while Merlin in Le Retour imprévu may use the term 'conscience' when - perhaps not entirely seriously - he maintains that he will no longer be a party to his master's profligacy (telling the latter: 'Pour moi, je fais conscience d'être l'instrument et la cheville ouvrière de votre ruine'),⁸¹ and while Hector in Le Joueur may appear to express doubts about the propriety of his master's refusal to pay his creditors even when he is in funds,⁸² in each case the servant's actual behaviour suggests that any moral qualms which he may have are easily overridden by his sense of fun. Thus, one finds that any objections which Merlin may have melt away as soon as he is able to view in a comic light his master's spendthrift behaviour in the absence of the latter's father:

Allez, monsieur, vous n'avez pas tant de tort qu'on dirait bien. Monsieur votre père fera un gros profit pendant son voyage; vous aurez fait une grosse dépense pendant son absence. Quand il reviendra, de quoi aura-t-il à se plaindre? ce sera comme s'il n'avait bougé de chez lui; et, au pis aller, ce sera lui qui aura eu tort de voyager.⁸³

While Hector is tempted by his sense of fun to launch verbal assaults on two of his master's creditors, Mme Adam (who is in urgent need of money to marry off her daughter) and Galonier (whose wife is soon to give birth), using his fertile mind to produce all sorts of reasons for his master being unable to pay, and only then, having driven off the creditors empty-handed, expressing his moral doubts to his master:

Voilà des créanciers assez bien régalés.
Vous devriez, pourtant, en fonds comme vous êtes ...⁸⁴

⁸⁰ See also below, pp.125-6, where reasons for Hector sometimes being seen as a moral creature are discussed.

⁸¹ Sc.4.

⁸² III,8.

⁸³ Sc.4.

⁸⁴ III,8.

Although he is interrupted, the sense of his words is clear: the debts could and should have been paid; but although he may appear to recognise the direction in which moral action lies, it is equally clear that it was his seduction by the opportunity afforded to his inventiveness by the situation in which he found himself that prevented payment from being made. Once again, the love of fun has triumphed as the servant's principal motivating force.

However strong both the desire to assert themselves over their superiors and the love of fun may be in Regnard's servants, it would nevertheless be misleading to conclude an analysis of the motivation of these figures without noting that not all of them are governed by such considerations. Significantly, though, those who show no sign of being so governed are precisely those characters whom we previously saw as essentially un-fourbe-like, namely, Champagne in La Sérénade, Jaquinet in Le Retour imprévu (both extremely minor figures overshadowed by more important valets in the same plays), and, above all, Strabon in Démocrate. For in the case both of Champagne and Jaquinet, whose characters are scarcely developed, there is no evidence that their behaviour is shaped by anything other than a concern for their own physical satisfaction, as manifested in their propensity to drink,⁸⁵ while even the more fully developed Strabon, lacking the fourbe's perspective on life, shows no sign of being tempted to indulge in the kind of trickery which beguiles many of Regnard's other valets, nor does he appear to be possessed of the fourbe's inability to resist fun whatever the consequences. Instead, it is considerations of a much more prosaic (and realistic) nature which shape his behaviour, above all a concern for his own physical wellbeing, and, to a lesser extent, a desire to be seen by others as a man of some sophistication.⁸⁶

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Although we have considered both the general outlook of the male servants in Regnard, and their apparent motivation, this is not to say that everything has been said about their moral dimension, for there remains the important question of whether or not audiences see them as

⁸⁵See above, pp.42-3.

⁸⁶Strabon's preoccupation with his creature comforts emerges as early as the second scene of the play, where he complains to Thaler of his spartan life in the country. His love of food, and his desire to impress others by presenting himself as a philosopher, are noted above, pp.43-4.

generally moral, immoral, or, indeed, amoral - a question which is all the more difficult to answer because in addressing it one must take into account not only what the servants say and do, but also much less tangible factors which nevertheless contribute to the general impression which these figures make on an audience.

There are, certainly, critics who see at least some of Regnard's servants - particularly Hector in Le Joueur - as moral figures. Des Guerrois, for example, sees Hector as an 'honnête homme parmi ceux qui ne le sont guère',⁸⁷ and Gautier seems to express much the same attitude when he sees Hector as 'le valet très humain et un peu horrifié comme celui de Dom Juan',⁸⁸ while Fournel also inclines in this direction, although with slight reservations: 'Dans le Joueur', he maintains, 'Hector représente la morale, en ce sens du moins que c'est lui qui tire ou aide à tirer la moralité du sujet'.⁸⁹ But while such pronouncements have a measure of truth in them, they arise from a desire at all costs to find a moral in every play, and are not necessarily accurate evaluations of the overall situation.

Pronouncements such as those quoted above might appear soundly based, for example, if one were to take into account only what servants such as Hector say, and, even then, only if one were to interpret their pronouncements in a very literal way. Thus, those who argue that Hector is essentially a moral creature might not only cite his criticisms of gambling and of his master's refusal to pay off his debts, to which reference has already been made,⁹⁰ but might also point to the fact that Hector objects to his master's suggestion that he should pawn the portrait of his beloved Angélique,⁹¹ is the first to suggest redeeming it once it has been pawned,⁹² and expresses the view that the whole sordid transaction is 'une action inique'.⁹³ But as soon as one takes into account the actions of the servants, or interprets their words in

⁸⁷ Charles Des Guerrois, Eloges littéraires et biographiques, p.168.

⁸⁸ Jean-Jacques Gautier, 'Joué 7 fois en 57 ans: Le Joueur gagne au Français', p.9.

⁸⁹ Victor Fournel, Le Théâtre au XVIIe siècle: la comédie, p.360.

⁹⁰ Above, pp.106 and 123-4 respectively.

⁹¹ II,14.

⁹² III,6.

⁹³ II,15.

a less than literal manner, a quite different picture emerges. For example, as we have seen, Hector's comments on gambling may not be entirely serious, and his objections to the non-payment of debts are counterbalanced by the obvious delight with which he himself sends his master's creditors packing. Moreover, although he objects to the pawning of the portrait, he does submit remarkably easily to his master's weak justifications for taking such a step. In short, even when servants like Hector make statements which seem seriously to glance at the question of morality - and not many of Regnard's servants do make such statements⁹⁴ - the actions of these servants are not in accord with their stated views.

Moreover, not only are the servants' actions at odds with any apparently moral pronouncements which they make, but in realistic terms their activities may be even more unsavoury than those of figures like Scapin in Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin. For while the crimes to which Scapin admits are harmless tricks,⁹⁵ and while even his major exploits can be viewed with some sympathy since they involve the extraction of money from those who can well afford it in order to further the ends of young love, in Regnard the servants' deeds may lack the relative innocence of Scapin's, and in not a few of the plays this is aggravated by the fact that the masters whom the servants serve are themselves no longer the innocent young lovers of Molière's comedies.⁹⁶ Thus, although the masters whom the servants assist in La Sérénade, Le Bal, and Les Folies amoureuses come close to resembling the young lovers of traditional comedy, in Les Ménechmes the aim of the servant is to trick an innocent and legitimate heir out of his rightful inheritance (although he does in the end receive his share), and to do so in order to serve the interests of a cynical master who feigns love for the rich Araminte lest his attempts to win Isabelle should prove unsuccessful.⁹⁷ In Le Joueur, the master, Valère, is

⁹⁴Crispin, in Le Légataire universel, for example, makes no such pronouncements.

⁹⁵They include, for example, drinking his master's wine and concealing the fact by pretending that the barrel has split (II,3).

⁹⁶Charles Lenient, in 'La Comédie après Molière: Regnard', pp.293-4, also comments on the baseness of Regnard's masters, as do Hippolyte Lucas in his Histoire philosophique et littéraire du théâtre français depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours, p.189, and Victor Fournel, in Le Théâtre au XVIIe siècle: la comédie, p.360.

⁹⁷I,2.

equally cynical, explaining to Hector - who, as we have seen, approves of his approach⁹⁸ - that should Angélique tire of him he can always 'rabattre sur la veuve', her rich sister.⁹⁹ Moreover, in Le Joueur the conventional situation in which two young lovers are thwarted by a heartless father is replaced by one in which the only real obstacle is Valère's addiction to gambling, and where the subterfuges to which he and his servant have recourse are designed to trick his not unsympathetic father and the comparatively sensible Angélique into believing that he has in fact abandoned his dissolute life-style. Similarly, in Le Légataire universel, Eraste, who is helped by Crispin to trick his uncle into excluding his rightful heirs from his will, is far too concerned with the hope of gain to be seen as an innocent young lover, while in Le Retour imprévu Clitandre, whom Merlin so enthusiastically serves, is no more than a good-for-nothing playboy in love with a coquette and anxious only to squander his absent father's wealth. In fact, of all the plays in which the servant actively assists his master, Le Distrain alone features a master who, in his forgetfulness, can be seen as actively sympathetic.¹⁰⁰

It might appear, therefore, that far from viewing Regnard's servants as moral creatures, the audience could be expected to consider most of them - Hector included - as quite the reverse. In fact, however, this is not the case, for closer inspection reveals that there are factors which cause the audience to view these figures in a less unfavourable light than a dispassionate analysis either of their behaviour or of their pronouncements might lead one to expect.

First, when an audience is confronted with a servant's imaginative tricks, it is generally so interested to see how these will develop, and whether or not they will succeed, that it simply does not pause to consider the overall moral consequences of their success. Indeed, even when the audience feels - as it may sometimes do - that it would like the servant to succeed in his enterprises, this should not be seen as evidence that it has considered and approved of the moral consequences

⁹⁸ See above, p.109.

⁹⁹ I, 6.

¹⁰⁰ In Démocrite, where the servant, Strabon, does not support his master, the latter is presented as a self-deluding and somewhat pompous philosopher.

of his acts; rather, it should be seen as arising partly from the fact that because the audience is frequently a party to the servant's secrets it tends to identify itself with him, rather than with those whom he dupes, and partly from the fact that, caught up in the excitement of the moment, it wishes to see the servant's efforts and talent rewarded. As Geoffroy puts it, stressing the latter point in his defence of Regnard against Rousseau's assertion that he encourages immorality:

Si l'on craint, au théâtre, qu'un fourbe ne manque son coup, c'est parce que l'on ne considère dans le moment que l'industrie, la finesse et le talent du fourbe: on est bien éloigné d'approuver son action.¹⁰¹

Second, any tendency on the part of the audience to view the servants in a critical light is blunted by the contribution which these figures make - in a variety of ways - to the generation of laughter,¹⁰² for comedy has a disarming effect. Thus, just as it is difficult to see Regnard's plays as a whole as immoral, whatever the nature of the deeds which they portray, because of the sense of fun which pervades them - a fact recognised both by Mercier, who asks, 'Comment sentir de la haine pour ce qui a fait naître le sourire sur nos lèvres?',¹⁰³ and by Fournel, who observes that 'le rire qu'excite Regnard désarme les plus rigoristes',¹⁰⁴ - so it is even less likely that the audience will give serious consideration to the morality or otherwise of the very figures who play such a large part in creating that sense of fun. In short, while it is conceivable that the audience may to some extent

¹⁰¹ Julien-Louis Geoffroy, Cours de littérature dramatique, II, 291. It is against the criticism of Regnard in Rousseau's Lettre à M. d'Alembert that Geoffroy's remarks are directed.

¹⁰² The ways in which Regnard's servants contribute to comedy are explored in Part IV.

¹⁰³ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, Du théâtre, p.76. Mercier, however, sees this as a fault in Regnard, objecting that his comic treatment of subjects such as gambling prevents the audience from seeing them as the vices which they are.

¹⁰⁴ Victor Fournel, Le Théâtre au XVIIe siècle: la comédie, p.362. Béatrix Dussane, in her 'De l'interprétation des grands rôles classiques: la soubrette', p.464, makes a similar point, observing that 'seuls, le brio du style, sa verve à la fois débraillée et irrésistible, et aussi, il faut bien le dire, l'entrain des interprètes, peuvent sauver de l'odieux une pièce comme Le Légataire universel'.

gain the impression that the un-fourbe-like and largely humourless Strabon in Démocrite is morally unsavoury, the chances of it feeling a sense of moral outrage when faced with the trickery of Regnard's more lively or fourbe-like servants are slight. Can one, for example, imagine an audience seeing Carlin in Le Distrain as evil when, in one of his more fourbe-like scenes, he describes his attempts to 'finish off' his master's old uncle? Surely not, for the passage in which he describes his activities is gloriously comic, incorporating, among other features, elements of the mock heroic, and comic lists with unrealistic exaggeration:

Par trois fois de ma main il a pris l'émétique;
Et je n'en donnais pas une dose modique.
J'y mettais double charge, afin que par mes soins
Le pauvre agonisant en languit un peu moins:
Mais par trois fois le sort, injuste, inexorable,
N'a point donné les mains à ce soin charitable;
Et le bon homme enfin, à quatre-vingt-neuf ans,
Malgré sa fièvre lente et ses redoublements,
Sa fluxion, son rhume, et ses apoplexies,
Son crachement de sang, et ses trois pleurésies,
Sa goutte, sa gravelle, et son prochain convoi
Déjà tout préparé, se porte mieux que moi.¹⁰⁵

But Carlin's description of his activities is not merely disarming-ly comical, for its impossible list of illnesses and the disparity between the elevation of the language and the sordidness in literal terms of the deeds described also help to create a sense of unreality, and it is this tendency for the comedy generated by the servants to create a fantasy world (a tendency which is reinforced by other aspects of Regnard's plays, such as the servants' love of overacting) which constitutes the third - and most important - factor preventing the audience from seeing the servants as evil creatures. For in the plays under consideration - many of which bear more than a passing resemblance to those which Regnard had earlier written for the Italian stage in France, where fantasy was a major element¹⁰⁶ - the servants' activities appear as games of skill acted out in a world so divorced from reality

¹⁰⁵II,1. That the passage generates laughter by parodying the language of tragedy and creating a contrast between that language and the nature of the character speaking is further discussed below, p.331.

¹⁰⁶As Alexandre Calame puts it in Regnard: sa vie et son œuvre, 'Tout le Théâtre italien se meut ... dans une atmosphère de fête où le réel compte peu' (p.185). In Part III of the same work, which is devoted to Regnard's French plays, frequent allusion is made to the debt which these owe to their Italian predecessors (see, for example, pp.269, 271, 276, 290, 300, 306, 314, and 329).

that it is impossible to believe that anyone can be seriously hurt. The fun of the moment is all that matters, and neither the servants nor the audience, if it is responding appropriately, are concerned with the moral consequences of actions, since the universe in which the characters move is without a moral dimension. In such a situation, the servant can only properly be regarded as amoral, and one might feel amply justified in applying to the male servant in Regnard a comment which Nicoll makes in relation to the traditional Harlequin: '[He] exists in a mental world wherein concepts of morality have no being'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷Allardyce Nicoll, The World of Harlequin: a Critical Study of the Commedia dell'Arte, p.70.

Chapter 2

DUFRESNY

When one turns to the male servants of Dufresny and attempts to determine the nature of their outlook - that is, their view of life and their attitude to the world around them - it is inevitable that one should do so with only a modest expectation of success, for not only does the lack of prominence of the servants in the plays in which they appear mean that they generally fail to emerge as rounded three-dimensional characters who might be expected to express their views on a wide range of topics,¹ but, as has already been noted, the very nature of Dufresny's plays is inward-looking, with many of them relying for their effect on the interplay of characters motivated by strong passions and impulses, and in such an intricate chess-like situation there is likely to be little concern for matters not directly related to the interaction of the figures present.² It is, therefore, not surprising that a close examination of the texts would appear only to confirm that even to talk of the servants as having a developed 'outlook' may be an unjustifiable exaggeration.

On examining the plays under consideration one finds, for example, that while Regnard's servants are generally contemptuous of things provincial, openly favouring fashionable urban society, in Dufresny such matters appear to be of little concern either to the servants, or, for that matter, to the other characters. Thus, although the plays are set in a wide variety of geographical and social settings,³ the choice of setting appears designed only to provide the conditions necessary for the acting-out of the drama,⁴ and is not normally examined critically. Indeed, only once does a servant explicitly

¹As we have seen (above, p.45), male servants occur in only about half of the plays being examined, and even when they do appear may have limited roles.

²See above, pp.51-2. As in a game of chess, the world beyond the chess-board becomes irrelevant, or at least fades into the background.

³For example, Le Dédit takes place in a largely bourgeois environment, while La Noce interrompue centres on the mixed society of a count's country estate. Le Jaloux honteux is also set in the country, but Le Chevalier joueur, La Réconciliation normande and Le Dédit are given urban settings.

⁴In Le Jaloux honteux, for example, the obsessively jealous Président lives in a château outside Rennes, and is therefore obliged to leave his wife behind when he travels to Rennes on business.

allude to the respective merits of urban and rural life, and that is when Pasquin in Attendez-moi sous l'orme - behaving in a way which Regnard's fourbes would find unthinkable - does not dispute his master's observation that 'la vie champêtre ne convient point à un intrigant, à un fourbe', and even admits that he has 'tous les talents pour faire fortune à la ville', yet nevertheless elects to remain in the country to marry Lisette.⁵

It is, however, not only the general question of town versus country which is of little concern to Dufresny's servants, for one can go further than this and say that society - that is, the particular world in which they find themselves - is also of little interest to them, and, as far as they are concerned, might almost not exist.

This lack of interest in, or lack of awareness of the habits of the world around them can be seen first of all in the way in which the servants in Dufresny generally fail to draw attention to the fashions of the time. Thus, whereas the servants in Regnard, even if they do not disapprove of the particular quirks of behaviour which they see around them, may nevertheless occasionally show their awareness of them by drawing them to the attention of the audience through what may be little more than lighthearted remarks on the subject,⁶ in Dufresny not only is there generally no emphasis on social as opposed to psychological oddities in the plays in which male servants occur,⁷ but if the servants notice any of the peculiarities of the social activity around them one can only assume that they see them as

⁵Sc.1. Although other servants do not specifically discuss the merits of urban and rural life, there is evidence that they too (unlike Regnard's valets) are not hostile to the provinces. Neither Falaise in La Réconciliation normande (I,8) nor La Valée in La Malade sans maladie (II,7) appears ashamed of his provincial origins, and at the end of La Réconciliation there is no suggestion that the servant will not return to his master in Normandy (V,12), while in La Malade La Valée faithfully serves a master who pursues Angélique's inheritance partly as a means of consolidating his holdings in Normandy (II,3).

⁶See above, pp.105-6.

⁷The jealousy of the protagonist in Le Jaloux honteux and the mutual hatred of the Marquise and her brother the Comte in La Réconciliation normande are, for example, not fashionable social aberrations in the way that the behaviour of a petit-maitre is. Dufresny comes nearest to showing a social aberration in his Le Chevalier joueur, which so closely resembles Regnard's Le Joueur.

unexceptional features of a backcloth against which all their activities take place, and, as such, unworthy of comment, for they tend not to make pronouncements which draw the vagaries of fashionable society to the attention of the audience.⁸ Indeed, unlike the servants in Regnard, whose comments imply an interest in how people in general behave, the servants in Dufresny, in keeping, possibly, with the type of plays in which they function, fail to broaden their vision sufficiently to generalise in this way, showing an interest only in how other figures are likely to react to particular situations.

But if, in Dufresny, the servants' failure to draw attention to the fashions of their time is one feature which suggests that they have little interest in the world around them, a second feature which points to the same conclusion is their apparent lack of concern even for their own position in society. Regnard's servants are capable of viewing the broad prospect of society as a whole, and it is partly because of an awareness of the many possibilities offered by the world that they are able both to express discontent with their present lot and to dream of a future when their position in society will be different, and, from their point of view, much more satisfactory,⁹ but Dufresny's servants, seemingly incapable of casting their eyes beyond the almost hermetically sealed group of individuals in which they find themselves, do not place their activities in a wider context, and tend neither to complain of their existing situation nor to imagine themselves in a different position in the future.¹⁰ Indeed, even when, as Dufresny's

⁸ Although he does not specifically comment on current fashions, Pasquin in Attendez-moi sous l'orme does, however, show an awareness of them when, schooling his master in how to woo Lisette (in her guise as a rich widow), he reveals an intimate knowledge of the mannerisms of a petit-maître: 'Ça, préparez-vous à aborder la veuve en petit-maître', he tells him, 'Cachez-vous un œil avec votre chapeau, la main dans la ceinture, le coude en avant, le corps d'un côté, et la tête de l'autre; surtout gardez-vous bien de vous promener sur une ligne droite, cela est trop bourgeois' (Sc.9). And in the same play current fashions in dress and adornment are highlighted when Pasquin reads from a book on the subject (Sc.6). The latter passage is cited in part below, p.341.

⁹ See above, pp.107-8.

¹⁰ Moreover, these figures do not usually appear to leave their masters at the end of the play, and if they do, it is only to transfer their allegiance to another, more generous, master (see below, pp.138-9). The sole exception is Pasquin in Attendez-moi sous l'orme, who intends to leave his master to marry Lisette and make his home in the country (Sc.1).

servants frequently do, they seek their own financial gain,¹¹ they do so not in order to satisfy an ambition to buy their way out of their present situation, like certain servants in both Regnard and Lesage,¹² but at most - for in many cases the pursuit of gain is seen almost as an end in itself, and the use to which the money acquired will be put is not specified - because it will allow them to settle down with a wife.¹³

The fact that some of the male servants in Dufresny do show an interest in winning a wife might lead one to suspect that love is perhaps a topic on which these figures, like Regnard's servants, have a well-developed outlook, but even here, although the general direction of their thinking does emerge through their words and actions, it is impossible to penetrate far below the surface of their thought.

As far as the servants' attitude to others who are in love is concerned, one can, for example, say that, even more than in Regnard, the servants in Dufresny display a lack of understanding of sentimental attachments and a general cynicism which prevents them from furthering the ends of innocent young love. Indeed, in the nine plays which feature male servants, most valets either show a lack of concern for the success of young love,¹⁴ or are loyal and uncomplaining assistants to the evil outsiders who actively threaten the happiness of young

¹¹See below, pp.136-9.

¹²Frontin in Lesage's Turcaret is the classic example of a servant seeking social advancement (see below, p.144), but we have already seen (above, pp.107-8) that both Valentin in Regnard's Les Ménechmes and Hector in the same author's Le Joueur have social aspirations.

¹³That, for instance, would appear to be the case with Frontin in Le Jaloux honteux, whose relationship with Hortence is discussed below, pp.135-6.

¹⁴Frontin in Le Chevalier joueur, like Hector in Regnard's Le Joueur, is happy that his master should hold an unattractive older lover in reserve lest he should fail to win the hand of Angélique (I,1), and is apparently unconcerned at the possibility of Angélique marrying his master even when he knows that the latter's attitude to her can be close to casual indifference (IV,8).

lovers,¹⁵ while only three - Adrien in La Noce interrompue, Pasquin in Attendez-moi sous l'orme, and Frontin in Le Dédit - serve to advance the cause of young lovers, although even then they may appear to do so not entirely out of conviction, or for altruistic reasons, but with an eye to their own self-interest.¹⁶

Moreover, the cynicism and lack of understanding of true love which Dufresny's servants display towards the sentimental attachments of others may extend to their own relationships, where it becomes clear that their attitude is frequently even less romantic than the down-to-earth and unsentimental approach to love which characterises Regnard's servants. Thus, although the love which the guileless and bashful Flamand in Le Faux Honnête Homme has for Frosine may seem pure,¹⁷ and although there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Pasquin's love for Lisette in Attendez-moi sous l'orme, in other plays it may transpire that the servant is using love - or the pretence of it - partly to promote his own financial gain through the furtherance of his master's schemes. For instance, in La Réconciliation normande, Falaise will happily feign love for Nérine in order to extract from her information which might strengthen his master's position,¹⁸ while in the last scene of the play there is the suggestion that he could with equal cynicism marry the defeated Marquise. And in Le Jaloux honteux, where the jardinière, Hortence, is attracted to Frontin, the latter

¹⁵The plays presenting this situation are discussed above, pp.53-4. The evil outsiders in Dufresny are generally much more evil than Regnard's least attractive masters, since the latter are less deliberate in their activities, emerging frequently as mere playboys. The master in Le Chevalier joueur is, however, more an unworthy lover than an evil outsider, and, as such, comes close to resembling some of Regnard's figures.

¹⁶See below, pp.136-9.

¹⁷Although Flamand's love for Frosine is never explored in any depth, there is never any suggestion that it is other than genuine. Indeed, if anything, it is Frosine who is the less romantically committed of the two, often adopting a patronising attitude towards Flamand, as when she announces their marriage to the Capitaine: 'Puisque mon bon ami Flamand nous a servi à démasquer notre fourbe', she tells him, 'il faut le récompenser en me donnant tout à lui' (III,13).

¹⁸Falaise is, however, singularly unsuccessful in this, and, in the comic scene in which he makes the attempt (III,11), Nérine reverses their roles by pretending to believe his flattery in an attempt to extract information from him.

uses the hold which this gives him over her to induce her to advance his master's schemes by sowing doubts in the mind of the jealous Président¹⁹ (although there are indications that by securing the success of his master's plans Frontin expects to benefit financially himself, thus, indirectly, placing himself in a better position to settle down with Hortence).²⁰ What is more, when one servant whose love appears genuine - La Valée in La Malade sans maladie - meets with rejection, he automatically assumes that the prospect of his own enrichment as a result of his master's schemes will be sufficient to overcome Lisette's objections, stressing, for her benefit, that the match should be treated as an 'alliance financière', and adding that 'une règle d'arithmétique suffit pour assortir les cœurs'.²¹

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Although, in considering the ethos of Dufresny's male servants, we have so far focussed our attention primarily on their outlook on life, it will nevertheless have become apparent that with these figures self-interest is a strong motivating force, even if they may also, to some slight extent, experience the attractions of love. However, when one comes to examine the question of the servants' motivation in greater depth, it soon becomes evident that self-interest, or the direct pursuit of their own gain, is not merely a motivating force for Dufresny's servants, but is, in fact, the one predominant factor which causes the majority of them to behave as they do.

Self-interest emerges as the major motivating force in Dufresny partly because other forces - particularly those which appear to shape the behaviour of Regnard's fourbes - seem to have little influence on his male servants. It has, for example, already been noted both that the servant in Le Dédit never voluntarily jeopardises his own plan²²

¹⁹In the opening scene of the play he suggests to his master that Hortence be made use of in this way; later in the play we find him instructing Hortence in the role that she is to play (II,5); and later still we learn that she has acted as requested (V,3).

²⁰'Je vous mettrai à votre aise avec Lucie', he tells Argan, 'et vous me mettrez à mon aise avec Hortence' (I,1).

²¹II,2. Compare Falaise's assumption in La Réconciliation normande (discussed below, p.139) that if Nérine fails to respond to his charms this can only be because she is being generously paid by someone else.

²²See above, p.48.

(in this he is representative of his fellow servants in other plays), and that Dufresny's servants generally avoid the limelight, while showing no eagerness to participate in schemes by, for example, indulging in disguise,²³ and both of these factors point to the conclusion that the strong love of fun for its own sake which was seen as one of the major driving forces in Regnard tends to be absent in Dufresny. Moreover, whereas in Regnard the attraction of being able to place themselves in a position of dominance in relation to their masters can be seen as one of the factors which motivates the servants, in Dufresny this same force appears not to exist, for, as has been shown, his servants are neither begged for help by their masters, nor do they usually give signs of attempting to assume control in difficult situations.²⁴ Indeed, one scene in Dufresny which might at first sight be interpreted as an example of a servant teasing his master and asserting his dominance over him by refusing to reveal his schemes - the third scene in Le Dédit - in the end only provides further evidence of the servant's overwhelming concern for straightforward self-interest when Frontin, who is already dressed in his master's finery, makes it clear that it is not simply a desire to tease his master which lies behind his refusal to divulge the details of his plans:

VALERE:

Frontin, mon cher Frontin, tu travailles pour moi!
Par quel moyen? comment? et vite explique-toi.

FRONTIN:

Je m'explique d'abord, moi, sur ma récompense,
C'est par là que toujours mon zèle ardent commence.
Si je vous fais avoir votre Isabelle ...

VALERE:

Eh! bien!

FRONTIN:

Linge, habit, diamant, je ne vous rendrai rien.
Si l'habit m'est trop long, trop court, vaille que vaille:
Mais pour le diamant, il est fait pour ma taille.

VALERE:

Je te donnerai tout.

FRONTIN:

Ecoutez mon récit.

Such an exchange shows very clearly that even for this most fourbe-like of Dufresny's servants the pleasure of having his master at his mercy and hanging on his every word is insufficient recompense.

²³See above, pp.56-7.

²⁴See above, pp.50 and 54-5.

But the apparent importance of self-interest as a motivating force in Dufresny is attributable not only to the absence of other major motivating forces, but also to the fact that the male servants - like Frontin in the passage cited above - are much more ready to express their interest in personal gain than are comparable figures in Regnard. For example, while Regnard's servants often appear to remain with their masters even when this is not in their financial interest - in order, it would seem, both to satisfy their love of fun and to assert their dominance over their masters -, Dufresny's servants (with the notable exception of Frontin in Le Chevalier joueur)²⁵ decide whether or not to remain in the service of their masters largely on the basis of self-interested - usually financial - considerations, and through their own pronouncements make it very clear that this is the case. Thus Falaise in La Réconciliation normande, who remains loyal to his disreputable master, describes their community of interest in the following terms:

Je gagne trop d'argent à servir un fripon,
Pour n'être pas fidèle, et ne pas tenir bon.²⁶

Likewise, in La Malade sans maladie, it is probably because La Valée considers his own future to be inextricably bound up with that of his master - as is shown by his use of 'nous' in his prediction that the proposal which Faussinville makes to Angélique will be 'lucratif pour nous',^{26a} - that he remains loyal to him, while in La Noce interrompue, where Adrien abandons his master, the Comte, he does so not so much because the latter's designs on Nanette are less than honourable, but because Nanette's young lover, Dorante, to whom he ultimately transfers his allegiance,²⁷ is much more generous. Thus, describing his first encounter with Dorante, he stresses the young man's generosity on that occasion ('Il me mit quelques louis d'or dans la main'),²⁸ and later, faced with the threat of the young Nanette being banished to a

²⁵Despite his evident concern for his self-interest in the course of the play (see below, p.141), in its closing scene Frontin appears to suggest that he will not abandon his master although all hope of financial gain is by then lost: an aberration which may possibly be explained in terms of the common origin of Dufresny's and Regnard's plays on gambling.

²⁶IV,6.

^{26a}II,7.

²⁷The transfer of allegiance is made explicit in scene 24.

²⁸Sc.3.

convent, he makes it clear that he would regret such a development principally because it would end the need for Dorante to show such generosity towards him:

Nanette dans un couvent! cela serait fâcheux; car point de Nanette pour Dorante, point de fortune pour moi.²⁹

And if, in Le Jaloux honteux, Frontin at first eagerly supports his master, Argan, it is again because the servant sees this as being in his best interests (for when Argan, stressing how important it is for him that his schemes should be successful, observes: 'Ma fortune dépend de cette affaire-ci', the servant replies: 'Et ma fortune dépend de la vôtre, monsieur'),³⁰ while, significantly, after his master's plans have come to nought, the same servant appears happy to abandon him and to ingratiate himself with the Président, since such a course of action now appears to offer him the best prospect of achieving his ambition to establish himself with Hortense.³¹

Moreover, even Pasquin in Attendez-moi sous l'orme may be seen to engage in his scheme to prevent his master from marrying Agathe not merely because he is sympathetic to young love (and certainly not because he enjoys trickery, as his low-key approach to the problem shows), but partly out of self-interest, since Lisette, to whose brother, Colin, Agathe has been betrothed, makes it clear that she will marry him only if he will prevent his master from stealing Agathe from Colin.^{31a}

Indeed, the servants' preoccupation with personal gain is such that they tend to assume that others are similarly motivated. Thus Falaise in La Réconciliation normande is so incapable of believing that others may be motivated by anything other than financial considerations that when he fails to win over Nérine he immediately assumes that this is because she is in the pay of his master's rival:

Pour ce maudit rival, la Nérine nous trouble:
Je croyais la charmer, cet homme apparemment
Plus libéral encor que je ne suis charmant,
La paie bien.³²

²⁹Sc.8.

³⁰I,1.

³¹V,9.

^{31a}Sc.3. His low-key approach to the scheme is noted above, p.57.

³²IV,6.

When the overall impression made on the audience by Regnard's servants was considered, it was noted that one of the factors which played some part in influencing the audience's attitude towards them was the nature of those whom they served and assisted, for a servant helping a disreputable figure was less likely to be viewed as moral than one who - like the conventional fourbe - promoted the interests of naïve and sympathetic young lovers. With Dufresny, the same principle applies, for although, as has been noted, most of his servants are influenced by a desire to promote their self-interest, the fact that this may cause them to support either evil figures who threaten young love; or figures who promote young love, colours the audience's attitude to them; but whereas in Regnard this factor is not of major importance, in Dufresny it is supremely important, and is, for a variety of reasons, crucial in determining whether or not his servants are seen as moral or immoral creatures.

First, the question of the servants' allegiance is of greater importance in Dufresny because although the 'good' figures assisted by his servants in plays like Le Dédit, La Noce interrompue, and Attendez-moi sous l'orme are comparable to, or even more innocent than, similar figures in Regnard,³³ the 'bad' figures served by his male servants are much more thoroughly evil than even the least attractive of Regnard's masters, despite the fact that the latter are themselves more cynical and less pure than the innocent young lovers of many traditional comedies. Thus, while it may be possible to forgive Merlin in Regnard's Le Retour imprévu for supporting Clitandre, a good-for-nothing yet attractive playboy, it is very difficult, in Dufresny, to ignore the implications of the servants' support for masters such as the absent Procinville in La Réconciliation normande, Argan in Le Jaloux honteux, or Faussinville in La Malade sans maladie,

³³In Le Dédit Frontin helps his master, a sincere - if somewhat foppish - young lover, to outwit his two old aunts who would prevent his marriage largely out of meanness, and in La Noce interrompue Adrien supports the eager young lover, Dorante, in his attempts to win Nanette and shield her from the Comte's attentions. The figures assisted in these plays are similar to the lovers in La Sérénade, Le Bal, and Les Folies amoureuses, who are the only innocent young lovers in Regnard (see above, p.126), while Angélique and Colin in Attendez-moi sous l'orme, whose marriage Pasquin seeks to advance, are much more innocent than any of Regnard's figures.

since these figures are not merely less than innocent young lovers, but cynics who would destroy all happiness and all love around them for the sake of their own gain.³⁴

Second, the question of the servants' allegiance is of particular importance in Dufresny because, with the exception of the dim-witted and ineffectual Flamand in Le Faux Honnête Homme, who supports his master without appreciating what he is doing, male servants who assist evil masters are presented not as carefree individuals whose buoyant spirit leads them to indulge in trickery, and for whom the presence of a master may be only a convenient focus for their vigorous activities, but as very deliberate accomplices of figures whose wickedness they acknowledge, but whom they eagerly serve in order to further their own ends. Thus, as we have seen,³⁵ Falaise in La Réconciliation normande acknowledges that his master is a scoundrel, but serves him no less enthusiastically for that, since it is in his financial interest to do so. Even more interesting, however, is the case of Frontin in Le Chevalier joueur, who sees his master as 'le plus ensorcelant petit scélérat',³⁶ yet nevertheless supports him; for whereas Hector in Regnard's Le Joueur assists his master, but on occasion indicates that twinges of conscience may prevent him from giving him his total support, in Dufresny's play the servant has no such qualms, and supports his master wholeheartedly, criticising his activities only when he fears that they may be counter-productive.³⁷ Indeed, of the servants who consciously assist unsavoury masters, only Frontin in Le Jaloux honteux makes excuses for his behaviour, explaining it

³⁴ See above, pp.53-4. Procinville would like to see Angélique forced to marry him in order that he might profit from the match, even although it would conflict with Angélique's inclinations, and Argan, who wishes to see Lucie married to himself rather than to Damis simply because he would gain from the match, cynically admits that he has 'plus de passion pour la succession, que pour l'héritière' (I,1). Faussinville likewise would force Angélique to marry him for the sake of his own material gain.

³⁵ Above, p.138.

³⁶ I,1.

³⁷ His attempts to prevent his master from gambling are, for example, based on his desire that his master should not lose money (III,10); on his wish to prevent him from alienating Angélique, a source of money (IV,9); and on his desire to receive payment of his own wages (V,2). The question of the pawning of Angélique's portrait, which is central to Regnard's play, and which comes near to stirring Hector's conscience, is not a central issue in Dufresny's play.

in terms of a servant's duty to support his master;³⁸ but seen in their context his words of contrition ring hollow, for they are uttered at the point when, his master's attempts to enrich himself having failed, he is seeking to find favour with the Président, whom his master had sought to trick.

There is, however, a third reason for the servants' allegiance in Dufresny being crucial in determining whether or not they are seen as moral figures, and this - possibly the most important reason - is quite simply the fact that in these plays aspects of the servants' behaviour which in Regnard's production prevent the audience from judging them on purely rational grounds are wanting. In particular, as has already been noted,³⁹ Dufresny's servants lack the boisterous vitality and spirit of fun which, in Regnard, not only endear many of the servants to the audience but make for the creation of a world of fantasy where rational judgements are inapplicable, and this, linked to the fact that Dufresny's plays themselves, unlike Regnard's, function largely on the basis of rational cause and effect within a given situation,⁴⁰ creates a climate where everyday considerations such as the servants' allegiance and the consequences of their words and deeds must inevitably be taken into account by an audience. As a result, it becomes impossible to see Dufresny's servants as the unreal and amoral figures who are to be found in Regnard, and instead an audience tends to see them as figures who, despite their consistent desire to further their own self-interest, come across as either good or bad depending almost entirely upon whether or not those whom they serve and the acts which they perform are morally acceptable or morally unacceptable in ordinary everyday terms.

³⁸ 'Il faut vous avouer ma fourberie', he tells the Président, 'fourberie vertueuse pourtant; car je servais mon maître en faisant agir les ressorts qui ont rendu Monsieur jaloux' (V,9).

³⁹ See above, pp.48-51.

⁴⁰ See above, pp.51-2.

Chapter 3

LESAGE

On turning to Lesage's male servants, one quickly discovers that like Regnard's valets, but unlike those of Dufresny, they show at least an awareness of the practices of the world around them. Thus, in all three plays under consideration, one finds male servants drawing attention to the vagaries of social behaviour through comments which, superficially at least, might appear to be satirical in nature. For example, when Crispin in La Tontine, disguised as a colonel, wishes to emphasise that he is able to resist both Trousse-Galant's bribes and the pleadings of a 'belle solliciteuse' (Marianne), he asks, rhetorically, 'Me prenez-vous pour un homme de robe?',¹ and when La Branche, in Crispin rival de son maître, is asked by Mme Oronte if his 'master' (Crispin disguised as Damis) is 'sage', he responds with an ironical 'S'il est sage, madame! Il a été élevé avec la plus brillante jeunesse de Paris',² while, in Turcaret, Frontin comments at one point that 'les soubrettes sont comme les bigotes; elles font des actions charitables pour se venger'.³

However, closer inspection reveals that although comments of this nature may show an awareness of the vagaries of society, like comparable statements in Regnard, they must be seen largely as witty fireworks,⁴ for they do not in fact constitute a solid critique of social behaviour, being largely unco-ordinated, and occurring even less frequently than in Regnard. Moreover, while it is through such comments alone that the servant in the traditional and stylised La Tontine acknowledges the existence of a world outside his immediate circle, in both Crispin rival and Turcaret the servants⁵ are more forthcoming about their view of the world around them, and it rapidly emerges that far from wishing seriously to criticise urban society, they see themselves as having a potentially rosy future in the urban

¹Sc.26.

²Sc.8.

³I,8.

⁴See above, pp.105-6.

⁵In the present chapter, as in Part I Chapter 3, Frontin is the only servant in Turcaret to be examined, his dim-witted and minor fellow servant, Flamand, being treated in Part IV.

jungle. Thus, in Crispin rival, one finds Crispin lamenting his present condition because he sees his real place in life as being amongst the financiers of the day:

Que je suis las d'être valet! Ah, Crispin, c'est ta faute, tu as toujours donné dans la bagatelle, tu devrais présentement briller dans la finance. Avec l'esprit que j'ai, morbleu, j'aurais déjà fait plus d'une banqueroute.⁶

While in Turcaret Frontin dreams not just of enrichment, but of social advancement through enrichment (something which is eminently possible, as Turcaret's own history shows).⁷ Attitudes like these suggest very strongly that - again like Regnard's servants - Lesage's figures are glad to accept society as it is, provided that they may work within its existing structure for their own betterment.⁸

It is clear, then, that Lesage's male servants bear a strong superficial resemblance to those of Regnard, both in their awareness of society at large and in their attitude to it. But this comparison cannot be taken too far without significant differences beginning to emerge, for although the servants of both authors share a superficially similar outlook, those of Lesage show a much greater seriousness in their attempts to better their position, and this in turn implies that the considerations which motivate them are very different from those which drive Regnard's figures. Moreover, a close study of Lesage's servants shows that the forces which motivate them also differ in extent, if not in nature, from those which cause Dufresny's servants

⁶Sc.2.

⁷Turcaret's history as revealed in the play (IV,10) may show the possibility of social advancement, but Daniel Dessert's article, 'Le "Laquais-financier" au Grand Siècle: mythe ou réalité?', questions the historical accuracy of this. Frontin's dreams of enrichment emerge in Act II scene 6, where he imagines that his new post as servant to Turcaret will mean that everything he touches will turn to gold; in Act III scenes 11-12, where his resolve to accumulate wealth is stimulated by Lisette, who sees this as the first step to her becoming a femme de qualité; and in the famous closing words of the play where Frontin boldly declares: 'Voilà le règne de Monsieur Turcaret fini; le mien va commencer' (V,14). It is interesting to note, too, that in La Tontine, where social elevation is not a goal of the servants, its possibility is nevertheless referred to when Crispin, disguised as a colonel, jokes that by marrying Frosine he will 'ennoble' her, turning her from a soubrette into a femme de qualité - a remark which prompts her to observe that 'la métamorphose n'est pas neuve' (Sc.27).

⁸T. E. Lawrenson's comments on the similarity between Regnard's and Lesage's servants in this respect are cited above, p.108, note 27.

to act as they do.

In Regnard, for example, although servants may have rather grandiose dreams of a successful future,⁹ these are no more than dreams, for, as has already been shown,¹⁰ self-interest is in practice often pushed aside by the servant's love of fun, and by his desire to show himself superior to his master (both of which prove more attractive than the cool pursuit of his best interests in purely material terms), while in Dufresny, although the servants may pursue self-interest and little else, the scale of their ambition is much reduced as compared to that of either Regnard's or Lesage's servants, and, lacking even the vision of a rosy future in a more elevated social position, they pursue only short-term gain.¹¹ In Lesage's Crispin rival and Turcaret, however, it is as if the dreams of Regnard's servants were combined with the singleminded pursuit of self-interest found in Dufresny's figures to produce valets who see a future for themselves in society, and who, driven by a much more far-sighted self-interest, devote most of their energies to the achievement of this end.

The seriousness with which Lesage's servants in Crispin rival and Turcaret pursue their goal of self-advancement is, for instance, evident in the way in which they do in fact pursue it even although it may utterly change their present situation and involve them in rupture with their masters, and in ultimate flight. In Regnard this is not the case, for in his production the servants, should they seek to advance their interests, do so largely through their masters, as though they have little desire to pursue self-interest at the expense of destroying a relationship which gives them the opportunity both to show their superiority and to indulge their love of fun,¹² while in

⁹See above, pp.107-8.

¹⁰Above, pp.113-22.

¹¹Although this is most obvious in the case of Frontin in Le Dédit, who shows no social ambition but covets his master's finery, including his diamond (Sc.3), evidence of the same tendency can be found in most of Dufresny's other servants.

¹²Hector in Le Joueur, for example, despite his dreams of self-advancement, shows no sign of taking independent action to improve his lot, and, at most, seeks to improve his situation by attempting to persuade his master to pay the wages which are due to him (III,6).

Dufresny, although the servants may pursue their interests with great vigour, they normally do so by riding upon the coat-tails of a master (although they may sometimes change their allegiance if that is in their best interests), rather than by taking independent action on their own.¹³ In Lesage, however, the principal servants in Crispin rival and Turcaret are apparently content neither with the pleasure to be gained from the fun of dominating their masters nor with the gains to be won by riding upon their coat-tails; instead, they are driven by their overpowering desire for advancement to indulge in schemes where the stakes are higher and where a successful conclusion can lead only to the abandonment of their existing position (indeed, that is part of their intention). Thus, in Crispin rival, Crispin is not satisfied with the opportunity to dominate his master afforded him by the latter's belief that he can solve his problems for him,¹⁴ and is not even content to help his master, Valère, win Angélique and her dowry: he must have the whole dowry for himself, and it is only with considerable reluctance that he agrees to share it with La Branche, his accomplice in a scheme which must inevitably lead to flight and the abandonment of their masters for both of them,¹⁵ while in Turcaret Frontin, in his various soliloquies,¹⁶ thinks only of himself, and in ultimately enriching himself at the expense of his own master - by appropriating the billet au porteur which the latter has entrusted to him - knowingly places himself in a situation where it is impossible for him to continue in the service of his master.¹⁷ Clearly, for such servants, despite the evident attraction of pure fun which is still a feature of Crispin rival,¹⁸ long-term self-interest and social ambition are not just idle dreams, but are, in fact, their main driving force.

¹³The tendency of Dufresny's servants to show loyalty only to those in whose service they can gain the most is discussed above, pp.138-9.

¹⁴Although the domination of masters by their servants does not play a large part in Lesage's plays, the conditions necessary for its existence do occasionally appear, especially in Crispin rival and La Tontine (see above, pp.59-60).

¹⁵Sc.3. Crispin will pretend to be Damis, the young master of La Branche, whom it is intended that Angélique should wed, but after the marriage he will share the dowry with La Branche before both take flight with their booty.

¹⁶For example, those in Act II scenes 6 and 10.

¹⁷V,12-14.

¹⁸The not inconsiderable amount of overacting in that play is, for example, a measure of this (see above, p.63).

What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that although Crispin and La Branche in Crispin rival, and Frontin in Turcaret, tend to share the same general outlook as the male servants of Regnard, the fact that Lesage's figures actually make the pursuit of advancement their prime objective, and do not merely dream about it, means that their situation becomes fundamentally incompatible with the fourbe's role - even although, as has already been noted, fourbe elements do occur with some frequency in Crispin rival.¹⁹

First, because Lesage's servants are singleminded in their pursuit of advancement, and have no desire to waste their energies in the support of their masters, they cannot occupy the same situation as the traditional fourbe, whose assistance of his master is one of his distinguishing features. Indeed, of the three plays under consideration, only La Tontine, which does not feature a socially ambitious servant, ends with its servant still serving his master.

Second, the ambitions of the servants in Crispin rival and Turcaret, and their desire to turn their dreams into reality, conflict with the dynamic nature of the fourbe, for while the fourbe's urge to perform fourberies seems spontaneously to spring from an inner need, and not from the desire to win money or social status, with Lesage's figures intrigue becomes more of a means to an end - as the ambitious Frontin in Turcaret makes clear: 'Mais patience!', he tells himself, as he pauses to take stock of his over-busy existence, 'Après quelque temps de fatigue et de peine, je parviendrai enfin à un état d'aise. Alors quelle satisfaction! quelle tranquillité d'esprit!... Je n'aurai plus que ma conscience à mettre en repos'.²⁰ Such a statement reveals an attitude which runs directly counter to that of the fourbe, since, far from seeking a period of tranquillity, the latter is possessed of an irrepressible dynamism which drives him actively to seek activity and intrigue for their own sakes.²¹

There is, however, a third way in which the serious pursuit of

¹⁹See above, pp.59-65.

²⁰II,10.

²¹Compare Scapin's 'Je me plais à tenter des entreprises hasardeuses', in Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin (III,1), and Crispin's 'J'aime à ferrailler', in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses (I,6).

advancement is incompatible with the fourbe ethic: it makes for the denial of imagination and fantasy. Thus, whereas the fourbe - precisely because he does not see trickery as a serious means to an end - can treat intrigue as a game in which imagination and fantasy are given free rein, and as a result will frequently punctuate his activities with episodes of exaggerated behaviour or overacting, which satisfy his love of fun and create the fantastic situations so beloved of audiences (but which in a realistic situation would only arouse the suspicions of those being duped), in Lesage the situation is somewhat different. For even if in La Tontine (which takes place almost entirely in a world where realistic considerations have no place, and where the servant has no real ambition) overacting is still very much to the fore,²² in Crispin rival, although there is a measure of overacting, there is a tendency for the servants' sense of fun to be channelled into less patently unrealistic forms of expression, such as double meaning, while in Turcaret Frontin is in no way tempted to put his schemes at risk by overacting, the element of daring which the fourbe shows in appearing to lay his trickery open to discovery is not present, and it is solely in his use of double meaning that he shows traces of the fourbe's sense of fun.²³

When we considered Regnard's plays, we observed that because much of their business was conducted on an unreal and fantastic plane, the audience tended not to trouble itself with questions of morality, and therefore did not necessarily look upon the servants as evil creatures, even if, in realistic terms, some of their activities were morally questionable.²⁴ Conversely, when we examined Dufresny, we saw that the absence of fantasy in his plays meant that the audience was more

²²See above, pp.62-3. It should be noted, however, that it is not only the behaviour of the servant which places La Tontine in a world of fantasy: the note of unreality is struck in the first two scenes of the play when Trousse-Galant and Bolus engage in a discussion in which there are few signs of logical thought, and this is continued in the next scene which involves a discussion between Trousse-Galant and Bolus on the subject of the tontine on Ambroise's life, in the course of which the latter's chances of survival are assessed, and it is agreed, with apparent seriousness, that, at worst, he will live to be one hundred years old.

²³Examples of the use of double meaning by Lesage's servants are given below, pp.305-6.

²⁴See above, pp.129-30.

inclined to judge the servants on the basis of their actions, viewing those who assisted evil masters as themselves evil, while regarding with considerable benevolence those who advanced the cause of innocent young lovers.²⁵ Given, then, that, as we have seen, both Crispin rival and Turcaret tend, in varying degrees, to incline away from the world of out-and-out fantasy which the fourbe normally inhabits, one might anticipate that in these plays too the audience could be expected to judge the servants on the basis of their actions. In fact, however, this is not the case, and, as we shall see, the servants in both Crispin rival and Turcaret are viewed with only slightly less benevolence than Crispin in La Tontine (who inhabits a world of utter fantasy, and whose tricks are directed not towards his own enrichment, but towards the assistance of young lovers), despite the fact that, in realistic terms, their activities are thoroughly distasteful.

In Crispin rival, for example, the conduct of the two male servants, viewed in everyday terms, conflicts with conventional ideas of moral behaviour, for in their ruthless pursuit of self-interest these figures disregard the rights of others, and, indeed, of each other. Thus one finds that Crispin plans to thwart the progress of young love by disguising himself as the unacceptable lover whose suit is supported by Angélique's parents, simply in order to marry the girl and win her dowry.²⁶ Such behaviour is very different from that of the traditional fourbe, and indeed, from that of the servant in La Tontine, since these figures, rather than thwarting true love, attempt to further its ends.²⁷ Moreover, in the opinion of La Branche, Crispin would be willing further to desecrate young love by bedding Angélique before taking flight; indeed, La Branche contemplates encouraging him to do just that since it would give him the opportunity to make off with the entire proceeds of their trickery, while Crispin occupies himself with the girl. What is more, even when La Branche decides against implementing this scheme, he does so not primarily on moral grounds

²⁵See above, p.142.

²⁶Sc.3.

²⁷The contrasting nature of the servants' attitude to young love in La Tontine and Crispin rival is striking: Crispin in Crispin rival has no scruples about using deceit to marry his master's beloved, Angélique, while Crispin in La Tontine rejects the opportunity to wed Marianne when it presents itself (Sc.26).

(although after he has decided not to pursue this approach he does attempt to justify his decision in terms of thieves' honour), but simply because, thinking, as always, of his self-interest, he fears that Crispin would seek revenge for such a coup.²⁸

Nevertheless, despite such conduct, the servants in Crispin rival do not, for a variety of reasons, leave the audience with the impression that they are evil creatures. One reason is that although in Crispin rival there is less emphasis on outrageous fantasy than in, for example, La Tontine, the element of fantasy in the play is nevertheless strong,²⁹ with the result that, as in the case of many of Regnard's comedies, the play is acted out in an unreal world where moral considerations tend to become largely irrelevant. Another reason is that in the course of the play emphasis is placed on the duping of Angélique's parents, rather than on the plight of the young lovers, thus diverting attention away from the consequences of the servants' activities.³⁰ But a third reason is quite simply that whereas the fourbe is normally successful, in that the cause which he supports - usually the advancement of the interests of true love - triumphs in the end (although not necessarily as a direct consequence of his efforts), in the somewhat hybrid play which is Crispin rival the servants are denied success; for if these figures, with their deep-seated and ruthless desire for advancement were, like the fourbe, allowed to triumph, the play would be transformed into a tragedy. As it is, however, by reversing the traditional fourbe's role at the end of the play, Lesage allows it to remain a comedy, and through this same device - because it is easy to forgive the defeated - makes it possible for his servants to be accorded the benevolent regards which the public normally bestows

²⁸Sc.20. La Branche does take care to point out that since Crispin would actually be married to Angélique his proposal would not, technically, be illegal, but his lack of concern for the interests of young love (or, indeed, for any love, since neither he nor his fellow servant shows signs of being in love) and his cynical attitude to romantic love are easily discernible in the terms in which he presents Crispin's dalliance with Angélique, and his own appropriation of the money: 'Pendant qu'il s'amusera à la bagatelle', he says, 'je déménagerai avec le solide'.

²⁹See above, p.63.

³⁰Indeed, the young lovers appear on stage only comparatively rarely.

upon the fourbe.³¹

Similarly, in Turcaret, deceit is a feature of Frontin's behaviour,³² and in the soliloquy in which he envisages a period of tranquillity in the future, he himself recognises the lack of morality in his present activities by admitting that once his goal has been achieved it will only remain for him to put his conscience to rest.³³ But despite this, and even although he lacks the effervescence which partly characterises the servants in Crispin rival, and which to some extent raises the latter play towards a level of unreality where no-one can suffer serious injury, he too emerges as not wholly unsympathetic. Indeed, most audiences would regard him - ruthless as he is - as less unsympathetic than Dufresny's more unattractive figures, and would probably do so for three main reasons.

First, Frontin provides a greater degree of comedy than Dufresny's servants, and while the provider of comedy tends, in any case, to be regarded with some benevolence, this is especially true of Frontin, whose particular brand of double meaning creates a sense of collusion between himself and the audience.³⁴

Second, even although Frontin's schemes display little of the ingenuity which was a mark of the fourbe's projects, but depend, instead, on straightforward lies and deceit, the persistence with which the servant takes the initiative to pursue his ends, and the success of the final coup in which he gets the better of the other rapacious inhabitants of the play, excite more admiration in the audience than is produced by the activities of Dufresny's evil servants, whose lack of imagination is possibly even greater, and in whom the absence of initiative is revealed in the extent to which they act

³¹In Regnard's Le Joueur, Hector is also denied success, but in that play the effect is less important since there is never any suggestion that Hector is engaged in a systematic scheme which will seriously threaten the good and the virtuous. In Dufresny, evil servants are likewise denied success, but they display few, if any, fourbe characteristics.

³²As has already been noted above, p.68, note 28, his ultimate success stems from little more than a straightforward lie.

³³II,10. The passage is quoted above, p.147.

³⁴For an example of Frontin's use of double meaning, see below, p.305.

largely on behalf of, or, indeed, on the instructions of, their evil masters.

Third, and most important of all, there is the fact that whereas the evil nature of the wicked servants in Dufresny is emphasised by the presence, in the plays in which they occur, of 'good' figures with whom they can be contrasted, and whom their activities threaten, in Turcaret this is not the case, for there are no innocent young lovers, and, indeed, no truly 'good' figures in the play at all³⁵ - not even a sensible and outspoken female servant.³⁶ As a result, even although Frontin, unlike his fellow servants in Crispin rival, is allowed to achieve his aims at the end of the play, it is possible to consider his wickedness with greater detachment, since those whom he injures are not young innocents, but equally selfish cynics who differ from him only in that they may already have achieved some measure of success, even if, on this occasion, it is their turn to suffer defeat. Together, these three factors combine to produce a servant figure who may stimulate interest, and may provoke thought, but who does not create the strong sense of evil which surrounds not a few of Dufresny's characters.

³⁵In this respect, Turcaret is like Regnard's Le Légataire universel.

³⁶See Part III Chapter 3, especially pp.227-30. Whereas many of comedy's female servants are more sensible and morally more acceptable than their male counterparts, Lisette is as unscrupulous and self-interested as Frontin; and although some commentators have seen Marine as more concerned with the morality of her activities, close examination shows that she is far from disinterested. The fact that Frontin loves Lisette does not reflect well on him, and contrasts with the situation in La Tontine, where the male servant, Crispin, is in love with, and hopes to marry, the much more agreeable Frosine. In Crispin rival the servants show no sign of being tempted by love.

Chapter 4

DESTOUCHES

In many respects, the male servants of Destouches are the antithesis of the figures whose ethos we have so far examined, and nowhere is this more evident than in their attitude towards their own self-interest. For while the servants of Regnard, Dufresny and Lesage are all to some extent motivated by the desire for gain (even if its importance to them varies very considerably), those of Destouches show an almost total lack of concern for their own affairs.

Unlike Dufresny's figures, for instance, they show little evidence of deliberately attempting to better their own position in purely financial or material terms, for although not a few of them appear willing to accept small considerations when these are offered, they do not normally go out of their way to seek reward;¹ indeed, it is a servant - Pasquin in L'Ingrat - who, in an exchange with his self-interested master, Damis, condemns most strongly the principle that the ruthless pursuit of one's own gain is an acceptable mode of behaviour:

DAMIS:

Des plus puissants états l'intérêt est la loi;
Les grands hommes toujours ont pensé comme moi.

PASQUIN:

La chose étant ainsi, vous êtes un grand homme;
Si je le suis jamais, je veux bien qu'on m'assomme.²

Moreover, if they are unlike Dufresny's figures in that they fail to pursue their immediate gain, the valets in Destouches also differ from Lesage's servants in Crispin rival de son maître and Turcaret, since they do not, like them, seek a long-term improvement in their

¹Examples of servants accepting unsolicited gifts occur in L'Obstacle imprévu (III,6) and in L'Irrésolu (I,2), while in L'Ingrat, although Cléon appears to have offered a reward to Pasquin if he will change his allegiance (III,3), it is not this enticement which causes Pasquin to leave his original master in the first place. Le Glorieux is the only play in the course of which the servant seems to take the initiative in unburdening his master of some of his possessions, either by varying his mood in order to wheedle money from his master (as Pasquin himself explains in Act I scene 4), or by simply removing a few coins from his master's purse (II,10-11), although Crispin in L'Obstacle imprévu claims to have behaved in a similar manner in the past (III,6).

²I,6. In the edition of 1712 the servant's objection to his master's behaviour is as strong, but he does not use these words.

status. In fact, the question of social advancement seems almost not to exist for them, and although there is a slight suggestion that Pasquin in L'Obstacle imprévu is not totally unaware of changes in the fabric of society,³ Destouches's servants are generally presented as being firmly fixed in their own particular station, and, as such, separated by an unbridgeable gulf from other, non-servant, figures. Indeed, their sentiments in this respect are shared by their female counterparts, and it is probably the latter who express most clearly the view that the social order is largely immutable. Thus, in L'Irrésolu, one finds Nérine commenting that she would pursue Dorante were she 'faite pour y prétendre';⁴ in Le Glorieux Lisette, in her brief existence as a servant before her true and more elevated status is revealed, refers to the 'distance terrible' which separates her from Valère, making thoughts of open marriage impossible;⁵ while in Le Médisant Lisette, on the revelation that the 'servant', La Fontaine, is none other than Léandre in disguise, abandons her attempt to woo him with a confused: 'C'est un malentendu. Je vous croyais valet'.⁶

In fact, lacking, as they appear to be, in the desire to pursue either short- or long-term gain, it is only in their tendency occasionally to moderate their outspokenness so as to avoid retaliation from their masters that the male servants in Destouches show that they are not wholly unconcerned with their own wellbeing.⁷

But it is not only in their almost total lack of self-interest that Destouches's servants differ from those previously considered. For they are also distinguished from the latter by the fact that, although they are only minor characters with limited roles, they nevertheless emerge as surprisingly rounded figures with an outlook on life which is not only shaped by moral considerations, but which is broadly supportive of the conventional values of commonsense, honesty, and uprightness.

³He admits to the Comtesse that 'depuis l'alliage des traitants, nous avons, du côté de nos mères, moins de Guillaumes et de Bertrands, que de Champagnes et de Poitevins' (II,2).

⁴II,7.

⁵I,8.

⁶II,6.

⁷See below, pp.159-61.

To some extent, the essentially moral outlook on life which Destouches's servants possess is implicit in their behaviour. One notes, for example, that while there are to be found among the servants of each of the authors so far considered at least some whose support for innocent young lovers is less than total, in Destouches - where love intrigues are, admittedly, of much less overall importance to the plays than in the case of the other authors - the servants never willingly lend support to cynical or evil masters who threaten the happiness of youthful lovers, and sometimes they even break with them on grounds which would appear to be largely moral.⁸ Moreover, and more importantly, the conduct of Destouches's servants shows no sign of baseness, whereas that of their fellow servants in Regnard, Dufresny and Lesage - viewed in purely realistic terms - is essentially disreputable. In Regnard's Le Joueur, for instance, Hector tells lies in order to prevent his master's creditors from obtaining their rights; in Dufresny, the servants of the evil outsiders may use ruthless deception in the furtherance of their masters' schemes; in Lesage's Turcaret, Frontin makes off with money which is not rightfully his; and in the same author's Crispin rival de son maître the servants have no qualms about using deceit in order that one of them may wed, and possibly bed, the young Angélique. But in Destouches the servants are, in general, comparatively straightforward figures. Thus, not only are they not

⁸ With few exceptions, Regnard's servants do not leave their masters, but if, like Hector, they dream of a future when they will have separated from them, it is clear that concern for their physical wellbeing and social advancement is a major factor in this (see above, pp.107-8); and in Dufresny, a servant like Adrien in La Noce interrompue, whose benevolent attitude to young love is undeniable, nevertheless leaves his original master, who is a threat to young love, partly for self-interested - as opposed to moral - reasons (see above, pp.138-9). In Lesage, where the servants are more ready than in Regnard to leave their masters, the promotion of their own interests is the main reason for this (see above, pp.145-6). In Destouches, on the other hand, it would appear that those who serve masters with whose conduct they disagree are not afraid to risk rupture with them for the sake of their beliefs. Thus, in L'Ingrat, Pasquin's 'Morable! que je suis las de servir un ingrat!' (I,6) emphasises that it is the moral qualities of his master which make him wish that he were no longer associated with him (unlike Crispin's 'Que je suis las d'être valet!' soliloquy in the second scene of Lesage's Crispin rival, where the emphasis is on the servant's wasted talents), and in a later scene (II,7) he threatens to leave his master and has his offer to go accepted (although this seems to dismay him somewhat), while in L'Obstacle imprévu it seems likely that Pasquin's eventual abandonment of his master (V,12) may stem from their earlier disagreements over the morality of the latter's behaviour - disagreements which are evident in Act V scene 7, and which are even more evident in the corresponding scene (V,4) of the 1718 edition.

normally given to stealing,⁹ but they are also generally reluctant to resort to deceit in order to hoodwink the innocent, and, if forced by a master to employ deception, engage in it so half-heartedly that they convince no-one.¹⁰ Indeed, only in the conduct of their love-life do some of the servants seem less than committed to conventional morality, although the lightness with which this topic is treated suggests that it is not to be taken over-seriously, and should be seen as having little importance other than as a source of comedy.¹¹

However, although the servants' own behaviour gives some indication of their essentially moral outlook on life, it is above all in their reaction to the activities of others that their views emerge, for a feature of Destouches's servants which distinguishes them from most of the servants hitherto examined - and which is not unrelated to their confidant role¹² - is the readiness with which they are prepared

⁹Although, as we have seen (above, p.153, note 1), the servant in Le Glorieux is not above removing a few coins from his master, while Crispin in L'Obstacle imprévu has behaved similarly in the past.

¹⁰See, for example, Pasquin's defence of his master in Le Glorieux, discussed below, p.161.

¹¹In L'Ingrat, for example, the audience may witness Pasquin, who condemns his master's infidelity, but who has himself left Nérine behind in the provinces, attempting, with a comical lack of success, to woo Lisette (I,5 and II,2) before he admits that he still loves Nérine (III,3), and ultimately renews his relationship with her (III,5), while in L'Obstacle imprévu, although Pasquin (unlike Crispin in Regnard's Le Légataire universel) makes much of his concern to preserve the honour of his wife, Nérine (I,1), this would appear to serve entirely as a laughter-provoking device, as does the plight of Crispin, Nérine's former love, who hopes to marry her on his return (III,6), eventually expects to marry her after Pasquin's demise, but is rejected on suggesting an advance on his conjugal rights (IV,11), and leaves in search of a more accommodating grisette (V,13). The light vein in which the servants' love affairs are treated in this play is again underlined when Nérine, emphasising that we are in the world of theatrical comedy, observes that 'une suivante aime toujours le valet de celui qui soupire pour sa maîtresse. C'est la règle' (I,6). In other plays the subject is either even less well developed, or is treated just as lightly, so that in Le Triple Mariage one laughs at the slightly tipsy L'Epine's attempts to woo his female counterpart (Sc.5), and learns that in fact Nérine is the girlfriend of Pasquin (Sc.10); in Le Glorieux one sees Pasquin's light flirtation with Lisette before her true identity is revealed (I,2); and, in L'Irrésolu, one discovers that Frontin believes himself to be loved by the female servant (I,7).

¹²Their confidant role is touched on above, pp.80-1.

actively to discuss and criticise the behaviour of others, not least that of their masters.

Thus, whereas there is a tendency for servants like Pasquin in Dufresny's Attendez-moi sous l'orme or Adrien in the same author's La Noce interrompue, who oppose their masters, to do so by conspiring against them in secret rather than by engaging in open verbal confrontation, the servants in L'Ingrat, L'Obstacle imprévu and Le Glorieux (who reject their masters' philosophies), and the servant in L'Irrésolu (who wishes to help his master to make up his mind), can be quite forthright with those whom they serve.

One finds, for instance, that in L'Obstacle imprévu Pasquin, who advocates a change in the behaviour of his selfish petit-maitre master, Valère, is so outspoken in the opening scene of the play that Valère is prompted to ask him how much he is being paid by his father to preach at him,¹³ and in Le Glorieux his namesake also succeeds in addressing a few words of criticism to his extremely unapproachable and vain-glorious master, the Comte, advising him to adopt 'une manière un peu moins dédaigneuse' (although the extent to which his advice is based on moral considerations, as opposed to considerations of expediency, is not entirely clear),¹⁴ while in L'Irrésolu Frontin's frequent comments on the foolishness and absurdity of his indecisive master's behaviour again reveal an essentially honest, sensible, and straightforward outlook on life.¹⁵ Indeed, at one point, when Dorante argues that he can only hope to remain master in his own house if he marries someone whom he does not love, and the servant counters this by observing that such an approach would be likely to lead to infidelities on his master's part, Dorante is driven to exclaim: 'Sais-tu que quelquefois tu raisones fort bien?'¹⁶ - a remark which echoes his own father's earlier praise of the servant's abilities.¹⁷

¹³I,1.

¹⁴II,13.

¹⁵Frontin's forthrightness emerges most clearly in Act I scene 7, Act III scenes 2 and 5, and Act IV scene 1.

¹⁶III,2.

¹⁷III,1.

But it is in L'Ingrat that there appears perhaps the most outspoken servant of them all, for before Pasquin leaves the unscrupulous and self-centred Damis (or is dismissed by him), and begins his secret campaign to bring about his downfall,¹⁸ he devotes much energy to 'preaching' at him, in an attempt to reform him. Thus one finds that in the sixth scene of the play there occurs a debate between the master and servant on the rights and wrongs of the master's behaviour in jilting Orphise in favour of Isabelle (whose money the master hopes to win for himself), in the course of which the servant is much more persistent in voicing his objections than is Hector in Regnard's Le Joueur, with his occasional suggestions that his master should perhaps not be acting as he does.¹⁹ Moreover, and more importantly, unlike Frontin's objections to his master's gambling in Dufresny's Le Chevalier joueur,²⁰ Pasquin's objections to his master's conduct, although based initially on expediency (the family of the jilted girl may yet win a lawsuit which will enrich them), in the end come to rest quite simply on the argument that to behave as his master does is morally wrong:

PASQUIN:

Que dira-t-on de vous?

DAMIS, en riant:

Tout ce que l'on voudra.

PASQUIN:

C'est une ingratitude; on vous en blâmera.

DAMIS:

Ingratitude ou non, je songe à ma fortune.

PASQUIN:

Il n'est pas d'un bon cœur...

DAMIS:

Un bon cœur importune.²¹

Furthermore, it cannot be doubted that the servant is sincere in his attempts to convince his master of the wrongness of his approach, for on other occasions he hopes that his master will at least feel some sort of remorse,²² shows excitement when he thinks that his master has been cornered in argument (exclaiming, 'Ma foi, vous voilà pris', when

¹⁸See above, p.74.

¹⁹Compare, for example, the weakness of Hector's unfinished comment to his master - cited above, p.123 - in which he appears to recognise the iniquity of his master's behaviour.

²⁰See above, p.141.

²¹I,6. The passage cited does not occur in the edition of 1712, although in that edition the servant's objections are based exclusively on moral grounds, and the question of expediency is ignored.

²²II,7.

he believes that Lisette and Isabelle have got the better of Damis in debate),²³ and also, rather like Sganarelle in Molière's Dom Juan, reacts with jubilation to what he mistakenly believes is a genuine change of heart on the part of his master:

Je suis content de vous, monsieur, pour cette fois.
Oui, j'en pleure de joie, et vous demande en grâce²⁴
De vouloir bien souffrir ... que je vous embrasse.

It must be noted, however, that while not a few of Destouches's servants are like Sganarelle in Dom Juan in that they feel constrained to comment on the morality of their masters' behaviour, they are also like Sganarelle in that they tend to lack both the articulateness and the boldness which frequently distinguish their female counterparts. For whereas, as is shown in Part III, below, the female servants in Molière and Destouches (as well as in some of the other authors) can be both fluent and irrepressible in their condemnation of behaviour which they consider reprehensible, both Sganarelle and the male servants in Destouches are quite different. One finds, for instance, that while Destouches's male servants, like Sganarelle, appear to know almost instinctively the difference between right and wrong, they are not always capable of translating their feelings into a coherent argument in favour of right action. In Dom Juan, this is evident when Sganarelle's response to his master's praise of hypocrisy rapidly becomes garbled,²⁵ and in the case of Destouches's plays the point is made particularly well by Lisette in L'Ingrat, who, after her male counterpart's attempted condemnation of ingratitude has degenerated into nonsense, comments:

Oui, Pasquin, ta morale est très fine:
Mais tu la prêches mal.²⁶

Moreover, far from being irrepressible, Destouches's male servants, like Sganarelle, are essentially timid creatures who voice their moral objections to their masters' behaviour only as long as the masters

²³II,2.

²⁴II,3. In similar circumstances in Dom Juan, Sganarelle exclaims: 'Ah! monsieur, que j'ai de joie de vous voir converti! Il y a longtemps que j'attendais cela, et voilà, grâce au ciel, tous mes souhaits accomplis' (V,2).

²⁵V,2.

²⁶III,3. The comic effect of the servants' inability to express themselves is discussed below, pp.342-6.

will tolerate it. In practice, this usually means that when alone with their self-assured masters, who tend to regard them and their moral scruples with lighthearted condescension, the servants will do their best to express their disapproval of their masters' conduct, but as soon as a third party arrives on the scene the masters will bring the game to an end, and, under their withering gaze, the servants will desist from their criticism, even giving half-hearted support to their masters if forced to.²⁷ As Sganarelle puts it, explaining his relationship with his master to Gusman:

Un grand seigneur méchant homme est une terrible chose; il faut que je lui sois fidèle, en dépit que j'en aie: la crainte en moi fait l'office du zèle, bride mes sentiments, et me²⁸ réduit d'applaudir bien souvent à ce que mon âme déteste.

Thus, when Damis in L'Ingrat, confronted by Isabelle, who suspects that he is interested in her only for her wealth, looks to Pasquin for support, the latter - who has in private expressed disapproval of his master's behaviour, and who continues to do so in asides to his master during the scene in question²⁹ - dutifully obliges (no doubt fearful of retaliation if he should do otherwise),³⁰ and unenthusiastically repeats to Isabelle his master's own pronouncements:

DAMIS:

L'intérêt? juste ciel! Moi qui ne sais qu'aimer!

PASQUIN:

Mon maître intéressé! Grand Dieu! c'est blasphémer.³¹

Likewise, in L'Obstacle imprévu, when Angélique refuses (with justification) to believe the playboy Valère's assertion that he loves her, Valère turns to his servant - who, when alone with him in the previous scene, has been fiercely critical of his behaviour - and seeks his support, whereupon the servant, rather than taking the

²⁷Such behaviour is in marked contrast to that of Regnard's servants, who, when their masters are confronted by their adversaries, will enthusiastically take charge.

²⁸Molière, Dom Juan, I,1.

²⁹'Mais pouvez-vous mentir avec cette impudence?', he asks his master in an aside, amazed, as always, at the extent of Damis's perfidy (II,2).

³⁰At a different point, and in a different context, Pasquin candidly admits to Lisette that the fear of a beating will cause him to lie (V,1), while in another comment he reveals something of the fear and awe which - again like Sganarelle in Dom Juan - he feels for his apparently invincible master: 'Je crois qu'il est sorcier' (III,3).

³¹II,2.

opportunity to condemn his master outright, meekly responds with statements like 'Mon maître est l'homme de France qui aime le plus: il n'a qu'un défaut, c'est qu'il aime trop',³² which appear superficially to reinforce his master's claims, and only in their underlying ambiguity contain a hint of criticism.

And similarly, in Le Glorieux, Pasquin conducts a superficial defence of his master - this time even in his master's absence - but, since he is at heart opposed to his master's machinations, and, unlike the fourbe, has no taste for trickery for its own sake, he carelessly introduces inconsistencies into his argument, and, on being tackled about these by Lisette, candidly admits that he is acting under orders:

Naturellement, moi, je suis très véridique.
Mais j'obéis.³³

But it is not only in their direct criticism of those with whom they come into immediate contact that the views of Destouches's servants emerge, for these figures, with their ready capacity for irony, occasionally extend their critical gaze to fashionable urban society as a whole, and comment upon what they see as its vagaries, often emphasising - by the use of terms like 'à présent' and 'aujourd'hui' - that the phenomena to which they refer are recent aberrations in behaviour.

Thus one finds that when, in L'Obstacle imprévu, Pasquin's petit-maître master complains that Angélique has 'trop d'esprit', Pasquin expresses only mock sympathy:

PASQUIN:
Trop d'esprit! Cela est insupportable.
VALERE:
Elle lit depuis le matin jusqu'au soir, et se pique de savoir tout.
PASQUIN:
C'est un reste de province. Le grand monde la corrigera.³⁴

And when Valère goes on to state that Angélique's 'beaux sentiments' bore him, Pasquin's response is again similar in tone:

³²_{I,2.}

³³_{IV,1.}

³⁴_{I,1.}

Je le crois bien. Parler beaux sentiments aux jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui, c'est leur parler grec et latin; ils entendent aussi bien l'un que l'autre.³⁵

Likewise, when Dorante in L'Irrésolu worries that he will be cuckolded if he marries, Frontin ironically informs him that he is behind the times:

Tenez, vos sentiments ne sont plus à la mode;
Et tout cela, monsieur, sent l'ancienne méthode.
Autrefois sur l'honneur on était délicat;
Un mari qui s'en pique à présent, est un fat.³⁶

Moreover, although Frontin may later make much the same point in less ironical statements, telling his master that 'en ce temps-ci' it will be difficult for him to be preferred to a lover by his wife,³⁷ and explaining Dorante's desire to remain master in his own house by saying that 'en dépit des mœurs et du ton d'aujourd'hui, / Il veut, malgré sa femme, être maître chez lui',³⁸ he does again resort to mock sympathy and irony in an exchange, not with his master, but with the Chevalier. For when the latter - whose behaviour, thanks to his background and upbringing, is the complete antithesis of that of the gentle master whom Frontin serves with patient loyalty - shouts aggressively at his father, and explains to Frontin that he is in a bad mood because his father is trying to tell him what to do, the servant pretends to agree with him:

FRONTIN:

Voyez la belle chose!
Un père qui veut mettre un fils à la raison!
Il a perdu l'esprit.

LE CHEVALIER:

Ai-je tort? Dis-moi.

FRONTIN:

Non.

On devait autrefois du respect à son père;
Mais à présent, monsieur, oh! c'est une autre affaire.³⁹

Such statements bear a certain resemblance to the observations on society made by the servants of Regnard and Lesage.⁴⁰ But whereas the

³⁵I,1.

³⁶I,7.

³⁷I,7.

³⁸III,4. This particular reference to contemporary manners does not occur in the 1713 edition.

³⁹II,10.

⁴⁰See above, pp.105-6 and 143.

comments by the servants in Regnard and Lesage can be dismissed as little more than witty fireworks of a morally neutral tone, those made by Destouches's servants must to a large extent be regarded as reflecting the servants' genuine disapproval of what they see as current, and, it is implied, degenerate patterns of behaviour, since not only do they constitute a slightly more consistent body of comment (in that they tend to lay stress on the modernity of the practices to which they refer), but they are in accord with the servants' outlook as revealed by their behaviour elsewhere in the plays. The position is, therefore, that whereas in both Destouches and Regnard the servants may be associated with disreputable, fashionable masters, in Regnard they will imitate - or at least not reject - the latter's values, possibly because they identify themselves with their masters, and hope, in the long term, to be masters themselves, while in Destouches, on the other hand, they will refuse to imitate such masters, and, by making wry or ironical comments on contemporary decadence, will tend not only to offer lighthearted condemnation of the sort of behaviour alluded to, but also to create a feeling of complicity with the audience, inviting it to laugh at current behavioural trends.

From all that has been said so far, it must be clear that Destouches's male servants cannot fail to be seen by the audience as essentially moral creatures. For whereas many of the servants in Regnard and Lesage are in realistic terms unscrupulous, but escape from being regarded as wicked largely because their imaginative activities place them in an amoral world of fantasy, the male servants in the plays of Destouches - where fantasy has little part to play - behave with considerable rectitude, showing no motivation beyond an understandable desire for self-preservation, and, through their comments, expressing only support for the conventional values of common sense, uprightness, and honesty.

But Destouches's plays differ both from those of the authors hitherto considered and from those of Dancourt - whose production is examined in the chapter which follows - in that whereas the plays by the other authors appear to be in no sense didactic, those by Destouches, constituting, as they do, a transition between conventional comedy and the comédie larmoyante which was to follow it, may be seen as having a moralising intent. A number of critics comment on this aspect of

Destouches's plays (Graziano, for instance, declares that Destouches 'veut avant tout corriger et épurer les mœurs',⁴¹ while Charaux sees Destouches - in Le Glorieux - as 'une sorte de précepteur'),⁴² and Destouches himself is at pains to stress the moralising aim of his work (as when, in his preface to Le Glorieux, he declares: 'On sait que j'ai toujours devant les yeux ce grand principe dicté par Horace: "Omne tulit punctum, qui miscuit utile dulci", et que je crois que l'art dramatique n'est estimable, qu'autant qu'il a pour but d'instruire en divertissant');⁴³ but even if one places little credence on Destouches's own statements (for it is not uncommon for authors of the period to seek to justify their work by presenting it as in some way didactic), the very fact that, in these plays, the unmasking of the villain brings little gain to the servants who nevertheless welcome it, suggests that Destouches is presenting a critical view of certain social and moral values. And because these plays may be seen as having a moralising function, one must inevitably ask whether or not the servants, in addition to projecting themselves as essentially moral creatures, have a direct role to play in the advocacy of right action.

Superficially, there are occasional indications that the servants may have such a role to play, the most obvious of which is Pasquin's address to the audience which brings L'Ingrat to a close, and which might suggest that he is acting as a straightforward spokesman for the author:

Vous avez vu punir le plus grand des ingrats:
Profitez de l'exemple et ne l'imitiez pas.⁴⁴

But in fact such a statement is not only out of keeping with Pasquin's role in L'Ingrat, but is also uncharacteristic of the plays as a whole, since Destouches's male servants do not normally address the audience directly in this way. Moreover, the servants are not the most conspicuously moral figures in the plays in which they feature, either in terms of their behaviour or their pronouncements. For as well as usually being rather minor characters, they are never alone in regarding the villains of the plays with horror, and tend to work in concert

⁴¹ Joseph Graziano, Essai sur la vie et les œuvres de Destouches, p.vi.

⁴² A. Charaux, 'La Comédie après Molière et Regnard', p.286.

⁴³ Œuvres dramatiques, II, 307-8. For a more extended account of Destouches's views on the moralising value of drama see Chapter 2 of Aleksandra Hoffmann-Lipońska's Philippe Néricault Destouches et la comédie moralisatrice.

⁴⁴ V, 7.

with a number of non-servant figures who share their views.⁴⁵ Furthermore, although some of the servants' comments may raise moral issues, it is primarily their non-servant colleagues who, in their discussions, draw the attention of the audience to considerations of a moral nature: in L'Irrésolu, for instance, the opening exchange between Lisimon and Pyrante (the fathers of the Chevalier and Dorante) on how best to bring up children does more to draw attention to ethical matters than anything the servants might say.⁴⁶ Overall, therefore, the servants do not have a unique role to play in the promotion of a moral view, and instead simply serve - along with not a few of the non-servant characters with whom they share the stage - as examples of kindly, largely decent figures, whose presence throws into sharp relief the less edifying characteristics of the unscrupulous figures whom they encounter or serve.

⁴⁵This is most obviously the case in L'Ingrat (see above, p.74).

⁴⁶Further examples of non-servant figures raising moral issues in their discussions and soliloquies are cited below, p.234, note 4.

Chapter 5

DANCOURT

With the exception of La Vigne in La Parisienne, the male servants in those plays of Dancourt which fall within the scope of this study support their masters' causes;¹ but although it is true that La Vigne is also exceptional in having as a master not the young lover, but the senex figure of the play in which he features, it would be wrong to conclude from this that the majority of Dancourt's servants support their masters because of a commitment to innocent young love. For in fact, as a close analysis of these plays soon reveals, the servants' outlook on life involves no such commitment.

One finds, for example, that far from being devoted to innocence and purity, Dancourt's servants share with those of Regnard a certain mistrust or lack of comprehension of pure romantic love.² This can, in the first instance, be seen in their lack of sympathy for any expression of romanticism on the part of their masters.³ Thus, in Renaud et Armide, when the lovers Clitandre and Lisette swoon with ecstasy on encountering each other after a period of separation, L'Olive's comment is an unsympathetic 'Maugrebleu des sottés gens',⁴ while in La Parisienne a not dissimilar encounter between Eraste and Angélique provokes L'Olive to utter an ironical 'Morbleu, voilà des gens qui s'aiment'.⁵ Similarly, in La Gazette de Hollande, Crispin shows a lack of sympathy for romantic love when he comments that 'les jeunes gens vraiment amoureux, sont aussi sots qu'ils sont insolents quand ils n'aiment que par manière de conversation',⁶ and in Le Galant Jardinier,

¹This is not to say that servants take positive action to assist their masters, for, as has been noted above, pp.86-8 and 95-8, this is not usually the case; rather, it is merely a recognition of the fact that the servants behave as if they are, in general, supportive of their masters' aims. La Vigne's master is the aged Damis, who hopes to marry his son's beloved, Angélique - a match which La Vigne shows no desire to see concluded, although he seems content to rely on the resourcefulness of the female servant, Lisette, to prevent it (Sc.5).

²The attitude of Regnard's servants to romantic love is discussed above, pp.109-11.

³As in Regnard, such expressions of romantic love can be made by masters who at other times are far from idealistic lovers.

⁴Sc.12.

⁵Sc.9.

⁶Sc.3.

when Léandre relates to La Montagne how he was unable to resist Lucile's charms, commenting that before an 'enemy' of such a sex 'les plus grands hommes font gloire de céder', the servant's response is again less than sympathetic: 'Morale d'opéra, monsieur, fades discours. On ne se rend que quand on veut bien ne pas résister'.⁷ While in Les Fonds perdus Merlin is rather critical of the fact that the threatened non-fulfilment of his master's romantic love for Angélique should have such a serious effect on him, especially since he has the opportunity to marry a rich old widow:

Ma foi, monsieur, votre amour n'est qu'une bête, puisqu'il vous empêche de raisonner. Je voudrais bien savoir d'où diantre il peut venir ce chagrin où vous êtes si mal à propos. Une veuve, un peu sur le retour à la vérité, est amoureuse de vous; le grand malheur!⁸

But, as in Regnard,⁹ the servants' lack of commitment to pure romantic love is reflected not only in their attitude to the love affairs of their masters, but also in the occasional glimpses which one gets of their own love lives, for although the servants' attachments are in some plays alluded to so briefly that it is difficult to determine the precise nature of their sentiments,¹⁰ in others it is quite clear that while their relationships are based on a variety of emotions, pure head-in-the-clouds romanticism is not one of them. Thus, in La Gazette de Hollande, Crispin reveals a significant degree of cynicism when he informs the audience that he has a girlfriend waiting for him, 'car, dans le printemps, chacun est amoureux';¹¹ and a similarly cynical attitude to the permanence of love is revealed in Les Eaux de Bourbon where La Roche (who may, however, only be joking) describes his behaviour in the following terms:

⁷Sc.6.

⁸I,1.

⁹See above, pp.112-13.

¹⁰In Renaud et Armide, for example, one learns only that the female servant, Lisette, is attracted by the male servant, L'Olive (Sc.10), that her love is returned (Sc.12), and that they will marry (Sc.23); in La Maison de campagne little is revealed of the servants' aspirations other than that La Flèche would like to elope with Lisette if his master were to elope with Marianne, and that the female servant does not view this proposition in a kindly light (Sc.1); while in Le Mari retrouvé one is told only that L'Epine hopes to win Julienne, the miller's widow (Sc.1), and that his love is not reciprocated (Sc.3).

¹¹Sc.9.

Et moi, qui vous parle, moi, dans toutes nos villes de quartier d'hiver, je ne manque jamais de faire quelque alliance: c'est là ma folie.¹²

Furthermore, in Le Chevalier à la mode, Crispin indicates a willingness to contemplate love for financial reasons when he declares that 'pour accommoder [ses affaires]' he would be willing to marry any of the rich lovers rejected by his master,¹³ while in La Parisienne the stormy reunion of the female servant, Lisette, with her long-absent husband, the servant L'Olive,¹⁴ and their subsequent rather reluctant reconciliation,¹⁵ is somewhat reminiscent of the situation in Regnard's Démocrite, where Strabon and Cléanthis, after a fierce reunion,¹⁶ resume life together, not with their heads in the clouds, but with an unromantic awareness of each other's shortcomings.¹⁷

It is, however, not only in their attitude to romantic love that Dancourt's servants show a tendency towards cynicism, for whereas the valets of Destouches can be critical of conduct which they see as morally questionable, those of Dancourt are inclined to view dubious behaviour, wherever they may encounter it, with carefree moral neutrality. And to some extent this is not surprising, as it is in keeping with the tenor of these plays as a whole. For although, as we have seen, Dancourt's comedies place greater emphasis on manners than on intrigue,¹⁸ like those of Regnard, Dufresny and Lesage - but unlike those of Destouches - they are nevertheless in no sense didactic, exploring the vagaries of society largely through the straightforward depiction, in episodic scenes, of rumbustious contemporary life,

¹²Sc.17.

¹³I,7.

¹⁴Sc.6.

¹⁵Sc.9 and 25. In the edition cited, the names of L'Olive and La Vigne are transposed in the latter scene.

¹⁶IV,7.

¹⁷V,7.

¹⁸See above, pp.82-4.

without any attempt to moralise about the activities portrayed.¹⁹

One finds, therefore, that whereas the servants of Destouches will give their unqualified support only to pure young lovers, those of Dancourt, although they do support pure young lovers when these occur, may just as easily (and, indeed, more frequently) lend their support to figures who, while remaining within the young lover category, not only show little evidence of innocence or purity, but, indeed, may emerge as much more consistently disreputable than Regnard's least attractive masters (although they never appear quite as wicked as the evil masters in Dufresny, who know nothing but self-interest, and seem altogether ignorant of the joys of life).

Thus, while in early plays like Angélique et Médor and Les Fonds perdus the masters served by the male servants are cast fairly firmly in the naïve young lover mould (in fact, in Les Fonds perdus the young master, Valère, is so upright that he professes to feel repugnance for the means employed by his servant to help him),²⁰ in other plays it soon becomes clear that the masters whom the valets serve are far from pure and innocent figures. In some cases, this emerges from glimpses of the master's past activities: in Renaud et Armide, for example, one learns that Clitandre has been preying on his beloved's aunt for a living;²¹ in La Gazette de Hollande it is clear that Clitandre (who is, according to his servant, 'fort connu de quantité de coquettes') indulges in amorous intrigues each winter when he returns from the wars;²² and in Les Vacances it transpires that Clitandre, another

¹⁹La Désolation des joueuses is typical in this respect. The gambling craze of the period is made fun of by presenting the audience with scenes in which gamblers display the foolishness of their passion as they try to circumvent the banning of lansquenets, and there is no attempt seriously to discuss the morality of such behaviour. Indeed, the play is so devoid of the type of moralising which one expects to find in the plays of Destouches that it even ends with Dorante (the young lover, who is not a gambler) agreeing to gamble in future in return for being allowed to marry Angélique, whose mother is obsessed with the craze (Sc.14).

²⁰I,1.

²¹Sc.14.

²²Sc.2.

military captain,²³ in addition to seeing his dear Angélique in the convent where she has been brought up, has had a previous involvement with the old bourgeoise, Mme Perrinelle, who is not averse to renewing it, and has sent her husband away so that he will be less of an obstacle than in the previous winter.²⁴ In other plays, however, the disreputable nature of the masters may be made clear by the pronouncements of the non-servant figures. Thus, in Le Galant Jardinier, Dubuisson believes Léandre to be 'un libertin, qui s'est fait capitaine malgré son père, grand dissipateur de biens, homme de plaisirs, de bonne chère, et aimant les femmes',²⁵ while in Le Chevalier à la mode Crispin's master is described by Migaud as someone who 'n'est point fait pour épouser', and as 'un aventurier ... un jeune extravagant ... qui n'a pour tout mérite que celui de boire, et de prendre du tabac'.²⁶

Particularly interesting, however, are the occasions where the highly disreputable nature of the masters is made clear by their own servants' discussion of their views and activities, for not only do cases of this type underline the lack of innocence of many of the masters whom the servants are apparently happy to support, but they also illustrate very clearly the extent to which the attitude of Dancourt's servants towards such figures differs from that of the valets in Regnard and Destouches. For although, in Destouches, the servants assist masters whose conduct might be considered unethical only with considerable reluctance, sometimes openly expressing their disapproval of their masters' behaviour,²⁷ while even in Regnard faint stirrings of conscience may intrude upon the servants' largely uncritical support of unscrupulous masters, causing them to voice doubts about the propriety of their masters' conduct,²⁸ in Dancourt the servants' attitude towards such masters is entirely carefree and

²³ Many of Dancourt's masters are military men - Léandre in Le Galant Jardinier and Eraste in Le Vert Galant are further examples - and, as such, figures whose purity is strongly suspect. As Mathurin, the gardiner in Colin-Maillard, puts it: 'Ce sont des enjôleux, que ces capitaines, des attrapeux de filles' (Sc.1).

²⁴ Sc.16.

²⁵ Sc.1.

²⁶ I,5.

²⁷ See above, pp.157-9.

²⁸ See above, pp.123-4.

uncritical, and may sometimes even be tinged with admiration when, apparently oblivious to questions of morality, the servants find themselves attracted by the fun of their masters' bold deceits in much the same way as the servant in Regnard was attracted by the fun of his own trickery.

One finds, therefore, that in Les Enfants de Paris Merlin characterises his master as someone whose time is taken up with 'l'amour, le jeu, la bonne chère', but then, far from passing any moral judgement on this, proceeds quite happily to give a more detailed account of his master's daily timetable,²⁹ while in La Foire Saint-Germain there is no hint of real criticism in Le Breton's lighthearted assertion that the marriage of his master's beloved to a third party would be no problem for his master:

Mon maître n'est pas scrupuleux, il l'épousera en secondes noces avant qu'elle soit veuve.³⁰

A similar situation occurs in Le Moulin de Javelle, where L'Olive, bearing a note from his master to Angélique, discovers that she too appears to be married already, for although the servant rejects Mme Bertrand's offer still to convey the letter to Angélique, he does so not because he might doubt the morality of such an action, but, it is implied, because the note would have to be modified to suit the new situation.³¹ Indeed, L'Olive is apparently unabashed when, later in the same play, Bertrand comments, in the following terms, on the behaviour of his master:

Morgué, c'est un grand libartin que votre maître, Monsieur de L'Olive! Des vieilles, des jeunes, des bourgeoises, des marquises; il en aime de toutes les façons, et il n'en épouse pas une.

Because, rather than responding in a defensive manner, the servant simply explains in detail his master's technique (even proudly associating his own behaviour with that of his master):

²⁹I,7.

³⁰Sc.18.

³¹Sc.11. That L'Olive sees Angélique's marriage as no major obstacle becomes even clearer when he later advises his master not to try approaching her too soon, lest all be lost: 'De nouvelles mariées sont encore toutes sottes de leurs maris; réservons cela pour le quartier d'hiver, au retour de la campagne' (Sc.25).

Qu'est-ce à dire, il n'en épouse pas une? Il n'y en a presque point qu'il n'épouse. Mais comme, nous autres jeunes gens, nous ne faisons pas les choses dans toutes les règles, il manque toujours quelque formalité à nos mariages, et c'est ce qui fait qu'on les casse.³²

In Les Eaux de Bourbon there is again little sign of serious criticism when La Roche, talking of his master, wittily concludes that 'sans la fureur qu'il a pour le vin, le jeu, et les femmes, ce serait bien le garçon le mieux morigéné',³³ or when he later seems to suggest that his master, possibly tiring of his marriage after only six months, might be persuaded to cast it aside.³⁴ And in Le Vert Galant, although L'Epine baldly reminds his master of his behaviour - 'Vous êtes jeune, assez bien fait, hardi, entreprenant, et insolent même quelquefois; mais cela ne vous a encore mené qu'à la connaissance de quelques coquettes de frontière, et à deux ou trois mois de crédit, que nous avons attrapés par-ci par-là de vos hôtesse',³⁵ - his comments are not, as they might well be, a prelude to a lecture on morality, but merely part of the servant's campaign to persuade his master, for purely pragmatic reasons, to seek lodgings at his uncle's house rather than in any of the inns which they have previously swindled. Moreover, when a servant such as L'Epine in Le Mari retrouvé believes that his master, formerly 'libertin' and 'la coqueluche de tout le Gâtinais, et les délices de toutes les coquettes de Montargis', is about to become serious in love, forgetful of morality, he first laments this move away from a carefree state,³⁶ and even when he later supports his master's serious intentions towards Colette, the mill-wife's niece, does so not on ethical grounds, but because he finds it amusing that such a match, linked to his own hoped-for marriage to the girl's aunt, might make him his master's uncle.³⁷

Most interesting of all, however, is the case of Crispin in Le Chevalier à la mode, since it provides a particularly striking illustration of the moral gulf which separates the servants of Dancourt from those of Destouches, for while Damis's unscrupulous use of deceit

³²Sc.24.

³³Sc.17.

³⁴Sc.18. The duration of the marriage is alluded to in the closing scene (Sc.31).

³⁵Sc.1.

³⁶Sc.1.

³⁷Sc.1.

in Destouches's L'Ingrat provokes only outrage and shock in his morally upright servant, Pasquin,³⁸ in Dancourt's Le Chevalier à la mode the Chevalier's success in using deceit to extricate himself from situations from which escape seems impossible arouses no such sentiments in his servant. Thus, his ability to persuade Mme Patin (whom he pretends to love because of her wealth) that the widespread circulation of verses which she believed had been composed for her alone has arisen from the pirating of his creations by friends, provokes an admiring Crispin to exclaim: 'L'excellent fourbe que voilà!'.³⁹ And in a later scene Crispin again makes it clear that, unlike the servants of Destouches, he is oblivious to morality, for instead of rejoicing at the threatened unmasking of his master, he appears anxious to see him achieve the impossible by escaping from the corner in which he finds himself:

Oh, parbleu, je voudrais bien pour la rareté du fait qu'il se tirât d'intrigue.⁴⁰

Such reactions are most definitely not those of a servant who gives any serious thought to questions of morality.

It is obvious, then, that the attitude of Dancourt's servants towards the conduct of those with whom they come into contact is largely one of lighthearted moral neutrality or amorality; but it is not only towards those with whom they are closely associated that Dancourt's servants respond in this way, for although it is only infrequently that they stand back and view the fashions of the world at large, when they do, they tend neither to moralise nor to resort to the critical irony favoured by some of the servants in Destouches, but instead restrict themselves to amused comment - not unlike that found in Regnard - on the phenomena of the period.

One finds an early example of this in Angélique et Médor, where Merlin, clearly amused by the activities of the opera-going public, comments: 'Quelque méchant qu'il soit ^[sic] un opéra, il ne manquera pourtant jamais d'y avoir du monde, et il y a un certain commerce et

³⁸ See above, pp.158-9.

³⁹ IV,2.

⁴⁰ V,6.

une certaine liaison des troisièmes loges avec le parterre qui attire bien des gens'.⁴¹ But it is probably two scenes in La Foire de Besons which provide the best illustration of the servants' attitude. In the first of these L'Olive explains to Cidalise one of the functions of the fair in the following terms:

Il y a des foires pour les chevaux, et pour les bêtes à cornes: madame, il est bien juste qu'il y en ait une pour les soupirants. Les dames, qui veulent faire emplettes, viennent ici dans la prairie voir danser, sauter, gambader, trotter, galoper ce qu'il y a de jeunes gens, et quand il s'en trouve quelqu'un beau, bien fait et de bonne mine ... Je me donne au diable, je l'ai échappé belle, moi qui vous parle, la bonne marchandise est de défaite en ce pays-ci.⁴²

And in the scene which follows, the same servant describes to Frosine the attitude of young military officers to marriage:

Au retour d'une campagne ils ne sont pas fâchés de trouver chez des Madame Argante, toutes les commodités de la vie. Ils regardent cela comme une espèce d'auberge Tant que cela dure, on a des empressements pour elles; soins, complaisances, égards, assiduités, rien ne manque: le printemps vient, le mois de mars arrive, le dénouement approche, il est question d'épouser, ohé, ohé, l'amour s'envole, le cavalier décampe, et la dame enrage. Oh ça, le mariage est une espèce de conclusion qu'on ne connaît point parmi les troupes, et la plupart des jolies femmes ne s'embarrassent pas de le supprimer.⁴³

Both these scenes reveal much the same lighthearted, amused acceptance of life as was seen in the servants' reaction to the foibles of their masters, and this is a stance which is maintained by these figures throughout most of Dancourt's production. Indeed, the only occasions on which a hint of bitterness creeps into the servants' comments, suggesting that their attitude towards the behaviour which they see around them is not always one of neutrality, are those which occur when the servants feel that they are directly threatened by the injustices of society, as when La Flèche in L'Opéra de village reflects on the capricious behaviour of 'les gens de qualité' towards those who serve them - 'Vous les réjouissez, ils vous souffrent dans leurs débauches; ils vous noyeraient le lendemain, pour satisfaire leur moindre caprice'⁴⁴ -, or when he later comments on the inequality of treatment

⁴¹Sc.11.

⁴²Sc.12.

⁴³Sc.13.

⁴⁴Sc.4.

meted out to masters and servants who have participated in an enlèvement (a theme which also appears in other plays),⁴⁵ but such expressions of apparent disapproval are too infrequent, and too unco-ordinated, to be seen as part of a serious attempt to criticise the structure of society.

The outlook of the servants in Dancourt is such, then, that they are capable of contemplating with equanimity both the essentially selfish and crooked behaviour of libertine masters, and the somewhat questionable habits of other figures in society; and to some extent this can be explained by the fact that the servants' own past activities and associations as alluded to in the plays (often by the servants themselves) mark them out as figures whose behaviour can be every bit as disreputable as that of their masters,⁴⁶ although with more of an inclination towards straightforward swindling than the use of libertinage for both pleasure and gain. One learns, for example, that Merlin in La Désolation des joueuses has, as a card sharper, already been entangled with the law,⁴⁷ and in La Foire de Besons it is clear that L'Olive's previous activities have included forgery,⁴⁸ while the admissions by Le Breton in La Foire Saint-Germain that 'l'entrepreneur du petit opéra est le bâtard d'une de mes tantes, et la petite danseuse de corde, est la maîtresse de mon neveu',⁴⁹ and his revelation that the courtesan, Mlle de Kermontin, is none other than his sister Nicole,⁵⁰ like L'Olive's admission in Le Moulin de Javelle that his sister and aunt have been imprisoned and his cousin executed,⁵¹ mark him out as someone who is well integrated into

⁴⁵In L'Opéra de village La Flèche reflects that, after an enlèvement, 'pendant qu'on fait le procès du maître, le valet de chambre est pendu par provision' (Sc.11), and in Le Tuteur L'Olive holds similar views, telling his master, who is optimistic about the outcome of an enlèvement, 'Cela s'accommodera pour vous; mais je serai peut-être pendu par accommodement, moi' (Sc.17), while in Le Chevalier à la mode Crispin expresses similar sentiments (IV,7).

⁴⁶Hippolyte Lucas, Le Foyer du Théâtre-Français: Molière, Dancourt, p.100, puts it simply: 'Les valets ... sont tous aussi fripons que leurs maîtres'.

⁴⁷Sc.3.

⁴⁸Sc.13.

⁴⁹Sc.18.

⁵⁰Sc.22.

⁵¹Sc.25.

society's underworld.

Nevertheless, although such glimpses of the supposed background of Dancourt's servants suggest that these figures might have few scruples about ruthlessly pursuing their own interests, when one comes to examine their actual conduct in the course of the plays, one finds that, paradoxically, there is little evidence of self-interest being a prime motive.

First, although these plays, with their detailed depiction of society, are crowded with social climbers, including some whose origins are every bit as lowly as those of many of the servants,⁵² the servants themselves give little evidence of seeking substantial social advancement. It is, in fact, rare for them even to think of leaving their masters at all,⁵³ and when their thoughts do turn in this direction they usually contemplate a return to a previous position as a relief from the service of their demanding libertine masters rather than advancement to a socially more elevated position. Thus, in Le Vert Galant, L'Epine threatens to leave his master and become once more a dyer's assistant,⁵⁴ while in Madame Artus Merlin, in an opening soliloquy which is slightly reminiscent of that of Hector in Regnard's Le Joueur, laments his present situation as servant to a young libertine, but, unlike Hector, reflects only on the comparative ease of his previous position, and not on the possibilities for advancement which the future might hold for him. Indeed, of the male servants under consideration, only Crispin in Le Chevalier à la mode shows a real awareness of social advancement, reflecting on the possibility that he, rather than his master, might marry the Baronne, and observing that 'il arrive tous les jours des choses moins faisables que celle-là'.⁵⁵ But his speculations come in a moment of disillusionment which

⁵² Social climbers are perhaps most prominent in Les Bourgeoises à la mode, which, in addition to featuring the socially ambitious lawyer's wife, Angélique, and the equally ambitious commissaire's wife, Araminte, contains a Chevalier who proves to be none other than Jannot, the son of Mme Amelin, a pawnbroker.

⁵³ In Les Fonds perdus, for example, although the male and female servants extract money from the aged parents, unlike Lesage's servants they do not think of using this to set themselves up in life.

⁵⁴ Sc.1.

⁵⁵ IV,7.

is later forgotten, and do not mark a serious attempt on his part to break out of his existing situation.

Second, and perhaps even more surprisingly, despite the suggestion that the servants have in the past been active in the pursuit of their own interests, in the course of the plays they not only show no long-term ambition but also appear to have little concern for immediate gain. Thus, not only do the servants, surrounded by socially ambitious figures, show no social ambition, but, finding themselves in the midst of figures whose major concern is their immediate self-interest, they nevertheless, unlike the servants of Dufresny or Lesage, give little evidence of being actively concerned with direct material gain.

One finds, therefore, that whereas the peasant figures and the professional fourbes introduced to help to solve particular problems are clearly motivated by the hope of remuneration,⁵⁶ the true servants show no such motivation. Thus, while Frontin in Dufresny's Le Dédit may openly state his price before helping his master,⁵⁷ and while his namesake in Lesage's Turcaret will appropriate a cheque entrusted to his care by his master,⁵⁸ in Dancourt not only do the servants not normally demand specific rewards - and one of the few rewards freely offered is merely 'une parfaite reconnaissance',⁵⁹ - but servants who find themselves in the possession of money destined for the use of their masters (with the exception of Merlin in Les Enfants de Paris)

⁵⁶The blatant self-interest of the peasant-type figure is seen in the behaviour of Lucas in Le Galant Jardinier (Sc.8; the first of two scenes so numbered in the edition cited), Thibaut in Les Vendanges de Suresnes (Sc.3), and Mathurin in Colin-Maillard (Sc.9). For non-servant fourbes who become involved largely for the rewards to be won, see above, pp.96-7, where Frontin in Les Bourgeoises à la mode and La Brie in La Femme d'intrigues are discussed.

⁵⁷Sc.3. The passage is cited above, p.137.

⁵⁸V,14.

⁵⁹This promise is made to Merlin in Les Fonds perdus (I,2). It is, however, only fair to point out that, as has already been noted above, pp.86-90 and 95-7, Dancourt's servants have a reduced role as providers of schemes and that there is, therefore, less cause for reward to be offered to them.

may make no attempt to retain it for their own purposes.⁶⁰ In short, in the action of the plays under consideration there is little or no evidence to support the generalised assertion by Lucas that Dancourt's servants 'ont ... la main ouverte pour recevoir, et très souvent prompte à se payer elle-même',⁶¹ for even if servants are occasionally seen to take their own interests into account, they are generally seen to do so only in the negative sense that a simple (but un-fourbe-like) desire for self-preservation may threaten to inhibit their actions, and not in the sense that a desire for gain may prompt them to undertake disreputable activities which they would not otherwise contemplate.⁶²

How can this apparent paradox be explained? It cannot be explained by arguing that in the course of Dancourt's plays the servants are suddenly overwhelmed by a love of trickery similar to that which makes Regnard's more fourbe-like servants forget their own best interests in material terms, for although Dancourt's valets are care-free figures who enjoy fun in a general way, their behaviour is, as we have seen, essentially un-fourbe-like, making it unlikely that the

⁶⁰In Les Fonds perdus, for example, where both the female and male servants devote their energies to extracting money from the aged obstacles to true love, there is never any suggestion that it will be used for any purpose other than that of furthering the young lovers' ends, and even in the much less conventional Le Chevalier à la mode, remarks made by Crispin immediately after he has failed to acquire money to take to his master suggest that had he been successful he would have conveyed his booty to his master forthwith (IV,7). In La Gazette de Hollande Crispin makes no attempt to depart with any of the profits won as a result of his pretending to be a shop-assistant, but in Les Enfants de Paris (II,8) Merlin removes some of the money which he is bearing to his master before he hands it over - a technique resembling that used by the servant in Destouches's Le Glorieux (see above, p.153, note 1).

⁶¹Hippolyte Lucas, Le Foyer du Théâtre-Français: Molière, Dancourt, p.100.

⁶²The reluctance of the servants in Le Chevalier à la mode, Le Tuteur, and L'Opéra de village to participate in enlèvements (discussed above, pp.174-5) is an illustration of this. The thoughts which the servant in Le Chevalier à la mode has of settling his affairs through marriage to a rich match are exceptional (see above, p.168).

attraction of trickery could for them be a major motivating force.⁶³

Nor can the disparity between the servants' supposed behaviour in the past and their actual behaviour on stage be explained by suggesting that in the course of the plays' action they have the chance to assert their superiority over their masters, and see this as sufficient reward. For whereas Regnard's servants may clearly enjoy asserting themselves over their masters, Dancourt's valets, lacking the fourbe's skill in devising tricks, and frequently serving masters who are in no sense innocent young lovers, have little opportunity to place their superiors in a position of subservience, and in a play like Colin-Maillard the pattern of dominance may even be the reverse of that usually found in plays containing fourbes, since it is the servant who asks his master how he intends to use Claudine to advance his plans ('Qu'en prétendez-vous faire?'), while it is the master who is coy about his intentions ('Tu le verras').⁶⁴ Moreover, on the few occasions when the servants do have a chance to tease their masters, they do not exploit the situation sufficiently to suggest that this is a major motivating force. Thus, when, in Renaud et Armide, Clitandre puts himself in the hands of his servant, declaring, 'Je m'abandonne à ta conduite',⁶⁵ the latter does not take full advantage of the situation to assert his superiority, while in Le Vert Galant, when L'Epine is begged by his master not to leave him, the servant again fails to make the most of the opportunity which this affords him.⁶⁶ What is more, as we have seen, Dancourt's servants do not - like those of Regnard - make an effort to emerge as lone saviours, but, in plays like Colin-

⁶³Whereas Regnard's more fourbe-like servants may remain with their masters because this affords them the opportunity to indulge in trickery, Dancourt's servants remain with their masters even although, as we have seen, above, pp.86 and 95-6, they are rarely begged to produce tricks. Moreover, when, occasionally, they are invited to provide schemes, or find themselves in plays where tricks are sought, they generally prove to be reluctant contributors of devices (as is the case in Le Chevalier à la mode, discussed above, p.98), and may freely admit their inability to provide any solution at all (as in the case of Les Curieux de Compiègne, discussed above, pp.86-7). Furthermore, if they do propose a solution, they may suggest unsubtle and unimaginative tactics which are uncharacteristic of the fun-loving fourbe (see above, p.90).

⁶⁴Sc.10.

⁶⁵Sc.14.

⁶⁶Sc.1.

Maillard, Les Curieux de Compiègne, La Foire Saint-Germain, and Madame Artus, will readily collaborate with others who are seeking to solve difficult problems.⁶⁷ Indeed, it is only in two of Lancelotti's earliest plays, Angélique et Médor and Les Fonds perdus, that one finds servants who appear to be motivated to a significant extent by the desire to assert themselves over their masters. For in Angélique et Médor Merlin takes obvious delight in making his master, Eraste, uncomfortable, both by telling Guillemin that Eraste is a marvellous singer capable of taking part in his projected opera - an action which causes the master to mutter, 'J'enrage. Ce maraud-là prend plaisir à me chagriner',⁶⁸ - and later by seeming to assume control without revealing details of his plans to his master, thereby causing the latter to exclaim: 'Qu'est-ce que cet animal-là veut faire?',⁶⁹ while in Les Fonds perdus the servant similarly exerts his authority by to some extent keeping his master in the dark as to his plans.⁷⁰

In fact, an examination of these plays forces one to conclude that the main explanation for the discrepancy between the servants' supposed behaviour in the past and their actual behaviour on stage lies in the status accorded to them in the plays. For such an examination suggests that whereas the non-servant figures in these comedies of manners are developed as individuals who are representative of certain social types, with their own particular motivations and with typical patterns of behaviour arising from their motivations and from their interaction with other figures (types like the libertine military officer, the greedy peasant, the socially ambitious bourgeoise, or the professional fourbe who will do anything for reward), the servants themselves are developed neither as rounded individuals nor as representatives of a social type with a particular motivation in terms of which their behaviour can be explained. Rather, they emerge merely as secondary figures who, although they may have acted as individuals in the past, do not, like the other figures, have a strongly independent existence

⁶⁷See above, pp.86-8 and 95. The fact that the servants' occasional use of the conventional fourbe's 'Laissez-moi faire' might also give a false impression of them - making it appear that they do wish to take sole charge of affairs - has already been noted above, p.87, note 16.

⁶⁸Sc.8.

⁶⁹Sc.9.

⁷⁰I,1.

in the 'present' of the plays, but instead merely serve the functional requirements of the author. Thus, while in Regnard or Lesage many of the servants emerge as creatures in their own right (although not necessarily social types) who may be so central to the construction of the plays in which they appear that to remove them would be to destroy the plays in question, Dancourt's servants are presented largely as carefree appendages to their masters who help to reveal the true nature of the latter to the audience by acting as confidants and bearers of simple messages.⁷¹ Consequently, to expect to find a high degree of consistency in the motivation and behaviour of these figures is in many ways inappropriate: they are little more than pawns whose movements are dictated not by any internal logic but by the requirements of the author, and if they serve their masters - whatever their nature - without complaint, they may do so simply because that is the role to which they have been appointed by Dancourt himself.⁷²

What, then, is the general impression which these servants make on an audience, given their nature as outlined above? Certainly, they cannot be seen as moral figures since, unlike the servants of Destouches, they show no evidence of any positive commitment to right action. But neither do they leave the audience with the feeling that they are evil, unlike those of Dufresny's servants who consciously and deliberately assist highly disreputable masters. Rather, like most of Regnard's servants, they are remembered - if they are remembered at all - as largely amoral figures, although the reasons for this are not the same as in the case of Regnard. For whereas in Regnard the servants tend to be viewed as amoral largely because their involvement in imaginative schemes creates a world of fantasy in which moral questions have no part, in Dancourt the impression of amorality is conveyed simply by the fact that in these plays, which consist largely of tableaux where the vagaries of society are presented without comment, the servants - largely minor figures who do not normally engage in imaginative schemes - themselves adopt an attitude of uncritical and amused acceptance towards the world around them.

⁷¹Le Chevalier à la mode is an excellent example of this.

⁷²This may to some extent explain why, as has been seen (above, p.169), the servants will indiscriminately serve both innocent and disreputable young lovers.

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In the course of our examination of the ethos of the male servants it has become apparent that in their moral dimension these are again figures of considerable variety. As the preceding chapters show, for instance, although there is a general tendency for those servants who show an awareness of the world around them to emerge as amoral figures, whose apparently adverse comments on current behaviour are in fact no more than witty fireworks of little serious intent, there do exist significant exceptions to this, principally in Destouches, whose valets are portrayed as supporters of conventional moral values, and appear to be serious in their disapproval of the more questionable mores of fashionable society. Moreover, in Dufresny, where the male servants, unusually, show no awareness of society, but assiduously assist either unsavoury or benevolent masters, they themselves emerge as either good or evil depending upon the nature of the cause which they support. And in terms of their motivation the servants display similar diversity, because even those for whom their own wellbeing is a prime concern are governed by different kinds of self-interest (the preoccupation with short-term gain displayed by Dufresny's figures is, for example, fundamentally different from the desire for long-term social advancement found in Lesage's valets), while other servants may show altogether different motivations, those of Regnard allowing their love of fun to override self-interest; those of Destouches apparently allowing moral considerations to shape their actions; and those of Dancourt offering little or no insight into their reasons for behaving as they do.

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PART III

THE FEMALE SERVANT

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In the plays under consideration, the female servants are, generally speaking, much less well developed than their male counterparts. It is possible, nevertheless, to detect in most of them a definable attitude to life, and it is on this, as well as on their not insignificant contribution to the mechanics of the plays in which they occur, that the chapters which follow focus their attention.

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Chapter 1

REGNARD

Regnard's female servants, like those of the other authors who fall within the scope of this study, tend to be minor figures (a point underlined by Sharon d'Obremer, who, discussing Regnard's production, talks of 'le personnage épisodique de la servante'),¹ and even the more prominent of these characters - such as Nérine in Le Joueur - are usually eclipsed by their male counterparts. But, despite the smallness of their roles, these are characters of considerable diversity, both in their outlook on life, and in the part which they play in the functioning of the comedies.

When one turns to their outlook on life, for instance, it soon becomes apparent that the situation is quite different from that found in Molière. In Molière, all the most memorable soubrettes, different though they may be from each other in many respects, are nevertheless of the type usually described as servantes de bon sens or servantes dévouées. That is, they belong to the family of commonsensical servants who traditionally are characterised by their honesty, forthrightness, lack of self-interest, and - above all - by their devotion to the cause of the young lovers with whom they are associated. Nicole, in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, and Dorine, in Tartuffe, are perhaps the most prominent examples, but even Toinette, in Le Malade imaginaire, for all her fourbe-like attributes, can be seen as falling into the same category, since she, too, is as stout a defender of the interests of young love as Dorine.² Moreover, with similar tendencies in evidence among Molière's minor female servants - the least 'honest' of whom is only Claudine in George Dandin, who lends somewhat unintelligent and ineffective support to a mistress whose attitudes may be morally questionable -, it becomes impossible to point to a single

¹Marguerite-Anne Sharon d'Obremer, Les Rôles des femmes dans la comédie française, p.27.

²Opposing Argan's determination to marry his daughter, Angélique, to someone whom she does not love, Toinette, for instance, argues that 'quand un maître ne songe pas à ce qu'il fait, une servante bien sensée est en droit de le redresser' (I,5), and when Angélique later expresses the fear that Toinette will abandon her to her fate, the servant replies: 'Moi, vous abandonner? j'aimerais mieux mourir' (I,8).

clear-cut example of a female servant in Molière who departs sufficiently from the mould of the commonsensical servant to qualify as a soubrette perfide (the antithesis of the servante de bon sens).³ In Regnard, on the other hand, the female servants display such a variety of attitudes that they cannot all be seen as belonging to the same basic type; indeed, far from falling into a single category, they display a spectrum of attitudes ranging from that of the Moliéresque servante de bon sens to that of the soubrette perfide.

At the end of the spectrum at which is placed Regnard's most Moliéresque character, one finds - as critics have not been slow to point out - Nérine in Le Joueur.⁴ For although (owing to the different social situation in Regnard's comedy) Nérine's position differs from that of Molière's servants in that she finds herself trying to persuade her mistress to make the correct choice between two suitors, whereas Molière's figures are generally involved in assisting their young mistresses to resist imposed marriages, she nevertheless resembles Molière's servantes de bon sens in a number of respects.

She has, for instance, a common-sense approach to life which is broadly similar to that of Molière's figures. Thus, while Dorine rails against Orgon's folly in allowing himself to be deceived by a false dévot to the extent that he will refuse even to honour his promise to let his daughter marry her love, insisting, instead, that the perfidious Tartuffe should be her husband, and while Nicole recognises the ridiculousness of Jourdain's pretensions (pretensions which again threaten to destroy the happiness of the young lovers of the play), Nérine is at pains to point out to her young mistress the folly of contemplating marriage to an inveterate gambler and fashionable playboy.

³It should be noted that although Nérine, in Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, is clearly less than honest, she is not properly a servant, but an independent femme d'intrigue.

⁴Jean Emelina, for example, in his Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre de Molière, p.70, sees Nérine as an imitation - albeit a pale one - of Molière's female servants, while Augustin Gazier in his 'La Comédie en France après Molière: Regnard', p.114, likens Nérine both to Nicole in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme and Dorine in Tartuffe.

Moreover, just as Molière's servants show no evidence of being influenced by self-interest (unless one sees Nicole's support for true love in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme as self-interested, since she hopes to marry the future husband's servant), so Nérine's attempts to make her mistress see reason would appear to arise out of a spontaneous and heart-felt desire that good sense should prevail, rather than out of any self-interested considerations. For example, as we shall see, both Molière's servants and Nérine tend to express themselves in strong tirades which burst forth irrespective of the consequences.⁵ Indeed, it can be argued that although the disinterestedness of the servants in Tartuffe, Le Malade imaginaire, and Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme is not in doubt, that of Nérine in Le Joueur is even less open to question, for whereas in Molière's plays the servants, in opposing the advocates of folly, are merely contributing to an existing debate - as when they articulate views which others, particularly the young female lovers, are afraid to express -, in Le Joueur Nérine not only participates in the dispute between Angélique and Valère, but also virtually initiates it by urging her young mistress not to submit to the feeling of attraction which the good-for-nothing Valère arouses in her, and which, without the servant's very positive intervention, could easily triumph over her better judgement. In short, while Angélique herself may not be totally unhappy to contemplate marriage to Valère, Nérine will do her utmost to prevent it, not because this will benefit her materially,⁶ and not because by so doing she will be siding with her young mistress, for she will not,⁷ but simply because her innate good sense, linked to a 'conscience professionnelle' of a very different type from that of the male fourbe, will not allow her to stand back and see her young mistress adopt a foolish course: as she tells Angélique when the latter persists in countenancing marriage to the gambler, 'Je suis fille d'honneur; je ne veux point qu'on dise/Que vous ayez sous moi fait

⁵See below, p.188. This contrasts with the behaviour of the more fourbe-like male servants of both playwrights, who, even when their sympathies appear genuinely to lie with their masters, nevertheless may fail to engage in active support for them until they have allowed themselves to be begged for assistance.

⁶The ring which Nérine accepts from Dorante (III,1), whom she favours as a match for her mistress, seeing him as 'un homme d'ordre, et qui vit congrument' (I,2), is unsolicited, and does not serve to initiate her efforts on his behalf.

⁷At one point, indeed, Nérine expresses a willingness to accept dismissal rather than be associated with a mistress who would marry Valère (V,1).

pareille sottise'.⁸

Furthermore, Nérine also resembles Molière's female servants - particularly Dorine in Tartuffe - in the way in which she expresses herself when attempting to further the cause which she supports.

One finds, for instance, that on the one hand Nérine - like Molière's typical female servant, whom Sharon d'Obremer aptly describes as 'forte en gueule et riche de dévouement',⁹ - will resort to no more than a straightforward and forceful argument in favour of her views. Thus, while Dorine in Tartuffe openly tells Orgon that he is mad to propose that his daughter should wed Tartuffe,¹⁰ and while Toinette in Le Malade imaginaire makes it clear to Argan that his plans for his daughter's marriage amount to a 'dessein burlesque',¹¹ Nérine will leave the enemy camp in no doubt as to her intention of preventing her mistress from being duped by Valère, spelling out to Hector with vigour and clarity her own position:

Je ne souffrirai pas qu'on trompe ma maîtresse,
Et qu'on profite ainsi d'une tendre faiblesse;
Qu'elle épouse un joueur, un petit brelandier,
Un franc dissipateur, et dont tout le métier
Est d'aller de cent lieux faire la découverte
Où de jeux et d'amour on tient boutique ouverte,
Et qui le conduiront tout droit à l'hôpital.¹²

Indeed, she even tells Hector in so many words that she is declaring open war on him and his master,¹³ thus emphasising still further the fact that, unlike the male servant fourbe, but like her fellow female servants in Molière, she attempts to achieve her goal not by trickery but by forthright and direct attack.

On the other hand, however, despite her obvious liking for forthright statement, Nérine will sometimes use a more subtle approach,

⁸V,1.

⁹Marguerite-Anne Sharon d'Obremer, Les Rôles des femmes dans la comédie française, p.14.

¹⁰'Quoi? se peut-il, monsieur, qu'avec l'air d'homme sage/Et cette large barbe au milieu du visage,/Vous soyez assez fou pour vouloir?...'
(II,2).

¹¹I,5.

¹²I,2.

¹³'Quoi qu'il en soit, enfin, je ne t'abuse pas;/Je fais la guerre ouverte' (I,2).

mischievously pretending to encourage her interlocutors (in particular her young mistress) to follow their own inclinations in the hope that this will bring home to them their folly. Thus, in a major confrontation with Angélique, after she has failed by direct argument to persuade her mistress that she should not contemplate marriage to Valère,¹⁴ she changes her tack and adopts the more oblique approach, pretending suddenly to favour marriage to the gambler:

Eh bien! madame, soit; contentez votre ardeur,
J'y consens: acceptez pour époux un joueur,
Qui, pour porter au jeu son tribut volontaire,
Vous laissera manquer même du nécessaire.¹⁵

Yet even this approach, with its echoes of Dorine's not dissimilar attempt to persuade Marianne to resist her father's attempts to wed her to Tartuffe ('Non, non, je ne veux rien. Je vois que vous voulez/Etre à Monsieur Tartuffe; et j'aurais, quand j'y pense,/Tort de vous détourner d'une telle alliance'),¹⁶ forges yet one more link between the most Moliéresque of Regnard's female servants and the creations of Molière himself.

At one end of the spectrum of female servants presented by Regnard, one has, then, a servant who comes close to matching Molière's commonsensical servants (particularly Dorine) in many respects; but at the other end of the spectrum Regnard presents his audience with a figure - Lisette in Le Légataire universel - who has attracted the attention of critics just as much as Nérine, but for a very different reason, namely, because she can be seen as representing the soubrettes perfides who, in the eighteenth and late seventeenth centuries, rival the sensible, and more Moliéresque, soubrettes dévouées. Thus Emelina, commenting that after Molière the dominant type of female servant will be 'la soubrette effrontée et spirituelle, intéressée et sans scrupules', cites Lisette as an example, since in her 'le dévouement et la bonté ont cédé la place au cynisme et à la cupidité',¹⁷ while Janin

¹⁴'Je ne puis sur ce point m'accorder avec vous', she tells her mistress, 'Valère n'est point fait pour être votre époux;/Il ressent pour le jeu des fureurs nonpareilles,/Et cet homme perdra quelque jour ses oreilles' (IV,1).

¹⁵IV,1.

¹⁶Tartuffe, II,3.

¹⁷Jean Emelina, Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre de Molière, pp.70-1.

contrasts the same Lisette with the devoted and sensible servant when he comments that, in Le Légataire universel, 'il ne s'agit pas d'une soubrette éveillée et rieuse, protégeant l'amour des jeunes gens, comme c'est son droit, son devoir, son instinct; il s'agit d'une fine mouche avide et piquante, qui ne pense qu'à s'enrichir aux dépenses [sic] de la pauvre vieille imbécile de créature dont elle exploite le dernier souffle'.¹⁸

Such assessments are well justified. Unlike the devoted servante de bon sens, Lisette in Le Légataire universel displays much evidence of self-interest, and this feature of her behaviour soon emerges as her principal characteristic. Thus, in the very first scene, she refers to her hopes of being named in the will of her old master, G ronte, and in the following scene she reminds Eraste - the young master of her fellow servant, Crispin, and nephew of her own master - of his promise (already described in detail by Crispin, in the opening scene of the play) to give to her and her male counterpart a sum of money which will allow them to marry and set themselves up, on condition that they succeed in having him nominated as his uncle's heir (an achievement which would in turn persuade Mme Argante to agree to his marrying her daughter, Isabelle). Indeed, if Lisette supports the marriage of the young lovers and opposes her aged master's desire to wed young Isabelle himself, her pronouncements imply that this is essentially because her master's marriage to Isabelle would lead to the latter being made his heir, thus depriving Eraste of his inheritance and herself and Crispin of their reward, rather than because she shares the commonsensical servant's desire to see young lovers happily united.¹⁹

¹⁸ Jules Janin, Œuvres diverses, VI, 140.

¹⁹ When, for example, Lisette, unaware of Eraste's efforts to thwart his uncle's marriage, exclaims at his apparent willingness to see a wedding proceed which will deprive him of his inheritance, she makes no reference to the fact that young love will be thwarted: 'Eh bien! vous souffrirez que votre oncle,   son  ge,/Fasse devant vos yeux un si sot mariage;/Qu'il vous frustre d'un bien que vous devez avoir!'; and in the discussion which follows she again stresses the danger to 'le testament,/Sur lequel nous fondons toutes nos esp rances,/Et qui doit cimenter un jour nos alliances,/Et faire le bonheur d'Eraste et de Crispin' (II,3). It is also worth remembering that as a young lover Eraste is himself less than pure if one is to believe Crispin's references to his earlier behaviour (I,1 and 2), although he does protest that it is love which guides him in his actions (V,1).

Moreover, not only is Lisette's motivation different from that of the servante de bon sens, but so too is the way in which she goes about achieving her goal, for while the commonsensical servants both in Molière's comedies and in Regnard's Le Joueur are forthright in making their views known, Lisette in Le Légataire universel, although frequently outspoken in her dealings with her master - she claims that she has 'le droit de lui parler avec toute licence',²⁰ and tells him that she does not know what it is to be a flatterer²¹ - does not in fact conduct the same sort of 'guerre ouverte' as a figure like Nérine in Le Joueur. She may indeed address what she calls 'des mots assez piquants' to him,²² replying to his request not to talk of his lavement to Angélique and her mother with a typically brutal 'Elles ont toutes deux bon nez',²³ or telling him unequivocally that she disapproves of his projected marriage to Angélique ('Si le diable vous tente, et vous veut marier,/Qu'il cherche un autre objet pour vous apparier'),²⁴ but behind this superficial outspokenness there lies deception, for the very fact that she is motivated almost entirely by simple self-interest and not by a profound belief that the cause which she supports can be argued for on the basis of the natural justice of common sense means that she can never openly discuss her real thoughts with Geronste.

Indeed, far from conducting open warfare with words as her principal weapon, Lisette's reaction to the problem of achieving the goal which she has set herself - apart from merely voicing her displeasure at her master's proposals - is to resort to subterfuge, and so where Nérine in Le Joueur has great faith that what she calls 'la raison' - the sort of common sense which she advocates in her arguments with her mistress - will in the end lead to a successful outcome,²⁵ Lisette in Le Légataire universel places her faith in 'l'esprit',²⁶ and after a

²⁰I,1.

²¹I,7.

²²I,1.

²³I,6.

²⁴I,7.

²⁵Nérine declares to Hector that she will be able to extricate Angélique from Valère's clutches and reconcile her with Dorante because 'Dorante a pour lui Nérine et la raison' (I,2).

²⁶'Il faut par notre esprit faire notre destin', she tells Eraste (II,3).

brief attempt to initiate a modest scheme of her own (she informs her master's apothecary of his client's projected marriage so that he can attempt to intimidate G ronte into abandoning his plan)²⁷ assists Crispin in the course of his extensive deceptions. Such behaviour differs both from that of N rine and from that of Moli re's commonsensical female servants, who, by and large, prefer forthrightness to subterfuge; on the other hand, though, it is worth noting that while Lisette may willingly contemplate trickery, her role in this direction is essentially a supportive one, and, as with all her fellow female servants in Regnard, there is never any danger of her emerging as a sort of female fourbe - a fact which distinguishes her from Toinette in Moli re's Le Malade imaginaire, who, in her use of disguise and extravagant acting, comes to resemble the male fourbe on more than one occasion.²⁸

Lisette and N rine represent, then, the two extremes of Regnard's female servants - one close to Moli re's figures, and the other the complete antithesis of such characters. But between these two figures there lie several others who have tended to escape the attention of critics both because of the frequent smallness of their roles, and, since there is a tendency for them not to discuss their attitudes to any great extent, because of the less clearly developed nature of their outlooks. Nevertheless, close examination shows that even these figures, far from falling into one simple category, display variations in outlook which to some extent span the gap between Lisette and N rine.

There are, for instance, figures who, like N rine, support young (and, in one instance, not-so-young) love. Finette, the female servant in Les M nechmes, for example, devotedly supports the foolish aspirations-in-love of her unattractive and rather elderly mistress, although she is to a very large extent untypical in that she emerges almost as a dullard, and never gives any indication as to why she

²⁷ The plan is described briefly in Act II scene 3, but when the apothecary does tackle G ronte in Act II scene 11, the effect is purely comical since by that time G ronte has already been persuaded not to contemplate marriage - a fact which the talkative apothecary fails to appreciate.

²⁸ It should be stressed, however, that although Toinette's techniques may sometimes resemble those of the male fourbe, her motives, unlike those of some fourbes, are neither evil nor mischievous.

should espouse such a lost cause.²⁹ More typical of this brand of servant, however, is Lisette in Les Folies amoureuses, who, like Nérine in Le Joueur, supports pure young love, and assists the youthful Agathe in her efforts to be united with Eraste, firmly opposing the intention of her master, Agathe's guardian, to marry the young girl himself. Moreover, like Nérine in Le Joueur, and like Molière's figures, she indicates clearly that she is not motivated by self-interest, for she rejects her master's promises of reward if she will help to further his scheme:

Je ne veux point tremper dans vos lâches desseins;
Le cas est trop vilain, je m'en lave les mains.³⁰

In Le Bal one finds a roughly similar situation when yet another Lisette reveals the genuineness of her support for young love not only in the evident panic with which she regards the imminent marriage of her young mistress, Léonor, to an unsuitable and unwanted suitor,³¹ but also in the way in which she stresses to Léonor her determination to see her matched with the man she loves:

Il faut qu'il vous épouse, ou j'y perdrai la vie.³²

And in La Sérénade, the female servant, Marine, not only stresses her sympathy for her young mistress, Léonor, and her love, Valère, whose own father proposes to marry the girl,³³ but is very positive in her belief that those who attempt to profit from marriage are evil, and that love, and not interest, is of paramount importance in any match. Thus, in addition to expressing her displeasure towards Mathieu, who attempts to profit from the proposed match by selling to her young mistress's aged suitor a necklace which will help him to woo the girl (and who would just as happily help the girl herself to thwart the old man's plans were she able to pay him enough),³⁴ Marine replies to his

²⁹The most likely explanation for Finette's untypical behaviour is that she is conceived of by Regnard as a figure who, by her close association with her much-duped mistress, can effectively double the number of opportunities for scenes of confusion (resulting from mistaken identity) in this comedy of errors.

³⁰I,3.

³¹Her panic, which contrasts comically with the laconic approach of her male counterpart, is evident in scene 4, cited above, p.27.

³²Sc.9.

³³'Que je plains le pauvre Valère!', she exclaims at one point, before she even knows that it is Valère's father who is his rival (Sc.2).

³⁴Sc.1.

cynical observation that, in matters of marriage, 'entre l'utile et l'agréable il n'y a pas à balancer' (meaning that the rich match proposed is the best solution) by insisting that she will do 'tout [son] possible pour rompre un mariage aussi biscornu que celui-là';³⁵ and she later goes on to explain the whole situation to Valère's father, Grifon, in terms which stress the realistic, common-sense considerations which favour the union of the young lovers:

Mademoiselle est fille, Monsieur est garçon; elle est aimable, il est joli homme; ils ont fait connaissance; ils s'aiment; ils sont dans le goût de s'épouser; y a-t-il rien là que de fort naturel?³⁶

But in addition to these figures who support pure young love with apparent wholeheartedness, there are amongst Regnard's minor female servants creatures whose outlooks show significant differences from that of Nérine in Le Joueur.

One finds, for instance, that although Cléanthis in Démocrite is sympathetic to Ismène who fears (and justifiably so) that the king, her love, has eyes for Criséis, her sympathy is tempered with a strain of cynical pragmatism which emerges quite strongly - even although her involvement in the love plot is only peripheral - in her responses to Ismène's lamentations, particularly in her comments that women should not become too easily jealous:

Il faut aller plus doux dans le siècle où nous sommes;
On doit parfois passer quelque fredaine aux hommes,
Fermer souvent les yeux.³⁷

Moreover, when one moves to Le Retour imprévu and Le Distrain, one finds that although the female servants in these plays show little of the self-interest displayed by Lisette in Le Légataire universel, their view of love is nevertheless different from that of Nérine in Le Joueur, since, rather than attempting - as she does - to reinforce the resistance of a young lover to a fashionable playboy, they themselves - unlike either Nérine in Le Joueur or the female servants of Molière - show a certain relish for fashionable or dissolute living, as can be seen in the way in which activities of young mistresses and their

³⁵Sc.1.

³⁶Sc.8.

³⁷II,1.

lovers, which would meet only with the disapproval of a true servante de bon sens, are regarded by them with a measure of sympathy.

Thus when, in Le Retour imprévu, Mme Bertrand objects to Lisette that her niece 'garde auprès d'elle une coquine comme vous, qui ne lui donnez que de mauvais conseils, et qui la poussez dans un précipice où son penchant ne l'entraîne déjà que trop',³⁸ the servant makes no real attempt to deny the charge, and when later asked to explain how her mistress comes by so much money, replies uncritically (although probably with some exaggeration designed to shock the aunt) in the following vein:

Fort innocemment; elle boit, mange, chante, rit, joue, se promène:
les biens nous viennent en dormant, je vous en assure.³⁹

And in Le Distrait, although Lisette may occasionally voice some criticism of the fashionable excesses of the Chevalier, whom her mistress, Isabelle, loves (telling him quite candidly, for example, when he expresses a wish to have a canapé brought for him rather than a chair, that he can very well remain on his feet),⁴⁰ she nevertheless supports her mistress against her mother, Mme Grognac, when the latter opposes her daughter's love for the Chevalier, and she does so not necessarily because, like the young man's uncle, she believes that time will render the Chevalier a more acceptable match,⁴¹ but, it would appear, because she too feels the attraction of the young fop. Indeed, it is in this respect that Lisette differs most strikingly from Nérine in Le Joueur, for while Nérine shows only hostility towards the fashionable young gambler who so attracts her mistress - a hostility which finds its most eloquent expression in her tirade beginning with the words 'Ne verrai-je jamais les femmes détrompées/De ces colifichets, de ces fades poupées', in which she describes the type of behaviour favoured by men like the gambler⁴² -, Lisette, despite her

³⁸Sc.1.

³⁹Sc.1.

⁴⁰'Tenez-vous sur vos pieds, monsieur, ne vous déplaie./J'enrage quand je vois des gens qu'à tout moment/Il faudrait étayer comme un vieux bâtiment,/Couchés dans des fauteuils, barrer une ruelle' (III,2).

⁴¹'Il sera très riche quelque jour:/Il peut lui convenir d'esprit, de bien, et d'âge' (I,4).

⁴²I,2. The passage is quoted in full above, p.27.

criticism of him, clearly feels some attraction for her mistress's lover, as becomes apparent not only from the tone of amused benevolence which characterises her description of his life-style⁴³ (as opposed to the tone of bitter criticism which characterises Nérine's equally lively description), but also, and even more obviously, from her closing soliloquy of the first act, in which both the tone of what she says and her use not just of 'les femmes' but also of 'nous' (contrasting with Nérine's use of 'les femmes' alone) clearly shows that she associates herself with those who can easily fall under the spell of such fashionable figures, even when, like the Chevalier, they may show so little seriousness in affairs of the heart that they put good wine before their mistresses:

Quel amant! Pour raison importante il diffère
D'aller voir sa maîtresse. Et quelle est cette affaire?
Il va tâter du vin! Ma foi, les jeunes gens,
A ne rien déguiser, aiment bien en ce temps!
Heu! les femmes, déjà si souvent attrapées,
Seront-elles encor par les hommes dupées?
Aimera-t-on toujours ces petits vilains-là?
Maudit soit le premier qui nous ensorcela!⁴⁴

It is clear, then, that Regnard's female servants are so varied in their outlook that in this respect at least they cannot be seen as constituting a unified type; but it is not only in their outlook that these figures show considerable individuality, for an examination of their contribution to the mechanics of the plays in which they occur shows not only that there is a tendency for them to perform different functions in different plays, but that in the one area where most of them do perform the same role the manner in which they perform it is in itself subject to considerable variation.

To take the latter point first, one finds that although, with the exception of Finette in Les Ménechmes and Lisette in Le Distrait,

⁴³The amusing passage in which she describes the Chevalier to Isabelle's mother, and which begins with the words 'C'est un petit jeune homme à quatre pieds de terre,/Homme de qualité, qui revient de la guerre', is cited below, p.337.

⁴⁴I,8. My italics.

Regnard's female servants are all alike in that they make a major contribution to the exposition of the plays in which they feature, the manner in which they fulfil their expository role varies so considerably that there is never any danger of them appearing as stock characters performing a set routine.

Thus, at one extreme, the female servant may assist the exposition by acting as a fairly basic confidant-like figure, and, in an exchange with another female figure - an exchange which may be extremely pedestrian, not to say artificial - may help to bring to light information necessary to an understanding of the play: in Les Folies amoureuses, for instance, a rather artificial question-and-answer session between Lisette and Agathe in the opening scene outlines the current situation, while in Démocrite, although it is the male servant who gives the initial exposition in the opening scene, in the first scene of the second act his female counterpart, Cléanthis, brings out the historical background to the situation at court in a highly artificial exchange with her mistress, Ismène.⁴⁵

At the other extreme, however, the female servant is not used as a basic confidant, but, instead, her innate liveliness, channelled into fury or outrage, is used to produce scenes whose angry vitality disguises their expository nature: such is the case in Le Joueur, where the exposition emerges from Nérine's angry encounter with Hector in the second scene; in Le Retour imprévu, where a barbed exchange occurs between Mme Bertrand and Lisette in the first scene; and in La Sérénade, where in the first scene hostilities break out between Marine and Mathieu.

And between these two extremes there lie plays where the female servant's expository role matches neither of the above patterns: in Le Légataire universel, for instance, the fact that the opening exchange of questions and answers which sets the exposition off in the

⁴⁵So artificial is the exchange that, as Dorothy Moser Medlin suggests in The Verbal Art of Jean-François Regnard, p.102, it must be seen as a very deliberate parody of the 'confidente' scenes of tragedy. The servants' involvement in parody, as revealed in this and other scenes, is further explored below, pp.329-35.

very first scene occurs not between the female servant and another female figure for whom she acts as a confidant, but between the female servant, Lisette, and Crispin, the witty male servant whose associate she is to become, means that the scene is neither pedestrian nor angry in tone, but is enlivened by the wit of both characters; while in Le Bal, the expository exchange which occurs in the fourth scene between Lisette and Merlin, her male counterpart, is again enlivened not by the female servant's anger, but, instead, by her excitable expression of the distress which she feels at the threat to her mistress's happiness, and by the comic contrast of her own agitation and Merlin's laconic response.

Moreover, as has been suggested, when one leaves the question of exposition - in which almost all the servants have a part to play - and proceeds to consider the female servants' other mechanical roles, one finds that the functions which these figures perform (most of them relatively minor) vary so widely from play to play that in this respect too it is impossible to see the servants as being of a standard, uniform type.

Thus, although, as we have noted, the female servants play a confidant-like role in the expository scenes of certain comedies, not only may this role not be extended to other parts of the same plays,⁴⁶ but in other plays the servants may not serve as confidants at all. Such is the case in both Le Retour imprévu and La Sérénade, in each of which there do not even exist any scenes in which the female servant and the young female whom she assists find themselves alone together.

Likewise, although Regnard (unlike Molière) may show no reluctance to place in the mouths of his female servants the type of blatantly artificial aside which draws the audience's attention to the significance (particularly the comic significance) of what is being said on stage, the extent to which servants utter such 'punctuations' varies considerably. Thus, while Marine in La Sérénade and Nérine in

⁴⁶In Démocrite, Cléanthis does not have any important function as a confidant outside the expository scene discussed above, while in Les Folies amoureuses Lisette's role as confidant to Agathe is not revived after the first scene, although she comes near to acting as a sort of confidant for Albert in the third scene of the first act.

Le Joueur may utter a number of asides of this type - as when Marine's 'Il y a de l'erreur de calcul' alerts the audience to the fact that Léonor is expressing a willingness to concur with her mother's marriage plans for her only because she believes that the latter is referring to Valère, whereas she is in fact referring to his aged father,⁴⁷ or when Nérine's 'Voici du quiproquo' draws the audience's attention to the fact that the Comtesse thinks that Valère is going to express love for her, when in fact it is Angélique whom he loves⁴⁸ -, other servants, most notably Finette in Les Ménechmes, who never fully understands what is going on around her, may utter no asides of this nature.

And if, as a final example, one turns to the basic mechanical function which involves the bearing of messages and the announcing of the arrival of characters on stage, one finds that here too a similar situation obtains, with some servants frequently performing this utilitarian role while others do not. Thus, whereas Finette in Les Ménechmes, Lisette in Le Retour imprévu, and Cléanthis in Démocrite rarely if ever behave in this way, Lisette in Le Légataire universel frequently performs utilitarian tasks (announcing, for example, Géronte's supposed death; ushering in the lawyers who have come to make his will; ushering the same characters out again; and announcing the old man's resurrection),⁴⁹ as do Lisette in Les Folies amoureuses (who performs the important task of announcing Agathe's episodes of supposed madness)⁵⁰ and her namesake in Le Distrait (who not only transmits to the Chevalier and Clarice news of Mme Grognac's intentions, but also, by introducing Carlin in the guise of a courrier, helps the latter to bring the play to a successful conclusion).⁵¹

Once again, the evidence points firmly to the conclusion that in their mechanical role, as in their outlook, Regnard's rather episodic soubrettes do not conform to a single general pattern, but are, instead, creatures of diversity whose nature and function are tailored in such a way as to satisfy the varied requirements of the plays in which they occur.

⁴⁷Sc.8.

⁴⁸II,10.

⁴⁹III,10; IV,6; IV,6; and IV,8.

⁵⁰II,6 and III,3.

⁵¹IV,4 and V,10.

Chapter 2

DUFRESNY

One obvious effect of Dufresny's liking for eccentric characters¹ is that his plays display a great diversity of protagonists, for with the central figures of many of his comedies dominated each by a different passion, they rarely have anything in common apart from a basic tendency to behave in an unusual way. However, if diversity is the hallmark of Dufresny's major figures, the same cannot be said of his female servants, since these comparatively minor characters, unlike Regnard's soubrettes, are sufficiently similar to be seen as conforming, in varying degrees, to the same fundamental pattern. In short, while it is impossible to describe a single type of female servant which is representative of such figures in Regnard, it is possible to describe in broad terms the typical female servant in Dufresny.

It is possible to say, for instance, that Dufresny's typical female servant is generally characterised above all by the importance of her contribution to the mechanics of the plays in which she appears, and that this contribution is confined very largely to three main functions.

First, like Regnard's soubrettes, she normally participates in the expository scenes of the play in which she appears. Indeed, of the ten plays which feature one or more female servants, only two - Le Jaloux honteux, which opens with a conversation between Frontin and Argan, and Le Faux Sincère, which starts with a discussion between Marianne and Dorante - do not make use of a soubrette in their first major expository scene.² Moreover, the female servant's contribution to the initial exposition almost invariably takes the same superficial form, namely, that of an exchange with one other character (the only exception being La Réconciliation normande, which instead opens with a soliloquy by the female servant). However, as in Regnard, although perhaps to a lesser extent, the tone of such exchanges varies from play to play, preventing the servants from emerging simply as mechanical devices for the purveying of information. Thus, in Le Faux Honnête

¹See above, pp.51-2.

²It should be noted that the first major expository scene is not necessarily the first scene of the play. In La Joueuse, for instance, the exposition proper begins only with the second scene.

Homme, the exposition begins in the first scene with a comical discussion-cum-argument between Frosine and the Veuve; in La Joueuse a mild but amusing dispute between Lisette and Triolet sets the exposition in motion in the second scene; and in Le Chevalier joueur a hostile encounter between the gambler's servant and Nérine (although less impassioned than the corresponding scene - Act I scene 2 - of Regnard's Le Joueur) opens the exposition in the first scene. In Le Faux Instinct, the female servant, Toinette, again opens the exposition in the first scene, this time in a discussion with Angélique, the artificiality of which is accounted for by Angélique's love-sick absentmindedness, and similar situations occur in the initial scenes of Le Double Veuve (where Frosine outlines the current position to the recently-retained and love-sick Dorante) and La Malade sans maladie (where Lisette and Angélique review matters affecting them), while in the second scene of Le Négligent the exposition is set in motion by a fairly straightforward discussion between Fanchon and Oronte.

Second, and more importantly, the female servant in Dufresny, as well as acting as a fairly basic interlocutor in the initial expository scenes, continues to perform this role throughout the plays, so that she tends to emerge as a sort of universal confidant³ whose dialogues with a wide range of characters lubricate the workings of the plays in a variety of ways: principally, by allowing additional expository information to be brought to the fore either by the servant or by her interlocutors, and by giving the latter - some of them rather isolated creatures - the opportunity to reveal their attitudes and intentions in a situation relatively free from conflict; but also, occasionally, by advancing the action, either because they are revelatory to the characters involved, or because they bring to light information which can subsequently be used by the female servant or her associates in the promotion of their cause.

The female servant's role as a universal confidant can be seen quite clearly in Le Faux Honnête Homme, where Frosine, after her initial expository dispute with the Veuve, goes on to feature in a

³The term 'confidant' is used here in the loose sense of someone to whom another figure is willing either to talk or to listen, and does not imply that only intimate or personal matters are discussed. Like the true confidant, however, Dufresny's female servants tend to be most prominent in dialogues, and on many occasions (such as in Act I scene 4 of Le Faux Honnête Homme) fall silent in scenes where two or more other characters are also present.

series of dialogues which spans all three acts of the play.

In the third scene of the first act, for instance, she engages in an amusing dialogue with Angélique, in the course of which she attempts to force her to admit that she is in love (something which she will not even do to the object of her affections, Valère), and although her attempt may prove unsuccessful in that Angélique gives no open verbal admission, the girl's reactions quickly make the true situation apparent to the audience. Two scenes later, Frosine and Angélique can once more be found talking together, this time in a very brief exchange, but one which again displays Angélique's attitude while allowing the female servant to indicate that she hopes to assist the Capitaine in solving the girl's problem; and in the final scene of the same act an extended exchange between Frosine and the evil Ariste's naïve valet, Flamand, allows the latter to lament what he sees as his own inadequacy alongside the shining example of his 'honnête' master, and in so doing not only to demonstrate his own comical naïveté, but also to describe in some detail the type of trickery in which his master engages.

Likewise, in the second act, the brief opening scene between Frosine and Angélique lets an audience see that Angélique has now openly admitted her love to Frosine, and reveals something of her hopes for a happy outcome, while allowing Frosine succinctly to review the nub of the problem; and in the sixth scene a further comical exchange between Frosine and Flamand sees the latter lamenting the likely financial consequences - as he sees them - of his master's projected marriage, and revealing additional information about his master's conduct, including some details which may later be used to pressurise Ariste.

Similarly, in the third act, Frosine engages in still more dialogues. In the first scene, for example, one finds her engaged in a dialogue with the Capitaine, who reveals his feelings to an extent which he has not previously done, and who discusses with her his secret plan for unmasking the evil Ariste; while in the sixth scene she talks to the Marquise, who discusses with her the part which she is to play in a plan to thwart Ariste.

Moreover, if the female servant's function as a universal confidant can be seen clearly in Le Faux Honnête Homme, it can also be detected with little difficulty in most of Dufresny's other plays. Thus, just as Frosine in Le Faux Honnête Homme attempted to tease admissions of love from Angélique, so, in Le Jaloux honteux, Lisette may force Lucie first to admit her love for Damis, and then to discuss her fears that her love may not be returned,⁴ while, later in the play,⁵ the same servant may exchange words with Damis himself, permitting him to give some expression to his love for Lucie - something which the jealousy of the girl's guardian prevents him from doing more directly. Similarly, in La Joueuse, one of the female servants, Lisette, after her early expository dispute with Triolet, discusses matters at some length with Orgon, the gambler's unfortunate husband,⁶ and with the Joueuse herself,⁷ while the other female servant, Frosine, has one very important exchange with the gambler's daughter, Jacinte, in which the latter seeks her opinion on the love which she feels for Dorante.⁸ In La Réconciliation normande, the female servant, Nérine, also discusses matters with a number of figures, ranging from Angélique, with whom she continues the exposition in the second scene of the play, through the Marquise, who confides in her the attraction which she feels for Angélique's love, Dorante,⁹ and through Dorante himself, with whom she laments the tragic news,¹⁰ to the Chevalier, who confides in her the essence of his plan to outwit the Marquise;¹¹ while in Le Double Veuvage Frosine, after her initial expository conversation with Dorante, the young lover of Thérèse, goes on to have conversations with the Veuve, Thérèse's guardian (who is encouraged by Frosine's feigned sympathy to reveal more of her attitude to the Comtesse's insistence that she make it possible for Thérèse to marry than she would otherwise have done),¹² and with Thérèse herself (to whom she briefly describes the reaction of

⁴I, 4.

⁵II, 1.

⁶I, 9.

⁷II, 8.

⁸II, 1.

⁹II, 7.

¹⁰II, 9.

¹¹III, 2.

¹²I, 12.

the Intendant when he learned that his wife, Thérèse's guardian, was not in fact dead and therefore remained an obstacle to his intentions for Thérèse).¹³ In Le Chevalier joueur, Nérine acts principally as a confidant-like figure for Angélique and her would-be lover Dorante, allowing the former, for example, to make clear, in a lengthy dialogue in Act I scene 3, the extent to which she feels attracted to the gambler, and bringing out the reticent sincerity of Dorante's love for Angélique in the same act's fifth scene; while in Le Négligent the exposition, begun in a dialogue between Fanchon and Oronte, is continued in the fifth scene in a dialogue between Fanchon and the poet in which is discussed an incident which led Angélique's aunt to believe that the young girl's love, Dorante, is in fact attracted to her. Moreover, later in the same play Fanchon engages in dialogues with the unscrupulous Marquis, Dorante's rival, who is, for example, encouraged by her flattery to display his foppish behaviour;¹⁴ with Dorante himself, who, for instance, discusses with her his discovery of the Marquis's plan to swindle Angélique's uncle, Oronte;¹⁵ and with Dorante's valet, L'Olive, whom she encourages to talk about his master's behaviour, and, in particular, the seriousness with which his master regards his love for Angélique.¹⁶ Similarly, of all the characters in La Malade, Faussinville is the only one never to engage in a dialogue with Lisette. Indeed, only in Le Faux Sincère and Le Faux Instinct is the female servant's role as a universal confidant in some doubt, for in the former play there are only two scenes of any importance in which Laurette finds herself alone with another character,¹⁷ while in the latter most of Toinette's dialogues are with a single figure, the Nourricier,¹⁸ and tend to take the form of a discussion between conspirators, in the course of which the female servant instructs her co-conspirator in the way in which he is to behave, since, as will be seen,¹⁹ Toinette is exceptional in attempting to control the action of the play in which she appears.

¹³ III, 1.

¹⁴ I, 14.

¹⁵ II, 14.

¹⁶ II, 1.

¹⁷ The scenes in question are Act I scene 5, in which the servant discusses with the Marquise the trustworthiness of the Chevalier, and Act II scene 3, where an encounter between the servant and Rapin reveals the latter's background.

¹⁸ Most notably Act I scene 12, and Act II scenes 1, 5, and 10.

¹⁹ Below, pp. 221-2.

If the second main mechanical function of the female servant in Dufresny is, then, to lubricate the workings of the plays through her dialogues with other characters, her third mechanical function is again to help the operation of the plays, but this time through the soliloquies and asides which she introduces into most of them,²⁰ and which assist their workings in a number of ways.

It has already been noted that when the female servant in Regnard addresses words to the audience she has a tendency to do so in brief interjections or punctuations, the purpose of which is to draw the attention of the audience to the comedy of the situation;²¹ but in Dufresny, although a few similarly brief punctuations can be detected,²² not only are the female servant's addresses to the audience generally less brief, with the most important of them taking the form of soliloquies (although a number of them also occur as asides in scenes where other characters are present), but, more importantly, their purpose is usually significantly different.

Perhaps the most striking difference is that whereas in Regnard the female servant's punctuations seem primarily intended to accentuate the comic aspects of the situation, in Dufresny's much more complex plays²³ the prime purpose both of the female servant's soliloquies, and of her extended asides within scenes involving other characters, is to assist the audience to understand the progress of the plays by reviewing the current situation, or by indicating how events are likely to develop, rather than to accentuate the comedy of what is taking place (although they may do so incidentally).²⁴

²⁰All plays feature addresses to the audience of some sort, although the number of these varies from play to play: La Réconciliation normande has many; Le Double Veuvage, Le Faux Sincère, and La Malade have few.

²¹See above, pp.198-9.

²²In Le Négligent, for instance, when the far-from-youthful Bélise assures the poet that she is young - 'Pour l'âge', she tells him, 'je ne suis encore qu'au commencement de mon été' -, Fanchon responds with a brief aparté: 'C'est un été bien sec que cet été-là' (III,1).

²³The complexity of Dufresny's plays is discussed briefly above, pp.51-2.

²⁴A clear understanding of the situation can, for example, lead to a better appreciation of the comical implications of certain scenes, particularly where the complexity of the situation, or a misunderstanding, is the source of comedy. For example, Nérine's aparté in Act III scene 4 of La Réconciliation normande, discussed below, p.206, serves both to clarify the situation and to highlight its comical implications.

A very rudimentary example of a soliloquy conforming to the general pattern outlined above occurs in La Réconciliation normande, which opens with Nérine reflecting upon the characters involved in the dispute on which the play centres:

Nous verrons la très haineuse tante,
L'oncle très rancunier, puis l'amoureux Dorante,
Le galant chevalier, le grave arbitre et moi.

Less artificial, but again informative, is Frosine's soliloquy in the seventh scene of the third act of Le Faux Honnête Homme, in which she reminds the audience of the critical stage that has been reached in the plan to prevent the evil Ariste from marrying the Veuve, pointing out that if he were to learn that the Marquise, his first choice, is only feigning love for him as part of the scheme, he might well concentrate his attentions on the Veuve and win her hand before she too has been disabused:

Ah! respirons un moment; après avoir pris des mesures si justes, nous serions bien malheureux, s'il allait deviner qu'il pourrait épouser à présent la veuve sans rien risquer.

And Le Jaloux honteux and La Joueuse each provide further examples of informative soliloquies with, in the former play, Lisette revealing to the audience the very important piece of information that the account which she gave to the jealous Président of the young lover Damis's departure was entirely fictitious,²⁵ and with her namesake in the latter play hinting darkly at the possibility that the death of Triolet's wife may have dire consequences for the young Jacinte,²⁶ and thereby alerting the audience to the impending importance of what at first seems a peripheral event.

What is more, even the servants' apartés may have the same informative role as the soliloquies discussed above. Thus in an embarrassing scene in La Réconciliation normande in which Dorante is obliged to pretend that he returns the affection which his love's aunt, the Marquise, feels for him, one finds the female servant, Nérine, devoting a three-line aparté to explaining some of the emotions involved:

La riche veuve croit que l'intérêt inspire
Au jeune cavalier tout ce qu'il ne sent pas,
Et qu'il lui dit ... Je ris de ce double embarras.²⁷

²⁵IV,13.

²⁶III,6.

²⁷III,4.

While a few scenes later the same servant finds time, before joining in conversation with the Comte and Falaise, to reveal a new twist to events, namely, the fact that the Marquise will only give her niece the wherewithal to marry if she agrees to wed Procinville.²⁸ And in the scene which follows, Nérine again resorts to an aparté, this time both to remind the audience of the astonishing fact that the antagonistic aunt and uncle now appear to favour the same match for their niece, and to indicate that she proposes to feign love for the male servant, Falaise, in order to discover the extent to which he was involved in bringing about this situation (thereby preventing any possible misunderstanding that her forthcoming deception might produce in the audience, while helping the audience to savour to the full the comedy which is to come):

Ceci m'étonne ... j'examine ...
Ils veulent Procinville en secret tous les deux.
Sans doute ce Falaise ici s'est joué d'eux,
Il m'observe. Tâchons d'éclaircir ce mystère....
... Pour tirer son secret,
Feignons qu'il m'a charmée tantôt.²⁹

While a further clear example of an aparté not only commenting on the situation but also indicating the servant's intentions occurs in Le Faux Honnête Homme, where Frosine first notes that Angélique's reaction to the news of Valère's impending marriage suggests that she is indeed in love with him, and then states that she intends to force her to admit this - a piece of information which is particularly helpful to an audience about to witness her rather oblique method of implementing her plan.³⁰

Nevertheless, although the most obvious difference of purpose between remarks addressed to the audience in Dufresny and Regnard is that the former are more generally informative and less restricted to what we have termed comic punctuation, there is also another important difference, and that is that in Dufresny the more frequent use of soliloquy means that such remarks can be used by the author as a convenient device for separating the appearance on stage of one character, or group of characters, from another; in short, unlike

²⁸III,10.

²⁹III,11.

³⁰I,3. In order to provoke a response she pretends to agree with Angélique's declared dislike of marriage.

Regnard's apartés, Dufresny's soliloquies constitute what might be termed 'buffer' scenes, that is, scenes which, by eliminating the need to devise transitional exchanges between figures more important than the female servant (particularly when these figures may be in conflict), provide the author with an easy, if artificial, method of moving from one scene to the next.³¹

This second utilitarian role of the servant's soliloquies in Dufresny can, of course, exist happily alongside their informative role, so that, of the soliloquies already cited as examples of informative remarks addressed to the audience, only those which appear at the very beginning or end of an act do not also serve as buffers.³² Thus Frosine's soliloquy in Le Faux Honnête Homme³³ isolates the departure of the Marquise at the end of the preceding scene from the arrival of Flamand in the scene which follows, while Lisette's soliloquy in La Joueuse³⁴ avoids an unnecessary encounter between Triolet and the Chevalier, who have been on stage in the preceding scene, and Jacinte, who appears in the following scene.

However, not all soliloquies which act as buffers are also truly informative, and it is easy to cite a number of cases where the female servant's very basic utilitarian function as a buffer appears to be the principal, or even sole, reason for her presence alone on stage. Thus in Le Jaloux honteux Lisette's musings, in the third scene, on the unsavoury nature of Argan, the proposed match for Lucie, and the possibly suspect nature of her other suitor, Damis, are less important as a source of information than as a means of avoiding a confrontation between the evil Argan, who, with his servant, Frontin, has been

³¹It should be emphasised that since the female servants are generally not schemers there is usually no question of them deliberately seeking to prevent characters from confronting each other: it is simply that the author appears to use their soliloquies as a convenient means of effecting a transition from one scene to another. Furthermore, the author's use of this device to avoid awkward encounters on stage is relatively unsophisticated, and the soliloquies - many of which are not particularly extensive - are not normally used to allow for developments to take place off stage.

³²The soliloquies which fall into this category are Nérine's opening soliloquy in La Réconciliation normande and Lisette's soliloquy in Le Jaloux honteux, Act IV scene 13, which closes the fourth act.

³³III, 7.

³⁴III, 6.

present in the preceding scene, and Lucie, who joins Lisette in the following scene, while later in the same play Lisette's reflections on attractive young men like Damis, and the reaction of women to them,³⁵ can again be seen simply as a means of preventing an encounter between Damis, who leaves the stage before Lisette's soliloquy, and Frontin, his rival's servant, who joins Lisette immediately after it. Similarly, Nérine's brief invocation of Dorante in the fourth scene of Le Chevalier joueur contributes little to the understanding of that play:

Ah! Dorante, Dorante, vous deviez différer votre départ jusqu'à ce que votre rival fût en possession ... mais si je fais ce raisonnement-là, un homme amoureux pourrait l'avoir fait aussi: voyons si par hasard ... par ma foi, je crois que j'ai deviné, c'est Dorante.

But it does very clearly serve to prevent an encounter between Angélique, with whom Nérine had previously been conversing, and Dorante, whose attentions are not at that time welcomed by Angélique. And this utilitarian function of the female servant is again obvious in Le Négligent, where several rather brief and uninformative soliloquies by Fanchon serve to prevent a number of awkward encounters. Thus, in the thirteenth scene of the second act, her reflections on the money which she has just accepted from the Marquis ('Le scélérat! Il faut que j'aime bien l'argent pour en recevoir de la main de cet homme-là') prevent the latter from encountering Dorante, who subsequently joins her to tell her of his discovery that the Marquis is attempting to ruin his lover's uncle; while in the second scene of the third act her further musings on money - this time the money which the poet will earn if he can deflect the amorous attentions of the rather elderly Bélise from Dorante ('Hé! plutôt au ciel qu'elles [les soixante pistoles] fussent déjà bien gagnées, et qu'il ne fût plus question que de les payer! Mais je suis inquiète, Dorante devrait être ici') - prevent Dorante and Bélise from encountering each other.

It is clear, then, that Dufresny's female servants show great consistency in performing certain functions which assist the mechanical operation of the plays in which they appear; but even if their importance to the mechanics of the comedies is their major characteristic, it would

³⁵II,2. Lisette's words are quoted below, p.216.

be wrong totally to ignore the approach to life which they reveal in the course of the plays, for although they may never emerge as fully three-dimensional characters with a well-developed philosophy, and although, like their male counterparts, they may show little interest in the world 'outside' the situation in which they find themselves,³⁶ an examination of their remarks and behaviour soon reveals that just as they tend to perform similar mechanical functions, so too they tend to hold similar views on matters affecting them, so much so that it is eminently possible to talk of the 'typical' outlook of Dufresny's female servants.

First, the typical female servant in Dufresny, unlike many of her male counterparts, and unlike Lisette in Le Légataire universel, the most perfidious of Regnard's soubrettes,³⁷ seems largely to be uninfluenced by self-interest, that is, by the prospect of direct personal gain. Thus, not only is there never any real reference to the possibility of servants like Toinette in Le Faux Instinct, Nérine in La Réconciliation normande, Lisette in La Joueuse or Laurette in Le Faux Sincère gaining directly from the situation in which they find themselves, but even when other servants may be offered rewards in return for assistance in bringing about a particular outcome, they give no sign of allowing such offers significantly to alter their behaviour, although they may not, like Lisette in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses, refuse the money.³⁸

The most prominent examples of servants refusing to allow the prospect of reward to divert them from their chosen course occur in Le Jaloux honteux and Le Négligent, for in these comedies the servants make their attitude known in a quite positive way. Thus, in the

³⁶The lack of interest which Dufresny's male servants show in the world outside their immediate environment is discussed above, pp.131-3. The female servants, although they may appear suspicious of certain types of fashionable young men (see below, pp.216-17), and in so doing may show some awareness of the customs of the time, do not normally make comments which allude to, or could be seen as critical of, current fashions. A notable exception does, however, occur in Le Faux Honnête Homme, where Frosine jokingly asks Angélique what point there would be in her remaining in Paris: 'Que feriez-vous à Paris: vous n'avez ni vanité, ni coquetterie; vous n'êtes ni joueuse, ni musicienne; vous ne serez jamais ni sollicitieuse de juges, ni marieuse du quartier' (I,3).

³⁷Lisette is examined in detail above, pp.189-92.

³⁸See above, p.193.

former play, Lisette makes it clear to Damis (who seeks to persuade her that his love for Lucie is disinterested) that although she may accept his offer of a small consideration, this does not entirely dissipate the suspicion with which she regards him: 'Je le prends; mais cela ne me persuade point'.³⁹ And, later in the play, Fanchon gives a similarly cheeky reply to the Marquis when he asks if she would be annoyed were he to offer her 'un petit présent':

Pourvu que vous n'exigiez de moi rien autre chose que de recevoir, je suis toute à votre service.⁴⁰

But even although such open pronouncements may be wanting in other plays, it is nevertheless usually clear that the servants who feature in them are similarly uninfluenced by the opportunity of gain, despite the fact that, like their colleagues cited above, they are perfectly willing to accept the money offered.

In Le Chevalier joueur, for instance, although Nérine may not admit to the Comtesse that the payments which she receives from her have in fact no influence on her behaviour, her remarks to Frontin on the matter imply that her attempts to disrupt the relationship between the gambling Chevalier and Angélique are prompted not by the rewards which the Comtesse offers her if she can achieve this (the Comtesse hopes to drive the Chevalier into her own arms) but by a quite separate consideration (in fact, her desire to protect Angélique from a disastrous marriage):

J'avoue qu'elle [la comtesse] me fait des présents lorsque je réussis à brouiller Angélique avec le chevalier; mais puisqu'elle me cache l'intention de sa libéralité, je prétends que mon gain est honnête.⁴¹

And in Le Faux Honnête Homme, although the honest Capitaine, anxious to appear crooked in the eyes of Ariste, may give Frosine money to speak ill of him, not only does this come after the servant has shown a consistent willingness to assist him in every way, but, as her own response suggests, the incident's significance is largely a comical one.⁴² Similarly, in Le Double Veuvage, although Frosine may at one

³⁹II,1. The exchange should not, however, be taken too seriously, for Damis's reply makes it clear that the female servant's assertion is made partly in jest.

⁴⁰II,12.

⁴¹I,1.

⁴²III,1. Frosine uses the occasion to joke about women's love of gossip. This and similar jokes are discussed below, pp.309-11.

point refer briefly to the sum of thirty louis d'or which Dorante appears to have promised her in return for her support in winning Thérèse, not only does she speak of it in a lighthearted tone, but never again does she refer to it, and never in the remainder of the play does her behaviour suggest that her support for Dorante is attributable to anything other than her desire to see a young couple happily united,⁴³ while in La Malade Lisette's support for Angélique is made clear before the servant coaxes from her a promise of future financial support by alluding to the generosity of Lucinde, her adversary.⁴⁴

Indeed, of all the female servants, only one, Frosine, the second and minor of the two soubrettes in La Joueuse, seems to be governed by self-interest, for her unwillingness even to try to help Jacinte find a means of circumventing the financial obstacles which stand in the way of her marriage to her love, Dorante,⁴⁵ linked to her support for the latter's aged but wealthy rival, the Chevalier, without any attempt to persuade Jacinte of the advantages of this, and with no apparent reason other than the reward which she can expect of him,⁴⁶ suggests that the hope of financial gain may lead her to act as she does.

But Frosine in La Joueuse is untypical of Dufresny's female servants not only in that she appears to allow the hope of gain to influence her, but also in that, despite her insistence that she is

⁴³After Dorante, in a reverie caused by his love for Thérèse, asks Frosine what she is trying to talk to him about, she replies, with lighthearted exaggeration: 'Je vous conte vos affaires et les miennes; car les trente louis d'or que vous m'avez promis, ont autant d'appas pour moi, que Thérèse en a pour vous' (I,1). Frosine's situation is similar to that of Nérine in Regnard's Le Joueur, who accepts money from Dorante, but who would clearly support his cause in any case (see above, p.187, note 6).

⁴⁴I,1.

⁴⁵She cuts short Jacinte's confidences concerning her love for Dorante with an abrupt refusal to speculate about the sincerity of the latter's sentiments: 'Il n'est pas question de cela, mademoiselle, il s'agit d'oublier entièrement un homme que vous ne sauriez jamais épouser: car enfin dans la situation de vos affaires ... il est impossible' (II,1).

⁴⁶'Il m'a mis dans ses intérêts', she tells the musician, Triolet, and goes on to note that Triolet, like herself, is to receive from the Chevalier 'un petit présent' for his assistance in the matter (I,4).

fond of Jacinte,⁴⁷ she does not sympathise with the girl's aspirations-in-love (indeed, it might be suggested that it is her lack of concern for young love which causes her to submit with such apparent ease to the aged Chevalier's bribes), for the second major characteristic of the outlook of Dufresny's female servants is the consistency with which - unlike many of their male counterparts - they show sympathy for the cause of true young love, although they are themselves rarely in love.⁴⁸

One finds, for instance, that in some cases the servant makes it clear that affection for the young heroine lies behind her desire to see her happily married: thus, in Le Faux Instinct, Toinette reveals heartfelt concern for her mistress's wellbeing when she explains why she hopes that the young child whose parentage is in dispute will prove to be the widow's daughter, and not that of Angélique's uncle:

Je donnerais toutes choses au monde pour qu'elle fût à la veuve; car ma jeune maîtresse aurait besoin pour se marier, d'hériter de son oncle: elle serait son héritière unique, s'il n'avait point cette petite fille-ci.⁴⁹

And, in La Joueuse, Frosine's fellow-servant, Lisette, in pressing the Joueuse to put her mind to the question of her daughter's marriage, reveals similar sentiments:

Parlons à présent de Jacinte, dont le mariage me tient au cœur. Car Jacinte, pour ainsi dire, est presque ma fille, parce que vous n'avez pas le loisir d'être sa mère.⁵⁰

But elsewhere the reasons for the servant's allegiance may be less clear, and it may appear simply to be a given fact that the female servant in Dufresny, like the majority of her ancestors, supports the young heroine's attempts to secure her marriage to a man she loves.

⁴⁷ J'aime la petite Jacinte d'inclination', she tells Triolet, lamenting the fact that the girl's mother has no time for her, but not that the Joueuse may force her into a marriage which she does not want (I,4).

⁴⁸ In only three plays are there references to the servants' own love affairs, and these are never developed. In Le Faux Honnête Homme Frosine first remarks that she is in love with the naïve Flamand (I,3), and it is later made clear that they will wed (III,13); in La Joueuse Lisette and Triolet have been in love in the past (I,2), and may marry each other after the death of the latter's current wife (V,2); while in La Malade sans maladie Lisette alludes in general terms to the prospect of marriage in the future (I,1 and II,1), but rejects the unsavoury La Valée's advances (for example, in II,2).

⁴⁹ I,12.

⁵⁰ II,8. It is interesting to note that Nérine, in La Réconciliation normande, also sees herself as a substitute mother (V,11).

In the conventional arrangement alluded to above, the female servant lends her support to a young girl whose plans to marry her lover are opposed by a third party, such as a parent or guardian. But in Le Chevalier joueur - as in Regnard's Le Joueur - the situation is slightly different, since the heroine is herself drawn to two men, and the servant's energies are devoted to ensuring that her mistress makes what she considers to be the correct choice. Thus, whenever Angélique inclines in favour of the playboy Chevalier, with his addiction to gambling, Nérine attempts to put obstacles in her path, and argues in favour of marriage to Dorante, the gambler's stable, if less exciting, rival. But although Nérine's situation may be somewhat different from that of her fellow servants in other plays, her behaviour serves to highlight a third feature which characterises the outlook of Dufresny's female servants, namely, the fact that although they may support young love, they do not do so indiscriminately, as unquestioning romantics, but as figures who, while appreciative of the importance of affection to a successful match, show, at the same time, a strong awareness of the demands of reality and common sense (although this never becomes the cynicism which marks at least one of Regnard's soubrettes).⁵¹ In short, like many of their commonsensical ancestors, Dufresny's female servants may provide a corrective to the romanticism and wishful thinking of young lovers, doing so sometimes with the playfulness of Toinette in Molière's Le Malade imaginaire, but more frequently with at least some of the earnestness of Dorine in Molière's Tartuffe, or Nérine in Regnard's Le Joueur.

At its most basic, the servants' common-sense and to some extent unromantic view of love emerges from the benevolent amusement with which they regard certain aspects of the behaviour of those who are under the spell of romantic love. The tendency of such lovers to seek out each other's company while pretending - at least in the early stages of their relationship - either that they do not wish to see each other, or that it is chance which brings them together, is, for instance, commented on with some amusement by both Frosine in Le Faux Honnête Homme and Toinette in Le Faux Instinct. Thus Frosine, noting that Valère and Angélique have at last come together, describes the situation in a witty aside:

⁵¹ See above, p.194. The servant in question is Cléanthis, in Démocrate.

Je me doutais bien qu'à force de se fuir l'un l'autre
ils se rencontreraient bientôt.⁵²

And it is with an equally witty riposte that Toinette counters Valère's expression of surprise at finding Angélique at a staging-post outside Paris:

N'êtes-vous point venu ici exprès pour être surpris de
l'y trouver?⁵³

Similarly, the tendency of lovers to endow situations or actions with the significance which they wish to see in them comes in for some comment. Toinette, in Le Faux Instinct, for instance, notes dryly that every situation inspires in the starry-eyed Angélique the same sentiments as the 'bois sombre' in which she finds herself at the time:

Je me suis douté que ce lieu-ci vous inspirerait, ce que tous
les lieux et tous les objets vous inspirent également depuis
quelques jours.⁵⁴

And Lisette, in Le Jaloux honteux, ironically describes as 'incontestable' Lucie's 'proof' of Damis's love, namely, the fact that at a meeting with herself and her aunt he had almost totally ignored her, giving all his attention to the aunt!⁵⁵

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Moreover, the female servant can show even more clearly her exasperation with young lovers whose heads are in the clouds when she discards irony and wit and openly expresses her annoyance at their refusal or inability to address their minds to overcoming the obstacles to their happiness. Thus, in Le Faux Instinct, Toinette, irritated by Angélique and Valère's discussion of the emotional implications of the possibility that one or other of them will become rich, urges them to find a practical solution in the following terms:

Vos délicatesses m'ennuient: vous avez l'un pour l'autre
de petits sentiments déliés, minces; on voit le cœur à
travers: raisonnons un peu plus solidement.⁵⁶

While in La Réconciliation normande Nérine, exasperated by the behaviour of the young lovers, throws her hands in the air and gives outspoken expression to her views on the folly of such creatures:

⁵²I,9.

⁵³I,2.

⁵⁴I,1.

⁵⁵I,4.

⁵⁶III,1.

Peste soit des amants, et de leurs faibles têtes!
Ils ne savent qu'aimer; l'amour les rend si bêtes!
De leurs tendres soupirs, et de leurs chagrins noirs,
De leur joie excessive, et de leurs désespoirs,
On ne tirerait pas une once de prudence,
De bon conseil.⁵⁷

But it is above all the female servant's evident disapproval of lovers whose approach may involve a degree of insincerity or a lack of straightforwardness which reveals the essentially down-to-earth and common-sense nature of her outlook. On the one hand, for instance, one finds that whereas some of Regnard's female servants are clearly attracted to the fashionable playboys who appeal to their mistresses,⁵⁸ Dufresny's soubrettes are deeply suspicious of figures who they feel may fall into this category, and therefore hesitate to support their efforts to win the young heroine before their sincerity has been established. Thus, in Le Jaloux honteux, Lisette is initially suspicious of Damis because he is 'trop joli homme pour n'être pas scélérat',⁵⁹ and even after she has interrogated him at some length about the sincerity of his love,⁶⁰ remains suspicious of his type:

Ces petits messieurs-là parlent tous aussi tendrement les uns que les autres. Ce qui les rend plus ou moins croyables, c'est le plus ou moins de faiblesse de la femme qui les écoute.⁶¹

Likewise, in Le Négligent, Fanchon initially refuses to confirm to Dorante Angélique's love for him, because, she tells him, he has 'la mine d'être de nos beaux à la mode, qui sont insupportables dès qu'on leur a fait entrevoir le moindre penchant pour eux';⁶² and later in the play she returns to the question of the genuineness of his love when she asks L'Olive about his master's true feelings.⁶³ On the other hand, however, Dufresny's female servants may also show

⁵⁷V,1.

⁵⁸Most notably the servants in Le Retour imprévu and Le Distrain. See above, pp.194-5.

⁵⁹I,3.

⁶⁰II,1.

⁶¹II,2.

⁶²I,6.

⁶³Although L'Olive's description of his master's customary behaviour may not augur well for the future, he does maintain that the present occasion is the first on which he has seen his master genuinely in love (II,1).

little sympathy for a lover who, far from being a playboy, subscribes to the doctrine of sensibility, since this too, in its suppression of spontaneous emotion, implies a dangerous measure of insincerity. Thus Frosine, in Le Double Veuvage, makes it very clear to Dorante, who regrets that Thérèse, far from being sensible, shows her love for him in a boisterous, open fashion, that his approach to love is, in her view, lacking in common sense,⁶⁴ and goes on to suggest that for domestic happiness it might be better to have a wife who has no feelings than one who can suppress them.⁶⁵

Clearly, then, the outlook of Dufresny's female servants, particularly in respect of their attitude to young lovers, is broadly the same as that of traditional commonsensical servants such as Nérine in Regnard's Le Joueur and Dorine in Molière's Tartuffe. But despite their similarity of outlook, the manner in which Dufresny's figures support the cause of young lovers differs significantly from that of both Nérine and Dorine.

It is noticeable, for instance, that although Dufresny's female servants may sometimes be relatively forthright in expressing their views to those whom they support (as, for example, when Nérine in La Réconciliation normande lets the young lovers know what she thinks of their over-romantic attitudes),⁶⁶ in their dealings with the opponents of young love they are much more circumspect than either Molière's Dorine or Regnard's Nérine, both of whom direct impassioned tirades at their adversaries. Thus, whereas Regnard's Nérine is extremely outspoken in her first encounter with the gambler's male servant, expressing fury at the attraction which his master has for her mistress, and vowing to do all in her power to prevent their union,⁶⁷ Nérine, who appears in Dufresny's Le Chevalier joueur, finding herself in a similar situation, responds with phrases like 'J'espère qu'Angélique reviendra de ce plaisir-là',⁶⁸ the colourlessness of which

⁶⁴ 'Vous êtes le gentilhomme de France le plus raisonnable, mais votre amour n'a pas le sens commun' (I,1).

⁶⁵ 'J'aimerais mieux une femme qui n'eût pas de passions', she tells him, 'qu'une femme qui les sût vaincre' (I,1).

⁶⁶ V,1. The passage is cited above, p.216.

⁶⁷ I,2. One of Nérine's tirades from this scene is quoted in full above, p.188.

⁶⁸ I,1.

cannot solely be accounted for by the fact that the play, unlike Regnard's, is in prose;⁶⁹ and although Lisette, in La Joueuse, may confront her gambling mistress with her theft of her daughter's dowry, she does so quietly, with controlled anger.⁷⁰ Similarly, although in the first scene of Le Faux Honnête Homme Frosine makes it clear to her mistress, the Veuve, that she disagrees with her assessment of Ariste, she does so not by deluging her with a torrent of words, but by countering her repeated emotional assertions of Ariste's probity with cool, reasoned, and frequently humorous demands for proof. Indeed, it is probably only in Le Négligent, where Fanchon tackles a rather surprised Oronte with the neglect of his family affairs, that a female servant in Dufresny comes close to uttering the sort of impassioned attack for which Molière's Dorine and Regnard's Nérine are renowned:

Oui, monsieur, quand vous devriez me tuer, je ne puis m'empêcher de vous le dire, il faut être absolument fou pour abandonner comme vous faites, le soin des affaires les plus importantes.⁷¹

Moreover, in many instances Dufresny's female servants will avoid open confrontation altogether, frequently even preserving their status as universal confidants by humouring those whom they oppose. Thus, although Frosine, in Le Faux Honnête Homme, may let her mistress know her view of Ariste, she launches no major verbal attack on the false Ariste himself, and in Le Jaloux honteux Lisette likewise does not waste her breath in charging the Président with the folly of his jealous behaviour, while in La Réconciliation normande Nérine, rather than telling the warring Comte and his sister, the Marquise, her opinion of them, pretends to sympathise with each in turn.⁷² Similarly, in Le Double Veuvage, Frosine, by ostentatiously echoing the false lamentations of her mistress on the supposed death of her husband, encourages her mistress to believe that she is deceived by

⁶⁹ Animation may be more easily conveyed by the type of verse favoured by Regnard, but it can still be conveyed by prose. Indeed, Nérine in Le Chevalier joueur does speak animatedly on at least one occasion towards the end of the play, but her speech is less an outspoken expression of her views than a description of an animated scene (V,3), and the same is true of Lisette's description of the unruly behaviour of gamblers in La Joueuse (II,8).

⁷⁰ IV, 14.

⁷¹ II, 16.

⁷² For example, in Act II scenes 5 and 7.

her behaviour;⁷³ in Le Négligent Fanchon, although she may be forthright with Oronte, pretends to concur with the views of the real enemies, the Marquis and Bélise;⁷⁴ and in Le Faux Instinct Toinette restrains herself sufficiently to avoid berating the Vieillard and the Veuve for the folly of their superstitions, while in La Malade Lisette consistently conceals her true feelings from the hypocritical Lucinde, whose manipulation of Angélique's aunt threatens the young lovers' happiness.

For in Dufresny what characterises the female servants' attitude to problem-solving is, above all, their willingness to use deception and behind-the-scenes activity, rather than confrontation, as their principal weapon. However, although the servants may show a willingness to resort to deception - a willingness which is typified by Lisette's observation in La Malade that 'pour réussir dans le monde, il faut une sincérité à deux envers',⁷⁵ -, this is not to say either that their involvement in trickery is inordinately great or that they are the prime movers in the campaign to outmanoeuvre the opponents of young love; for not only do their activities in this sphere frequently extend no further than the purveying of false information or the probing of other figures' thoughts and intentions, but, to some extent like Molière's Dorine in Tartuffe, and like a number of Dufresny's male servants, they are generally content to see someone else take the lead in devising schemes.⁷⁶

One finds, therefore, that in Le Faux Honnête Homme it is the Capitaine who leads the forces of good, and who devises and implements the scheme to unmask Ariste, while the servant, Frosine, acts largely as a spy, relaying to him information which she has gleaned from others. Thus, having extracted from Ariste's naïve servant, Flamand, details of his master's behaviour, her first reaction is to tell the Capitaine

⁷³I, 11.

⁷⁴For example, in Act I scene 14, and in Act III scene 1.

⁷⁵I, 1.

⁷⁶Dorine may lead the verbal attack in Tartuffe, but she does not object when Elmire devises a trick to unmask Tartuffe (IV, 3). The failure of Dufresny's male servants to take the lead in such matters is discussed above, pp. 54-5.

('Allons toujours rendre compte de ceci au capitaine'),⁷⁷ and having witnessed an encounter between Ariste and the Veuve in the course of which the former proposes marriage, her reaction is similar ('Allons avertir le capitaine').⁷⁸ Likewise, in La Joueuse, the principal female servant, Lisette, after her failure to force the Joueuse even to discuss her daughter's future, looks to Dorante for a solution:

Allons voir avec Dorante les mesures qu'il faut prendre avec cet esprit-là.⁷⁹

And later she tells Jacinte of her intention to 'travailler de concert avec Dorante' in order to force the Marquise to agree quickly to their marriage.⁸⁰ In La Réconciliation normande it is the Chevalier who takes control, first outlining a possible solution in broad terms,⁸¹ and later working out the deception in greater detail,⁸² while Nérine supports him by, for example, helping Dorante to feign love for the Marquise as part of the plan,⁸³ and by play-acting with the Comte in order to trick Falaise into believing that the Chevalier is himself the object of Angélique's affections.⁸⁴ Similarly, although in Le Négligent it is Fanchon who is involved in much of the detailed work of deception, diverting the elderly Bélise's passion away from Dorante by informing her that Licandre is madly in love with her,⁸⁵ and later suggesting to her that she might reassure Licandre of her love for him by marrying off his supposed rival, Dorante, to Angélique,⁸⁶ it is Dorante himself who is the main engineer of the downfall of the forces of evil,⁸⁷ a fact recognised by Angélique's

⁷⁷I, 11.

⁷⁸II, 4.

⁷⁹II, 8.

⁸⁰III, 7.

⁸¹II, 10.

⁸²III, 2.

⁸³III, 4.

⁸⁴V, 4.

⁸⁵I, 8.

⁸⁶III, 1.

⁸⁷In Act III scene 3 Dorante reveals that he has asked his servant, L'Olive, to shadow the Marquis's intendant; in the scene which follows, it emerges that in the course of his detective work L'Olive has obtained a letter written by the intendant to the Marquis; and in the next scene it is revealed that the letter contains information which will allow Dorante effectively to counter the Marquis's nefarious schemes.

uncle, Oronte, in the closing scene of the play.⁸⁸ And in both Le Double Veuvage and Le Chevalier joueur it is again figures other than the female servant who guide the play's action, with, in the former play, Gusman bringing matters to a successful conclusion with some help from Frosine,⁸⁹ and with the latter play eventually reaching its conclusion thanks largely - as Angélique herself acknowledges⁹⁰ - to Dorante's initiative in suggesting a means of testing the gambler's sincerity, although Nérine has previously made her own contribution to the campaign against the Chevalier by encouraging the Marquis to tempt him to resume his gambling.⁹¹ Moreover, even although Laurette, in Le Faux Sincère, takes credit for unmasking the Chevalier,⁹² not only has she not been alone in seeking to discredit him - for Dorante and Marianne have to some extent been active on this front too⁹³ -, but her success in unmasking the villain is more the result of chance (she happens previously to have met Rapin, with whom the Chevalier turns out to be associated) than of the implementation of a carefully thought-out plan, while in La Malade, although Lisette may take the initiative in encouraging La Valée inadvertently to advance the cause of the young lovers by impersonating a doctor, she generally is content to act in concert with those whom she supports.⁹⁴

Indeed, only in Le Faux Instinct does the female servant appear to emerge as a quite important and largely independent deviser of schemes,⁹⁵

⁸⁸Oronte's expression of gratitude ('Sans vous, Dorante ...') is cut short by a modest Dorante (III,15).

⁸⁹Gusman conceives his plan, and resolves to communicate it to Frosine, in the closing scene of Act II.

⁹⁰V,11.

⁹¹III,3.

⁹²'De l'avoir démasqué je prends pour moi la gloire' (V,12).

⁹³In Act IV scene 1, for instance, Dorante suggests a means of testing the Chevalier's sincerity.

⁹⁴Lisette's plans for La Valée emerge in Act IV scene 9 and Act V scene 1, and La Valée implements the scheme in Act V scenes 4 to 6. But her tendency to work with others is illustrated by her reference to 'le projet que nous avons fait avec Angélique' when, earlier in the play, she discusses matters with Valère (I,6).

⁹⁵Lisette, in Le Jaloux honteux, is also largely independent in that she does not work with another figure, but her influence on the action of the play is slight, being restricted largely to her suggestion, made in Act V scene 5, that Lucie should disguise herself as the Présidente in order to test Damis's love (a suggestion which is in fact taken up, bringing the play to a rapid close).

rapidly taking command of the situation when the Nourricier is asked to produce both of his charges when in fact there is only one child to present,⁹⁶ and thereafter seeming to direct the Nourricier in the use of deception to achieve their desired goal and even being praised for her 'esprit';⁹⁷ but appearances can be deceptive, and as the play draws to its conclusion it becomes clear that, far from controlling its action, Toinette, unusually for a female servant in Dufresny, never has been aware of the true situation, and has, in fact, like the other characters in this rather unusual play, been the dupe of the wily Nourricier.⁹⁸

⁹⁶II,1.

⁹⁷II,5.

⁹⁸III,6-7.

Chapter 3

LESAGE

Although the three plays by Lesage which fall within the scope of this study - Crispin rival de son maître, Turcaret, and La Tontine - were composed within a short space of time,¹ they differ substantially one from another, and so too do their four female servants, for even if none of the latter emerges as a figure of great importance, each displays a unique blend of personality and functional utility.

One finds, for instance, that in terms of personality, Lisette in Crispin rival is scarcely developed at all. Indeed, not only does the audience learn only a few basic facts about her attitude to life - principally, that, like so many of her ancestors in the French comic tradition, she favours young love (for she openly sides with Angélique in her attempts to avoid the marriage arranged by her father); that her attitude to young love is, nevertheless, 'unromantic' or down-to-earth;² and that she is rather coy about advocating less-than-legal means of circumventing the obstacle to the young lovers' union³ - but of those aspects which are revealed, none is explored in any depth. For although the attributes noted above are largely those of the conventional servante de bon sens, Lisette in fact shows none of the forthright outspokenness which frequently characterises such figures,⁴ and which

¹Crispin rival and Turcaret were performed in 1707 and 1709 respectively, and La Tontine was offered to the Comédie-Française in 1708, although it was not acted until 1732.

²When Angélique, commenting on the possibility that she may have to marry Damis, even although she knows that her love for Valère is reciprocated, declares, 'Il m'en coûtera le repos de ma vie', Lisette's response to this romantic pronouncement is a mildly ironical 'Voilà un dangereux homme que ce Valère' (Sc.4), while, later in the play, when the likelihood of marriage to Damis seems greater than ever, Angélique's somewhat rhetorical 'Hélas! que vais-je devenir?' receives a comically realistic reply from the servant: 'Vous allez devenir femme de Monsieur Damis, cela n'est pas difficile à deviner' (Sc.11).

³Lisette claims that she has 'la conscience trop délicate' to advocate outright resistance to paternal authority (Sc.4), and later mischievously expresses the fear that her pity for Angélique's plight may drive her to offer 'quelque mauvais conseil' (Sc.11).

⁴The nearest Lisette ever comes to showing the forthright outspokenness of the servante de bon sens is when she rounds on Oronte, who has admitted that her suspicions that Damis is already married deserve 'quelque attention', with an exasperated: 'Comment quelque attention? Si j'étais à votre place, avant que de livrer ma fille, je voudrais du moins être éclairci de la chose' (Sc.13). But elsewhere she may just as readily resort to flattery as a means of persuasion, as when she seeks to enlist Mme Oronte's support for her daughter (Sc.5).

might lead to the further revelation of her views. She remains, therefore, a character whose personality is sketched in outline only.

On the other hand, however, although Lisette in Crispin rival may not be developed in terms of outlook, she has a not insignificant (although by no means major) role to play in the mechanics of the comedy, for even if she remains very much on the sidelines in a number of scenes in which she is present,⁵ in others she can be seen performing a variety of functions which assist the progress of the play or contribute to its comic dimension. Thus, although the female servant plays no part in the initial exposition, she acts as a confidant to Angélique in the fourth scene, and in so doing not only permits a rapid review of the young lovers' problem, but, equally to the benefit of the audience, gives some insight into the nature of both Angélique and herself. Likewise, although she can in no way be seen as having a major impact on the overall pattern of events in the play, Angélique's plea, 'Conseille-moi, je t'en conjure' (also in the fourth scene), causes her to suggest that the support of Angélique's sympathetic but weak-spirited mother, Mme Oronte, be enlisted - a plan the success of which is short-lived, but which is the source of much amusement for the audience when Mme Oronte's resolve crumbles in the face of her husband's objections.⁶ Moreover, the female servant may be used by Lesage to keep apart characters in conflict either with a brief transitional buffer soliloquy,⁷ or by engaging in a dialogue which

⁵Although, as a quick review of scene headings shows, Lisette is on stage in the majority of the play's scenes, she is not, in fact, as important a figure as this might suggest, for in many cases she remains on the sidelines, and makes no obvious contribution to the proceedings. In scenes 8, 9, and 10, for instance, which centre on the arrival of 'Damis' (Crispin in disguise), Lisette's contribution is limited to one brief remark - in scene 9 - made at Mme Oronte's invitation, and in each of the final two scenes of the play, which focus on the unmasking of the deceitful male servants, she contributes only two brief asides.

⁶Sc.7.

⁷Lisette's 'Ouais, que signifie tout ceci? Il y a quelque chose là-dedans qui passe ma pénétration' (Sc.22) prevents Oronte - who in the previous scene has made it clear to Lisette that he believes that Valère is a crook - from encountering Valère, who arrives on stage immediately after the servant's soliloquy. It must be emphasised, however, that - as in Dufresny - the use of the servant to prevent inconvenient encounters is essentially an author's device: the servant does not consciously seek to keep other characters apart.

serves a similar purpose;⁸ and on a number of occasions she may punctuate scenes with asides which accentuate the comic aspects of whatever is taking place on stage - a role which is most evident in the seventh scene, where her four asides ('Bon', 'Courage, ne mollissez point', 'Adieu, la girouette va tourner', and 'Mort de ma vie! Est-ce là une femme? Elle ne contredit point') effectively chart the progress of Mme Oronte's gradual abandonment of Angélique's cause as she capitulates to her husband's arguments. But beyond these rather basic functions, Lisette has little contribution to make to the development of the play.

When one leaves Crispin rival and turns to Turcaret, one finds that Marine, one of the two servants who feature in that play, resembles Lisette in Crispin rival in one respect: she has a discernible functional role, although it is of limited extent since she appears only in the comedy's first seven scenes. In most other respects, however, and even in the nature of her functional role, she differs profoundly from her fellow servant in Crispin rival.

First, unlike Lisette, she is a figure of considerable outspokenness, and it is this attribute which lies at the heart of her functional role. It is, for instance, put to good use at the very start of the play, when a discussion-cum-argument between herself and her mistress, the Baronne, provides an expository scene which is not only extremely lively, but which gives the impression of being completely natural, with the servant rapidly reviewing her mistress's current situation in order to reinforce the points which she is trying to make, as she does in the following passage:

Vous êtes veuve d'un colonel étranger qui a été tué en Flandre l'année passée; vous aviez déjà mangé le petit douaire qu'il vous avait laissé en partant, et il ne vous restait plus que vos meubles, que vous auriez été obligée de vendre, si la fortune propice ne vous eût fait faire la précieuse conquête de Monsieur Turcaret, le traitant. Cela n'est-il pas vrai, madame?⁹

⁸This is probably the main purpose of Lisette's conversation with Angélique in scene 11, in which Angélique seeks her suiivante's sympathy, for it provides little fresh information for the audience (although it reveals something of the servant's attitude, and provides some comedy), and is most easily justified in terms of its buffer effect, since it prevents an encounter between Angélique's parents and Crispin (present in scene 10), and Valère, the latter's master, who arrives in the following scene (scene 12), anxious to discover exactly what his servant is up to.

⁹I, 1.

And Marine's outspokenness is again put to use in most of the other scenes in which she occurs, for one of her main functions would appear to be to stress the reality of the situation (something which the deliberate deception or unconscious self-deception of other figures may obscure), and to do so in a lively and amusing way. One finds, for instance, that on a number of occasions Marine's willingness to make clear her view that the Chevalier and his servant, Frontin, are crooks, intent only on fleecing her mistress, bursts the bubble of their deceptive eloquence as they attempt to ingratiate themselves with the Baronne. Thus when Frontin, on being asked the age of the 'comtesse' whom the Chevalier has supposedly given up in favour of the Baronne, evasively tells the latter: 'C'est ce que je ne sais pas trop bien; car elle a le teint si beau, que je pourrais m'y tromper d'une bonne vingtaine d'années', Marine, convinced that he and his master would not have rejected a really worthwhile 'catch', intervenes with a realistic gloss: 'C'est-à-dire qu'elle a pour le moins cinquante ans';¹⁰ and it is similar forthrightness, directed against the Chevalier himself, which ultimately leads to her dismissal in the seventh scene. Likewise, in a discussion with her mistress in the third scene, Marine does not attempt to conceal her mistrust of the Chevalier, and, for example, makes the following reply to the Baronne's argument that the Chevalier must be sincere because he has sacrificed in her favour the 'comtesse' whose portrait she has been shown:

Le plaisant sacrifice! Que vous êtes facile à tromper! Mort de ma vie! C'est quelque vieux portrait de famille; que sait-on? De sa grand'mère peut-être.¹¹

Indeed, even in a scene where the Baronne receives Turcaret's gift of a casket containing a billet au porteur from the hands of his rather dim servant, Flamand, Marine does not hesitate to cut through her mistress's extravagant praise of the container with a forthright expression of interest in its contents:

Ouvrez, ouvrez, je réserve mon admiration pour le dedans; le cœur me dit que nous en serons plus charmées que du dehors.¹²

And only in two scenes - one a brief transitional dialogue with her

¹⁰I,2.

¹¹I,3.

¹²I,4.

mistress,¹³ and the other a scene in which both she and her mistress smother Turcaret with flattery¹⁴ - is Marine's outspokenness not put to full use.

But if the first point of difference between Lisette in Crispin rival and Marine in Turcaret relates to the degree of forthrightness with which they express themselves (and to the differences in their mechanical roles which this to some extent implies), the second and major point of difference concerns the nature of the views which they express, for although Lisette, despite her lack of outspokenness, has an honest outlook which might be shared by any commonsensical servant, Marine, for all her outspokenness, has a view of life which is the antithesis of that which such a figure might possess - despite what a number of commentators may have felt in the past.¹⁵

One finds, therefore, that whereas the servante de bon sens may be thought of as someone who castigates those who behave in a foolish or unscrupulous manner, particularly when such behaviour runs counter to the interests of true love, Marine shows no concern whatsoever for true love, and will use her outspokenness actively to encourage unscrupulous behaviour. Thus while Nérine in Regnard's Le Joueur, seeing her mistress intent on sacrificing herself to a parasitic gambler when she could be enjoying the sincere love of Dorante, cannot remain silent, Marine's objection to her mistress's behaviour ('Non, madame, je ne puis me taire; votre conduite est insupportable')¹⁶ centres neither on the latter's willingness to marry the opulent Turcaret even although she has no real love for him, and even although he himself seems in no hurry to tie the conjugal knot ('Je n'ai rien à dire à cela', she tells her),¹⁷ nor on the fact that the 'petit chevalier joueur',¹⁸ to whom she is attracted is unworthy of her

¹³I,6.

¹⁴I,5.

¹⁵François-Xavier Cuche, in his 'La Formule dramatique de Turcaret ou le rythme et le jeu', p.78, also expresses surprise that Marine could ever have been seen as honest. 'Il nous étonne qu'on ait pu considérer Marine comme échappant à la corruption', he writes, referring to the assessment made of the servant by earlier commentators such as Adam.

¹⁶I,1.

¹⁷I,1.

¹⁸I,1.

attentions, but simply on the fact that she allows the Chevalier to gamble away the gifts which her deception causes Turcaret to lavish upon her. In short, Marine's objection is not that her mistress's behaviour debases love, nor is it that her duping of Turcaret in order to ruin him is immoral, but, rather, that by refusing to banish the Chevalier she is allowing sentiment to have too much control over her, thereby reducing the efficiency of her crooked operation. For, like the commonsensical servant, Marine takes pride in seeing a job well done; but whereas, in the case of the servante de bon sens this means seeing that common sense prevails and true love wins through, in the case of Marine the task in which she would like to take pride is the ruining of an individual (albeit one not noted for his scruples) in the interests of her own and her mistress's financial gain. As she herself puts it:

Je ne veux pas que l'on dise dans le monde que je suis
infructueusement complice de la ruine d'un financier.¹⁹

Turcaret, however, contains a second female servant, Lisette, who offers yet another permutation of personality and functional utility, for, unlike both Lisette in Crispin rival and Marine, not only does she make little or no contribution to the mechanics of the play, but although her self-interested outlook bears some resemblance to that of Marine, unlike her, she emerges not as an auxiliary figure, but as a character in her own right, even if, in terms of lines spoken, her contribution to the play is by no means a major one. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that in many ways Lisette can be seen simply as one of a number of representatives of the rapacious 'society encapsulated by Lesage in his play.

One finds, therefore, that although Lisette very occasionally performs a mechanical role - as when she announces the arrival of Furet²⁰ - and sometimes accentuates the comedy of the play by punctuating scenes with comical (frequently ironical) remarks and asides,²¹ on other occasions, particularly in her most important

¹⁹I, 7. Her statement contrasts nicely with Nérine's 'Je suis fille d'honneur; je ne veux point qu'on dise/Que vous ayez sous moi fait pareille sottise' in Regnard's Le Joueur, discussed above, pp. 187-8.

²⁰IV, 6.

²¹As in Act V scene 6, for example.

appearances,²² her presence on stage would seem to have less to do with assisting the progress of the play in any functional or comical way than with her presentation as a figure who, through the use of deceit, will - like most of the play's other characters - pursue her own selfish interests. Thus when she first appears on stage in the second act, after already having been described by Frontin, her male counterpart and associate, in terms which suggest that she may not be above prostitution,²³ she can be seen brushing aside Frontin's advice on deceiving the Baronne by means of 'une complaisance infatigable', not because she is opposed to deceit, but because it is a subject in which she needs no instruction;²⁴ and in subsequent scenes she can be seen actively practising the art of deceit or urging the Baronne to behave in a similar way. In Act III scene 2, for instance, Lisette does her best to counter Marine's preaching by assuring the Baronne that the Chevalier (Frontin's master) is indeed worthy of her attentions; in Act IV scene 8 she urges the Baronne to suppress the scruples which her deception of Turcaret is starting to arouse in her; in Act IV scene 11 she counsels the Baronne not to break with Turcaret - whose existing marriage has just come to light - since it is in her interests to ruin him completely; and in Act III scene 10 she uses her complaisance to ingratiate herself with Turcaret before discreetly supporting Frontin's argument that the financier is insufficiently generous to the Baronne.

Moreover, unlike her namesake in Crispin rival, Lisette will utter soliloquies which focus attention on her own feelings and aspirations, or will share her thoughts with another figure, and it is above all through such scenes that the audience gains insight into her attitudes, and comes to appreciate that it is witnessing a very distinctive type of female servant; for from Lisette's first intimation to Frontin that

²²That is, in appearances where she makes some contribution to what is happening on stage; in a number of other scenes she may, like Lisette in Crispin rival (see above, p.224), remain on the sidelines, making little or no contribution to the scene. Such is the case in, for instance, Act V scenes 7 to 13.

²³The allusion to slightly suspect behaviour on Lisette's part comes in remarks which Frontin makes to the Baronne in the opening scene of Act II. His comments are cited below, p.327.

²⁴'Tu me fatigues de leçons inutiles', she tells him (II,7).

she is disenchanted with her position as a soubrette and is quite capable, if Frontin cannot rapidly enrich himself, of going off with 'le premier riche faquin' who shows an interest in marrying her,²⁵ through the subsequent soliloquy in which she gives voice to her premonition that, in partnership with Frontin, she will one day become a femme de qualité,²⁶ and through a further soliloquy in which she croons over a recent gain of sixty pistoles,²⁷ to the final scene in which she agrees to join the now-wealthy Frontin to 'faire souche d'honnêtes gens',²⁸ it becomes increasingly clear that Lesage is presenting not simply a soubrette perfide who seeks material gain or better conditions for their own sakes, but one who, appreciating the social mobility which wealth can bring, seeks to elevate her social standing and leave servitude behind her for ever.

In La Tontine, the last of the three plays by Lesage to be considered, one also finds a female servant who shows an awareness of social mobility, for when Crispin, still wearing the uniform of a colonel as part of his scheme to deceive Trousse-Galant, offers Frosine his hand in marriage, joking that this will transform her from a soubrette into a femme de qualité, her comment is that 'la métamorphose n'est pas neuve'.²⁹ The exchange is, however, purely lighthearted, and elsewhere in this brief, stylised, and rather zany comedy, which centres on the traditional problem of young lovers seeking to overcome the obstacle to their happiness,³⁰ social trends are not at issue, and the female servant shows no desire to promote her self-interest in terms either of short-term monetary gain or of long-term social advancement; rather, she appears as a figure whose sympathies, like those of many of her ancestors, are with the play's young lovers. Nevertheless, although she may show sympathy for the young lovers, she does not, for a number of reasons, emerge as a servante de bon sens of

²⁵III,11.

²⁶III,12.

²⁷V,1.

²⁸V,14.

²⁹Sc.27.

³⁰Frosine's mistress, Marianne, loves Eraste, but her father, Trousse-Galant, a man of medicine, proposes to marry her to his apothecary, Bolus, who, instead of receiving a dowry, will be given the proceeds of a tontine on the life of the elderly Ambroise, whom Trousse-Galant hopes to keep alive by the use of his medical skills.

the type represented by Dorine in Molière's Tartuffe, or by Nérine in Regnard's Le Joueur.

First, Frosine, unlike Regnard's Nérine, puts little emphasis on the desirability of her mistress finding a good, honest, straightforward husband, and stresses only her need for an attractive young man, telling Marianne's father, Trousse-Galant, that, when he describes his choice of a future son-in-law, she and her mistress would prefer 'un vilain portrait de quelque joli jeune homme' to a description of an older suitor with numerous 'bonnes qualités'.³¹

Second, although it is not unusual for a commonsensical servant to regard with mild amusement the earnestness of her mistress's attitude to love, Frosine appears hardly ever to take Marianne's problems seriously at all, and frequently irritates her with her levity. Thus Marianne's rhetorical invocation of Eraste after she has learned that her father plans to wed her to Bolus - 'Eraste, cher Eraste, quel sera ton désespoir quand tu sauras cette nouvelle!' - prompts Frosine to make the following lighthearted reply:

Hélas! je crois déjà le voir qui s'afflige avec vous. Quelle vive douleur paraît dans ses yeux! Que de pleurs coulent des vôtres! J'en ai le frisson pour le vieil apothicaire!³²

And, later in the play, Marianne's despairing comment that she feels herself 'capable de [se] porter aux dernières extrémités' rather than marry Bolus receives from Frosine the following, less-than-helpful, response:

Soyez toujours dans cette disposition; elle ne nous sera pas inutile, si nous ne pouvons faire les choses plus honnêtement.³³

Third, and most importantly, however, Frosine fails to come across as a servante de bon sens because Lesage subordinates her character to her functional role (in particular her role as a

³¹Sc.12.

³²Sc.13.

³³Sc.19.

generator of comedy),³⁴ with the result that there is a measure of inconsistency in her behaviour which prevents her from emerging as a clear-cut servant type.

Thus, whereas on her first occurrence, in the second scene, she may appear as a forthright individual whose frankness helps to reveal the extent of Trousse-Galant's folly,³⁵ in a later encounter with Ambroise, the current victim of Trousse-Galant's less-than-tender care, far from openly expressing any great degree of sympathy for him, or joining with him in condemning Trousse-Galant, she adopts a non-committal attitude towards his complaints of ill-treatment and request for assistance, which is both comical in itself and which also creates comedy indirectly, by encouraging Ambroise to elaborate his complaints in his comically dim-witted and prosaic way, but which comes as a surprise after her earlier behaviour.³⁶ And still more surprising is Frosine's subsequent behaviour when, rather than seeking to justify or by some means explain away the conduct of Ambroise, whom Trousse-Galant has come upon kneeling before her as he begs for help, she attempts to tell Trousse-Galant of Ambroise's secret intention of avoiding the rigours of the régime prescribed for him.³⁷ Such an action seems strange coming from someone who has earlier shown some scepticism towards Trousse-Galant's professional judgement, and who, far from seeking to co-operate with him, subsequently gives every assistance to Crispin and Eraste in their efforts to thwart him. It is, however, an

³⁴In addition to those instances of Frosine generating comedy which are cited in the present chapter, other examples are referred to in Part IV, below. It should also be noted that Frosine's role is not exclusively devoted to comedy, for she may occasionally serve to advance the play in a more mechanical way. In the seventh scene, for example, she can be found bearing a message to Trousse-Galant (although the purpose of the message seems to be to provide a reason for Trousse-Galant to leave the stage and make way for a comic scene between herself and Ambroise), while she later has a slight influence on the action of the play when, in its penultimate scene, she 'feeds' Crispin with a suggestion which leads to the comedy's successful conclusion (even if, in so doing, she appears only to be following Crispin's earlier instructions).

³⁵Commenting on the death of his patient, Bonnegriffe, which Frosine has just announced, Trousse-Galant states, for instance, that 'il devait guérir, suivant nos anciens', to which Frosine forthrightly retorts: 'Et mourir, suivant les modernes', for which impertinence she is rapidly sent out.

³⁶Ambroise's complaints provoke only responses such as 'Je le crois', 'La chose est possible', and 'Il est constant que la frugalité règne dans tes repas' (Sc.8).

³⁷Sc.10.

action which, if inexplicable in terms of character, can be explained in terms of Frosine's role as a device for producing laughter, for the true significance of what she does is not that it shows her aligning herself with Trousse-Galant, but that her attempted disclosure of Ambroise's intentions ('Vous ne savez pas, monsieur, ce qu'il me demandait à genoux?') introduces a series of comic misunderstandings in which Trousse-Galant and Frosine talk at cross purposes, with Trousse-Galant firmly convinced that Ambroise has been propositioning the servant.

It is no exaggeration to say that, in general, the female servant emerges as a minor and almost inessential figure in the world of Destouches's comedies, for not only does no such character appear in two of the eight plays under consideration¹ (although two other plays in the group feature more than one soubrette),² but where a female servant does occur her appearances are generally restricted in extent.³ Moreover, Destouches's female servants make few contributions to the functioning of the plays in which they appear, so much so that it is probably easiest to give a true impression of the minor nature of their roles by noting the ways in which they do not help the workings of the comedies, before proceeding to examine their more positive aspects.

It very soon becomes apparent, for instance, that the involvement of Destouches's female servants in exposition is much smaller than that of similar figures in the works of other playwrights, for in half of the plays being considered the exposition is set in motion by non-servant figures who, in a quite serious way, either discuss current issues and moral problems amongst themselves, or comment on them in a soliloquy,⁴

¹In Les Philosophes amoureux there is no female servant, and although Le Glorieux features 'Lisette', who is initially presented as the servant of Isabelle, it is soon revealed (I,9) that she is really the latter's friend, who has been forced into service by adversity, a situation which is reversed before the end of the play. In a sense, she is no more a true servant figure than the young male lovers, like Léandre in Le Médisant, who assume the role of a servant to gain access to their loves.

²L'Ingrat features Lisette and Nérine, while Le Médisant presents Lisette and Javotte.

³The second servants in L'Ingrat and Le Médisant have particularly limited roles, appearing only in a very few scenes, but many of the other servants also make restricted appearances. Lisette in L'Ingrat, for example, loses her initial prominence towards the end of the play, and Nérine in L'Irrésolu makes her first appearance only in Act II, and is again absent at the play's conclusion, while Finette in Le Philosophe marié achieves prominence in only a very small number of scenes.

⁴Among topics debated by Ariste and G ronte in the opening scene of L'Ingrat are the correct way to bring up children, the desirability of love in marriage, and the respective merits of wealth and pedigree (all themes which recur throughout this and other plays by Destouches), and similar discussions between Pyrante and Lisimon, and Pol mon and Lisidor open L'Irr solu and Les Philosophes amoureux, while Le Philosophe mari  is opened by Ariste's soliloquy in which he notes the pleasures of philosophy and regrets that his marriage should intrude upon his intellectual pursuits.

and even in the remaining plays, where the expository scenes are much more lighthearted, female servants never feature in the opening scenes, and on only two occasions have any contribution to make to the early exposition at all.⁵

Likewise, the female servants in Destouches do not normally contribute to the workings of the comedies by acting as bearers of messages or announcers of new developments, and even when, very occasionally, they do make an announcement, the information which they impart is probably less important than the comedy generated by the manner in which they deliver it. Such is the case, for instance, both in Le Philosophe marié, when Finette tells Ariste that the Marquis has arrived, gleefully stressing that the latter is courting the former's wife (something which Ariste cannot prevent without revealing the secret of his marriage),⁶ and in L'Irrésolu, where Nérine interrupts a somewhat petty dispute between Dorante and Julie with an announcement which, couched as it is in rather formal terms, and with its significant information - that Julie will not be allowed to marry Dorante - held back until the end, is clearly intended to have a dramatic impact, but which, to the servant's surprise and the audience's amusement, has no such effect, since Julie has herself decided against marriage to Dorante:

NERINE:

Qu'on m'écoute, j'apporte une grande nouvelle.
Depuis une heure entière, en son particulier,
Madame tient conseil avec le chevalier.
Voici le résultat de leur haute folie:
Pour vous punir, monsieur, d'avoir aimé Julie,
Et d'avoir témoigné la vouloir épouser,
On a pris le parti de vous la refuser.

JULIE:

On a bien fait.⁷

Indeed, even the arrival of Nérine, the second servant in L'Ingrat, who precedes her mistress, Orphise, and prepares the audience for the

⁵ Le Médisant opens with an argument between the Baron and the Baronne which is further enlivened by the arrival of Lisette in the second scene, while Oronte's soliloquy, which opens Le Triple Mariage, gives way to a more lively scene between Oronte and Nérine; L'Obstacle imprévu opens with an exchange between Valère and Pasquin, while Le Glorieux opens with a brief soliloquy by Pasquin, who, in the second scene, is joined by 'Lisette', the supposed female servant.

⁶ II, 8.

⁷ IV, 5.

latter's arrival, can be seen as a primarily comical event, since the information which she provides, although not proclaimed as in the passage cited above, emerges in the course of a substantially comic scene in which she and her fellow servant, Lisette, suspiciously sound each other out.⁸

Moreover, whereas the female servants in both Regnard and Dufresny may contribute to the development of the plays in which they occur by their distinctive use of asides and soliloquies, Destouches's female servants rarely use such devices at all, particularly in L'Ingrat, Le Triple Mariage, L'Obstacle imprévu, and Le Philosophe marié, although it is possible, especially in L'Irrésolu and Le Médisant, to find a few examples of addresses to the audience which serve either to punctuate a scene,⁹ to review the situation,¹⁰ or to act as a buffer between the appearance of two or more other figures.¹¹

What is more, like many of their ancestors, but unlike figures such as Molière's Toinette, Destouches's female servants make no significant contribution to the action of his comedies, and are not normally looked upon by other figures as potential providers of solutions to the problems of the plot.

Thus only rarely are female servants even turned to for their advice in a difficult situation (the most notable exceptions being Lisette in L'Ingrat and Nérine in Le Triple Mariage, who are approached by their young mistresses with phrases like 'Conseille-moi ... sur ce que je dois faire',¹² and 'Nérine, aide-nous de tes conseils'),¹³ and although a few of them may appear to express confidence in their ability to solve problems - with Lisette in L'Ingrat resorting to the fourbe's traditional 'Laissez-moi faire',¹⁴ and with Nérine in

⁸ III, 2.

⁹ For example, Nérine's 'Ah! que d'hypocrisie!' ('Oui. Pure hypocrisie' in the edition of 1713) in L'Irrésolu (II, 2).

¹⁰ For example, Nérine's soliloquy which opens Act II of L'Irrésolu and makes clear her intention of sounding out Célimène and Julie.

¹¹ For example, Lisette's brief soliloquy in Le Médisant (I, 3) which separates the departure of the Baron and his wife from the arrival of their daughter, whose marriage is a source of friction between them.

¹² L'Ingrat, I, 4.

¹³ Le Triple Mariage, Sc. 9.

¹⁴ 'Mon Dieu! laissez-moi faire,/Je trouverai moyen de rompre cette affaire' (I, 4).

L'Irrésolu boasting of her prowess to Frontin: 'Lorsque pour quelqu'un mon adresse s'emploie,/Tout réussit',¹⁵ - not only are such instances counterbalanced by servants who openly admit their helplessness in the face of difficulties - Nérine in Le Triple Mariage, for example, tells her mistress, 'Je suis aussi embarrassée que vous',¹⁶ - but in no case, whether the servant has uttered expressions of self-confidence or not, does such a figure, when she suggests a particular approach (and a number have no suggestions to make at all),¹⁷ produce either imaginative schemes, or, indeed, any sort of plan which will succeed in changing the pattern of events.¹⁸ So even if Lisette in L'Ingrat may be asked for help, and may seem to have confidence in her abilities, when she does suggest a plan of action, far from revealing an ingenious scheme, she merely advises her young mistress to disobey her father¹⁹ - a piece of advice which the equally unimaginative Nérine in Le Triple Mariage also gives to her young mistress²⁰ - and while other servants may advocate a slightly more subtle approach, they never resort to the fourbe's use of tricks, but confine themselves largely to persuasion. Thus Lisette in Le Médisant, for instance, tries to promote the marriage of Marianne to Richesource by attempting to persuade the former's brother to marry the latter's sister,²¹ while in L'Obstacle imprévu (which, unusually, features a young mistress who frequently takes the initiative), the female servant, Nérine, although she may express considerable joy at the prospect of supporting her mistress in her proposed deception of Valère and his father,²² herself uses only persuasion when she initiates a scheme to have Julie wed Valère rather

¹⁵V,11. This statement does not occur in the edition of 1713.

¹⁶Sc.9.

¹⁷Nérine in L'Ingrat and Javotte in Le Médisant, for instance, have no suggestions to make about how to overcome the obstacles of these plays.

¹⁸As has already been noted above, p.72, there is, in any case, a tendency for Destouches's comedies to need no action to bring them to a conclusion.

¹⁹I,4.

²⁰Sc.4.

²¹Lisette's (unsuccessful) attempts to persuade Valère are seen in Act II scene 2, the mechanism by which she hopes to promote the match which she desires for Valère's sister having been outlined in Act I scene 6.

²²'Tant mieux', she tells her mistress, 'j'aime le désordre.... Que je vais me réjouir! Je meurs d'envie de mettre la main à l'œuvre, et je n'ai jamais rien entrepris de si bon courage' (I,8).

than await the return of her former love.²³

It is clear, then that there are many areas in which Destouches's female servants have little or no part to play, but it would nevertheless be wrong to dismiss these figures as total nonentities who make no contribution whatsoever to the comedies in which they appear, for although their roles may be minor, there are two main ways in which they tend to make their mark.

The first way in which they make their mark is by acting as confidants,²⁴ a role which, although less developed than in Dufresny, is very prominent in a number of plays, and in some cases may appear to be the main justification for the servant's presence on stage.

In L'Irrésolu, for instance, Nérine herself seems very much aware of her ability to attract confidences even from those most given to secrecy, as she makes clear on her very first appearance:

Je suis fine, et je sais du cœur le plus discret
Arracher, quand je veux, un amoureux secret.²⁵

And in the scenes which follow she is given ample opportunity to demonstrate her capabilities in a series of encounters with Mme Argante and her two daughters, Célimène and Julie,²⁶ which concludes with her again drawing attention to her role as confidant:

Me voilà, grâce au ciel, l'unique confidente
De nos deux jeunes sœurs, et de Madame Argante.²⁷

²³ III, 1.

²⁴ The term is again used in its broadest sense, as defined above, p. 201, note 3.

²⁵ II, 1.

²⁶ In Act II scene 2 Nérine draws from Célimène an admission of her love for Dorante; in Act II scene 4 Julie readily discusses with Nérine her love for Dorante; and in Act II scene 6 it is the turn of Mme Argante to admit to Nérine her love for Dorante. These are not, however, the only scenes in which figures discuss matters with the female servant: a similar situation occurs in, for instance, the first scene of Act V, where Célimène reacts to the news that Dorante is to marry her sister.

²⁷ II, 7. It should be noted that throughout these scenes the comic potential of the situation is not exploited to any great degree by Destouches: it is, for instance, only really in these concluding remarks by Nérine (and not in any earlier asides) that the servant draws attention to the unusualness of her position.

Similarly, in Le Médisant, the female servant, Lisette, again features prominently as a figure to whom others will gladly address their words, and, with a wider range of characters turning to her than was the case in L'Irrésolu, she even comes close to resembling some of the servants in Dufresny whose prominence as universal confidants has already been noted.²⁸

But Destouches's female servants also make their mark by contributing, through their use of forthright language, to the comedy of the plays²⁹ (a role which may at times overlap with their confidant role, or which may, in some plays, completely supplant it as their main raison d'être), for, as Graziano accurately points out, these figures are almost all 'fines mouches à la langue bien pendue'.³⁰

Thus, in L'Ingrat, not only does Lisette disrupt an early interview between Gêronte and his daughter (in which he attempts to discover the latter's amorous inclinations) with forthright interjections - such as, 'O la grande merveille,/Qu'une fille à vingt ans ait la puce à l'oreille!' - which contrast comically with the delicacy of the old man's initial approach,³¹ but, using tactics strongly reminiscent of those employed by Dorine in Act II scene 2 of Molière's Tartuffe, she refuses to allow herself to be silenced - claiming at one point (like Dorine)

²⁸The main scenes in which Lisette and another figure engage in a dialogue are Act I scene 4 (Lisette and Marianne), Act I scene 6 (Lisette and Léandre, the latter disguised as La Fontaine), Act II scene 2 (Lisette and Valère), Act II scene 7 (Lisette and Damon; Léandre is also present, but takes no part in the first half of the scene), Act III scene 1 (Lisette and the Baron), and Act IV scene 6 (Lisette and Marianne), the latter being a scene immediately prior to which the servant has, in the following terms, intimated to Léandre that she will deliberately probe her mistress's feelings: 'Allez, je vais sonder le cœur de ma maîtresse' (IV,4). Dufresny's use of servants as universal confidants is discussed above, pp.201-4.

²⁹This and other ways in which Destouches's servants contribute to the comedy of the plays are considered more fully in Part IV. It should be noted that one indication of the relative importance of the comic function of the servants is the fact that Les Philosophes amoureux, possibly Destouches's most 'serious' comedy, has no female (or, indeed, male) servant, while the almost equally serious Le Philosophe marié has only a very minor female servant (and, again, no male servant).

³⁰Joseph Graziano, Essai sur la vie et les œuvres de Destouches, p.20.

³¹I,3.

to be talking to herself³² - and goes on to lecture G ron te, who has by now abandoned all semblance of calmness, in the following terms:

Malgr   votre col  re,
Sachez qu'on n'aime point selon l'ordre d'un p  re.
La main d  pend de lui. Le c  ur, en libert  ,
Du pouvoir paternel brave l'autorit  ;
Il ne s'attache    rien qu'   ce qu'il trouve aimable,
Et c'est de la nature un droit incontestable.
Tr  s inutilement pr  tend-on l'engager,
Par force, par devoir, par raison,    changer.
Ni force, ni devoir, ni raison, ni prudence,
Rien ne l'y peut forcer que sa propre inconstance.³³

Similarly, in L'Irr  solu, N  rine, after Mme Argante has revealed to her her infatuation with Dorante, demolishes the elderly widow's romantic illusions with comically forthright responses, culminating in a tirade which spells out in no uncertain terms the improbability of it all:

Quant    moi, je ne sais point flatter,
Et je ne suis point fille    vouloir vous g  ter.
Chaque chose a son temps. Il faut vous mettre en t  te,
Que jamais,    votre   ge, on n'a fait de conqu  te;
Que cette gloire est due    des charmes naissants,
Et non    des appas si loin de leur printemps.
En vain vous disputez contre le baptistaire,
Par vos ajustements, par le d  sir de plaire,
Par le m  lange adroit des plus vives couleurs,
Par un ris attrayant, par de tendres langueurs,
Et par tout ce qui peut, avec le plus d'adresse,
Conserver la fra  cheur de l'aimable jeunesse.
L'  ge est un ennemi qui nous trahit toujours.
Jamais nous ne plaisons qu'au printemps de nos jours;
C'est alors que sied l'art de la minauderie.
Sur l'arri  re-saison, l'art de la pruderie
Convient; et si le c  ur se laisse encor blesser,
On peut aimer sous cap, mais il faut financer.³⁴

And in Le Triple Mariage, the female servant, N  rine, can be equally forthright with Oronte, making clear, for instance, her doubts about the ability of the man whom he proposes as a match for his daughter - one of his old student friends - to cure her of her love-sickness:

Mais croyez-vous de bonne foi, qu'un homme qui a   tudi   avec vous, soit capable de lui rendre la sant  ?³⁵

In Le M  disant, the female servant, Lisette, does not hesitate to scold

³² Asked by G  ron te why she is replying to him when he is not addressing his words to her, she replies, 'Je me r  ponds    moi' (I,3). Compare Dorine's 'Je me parle    moi-m  me' (II,2).

³³ I,3.

³⁴ II,6. In the edition of 1713 lines 6 and 12 read: 'Et non    des appas   g  s de cinquante ans', and 'Pour conserver les c  urs imiter la jeunesse'.

³⁵ Sc.8.

the quarrelling Baron and his wife:

Hé, bon Dieu! quel désordre est ceci?
On vous entend crier du milieu de la rue:
Pour mettre le holà je suis vite accourue;
Ne finirez-vous point?³⁶

While, in L'Obstacle imprévu, Nérine not only gives her husband, Pasquin, a taste of her tongue, prompting him to exclaim, 'Quel flux de langue!',³⁷ but is also openly insolent towards the elderly Lisimon, to whose complaints about her audacity - 'Sais-tu bien qu'il n'y a que toi qui oses me répondre ici comme tu fais?' - she has a ready reply: 'C'est qu'il n'y a que moi qui aie du courage et de la fermeté'.³⁸ Indeed, even the philosopher, Ariste, in Le Philosophe marié, is obliged to listen to the outpourings of Finette, the female servant in that play, who stresses the pointlessness of his continued concealment of his marriage, and looks forward maliciously to the advent of children to disrupt his meditations:

Je brûle de vous voir trois ou quatre marmots
Braillants autour de vous; et vous-même en cachette,
Jouant à cache-cache, ou bien à climussette.³⁹

It is very evident, then, that, particularly through their outspokenness, Destouches's figures have a not insignificant contribution to make to the comedy of the plays in which they appear, but it must be stressed that although they may be forthright, and although, as some of those to whom they address their words themselves admit, there may be sense in what they say,⁴⁰ it would be wrong, for a number of reasons, to see these characters as necessarily falling into the mould of the commonsensical servant as represented by figures like Dorine in Tartuffe or Nérine in Regnard's Le Joueur.

First, whereas a figure like Nérine in Regnard's Le Joueur may use her verbal fluency to launch an unequivocal attack on young men who, like the gambler of the title, follow the fashions of the day in

³⁶I,2.

³⁷IV,2.

³⁸I,6. ('C'est qu'il n'y a que moi ici ...' in the edition of 1718.)

³⁹I,4.

⁴⁰In Le Philosophe marié, for example, Ariste, speaking of Finette, comments: 'La friponne a raison de rire à mes dépens,/Et ses discours malins sont remplis de bon sens' (I,4).

behaving like playboys and fops,⁴¹ a number of Destouches's female servants have a much less sharply-defined attitude to social trends, so that even if they draw attention to what in their eyes are clearly present-day aberrations in behaviour, their brief comments, surrounded as they often are by an air of lightheartedness, cannot be interpreted as expressions of serious criticism. Thus in L'Irrésolu, when Nérine, discussing in a lively exchange with Julie the latter's plans for marriage, comments that 'il est statué par les lois d'aujourd'hui,/ Qu'un mari du bel air n'aime jamais chez lui',⁴² it is difficult to imagine that the female servant is genuinely outraged by such behaviour, and when, later in the same play, she responds to Frontin's advice to his master to marry the wealthy widow rather than one or other of her daughters ('Ma foi, prenons l'argent, et laissons les vertus') with a quick 'Du siècle où nous vivons, c'est assez là l'usage',⁴³ her interjection, while not suggesting approval, implies the amused acceptance of a recent trend - an attitude which is also apparent in Le Triple Mariage, where Nérine's remark to Isabelle that 'il y a longtemps que l'Amour et le Mariage ont fait divorce, et qu'ils ont juré de n'habiter plus ensemble' prompts in Isabelle the simple reply: 'Cesse de plaisanter'.⁴⁴

Second, although one figure, Lisette in L'Ingrat, may - like Regnard's Nérine - not only be reduced to tears at the prospect of her young mistress's enforced marriage,⁴⁵ but may also make clear her dislike of the fashionable young fops of the day, telling Pasquin that a young man is now no more than 'un jaseur importun,/Un petit freluquet vide de sens commun,/Distrait, fat, étourdi, qui met toute sa gloire,/ Tout le jour à courir, toute la nuit à boire',⁴⁶ there are others who will not merely show no objection to their mistresses marrying slightly less-than-ideal husbands, but will even urge them to conclude such a match, not because it is in their mistresses' best interests, but because it suits their own purposes. Thus Lisette in Le Médisant at one point urges her mistress, Marianne, to wed the wealthy, but foolish,

⁴¹I,2. The passage is cited above, p.27.

⁴²II,4.

⁴³II,8.

⁴⁴Sc.4.

⁴⁵I,4.

⁴⁶I,5. (The two last lines read 'Qui court, saute, trépigne, et met toute sa gloire,/A passer et les jours et les nuits à bien boire' in the 1712 edition.)

Richesource (who she admits is far from ideal),⁴⁷ not necessarily because he is a better proposition than Damon - the médisant of the title - to whom Marianne is at that moment attracted, but because, as she has already made clear in a soliloquy,⁴⁸ she wishes to thwart Damon's plans in order to have her revenge on him for his previous behaviour towards her. Likewise, in L'Obstacle imprévu, not only does Nérine appear to have no objection in principle to her mistress Julie (herself a rather coquettish young woman) hoping to marry Léandre, whom the servant describes as 'le plus joli homme du monde',⁴⁹ and who, it transpires,⁵⁰ has at one stage married Julie's supposed mother in order to lay hands on her wealth, but, before Léandre returns from his travels, she does her best to persuade Julie to marry the petit-maître, Valère, who has bribed her to support his cause,⁵¹ but whose adherence to foolish fashions is so great that Julie refuses even to consider him as a possible husband, as she makes only too clear to Nérine:

Quoi, tu veux que j'épouse un jeune étourdi, tout rempli de lui-même, amoureux par caprice, inconstant par habitude, débauché par tempérament? Un fou rempli d'imperfections et de vices; et qui, bien loin de faire ses efforts pour les cacher, a la sotte vanité de s'en glorifier, et de vouloir même qu'on les croie plus grands qu'ils ne sont?⁵²

It should be noted, however, that although, on occasion, Destouches's female servants allow their own interests to dictate their behaviour, Nérine in L'Obstacle imprévu is the only one for whom the hope of direct financial gain would appear to be a significant

⁴⁷'Je conviens qu'il n'est point d'homme plus animal', she tells Marianne, 'Il a l'esprit borné: mais il est franc, sincère,/Bon ami, généreux, fait à ne point déplaire:/Il est puissamment riche, et s'est mis dans l'esprit/Que, pour égaler tout, ce mérite suffit' (I,4).

⁴⁸I,3.

⁴⁹II,9. It is difficult to imagine either Regnard's Nérine or Molière's Dorine supporting so wholeheartedly someone who could be described in these terms.

⁵⁰IV,9.

⁵¹II,9. The exchange between Valère and Nérine, during which the latter is offered money, also has comic consequences, since Pasquin overhears part of it, and misinterprets its significance. The episode is discussed below, pp.291-2.

⁵²III,5.

motivation.⁵³ Moreover, neither she nor her fellow servants ever show any of the greedy desire for self-advancement so evident in the female servants of Regnard's Le Légataire universel or Lesage's Turcaret; indeed, only one of Destouches's servants - Lisette in L'Ingrat, who anticipates with pleasure the move to the court which will result from the marriage of Isabelle and Cléon - looks forward to a future in a new environment (albeit one where she will still, apparently, be a souvante),⁵⁴ while, on the other hand, another figure, Nérine in L'Irrésolu, openly acknowledges the fixed nature of her social condition when she jokes that she, too, would be attracted to Dorante if only she were 'faite pour y prétendre'.⁵⁵

But there is a third reason for not seeing Destouches's soubrettes as falling into the mould of the commonsensical servant, and that is the particular view of love and marriage which a number of them appear to have. For whereas a servante de bon sens like Regnard's Nérine seems to see marriage as something more than a simple recognition of spontaneous, possibly purely physical, attraction (although love is an essential ingredient), and in consequence urges Angélique to fight against the irresistible pull of Valère and, instead, marry the stable, if less exciting Dorante, it is precisely on spontaneous, often physical, attraction that some of Destouches's figures place greatest emphasis. Thus Nérine in Le Triple Mariage - albeit lightheartedly - uses the image of marriage as a refreshing drink at the end of a long, hot journey during which all refreshment has been forbidden, to 'prove' to Oronte that, 'c'est la vertu d'une fille qui cause son empressément pour le mariage',⁵⁶ while, in Le Médisant, Lisette herself is all too ready

⁵³ Other servants may be offered financial incentives, but only after they have already adopted a course of action, as is the case both with Lisette in Le Médisant, whose intention of supporting Richesource to spite Damon is recorded (I,3) before she is offered money to pursue the same course (I,6), and with Nérine in Le Triple Mariage, who states her support for Isabelle, who loves Cléon - 'Je vous jure que vos intérêts me sont plus chers que les miens' (Sc.4) -, before Cléon has offered her 'une récompense / espérance' in the edition of 1716/proportionnée aux services que tu nous rendras' (Sc.9). Moreover, Fînette in Le Philosophe marié cheekily accepts money from Ariste as an encouragement to her to keep his secret (I,4), but later reveals that this has had little effect (V,4).

⁵⁴ Lisette will still be with her mistress at court, but they will, she imagines, have other servants to attend to routine chores, and to escort them on the social round (V,2).

⁵⁵ II,7. For additional comments on this and similar statements, see above, p.154.

⁵⁶ Sc.2.

to submit to the instant appeal of Léandre in his disguise as Richesource's servant, as she makes clear in a dialogue with herself in which she comes close to parodying the talk of naïve young lovers:

Oh! pour moi je suis vive;
Dès que mon cœur dit oui, ma raison le veut fort,
Et je n'ai point de peine à les mettre d'accord.⁵⁷

Moreover, to a quite considerable extent Destouches departs from the French comic tradition by introducing into his plays female servants who - unlike either Regnard's Nérine or Molière's Dorine, for example - have a personal interest in marriage. One finds, for instance, that a number of Destouches's female servants suggest in a lighthearted way that they would quite relish the prospect of following their mistresses into wedlock. Thus, in L'Ingrat, when Isabelle hesitates to admit her desire for marriage, Lisette prods her with a quick 'Hé! vous n'en mourriez pas; ni moi non plus, je crois',⁵⁸ and, in L'Irrésolu, Célimène's assertion that she will take a husband in order to have her revenge on Dorante prompts Nérine to exclaim, 'Par ma foi, /C'est comme je voudrais me venger aussi, moi',⁵⁹ while, in L'Obstacle imprévu, when Julie notes that her own schemes have rebounded on her, placing her in a position where she will have to marry Valère, Nérine professes to see no harm in that: 'Voyez le grand malheur! Je voudrais bien être dans cette nécessité-là, moi'.⁶⁰

Indeed, unlike the conventional commonsensical servant, a few of Destouches's figures - in addition to Lisette in Le Médisant, who, it has already been noted,⁶¹ feels attracted to the disguised Léandre - are either already married, or have at some point serious hopes of uniting with a particular individual. Nérine in L'Obstacle imprévu, for instance, too impatient to await the return of her love, Crispin, has married Pasquin,⁶² and Nérine, the secondary female servant in L'Ingrat, is in love with another Pasquin,⁶³ while Javotte, the secondary servant in Le Médisant, is (like her fellow servant, Lisette)

⁵⁷II,3.

⁵⁸I,3.

⁵⁹V,1.

⁶⁰II,8.

⁶¹II,3. Her comments are noted above.

⁶²Her uncomfortable reunion with Crispin takes place in Act III scene 6.

⁶³III,2.

attracted to the disguised Léandre.⁶⁴ However, although these attractions reveal a much greater personal interest in love than might be expected of a servante de bon sens, they also point quite firmly, once again, to the importance of the comic role of the female servants, for, in each of the instances cited, the servant's attachment is used to provide comic scenes. Thus Nérine's marriage to Pasquin in L'Obstacle imprévu has comical consequences when Crispin returns from his travels to claim her hand in marriage,⁶⁵ and, in L'Ingrat, Nérine's reunion with Pasquin, whose fidelity has been strained, in her absence, by the presence of Lisette, is again a source of amusement,⁶⁶ while the rivalry which Léandre's disguise as a servant creates between Lisette and Javotte in Le Médisant is likewise put to comic use.⁶⁷

⁶⁴II,4.

⁶⁵It leads, for instance, to the comical confrontation between Pasquin and Crispin (IV,5) which is discussed below, p.298.

⁶⁶Lisette, having concealed Nérine within earshot, questions Pasquin about his feelings and then pretends to conjure up Nérine, finally leaving him face to face with the 'ghost' of his love (III,2-5).

⁶⁷II,4-6. The comical misunderstandings which arise out of the situation are explored below, p.292.

Chapter 5

DANCOURT

A cursory examination of those of Dancourt's comedies which fall within the scope of this study is likely to leave a student of the female servant with two main impressions: first, that the female servant is not of central importance to them, and, second, that the soubrettes which they feature constitute a varied group of characters. Of these impressions, the former is undoubtedly accurate, for more than one in three of the plays being considered contain no female servants at all;¹ the latter, however, requires some qualification, for although the servants are varied in the size of their roles,² more detailed analysis reveals that beneath this superficial variety there exists a measure of underlying unity, since, rather than endowing his servants with completely opposite or conflicting natures, Dancourt appears to create the majority of them by drawing on the same small pool of characteristics, although not all of these are used, or are used in the same proportions, in the case of each individual. It is possible, therefore, despite the superficial diversity of these figures, to describe, in broad terms, a number of aspects which characterise them both in their outlook and behaviour, and in the contribution which they make to the mechanics of the plays.

If one begins a detailed examination of Dancourt's female servants by considering their outlook and behaviour, it becomes clear, for instance, that although there are two who might be categorised as soubrettes perfides (Gabrillon, in La Femme d'intrigues, who is the willing assistant of an unscrupulous professional intriguer whose

¹Of the thirty-five plays under consideration, the following fifteen have no female servants: La Gazette de Hollande, L'Opéra de village, Les Vendanges, La Foire de Besons, Les Vendanges de Suresnes, La Foire Saint-Germain, Les Eaux de Bourbon, Les Vacances, Les Curieux de Compiègne, Le Mari retrouvé, Les Trois Cousines, Colin-Maillard, La Comédie des comédiens, Le Vert Galant, and Le Prix de l'arquebuse.

²A few figures have fairly substantial roles: so important is Finette in Les Enfants de Paris, for instance, that the play was once known as Finette; most servants have, however, only a minor part to play, and some make scarcely any contribution at all to the comedies in which they occur: Marton, in Le Galant Jardinier, for example, appears on stage in only four scenes (the scenes numbered 9, 10, 18 and 23 in the edition of 1760, which contains two scenes numbered 8), in one of which (scene 10) she does not even speak.

business she hopes eventually to take over,³ and, possibly, Finette, who supports the Comtesse, one of many dubious characters in Le Moulin de Javelle),⁴ the majority share few of the perfidious servant's characteristics.

One finds, for example, that whereas the soubrette perfide may show little regard for young love, all of Dancourt's female servants who feature in plays where young lovers occur (that is, all plays except La Femme d'intrigues and Le Moulin de Javelle)⁵ can be described as generally supportive of them in that they never oppose such figures,⁶ and may, indeed, give them positive encouragement or assistance.

Moreover, one also finds that whereas a prime characteristic of the soubrette perfide is that she is very strongly motivated by self-interest, such a consideration appears to be of much less concern to Dancourt's figures. Many, in fact, do not raise the question of self-interest at all, and of those who do, none gives any indication that it is, for her, a matter of overwhelming importance. Thus, although Finette, in Les Enfants de Paris, states at one point that she is to

³Like her mistress, Gabrillon can, for instance, consider an unwanted baby - the product of one of their intrigues - as an object either to be dumped on a neighbour's doorstep (IV,12), or to be sold at a profit (IV,13). And, talking of her mistress in the opening scene of the final act, she declares: 'Elle est prête à me remettre ses pratiques'.

⁴Finette's role is extremely small, and she is scarcely developed as a character, but it appears not only that her support for her mistress is unequivocal, but that, like her mistress, she may have a dubious background: as their drunken coachman points out, he could readily dishonour them by making it known that he has picked them up in the Rue de Seine (Sc.2).

⁵La Femme d'intrigues and Le Moulin de Javelle are both episodic plays which parade a wide range of odd or disreputable characters before the audience, but in which there is no real young love interest. In most of the other plays in which female servants occur, young lovers of various sorts do feature, although they do not always constitute the main centre of interest: in Le Chevalier à la mode, for example, the action centres on the problem of preventing Mme Patin from marrying the Chevalier, and young Lucile's affairs (although related) are peripheral, while in Les Bourgeoises à la mode it is the tricking of Simon, the notaire, and Griffard, the commissaire, by their wives - and not the problems of Simon's young daughter, Marianne - which occupies most of the play.

⁶Lisette in Le Chevalier à la mode may appear to be an exception, since she opposes Lucile's infatuation with the Chevalier; in so doing she is, however, attempting to serve Lucile's best interests.

some extent motivated by the hope of recompense,⁷ she does so only as part of a plan to enlist the support of the self-interested Mme Brichonne, and later rejects Valère's offer of reward with a firm 'J'agis désintéressément'.⁸ And in La Maison de campagne the self-interest shown by Lisette when she attempts to prevent Eraste from seeing Marianne partly because their discovery together would lead to her own dismissal,⁹ though real, differs in scale from the much more positive self-interest of the soubrette perfide, as does that revealed by Lisette in Le Chevalier à la mode, when, after apparently seeking an assurance from Serrefort that he will not disclose to Mme Patin that it was she who revealed her plans, she goes on to give the following explanation:

Au moins, monsieur, vous savez bien que ma petite fortune dépend d'elle en quelque façon; et si ce n'était que vous donnez des commissions à mon père, à mon cousin, et à celui qui veut m'épouser, je ne trahirais pas ma maîtresse pour vous faire plaisir.¹⁰

What is more, although, in La Parisienne, Lisette - whom Angélique has instructed to discourage Dorante by acting the part of a 'gouvernante incommode',¹¹ - is tempted by the purse which Dorante offers her as a bribe, and eventually, much to Angélique's annoyance, accepts it (albeit with the words, 'Je ne la prends pas; mais, je vous la garde'),¹² there are no other signs that the servant is seriously concerned with extracting money from those around her, and the incident, whose main purpose would seem to be the creation of comedy, is quickly forgotten. Indeed, only in two of the plays where young lovers are supported does the self-interest of the servant even begin to resemble the much more positive and deep-rooted self-interest of the soubrette perfide. The first of these is La Loterie, where the female servant assists the trickster, Sbrigani, and initially expresses surprise that his daughter, Marianne, should allow love to take precedence over the more material interests of herself and her father;¹³ and the second is

⁷III,1.

⁸III,17.

⁹Sc.1.

¹⁰V,1.

¹¹Sc.11.

¹²Sc.12.

¹³Sc.1. It should be noted, however, that her remark is lighthearted in tone.

Les Bourgeoises à la mode, where Lisette expresses, in a soliloquy, sentiments which reveal not only short-term self-interest, but also longer-term ambition:

Tout se dispose à merveille pour ma petite fortune. La passion du chevalier, l'humeur de ma maîtresse, qui ne songe qu'à ruiner son mari; elle achète cher, vend à bon marché, met tout en gage; je suis son intendante. Voilà comme les maîtresses deviennent soubrettes, et comme les soubrettes deviennent quelquefois maîtresses à leur tour.¹⁴

However, even in these cases, self-interest does not emerge as of overwhelming importance, for although, in La Loterie, Lisette does not give up her general support for Sbrigani, she does eventually agree also to support his daughter (and comes close to admitting the inconsistency of this),¹⁵ while in Les Bourgeoises à la mode Lisette never again shows any sign of social ambition, and even if she skilfully (and comically) extracts a small bribe from Griffard,¹⁶ when she later succeeds in extracting from him a more substantial sum of money for Angélique, she does indeed convey it to her mistress, and does not, like Frontin when he makes off with the Chevalier's billet in the final scene of Lesage's Turcaret, appropriate it for her own use.¹⁷

It is clear, then, that most of the servants being considered do not fit easily into the mould of the soubrette perfide; it would, however, be wrong to assume that they are, therefore, the antithesis of such figures, namely, servantes de bon sens, for analysis shows that while they may not be possessed of the basic characteristics of the former type of servant, neither do they display the more fundamental characteristics of the latter.

First, whereas the commonsensical servant is normally only willing

¹⁴I,13.

¹⁵'L'avarice du père, l'amour de la fille, je me prête à tout, dans cette maison-ci; ça a toujours été mon défaut, je suis trop facile' (Sc.19).

¹⁶II,8.

¹⁷Lisette, at her own suggestion, is given money by Griffard to convey to her mistress, Angélique (Simon's wife), with whom he is infatuated, as a gambler's 'restitution' (III,9), and does so, while later in the play (IV,9) Frontin similarly persuades Simon to entrust him with money for Griffard's wife (with whom Simon is infatuated), and appears to carry out his commission honestly. A similar situation obtains in Les Fonds perdus.

to assist essentially straightforward and innocent young lovers, those of Dancourt's servants who are broadly supportive of young love seem less discriminating. In L'Eté des coquettes, for example, Lisette is content to serve Angélique, whose coquettish behaviour is the talk of the town,¹⁸ while in Le Retour des officiers Toinette willingly assists Henriette, who, during the absence of her officer-lover, Eraste, in the summer, gives encouragement to other aspiring lovers, only to cast them cynically aside at the onset of winter. As the servant herself puts it, explaining to Maturin her mistress's attitude:

Quand il n'y a que de la robe et de la finance dans le commerce, les sous-fermiers brillent, on les trouve passables: mais sitôt qu'on revoit des officiers, ces autres messieurs-là deviennent si laids, si laids.¹⁹

Similarly, although, in La Parisienne, Angélique initially seems very different from the coquettes of L'Eté des coquettes and Le Retour des officiers, and, indeed, at first appears to be the epitome of the shy, innocent young lover, showing reluctance even to admit that she may be in love,²⁰ it quickly emerges that she is, in fact, a nascent coquette who, in the absence of her lover, Eraste, has been arranging secret assignations with both Dorante and Lisimon;²¹ yet Lisette, despite this revelation (indeed, partly because of it, since it makes her see Angélique as 'une petite personne qui ira loin'), continues to lend her her support. And in Les Bourgeoises à la mode, although Marianne, the young lover whose marriage Lisette promotes, appears genuinely innocent, the Chevalier, her husband-to-be, is - as the servant knows²² - less than reputable. Indeed, only in Le Chevalier à la mode does the female servant, like a true commonsensical servant, refuse to support a young lover's natural inclinations because she suspects that the man to whom she is attracted may be unworthy of her, counselling Lucile that 'ces

¹⁸'[La voix publique] vous accuse d'aimer tout le monde', observes Lisette at one point, to which her mistress replies: 'Non, de bonne foi, je n'aime personne; mais je suis ravie d'être aimée, c'est ma folie, j'en demeure d'accord' (Sc.1).

¹⁹Sc.3.

²⁰Sc.8.

²¹Sc.8.

²²Even if the servant is not aware of the Chevalier's true identity (he is none other than Jannot, the son of Mme Amelin, whom Lisette describes in Act I scene 11 as 'une espèce de marchande'), she continues to promote the marriage after Frontin has informed her that the Chevalier is being obliged to 'remonter une compagnie de cavalerie que les trois dés et le lansquenet ont démontée' (III,5).

jeunes seigneurs d'aujourd'hui sont de grands fripons en matière d'amour';²³ but in this play Lucile's affairs are only of peripheral interest, and with the servant's support for her never developed in detail, Lisette does not, in the end, emerge as an obvious example of the commonsensical type.

Second, Dancourt's soubrettes cannot be seen as straightforward servantes de bon sens because not only do they have a tendency to show no opposition to young lovers whose conduct may be less than exemplary, but unlike the commonsensical servant, who generally shows little sign of having a personal interest in love, they may have - or appear to have had - attachments of their own. Moreover, while some of the attachments alluded to - such as those in Les Fonds perdus, Le Charivari, and Le Chevalier à la mode - seem to be perfectly straightforward, and are expected to culminate in marriage,²⁴ the nature of others suggests that the servants' behaviour in love may occasionally, like that of the young lovers, be somewhat questionable. Thus, in Le Retour des officiers, Toinette not only supports Henriette, whose lovers change with the seasons, but has herself behaved similarly in the past, as becomes clear when she agrees with Henriette's cousin that the departure of the officers in the spring may not be without its benefits:

Cela se pourrait fort bien, au moins; et il me semble, à moi, qui en ai quelquefois fait l'expérience, qu'une passion d'hiver est bien usée, et qu'elle tire diantrement sur ses fins quand le mois de mars arrive.²⁵

And in Renaud et Armide Lisette's use of 'on', when she reflects indignantly on Grognac's intention of marrying his daughter to a lawyer, suggests that she too may have behaved like Toinette:

Mais voyez un peu quelle extravagance! Vouloir forcer une jeune fille de bourgeois et de bon esprit à se contenter d'un homme de robe, et en hiver encore! En été, passe, on prend ce qu'on trouve; mais dans le bon temps on serait bien sotte de n'en pas profiter.²⁶

²³III,9.

²⁴In Les Fonds perdus Merlin and Lisette appear to sign their own marriage contract in the final scene (III,10); in Le Charivari the rather peasant-like Mathurine and L'Olive agree to marry each other (Sc.13); and in Le Chevalier à la mode Lisette makes a passing reference to her projected marriage (V,1).

²⁵Sc.5.

²⁶Sc.3. It should be noted, however, that in the course of the play Lisette indicates that she is attracted to L'Olive (Sc.10), and they ultimately agree to marry each other (Sc.23).

While in La Parisienne Lisette, who is married to the absent L'Olive but clearly hopes that he has died on his travels, may, it is suggested, be too impatient to await confirmation of his death before joining forces with La Vigne, to whom she is strongly attracted.²⁷

Third, unlike the servante de bon sens, who is frequently characterised by her outspokenness, those of Dancourt's servants who support young love contradict their opponents only rarely, and generally show little of the commonsensical servant's fierceness or consistency when they do. In Le Chevalier à la mode, for example, although Lisette points out to Mme Patin the folly of her love for the Chevalier, she does so in comparatively mild terms ('Je crains bien que ce Monsieur le Chevalier ne vous donne bien des chagrins'),²⁸ and elsewhere in the play feigns sympathy for her foolish mistress's views,²⁹ while in Le Charivari, although Mathurine's basic complaisance is occasionally punctuated by forthrightness, unlike that of the commonsensical servant this would appear to be in some measure unintentional, and largely the result of her peasant-like naïveté, as when, comparing the relative chances of Mme Loricart and her daughter and niece acquiring partners, she comments: 'Quand on est comme elles, on prend ce qu'on veut: quand on est comme vous, on prend ce qu'on trouve'.³⁰ Indeed, it is only in a figure such as Lisette in Renaud et Armide - who is described by Grognac as 'une insolente' when she explains to him that she is surprised to find him constantly in a bad mood since she has always understood that 'les plus grands fous avaient quelquefois de bons intervalles',³¹ - that one finds echoes of the more outspoken servantes de bon sens.

Moreover, far from placing heavy reliance on outspokenness, Dancourt's female servants tend instead both to advocate and practise a less direct approach. Thus, in Madame Artus, Finette advises that, in countering the Tartuffe-like parasite who gives the play its title,

²⁷As La Vigne himself tells L'Olive (unaware of the latter's true identity): 'Nous attendons, pour nous épouser, le certificat de la mort d'un mari qu'elle avait. S'il vient, à la bonne heure; s'il ne vient pas, on s'en passera' (Sc.5).

²⁸I, 9.

²⁹Principally in Act I scene 1 and Act IV scene 5, discussed below, pp.254-5.

³⁰Sc.11.

³¹Sc.2.

'il faut suivre ... des sentiers détournés',³² and later makes the point that obvious attempts to persuade Mme Argante that she is being misled by the hypocrite should initially be avoided: 'Devant elle, il ne faut parler qu'avec respect/De la Madame Artus'.³³ In Le Tuteur, Bernard's announcement that he himself intends to marry his young charge does not provoke in Lisette any overtly hostile reaction, although in her apartés she makes it clear that she will oppose his plan,³⁴ while in Les Enfants de Paris Finette talks of having gained Harpin's trust by 'un excès de fausse complaisance'.³⁵ Similarly, in La Désolation des joueuses, Lisette will pretend to agree with the foolish behaviour of Angélique's mother, Dorimène, and her fellow gamblers in the many episodic scenes in which they appear, although her asides make her real attitude clear: in one such scene, for example, when the gamblers discuss the story of a procureur who was furious to learn that his wife had pawned a necklace in order to pay her gambling debts, Lisette joins in the general condemnation of such behaviour by describing him as 'ridicule',^{35a} although her opposition to the gamblers and their views is well known to the audience. Indeed, whereas with the servante de bon sens it is her outspokenness which is a frequent source of comedy, in the case of many of Dancourt's figures laughter is provoked by the considerable degree of implied criticism which underlies the complaisance which they show towards their opponents, but which apparently goes unremarked by those to whom their words are addressed. In Les Fonds perdus, for example, although Lisette's comments on Mme Géronte's complexion, which she describes as 'tout de lis et de roses', are superficially favourable, they have a sting in their tail: 'Vous seriez bien folle de l'avoir autrement; et en teint comme en cheveux, il faut toujours prendre les plus belles couleurs'.³⁶ Similarly, in Le Chevalier à la mode, Lisette's expression of sympathy for the socially ambitious Mme Patin when the latter is indignant at having been made to reverse her carriage for a Marquise, although apparently accepted at face value by Mme Patin, can be seen as entirely ironical by the audience:

³² II, 2.

³³ II, 3.

³⁴ Sc. 6.

³⁵ I, 4.

^{35a} Sc. 6.

³⁶ I, 5.

Voilà une marquise bien impertinente. Quoi! votre personne qui est toute de clinquant, votre grand carrosse doré qui roule pour la première fois, deux gros chevaux gris pommelés à longues queues, un cocher à barbe retroussée, six grands laquais, plus chamarrés de galons que les estafiers d'un carrousel, tout cela n'a point imprimé de respect à votre marquise?³⁷

And later in the same play a similar situation obtains when Lisette sympathises with Mme Patin, whose brother-in-law, Serrefort, objects to her marrying the Chevalier:

Parce que Monsieur le Chevalier est un jeune homme assez mal dans ses affaires, et que Monsieur Serrefort prévoit qu'en l'épousant, vous allez faire un mauvais marché, il veut vous empêcher de le conclure; cela est bien impertinent, madame.³⁸

It would appear, then, that in terms of their outlook and behaviour the majority of Dancourt's intelligent female servants share a number of basic characteristics which place them somewhere between the commonsensical servant at one extreme and the soubrette perfide at the other. But what of their contribution to the mechanics of the plays in which they appear? Are there also similarities between the functions of the various servants in this domain? Detailed analysis would suggest that there are, and that two aspects of their contribution to the mechanics of the plays are particularly worthy of comment.

First - if rather negatively -, an examination of the plays shows that despite the fact that these figures tend to avoid open confrontation, and may counsel a less direct approach, it is generally not they who orchestrate any schemes aimed at outwitting those whom they oppose. There are obvious exceptions, most notably Finette in Les Enfants de Paris (who suggests to Valère a trick which will solve his problems,³⁹ instructs both him and Angélique in the behaviour which they are to adopt,⁴⁰ gives misleading advice to Harpin, the obstacle

³⁷I,1.

³⁸IV,5.

³⁹The idea comes to her, in the way that ideas come to the fourbe, with the hesitancy of inspiration ('A propos d'être fausse, attendez,/Ne pourrions-nous pas?.../... Oui-da, c'est une idée,/Qui pour peu que d'ailleurs elle fût secondée,/Vous ferait obtenir ce que vous prétendez'), and the scene ends with Valère placing his destiny in her hands: 'Je m'abandonne/A ta conduite' (I,4).

⁴⁰I,4 and I,6 respectively.

to the young lovers' happiness,⁴¹ enlists the support of Mme Brichonne,⁴² and even shows some fourbe-like pride in her abilities),⁴³ and Toinette in Le Retour des officiers (who suggests to Henriette and Isabelle a means of overcoming Mme Thomas's dislike of their lovers,⁴⁴ proposes - with the fourbe's confident 'Laissez-moi faire' - that she implement the scheme,⁴⁵ and subsequently does so),⁴⁶ but normally the female servant's role in shaping the action of the comedies is either non-existent or of only secondary importance. Thus, where there are early indications that a female servant may be about to take overall charge of the action, these do not, in general, live up to their promise: in Madame Artus, for example, Finette's early advice on how best to counter the hypocrite⁴⁷ does not lead to her orchestrating a major campaign against her, and in La Parisienne Lisette's advice to the young lovers to trust in her 'petit savoir-faire'⁴⁸ does not in fact herald a major initiative on her part, while in Angélique et Médor, although Lisette seems to be the first to appreciate the opportunity for infiltration afforded by Guillemin's proposal to entertain Isabelle with an opera,⁴⁹ her control of the action does not extend beyond the first four scenes, after which the initiative passes to Merlin, who elaborates the basic idea of infiltration while his female counterpart remains on the sidelines. Moreover, on the comparatively few occasions when female servants participate in schemes designed to outwit those whom they oppose, their contribution is largely limited to the support of projects devised by others: in Les Fonds perdus, for instance, one finds that when Lisette puts on an act in order to persuade Oronte to make out a donation in Angélique's favour,⁵⁰ she is helping to implement a plan the broad outline of which

⁴¹I,9.

⁴²III,1.

⁴³She tells Valère: 'Quelque chose que je projette,/Jamais je ne travaille en vain' (II,5).

⁴⁴Sc.7.

⁴⁵Sc.7.

⁴⁶She begins by telling Clitandre the outline of her plan (Sc.9), then gives him more detailed instructions (Sc.10), then tackles Des Baliveaux, his rival (Sc.11), before orchestrating an encounter between them (Sc.12).

⁴⁷II,2 and II,3, cited above, p.254.

⁴⁸Sc.9.

⁴⁹Sc.1.

⁵⁰II,2.

was first devised by Merlin,⁵¹ and in La Parisienne Lisette's assumption of the role of a 'gouvernante incommode' is at the suggestion of Angélique,⁵² while in her subsequent efforts to support Angélique when the latter seeks to extricate herself from difficult situations she is clearly again taking the lead from the young lover, as asides such as 'Où ceci nous mènera-t-il?'⁵³ show. Similarly, although, in Le Tuteur, Lisette appears to act on her own initiative when tackling L'Olive about his and his master's true identity,⁵⁴ it is Angélique who, in the scenes of misprision acted out in the darkness of a garden after sunset, thinks of a trick which leads directly to the play's successful dénouement, and is only assisted by the servant, as is made clear when, commenting to Lisette on her scheme to get rid of Bernard, she observes: 'L'imagination du rendez-vous m'est venue bien à propos pour nous en débarrasser', to which the servant replies, 'Avouez que je ne vous ai pas mal secondée'.⁵⁵ Indeed, far from acting as providers of solutions, it is more common for female servants, particularly in episodic comedies such as La Femme d'intrigues and L'Eté des coquettes, to act merely as doorkeepers and bearers of messages who facilitate the transition from one scene to the next.⁵⁶

But Dancourt's female servants also have a second and much more positive role in the comedies in which they appear, almost invariably having a clearly discernible part to play as confidants;⁵⁷ indeed, in many cases - with the notable exception of those comedies where, as has been seen, the female servant orchestrates the action to a significant

⁵¹I,2.

⁵²Sc.11.

⁵³Sc.16.

⁵⁴Sc.12.

⁵⁵Sc.20.

⁵⁶In La Femme d'intrigues, for example, Gabrillon announces the arrival of La Brie disguised as Mme Thibaut's notaire (II,2); of the baby and its nurse (II,7); of Léandre (IV,3); and of the false Cléante (V,12). In L'Eté des coquettes, Lisette's main contribution is to usher in various characters and deliver messages. She ushers in the dancing master, Des Soupirs, for instance (Sc.6); announces the arrival of Patin (Sc.15); announces the arrival of Clitandre (Sc.20); and is subsequently sent to fetch Cidalise (Sc.21).

⁵⁷As elsewhere in this study, the term 'confidant' is here used in its broadest sense to describe someone to whom other figures will willingly address their words.

extent⁵⁸ - this emerges as their principal mechanical function.

One finds, for instance, that scenes involving the female servant and just one other figure make an important contribution to the early exposition of a number of plays, with the soubrette either facilitating discussion of the issues which lie at the heart of the comedies, or, more simply, allowing her interlocutors to reveal their natures and attitudes in the course of their conversation. Noteworthy examples of the former pattern occur both in La Désolation des joueuses, which opens with Lisette and Angélique discussing the ban on lansquenet which dismays the latter's mother (and around which the play centres), and in L'Eté des coquettes, where, in the first scene, Lisette questions Angélique about her reaction to her mother's decision to marry her to an elderly cousin; while the latter pattern is possibly best illustrated by the opening scene of Le Chevalier à la mode, where Mme Patin reveals her delusions of grandeur when she describes to Lisette her outrage at an incident in which she was obliged to reverse her carriage to give passage to that of a Marquise. Similar examples do, however, also occur in La Femme d'intrigues, which opens with Gabrillon and La Brie discussing the affairs of Mme Thibaut; in Le Tuteur, where, in the second scene, Lucas confides in Lisette that he has found 'un papier'; in La Loterie, in the first scene of which Marianne discusses with Lisette her father's marriage plans for her; in Madame Artus, where much of the second scene is taken up with Merlin describing to Finette the state of his master's relationship with his family; in Les Enfants de Paris, where, in the second scene, Mme Brichonne, with only the minimum of prompting on the part of Finette, reveals to the latter details of the intrigue in which she is currently engaged; in Le Moulin de Javelle, in the third scene of which the Comtesse explains to Finette her cynical plan to marry Ganivet for his wealth; and in Renaud et Armide where, in the second scene, Lisette provokes Grognac into an argument which reveals his ill-tempered nature, and something of his thoughts on his daughter's marriage - an issue which will prove to be central to the comedy.

Sometimes the female servant's role as confidant does not extend beyond the early expository scenes of the play in which she occurs: in

⁵⁸ Principally Les Enfants de Paris and Le Retour des officiers; see above, pp.255-6.

La Désolation des joueuses, for example, although Lisette may appear on stage after her opening exchange with Angélique, when she does, she remains largely on the sidelines, and never achieves the prominence as a confidant (or, indeed, in any other role) which the first scene might lead one to expect. However, in other comedies the servant's role as confidant may be evident beyond the opening scenes, and may sometimes be of considerable importance to their development.

Throughout La Loterie, for instance, a number of scenes occur in which Lisette acts as someone to whom the confidence trickster Sbrigani can reveal the private thoughts which he normally conceals behind a public façade of courteous honesty. Thus, in the eighth scene he confides in her that only in Paris, where the populace is so proud that it will never admit to having been duped, would he dream of organising such a crooked lottery, while, later in the play, he engages in similar - although much less extensive - exchanges with Lisette, some of which also act as transitional or buffer scenes between confrontations with a variety of individuals who have purchased lottery tickets.⁵⁹ Likewise, in the case of La Femme d'intrigues, the audience learns a great deal about the thinking of Mme Thibaut - who, like Sbrigani, is a professional intriguer, working on her own - from her conversations with her servant, Gabrillon. When, in the lengthy third scene of the first act, for example, Mme Thibaut bustles into her house and quickly sets about reviewing with Gabrillon the visitors who have called during her absence, the ensuing discussion gives the audience a clear insight into her character and activities, while in the fifth scene of the second act and the first of the third act brief

⁵⁹The fourteenth scene, for instance, in which Lisette and Sbrigani exchange a few words on the advantages of organising lotteries, acts as a buffer between the preceding scene, in which Sbrigani allows himself to be bribed into concealing a love letter in one of the prizes without seeming to acknowledge that he is behaving unscrupulously, and the following scene, in which he maintains his usual superficial courtesy in the face of Mme La Cloche's threat to discredit him if he does not ensure that she gets a good prize. The sixteenth scene again finds Sbrigani alone with Lisette, and frankly acknowledging what he would not openly admit to Mme La Cloche, namely, that it is not chance alone which dictates the prizes. Similarly, the twenty-third scene, in which Sbrigani is pressurised by a Gascon into refunding his lottery ticket, and in which the need for this transaction to be kept secret is alluded to fairly jovially ('Hé bien, monsieur', Sbrigani tells him, 'ne le dites donc à personne, et revenez une autre fois, vous serez content de moi, je vous le promets'), is separated from an encounter with a procureuse by a brief scene in which Sbrigani admits to Lisette just how crucial it is that the secret should be kept.

exchanges between the servant and her mistress on a variety of subjects, including a carriage which she has sous remise, are similarly illuminating.

Moreover, in addition to figures such as Lisette and Gabrillon, who make a major contribution to the plays in which they occur by acting as confidants to one particular individual occupying a somewhat isolated position (although by no means do they act as confidants only to these figures), there are female servants who make their mark primarily by acting as confidants to a wide variety of characters; some, indeed, come close to rivalling the universal confidants found in Dufresny.⁶⁰

One finds, for instance, that in Les Bourgeoises à la mode Lisette, whose contribution to scenes involving more than one other person is small, and whose major scenes involve only herself and one other individual, acts as someone to whom not just her mistress, Angélique, but also a number of other figures, can address their words, particularly when they arrive on stage for the first time. Thus Angélique's step-daughter, Marianne, her admirer, Griffard, and her husband, Simon, all engage in extensive conversations with Lisette when they first appear on stage.⁶¹ Similarly, in Le Chevalier à la mode, Lisette is most prominent in scenes involving only one other figure, and not only acts as a confidant to her mistress, Mme Patin, but also serves as someone to whom other characters can address their words - characters such as Migaud, who, in the fifth scene of the first act, discusses with Lisette the significance of her mistress's behaviour towards him, and later, in the opening scene of the third act, reviews with her the current situation; or Lucile, who, in the ninth scene of the same act, expresses to Lisette the joy which she feels at the prospect of marrying the Chevalier; or Serrefort, who, in the opening scene of the second act, reveals to Lisette the extent of his knowledge of her mistress's recent activities. While in La Fête de village Lisette's role as a universal confidant is alluded to by the female servant herself when she makes the following observation to Angélique after the latter has objected that she pays insufficient attention to her:

⁶⁰See above, pp.201-4.

⁶¹Act II scenes 7, 8, and 9 respectively.

Je ne puis pas suffire à toute la famille; c'est à qui m'aura. Madame Blandineau, pour pester contre son mari, le mari pour se plaindre de sa femme: Madame la Greffière, pour m'entretenir de son ajustement et de ses charmes: et vous, pour parler de votre amant. Voilà bien de l'occupation dans un même ménage.⁶²

It is clear, then, that one of the more noteworthy characteristics of Dancourt's female servants is that they tend to act as confidants for those among whom they find themselves. It must nevertheless be stressed that to say this is not to imply that all of Dancourt's comedies contain numerous scenes in which the servants act as confidants: some - such as Les Bourgeoises à la mode and Le Chevalier à la mode, discussed above - do contain a number of such scenes, while others contain but few. What is important, however, is that, whatever the size of the servant's role (and it has already been noted that this can vary considerably),⁶³ there is a tendency for a significant part of it to be devoted to being of service to other figures by giving them opportunities to express their views or otherwise reveal their natures (in Les Vacances, for instance, although the female servant, Mme La Roche, has only one major scene it is devoted to a discussion with Angélique, in which the latter's problems are examined),⁶⁴ and for this reason the role of confidant can be seen as probably the most consistently-occurring aspect of the female servant in Dancourt, rivalled only by her contribution to comedy, which is universally in evidence, and to which some consideration will be given in Part IV.

⁶²I, 8.

⁶³See above, p. 247, note 2.

⁶⁴Sc. 7.

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Although it may be convenient to think of female servants in the French comic tradition as being either servantes de bon sens or soubrettes perfides, the preceding chapters show that in the plays under discussion the only figures whose outlook allows them comfortably to be fitted into these categories are, respectively, Nérine in Regnard's Le Joueur, and Lisette in the same author's Le Légataire universel. For Regnard's other servants, although varied in their outlook, tend to occupy the middle ground between the extremes represented by the commonsensical and perfidious servants, as do the much less varied servants in Dufresny, Dancourt, and Destouches, while Lesage presents the audience with a range of figures who frequently defy categorisation, either because (as in the case of Marine, in Turcaret) major characteristics of both the commonsensical and perfidious servant types are to be found in them, or because they fall completely outwith the spectrum of soubrettes whose limits are defined by the commonsensical and perfidious servants (as in the case of Lisette in Turcaret, whose concern for self-interest goes beyond the soubrette perfide's desire for material gain, transforming her into a social climber who wishes to leave servitude completely behind her). What is more, it is equally clear from our investigations that almost all the female servants being examined are called upon to assist in the mechanical development of the plays in which they occur, but that there is no direct correlation between their mechanical roles - which are many and varied, although with the emphasis frequently being on their activities as confidants - and the precise nature of their outlook on life.

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PART IV

THE COMIC FUNCTION OF THE SERVANTS

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In all five authors under consideration, the servants - both male and female - make an important contribution to the comic dimension of the plays in which they occur. Indeed, in the case of Regnard's plays, at least one critic has suggested that the servants constitute the main source of laughter.¹ In the chapters which follow, an attempt is made both to analyse the principal ways in which the servants (whether deliberately or inadvertently) make a direct contribution to the generation of comedy,² and to demonstrate the different degrees to which the authors being examined favour the various comic devices with which servants are associated. It must, however, be borne in mind that the isolation of individual comic devices for the purposes of this study will inevitably tend to distort the overall comic reality of the situations being discussed, since laughter is almost always provoked not simply by the operation of one mechanism, but by the interaction, or rapid succession, of many.

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¹Queenie S. Muntz, in her thesis, 'The Works of J. F. Regnard with Special Reference to their Social and Dramatic Aspects', states: 'The playwright relied on his valets for most of the comedy of his plays, and he made them consequently the wittiest and most amusing of his characters' (p.515).

²Since it is the servants' contribution to comedy which is under scrutiny, only situations where servants make a direct contribution to comedy are considered. No account is taken, therefore, of occasions where a servant simply highlights a comic situation (for example, by means of asides) in the creation of which he or she has played little or no part, unless the manner in which he or she draws attention to the situation is in itself a significant source of comedy.

Chapter 1

SITUATIONAL COMEDY

(a) The Dominance Game

One of the most important sources of comedy in the plays under consideration is the servants' ability to assert their dominance over those with whom they come into contact. As we shall see, the circumstances which the servants turn to their advantage in this way are many, but, whatever the circumstances, the laughter generated can usually be attributed to the same underlying considerations. For when any character seeks subtly to exasperate or outdo another, there is a tendency for the audience - which is inclined subconsciously to associate itself with the clever perpetrators of tricks, rather than with their less agile-minded victims - to share that character's delight when he or she succeeds. And when the characters who succeed in placing themselves in a dominant position are servants, and when the figures over whom they assert themselves with obvious relish are their social superiors - normally their masters -, the spectacle of those who usually command being reduced to an inferior position, while those who might be expected to be subservient gain the upper hand, creates a sense of comic incongruity or disconvenance (in the sense in which the word is used in the Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur, pp.560 and 564) which becomes the major source of laughter.

Capitalising upon the helplessness of others.

A favourite practice of the male servants in particular is to assert themselves by capitalising upon the helplessness of others, especially their masters. That is, they will seize upon almost any occasion when others are not fully in control of affairs, and will manipulate the situation in such a way as to impress upon their victims the extent to which they - the servants - hold their fate in their hands. There are three main types of situation which the servants use in this way.

First, when a servant is in possession of information which is of potentially crucial importance to another figure, and which that figure is eager to acquire, the servant, not content with the feeling of importance which his superior knowledge must surely give him,

frequently emphasises his powerful position by failing to reveal the desired information as quickly as he might, thereby deliberately prolonging the agony, or increasing the exasperation, of his interlocutor, who, even if he is certain that the servant is being deliberately annoying, cannot take action against him (since it is the valet who holds the trump card), but can only beg him to come to the point. As we have already seen, a situation of this kind is to be found in Regnard's La Sérénade, where Scapin first drives his master, Valère, to distraction by maintaining - in response to his master's anxious questions - that Marine has been unable to clarify the reason for her mistress's desire to discontinue her liaison with him, and only then, after he has teased him in this way, reveals that Marine has handed over a letter from her mistress which may well throw light on the situation: 'Elle m'a seulement donné une petite lettre qui vous expliquera peut-être mieux la chose'.¹ But there are also many examples of this type of situation in other plays. In Destouches's Le Médisant, for instance, Frontin, reporting to his master, Léandre, details of his interview with the latter's father, is deliberately slow in coming to the point, with the result that an increasingly irritated Léandre is driven to exclaim: 'Hé! bourreau, viens au fait';² while in the same author's L'Irrésolu, when the elderly Lisimon and Pyrante seek to extract information about the intentions of the latter's son from Frontin, the servant again drags out his tale, and, in particular, defers his revelation of the identity of the two girls to whom Dorante is attracted, until Pyrante exasperatedly begs him to name them:

Finis ce badinage, et tire-moi de peine.
Qui sont ces deux objets?³

Second, servants may induce in their superiors a state of panic or anger (particularly - but not exclusively - when those whom they tease are unable to retaliate because of the need to restrain themselves in the presence of others), and, by depriving them of the composure and self-assurance which is normally the mark of a dominant figure, may comically reverse the normal master-servant relationship. One instance of this technique occurs in Dancourt's Angélique et Médor, where Eraste,

¹Sc.5. The passage is cited at greater length above, pp.116-17.

²IV,1.

³I,2.

who admits to being no singer,⁴ but who is not averse to being passed off as a musician if this will make it easier for him to gain access to his love, whom his aged rival, Guillemain, jealously guards, suddenly hears his servant, Merlin, introducing him to Guillemain not only as a musician willing to take part in the opera with which the old man hopes to woo Isabelle, but as a musical genius who will be willing to give a solo demonstration of his skills there and then. Eraste is naturally thrown into a state of panic by this development, but is powerless to do anything about it, since he cannot remonstrate with his servant in Guillemain's presence without revealing his true identity. Instead, he must leave his fate in the tender care of his mischievous servant, and can reveal his disquiet and anger only in asides, in one of which he freely acknowledges that Merlin is deliberately toying with him:

J'enrage. Ce maraud-là prend plaisir à me chagriner.⁵

But an even more famous instance of a servant behaving in this way is to be found in Regnard's Le Légataire universel, for when Crispin, disguised as his master's moribund uncle, goes beyond his brief, and dictates to the latter's lawyers a will which is not only favourable to his master, Eraste, but which is also inordinately generous in its provision for both Lisette and himself, Eraste - although choking with rage, as his asides show - cannot use his position as a master to demand that Crispin behave differently (since, in the presence of the lawyers, this would only jeopardise his own position), and is instead obliged meekly to suggest to his 'uncle' that he reconsider his decision:

Vous ne connaissez pas, mon oncle, ce Crispin;
C'est un mauvais valet, ivrogne, libertin,
Méritant peu le bien que vous voulez lui faire.⁶

Similarly, in Destouches's L'Obstacle imprévu, the audience is again entertained by the sight of a servant teasing his master by causing him to lose his composure. For when the self-assured Valère boasts

⁴Sc.1.

⁵Sc.8. It should be noted, however, that although the servant's behaviour is designed to embarrass his master, it also forms part of an attempt by Merlin to lay the foundation for a scheme to outwit Guillemain, as becomes clear in the scenes which follow.

⁶IV,6.

- untruthfully - that he is not afraid of his father, and would be happy to give him a piece of his mind, Pasquin maliciously pretends that he sees the old man approaching, whereupon the terrified Valère makes a dash for the wings, returning, like a puppet whose strings are held by Pasquin, as soon as the servant reveals that Lisimon is not, in fact, in the offing.⁷

Third, just as the possession of sought-after information may permit servants to tease their superiors with impunity, so too does their possession of a real or imagined ability to solve the problems of others. Indeed, it is above all the servants' perceived ability to provide solutions to intractable problems which is responsible for the reversal of the normal relationship between them and their superiors, and for the sense of comic incongruity or disconvenance which results from the inversion of the usual pattern of dominance; for as soon as another figure becomes convinced that a servant holds the key to his troubles, that servant will tend to play 'hard to get', thereby obliging the other figure - however elevated his social status - to adopt a suppliant or submissive tone.

A particularly comic episode of this sort occurs in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses, when Agathe pretends to be mad in order to avoid marrying her elderly guardian, Albert. For not only is the audience amused to see Albert being deceived by Agathe's feigned insanity, but when Albert becomes convinced that Crispin - who has previously pretended to be a man of science⁸ - has it within his power to cure Agathe, it is further entertained by the sight of Crispin turning the tables on Albert by refusing to use his curative abilities (which the audience knows are both non-existent and unnecessary) until the old man is reduced not only to begging forgiveness for his earlier high-handed attitude towards the servant ('Pardonnez mon erreur'), but also to pleading with his rival, Eraste, to intercede on his behalf.⁹ Likewise, in Dufresny's Le Dédit, Frontin is not afraid to appear in front of his master, Eraste, dressed in the latter's finery, since by hinting that he is working towards a resolution of his master's

⁷I,1.

⁸I,5.

⁹II,11.

problems, while refusing to go into detail about his plans, he can quickly, and comically, transform an outraged Eraste ('A mes yeux ainsi fait avoir osé paraître!') into an altogether much more submissive creature:

Frontin, mon cher Frontin, tu travailles pour moi!
Par quel moyen? comment? et vite explique-toi.¹⁰

And a not dissimilar situation occurs in Lesage's La Tontine when Crispin, in the guise of a colonel, threatens to execute Ambroise, whom he pretends to recognise as a deserter from the army. For as soon as it appears to Trousse-Galant and Bolus that their future prosperity is in the hands of Crispin, since it is on Ambroise's life that their tontine is based, they adopt a submissive attitude towards the servant, who, for his part, prolongs their agony by initially feigning reluctance to accede to their request that he should pardon Ambroise:

TROUSSE-GALANT:

Monsieur, je vous prie de lui pardonner.

BOLUS:

Nous vous en supplions.

CRISPIN:

Je suis fâché, messieurs, de ne pouvoir vous accorder sa grâce: mais, quand il s'agit de punir le mépris de la discipline militaire, je suis inexorable.¹¹

Composure.

It is clear, then, that, by capitalising upon the helplessness of others, the servants are able, in a variety of ways, comically to reverse the pattern of dominance which would normally characterise their relationship with their superiors. And from our discussion of scenes in which servants assert themselves over their nominal superiors when the latter are not fully in control of affairs, it will have become apparent that a feature of many such episodes is that the servants cause their superiors to lose the calm self-assurance normally associated with dominant figures, by deliberately inducing in them a variety of emotions, such as anxiety, panic, exasperation, or anger.

¹⁰Sc.3. Unusually, although Frontin's behaviour may place him in a position of dominance vis-à-vis his master, this is not its sole - or even prime - purpose, for as we have seen above, p.137, Frontin acts as he does largely in order to benefit materially from the situation.

¹¹Sc.25.

But another way in which servants may comically reverse the normal pattern of dominance is by themselves consciously adopting an attitude of calm, detached superiority, particularly when those with whom they are dealing, far from feeling themselves to be in a helpless position, are actively attempting to assert themselves over them. In Destouches's Le Triple Mariage, for instance, when the elderly Oronte discovers that his son, Valère, and the latter's valet, Pasquin, have been tricking him, he tackles the deceitful servant in an angry and assertive mood, clearly eager to pick a quarrel with him:

Ah! vous voilà, je suis bien aise de vous trouver ici,
monsieur le coquin.¹²

Pasquin, however, far from responding in a submissive manner, or allowing himself to be drawn into an undignified slanging match, retains his composure, and replies to Oronte's abusive opening shot with formal courtesy (although he clearly experiences some difficulty in maintaining his chosen register):

PASQUIN:

Bonjour, monsieur: comment vous portez-vous?

ORONTE:

Ce ne sont pas là tes affaires.

PASQUIN:

Pardonnez-moi, monsieur. L'intérêt que je prends à votre chère santé, fait que dans le moment que je suis éloigné de vous, mon cœur, prévenu des sentiments de la plus vive tendresse... se livre à des inquiétudes dont l'excès tendre et passionné.... Enfin, vous vous portez bien, et je m'en réjouis.

The effect of this, and of Pasquin's continued restraint throughout the rest of the scene, is that the normal pattern of dominance is again reversed, with the servant retaining the upper hand by maintaining a façade of unruffled self-assurance, which his non-servant adversary continually attempts - with a comical lack of success - to demolish. And in Lesage's Crispin rival de son maître there occurs a similar, if minor, episode. For when Crispin, having been granted only a week's holiday, returns to his master after a full month's absence, the latter is justifiably indignant, assailing his newly-arrived servant in less than flattering terms. But Crispin refuses to respond in the apologetic tones which would imply submissiveness on his part, and instead, to the audience's amusement, places himself in a position of superiority in relation to his master by maintaining an attitude of self-assured

¹²Sc.11.

composure:

VALERE:

Ah! te voilà, bourreau!

CRISPIN:

Parlons sans emportement.

VALERE:

Coquin!

CRISPIN:

Laissons là, je vous prie, nos qualités. De quoi vous
plaiguez-vous?¹³

Open confrontation.

So far, we have looked at a variety of ways in which male servants in particular comically undermine the authority of their supposed superiors. But although the ways in which the male servants assert themselves are varied, they tend to have one thing in common, and that is that they are relatively subtle, often depending for their effect on no more than a slight delay in the time taken by a servant to reveal a particular item of information, or on the register of the language which he uses, rather than on any more obvious form of insubordination.

However, not all of the servants favour such a subtle approach when it comes to comically asserting themselves over their social superiors, for in the plays being considered there are many servants - almost invariably females - who play the dominance game in a much more direct manner, and it is to the methods employed by such servants that we now turn.

Perhaps the most common way in which those servants who favour a direct approach assert themselves is by rounding on their superiors not with the submissive or acquiescent kind of response which the latter might (and, in many cases, clearly do) expect of someone of servant status, but with forthright outspokenness. For by responding in this way they normally engender feelings of surprise, dismay, or outrage in

¹³Sc.1. Both in this scene, and in the scene from Le Triple Mariage cited above, the contrast between the rascally nature of the servants and the somewhat elevated tone of the words which they utter is an additional source of laughter. The contribution which linguistic incongruities make to the generation of laughter is further explored below, pp.320-35.

those whom they address, thereby demolishing - just as effectively as their congeners who employ more subtle means - the self-assurance of their interlocutors. In Regnard's Le Distrain, for instance, when Mme Grognac, with all the confidence of someone born to command, imperiously calls for Lisette, muttering as she does so about the low standard of service which she receives from her ('Lisette, holà, Lisette. De la vie/On ne vit dans Paris femme si mal servie./Lisette'),¹⁴ the servant does not respond submissively, but, having learned that the object of the old woman's urgent summons is simply to find out what her daughter is doing, takes the wind out of her sails by stridently chiding her - in Valère's presence - for making such a fuss:

Quoi! ce n'est que pour cela?
Vous avez bonne voix. Quel bruit! A vous entendre
J'ai cru qu'à la maison le feu venait de prendre.¹⁵

Moreover, while in some cases (such as that cited above) it is primarily the outspoken tone of the servants' responses which comically deflates their superiors, in others the deflating effect of the servants' forthright replies is also attributable in large measure to the substance of what they say. For in their outspokenness the impudent servants will often make their self-centred and frequently self-deluding superiors uncomfortably aware of realities which they seek to ignore, including the fact that their view of themselves is not necessarily in accord with the opinions which others have of them.

Thus, in Destouches's L'Irrésolu, when the far-from-young Mme Argante, who deludes herself into believing that she is still attractive to men, seeks Nérine's reassurance on this point, the servant knocks her off balance by responding not with the politely acquiescent response which her mistress clearly expects of her, but with a brutally honest assessment of her charms:

MME ARGANTE:
Çà, Nérine, après tout, est-ce que je me flatte?
N'ai-je pas des attraits?

NERINE:
Mais d'ancienne date.

MME ARGANTE:
Nérine!

¹⁴I, 1.

¹⁵I, 2.

NERINE:

Quant à moi, je ne sais point flatter,
Et je ne suis point fille à vouloir vous gâter.
Chaque chose a son temps. Il faut vous mettre en tête,
Que jamais, à votre âge, on n'a fait de conquête;
Que cette gloire est due à des charmes naissants,
Et non à des appas si loin de leur printemps.¹⁶

Likewise, in Destouches's L'Ingrat, the domineering G ron te is comically knocked off his stride when his fierce attack on his daughter for having fallen in love without his permission is interrupted by an even fiercer counter-blast from Lisette. For not only does Lisette deflate him by bringing home to him a few elementary truths about the nature of love, but her outspoken eloquence steamrollers him into silence, transforming him from a dominant figure, in control of the situation as he browbeats his tongue-tied daughter, into a much more defensive creature who has difficulty even in getting a word in:

LISETTE:

Pouvez-vous (car il faut que je parle   mon tour)
Montrer tant d'ignorance en mati re d'amour?

GERONTE:

Quoi! coquine, tu veux?...

LISETTE:

Malgr  votre col re,
Sachez qu'on n'aime point selon l'ordre d'un p re.
La main d pend de lui. Le c ur, en libert ,
Du pouvoir paternel brave l'autorit ;
Il ne s'attache   rien qu'  ce qu'il trouve aimable,
Et c'est de la nature un droit incontestable.
Tr s inutilement pr tend-on l'engager,
Par force, par devoir, par raison,   changer.
Ni force, ni devoir, ni raison, ni prudence,
Rien ne l'y peut forcer que sa propre inconstance.¹⁷

And in Dufresny's Le N gligent a similar situation obtains when the dreamy aesthete, Oronte, whose interest in objets d'art leads him to neglect the welfare of his family, has his complacency shattered by an outspoken Fanchon, whose condemnation of his behaviour clearly leaves him startled and bewildered:

¹⁶II,6. The passage is quoted at greater length above, p.240, and examples of the female servants' outspokenness in Destouches, additional to those given in the present chapter, are also to be found above, pp.239-41. In the 1713 edition the third line reads 'Ils sont de vieille date'. Other variations are noted above, p.240, note 34.

¹⁷I,3.

FANCHON:

Qui, monsieur, quand vous devriez me tuer, je ne puis m'empêcher de vous le dire, il faut être absolument fou pour abandonner comme vous faites, le soin des affaires les plus importantes.

ORONTE:

Fanchon!

FANCHON:

Vous n'avez l'esprit rempli que de colifichets, de bagatelles, et vous vous laissez mener par le nez par le marquis qui vous fourbe.

ORONTE:

Comment diantre?

FANCHON:

Ah le beau vase! la belle urne!

ORONTE:

Explique-moi donc?...

FANCHON:

La belle pâte de porcelaine!

ORONTE:

Fanchon?

FANCHON:

Un bleu!

ORONTE:

Si tu ne parles...

FANCHON:

Hé mort de ma vie, vous, vous ne voulez écouter personne?¹⁸

But it is not only by rounding on their superiors with forthright outspokenness that those servants who favour a direct approach assert themselves, because a second way in which these figures - especially the female servants other than those in Regnard (the latter having a distinct preference for shouting their opponents down) - comically reverse the accepted relationship between themselves and non-servant figures is by using a more oblique form of forthrightness, involving transparent irony or blatant impudence.

The servants' use of transparent irony is discussed, and examples are cited, elsewhere;¹⁹ however, a few instances of servants using undisguised impudence, rather than the blunderbuss of straightforward outspokenness, will serve to illustrate the point. In Dancourt's La Fête de village, for example, the cheeky female servant, Lisette, offers Blandineau an openly back-handed compliment: 'Vous n'avez rien à craindre, monsieur', she tells him, 'madame votre femme est raisonnable, elle ne tient point du tout de la famille'.²⁰ Similarly,

¹⁸ II, 16.

¹⁹ Below, pp. 308-9.

²⁰ I, 4.

in Dufresny's Le Jaloux honteux, Lisette shows her contempt for Argan - the unattractive outsider who seeks her mistress's hand - with equal impudence when, reluctant to be drawn into conversation with him, she declares: 'J'ai encore les yeux si endormis... qu'à peine pourrais-je regarder un jeune homme'.²¹ And in Regnard's Le Retour imprévu Lisette, in a dispute with Mme Bertrand, her mistress's aunt, employs barbed politeness: 'Le respect que j'ai pour votre âge et pour la tante de ma maîtresse', she tells her, 'm'empêchera de vous répondre avec aigreur'.²² While in Dancourt's Renaud et Armide Lisette shows little respect for Grognac when, with blatant impudence, she makes it clear to him that she doubts his sanity:

Qu'avez-vous donc, monsieur? Vous êtes toujours chagrin, et depuis dix ans que je vous sers, je ne vous ai jamais vu de bonne humeur.... En vérité, je ne vous comprends point; et j'avais toujours ouï dire, moi, que les plus grands fous avaient quelquefois de bons intervalles.²³

There is, however, a third way in which those servants who favour a direct approach comically assert themselves over their superiors. For in addition to rounding on non-servant figures with forthright condemnation of their behaviour, and showing their contempt for them by employing transparent irony and undisguised impudence, a number of servants - both male and female - comically turn the tables on their superiors by openly outmanœuvring them.

At their simplest, situations in which the servants openly outmanœuvre their superiors may differ from those occasions already discussed, in which the servants' forthright responses pull the carpet from under the feet of their interlocutors, only in that at the time when the carpet is pulled from under the non-servant figures they are not merely making pronouncements of a general nature, but are actively doing their best to win the servants' support.

An instance of just such an occasion occurs early in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses, when the elderly Albert, who has plans to marry his young charge, Agathe, decides that it is not in his interests to

²¹I,2.

²²Sc.1.

²³Sc.2.

perpetuate his quarrel with Lisette, since her support may be essential if he is to achieve his goal ('Il faut l'amadouer', he observes, 'j'ai besoin de ses soins').²⁴ He therefore sets about deliberately wooing Lisette:

Allons, faisons la paix, vivons d'intelligence:
Je t'aime dans le fond, et plus que l'on ne pense.

Encouraged by an equally conciliatory reply from the servant, he lets it be known to Lisette that if she lends him her assistance she will be generously rewarded, and when this proposition fails to provoke a fiery response on the soubrette's part (she merely asks in what way she can be of assistance) he feels sufficiently confident to broach the matter of Agathe and her future. His initial preamble goes well, again provoking no adverse reaction in Lisette, with the result that he feels sufficiently emboldened to reveal his intention of making Agathe his wife. Then, and only then, when the old man has so obviously been lulled into the belief that his attempts to win over Lisette are moving towards a successful conclusion (and has revealed information which he would not otherwise have disclosed at this time), does the servant react, almost instantaneously reversing the situation with a forthright response - 'Votre femme? fi donc!' - which heralds a full-scale argument in which her outspoken refusal to take his assertions seriously places him in a situation where he, far from being dominant, finds himself obliged to justify to her his intended actions:

LISETTE:

Votre femme? fi donc!

ALBERT:

Qu'entends-tu par ce ton?

LISETTE:

Fi! vous dis-je.

ALBERT:

Comment?

LISETTE:

Eh! fi! fi! vous dit-on.

Vous avez trop d'esprit pour faire une sottise;
Et j'en appellerais à votre barbe grise.

ALBERT:

Je n'ai point eu d'enfants de mon hymen passé;
Et je veux achever ce que j'ai commencé,
Faire des héritiers dont l'heureuse naissance
De mes collatéraux détruit l'espérance.

LISETTE:

Ma foi! faites, monsieur, tout ce qu'il vous plaira;

²⁴
I,3.

Jamais postérité de vous ne sortira:

C'est moi qui vous le dis.

ALBERT:

Et pourquoi donc?

LISETTE:

Que sais-je?

ALBERT:

Qui t'a de deviner donné le privilège?

Dis donc, parle, réponds.

LISETTE:

Mon Dieu! je ne dis rien;

Sans dire la raison, vous la devinez bien:

Je m'entends, il suffit.

ALBERT:

Ne te mets point en peine;

Ce sera mon affaire, et point du tout la tienne.

LISETTE:

Ah! vous avez raison.

Similarly, when Lisette in Dufresny's Le Jaloux honteux suspects that it is Argan, an unwelcome suitor of her mistress, who has accosted her, she briefly leads him on in order to confirm her suspicions, in the process raising his hopes that he may be successful in his attempt to secure her support, but then, having ascertained the position, comically shatters his expectations:

LISETTE:

Ah! ah! N'est-ce pas vous qui vous nommez Monsieur Argan?

ARGAN:

Oui, la belle.

LISETTE:

Et qui êtes en négociation avec Monsieur le Président?

ARGAN:

Justement.

LISETTE:

Pour obtenir ma maîtresse en mariage?

ARGAN:

Tu l'as dit.

LISETTE:

J'ai une affaire pressée, monsieur: je suis votre très humble servante.²⁵

Sometimes, however, the situation can be a little more complex, with the non-servant figure taking more positive steps to achieve a desired effect, and with the servant cheekily - and openly - turning the stratagem against its originator. A minor and conventional instance of this is to be found in Dancourt's Les Enfants de Paris, where the servant, Merlin, having been ordered to be quiet by Harpin, subsequently turns the tables on the latter by refusing to answer his

questions because he has been told not to talk.²⁶ And a slightly more elaborate variation on the same theme is to be found in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses, where Albert's attempts to assert his authority over Lisette by threatening to dismiss her for having tripped him downstairs are confounded by the servant, who, after initially feigning horror at the severity of her sentence, declares, in forceful terms, that nothing could give her greater pleasure than to leave the old man, and thereby effectively takes control of the situation by obliging him to execute an undignified about-turn:

Oui! puisqu'il est ainsi, je change de désir,
Et je ne prétends pas te donner ce plaisir:
Tu resteras ici pour faire pénitence.²⁷

But possibly the most comical episode of this sort is to be found in Destouches's Le Triple Mariage, where Oronte, in an attempt to force Pasquin to say where he and his master have been, offers the servant a choice between 'deux pistoles, ou vingt coups de bâton'.²⁸ For the servant immediately causes the device to rebound upon Oronte by accepting the money with feigned innocence, while omitting to give any information in return:

PASQUIN:
Y a-t-il quelque chose pour votre service? Vous n'avez qu'à parler.
ORONTE:
Et toi, tu n'as qu'à choisir de deux choses que je vais te proposer.
PASQUIN:
Voyons.
ORONTE:
Deux pistoles, ou vingt coups de bâton.
PASQUIN:
Le choix n'est pas difficile. Je prends les deux pistoles.
ORONTE:
Les voici.
PASQUIN:
Grand merci, monsieur. Je vous donne le bonjour.
ORONTE:
Tu t'en vas?
PASQUIN:
Oui vraiment. N'ai-je pas choisi?

Moreover, when Oronte, continuing his efforts to get the

²⁶I, 8.

²⁷I, 2.

²⁸Sc. 11.

information which he requires, informs the servant that there is no point in telling a lie, since he already knows what he and his master have been up to, Pasquin outmanœuvres him even more cleverly, first declaring that, for his own satisfaction, he will reveal the truth only if the old man admits that he does not in fact know where they have been ('C'est que je suis sensible à l'honneur', he tells him: 'Je veux pouvoir me vanter de vous avoir mis au fait, et d'avoir bien gagné votre argent'), and then, when Oronte falls into the trap and agrees that he is ignorant of the true state of affairs, reaffirming his refusal to divulge his master's secret.

Reversals of dominance.

From all that has so far been said, it might appear that in the dominance game it is invariably the servant who occupies the superior position. But while it is certainly true that - with the exception of a small number of dullards whose case is considered later in this chapter²⁹ - both the male and female servants in the plays being considered do tend, overall, to have the upper hand, a significant number of them (most notably the fourbe-like male servants in Regnard and Lesage) occasionally find themselves in difficulties. Such temporary reversals in the fortunes of the servants do not, however, detract from the comedy created by the dominance game; on the contrary, they considerably enrich it. For when servants who are otherwise successful in asserting themselves over their superiors find the carpet pulled from under their own feet, the audience - which is itself invariably placed in a position of superiority by being forewarned of the difficulties which the servants are to encounter - experiences the pleasure of anticipating the servants' discomfiture, particularly when, as is often the case, the servants have given signs of pride or complacency before their fall. Moreover, it is above all on such occasions, when they momentarily lose control of affairs and have to re-establish their dominant position from a situation of considerable disadvantage, that the servants demonstrate their mental agility (particularly their ability to devise ingenious arguments),

²⁹Below, pp.299-302.

and in so doing provide the audience with the comic spectacle of those who are socially superior being outwitted by the superior intelligence of their supposed inferiors.

One of the most comical episodes of this type is to be found in Lesage's Crispin rival, a play in which La Branche pretends that his fellow servant, Crispin, is none other than his master, Damis, to whom Oronte - who has never met him - has promised his daughter's hand in marriage. The fun begins when, unbeknown to La Branche, Lisette, who has discovered that the true Damis is in fact already married (something which the audience has already learned),³⁰ discloses this crucial fact to Oronte, who resolves to confront La Branche with it.³¹ At this point, then, the audience, aware of Oronte's intentions, is well placed to anticipate the servant's impending discomfiture, and it does not have long to wait for its expectations to be fulfilled, for once La Branche has arrived on stage in the following scene, Oronte moves quickly to raise the matter of Damis's marriage, thereby immediately placing the servant in a situation in which he is no longer in control, as his exclamation of dismay shows:

ORONTE:

Il faut, mon ami, que tu me confesses la vérité. Je sais tout: je sais que Damis est marié, qu'il a épousé une fille de Chartres.

LA BRANCHE:

Ouf!

ORONTE:

Tu te troubles, je vois qu'on m'a dit vrai: tu es un fripon.³²

But, to the delight of the audience, which knows that Oronte is quite correct in his belief that Damis is already married, La Branche, with consummate skill, immediately sets about restoring his dominant position by duping the old man into believing that this is not in fact the case.

LA BRANCHE:

Allons, éclaircissons-nous tous deux de sang-froid. Ça, qui vous a dit que mon maître était marié?

ORONTE:

Qui? Il l'a mandé lui-même à un de ses amis, à Valère.

³⁰ Sc.3.

³¹ Sc.13.

³² Sc.14.

LA BRANCHE:

A Valère, dites-vous?

ORONTE:

A Valère, oui! Que répondras-tu à cela?

LA BRANCHE, riant:

Rien. Parbleu! le trait est excellent! Ah! Ah! Monsieur Valère, vous ne vous y prenez pas mal, ma foi!

ORONTE:

Comment, qu'est-ce que cela signifie?

Already the confident tones of Oronte at the beginning of the scene are gone, and a note of uncertainty starts to creep into his voice as La Branche continues, cleverly basing his argument on facts which are known to, and cannot be disputed by, the old man.

LA BRANCHE, riant:

On nous l'avait bien dit, qu'il nous régalerait, tôt ou tard, d'un plat de sa façon. Il n'y a pas manqué, comme vous voyez.

ORONTE:

Je ne vois point cela.

LA BRANCHE:

Vous l'allez voir, vous l'allez voir. Premièrement, ce Valère aime mademoiselle votre fille, je vous en avertis.

ORONTE:

Je le sais bien.

LA BRANCHE:

Lisette est dans ses intérêts. Elle entre dans toutes les mesures qu'il prend, pour faire réussir sa recherche. Je vais parier que c'est elle qui vous aura débité ce mensonge-là.

ORONTE:

Il est vrai.

LA BRANCHE:

Dans l'embarras où l'arrivée de mon maître les a jetés tous deux, qu'ont-ils fait? Ils ont fait courir le bruit que Damis était marié. Valère même montre une lettre supposée, qu'il dit avoir reçue de mon maître, et tout cela, vous m'entendez bien, pour suspendre le mariage d'Angélique.

At this point, Oronte - so convinced by the known facts that he fails to question La Branche's crucial contention that the letter is 'supposée' - begins to admit to himself the reasonableness of the servant's argument, and as La Branche presses home his case, flattering his adversary by praising his perspicacity, any residual doubts are overcome, and the old man again becomes a puppet, easily manipulated by the once-more dominant servant:

ORONTE, bas:

Ce qu'il dit est assez vraisemblable.

LA BRANCHE:

Et pendant que vous approfondirez ce faux bruit, Lisette gagnera l'esprit de sa maîtresse, et lui fera faire quelques mauvais pas, après quoi vous ne pourrez plus la refuser à Valère.

ORONTE:

Hon! Hon! ce raisonnement est assez raisonnable.

LA BRANCHE:

Mais, ma foi, les trompeurs seront trompés. Monsieur Oronte est homme d'esprit, homme de tête, ce n'est point à lui qu'il faut se jouer.

ORONTE:

Non, parbleu!

LA BRANCHE:

Vous savez toutes les rubriques du monde, toutes les ruses qu'un amant met en usage pour supplanter son rival.

ORONTE:

Je t'en réponds. Je vois bien que ton maître n'est point marié. Admirez un peu la fourberie de Valère; il assure qu'il est intime ami de Damis, et je vais parier qu'ils ne se connaissent seulement pas.

LA BRANCHE:

Sans doute. Malpeste, monsieur, que vous êtes pénétrant!

Comment! Rien ne vous échappe.

In the scene from Crispin rival cited above, once the servant has had the carpet pulled from beneath him by his adversary, the restoration of his dominant position proceeds steadily, without further setbacks. But the restoration by the servants of their dominant position is not always as straightforward as this, and, particularly with the fourbes of Lesage and Regnard, their recovery may be erratic, as they extricate themselves from one awkward situation only to find themselves (frequently as a result of their own ill-considered remarks)³³ in another, thereby effectively multiplying the comic effect of the episode.

Probably the finest example of such an episode - that in which Merlin in Regnard's Le Retour imprévu, after expressing satisfaction with the way in which matters are developing,³⁴ suddenly finds himself plunged into confusion by the unexpected return of his master's father, and thereafter continually extricates himself from the frying pan only to find himself in the fire - has already been given detailed consideration,³⁵ but scenes of a similar kind are also to be found in many other plays.

³³Such self-embroilment by the servants when they are under pressure is largely inadvertent, and, as such, is to be distinguished from the servants' tendency to overact - discussed above, pp.119-21 - which may equally jeopardise their position, but which is more an expression of their love of fun, and which occurs spontaneously, when they are not otherwise in difficulties. The dividing line between the two can, however, be a fine one at times.

³⁴'Voilà, Dieu merci, les affaires en bon train: nos amants sont en joie; fasse le ciel que cela dure longtemps!' (Sc.8).

³⁵Above, pp.32-5.

In Lesage's Crispin rival, for instance, the audience is amused when Crispin, who has successfully been manipulating Oronte in the guise of his prospective son-in-law, is casually asked by the old man about the progress of his supposed father's lawsuit. For the audience, aware that Crispin is an impostor, can anticipate that this will throw the hitherto dominant servant into a state of confusion, as indeed it does. In fact, so great is the servant's dismay that even Oronte becomes aware that something is amiss. But after unsuccessfully trying to call back La Branche, who would have some knowledge of the affair, Crispin succeeds - through his own none-too-skilful efforts - in allaying the old man's suspicions:

ORONTE:

Revenons à votre père. Je suis très affligé de son indisposition. Mais satisfaites, je vous prie, ma curiosité. Dites-moi un peu des nouvelles de son procès.

CRISPIN, d'un air inquiet:

La Branche!

ORONTE:

Vous êtes bien ému; qu'avez-vous?

CRISPIN, bas:

Maugrebleu de la question ... /haut/ J'ai oublié de charger La Branche ... /bas/ Il devait bien me parler de ce procès-là.

ORONTE:

Il reviendra. Eh bien, ce procès a-t-il enfin été jugé?

CRISPIN:

Oui, Dieu merci, l'affaire en est faite.

ORONTE:

Et vous l'avez gagné?

CRISPIN:

Avec dépens.

ORONTE:

J'en suis ravi; je vous assure.

MME ORONTE:

Le ciel en soit loué.³⁶

At this point, then, Crispin has regained his balance, and, despite his unnecessary elaboration about the awarding of costs, his interlocutors seem satisfied with his account of affairs. But, instead of letting the matter drop, he is sufficiently encouraged by his success in weathering the storm to raise it again in his next utterance, and in the course of the discussion which follows allows an ill-judged remark about his supposed father's adversary to place him once more in an awkward situation from which he escapes only with some difficulty:

CRISPIN:

Il /mon père/ avait affaire au plus grand chicaneur, au moins raisonnable de tous les hommes.

ORONTE:

Qu'appellez-vous de tous les hommes? Il m'a dit que sa partie était une femme.

CRISPIN:

Oui, sa partie était une femme, d'accord, mais cette femme avait dans ses intérêts un certain vieux Normand qui lui donnait des conseils. C'est cet homme-là qui a bien fait de la peine à mon père ... mais changeons de discours; laissons là les procès, je ne veux m'occuper que de mon mariage, et que du plaisir de voir Madame Oronte.

And in Regnard's Les Ménechmes there occurs a not dissimilar scene when the Chevalier, passing himself off as his own twin brother, finds himself having to discuss with Démophon the death of an uncle with whom his twin was familiar, but about whom he himself knows little. For when the Chevalier, unable to sustain the conversation, suggests that his servant, Valentin, should tell Démophon about the effect on him of the said uncle's death, the audience, aware that the servant knows no more about the uncle than his master, anticipates trouble, and is not disappointed, since Valentin, having launched into his task with some enthusiasm, soon embroils himself with a number of inept remarks. Moreover, after the Chevalier appears to have salvaged the situation with an intervention of his own, the servant, whose love of argument causes him to lose sight of the object of the exercise (which is to conceal the Chevalier's true identity from Démophon), again threatens to embroil both himself and his master with inept remarks, and is prevented from doing so only when his master hastily steps in to silence him:

LE CHEVALIER:

Ce garçon /Valentin/ vous dira l'excès de mes douleurs,
Et combien à sa mort j'ai répandu de pleurs.

VALENTIN:

Qu'à son âme le ciel fasse miséricorde!
Mais nous parler de lui, c'est toucher une corde
Bien triste ... et qui pourrait ... Mais il était bien vieux.

DEMOPHON:

Mais point trop: nous étions de même âge tous deux,
Cinquante ans environ.

VALENTIN:

Ce mot se peut entendre
En diverses façons, suivant qu'on le veut prendre.
Je dis qu'il était vieux pour son peu de santé;
Il se plaignait toujours de quelque infirmité.

DEMOPHON:

Point du tout; et je crois que dans toute sa vie,
Il ne fut attaqué que de la maladie
Qui causa de sa mort le funeste accident.

LA CHEVALIER:

C'était un corps de fer.

VALENTIN:

Il est vrai ... cependant ...

LE CHEVALIER, bas à Valentin:
Tais-toi donc.³⁷

It is not only in the scene quoted above, however, that Les Ménechmes provides the audience with the comic spectacle of a servant repeatedly finding himself in difficulties, for the same play contains an example of a comic situation much favoured by Regnard, in which a servant finds himself at a disadvantage when two individuals, one or both of whom he has previously misled in the furtherance of his schemes, meet face to face in his presence, and are in danger of discovering his trickery. We have already seen one example of such an episode when we examined Merlin's response to the unexpected return of his master's father in Le Retour imprévu, and observed how he coped with a difficult encounter between the old man and Mme Bertrand by letting each believe that the other was mad,³⁸ but the episode of this kind which Les Ménechmes offers us is possibly even more comical, both because the fluctuations in the servant's control of the situation are greater, and because he shows more inventiveness in the detailed development of the arguments which dupe his opponents.

The incident begins when the Chevalier's servant, Valentin, and Ménechme, the Chevalier's identical twin, to whom the servant has attached himself as part of a scheme to conceal from him his twin's presence until such time as the Chevalier can claim his inheritance, are confronted by one of the Chevalier's creditors, Coquelet.³⁹ 'Quel surcroît d'embarras', exclaims the servant in an aside, clearly anticipating with dismay the problems which lie ahead should Coquelet assume that Ménechme is in fact the Chevalier. The inevitable happens, and, to the amusement of the audience, which knows the reality of the situation, Coquelet does indeed assume that the innocent and increasingly bewildered Ménechme is his creditor. But the audience's amusement both at the servant's dismay and at Ménechme's bewilderment soon gives way to delight at the skilful and ingenious manner in which the servant dupes his adversaries and regains control of the situation; for before Coquelet has even had time to progress beyond his introductory civilities to a direct demand for payment, Valentin

³⁷III,2.

³⁸See above, p.35.

³⁹III,11.

forestalls him by cleverly explaining to Ménechme, in an aside, that his assailant is no more than an eccentric whose folly manifests itself in his belief that everyone whom he encounters is in debt to him:

C'est un visionnaire,
Une espèce de fou, d'un plaisant caractère,
Qui s'est mis dans l'esprit que tous les gens qu'il voit
Sont de ses débiteurs, et veut que cela soit:
C'est sa folie enfin.

Moreover, with particular astuteness he ends his description of Coquelet and his madness by declaring:

Il n'aborde personne
Qu'un mémoire à la main; et déjà je m'étonne
Qu'il ne vous ait point fait quelque sot compliment.

As a result, when Coquelet - not surprisingly - does present Ménechme with his mémoire, the servant can hold this up as proof that what he has said is true: 'Que vous avais-je dit?'.

Nevertheless, despite his efforts to conceal the real reason for Coquelet's behaviour, Valentin does not remain in control for long, since Ménechme's exchange with Coquelet grows increasingly acrimonious until, with the twin vehemently denying all knowledge of his supposed creditor, there is once more a danger that the servant's deception will be discovered. Again, however, Valentin rises to the occasion, this time intervening to inform Coquelet that Ménechme is unbalanced:

VALENTIN, prenant M. Coquelet à part:

Ignorez-vous encore

Le mal qui le possède?

COQUELET, à Valentin:

Oui, vraiment, je l'ignore.

VALENTIN, à part, à M. Coquelet:

Sa mémoire est perdue; il ne se souvient plus,

Ni de ce qu'il a fait, ni des gens qu'il a vus.

Ainsi, de lui parler du passé, c'est folie:

Son nom même, son nom, bien souvent il l'oublie.

Coquelet, however, is surprised at Valentin's revelation, particularly in view of the Chevalier's relative youthfulness, and in order to convince him the servant is obliged to use his ingenuity to elaborate his fiction (although he achieves this not without some difficulty, as the awkward pauses in his explanation show):

COQUELET, à part, à Valentin:

Ciel! que me dites-vous? quel triste événement!

Et comment se peut-il qu'à son âge ...

VALENTIN, bas:

Comment?

On l'a mis, à la guerre, en une batterie
D'où le canon tirait avec tant de furie,
Qu'il s'est fait dans sa tête une commotion
Qui de son souvenir empêche l'action.
De son faible cerveau ... la membrane trop tendre ...
Oh! l'effet du canon ne saurait se comprendre.

The important thing is, however, that Coquelet appears to accept Valentin's tale, thus allowing the servant to regain his dominant position. For although Coquelet and Ménechme may resume their arguments (much to the amusement of both Valentin and the audience, who, unlike them, know the real reason for their confusion), each remains convinced of the other's abnormality and thus fails to detect the true nature of the misunderstanding.

(b) Discrepant Awareness

In the course of the preceding section, it became clear that, in scenes involving a double reversal of roles (that is, where the servant first achieves a position of dominance in relation to a social superior, but then loses it before eventually regaining control of the situation), an important source of comedy is the different degrees of awareness enjoyed by the various parties involved, and the fact that this almost invariably results in the audience feeling superior to those being duped. Such comic discrepancies of awareness do not, however, occur only in scenes of the type already discussed, but are to be found, in a variety of forms, in a number of different situations.

First, and most importantly, in almost any scene in which servants seek, by whatever means, to dupe other figures (and whether or not their success is temporarily put in doubt), there tends to exist a major discrepancy between, on the one hand, the audience's and servants' perception of the situation, and, on the other, that of the figures whom the servants are attempting to dupe. That is, both the servants and the audience tend to share a knowledge of the reality of the situation, while the dupes do not fully understand what is

happening (although they may think that they do). The effect of such a discrepancy is that the audience, experiencing a feeling of superiority since it is, as it were, 'in the know', laughs at the foolishness of those who are deceived by the servants, and, indeed, feels a sense of complicity with the servants whenever they are successful in this way. Moreover, because deception, in one form or another, is a major activity of all but the least fourbe-like of the male servants, it is only in Destouches, whose valets have little enthusiasm for trickery, that this form of discrepant awareness is not a major source of comedy.

In Regnard, for example, it is discrepant awareness which renders so comical the numerous occasions, already noted,⁴⁰ on which his male servants resort to disguise or impersonation in the furtherance of their schemes. Thus when, in La Sérénade, Scapin (wearing an eye-patch and using the legal/financial terms of a financier) presents himself to Grifon as Isaac-Jérôme-Boisme Rousselet, and uses an appropriate letter of authority to extract money from the old man,⁴¹ the audience - which has been amply forewarned by Scapin's earlier comments and behaviour⁴² - has no difficulty in recognising his true identity, and revels in the ease with which Grifon is deceived by the act which the servant puts on, especially since the part which the latter plays (that of a 'garçon bien ingénu', as Grifon himself puts it) is in complete contrast to his real nature.

Similarly, in Le Bal, when Merlin finds himself mistaken by a dishonest wine-seller and rôtisseur for the majordomo of the house which he is visiting, and decides that, rather than disabusing them, he might as well profit from their mistake by playing the part of such a figure,⁴³ the audience, knowing who he is, and apprised of his intentions by an aside,⁴⁴ is well placed to appreciate the comic

⁴⁰Above, pp.36-8.

⁴¹Sc.18.

⁴²He has, for example, closely questioned Champagne, the original bearer of the letter, about whether or not Grifon knows him, pointedly exclaiming 'Tant mieux', in an aside, when he is informed that he does not (Sc.13), and subsequently exclaiming 'Voilà un fripon que je friponnerai, sur ma parole, si je puis seulement attraper le billet', once he has succeeded in packing Champagne off to an inn (Sc.14).

⁴³Sc.2.

⁴⁴'Profitons de l'erreur; faisons le majordome' (Sc.2).

spectacle of the rascally purveyors of food and drink having their trickery revealed by a figure who, in the very act of sanctimoniously condemning their behaviour and confiscating their produce, is, unbeknown to them, himself perpetrating a fraud.

Likewise, in Le Légataire universel, the scenes in which G ron te is insulted by two figures claiming to be a nephew and a niece⁴⁵ - scenes which, given the fantastic and outrageous behaviour of the visiting relatives, would be comical even if the latter were genuine⁴⁶ - are given added comic piquancy by the audience's knowledge that both figures are in fact played by the servant, Crispin, who is seeking to persuade G ron te to disinherit his real relatives (thereby leaving his master as sole heir), and who must be revelling in the opportunity to insult the old man with impunity.

With Dufresny, similar situations involving disguise occur in Le D dit, which centres on Frontin's ability to dupe his master's aunts, B lise and Araminte, by wooing the former in the guise of a serious s n chal, and the latter in that of a chevalier; but, with disguise and impersonation featuring less prominently in Dufresny than in Regnard, discrepant awareness is more frequently a contributor to comedy in scenes in which the servant, without concealing his identity, simply behaves deceptively (sometimes in co-operation with another figure). Thus when, in Le Chevalier joueur, Frontin and his master put on an act for the benefit of the latter's would-be lover, the Comtesse, in the course of which the Chevalier feigns reluctance to discuss the reason for his sadness, while his servant pretends to flout his wishes by revealing its cause, the audience, which is fully aware of the reality of the situation - partly because it has previously witnessed Frontin instructing his master in the part which he is to play⁴⁷ -, has the pleasure of seeing the foolish and na ve Comtesse accept what she is told at face value, and take the bait:

LA COMTESSE:

Ne peut-on pas adoucir votre affliction?

LE CHEVALIER:

Je dois vous la cacher, ce n'est rien.

⁴⁵III,2,7, and 8.

⁴⁶The contribution which fantasy and farce make to the comic dimension of these scenes is noted below, pp.295-7.

⁴⁷II,3.

FRONTIN:

C'est Angélique [the Comtesse's ward, and her rival for the Chevalier's affections] qui cause tous nos maux, nous voudrions bien nous en dépêtrer.

LA COMTESSE:

Ouvrez-moi votre cœur, parlez.

LE CHEVALIER:

Non, madame, mes chagrins sont d'une nature ...

LA COMTESSE:

Vous êtes discret, et je ne suis point curieuse.

FRONTIN:

Nous sommes fâchés d'être contraints à précipiter son mariage, pour payer des dettes pressantes.

LE CHEVALIER:

Je vous prie de vous taire, Frontin.

FRONTIN:

Dois-je me taire, madame, parce qu'il a du cœur, et qu'il crèverait plutôt que de vous découvrir ses besoins?

LE CHEVALIER:

Encore un coup je vous commande de vous taire.

FRONTIN:

Je me tairai, madame, de peur de chagriner mon maître, je me contenterai de vous faire voir un mémoire instructif.

LE CHEVALIER:

C'en est trop, donnez-moi tout à l'heure ce mémoire, que je le déchire en présence de Madame.

LA COMTESSE:

Je le veux voir absolument.⁴⁸

Similarly, in Lesage, just as in Regnard and Dufresny, scenes in which servants encounter difficulties in their attempts to dupe others may rely to some extent on discrepant awareness for their comic effect, provided that the threatened unmasking does not, in fact, become a reality: as we have seen, for instance, once La Branche in Crispin rival has recovered from the revelation that Oronte knows about Damis's marriage, and starts to persuade the old man that he is mistaken, it is the audience's knowledge - shared with the servant - that Damis is indeed married that makes the success of the servant's argument particularly comic.⁴⁹

But elsewhere in Lesage - again just as in Regnard and Dufresny - there are scenes involving duping which pose no serious threat to the servant's supremacy, and it is particularly in such scenes that

⁴⁸II,4. It must be noted, however, that although the servant's act succeeds in stimulating the Comtesse's interest in the list of his master's debts, his behaviour in the following scenes is so outrageous that he fails to follow up his success by extracting money from her.

⁴⁹The episode is discussed above, pp.280-2.

discrepant awareness is a major source of laughter. Thus, in Turcaret, when Frontin, whom the deceitful Baronne hopes to introduce into the financier's household by recommending him as a suitable servant, pretends to be somewhat naïve, the audience derives much pleasure from the fact that while it - having witnessed his previous behaviour - knows that Frontin is anything but innocent, Turcaret himself is completely taken in by the servant's performance, even priding himself on having immediately recognised Frontin as a simpleton: 'J'ai le coup d'œil infaillible'.⁵⁰

And in Dancourt, too, it is the different levels of awareness of the audience and servant on the one hand, and of the servant's victims on the other, which are frequently an underlying source of comedy in scenes involving deception. Thus, in La Gazette de Hollande, when Crispin, in order to allow his master to woo Angélique, mans the counter of her father's shop and is assumed by a number of callers to be the genuine proprietor or his assistant,⁵¹ it is the audience's knowledge of the servant's true status which allows it to savour the comedy of these instances of mistaken identity.

It is, however, not only when servants seek to dupe others that discrepant awareness makes an important contribution to comedy, for it is also a major factor in a second type of situation, namely, that in which it is the servants - most usually female servants or less fourbe-like male servants - who are the victims of some sort of quiproquo or misunderstanding. But whereas, when the servants are duping others, the audience usually shares with them their knowledge of reality, laughing with them at those whom they trick, in cases where the servants are themselves under a misapprehension the pattern of discrepant awareness is quite different, since although the audience may retain its knowledge of the true situation, the servants do not, with the result that it is at them that the spectators, from their superior vantage point, direct their laughter.

Scenes of this kind are particularly prevalent in Destouches, and one of the simplest examples of such an episode is provided by L'Obstacle

⁵⁰ II, 4.

⁵¹ The first incident of this kind occurs in scene 10.

imprévu, where Pasquin, arriving on stage, is surprised to hear his wife, Nérine, being offered money by his master, Valère.⁵² Because the audience - unlike Pasquin - has witnessed the early part of Valère's conversation with Nérine, it knows that the offer relates to Valère's attempt to persuade Nérine to incline her mistress in his favour, but the terms of the exchange ('Tiens, Nérine', says Valère, 'prends ces trente pistoles, et ne me refuse pas la faveur que je te demande', to which Nérine replies: 'Monsieur, vous me faites rougir; mais vous m'ébranlez terriblement') lead Pasquin to conclude that his wife's honour is at stake, with the result that, to the considerable amusement of the audience, he goes on to make a fool of himself by launching into an unjustified attack on both Nérine and Valère.⁵³

Similarly, in Destouches's Le Médisant, a whole string of misunderstandings results from the arrival of Marianne's true love, Léandre, in the guise of his rival's valet. For while the audience, having seen an encounter⁵⁴ between this supposed servant and Frontin (who has been sent by Léandre's father to discover his son's whereabouts), is well aware of his true identity, the same cannot be said either of Marianne's servant, Lisette, or of another female servant, Javotte, both of whom are, moreover, attracted to the new arrival. It is with much amusement, therefore, that the audience witnesses a series of scenes in which Lisette first explores Javotte's attitude to Léandre with feigned casualness,⁵⁵ mistakenly concluding that Léandre, who is reported as showing no inclination to marry Javotte, must be in love with her,⁵⁶ and then, having overheard Léandre musing on his love for Marianne, and assuming that it is to herself that he is referring,⁵⁷ engages in a conversation with him in which they talk at cross purposes, with Lisette assuring him that she knows his secret, which she takes to be his love for her, but which is, in fact, his love for her mistress.⁵⁸

⁵² II, 9.

⁵³ II, 10.

⁵⁴ I, 7.

⁵⁵ II, 4.

⁵⁶ II, 5.

⁵⁷ II, 6.

⁵⁸ II, 6.

But it is probably L'Ingrat which provides the best, and most complex, example in Destouches of a comic misunderstanding which leaves the servant at a disadvantage. The incident in question arises when the servant, Pasquin, in an attempt to prevent an unsuitable match, tries to reveal to the ill-tempered and opinionated G ron te something of the invidious behaviour of his master, Damis, to whom the old man insists on marrying his daughter, Isabelle. Aware of the old man's extremely difficult nature, Pasquin approaches his task with all the skill and subtlety at his command, first pretending to G ron te that he is looking for his master, and then, with feigned na vet , gradually revealing to him that his master is not an honourable man, and that Orphise, to whom he had already been betrothed, has arrived in town. This is a small example of the servant's technique:

GERONTE:

H  bien? tu veux savoir ...

PASQUIN:

O  peut  tre Damis. Il est de mon devoir
De ne lui pas laisser ignorer une chose ...

GERONTE:

Quoi donc? Qu'est-ce que c'est? Apprends-le-moi.

PASQUIN:

Je n'ose.

GERONTE:

Parle. Je te promets de ne me point f cher.

PASQUIN:

H ! Le moyen, monsieur, de vous en emp cher?
Si vous saviez le fait, vous voudriez, je gage,
D'Isabelle et de lui rompre le mariage.

GERONTE:

Tout de bon?

PASQUIN:

Tout de bon. Rien n'est plus assur ;
Mais vous ne saurez rien, car je l'ai bien jur .

GERONTE:

Compte ...

PASQUIN:

Un valet discret, et qui veut le para tre,
Ne doit point publier les d fauts de son ma tre.

... Jamais vous ne viendrez   bout
De tirer de ma bouche un aveu de la sorte.

GERONTE:

H ! fais-moi ce plaisir.

PASQUIN:

Non, le diable m'emporte:

Vous croyez que Damis est un homme d'honneur,
Est-ce   moi, s'il vous pla t,   vous tirer d'erreur?⁵⁹

However, whereas, in other circumstances, such an exchange might leave the audience laughing at the spectacle of an old trouble-fête being manipulated by a wily servant, the situation here is quite different, for the audience is in possession of information which the servant does not have, namely that G ron te has been warned by Damis, in the preceding scene, to expect just such an approach from Pasquin, and is determined not to fall for what he believes to be a genuine attempt at deception on the part of the servant. As a result, rather than laughing with the servant at his adversary, the audience, knowing that G ron te is only pretending to be deceived, directs its laughter primarily at the servant, who becomes increasingly convinced that his subtle approach is proving successful (a conviction which is made clear by his 'Je le tiens', uttered as an aside, once he has at last revealed to G ron te Damis's perfidy), and only secondarily at the old man, and then not because he is being tricked by Pasquin, but because, in steadfastly refusing to accept the truth of what the servant is saying, he is in fact being Damis's dupe.

It must be stressed, however, that although episodes of the kind discussed above - in which discrepancies of awareness cause the audience to direct its laughter at servants - are particularly prevalent in Destouches, they are also to be found in the works of the other playwrights. Thus, in Dufresny's La R conciliation normande, when Falaise and N rine - both thinking that they are alone in being deceptive - attempt to extract secrets from each other by feigning love for the other, the audience, which alone is aware of the true overall situation, since it has been apprised of the servants' intentions by their asides, is well placed to enjoy the ensuing action.⁶⁰ And in Regnard the audience also has occasion to laugh at servants when they find themselves the victims of misunderstandings, as in D mocr te, when the spectators are in possession of sufficient information to realise much earlier than Strabon himself that Cl anthis, whom he so energetically and eloquently woos, is none other than his long-estranged wife,⁶¹ or in Les M nechmes, where the audience is on more than one occasion able to enjoy the sight of

⁶⁰ III, 11.

⁶¹ The servants discover each other's identity in Act IV scene 7, but the audience has been prepared for this by revelations in Act I scene 1, and Act II scenes 1 and 7.

Finette falling prey to the similarity between Ménechme and his twin brother, the Chevalier.⁶²

(c) Fantasy and Farce

The existence of episodes involving fantasy or farce is yet another comic feature of a number of the plays under consideration - especially those in which there occur fourbe-like male servants, since it is almost invariably the behaviour and activities of such figures which lead to the creation of unrealistic or ridiculous situations.

We have already noted, for instance, that certain of the servants in Regnard and Lesage are inclined to overact by making highly improbable statements, and that in so doing they reveal an innate love of fantasy and fun;⁶³ but what we have not so far stressed is that, viewed from the standpoint of the audience, the principal function of episodes of this kind is the creation of laughter. For when Crispin in Regnard's Le Légataire universel, in the guise of G ron te's niece, claims that on being widowed at the age of twenty 'she' had nine children and ten years later gave birth to a 'posthumous' child,⁶⁴ or when L'Olive, in Dancourt's Le Moulin de Javelle, disguised as the ferocious Vicomte de La Jugulardi re, alludes in exaggerated terms to an incident in his past 'quand je tuai ces deux hommes, que je jetai ce grand laquais dans le puits, cette femme de chambre par la fen tre, et le tout par m prise encore',⁶⁵ they provoke laughter partly by creating a ridiculously topsy-turvy and farcical world (not unlike that of an animated cartoon) in which realistic, everyday considerations appear to be of no account. And when those to whom the servants address their words, and whom they are supposedly trying to dupe (G ron te and Ganivet in the cases cited above), do not

⁶²For example, in Act II scenes 3 and 5.

⁶³See above, pp.62-3 and 119-21.

⁶⁴III,8. The passage is in part cited above, p.120.

⁶⁵Sc.34.

seem unduly surprised by their improbable claims,⁶⁶ this is a further source of mirth, since when servants, by daring to go beyond plausibility, virtually challenge their opponents to penetrate their disguise or deception, yet their adversaries appear to be taken in by the impossible, the audience, sharing the servants' perspective, laughs with them at those whom they mock. Moreover, sometimes, when the servants overact, we glimpse again in their behaviour a tendency - already observed on occasions when servants are directly outspoken⁶⁷ - comically to deflate their superiors (and hence to reverse their accepted roles) by exposing them to truths which they might otherwise prefer to ignore. Such, for instance, is the case with the following passage from Lesage's La Tontine, in which Crispin's ridiculous comments on the similarity between Trousse-Galant and his charming daughter not only generate a sense of comic fantasy, but give unwelcome prominence to the old man's less attractive physical attributes:

CRISPIN:

Plus je regarde votre fille, et plus je trouve qu'elle vous ressemble.

TROUSSE-GALANT:

Vous vous moquez.

CRISPIN:

Foi de héros! C'est votre portrait en miniature; vous avez tous deux les mêmes yeux, quoique de couleur différente. Son petit nez deviendra grand comme le vôtre: visage ovale, visage long; il faut avouer qu'il y a des ressemblances étonnantes dans certaines familles.⁶⁸

It is, however, not solely through overacting that servants create fantastic or farcical situations, for in all the authors under consideration the stageplay or physical activity in which the servants (principally the male servants) occasionally engage has a not dissimilar effect.

Sometimes, such stageplay is restricted to a single action. In Regnard's Le Légataire universel, for instance, Crispin, in the guise of Géronte's nephew, not only launches a verbal assault on the old

⁶⁶Géronte, for instance, may be dismayed by Crispin's rudeness - the effect desired by the servant -, but, even in the face of the valet's extraordinary statements, shows no sign of questioning his identity, while Ganivet seems suitably impressed by the supposed Juglardiére's credentials.

⁶⁷The servants' outspokenness, and its deflating effects, are discussed above, pp.271-4.

⁶⁸Sc.21.

man, but, in greeting him, shakes his hand with such vigour that his arm is nearly torn from his body;⁶⁹ and in the same author's Démocrite, when Strabon gives the peasant, Thaler, a lesson in courtly deportment, he strikes him first on his back, and then on his front ('Ne tends pas tant le dos, renforce l'estomac').⁷⁰ Similarly, in Dancourt's La Foire Saint-Germain, Le Breton, on the pretext of helping Mme Isaac to her feet, adds to her discomfort by standing on her arm,^{70a} while in La Désolation des joueuses - also by Dancourt - a female servant, Lisette, produces a pack of cards and uses them as smelling salts to bring back to consciousness an intendante who is addicted to gambling.⁷¹

Elsewhere, however, the activity on stage may be slightly more complex. In Dufresny's Le Dédit, for instance, it is Frontin's quick change from one disguise to another as he dupes the two old women⁷² (resembling scenes in Molière's Le Médecin volant) which is the source of much comedy, and, in Destouches's L'Obstacle imprévu, there is a farcical scene in which Pasquin, reminding his master, Valère, of the latter's earlier encounter with his father, takes to acting out the scene with such authenticity that, in the role of Valère's father, he ends up making as if to beat his master.⁷³ Similarly, in Dancourt's Renaud et Armide, L'Olive, acting the part of someone whose madness causes him to play the role of opera characters, ends up seeking to beat his opponents,⁷⁴ while in Dufresny's Le Jaloux honteux, when the jealous Thibaut snatches from Hortence the piece of paper which she is reading (the contents of which, if revealed, might endanger the chances of Damis and Lucie being able to marry each other), the female servant, Lisette, in an amusing piece of stageplay, outwits him by in turn snatching it from him.⁷⁵

⁶⁹III,2.

⁷⁰II,3.

^{70a}Sc.10.

⁷¹Sc.8.

⁷²Sc.7.

⁷³I,1.

⁷⁴Sc.16.

⁷⁵IV,2.

Not all scenes involving stageplay leave the servants in so dominant a position, however, and on occasion the action on stage can leave them looking decidedly foolish. A minor example of this is to be found in Regnard's La Sérénade, in a scene in which Marine, who has to convey to Valère a letter, and Scapin, Valère's servant - to whom she gives the letter and who asks her about its contents -, have a petty squabble which ends up with them behaving so perversely that they both shout at each other simultaneously, as Marine insists on telling her male counterpart about the letter because he says he no longer wants to know about it, while Scapin loudly declares that he will not listen to what she is saying.⁷⁶ But of the comparatively small number of episodes in which servants create a farcical situation which leaves them looking foolish, probably the most laughter-provoking occurs in Destouches's L'Obstacle imprévu, where, in what amounts to an extended comical ballet of retreat, two servants - Crispin and Pasquin - have a confrontation in which each pretends to be a ruthless 'tough guy', while revealing, in asides, his fear of his opponent, until, honour satisfied, they adjourn to a local hostelry for refreshments. This is a short extract from the scene:

PASQUIN:

Voilà un visage que je suis bien las de voir.

CRISPIN:

Voilà un faquin qui me fatigue bien la vue.

PASQUIN, à part:

Cet homme-là n'entend point raillerie.

CRISPIN, à part:

J'ai bien peur qu'il ne me prête le collet.

PASQUIN, mettant la main sur la garde de son épée:

Voyons s'il a du courage.

CRISPIN, en faisant de même:

Tâtons un peu sa vigueur.

PASQUIN:

Avance.

CRISPIN:

Avance toi-même.

PASQUIN:

Je t'attends.

CRISPIN:

Et moi aussi.

PASQUIN:

C'est à toi à m'attaquer.

CRISPIN:

Non, c'est à toi.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Sc.3.

⁷⁷IV,5.

(d) Dimwittedness

Before leaving the subject of what might broadly be termed situational comedy, some consideration must be given to the comical effects of dim-witted behaviour on the part of servants, since even although the major dimwits in the plays under consideration are peasants or rural figures (and hence fall outwith the scope of the present study), a number of dullards are to be found among the ranks of the minor servants, while even the more important valets, although never innately dim-witted, may occasionally behave in a less-than-intelligent manner,⁷⁸ particularly when under the influence of alcohol.

On turning to the question of dimwittedness, one rapidly becomes aware that one is dealing with a phenomenon which creates mirth not in a single, uniform manner, but in four main ways. First, unintelligent behaviour can create situations not unlike those already noted,⁷⁹ in which servants tease their masters by failing to convey vital information to the latter as quickly as they might, or by inducing in them a state of fear or panic. However, whereas, in the cases already examined, the servants' infuriating behaviour is deliberate, on those occasions when a servant acting dimwittedly is involved the annoyance or panic caused is almost certainly unintentional. The result is that whereas the audience, as before, laughs at the discomfiture and exasperation of the non-servant figure, it no longer laughs with the servant at the effects of his behaviour, but instead directs part of its laughter at the servant himself, with his comic lack of appreciation of the results of his actions.

In Dufresny's Le Négligent, for instance, Fanchon and Dorante, eager to hear L'Olive's report of his spying mission against the intendant of the crooked Marquis, find that, because the servant is in a state of inebriation, he is maddeningly slow in coming to the point, especially when describing the results of his encounter with a fellow-

⁷⁸Such situations, when the servants inadvertently behave in a less-than-intelligent manner, are to be distinguished from those in which an otherwise intelligent servant will deliberately pretend to be a dullard (as does Frontin in Lesage's Turcaret, in the scene discussed above, p.291) in order to trick others.

⁷⁹Above, pp.265-8.

servant, La Flèche, who had been bearing a letter from the intendant to the Marquis. We join the scene after L'Olive has already devoted much time to describing his visit to La Flèche's home and the dispute between La Flèche and his wife which he had witnessed there.

FANCHON:

Qu'as-tu fait de Monsieur de La Flèche?

L'OLIVE:

Je l'ai laissé sous la table, il n'avait plus aucun signe de vie.

DORANTE:

Hé ne t'avais-je pas donné ordre ...

L'OLIVE:

Il a une apoplexie qui durera plus de vingt-quatre heures, et j'en suis un peu menacé, moi.

FANCHON:

Mais enfin ne t'a-t-il rien appris?

L'OLIVE:

Je lui ai donné la question ordinaire et extraordinaire; il a tout avoué.

DORANTE:

Mais encore?

L'OLIVE:

Ne me brouillez pas, monsieur, si vous me brouillez, je vous planterai là.

DORANTE:

Il faut que j'aie une bonté à l'épreuve!

L'OLIVE:

Ne me brouillez pas, laissez-moi me mettre à table, et je vous conterai tout par l'ordre des bouteilles.

FANCHON:

Dépêche-toi donc.

L'OLIVE:

A la première bouteille ... il n'a rien dit.

DORANTE:

Fort bien.

L'OLIVE:

A la seconde bouteille ... elle était de jauge celle-là.

A la troisième ... ne me brouillez pas.

DORANTE:

Hé finis, traître, finis.

L'OLIVE:

Vous verrez que vous me brouillez, car je ne possède pas trop bien l'histoire; mais tant y a qu'enfin je lui ai attrapé une lettre que Monsieur l'Intendant écrivait à Monsieur le Marquis. Etes-vous content?

DORANTE:

Tu as une lettre?

L'OLIVE:

Oui parbleu j'en ai une: voyez ce qu'elle chante.⁸⁰

And in Destouches's Le Triple Mariage, when L'Epine and his master, Oronte, who have disguised themselves as musicians in order to gain access to Isabelle, are confronted by the latter's father, the

⁸⁰III,4.

servant gives his master a few anxious moments when his lack of circumspection - again resulting from an over-consumption of alcohol - threatens to reveal their true status.⁸¹

Second, and particularly in Dancourt, dimness can cause servants either to behave, or to express themselves, in completely illogical ways, much to the amusement of the audience, which, convinced of its own superior intelligence, not only laughs at their folly, but also, to some extent, finds the topsy-turvy nature of what they say or do intrinsically comical (rather as it laughs at the complete zaniness of farce). For instance, in Dancourt's Le Tuteur, the servant, L'Olive, asked by Lisette if he is capable of keeping a secret, avers that he is, declaring: 'Pour gage de ma discrétion, je vous en confierais un autre';⁸² while in the same author's Les Enfants de Paris the servant, Merlin, in response to a question from Finette, also maintains that confidences are safe with him, and, moreover, seeks to prove his assertion by listing some of the secrets to which he is already privy!⁸³

Third, dimwittedness can take the form of innocence, with the servant naïvely accepting at face value the explanations of the devious characters whom he encounters, as is frequently the case in Dufresny's Le Faux Honnête Homme, where the simple-minded and guileless Flamand serves the confidence trickster, Ariste. For, however patently crooked Ariste's actions are, the servant accepts without question his master's contention that he is in fact behaving with integrity, and, in conversations with those who doubt this, even seeks to justify his master's behaviour, as in the following passage, in which Frosine asks him if his wages are paid regularly:

FROSINE:

Mais dis-moi un peu, ton maître qui est si savant en perfection, te paie-t-il bien tes gages?

FLAMAND:

Bon, mes gages, il s'amuse bien à cela.

FROSINE:

Quoi il ne te paie point?

FLAMAND:

Il ne me paie point, mais c'est pour mon bien, car il veut me

⁸¹Sc.8. Oronte's suspicions are, for instance, aroused when L'Epine foolishly refers to his fellow musician as 'mon maître'.

⁸²Sc.12.

⁸³I,7.

faire ma fortune tout à la fois: l'humeur de mon maître, c'est pour les grandes générosités.⁸⁴

And finally, dimness can manifest itself in a different form of innocence, one in which the frequently youthful servant, rather like the little boy in the tale of the emperor's new clothes, does in fact see the reality of the situation, and, naïvely ignorant of social conventions, has the temerity to speak openly of what he sees. Such, for instance, is the case in Lesage's Turcaret, when Flamand, taking leave of the Baronne, through whose good offices he has obtained from Turcaret what he takes to be a lucrative post in the provinces, expresses the hope that she will do nothing to reduce the financier's affection for her, counselling her: 'Mettez toujours de ce beau rouge pour lui donner dans la vue ...' - a suggestion which is rapidly cut short by Lisette, exasperated by the naïveté which leads him to allude so openly to a lady's makeup and its purpose.⁸⁵

⁸⁴I, 11.

⁸⁵V, 3. The situation is similar to that in Dancourt's La Femme d'intrigues where another youthful figure - this time not a valet but a petit dragon - innocently refers to his mistress's lover as 'son petit mari', and expresses the wish that he might be placed with someone else, 'pourvu que ce soit avec une femme qui n'ait qu'un mari' (IV, 7).

Chapter 2

CONSCIOUS HUMOUR

If situational comedy, of the kinds discussed in the preceding chapter, is one source of laughter frequently associated with servants, another - and just as important - way in which these figures delight audiences is by deliberately attempting to be amusing in what they say. Indeed, in the plays under consideration it is the servants, with their lively minds, who have a near monopoly of conscious humour, often directing it against others, but rarely being the victims of it themselves. And, as with situational comedy, conscious humour does not manifest itself in a single, uniform manner, but appears in a variety of forms, each of which generates laughter in a subtly different way.

(a) Double Meaning

A common form of conscious humour, and one especially favoured by male servants, particularly in Lesage and Regnard (although female servants may also occasionally have recourse to it), is double meaning, in which the servants make pronouncements which can have two valid interpretations, only one of which is obvious to their opponents, but both of which are transparent to those of their associates who happen to be present, and to the audience, which, from knowledge gleaned from earlier scenes, or from its understanding of the characters' normal patterns of behaviour, is - as so often - fully aware of the reality of the situation. The result is that, just as when the servants dupe their adversaries in some other way, the audience, from its superior vantage point, feels a sense of complicity with the valets and soubrettes, laughing with them at their easily-deceived victims, admiring their skill in devising such ambiguous expressions, and taking pleasure from the temerity with which - as when they overact¹ - they flaunt their deceit in the faces of their opponents.

Such, for instance, is the case in Regnard's Le Retour imprévu, when G ron te, on his return from a year-long business trip to Spain,

¹The amusement caused when servants, overacting, dare to go beyond plausibility and virtually challenge their opponents to penetrate their disguise and deception, is discussed above, pp.295-6.

asks Merlin if his son - Merlin's master - has put his wealth to good use in his absence. For the servant's ambiguous reply - 'Vous ne sauriez comprendre comme ce jeune homme-là aime l'argent; il a mis vos affaires dans un état ... dont vous serez étonné, sur ma parole.'² - is taken by the old man to mean that his son has been astute in his business dealings, whereas the audience, which has learned very early in the play that the son is a spendthrift wastrel who uses his father's capital resources to finance his profligate life-style,³ sees the alternative meaning in the servant's words. Likewise, in Regnard's Le Légataire universel, Crispin cleverly makes use of double meaning when, informing Géronte of his activities during the latter's period of unconsciousness, he expresses himself in words which can be taken to constitute either a message of reassurance, or an allusion to his own illegitimate efforts to secure the old man's wealth for his master and himself by disguising himself as the old man and dictating a false will:

Si vous saviez, monsieur, ce que nous avons fait,
Lorsque de votre mal vous ressentiez l'effet,
La peine que j'ai prise, et les soins nécessaires
Pour pouvoir, comme vous, mettre ordre à vos affaires,
Vous seriez étonné, mais d'un étonnement
A n'en pas revenir sitôt assurément.⁴

As before, the servant's dupe sees only one meaning; but the audience - which has earlier, with its own eyes, witnessed Crispin's dubious activities⁵ - sees both. And in Regnard's La Sérénade there occurs yet another highly comical instance of double meaning when Scapin, talking to his master's father (who, despite his advanced age, has just announced his intention of remarrying), offers the following ambiguous advice on the choice of a wife: 'Prenez-la belle et jeune, au moins, surtout d'humeur complaisante; tous vos amis vous conseilleront la même chose'.⁶ Again, the foolish old man appears to see nothing unusual in the words of the servant, whom he is encountering for the first time, but the audience, which in earlier scenes has seen how lively the servant's mind is, and has witnessed his lighthearted

²Sc.11.

³Sc.4.

⁴V,4.

⁵It is in Act IV scene 6 that Crispin dictates the false will.

⁶Sc.7.

and witty approach to life, realises that there is more to Scapin's advice than Grifon suspects, and laughs at the old man's inability to detect the servant's allusion to future cuckoldry.

Similarly, in each of the three plays by Lesage which fall within the scope of this study, there are instances of servants deliberately making pronouncements which have a double meaning. In La Tontine, for example, when the repulsive Bolus, mistakenly interpreting one of Marianne's remarks as a compliment, exclaims, 'Vous me flattez, mon ange', Frosine's response - 'Non, monsieur, je vous jure qu'elle ne vous flatte point',⁷ - is ambiguous, in that it can be taken to imply either that Marianne is praising Bolus with sincerity, or that she is not praising him at all; and while the apothecary innocently accepts the former meaning, the audience, which has for some time been aware of Marianne's dislike for him,⁸ is in no doubt that it is the second meaning which accurately reflects the servant's sentiments. Likewise, when, in Turcaret, the financier at one point observes that Frontin appears more sensible than he did at his initial interview (at which time, as we have seen,⁹ the servant deliberately pretended to be naïve), Frontin claims that serving Turcaret has a beneficial effect on his intellect, adding, 'Oh! je prévois que je profiterai beaucoup avec vous'.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, Turcaret assumes that the servant is alluding to the opportunities for self-improvement which serving his new master will afford him, but the audience, which knows full well that Frontin has infiltrated the financier's household as part of a scheme to ruin him,¹¹ sees the alternative meaning in his words: Frontin will enrich himself at the financier's expense. And in Crispin rival de son maître double meaning is again in evidence, for once Crispin and La Branche have persuaded Valère that they are doing all in their power to further

⁷Sc.18.

⁸Her despair at having to give up Eraste in favour of Bolus, whom her father wishes her to marry, is, for example, made clear in scene 13.

⁹Above, p.291.

¹⁰III,10.

¹¹The plan to 'plant' Frontin on Turcaret is first raised in Act I scene 8; and in the following scene it is made clear that the Chevalier and Frontin seek nothing less than the financier's complete ruination: 'son anéantissement'.

his interests, and that his continued presence may jeopardise his position (when in fact it would only endanger their plans to enrich themselves at his expense), La Branche sends him packing in the following ambiguous terms: 'Ayez l'esprit tranquille, monsieur, éloignez-vous vite, abandonnez-nous votre fortune',¹² - a remark which goes unquestioned by the young lover, who clearly sees it as a straightforward request to leave his fate in the hands of the servants, but which to the audience, aware of Crispin's plan to marry Angélique and secure for himself and for La Branche the dowry which Valère might otherwise expect to receive,¹³ constitutes an unmistakable allusion to his future financial situation.

(b) Irony

When servants create laughter by making pronouncements which have a double meaning, their statements, taken literally, are always true: Géronte would be amazed if he knew what his son had done with his finances (but not, as he might think, because his son has put his talents to work; quite the reverse), and Frontin does indeed believe that he will profit from his association with Turcaret (although not in the way that the financier might think). But in the case of irony - another form of conscious humour much favoured by servants - the intended meaning is in fact the reverse of what is said.

In Dancourt in particular, the servants - especially the soubrettes - tend to make statements of an ironical kind when conversing with characters whose foolishness is such that they fail to recognise any irony in what is said. And because, in such circumstances, the audience is invariably 'in the know' - in the sense that, in the light either of developments in the dramatic action of the play, or of the servants' previous behaviour or remarks, it is aware of the servants' true views -, it feels a sense of complicity with the servants, appreciating to the full the ironic tone of what they are saying, and

¹²Sc.17.

¹³The plot is hatched, and revealed to the audience, in scene 3.

laughing with them at those whom they mock (and who, as in the instances of double meaning cited above, do not even realise that they are being made fools of).

In La Femme d'intrigues, for instance, after the foolish poet, M. de La Protase, who fondly imagines that those who greet his plays with boos and cat calls can be legislated against, has read to Gabrillon a lengthy extract from his manifestly verbose petition to the king on the matter, the servant exclaims - with irony which apparently goes unnoticed by the poet himself - 'Malpeste, voilà un style bien concis'.¹⁴ And in La Fête de village, when the far-from-youthful Greffière not only announces that she intends to marry her niece's lover, the Comte, but indicates that she has opted for a public - rather than a secret - wedding, so that she may savour the frustration of her sister and niece and the envy of her other female friends, Lisette (who has earlier given every indication that she shares the general view that the Greffière, with her social pretensions, is rather mad)¹⁵ feigns agreement, the irony of her tone apparently passing unnoticed by her interlocutor: 'Il n'y a rien de plus gracieux, vous avez raison'.¹⁶ While in Le Chevalier à la mode a similar situation obtains, for when Lisette (who the audience knows is not blind to the folly of her self-deluding and socially pretentious mistress)¹⁷ responds to Mme Patin's complaint that the presence of her niece draws people's attention away from her, she does so with feigned sympathy, the irony in her words seemingly escaping the attention of the old woman:

Que le monde est fou! Parce qu'elle est jeune et jolie, on la regarde plus volontiers que vous.¹⁸

¹⁴V,2. 'Malpeste, voilà un style bien râblé', in the edition of 1694.

¹⁵The Greffière's foolishness is first discussed by her brother-in-law, Blandineau, and Naquart - who agrees that she is mad, but nevertheless wishes to marry her - in the second scene of the play, while in a conversation with Blandineau in Act I scene 7 Lisette gives every sign of agreeing with the procureur's assessment of his sister-in-law's mental state.

¹⁶II,2.

¹⁷The servant's true assessment of her mistress can, for example, be glimpsed in the scepticism with which she greets the old woman's foolish assertion that because her husband is dead, his brother, Serrefort (with whom she wishes to break on account of his bourgeois status), is no longer her brother-in-law (I,3).

¹⁸I,3.

If, however, the irony in what servants say frequently goes unremarked by their interlocutors in Dancourt, in the other playwrights (with the exception of Regnard) the servants often use irony when dealing with figures who - usually because they are less blinkered than corresponding figures in Dancourt - soon recognise their tone for what it is. In some cases, the fact that the servants' adversaries are aware of the true situation has to be derived from a knowledge of their characters and behaviour as demonstrated throughout the play, and from the general development of the scenes in which the ironical exchanges occur, while in other instances the non-servants may make it clear, in so many words, that they recognise the irony in what the servants say; but however it may become apparent that the other characters are aware of the irony in the servants' remarks, the comic effect is quite different from that created when the other figures are oblivious to the servants' irony, for, instead of laughing at the duping of a third party, the audience experiences much the same sort of pleasure as it does when a servant, by being openly critical of his supposed betters, reverses the accepted pattern of dominance.¹⁹ Thus, in Destouches's Le Médisant, when Lisette arrives on stage to confront the foolish Baron and Baronne in the middle of one of their arguments, she asserts herself over them not only by chiding them in forthright terms - 'Hé, bon Dieu! quel désordre est ceci?/On vous entend crier du milieu de la rue'²⁰ - but also by using terms which are overtly ironical, as the Baron himself clearly recognises:

LISETTE:

Admirables effets des nœuds du mariage!

Quelle docilité! Quel doux rapport d'humeurs!

Allons, dites-vous donc encor quelques douceurs.

LE BARON:

Ah! trêve, s'il vous plaît, à la plaisanterie.²¹

Je ne suis point d'humeur d'entendre raillerie.

And in the same author's L'Ingrat a not dissimilar situation occurs. For when Gêronte refuses to allow his daughter to marry the noble

¹⁹The comedy created by the forthright outspokenness of servants, and by the consequent reversal of accepted patterns of dominance, is discussed above, pp.271-4.

²⁰I,2. Her outspoken approach is reminiscent of that used by Lisette in Regnard's Le Distrain when she turns on Mme Grognac. The latter passage is cited above, p.272.

²¹I,2.

Cléon, whom she loves, and insists in no uncertain terms that she should wed Damis, whom she hates and who is not noble, stressing that when married they will address each other not in the highfalutin terms used by the upper classes, but using the time-honoured 'mon époux' and 'ma femme', which he sees as '[les] titres les plus doux, et les plus magnifiques', Lisette interrupts, comically denting his composure and putting him on the defensive by agreeing with him in effusive terms, the irony of which does not escape his notice:

LISETTE:

Ces mots ont en effet un agréable son!

Ma femme! mon époux! oui, vous avez raison.

GERONTE:

. Tu veux railler, je crois.²²

(c) Conventional Jokes

Whereas the comedies of Molière are largely devoid of gratuitous jokes - that is, jokes which are not closely integrated into the surrounding action, and which serve no purpose other than to raise a laugh -, such superficial laughter-provoking devices are not infrequently to be found in the works of the five authors presently being considered. Moreover, although the jokes which occur do not follow a set pattern, in the sense of tending to be at the expense of particular kinds of character within the plays, they do frequently have two features in common: first, they are above all to be found in the mouths of servants (both male and female), since the agile minds of these figures enable them to produce witticisms appropriate to almost any occasion; and, second, the jokes themselves are largely conventional, in that they depend for their impact not upon internal developments in the plays, but upon a general acceptance by the audience of certain preconceptions about the characteristics of particular categories of individual. Indeed, so conventional and timeless are the jokes which the servants make that many of them would not seem out of place in the repertoire of a twentieth-century comedian.

²² III, 7.

The great majority of the servants' jokes are, for instance, based on the supposed characteristics of womankind. Thus, in many plays, one finds the talkativeness of women being alluded to. In Destouches's Le Triple Mariage, for example, the female servant, Nérine, makes reference to it when she jokes: 'Je suis fille, mais je sais garder un secret',²³ while, later in the same play, the male servant, Pasquin, returns to the theme with his: 'Qui dit fille, suppose une personne incapable de se taire, et forcée à révéler le plus grand secret, ou à crever dans les vingt-quatre heures'.²⁴ And in Dufresny's Le Faux Honnête Homme women's love of gossip is similarly referred to when Frosine, who has been given money by the Capitaine to speak ill of him, quips: 'Si on payait toutes les médisances à ce prix-là, que les femmes seraient riches!'.²⁵

Another characteristic of women which forms the basis of servants' jokes is their supposed inability to make up their minds. For example, in Dancourt's Les Bourgeoises à la mode, Lisette chides Angélique for her indecision in the following terms:

Et comment donc! Quoi, vous ne savez jamais ce que vous voulez!
Mort de ma vie, vous êtes bien plus femme qu'une autre.²⁶

And the reputation which women have for contrariness also provides material for jokes, as in Lesage's Crispin rival de son maître, where Lisette, faced with the spectacle of Mme Oronte continually giving way to her husband, mutters, 'Mort de ma vie! Est-ce là une femme? Elle ne contredit point'.²⁷

Unfaithfulness is yet another supposed characteristic of women which comes in for lighthearted comment, and in Regnard's Le Légataire universel one finds Crispin addressing his wife-to-be in the following terms:

Lisette, sur mon front viens ceindre des lauriers;
Mais n'y mets rien de plus pendant le mariage.²⁸

²³Sc.4.

²⁴Sc.10.

²⁵III,1.

²⁶I,5.

²⁷Sc.7.

²⁸V,9.

While the supposed tendency of women to reduce their husbands to little more than lackeys also sometimes forms the basis of jokes, as it does in Dancourt's Les Bourgeoises à la mode, where Frontin's observation that the female servant's socially-ambitious mistress is said to pass her husband off as her homme d'affaires prompts Lisette to give the following reply:

Le grand malheur! Est-ce ici la seule maison de ta connaissance où les maris ne sont que les premiers domestiques de leurs femmes?²⁹

It must be stressed, however, that while it is above all the supposed characteristics of women which form the basis of the servants' jokes, other social groups also come in for similar - if less frequent - treatment. Thus, particularly in Dancourt, the reputed liking of musicians for drink is the focus of repeated comment: in La Foire de Besons, for instance, when L'Olive, who wants to know if the musicians for the evening's activities have arrived, learns from Eraste that they have been told to meet up at the nearest hostelry, he immediately becomes quite certain that they will be there:

Au cabaret! ils y sont dès le matin, sur ma parole.
Oh diable! pour ces sortes de rendez-vous-là la musique et la danse sont d'une exactitude admirable.³⁰

While the notorious promiscuity - and its consequences - of the officer class is also an occasional target for servants' jokes, as it is in Lesage's La Tontine, where Frosine explains in the following terms the desire of herself and her mistress to let Crispin and Eraste - who are pretending to be officers - consult Trousse-Galant in private: 'Nous ne voulons pas entendre la conversation d'un officier qui consulte un médecin'.³¹

²⁹I,3.

³⁰Sc.14.

³¹Sc.21.

(d) Wit

Although double meaning, irony, and conventional jokes all have a part to play in the generation of laughter, by far the most important way in which servants consciously contribute to the comedy of the plays is by exercising their wit, for the majority of the servants - both male and female - have an agility of mind which gives them the ability to respond, in a variety of quick-witted ways, to the circumstances of the moment.

Perhaps the most straightforward manifestation of wit on the part of the servants - and one which achieves prominence in all the authors except Destouches - is their use of the bon mot, which Callières has succinctly defined as 'un sentiment vivement et finement exprimé sur les choses qui se présentent, ou une repartie prompte et ingénieuse sur ce qui a été dit auparavant'.³² For example, in Regnard's Les Ménechmes, when Araminte, mistaking Ménechme for his twin brother, and therefore dismayed by his seemingly odd behaviour, exclaims 'Finette, il perd l'esprit', her servant is ready with a quip which is less than complimentary to the twin: 'Il ne perd pas beaucoup'.³³ And in the same author's Le Joueur, when Valère, desperate for money, comments to Hector that he would be willing to pawn himself in order to obtain some, the servant is similarly ready with a witty reply which calls into doubt his master's worth: 'Sur cette nippe-là vous auriez peu d'argent'.³⁴ In Lesage's La Tontine, the speed with which Crispin is able to produce witticisms can be seen in the episode in which, disguised as an officer, and apparently determined to execute Trousse-Galant's protégé for supposed desertion from the army, he refuses to change his mind in the face of the doctor's offer of a bribe and Marianne's feigned pleas for clemency. For when, pretending to be surprised at his firmness of purpose, Frosine exclaims, 'Quoi, monsieur, vous pouvez résister à l'éclat de l'or et d'une belle sollicitieuse?', Crispin immediately comes back with a witty reply: 'Comment, si j'y puis

³² François de Callières, Des Bons Mots et des bons contes, p.11.

³³ II,5. Compare La Flèche's witty observations in Dancourt's L'Opéra de village, when he tells Galoche that if he is shot in the back or legs when spectating at a battle this could have serious consequences for him, but that if he is shot in the head, 'ce ne serait qu'une bagatelle, et vous n'y perdriez pas grand-chose' (Sc.4).

³⁴ II,14.

résister! Me prenez-vous pour un homme de robe?'.³⁵ And in Dufresny's Attendez-moi sous l'orme the male servant, Pasquin, shows a similar ability to respond quick-wittedly to another character's statement, for when his bride-to-be, Lisette, who is to disguise herself as a widow as part of a plan to outdo Dorante, declares, 'Je contreferai la veuve comme si je l'étais', he has a ready reply: 'Tant pis; car on ne saurait bien contrefaire la veuve qu'on n'ait contrefait la femme mariée'.³⁶ While in the same author's Le Chevalier joueur, when Nérine, seeking to persuade the Comtesse to give Frontin money for his master, urges, 'Donnez-lui cent pistoles, je vous en conjure', Frontin responds with typically quick-witted humour: 'Encore une conjuration, car il me faut deux cents pistoles'.³⁷

But if the almost instantaneous production of apt remarks and retorts of a general nature constitutes the simplest manifestation of the servants' wit, a slightly more sophisticated manifestation of it is to be found in the way in which these agile-minded figures pick up specific expressions, and then re-use them in various laughter-provoking ways.

First, particularly in Regnard and Dufresny, the teasing servants delight in tossing back at their superiors - in circumstances in which they are most likely to cause embarrassment or annoyance - expressions which the latter have previously themselves used. Thus, in Regnard's Démocrite, the servant, Strabon, aware of the fact that Démocrite has a weakness for Criséis despite his professed contempt for all things temporal, addresses his master in terms which are virtually identical to those which the philosopher has previously used towards him when his interest in food and drink revealed a concern for worldly pleasures:

Va, fuis de devant moi; retire-toi, profane,
Puisque ton cœur est plein de sentiments si bas:
Assez d'autres, sans toi, suivront ailleurs mes pas.³⁸

Similarly, in Regnard's Le Distrait, when Léandre suggests to Lisette that she should modify her mistress's view of herself, the female

³⁵Sc.26.

³⁶Sc.7.

³⁷II,6.

³⁸I,4. In Démocrite's pronouncement, earlier in the same scene, 'ailleurs' is replaced by 'ici'.

servant throws back in his face, almost word-for-word, his earlier, critical assessment of her as an intriguer, and a bad influence on her mistress:

LEANDRE:

Lisette, tu devrais, dans le soin qui t'anime,
Lui faire prendre d'elle une plus juste estime:
Tu gouvernes son cœur.

LISETTE:

Oui, quelqu'un me l'a dit.
Cette Lisette-là lui tourne mal l'esprit;
C'est une babillarde, en intrigues habile,
Et qui pourrait montrer, en un besoin, en ville.³⁹

And in Regnard's Le Joueur, when Valère is in despair after ruining himself at the gambling table, Hector likewise throws his master's own words back at him, mischievously reminding him of his earlier assertion that in the hands of a gambler 'le cuivre devient or'.⁴⁰

Second, servants may quick-wittedly pick up expressions used earlier, not to throw them back in the teeth of their superiors, but as a short-hand method of recalling, or revivifying, an earlier joke or comic episode.

In Destouches's Le Triple Mariage, for instance, when Isabelle, telling Nérine of her relationship with Cléon, declares, 'Je tremble à t'avouer le reste', and Nérine replies, 'Oui! Oh! j'ai bien peur que vous ne vous soyez désaltérée en chemin',⁴¹ the effect of the servant's words is to recall her earlier comic 'proof',⁴² - based on the image of celibacy as a journey without refreshment on the way - that the virtuous are more eager than others to enter into matrimony, and to imply that Cléon and Isabelle may have been unable to resist the temptations of the flesh.

Similarly, in Dancourt's Les Curieux de Compiègne, when the bourgeois, Valentin, who on his visit to a military camp is subjected

³⁹III,9. Earlier in the scene the absent-minded Léandre, talking of Isabelle, has told Lisette (believing that he is speaking to Carlin): 'Cette Lisette-là lui tourne mal l'esprit;/C'est une babillarde, en intrigues habile,/Et qui, dans un besoin, pourrait montrer en ville'.

⁴⁰IV,13. Valère originally used the same expression in Act III scene 6.

⁴¹Sc.4.

⁴²Sc.2.

to all sorts of humiliations, admits that what has annoyed him most is the kick in the stomach which he received from a horse, the quick-witted Frontin comically replies, 'Ecoutez, ce cheval-là pourrait bien l'avoir fait exprès, lui; car il vous a vu au visage', thereby reminding the audience of Valentin's foolishness in maintaining, earlier in the same scene, that the rough treatment to which he is subjected is inadvertent, and that, in particular, the 'vingt coups de canne' which he received from an aide-major were all a mistake:

C'est une méprise, il l'a fait par mégarde, cet aide-major-là est un de mes amis, et qui me doit de l'argent même; il ne me voyait que par le dos quand il frappait, dès que j'ai retourné le visage, et qu'il m'a reconnu, il s'est mis à rire comme un fou; il n'était point du tout fâché contre moi.⁴³

While in Lesage's La Tontine, when Trousse-Galant, attempting to dissuade the disguised Crispin from executing Ambroise for desertion (since the success of his proposed tontine depends on the latter's longevity), offers to cure his asthma, the servant exclaims 'Il veut m'ôter ma pension',⁴⁴ thus wittily recalling an earlier episode⁴⁵ in which Trousse-Galant had himself teased Crispin by mischievously refusing him a cure for his supposed ailment because this would leave him with no grounds on which to claim a pension.

Third, in Dufresny in particular, but also to a noticeable extent in Dancourt, servants - especially the females - are inclined wittily to pick up phrases used by their interlocutors, re-using them immediately in an almost chiastic response to the other characters' statements.

Nérine in Dufresny's Le Chevalier joueur, for instance, is particularly fond of this approach, so that when Angélique, defending the Chevalier against the soubrette's accusation that despite all his promises he is still gambling, declares, 'On te l'a dit ainsi; mais tout le monde est prévenu contre lui', the servant is quick to come back with a witty 'C'est vous qui êtes prévenue contre tout le monde'.⁴⁶ And when the Comtesse, intrigued to know why Nérine wishes her to give

⁴³Sc.17.

⁴⁴Sc.25.

⁴⁵Sc.22.

⁴⁶I,3.

the Chevalier money, asks, 'Pourquoi veux-tu donc que je fournisse au jeu du chevalier, au lieu de le corriger d'un si grand défaut?', the servant begins her explanation with the words, 'C'est justement pour le corriger de son plus grand défaut que vous devez lui donner de l'argent'.⁴⁷ Moreover, the male servant in the same play shows a similar liking for witty ripostes of this kind, so that when Nérine expresses the hope that she will be able to cure her mistress of her infatuation with the Chevalier 'si je la puis rattraper dans quelque moment raisonnable', Frontin exclaims: 'Si mon maître la peut rattraper dans quelque moment déraisonnable!'.⁴⁸ Likewise, in Dufresny's La Réconciliation normande, when Angélique, exasperated by her servant's refusal to believe that the final obstacle to her love has now been overcome, exclaims, 'Nérine, ton défaut est de toujours douter', the soubrette replies: 'Jeune amante, le vôtre est de trop vous flatter'.⁴⁹ And in Dancourt's La Fête de village Lisette wittily matches her mistress's expression of surprise at her aunt's marriage plans - 'Ma tante est-elle devenue folle, de vouloir épouser Monsieur le Comte?' - with a parallel expression: 'Non, c'est Monsieur le Comte qui est devenu fou de vouloir épouser votre tante',⁵⁰ while in Angélique et Médor, also by Dancourt, when Isabelle observes that a 'bon génie' must have made her come downstairs, since she has, as a result, encountered her lover, Lisette cleverly picks up the term, using it to allude to the imminent arrival of the elderly Guillemain, whose unwelcome attentions Lisette and her mistress are trying to avoid:

Je ne sais si c'est un bon génie qui vous y a conduit, mais je crains bien que quelque mauvais génie ne vous y vienne trouver.⁵¹

But it is not simply in their use of the straightforward bon mot and in their picking up of specific expressions that the servants reveal their wit, for their abilities in this direction also emerge from the way in which they can quickly and cleverly counter their superiors' expressions of romantic or elevated sentiments with deflating remarks which not only serve to generate laughter, but also - and this is

⁴⁷II,7.

⁴⁸I,1.

⁴⁹I,2.

⁵⁰I,10.

⁵¹Sc.2.

important in a comedy - prevent the audience from taking the troubles of the young lovers too seriously.

In Regnard's Le Joueur, for instance, when Valère, lamenting his gambling losses, talks melodramatically of committing suicide, Hector observes with witty pragmatism that, ruined as he is, he could not even afford the wherewithal to implement his plan - and then turns to more important considerations, such as the next meal:

Heureusement pour vous, vous n'avez pas un sou
Dont vous puissiez, monsieur, acheter un licou.
Voudriez-vous souper?⁵²

And in Les Ménechmes, also by Regnard, when the Chevalier bewails the loss of Isabelle's love letters, Valentin is similarly unimpressed, and, with a complete lack of romanticism, mischievously offers him his twin brother's collection of billets doux:

Tenez, en voilà d'autres
Qui vous consoleront d'avoir perdu les vôtres.⁵³

Likewise, when Dorante and Angélique fall out with each other in Dufresny's Le Négligent, Fanchon has little time for Dorante's expression of romantic despair, wittily responding to it with more down-to-earth considerations:

DORANTE:
Je suis au désespoir, Fanchon.
FANCHON:
Allez-vous désespérer là-dedans, la tante va revenir.⁵⁴

And when Angélique in Lesage's Crispin rival, convinced that she will never be united with her true love, Valère, similarly despairs, exclaiming, 'Hélas! que vais-je devenir?', the female servant, Lisette, initially responds with a wittily unsympathetic: 'Vous allez devenir femme de Monsieur Damis, cela n'est pas difficile à deviner',⁵⁵ while in Dancourt's Les Fonds perdus, when Valère laments the fact that his father intends to marry the girl whom he loves while he himself is pursued by the latter's mother, his servant, Merlin, far from showing sympathy (although he does have in mind a plan which will remedy the situation), wittily draws attention to the unusual web of relationships

⁵²IV,13.

⁵³I,2.

⁵⁴I,11.

⁵⁵Sc.11.

which could result from this situation:

Ne serez-vous pas bien aise de devenir le beau-père de monsieur votre père? Je ne trouve rien de plus drôle que cela, moi.⁵⁶

Finally there is yet one more major way in which the servants - especially the male servants in Destouches and Dancourt - exercise their wit, and that is by using their agile minds to produce highly ingenious, though often patently spurious, arguments. Episodes of this kind bear a certain resemblance both to those in which ingenious arguments are produced by servants in their efforts to extricate themselves from awkward situations,⁵⁷ and (albeit less so) to those in which servants overact by making ridiculous statements;⁵⁸ but in fact they differ from the former in that they appear to be spontaneous, rather than forced upon the servant by circumstances, while they differ from the latter in that they are more cerebral, consisting, as they do, not simply of improbable statements, but of statements which have at least a semblance of logic about them. For instance, in Dancourt's L'Opéra de village, when Martine expresses to La Flèche the fear that if she and her cousin go to meet his master (who has designs on the cousin) they may both be carried off, the servant jokes that in the event of that happening he would himself save her honour by marrying her; and, when she declares that she has no intention of marrying a mere valet de chambre, he asserts that, far from marrying a simple servant, she would be wedding his master's cousin, proving his contention with the following witty argument:

Si Clitandre épouse votre cousine, vous deviendrez la cousine de Clitandre.... Et si je vous épouse, ne serai-je pas aussi leur cousin, moi? Il n'y a rien de plus clair, nous serons tous cousins et cousines.⁵⁹

Moreover, whereas both overacting and the production of arguments in situations of difficulty are not intended to arouse the suspicions of

⁵⁶I,2.

⁵⁷Compare, for example, the clever arguments deployed by Merlin in Regnard's Le Retour imprévu when his master's father makes an unwelcome return; the episode is discussed above, pp.32-5.

⁵⁸Examples of overacting - including the outrageous claims made by Crispin in Regnard's Le Légataire universel when disguised as Géronte's niece - are cited above, pp.119-21.

⁵⁹Sc.10.

those with whom the servants are dealing (for although, in overacting, the servants may go beyond plausibility, they do so secure in the knowledge that their foolish adversaries will be taken in by the impossible: that, indeed, is largely what makes overacting so amusing),⁶⁰ spurious reasoning is intended to be seen by the servants' interlocutors for what it is, with the result that when the servants address characters whose social status is superior to their own, there is added to the comedy of the pseudo-rational arguments themselves the pleasure of witnessing servants being openly cheeky towards those who would normally expect to command.⁶¹ Such, for instance, is the case in Destouches's Le Triple Mariage, in a scene in which the elderly and unattractive Comtesse learns that Valère, with whom she is infatuated, and whom she has been financing, does not love her. For Pasquin, Valère's servant, adds insult to injury by wittily arguing that it is all her fault, not only because the nobility of her features inspire esteem and respect, which, he asserts, are incompatible with love, but - more ridiculously - because she allowed herself to be born ahead of his master:

Vous avez tort d'être venue au monde une vingtaine d'années avant lui. Pourquoi diable vous pressiez-vous si fort? Puisque vous deviez l'aimer avec tant de tendresse, il fallait prendre si bien vos mesures, qu'il vînt au monde cinq ou six ans avant vous.⁶²

⁶⁰This aspect of scenes involving overacting is discussed above, pp.295-6.

⁶¹In this respect, the laughter generated is similar to that which occurs on those occasions discussed above (pp.275-9) when servants who prefer to assert themselves over their masters by direct means openly outwit or outmanœuvre their superiors.

⁶²Sc.14.

Chapter 3

LINGUISTIC COMEDY

(a) Linguistic Incongruities

We have already seen that when servants assert themselves over their nominal superiors the resultant sense of incongruity or disconvenance is a major source of laughter;¹ but it is not only when servants play the dominance game that incongruity has a part to play in the creation of comedy, for the laughter which they generate by their use of language is often largely - although by no means exclusively - dependent upon their incongruous choice of words.

Elevation of language.

Servants, for example, frequently go out of their way to describe perfectly mundane, or even slightly disreputable, situations not in a colloquial manner, but using a circumlocutory style in which common, forthright terms are replaced by more elevated turns of phrase.² Yet although this deliberate aping of the language of their superiors - for there is no suggestion that in making spurious use of elevated forms of speech they are only subconsciously imitating their masters - can amount to parody and comic criticism,³ the laughter-provoking effect of such behaviour is primarily attributable to the unexpected disparity between the language used and the nature of the situations or activities referred to. Such,

¹The sense of incongruity created by the reversal of normal patterns of dominance is discussed above, pp.265-87.

²Queenie S. Muntz, in her thesis, 'The Works of J. F. Regnard with Special Reference to their Social and Dramatic Aspects', alludes to this technique when she notes that, in Regnard, 'complicated and pedantic sentences are almost unfailingly uttered by valets and soubrettes', and observes that the servants 'often use far-fetched comparisons and metaphors, and indulge, after the literary fashion of the time, in mythological allusions, pedantic expressions and subtle "pointes" instead of expressing themselves in simple and straightforward words'. She fails, however, to recognise this as a deliberate comic device, rather than bad style (p.563).

³It should be noted that while the servants may poke fun at their masters by imitating their language, the masters, for their part, do not normally imitate the language of the servants.

for instance, is the case in Lesage's La Tontine when, as we have already seen, Frosine responds to the slow-witted Ambroise's complaints about the stringent diet which is being imposed on him by observing: 'Il est constant que la frugalité règne dans tes repas'.⁴ And a similar discrepancy between words and deeds is to be found in Regnard's Le Bal, where Lisette talks of the demise of her drunken husband, and her consequent resolution not to re-marry, in terms which seem comically out of keeping with the sordid domestic situation which they describe:

Depuis que mon mari, par grâce singulière,
D'un surtout de sapin, que l'on appelle bière,
Dont on sort rarement, a voulu se munir,
J'ai fait vœud d'être veuve, et je le veux tenir.⁵

Moreover, it is a particular practice of the servants frequently to elevate their utterances by using classical allusions, or by referring to the concepts of classical mythology. Thus, when Eraste, in Regnard's Le Légataire universel, comments on the mixed feelings which the prospect of his uncle's imminent death engenders in him, Crispin, observing that the death of his wife had given rise to similar emotions, declares:

Je sentis autrefois les mêmes mouvements,
Quand ma femme passa les rives du Cocyte,
Pour aller en bateau rendre aux défunts visite.⁶

And similarly, in Regnard's Les Ménechmes, Valentin, referring to the death of his master's uncle, explains that the latter 'a bien voulu descendre aux ténébreux manoirs',⁷ while in Destouches's L'Obstacle imprévu Crispin, recounting how his master dispatched a relative of a crooked former associate, declares: 'Mon maître l'envoya dans l'autre monde, pour savoir si son parent ne s'y était point caché'.⁸

But although, when servants express themselves in elevated tones (as in the examples cited above), the major source of comedy is the contrast between language and deed, this is to some extent

⁴Sc.8.

⁵Sc.4.

⁶I,2.

⁷IV,2.

⁸III,6.

supplemented by yet another comic incongruity, namely, that created by the disparity between the superficial elevation of the words used and the humble status of the servants who utter them. Indeed, when the circumstances referred to by the servants reveal them to be not only characters of humble status but also rascals - or where they are already established as such - this social incongruity may even become the major source of laughter.

Such, for instance, is the case in Regnard's La Sérénade, when Champagne, whose questionable activities have resulted in the issuing of a lettre de cachet, refers to the penalties imposed by the latter, declaring that 'elle me prescrivait un temps pour voyager'.⁹ And in Lesage's Crispin rival there occurs a similar situation when the rascally La Branche, talking of the likely consequences of his doubtful activities, admits: 'On m'a voulu donner de l'occupation sur mer'.¹⁰ While in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses Crispin similarly alludes in less than forthright terms to an earlier incident which had threatened to bring him into conflict with the law:

Le prévôt s'en mêlait; c'est pourquoi mes amis
Me conseillèrent tous de quitter le pays.¹¹

Undoubtedly the most extreme episode of this kind is to be found not in Les Folies amoureuses, however, but in another of Regnard's plays, namely, Le Bal, where Merlin, chiding both a wine-seller and a rôtisseur for their deceitful tricks, invokes the heavens in the following terms:

De l'or et des grandeurs, je n'en demande pas:
Juste ciel, seulement fais qu'avant mon trépas
Je puisse de mes yeux voir trois de ces corsaires,
Ornant superbement trois bois patibulaires,
Pour prix de leurs larcins, en public élevés,
Danser la sarabande à deux pieds des pavés.¹²

For what is so comical about his utterance is not simply the use of terms like 'trépas' and 'trois bois patibulaires' to say something which any outraged individual might express in a more straightforward

⁹Sc.13.

¹⁰Sc.3.

¹¹I,5.

¹²Sc.2.

- and brief - manner, but the fact that the audience knows that the character employing such elevated terms is not only a servant but a scoundrel, who, in the very act of expressing such self-righteous indignation, is himself duping those whom he condemns, since by behaving in a high-handed manner, and encouraging the tradesmen in their mistaken belief that he is the majordomo of the house to which they are making delivery, Merlin is gradually putting himself in a position from which he can, with an air of legitimacy, confiscate their goods.¹³

Jargon.

If the use of an elevated and circumlocutory style of speech is one way in which servants provoke laughter largely through the creation of a sense of linguistic incongruity, another way in which they produce similar effects - particularly in Regnard, but also to a noticeable extent in Destouches - is by having frequent recourse to what might broadly be termed 'jargon': that is, either the specialised terminologies of the learned professions, or Latin phrases.

As in the case of elevated language, the laughter produced by the servants' use of jargon is by no means solely attributable to a sense of linguistic incongruity, for in consciously employing terms normally associated with those of higher social status the servants may be seen as deliberately poking fun at, and parodying in a general way (for they do not imitate specific characters), their superiors. Moreover, when the use of jargon amounts to the adoption, by the servant, of a linguistic disguise as part of a plan to further his schemes, the nature of the resultant comedy is to some extent similar to that caused by other methods of creating a new persona - such as physical disguise - and may be seen as arising from the differing levels of awareness of, on the one hand, the audience, which knows the servant's true identity, and, on the other, the figure or figures who are deceived by his act.¹⁴ Such is the case, for instance, in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses, where Crispin, who has led Albert to believe

¹³The episode is also discussed above, pp.36-7.

¹⁴The comedy of discrepant awareness is considered above, pp.287-95.

that he is capable of curing Agathe of her supposed madness, reinforces his deception by responding to the old man's expressions of impatience with a reply in which medical terms and allusions abound:

J'ai depuis peu de temps pourtant bien fait des choses,
Pour savoir si le mal, dont nous cherchons les causes,
Réside dans la basse ou haute région:
Hippocrate dit oui, mais Galien dit non.¹⁵

However, on most occasions when the servants resort to jargon - especially when it is used openly, in a spirit of fun, and without any pretence that it constitutes part of a disguise -, it is the resultant sense of incongruity which is the major source of laughter.

First, when socially humble servants employ learned (or pseudo-learned) expressions which might normally be used by their superiors, the disparity between the nature of the language used and the kind of person uttering the words creates a sense of comic incongruity akin to that observed when lowly servants express themselves in elevated turns of phrase. This is the case even when the servants' use of jargon is limited to a scattering of Latin words, as it is in Regnard's Le Bal, where Merlin gives the following intimation of his intentions towards Lisette:

Et moi, je te promets que, si, dans cette affaire,
Mon maître, plus heureux, épouse incognito,
Je pourrai t'épouser de même ex abrupto.¹⁶

But when the servants' use of jargon is more extensive, as in Regnard's Le Légataire universel, where Crispin, explaining to Lisette the arguments for taking action to ensure that Eraste becomes his uncle's sole heir, expresses himself like a lawyer putting his case in a court of law, the incongruity is more obvious. These are Crispin's concluding words:

Ainsi tant de raisons sont autant de moyens
Que j'emploie à prouver qu'il est très nécessaire
Que le susdit neveu soit nommé légataire;

¹⁵III,7.

¹⁶Sc.4. B. Griffiths, in his thesis, 'The Style and Technique of J.-Fr. Regnard's Comedies', p.393, also stresses the incongruity of servants using such terminology, observing: 'Regnard often uses Latin words in a rhyme, especially in the mouths of the valets where it sounds most incongruous'. Dorothy Moser Medlin, in The Verbal Art of Jean-François Regnard, p.58, likewise discusses this and similar uses of Latin by Regnard's valets.

Et je conclus enfin qu'il faut conjointement
Agir pour arriver au susdit testament.¹⁷

Second, in conjunction with the comic contrast between language and speaker, and sometimes even overshadowing it (as was frequently the case when the servants expressed themselves in elevated tones), there is the delightful mis-match of language and deed, where trivial or disreputable situations are talked of with the formality of professional terminologies. For instance, in Regnard's Le Joueur, there is a gloriously comic episode in which Hector lists his master's debts - many of which have arisen from patently frivolous, not to say immoral, behaviour - in pseudo-legal terminology:

Plus, il doit à maints particuliers,
Ou quidams, dont les noms, qualités et métiers
Sont décrits plus au long avecque les parties
Es assignations, dont je tiens les copies,
Dont tous lesdits quidams, ou du moins peu s'en faut,
Ont obtenu déjà sentence par défaut,
La somme de dix mille une livre, une obole,
Pour l'avoir, sans relâche, un an, sur sa parole,
Habillé, voituré, coiffé, chaussé, ganté,
Alimenté, rasé, désaltéré, porté.¹⁸

And in Destouches's L'Irrésolu a similar sense of linguistic incongruity is created when Frontin uses the language of a lawyer to enumerate nothing more momentous than his indecisive master's recent changes of mind:

Plus, s'étant habillé, mondit maître, trop sage,
A blasphémé vingt fois contre le mariage.
Item, il est sorti, disant que son retour
Ne serait, au plus tôt, que vers la fin du jour;
Mais, un quart d'heure après, est rentré pour me dire
Qu'il s'allait marier; ce qui m'a fait bien rire.
Item, le susdit maître, en ce susdit moment,
Dit au susdit Frontin, que craignant prudemment
Pour son front délicat quelque sensible outrage,
Ou d'une prude au moins l'humeur fière et sauvage,
Il renonce à jamais au lien conjugal.¹⁹

While in the same author's Le Médisant the female servant, Lisette, faced with the petty squabbles between the Baron and his wife over the

¹⁷I,1.

¹⁸III,4. That the language is only an imitation of legal terminology is shown by the comic contrast between the legal precision of 'tous lesdits quidams' and the everyday imprecision of 'ou du moins peu s'en faut'.

¹⁹I,7.

most suitable husband for Marianne, and invited by them to act as arbiter, takes obvious delight in giving her verdict in the language of a judge:

Tout bien considéré, Monsieur, pour cette fois,
Faisant céder Madame, usera de ses droits;
Et Marianne ainsi doit avoir la licence
De choisir ou le bien, ou la haute naissance;
Mais pour dédommager Madame avec honneur,
Du chagrin d'obéir une fois à Monsieur,
Déclarons que Madame, en toute autre matière,
Pourra le contredire et lui rompre en visière,
Pour maintenir les droits des femmes de ce temps.
Le cas ainsi jugé, hors de cour sans dépens.²⁰

Euphemistic circumlocution.

When servants speak either in elevated language or in jargon, they do in fact say what they mean, although they may express themselves in terms which are not normally associated with characters of their humble status: in other words, if they do not necessarily call a spade a spade, they at least refer to it as an implement for turning the soil. But there are times when servants - especially those in Lesage and Regnard - favour a form of euphemistic circumlocution in which the true, disreputable, meaning of what they are saying is conveyed only by innuendo, since the literal sense of their words is not consistent with what the audience knows of their behaviour and attitudes. As Lawrenson puts it in his introduction to Crispin rival, the servants 'wrap up their villainies in the mundane suavities of polite speech'.²¹ However, although this practice is quite distinct from the use either of elevated language or jargon (as indeed it is from double meaning of the type already discussed, to which it also bears some resemblance),²² its comic effect is similar, insofar as it too is attributable to the creation of a sense of linguistic incongruity, for it is the discrepancy between the polite

²⁰I,2.

²¹Lesage, Crispin rival de son maître, edited by T. E. Lawrenson, p.15.

²²The servants' use of double meaning is discussed above, pp.303-6. The principal difference is that whereas phrases involving double meaning can have two distinct and opposite literal interpretations, phrases involving euphemistic circumlocution have only one obvious literal meaning.

respectability of the terms used and the disreputable nature both of the servants pronouncing them and of the deeds to which the audience justifiably suspects they allude which is the major cause of laughter.

For instance, in Lesage's Crispin rival, when the rascally La Branche describes the offence for which he was threatened with the galleys, he does so in incongruously innocent terms: 'Une nuit', he tells Crispin, 'je m'avisai d'arrêter dans une rue détournée un marchand étranger pour lui demander par curiosité des nouvelles de son pays'.²³ And in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses Crispin, talking of a bogged-down coach which he encountered, relates how he relieved it of its luggage - an incident which was to attract the unwelcome attention of the local prévôt - in euphemistic terms whose superficial innocence is comically at variance with the true, disreputable, nature of the episode:

En homme secourable aussitôt je m'approche;
Et, pour le soulager du poids qui l'arrêtait,
J'ôtai du magasin les paquets qu'il portait.²⁴

Likewise, in Lesage's Crispin rival, Crispin alludes to suspect behaviour in incongruously proper language when he talks of the 'petite expédition' on which he has been with a friend in order to 'lever un droit qu'il s'est acquis sur les gens de province par sa manière de jouer',²⁵ and in the same author's Turcaret, Frontin, in a conversation with the Baronne, makes a statement about Lisette which is undoubtedly less innocent than it appears on the surface: 'Elle est sous ma tutelle: j'ai l'administration de ses gages et de ses profits, et j'ai soin de lui fournir tous ses petits besoins'.²⁶ While in Regnard's Le Légataire universel Crispin similarly alludes to shady deeds in language of the utmost propriety, when, referring to the procureur whose clerk he once was, he comments:

Sa femme était jolie; et, dans quelques affaires,
Nous jugions à huis clos de petits commissaires.²⁷

²³Sc.3.

²⁴I,5. The episode is also discussed - and cited at greater length - above, p.121.

²⁵Sc.1.

²⁶II,1.

²⁷I,1.

Antiphrasis.

Yet another linguistic practice which creates laughter through a sense of incongruity - and one which is much favoured by the male servants (especially the tricksters) in all five authors - is the use of a form of antiphrasis in which matters of some considerable importance are alluded to as if they are of little consequence. For, at its simplest, such understatement is comic because of the discrepancy between the servants' dismissive reference to the events in question and - even to judge by the servants' subsequent description of them - their very real importance.

In Lesage's Crispin rival, for instance, La Branche assures Crispin that Damis will not marry Angélique because of 'une petite difficulté',²⁸ - the nature of the difficulty being, as it subsequently transpires, that Damis is already married! And in Dancourt's Renaud et Armide Lisette refers to another 'petite difficulté' which may stand in the way of the young heroine's marriage, namely, the fact that her lover's whereabouts are unknown;²⁹ while, as we have seen, Scapin, teasing Valère in Regnard's La Sérénade, insists that he has been unable to learn from Marine why it is that Léonor wishes their relationship to end - and then reveals that he has been given a 'petite lettre' which may reveal all!³⁰

However, although the discrepancy between the servants' dismissive references to events and the latter's real importance is probably the major source of laughter on occasions when antiphrasis is resorted to, it must be noted that when the actions or activities referred to are the servants' own there are additional comic overtones. For when, in Lesage's Crispin rival, Crispin describes his expedition with a friend to 'lever un droit qu'il s'est acquis sur les gens de province par sa manière de jouer' as a 'petite expédition',³¹ or when, in Destouches's L'Obstacle imprévu, Crispin talks of his knowledge of 'de petits jeux de main tout innocents, qui ont la vertu de faire puiser dans le bien d'autrui, comme si vous puisiez dans le vôtre',³²

²⁸Sc.3.

²⁹Sc.9.

³⁰Sc.5. The episode is discussed above, pp.116-17.

³¹Sc.1.

³²III,6.

or when, in Dancourt's Les Fonds perdus, Merlin, referring to Mme Géronte, talks of 'une petite entreprise utile et nécessaire pour tirer de la bonne dame certains deux mille écus qu'elle a reçus depuis peu, et qui seront beaucoup mieux dans nos coffres que dans les siens',³³ there is the suggestion that the rascally servant, by being casually dismissive of what are clearly major confidence tricks, is trying to raise himself in other people's esteem by emphasising the ease with which he can undertake difficult tasks while, paradoxically, seeking delicately to minimise his involvement in morally questionable enterprises.

Parody.

Finally, before concluding our consideration of the main ways in which servants generate laughter by the creation of a sense of linguistic incongruity, we must turn to their use of parody, because it is partly the incongruousness of parody which makes it comical.

Parody, it must be recognised, can take a number of forms, and in one sense the deliberate use, in inappropriate circumstances, of any established pattern of speech can be considered a form of parody, so that aspects of the servants' language which we have already examined in other contexts - principally their imitation of the elevated tones of their superiors,³⁴ their uncalled-for use of jargon,³⁵ and their tendency to re-use or mimic expressions previously uttered by other characters³⁶ - can be seen as parodic. It is, however, more common to apply the term to situations in which either a particular literary style, or specific lines from well-known works of literature, are mimicked or used out of context, and it is on such literary parody that the remainder of this section will focus.

³³I, 1.

³⁴The servants' use of elevated language is discussed above, pp.320-3.

³⁵For discussion of the servants' use of specialised terminologies, see above, pp.323-6.

³⁶The servants' practice of wittily tossing back at their superiors specific expressions previously used by the latter is examined above, pp.313-14.

Of the authors under consideration, most make virtually no use of literary parody. But there are two exceptions to this: Dancourt, who in his early plays occasionally parodies opera, and, above all, Regnard, whose extensive and enthusiastic use of parody has attracted the attention of many students of his work. As a result, his employment of the device has been well documented by critics seeking both to pinpoint episodes involving parody and to explain the particular pleasure which audiences of his time derived from them - pleasure which, it is suggested, arose not only from the fun of identifying recognisable passages from earlier dramatic writers, but, in no small measure, from the sense of incongruity generated by the use in a comic context of lines from a tragic setting.³⁷ However, what such critics have failed to stress is that of the episodes of parody which they discuss a high proportion - although by no means the majority - involve servant figures, and that, depending on the particular kind of literary parody employed, this may add to the comic effect.

Sometimes, it must be acknowledged, the overall comedy of an episode is affected hardly at all by the fact that it is a servant who is speaking. This is particularly so in those cases where the parody consists simply of the use of lines - or adaptations of them - from well-known comedies, since this kind of parody relies for its impact almost exclusively on the pleasure which the audience derives from recognising familiar phrases, and incongruity is of less than major importance, partly because the lines were originally used in a lighthearted situation. In Regnard's Le Légataire universel, for instance, it is not of enormous importance that it is a servant speaking when Tartuffe's 'C'est à vous d'en sortir, vous qui parlez en maître:/ La maison m'appartient, je le ferai connaître',³⁸ is echoed by Crispin, as, disguised as Géronte's nephew, he informs the old man:

³⁷For the discussion of parody in Regnard, see Alexandre Calame, Regnard: sa vie et son œuvre, p.302; B. Griffiths, 'The Style and Technique of J.-F. Regnard's Comedies', pp.360-6; H. C. Lancaster, Sunset: a History of Parisian Drama in the Last Years of Louis XIV 1701-1715, pp.226-7; Dorothy Moser Medlin, The Verbal Art of Jean-François Regnard, pp.95-104; Queenie S. Muntz, 'The Works of J. F. Regnard with Special Reference to their Social and Dramatic Aspects', pp.566-8; and Francisque Sarcey, Quarante ans de théâtre, II, 247-8 (where Théodore Reinach's criticism of plagiarism in Regnard's Le Légataire universel is cited).

³⁸Molière, Tartuffe, IV,7.

C'est à vous de sortir, et de passer la porte.
La maison m'appartient.³⁹

Indeed, in many instances of this sort, the lines which the servants parody were in any case uttered by servants in their original context. Such is the case, for example, when Crispin in Le Légataire universel, again addressing Géronte, declares:

Je sais que, pour un sou, d'une ardeur héroïque,
Vous vous feriez fesser dans la place publique.⁴⁰

For these lines are a clear imitation of those spoken by another servant, Mascarille, who, in Molière's L'Etourdi, says of Trufaldin that 'il se ferait fesser pour moins d'un quart d'écu'.⁴¹

But in a second form of literary parody sometimes favoured by Regnard, one in which the general style of tragedy is imitated, incongruity has a much larger part to play in the creation of laughter, and while the major incongruity is simply that caused by the transposition of the patterns of speech of tragedy into a comic setting, in those cases where the language of tragedy is pronounced by humble or disreputable servant figures, a supplementary sense of comic incongruity is created by the contrast between the nature of the words spoken and the status of the characters uttering them.

Thus, in the passage in Le Distrait in which Carlin describes his attempts to finish off his master's uncle in measured tones clearly intended to mimic those of tragedy, it is not only the contrast between the noble language and the context in which it is used that is comical, but the disparity between the superficial nobility of the language and the cheeky ragamuffin of a servant who speaks:

Par trois fois de ma main il a pris l'émétique;
Et je n'en donnais pas une dose modique.
J'y mettais double charge, afin que par mes soins
Le pauvre agonisant en languît un peu moins:
Mais par trois fois le sort, injuste, inexorable,
N'a point donné les mains à ce soin charitable.⁴²

³⁹III,2.

⁴⁰III,2.

⁴¹I,2.

⁴²II,1. The episode is also discussed - and cited more extensively - above, p.129.

Likewise, in Le Légataire universel, when Crispin, disguised as Géronte's niece, casts himself in the role of a faithful tragic heroine and reveals his supposed history in a passage which, as Medlin has observed, contains echoes of Racinian vocabulary and verse structure,⁴³ what generates laughter is not simply the fact that such high-flown language should be used in a non-tragic situation, but that it should be pronounced by, of all figures, a mischievous servant:

J'ai fait du mariage une assez triste épreuve;
A vingt ans mon mari m'a laissée mère et veuve....
Mais d'un veuvage affreux les tristes insomnies
Ne m'arracheront point de noires perfidies;
Et je veux chez les morts emporter, si je peux,
Un cœur qui ne brûla que de ses premiers feux.⁴⁴

And in Démocrite, when Cléanthis, in a parody of the 'confidente' scenes of tragedy, laboriously describes past events to her mistress in the following, formal, terms, the audience's knowledge that it is a humble comic soubrette speaking - and not, despite the courtly setting, a figure from tragedy - again adds to the laughter-provoking incongruousness of the occasion.

Ecoutez-moi. La reine, votre mère,
Abandonnant Argos, où mourut votre père,
Par un second hymen épousa le feu roi
Qui régnait en ces lieux, mais avec cette loi,
Que, si d'aucun enfant il ne devenait père,
Du trône athénien vous seriez l'héritière,
Et que son successeur deviendrait votre époux.
La reine eut une fille; et, l'aimant moins que vous,
Elle trouva moyen de changer cette fille,
Et de mettre un enfant, pris d'une autre famille,
De même âge à peu près, mais moribond, malsain,
Et qui mourut aussi, je crois, le lendemain.
Moi, j'allai cependant, sans tarder davantage,
Porter nourrir l'enfant dans un lointain village.
Un pauvre paysan, que l'or sut engager,
De ce fardeau pour moi voulut bien se charger.
Je lui dis que de moi l'enfant tenait naissance,
Qu'il devait avec soin élever son enfance;
Je lui cachai toujours son nom et son pays:
Le pâtre crut enfin tout ce que je lui dis.
Quinze ans se sont passés depuis cette aventure.
Votre mère a payé les droits à la nature;

⁴³Dorothy Moser Medlin, The Verbal Art of Jean-François Regnard, p.103.

⁴⁴III,8.

Et depuis ce long temps aucun mortel, je crois,
N'a pu de cette fille avoir ni vent ni voix.⁴⁵

It is, however, in a third form of literary parody, that in which specific lines from actual tragedies - and not merely the general style of non-comic works - are imitated, that the participation of servants can have the greatest comic impact; for while, on such occasions, the audience may derive some pleasure both from its ability to recognise familiar lines from tragic compositions and from the incongruous way in which these lines have been modified to fit an essentially lighthearted context, the fact that the lines are now spoken by servants who are frequently the complete antithesis of the more elevated or noble figures who first uttered them (and who would not necessarily be familiar with the plays whose lines they adopt)⁴⁶ can add considerably to the sense of comic incongruity.

In Dancourt's early comedies there are a number of instances of servants uttering lines from tragic operas, yet these do not illustrate this form of literary parody at its best, not only because the fact that other works are being cited is usually made clear - thus depriving the audience of the pleasure of detecting and identifying the quotations -, but also because characters other than servants often participate (since the rehearsal of opera scenes may form part of a general plan to promote the interests of the young lovers of the comedy), thereby to some extent drawing attention away from the incongruity of the servants giving voice to sentences originally uttered by more elevated figures. Moreover, when Dancourt's servants use lines from another source they usually adopt them with little or

⁴⁵II,1. That the whole episode is intended to be seen as a parody of the sometimes artificial expository scenes of tragedy is underlined by Ismène's reaction to her servant's narration, for after patiently listening to her tale she declares: 'Je sais depuis longtemps ce que tu viens de dire;/Ta bouche avait déjà pris soin de m'en instruire'.

⁴⁶The possibility that the servants would have known the plays which they parody is not, however, to be excluded. Indeed, when John Lough, in his Paris Theatre Audiences in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, discusses the composition of audiences in the seventeenth century, he remarks that throughout the entire period there were 'relatively frequent allusions in contemporary documents to the presence among the spectators of such low-born fellows as lackeys' (p.75). He does, however, go on to observe that in the early years of the eighteenth century (probably before 1716) servants in livery were banned from the Comédie-Française (pp.77-8).

no modification, and so reduce their laughter-provoking potential, since part of the comic effect of parody comes from the surprise which the audience feels when familiar lines are subtly and unexpectedly changed to fit a new situation. Thus, in Renaud et Armide, when L'Olive deals with the unwelcome presence of Grognaç and Filassier by addressing them in terms taken almost verbatim from the opening scene of Act IV of Quinault's Armide ('Laissez-nous un libre passage,/Monstres, allez cacher votre inutile rage/Dans l'abîme profond dont vous êtes sortis'),⁴⁷ and by threatening them with a piece of broken chair in mock imitation of the golden sceptre of the original work, he does so only after declaring his intentions to Lisette: 'Attends, attends, je vais faire Ubalde et le chevalier danois'.⁴⁸ And in Angélique et Médor it is in the context of a general plan to have Eraste and Isabelle elope while pretending to enact a scene from Quinault's Roland that the servants, Merlin and Lisette, announce the young lovers' departure using lines taken directly from Act IV scene 5 of that opera:

MERLIN chante:

J'ai vu partir du port cette reine si belle.

LISETTE:

Angélique est partie?

MERLIN chante:

Et Médor avec elle.⁴⁹

But in Regnard the situation is very different, and it is in his plays that the comic potential of this kind of literary parody is exploited to the full, for when he introduces into his plays sentences which parody specific lines from tragedy he does so without prior warning, and at irregular intervals, leaving it entirely to the audience to detect their presence. What is more, he tends slightly to modify the chosen sentences so that they appear in his comedies as subtle imitations of the original expressions, and not merely as direct copies of them. And, most important of all, he almost invariably assigns to servants phrases originally used by much more exalted figures (which is not always the case in Dancourt: Merlin's words in Angélique et Médor, cited above, were originally spoken by the shepherd, Tersandre, in Roland). Thus, Phèdre's

⁴⁷Sc.16. All references to Quinault are to the Paris, 1715 edition of his works.

⁴⁸Sc.15.

⁴⁹Sc.20.

'En vain vous espérez qu'un Dieu vous le renvoie,/Et l'avare Achéron ne lâche point sa proie',⁵⁰ becomes 'Voilà donc le défunt que le sort nous renvoie!/Et l'avare Achéron lâche encore sa proie!' in the mouth of Crispin, when, in Le Légataire universel, G ronte returns from the dead to confound the servant's plans.⁵¹ Likewise, when the same Crispin, perspiring after the nerve-racking episode in which he has dictated a will in the guise of G ronte, seeks to explain his condition to the lawyers whom he has duped by exclaiming 'Qu'un testament   faire est un pesant fardeau!',⁵² his words echo Ph dre's 'Le crime d'une m re est un pesant fardeau',⁵³ while when Lisette, earlier in Le L gataire universel, expresses her contentment at the fact that Eraste's hopes of obtaining a significant inheritance from his uncle seem about to be fulfilled (since the latter has resolved to abandon all thought of marriage), by declaring 'Nos affaires vont prendre une face nouvelle,/Et la fortune enfin nous rit et nous appelle',⁵⁴ she echoes Oreste's 'Ma fortune va prendre une face nouvelle', from the opening scene of Andromaque.

(b) Graphic Descriptions and Images

In all five authors, but most of all in Regnard, a significant contribution to comedy is made by servants (particularly the more outspoken soubrettes) who engage in graphic description of an extreme kind. For by talking in terms of precise - and frequently unrealistically exaggerated - physical detail, where more abstract terminology would normally be used, these figures are able to conjure up in the minds of the audience vivid cartoon-like mental pictures of the situations to which they allude.

⁵⁰Racine, Ph dre, II,5. All references to Racine are to the Pl iade edition of his works.

⁵¹IV,8.

⁵²IV,6.

⁵³III,3.

⁵⁴II,7.

One finds, for instance, that when Finette, in Regnard's Les Ménechmes, warns Ménechme never to visit her or her mistress again, she describes in picturesque terms the events which might ensue were he to ignore her advice:

Mais, ma foi, si jamais chez nous vous revenez,
Je vous fais de la porte un masque sur le nez.⁵⁵

Similarly, in the same author's Les Folies amoureuses, Lisette gives a colourful account of an incident in which she tripped up her young mistress's tiresome guardian, Albert, by tying a rope across the head of a staircase:

Ses deux jambes à faux dans la corde arrêtées
Lui font avec le nez mesurer les montées.⁵⁶

And likewise, in Dufresny's La Joueuse, Lisette gives an extraordinarily graphic description of the disgusting table manners of the gamblers with whom her mistress associates:

On prend du sel avec le coin d'une carte, et on voit courir
à la ronde un chapon en l'air; chacun en arrache son lopin,
comme quand on tire l'oie: celui-ci boit d'une main, et joue
de l'autre; l'un avale en gémissant, l'autre mâche en jurant;
celui-ci mange les cartes avec son pain; et l'autre avale sa
rage avec un verre de vin.⁵⁷

While in Regnard's Les Ménechmes, when Ménechme, furious at Coquelet (who, mistaking him for his twin brother, has demanded that he settle certain of the latter's debts), exclaims 'Laissez-moi lui couper le nez', the male servant, Valentin, wittily replies 'Laissez-le aller:/ Que feriez-vous, monsieur, du nez d'un marguillier?',⁵⁸ thereby ensuring that the audience, rather than dwelling on the figurative nature of his master's remark, pictures in its mind's eye the ridiculous consequences of a literal implementation of his threat.

It is not only when they allude to situations or events, however, that the servants - especially those in Regnard - use comically graphic language, because the intimate knowledge which they have of their masters, and which so often allows them to exploit the latter's weaknesses, enables them also to apply their techniques of comically

⁵⁵II,5.

⁵⁶I,2.

⁵⁷II,8.

⁵⁸III,11.

graphic description to their superiors. Thus, in Regnard's Le Distrain, Lisette, rather than simply stating that the Chevalier is a fop and a petit-maitre, gives a detailed and comically exaggerated description both of his physical appearance and his customary mode of behaviour:

C'est un petit jeune homme à quatre pieds de terre,
Homme de qualité, qui revient de la guerre;
Qu'on voit toujours sautant, dansant, gesticulant;
Qui vous parle en sifflant, et qui siffle en parlant;
Se peigne, chante, rit, se promène, s'agite.⁵⁹

And likewise, in the same author's Les Folies amoureuses, Lisette, on the pretext of introducing a measure of calmness into their dispute, compares the contrasting nature of the young Agathe and her elderly guardian and would-be husband, Albert, in terms which, far from being largely abstract, grow increasingly concrete and detailed. This is how she addresses the old man:

Ne nous emportons point; voyons tranquillement
Si l'amour vous a fait un objet bien charmant.
Vos traits sont effacés, elle est aimable et fraîche;
Elle a l'esprit bien fait, et vous l'humeur revêche;
Elle n'a pas seize ans, et vous êtes fort vieux;
Elle se porte bien, vous êtes catarrheux;
Elle a toutes ses dents qui la rendent plus belle,
Vous n'en avez plus qu'une, encore branle-t-elle,
Et doit être emportée à la première toux.⁶⁰

What is more, earlier in the play, the same servant comically characterises Albert's state of suspicious watchfulness by stating that 'lui, quand il dort d'un œil, l'autre fait sentinelle'.⁶¹

As we have suggested, the use of graphic description of an extreme and colourful kind is primarily - but not exclusively - a characteristic of Regnard's servants; however, although the other authors' servants may employ the technique less frequently than their congeners in Regnard, they make up for this by resorting to a device the comic effects of which are similar, and that is the use of images. In short, whereas Regnard's servants tend to conjure up comical pictures in the minds of the audience by offering detailed graphic descriptions of situations and individuals, the servants of the other playwrights engender similarly vivid mental pictures by their use of lively imagery.

⁵⁹I,4.

⁶⁰II,2.

⁶¹I,1.

For instance, as we have already seen, L'Olive, in Dancourt's La Foire de Besons, uses the image of a cattle or horse market to describe the way in which women come to the fair to select their lovers.⁶² Similarly, in Lesage's Turcaret, Marine neatly characterises the Chevalier, not by simply stating that he is a foppish man-about-town, and not - like her namesake in Regnard's Le Distrain, when she describes the Chevalier - by giving a colourful account of his behaviour, but by using an image which conjures up a comically incongruous picture: 'Il n'est pas de ces chevaliers qui sont consacrés au célibat et obligés de courir au secours de Malte', she declares, 'c'est un chevalier de Paris; il fait ses caravanes dans les lansquenets'.⁶³ And in Destouches, too, there are to be found instances of servants using comical imagery, as when Pasquin in L'Obstacle imprévu, warning his master (who has declared his intention of showing firmness towards her) of the impending arrival of the irate Comtesse, sees the encounter which is likely to ensue as a jousting match:

Oh! ça, vous voilà donc entré en lice. Tenez-vous ferme sur vos étrières; car voici Madame la Comtesse qui vient jouter contre vous.⁶⁴

(c) Lists

The skilful use of lists to provoke laughter is yet another form of linguistic comedy favoured by both male and female servants; but although lists may be used in a number of comical ways, not all of these find equal favour with the various authors' servants.

One way in which servants use lists to provoke laughter is, for instance, by rapidly enumerating actions and activities in such a way as to compress their timescale, so that the events in question become

⁶²Sc.12. The passage is cited above, p.174.

⁶³I,1.

⁶⁴II,1.

'speeded up' (like scenes from early cinematographs), and those performing the activities are made to appear - in the minds of the audience - as little more than mechanical puppets. This technique is particularly favoured by the valets and soubrettes in Regnard and Destouches, and is, for example, the underlying source of comedy in the following passage from Destouches's L'Obstacle imprévu, in which Pasquin describes to Angélique the current pattern of courtship in Parisian society. For, by presenting Angélique and the audience with a more or less unadorned list of the various stages through which couples progress in a fashionable courtship, the servant not only underlines the perfunctory way in which liaisons are established, but by making those involved appear to act mechanically, with a lack of genuine emotion and seriousness, transforms them into comic marionettes:

Vous êtes toute fraîche émoulue de la province; il faut vous apprendre comme on fait l'amour en ce pays-ci. On entre dans une assemblée ou dans une compagnie: on regarde, on choisit entre toutes les dames, celle qui revient davantage: on lui jette de tendres œillades, on lui fait des mines, on cherche à lui parler, on lui parle. La déclaration se fait dès le premier abord; si la belle s'en scandalise, ce qui n'arrive guère, on s'en moque, et on n'y revient pas: si elle prend la chose de bonne grâce, on lui fait des protestations; elle y répond, voilà qui est fait: ensuite on court ensemble au bal, aux spectacles; on médit du prochain, on prend du tabac, on boit du vin mousseux, on avale des liqueurs, on passe les nuits au cours: on ne songe qu'au plaisir, on le cherche ensemble tant qu'on a du goût l'un pour l'autre.⁶⁵

Likewise, when Pyrante, in Destouches's L'Irrésolu, asks Frontin what his son is doing, the servant reels off a list of the young man's recent activities, caricaturing him by placing emphasis on his irresolution at the expense of his other characteristics, and portraying him as a comical puppet, perpetually jerking first in one direction and then in another:

Il réfléchit, il pense,
Il me chasse, il m'appelle, il est assis, debout,
Il court, puis il s'arrête, il balance, il résout;
Il est joyeux, rêveur, plaisant, mélancolique;
Il approuve, il condamne, il se tait, il s'explique;
Il sort de la maison, il y rentre aussitôt;
Il veut, il ne veut plus, ne sait ce qu'il lui faut;
Et voilà, pour vous faire un récit bien sincère,
De monsieur votre fils le manège ordinaire.⁶⁶

⁶⁵_{I,2.}

⁶⁶_{I,2.}

Similarly, in Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses, Lisette uses a bald list of activities to describe the restless nocturnal prowling in which the jealous Albert engages:

Chez vous, toute la nuit, on n'entend autre chose
Qu'aller, venir, monter, fermer, descendre, ouvrir,
Crier, tousser, cracher, éternuer, courir.⁶⁷

And in Regnard's Le Légataire universel the female servant - also called Lisette - uses much the same technique, when, instead of listing activities, she details Géronte's supposed ailments in rapid succession (using words the similarity of whose endings gives aural emphasis to the fact that they are units in a list), and in so doing makes them seem to crowd in one upon another, thereby stressing the old man's overwhelming decrepitude and his complete unsuitability as a match for the young Isabelle:

Quoi! vous, vieux et cassé, fiévreux, épileptique,
Paralytique, étique, asthmatique, hydropique,
Vous voulez de l'hymen allumer le flambeau,⁶⁸
Et ne faire qu'un saut de la noce au tombeau!

A second way in which servants make use of lists to generate laughter (and one which finds particular favour with the valets of both Regnard and Lesage) is by enumerating a series of incorrect but comical 'solutions' to a particular problem before the correct one is arrived at - the precise nature of the 'solution' depending on the situation in question. In Lesage's Crispin rival de son maître, for instance, when Valère admits to Crispin that he is 'dans un grand embarras',⁶⁹ the servant immediately sets about listing what he sees as the most likely causes of such a problem, and, in so doing, provides the audience with a comical insight into his master's dissolute life-style:

CRISPIN:

Vos créanciers s'impatientent-ils? Ce gros marchand à qui vous avez fait un billet de neuf cents francs pour trente pistoles d'étoffe qu'il vous a fournie, aurait-il obtenu

⁶⁷I,2.

⁶⁸I,4. It is to be noted that the comedy of the passage cited is further heightened by the incongruous juxtaposition of the crude and down-to-earth tones of the first two lines and the more elevated style of the final two lines.

⁶⁹Sc.1.

sentence contre vous?

VALERE:

Non.

CRISPIN:

Ah! j'entends. Cette généreuse marquise qui alla elle-même payer votre tailleur qui vous avait fait assigner, a découvert que nous agissions de concert avec lui.

VALERE:

Ce n'est point cela, Crispin. Je suis devenu amoureux.

Later in the same play La Branche behaves in a not dissimilar manner in a scene in which he is to hand over to Oronte a letter which has supposedly come from Orgon; for, having fished a bundle of letters out of his pocket, he insists on reading out the names and addresses of the individuals for whom they are destined - names and addresses which, alluding as they do to weaknesses traditionally associated with the professions of those to whom they relate (such as the gluttony of the clergy), are clearly intended to provoke laughter - before eventually producing Oronte's letter:

J'ai plusieurs lettres que je me suis chargé de rendre à leurs adresses. Voyons celle-ci ... 'A Monsieur Bredouillet, avocat au Parlement, rue des Mauvaises-Paroles.' Ce n'est point encore cela, passons à l'autre ... 'A Monsieur Gourmandin, chanoine de ...' Ouais! je ne trouverai point celle que je cherche ... 'A Monsieur Oronte ...' Ah! voici la lettre de Monsieur Orgon.⁷⁰

And Dufresny, in his Attendez-moi sous l'orme, provides another striking example of this technique when Pasquin, in response to a query from the innocent young Agathe, turns to what he claims is a book on hairstyles in order to find out how the souris, or knot of ribbons, is worn, and, before arriving at the relevant entry, reads out a list of other fashions which supports his earlier comic assertion that Parisian women 'n'inventent point de modes qui ne servent à cacher quelque défaut'.⁷¹

C'est ici quelque part; attendez ... 'Coiffure pour raccourcir le visage.' Ce n'est pas cela. 'Petits tours blonds à boucles fringantes, pour les fronts étroits et les nez longs.' Je n'y suis pas. 'Supplément ingénieux qui donne du relief aux joues plates.' Ouais! 'Cornettes fuyantes pour faire sortir les yeux en avant.' Ah! voici ce que vous demandez. 'La souris est un petit nœud de nonpareille, qui se place dans le bois.'⁷²

⁷⁰Sc.8.

⁷¹Sc.6.

⁷²Sc.6.

Finally, particularly in Regnard, the servants make use of what is perhaps the simplest kind of comic list of all, namely, that in which they enumerate items largely, it would appear, as a demonstration - or celebration - of their verbal dexterity, but also partly as a form of overacting, since such unrealistic enumerations invite disclosure of the servants' trickery, while at the same time contributing towards the creation of a world of fantasy in which realistic considerations cease to apply. Probably the best example of such a list - that in which Scapin, in La Sérénade, boasting of his knowledge of musical entertainments, details the supposed types of musician with which he is able to deal - has already been cited in the course of our discussion of overacting,⁷³ but the same servant provides a further example of the technique when he proceeds to describe to Grifon the range of musicians which he claims would be necessary for the old man's projected 'sérénade à bon marché':

Je ménagerai votre bourse, ne vous mettez pas en peine. Il ne nous faudra que trente-six violons, vingt hautbois, douze basses, six trompettes, vingt-quatre tambours, cinq orgues, et un flageolet.... Pour les voix, nous prendrons seulement douze basses, huit concordants, six basses-tailles, autant de quintes, quatre hautes-contre, huit faussets, et douze dessus, moitié entiers et moitié hongres.⁷⁴

(d) Garbled Speech and Ideas

In Destouches in particular, but also to a noticeable extent in both Regnard and Lesage, the speech of servants - usually the males, and, somewhat surprisingly, not always the dimmest of them, but occasionally even the intelligent fourbes - may become garbled. As we shall see, this sometimes occurs simply as a result of their unsuccessful attempts to use words or eloquent expressions more usually found in the mouths of their social superiors, while at other times their verbal incoherence is more a reflection of intellectual confusion arising from their incompetent use - in a half-digested form - of concepts or arguments originally emanating from their betters; but, whatever the

⁷³Sc.7. See above, p.120.

⁷⁴Sc.7.

circumstances, the nature of the comedy generated tends to be the same. For, on the one hand, the audience is amused by the presence, in such scenes, of a comic disparity between the humble status of the servants and the sophistication of thought or speech to which they so unsuccessfully aspire - a disparity which is similar to that already observed on occasions when the servants ape the language and professional or learned terminologies of their superiors⁷⁵ -, while on the other hand, because the servants in such scenes are not merely parodying their superiors - as is the case when they ape the latter's language -, but are apparently making a serious attempt to express themselves, the audience views their ineptitude with condescension, and, rather than laughing with them (as it does when they parody their superiors), directs its laughter against them.

A fairly simple example of a servant using a term which he does not really comprehend is to be found in Destouches's Le Glorieux, where Pasquin, quizzed by Lisette about his master's non-existent family seat, seeks to impress her by describing it as 'le plus beau château qui soit sur la Garonne', adding that 'vous le voyez de loin qui forme un pentagone'. For when Lisette, having fastened on his use of the term 'pentagone' ('Pentagone! bon Dieu! quel grand mot est-ce là?'), and then having asked him to go beyond his initial explanation of it as 'un terme de l'art', forces him into a more detailed description of the building, it quickly becomes apparent that he does not know what he is talking about:

LISETTE:

Mais expliquez-moi bien ce que ce mot veut dire.

PASQUIN:

Cela m'est très facile, et je vais vous décrire

Ce superbe château, pour que vous en jugiez,

Et même beaucoup mieux que si vous le voyiez.

D'abord, ce sont sept tours, entre seize courtines ...

Avec deux tenaillons placés sur trois collines ...

Qui forment un vallon, dont le sommet s'étend

Jusques sur ... un donjon ... entouré d'un étang ...

Et ce donjon placé justement ... sous la zone ...

Par trois angles saillants, forme le pentagone.⁷⁶

⁷⁵The servants' aping of their superiors' language is discussed above, pp.320-6.

⁷⁶IV,1.

Sometimes, however, the servants may go further, and, instead of introducing into their conversation a single word which they do not understand, may attempt (often as part of a disguise) to conduct an entire conversation in elevated tones - with comic results when they fail to sustain their chosen register. For example, when the fourbe-like Crispin in Lesage's Crispin rival, pretending to be the young lover, Damis, in the hope of marrying Angélique, is introduced to the latter's father, his attempts to respond with formal politeness are less than successful: 'Ma joie est extrême', he tells Oronte, 'de pouvoir vous témoigner l'extrême joie que j'ai de vous embrasser';⁷⁷ while in Destouches's L'Ingrat, when the morally upright but somewhat unintelligent Pasquin, who intuitively understands that ingratitude is wrong, attempts to give formal expression to his feelings, he finds himself in similar difficulties:

Le cœur d'un ingrat est toujours agité,
Et je crois qu'un damné n'est pas plus tourmenté.
On convient, malgré soi, que l'on n'est qu'un infâme,
Et toujours la raison ... qui règle une belle âme ...
Car enfin, vois-tu bien! quand on a de l'honneur ...
On rougit aisément ... et sitôt que le cœur ...
Pour ainsi dire ... avec l'animal raisonnable ...⁷⁸
Fi, morbleu! les ingrats ne valent pas le diable.

In the case of Pasquin, the servant instinctively knows that ingratitude is wrong, yet finds himself in difficulties when he tries to put his strongly-held belief into words; but elsewhere the entanglement of the servants may, as we have suggested, arise partly from an inadequate understanding of that which they are seeking to express. Occasionally, for instance, they display a comic inability accurately to relay information of a factual kind, as is the case in Destouches's L'Obstacle imprévu, where Crispin, having overheard the admittedly complicated story of Julie's origins, attempts to convey to her and to Léandre, as they are saying their fond farewells, the glad news that her parentage is not as she had thought, and is not, therefore, an impediment to their marriage. For the valet's difficulty in conveying the news is attributable not only to his evident desire to express himself with polite delicacy, but also to the fact that he himself finds the story confusing. Indeed, after

⁷⁷Sc.9.

⁷⁸III,3.

completing his narration - cited below - he admits to being baffled by the situation ('Il y a un diable de brouillamini dans tout cela, qui m'a pensé faire tourner la cervelle').

Premièrement, monsieur votre oncle a dit ... qu'il était votre oncle.... Il est donc votre oncle; mais votre oncle, d'une certaine façon qui fait que, pour ainsi dire ... Vous comprenez bien, par le moyen d'un grand seigneur italien qui s'était établi à Paris, et dont il était l'écuyer ... Attendez, je n'y suis plus. Pardonnez-moi, m'y voici. Le seigneur dont je vous ai parlé avait deux filles, l'une qui était mariée, l'autre qui ne l'était pas; celle qui était mariée ... avait un mari, comme vous le jugez bien; mais celle qui ne l'était pas, en avait un sans en avoir; et parce qu'elle avait su plaire à monsieur votre oncle; et il est arrivé que monsieur votre oncle et monsieur votre père ont fait un certain mariage secret, qui fait que madame votre tante est devenue madame votre mère ... parce que votre première mère, qui n'était pas votre tante, est venue à décéder par son trépas; et voilà justement la raison qui fait que je ne crois pas que nous devions partir.⁷⁹

More frequently, however, it is not factual information that the servants do not fully comprehend, but abstract or philosophical ideas which are normally the preserve of their social superiors. Thus, earlier in Destouches's L'Obstacle imprévu, before Julie's true parentage is known, and when it is believed that Léandre has previously been married to her now-deceased mother, Crispin attempts to wax eloquent on the fickleness of fortune, but soon loses himself in his own eloquence, as he himself admits:

Oui, la fortune, par sa malignité, fait voir dans cette occasion ... qu'elle est femme. Un maudit caprice la gouverne, et la noirceur de son influence produit des événements bizarres, qui, joints aux aspects d'une étoile infernale, vous font épouser de vieilles femmes qui sont mères de vos maîtresses, et vous conduisent par là dans un gouffre profond, qui ... Par ma foi, je m'y perds.⁸⁰

And in Regnard's Le Joueur there is to be found a not dissimilar episode in which Hector, who has earlier, at Valère's request, read aloud some passages from Seneca, attempts, unsuccessfully, to give Géronte an eloquent account of the philosopher's teachings:

Ah! si vous aviez lu son traité des richesses,
Et le mépris qu'on doit faire de ses maîtresses;
Comme la femme ici n'est qu'un vrai rémora,
Et que, lorsqu'on y touche ... on en demeure là ...

⁷⁹V, 10.

⁸⁰IV, 9.

Qu'on gagne quand on perd ... que l'amour dans nos âmes ...
Ah! que ce livre-là connaissait bien les femmes!⁸¹

While, similarly, in Regnard's Démocrate, Strabon's attempts to impress Thaler, by informing him of the knowledge which he would gain were he to become the philosopher's servant, fall rather flat when he proves incapable of regurgitating his master's beliefs with either accuracy or fluency:

Tu deviendras savant: tu sauras, comme moi,
Que rien ne vient de rien, et que des particules ...
Rien ne retourne en rien; de plus, les corpuscules ...
Les atomes, d'ailleurs par un secret lien,⁸²
Accrochés dans le vide ... Entends-tu bien?

(e) Dialect

It would not be proper to conclude an investigation of the servants' contribution to linguistic comedy without making brief mention of their use of regional accents and dialects, for in these plays certain valets and soubrettes - especially in Dancourt - express themselves in terms which would have appeared comically rustic or quaint to the Parisian audiences of the Comédie-Française.

Thus, one of the many sources of mirth in Dancourt's Les Agioteurs is the way in which the illiterate female servant, Claudine, often betrays her rural origins by abandoning the Parisian French which she has acquired since going into service in the Capital, and lapses into peasant speech: for instance, in the opening scene of the play, after having greeted her cousin, Lucas, in essentially Parisian French, she quickly reverts to dialect when naïvely describing to him what she saw when she managed to catch a glimpse of a promissory note:

Hé bian, je vis du noir et du blanc, des lettres comme
on écrit, et pis d'autres lettres comme on compte, m'est

⁸¹IV, 14.

⁸²I, 2.

avis qu'ils appellont ça des chiffres.⁸³

While, later in the play, when Zacharie questions her about the paper which she and Lucas have presented to him in the innocent belief that they will be able to exchange it for money (it is, in fact, a lost love letter), Claudine insists, in the following terms, that it is her cousin's property:

Non, monsieur, c'est sti du cousin, que je voudrions bian
que vous ly troquissiais.⁸⁴

And in Dufresny's La Réconciliation normande, Falaise's allusion to his eloquent 'langage normand',⁸⁵ suggests that a provincial accent may have been a comic feature of his role.

However, although the use by servants of regional accents or dialects is a feature of certain of the plays under consideration, it must be emphasised that its overall importance as a source of comedy is only minor, because it is primarily humble figures other than servants - principally peasants - who create laughter in this way. Indeed, in many plays where dialect occurs it is used solely by non-servant figures, as in the case of Regnard's Démocrite, where only the peasant, Thaler, expresses himself in rustic terms,⁸⁶ while even in plays where servants do use language of this kind they are frequently outnumbered by other, non-servant, figures who employ similar terms: such, for instance, is the case in Les Agioteurs, where peasant speech is used not only by Claudine, as we have seen, but, to an even greater extent, by her cousin, Lucas,⁸⁷ and where there also occurs a scoundrel who, under the name of Dargentac, presents himself as a Gascon, and speaks in the accent of that region.⁸⁸

⁸³I,1. As is often the case when dialect is employed, it is not only the rustic language which is a source of laughter, but the fact that the sentiments expressed show the soubrette to be just as naïve as the dimwitted servants already examined (above, pp.299-302), who express themselves in Parisian French.

⁸⁴III,23.

⁸⁵I,8.

⁸⁶Thaler's use of dialect is obvious from the moment when he first appears on stage in Act I scene 2.

⁸⁷The play opens with Lucas, who has just arrived in Paris from the provinces, complaining bitterly, in rustic terms, about the difficulty which he has had in finding his cousin in the big city.

⁸⁸Dargentac's first appearance is in Act II scene 9.

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Our examination of the servants' comic role has shown that the ways in which these figures contribute to the generation of laughter are many and varied. But in focussing closely on the comic devices with which the servants are associated one is in danger of giving the impression that the laughter-provoking function of these characters is quite separate from other aspects of the plays: a comic icing to decorate an otherwise plain cake. It is, however, rare in the theatre for such a divorce to exist between the comic aspects of a play and its other dramatic features (as Howarth puts it, 'in all true comedy the laughter-producing element is integrated into an aesthetically satisfying whole which reflects the author's comic vision'),¹ and in this respect the comedies under consideration are no exception, because there is an underlying unity to much of the servants' laughter-generating activities, the effect of which is to shape the audience's perception of events in a certain way, and to give the spectators a particular comic perspective on the other characters.

For implicit in most of what has been said about the servants' comic activities is the fact that they are dependent upon, or create, a sense of complicity between the audience and the servants, so that the spectators, on all but a few occasions - principally when dim-witted, rural, or inarticulate servants are involved, or when otherwise able servants are momentarily put at a disadvantage -, find themselves laughing not at the valets and soubrettes themselves, but with them, at other characters in the plays (principally the servants' superiors) whose foolishness might not otherwise be disclosed. And it is in this ability to convey to the audience an impression of the other characters which the latter do not themselves wish to convey, and in so doing to persuade the audience to share the author's comic vision - for, as Howarth again observes, it is by being made to laugh at certain characters, and with others, that an audience is induced to 'concur in the dramatist's critical judgement',² -, that the servants' true comic function lies.

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¹Comic Drama: the European Heritage, edited by W. D. Howarth, p.18.

²Comic Drama, p.18.

CONCLUSION

Generalisations are always tempting, and nowhere more so than in literary criticism, for the sweeping statements of a Sarcey have greater resonance - and may appear more superficially convincing - than qualified and detailed comments of a more cautious kind. But if our close analysis of mainstream French comedy after Molière has revealed one thing above all about the nature of the stage servants of the period, it is that they are so diverse in their outlook and behaviour that to generalise about them is to run the risk of distorting reality.

For while it may be convenient to think of male servants as fourbes or dullards, and female servants as servantes dévouées or soubrettes perfides, few of the figures whom we have encountered in the course of our investigations fit convincingly into any of these categories. Certainly, there are in both Regnard and Lesage servants who are very close, in their outlook and behaviour, to the Moliéresque fourbe (although, on examination, even some of Lesage's more superficially fourbe-like servants can be seen to have characteristics which are very different from, and to some extent incompatible with, those of the traditional stage trickster); but each of these authors, probably the most inventive and imaginative of the period, produces a range of valets, so that alongside their more fourbe-like creations there are figures who show only a limited number of fourbe characteristics, or who bear resemblance neither to the stage trickster nor to any other established type. Moreover, although the remaining dramatists each tend to produce male servants who vary comparatively little from one play to another, not only do none of these figures conform to a recognisable type, but the differences between the servants of one playwright and those of another are considerable: the disinterested valets of Destouches, with their broad support for conventional moral values have, for example, little in common either with the ruthlessly self-interested servants of Dufresny or with the servants of Dancourt, whose attitude to the vagaries of society is one of uncritical and amused acceptance. What is more, in the case of the female servants - universally less prominent than their male counterparts - a remarkably similar situation obtains, with those of Regnard spanning the spectrum from the servante dévouée to the soubrette perfide, and with those of Lesage displaying similar diversity (to the extent that some even fall outwith the range whose limits are marked by

the perfidious and devoted servants), while those of the remaining authors, although exhibiting fewer internal variations, nevertheless differ markedly between one playwright's production and that of another: Destouches's outspoken soubrettes, for instance, have little affinity with their less forthright congeners in either Dufresny or Dancourt.

However, if one feature of the servants is that they are varied in nature, another is that they are prolific, since few indeed are the plays which do not contain at least one such figure. And while it must be recognised that the widespread presence of servants in the plays under review - like their almost total absence from late twentieth-century French drama - is in part a reflection of contemporary society, because in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries servants constituted an integral part of life in a way that they no longer do, the fact that these ubiquitous figures tend to be accorded a prominence which goes far beyond anything that might be required to give the plays a basis of reality (for even comedies of a fantastic nature are normally founded, however precariously, on reality) suggests that the authors regard them as creatures who can make a positive contribution to their works; indeed, on the evidence of our investigations this is a view which is amply justified, since we have seen that, however varied may be the nature of the servants, there is a tendency for them to perform certain major functional roles.

In the case of the female servants, our findings have shown that one of their main roles is to facilitate the mechanical development of the plays in which they occur. It must be emphasised, however, that to say this is not to imply that at a detailed level they all have the same part to play; rather, it is to acknowledge that the authors, without exception, make use of soubrettes to advance their plays in practical ways, although the precise form of the servants' contribution to the workings of the comedies varies with the requirements of the situation and the nature of the characters themselves. Thus, we have seen that while female servants may assist in the initial exposition of plays, and may draw the audience's attention, by means of asides and soliloquies, to the significance, or comic potential, of scenes on stage, as well as merely bearing messages and announcing the arrival of other characters, not all of them perform these functions, or perform them to the same extent: the more outspoken soubrettes are,

for instance, particularly associated with expository scenes, while the ability to explain involved situations is put to use above all in the kind of complex comedies in which Dufresny delights. In short, with the female servants' confidant role proving to be their only major mechanical activity to find favour with all the authors (albeit to a lesser extent in Lesage than elsewhere), it is clear that although a significant degree of involvement in the workings of the comedies is one of the soubrettes' principal characteristics, diversity is as much the hallmark of this role as it is of the servants' outlook and behaviour.

But if our analysis has shown the considerable importance of the servants' role in facilitating the mechanical development of the plays, it has also highlighted the extent to which these figures are instrumental in the creation of laughter; indeed, this second functional role constitutes one of the servants' greatest contributions to the comedies of the period.

The importance of the servants' laughter-provoking role lies partly, as we have seen, in its prevalence, because whereas it is primarily female servants who perform mechanical functions within the plays, servants of both sexes and of all complexions, ranging from the most intelligent fourbe to the simplest dullard, are used by every author, without exception, to create comedy. However, the importance of this role is not to be measured in quantitative terms alone, because what is particularly significant about it is that although the ways in which servants stimulate laughter are probably even more numerous and varied than the ways in which the soubrettes assist the mechanical development of the plays (depending, again, both on the nature of the plays and the characters involved), they tend, overwhelmingly, to be based upon the existence of a sense of complicity between servant and audience, and to that extent induce the spectators to laugh not at the valets and soubrettes themselves, but with them, at other characters. In other words, the laughter-provoking activities of the servants are not only a source of amusement for the spectators, but are fundamental in shaping the audience's perception of the characters in the plays and their behaviour on stage, and, as such, can be seen as central to the projection of the authors' comic vision of the world.

Our conclusions so far are that even if the servants of the period are extremely varied in nature, beneath their superficial diversity they are to some extent united by common functional roles, which they nevertheless fulfil in very different ways. But however valid these conclusions may be in themselves, they are perhaps too clinical adequately to convey an impression of the overall importance of stage servants to mainstream French comedy in the period after Molière; indeed, it is only by distancing oneself still further from the detail of the plays, and attempting to imagine how different the drama of the period would be if valets and soubrettes were banished from the stage, that one comes to realise the extent to which these figures are central to the comedies of the day. For in the final analysis the value of the servants is that in a period when both literary tradition and the structure of society allowed - indeed, almost obliged - authors freely to introduce such figures onto the stage, they afforded dramatists a convenient means not only of overcoming the purely mechanical problems of developing the plays' action while conveying to the audience their comic vision, but of imbuing the comedies with an elusive aura of lighthearted vitality and vigour. So that the banishment of stage servants, as well as destroying those of the plays - among them some of the most famous - in which valets or soubrettes clearly constitute the focal point (plays like Regnard's Le Légataire universel, which pivots on Crispin's impersonation of G ronte; Lesage's Crispin rival de son ma tre, constructed around the exploits of Crispin and his fellow servant, La Branche; Dufresny's Le D dit, which centres on Frontin's double act as a s n chal and a chevalier; and Dancourt's Les Enfants de Paris, whose female servant, Finette, is so important that her name once constituted its title), and, less obviously, inflicting structural damage upon comedies in which servants appear, at first sight, to be of lesser significance, would, in almost all cases, deprive the plays of their principal enlivening element, the only exceptions being the comedies of Dancourt, those rich cauldrons of activity in which caricatural and entertaining non-servants frequently submerge, or even supplant, the traditional valet and soubrette.

APPENDIX I

INVENTORY OF PLAYS

The tables which follow list those plays upon which the present study is based, in accordance with the criteria set out in the Introduction. I am indebted to Blanc, Brenner, Calame, Hankiss, Moureau, and - above all - Lancaster for much of the information concerning dates of first performance and publication.

PLAY	FIRST PERFORMED	FIRST PUBLISHED
La Sérénade	1694	Paris, Guillain, 1695
Le Bal ¹	1696	Paris, Guillain, 1696 ²
Le Joueur	1696	Paris, Guillain, 1697
Le Distrait	1697	Paris, Ribou, 1698 ³
Démocrite	1700	Paris, Ribou, 1700
Le Retour imprévu	1700	Paris, Ribou, 1700
Les Folies amoureuses	1704	Paris, Ribou, 1704
Les Ménechmes	1705	Paris, Ribou, 1706
Le Légataire universel	1708	Paris, Ribou, 1708

¹Originally entitled Le Bourgeois de Falaise.

²The imprint erroneously gives the date of publication as 1694, but the achevé date is 1696.

³Marcel Compaignon de Marcheville, in his Bibliographie et iconographie des œuvres de J.-F. Regnard, pp.9-10, gives this as the earliest edition, as does H. C. Lancaster in A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, Part IV, p.743. However, on p.958 of the same volume Lancaster gives 1697 as the date of first publication, and is followed in this by Jean Emelina, in Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre comique en France de 1610 à 1700, p.476. I have not located any edition earlier than that of 1698.

DUFRESNY (1657¹-1724)

Table 2

PLAY	FIRST PERFORMED	FIRST PUBLISHED
Le Négligent	1692	Paris, Pissot, 1728 ²
Attendez-moi sous l'orme ³	1694	Paris, Guillain, 1694
Le Chevalier joueur	1697 ⁴	Paris, Ballard, 1697
La Noce interrompue	1699	Paris, Ribou, 1699
La Malade sans maladie	1699 ⁵	in <u>Ouvres</u> , 6 vols, Paris, Briasson, 1731
L'Esprit de contradiction	1700	Paris, Barbin, 1700
Le Double Veuvage	1702	Paris, Ribou, 1702 ⁶
Le Faux Honnête Homme	1703	Paris, Ribou, 1703
Le Faux Instinct	1707	Paris, Ribou, 1707
Le Jaloux honteux	1708	Paris, Ribou, 1708 ⁷
La Joueuse	1709	in <u>Ouvres</u> , 6 vols, Paris, Briasson, 1731
La Coquette de village	1715	Paris, Ribou, 1715
La Réconciliation normande	1719	Paris, Le Breton and Ribou, 1719
Le Dédit	1719	Paris, Le Breton and Ribou, 1719
Le Mariage fait et rompu	1721	Paris, Ribou, 1721
Le Faux Sincère	1731	in <u>Ouvres</u> , 6 vols, Paris, Briasson, 1731

¹The date of Dufresny's birth has long been disputed. For an account of the various dates proposed, and the reasons for supposing that he was in fact born in 1657, see François Moureau, Dufresny: auteur dramatique (1657-1724), pp.17-19.

²In all probability based on Dufresny's manuscripts at that time in the possession of the Comédie-Française, this Paris edition can be considered the authoritative first edition of Le Négligent. A clandestine edition had, however, been published by Van Ellinkhuysen in the Hague in 1697 (see Moureau, p.51).

³Attendez-moi sous l'orme is traditionally attributed to Regnard, but Moureau, pp.56-8, has convincingly demonstrated that Dufresny is its author.

⁴I have included Le Chevalier joueur in my study although its first performance was not at the Comédie-Française: on the eve of its performance on the public stage on 27 February it was put on at court, possibly in an attempt to outflank hostile cabals (see Moureau, pp.60-1).

⁵Although La Malade sans maladie was first performed at court (under the title La Malade imaginaire) on 2 April, some seven months before its performance on the public stage on 27 November 1699, I have included it in my study because it is not a court entertainment, but represents a

clear attempt by Dufresny to establish himself in the important genre of five-act character comedy (see Moureau, pp.71-2).

⁶The imprint erroneously bears the date 1701.

⁷Both H. C. Lancaster (Sunset: a History of Parisian Drama in the Last Years of Louis XIV 1701-1715, pp.207 and 337) and C. D. Brenner (A Bibliographical List of Plays in the French Language, 1700-1789, p.61) give the date of the first edition as 1707; Moureau (p.481) gives 1708. I have accepted the latter date, having failed to locate an earlier edition. It is possible that Lancaster and Brenner may have been misled by an error in the catalogues of the Bibliothèque Nationale, which incorrectly describe a copy of the 1708 edition as having an imprint dated 1707.

PLAY	FIRST PERFORMED	FIRST PUBLISHED
Les Fonds perdus ¹	1685	The Hague, Foulque, 1696
Angélique et Médor	1685	in <u>Pièces de théâtre</u> , 3 vols, Brussels, Foppens, 1698
Renaud et Armide	1686	Paris, Guillain, 1697
La Désolation des joueuses	1687	Paris, Guérout, 1688
Le Chevalier à la mode	1687	Paris, Guérout, 1688 ²
La Maison de campagne	1688	Paris, Gontier, 1691
L'Eté des coquettes	1690	Paris, Gontier, 1691
La Parisienne	1691	Paris, Guillain, 1694
La Femme d'intrigues	1692	Paris, Guillain, 1694
La Gazette de Hollande	1692	in <u>Pièces de théâtre</u> , 3 vols, Brussels, Foppens, 1698 ³
L'Opéra de village	1692	Paris, Guillain, 1693
Les Bourgeoises à la mode	1692	Paris, Guillain, 1693
Les Vendanges	1694	Paris, Guillain, 1694
Le Tuteur	1695	Paris, Guillain, 1695
La Foire de Besons	1695	Paris, Guillain, 1695
Les Vendanges de Suresnes	1695	Paris, Guillain, 1695 ⁴
La Foire Saint-Germain	1696	Paris, Guillain, 1696
Le Moulin de Javelle	1696	Paris, Guillain, 1696
Les Eaux de Bourbon	1696	Paris, Guillain, 1696
Les Vacances	1696	Paris, Guillain, 1696 ⁵
La Loterie	1697	Paris, Guillain, 1697
Le Charivari	1697	Paris, Ribou, 1697
Le Retour des officiers	1697	Paris, Ribou, 1698
Les Curieux de Compiègne	1698	Paris, Ribou, 1698
Le Mari retrouvé	1698	Paris, Ribou, 1698
Les Enfants de Paris ⁶	1699	Paris, Ribou, 1705
La Fête de village	1700	Paris, Ribou, 1700
Les Trois Cousines	1700	Paris, Ribou, 1700
Colin-Maillard	1701	Paris, Ribou, 1701
Le Galant Jardinier	1704	Paris, Ribou, 1705
Madame Artus	1708	Paris, Ribou, 1708
La Comédie des comédiens	1710	Paris, Ribou, 1710

Continued ...

DANCOURT

Table 3
(Continued)

PLAY	FIRST PERFORMED	FIRST PUBLISHED
Les Agioteurs	1710	Paris, Ribou, 1710
Le Vert Galant	1714	s.l., s.n., 1714 ⁷
Le Prix de l'arquebuse ⁸	1717	Paris, Ribou, 1717

¹Originally entitled Le Notaire obligeant.

²André Blanc, in Le Théâtre de Dancourt, p.863, gives Guérout's edition of 1688 as the first edition. Robert H. Cranshaw, in his recent critical edition of the play, p.XXVIII, agrees (as does Nivea Melani in her edition of selected plays by Dancourt). Lancaster, in A History of French Dramatic Literature, Part IV, p.587, indicates a first edition dated 1687, and is followed in this by Emelina, Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre comique en France, p.474, and by C. A. Cleary, in her thesis, 'Aspects of the Life and Works of Dancourt', p.399. I have failed to locate any edition pre-dating that of 1688.

³Lancaster, A History of French Dramatic Literature, Part IV, p.780, states that no earlier edition has been found, and is followed by Cleary (p.399) and Emelina, Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre comique en France, p.479. Blanc, in Le Théâtre de Dancourt, p.866, indicates the existence of an earlier edition, published in the Hague by Foulque in 1696. I have, however, been unable to locate a copy of this edition.

⁴This is the achevé date: the imprint bears the date 1696.

⁵This is the achevé date: the imprint bears the date 1697.

⁶Originally entitled La Famille à la mode, and later Finette.

⁷This edition is the first, according to Lancaster, Sunset, p.161; Brenner, p.53; and Blanc, Le Théâtre de Dancourt, p.870. Elsewhere, however, in F. C. Dancourt (1661-1725): la Comédie-Française à l'heure du Soleil couchant, p.128, Blanc gives as the first edition that published by Ribou in 1714, as does Cleary, p.400. I have examined both editions: neither differs in any significant way from the edition of 1760.

⁸In 1724, some seven years after the first performance of Le Prix de l'arquebuse, there appeared a comedy, L'Eclipse, which has frequently been attributed to Dancourt. Never published at the time, its text was thought to survive only in a manuscript bearing the same title in the Bibliothèque Nationale (MS Arch. Th. Fr., ff 9245). Blanc, in Le Théâtre de Dancourt, pp.262 and 855, shows, however, that the text of the manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale does not correspond to what is known of the play performed in 1724, whereas that of a manuscript in the Bibliothèque de la Comédie-Française does. However, he also observes (pp.261-2) that the latter text, with its lengthy responses, is uncharacteristic of Dancourt, and is more likely to have been composed by an inept imitator of the playwright. An examination of the manuscript in the Bibliothèque de la Comédie-Française (MS.95) has led me to accept Blanc's contention, and I have therefore excluded L'Eclipse from consideration.

PLAY	FIRST PERFORMED	FIRST PUBLISHED
Crispin rival de son maître	1707	Paris, Ribou, 1707
Turcaret	1709	Paris, Ribou, 1709
La Tontine	1732 ¹	in <u>Recueil des pièces mises au Théâtre Français</u> , 2 vols, Paris, Barois, 1739

¹The play was originally offered to the Comédie-Française in 1708.

PLAY	FIRST PERFORMED	FIRST PUBLISHED
L'Ingrat	1712	Paris, Le Breton, 1712
L'Irrésolu	1713	Paris, Le Breton, 1713 ¹
Le Médisant	1715	Paris, Le Breton, 1715
Le Triple Mariage	1716	Paris, Le Breton, 1716
L'Obstacle imprévu	1717	Paris, Le Breton, 1718 ²
Le Philosophe marié	1727	Paris, Le Breton, 1727 ³
Les Philosophes amoureux	1729	Paris, Le Breton, 1730
Le Glorieux	1732	Paris, Le Breton, 1732

¹A. Burner, 'Philippe Néricault-Destouches (1680-1754): essai de biographie', p.203, considers an anonymous edition of 1713 to be the first edition, but Le Breton's edition of the same year is seen as the first edition by most commentators (Brenner, p.57; Jean Hankiss, Philippe Néricault Destouches: l'homme et l'œuvre, p.75; Aleksandra Hoffmann-Lipońska, Philippe Néricault Destouches et la comédie moralisatrice, p.174; and Lancaster, Sunset, p.290), and it is the latter edition which I have consulted.

²The Le Breton edition of 1718 is seen as the first edition by most commentators (Burner, p.204; Hankiss, p.103; and Hoffmann-Lipońska, Philippe Néricault Destouches et la comédie moralisatrice, p.174). Brenner, p.57, gives the date as 1717, but I have been unable to locate any edition of that date.

³I have followed Brenner (p.57), Burner (p.204), and Hoffmann-Lipońska (Philippe Néricault Destouches et la comédie moralisatrice, p.174) in accepting the Le Breton edition of 1727 as the first; Hankiss, however, treats an edition by Prault, in the same year, as the first edition (p.109).

APPENDIX II

INVENTORY OF SERVANTS

The tables which follow list those servants who, in accordance with the criteria set out in the Introduction, fall within the scope of the present study.

PLAY	MALE SERVANT(S)	FEMALE SERVANT(S)
La Sérénade	Scapin Champagne	Marine
Le Bal	Merlin ¹	Lisette
Le Joueur	Hector	Nérine
Le Distrait	Carlin	Lisette
Démocrite	Strabon	Cléanthis
Le Retour imprévu	Merlin Jaquinet	Lisette
Les Folies amoureuses	Crispin	Lisette
Les Ménechmes	Valentin	Finette
Le Légataire universel	Crispin	Lisette

¹Fijac, who also occurs in Le Bal, is essentially a professional trickster, and serves no master in the play, being described merely as a 'Gascon' in the distribution both of the original 1696 edition and of the edition of 1823. He has, therefore, been excluded from consideration. It should be noted, however, that the stage directions for scene 13 of the original edition (corresponding to scene 14 in the edition of 1823) refer to both Merlin and Fijac as valets.

PLAY	MALE SERVANT(S)	FEMALE SERVANT(S)
Le Négligent	L'Olive	Fanchon
Attendez-moi sous l'orme	Pasquin	-
Le Chevalier joueur	Frontin	Nérine
La Noce interrompue	Adrien ¹	-
La Malade sans maladie	La Valée	Lisette
L'Esprit de contradiction	-	-
Le Double Veuvage	-	Frosine ²
Le Faux Honnête Homme	Flamand	Frosine
Le Faux Instinct	-	Toinette
Le Jaloux honteux	Frontin	Lisette
La Joueuse	-	Lisette Frosine
La Coquette de village	-	-
La Réconciliation normande	Falaise ³	Nérine
Le Dédit	Frontin	-
Le Mariage fait et rompu	-	-
Le Faux Sincère	-	Laurette

¹Adrien is designated, in the distribution of the play, as the 'domestique du comte', and not as his 'valet'. However, his involvement with the Count and his wife is as close as that of any valet, as becomes clear in the course of the play, where it emerges that he is the couple's sole servant (Sc.5), and where he sees himself as a jack of all trades, wittily observing, for example, that 'Madame la Comtesse n'a point d'autre femme de chambre que moi' (Sc.3).

²There also appears a figure described in the distribution as 'une suivante de la comtesse'; but although she is clearly seen as part of the Countess's domestique (I,5), she is, in effect, a lady's companion. She is addressed by her mistress as 'vous', and is totally different in status from the much less elevated figures to whom the term 'suivante' is normally applied in the plays under examination.

³Falaise is given no designation in the distribution, and refers to himself as Procinville's 'agent' (I,10), but it seems likely that he is in effect the latter's valet. Emelina certainly considers him as such (Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre comique en France, p.48), although he is excluded from Maria Ribaric Demers's list of Dufresny's servants (Le Valet et la soubrette de Molière à la Révolution, p.66).

PLAY	MALE SERVANT(S)	FEMALE SERVANT(S)
Les Fonds perdus	Merlin La Verdure ¹	Lisette
Angélique et Médor	Merlin ²	Lisette
Renaud et Armide	L'Olive	Lisette
La Désolation des joueuses	Merlin	Lisette
Le Chevalier à la mode	Crispin	Lisette
La Maison de campagne	La Flèche	Lisette
L'Eté des coquettes	-	Lisette
La Parisienne	L'Olive La Vigne	Lisette
La Femme d'intrigues	-	Gabrillon Lisette
La Gazette de Hollande	Crispin	-
L'Opéra de village	La Flèche	-
Les Bourgeoises à la mode	-	Lisette
Les Vendanges	L'Olive	-
Le Tuteur	L'Olive	Lisette ³
La Foire de Besons	L'Olive	-
Les Vendanges de Suresnes	-	-
La Foire Saint-Germain	Le Breton	-
Le Moulin de Javelle	L'Olive	Finette
Les Eaux de Bourbon	La Roche	-
Les Vacances	-	Mme La Roche
La Loterie	- ⁴	Lisette
Le Charivari	-	Mathurine
Le Retour des officiers	-	Toinette
Les Curieux de Compiègne	Frontin	-
Le Mari retrouvé	L'Epine	-
Les Enfants de Paris	Merlin	Finette
La Fête de village	L'Olive	Lisette
Les Trois Cousines	- ⁵	-
Colin-Maillard	L'Epine	-
Le Galant Jardinier	La Montagne	Marton
Madame Artus	Merlin	Finette
La Comédie des comédiens	-	- ⁶
Les Agioteurs	-	Claudine

Continued ...

PLAY	MALE SERVANT(S)	FEMALE SERVANT(S)
Le Vert Galant	L'Epine	-
Le Prix de l'arquebuse	-	-

¹Usually called 'Le Bègue' in the edition of 1760, although in Act II scene 3 the name 'La Verdure' is used, as it is in the distribution of the edition of 1696.

²Although the distribution also lists a certain Langevin, describing him as the 'valet de Guillemin', he emerges as no more than a minor laquais, whose main function is to announce the arrival of other characters.

³The extremely minor figure, Mathurine, described in the play as 'la servante des Trois Rois' (Sc.7), has been excluded: she is clearly an inn-keeper's assistant, and not a personal servant of the kind examined in the present study.

⁴La France, who appears briefly in the play, is little more than a minor laquais.

⁵Internal evidence suggests that L'Epine, who occurs in the play, may be the 'valet de chambre de Monsieur le Président' referred to in Act I scenes 1 and 4. However, the Président himself does not feature in the play, and L'Epine's role is not that of a servant but of one of a number of young lovers. In the distribution, he and Giflot are together referred to as 'amants de Louison et de Marotte'.

⁶Nicole, Grichardin's servante, is omitted, since she is essentially no more than a female laquais who occasionally delivers messages (for example, in Act I scene 6).

LESAGE

Table 4

PLAY	MALE SERVANT(S)	FEMALE SERVANT(S)
Crispin rival de son maître	Crispin La Branche	Lisette
Turcaret	Frontin Flamand	Marine Lisette
La Tontine	Crispin ¹	Frosine

¹Although described as Trousse-Galant's 'valet' in the distribution, Ambroise is excluded from consideration; as the individual upon whom the tontine of the title is based, and kept for that sole purpose by the doctor, his role bears no resemblance to that of the usual stage servant.

DESTOUCHES

Table 5

PLAY	MALE SERVANT(S)	FEMALE SERVANT(S)
L'Ingrat	Pasquin	Lisette Nérine
L'Irrésolu	Frontin	Nérine
Le Médisant	Frontin	Lisette Javotte
Le Triple Mariage	Pasquin L'Epine	Nérine
L'Obstacle imprévu	Crispin Pasquin	Nérine
Le Philosophe marié	-	Finette
Les Philosophes amoureux	-	-
Le Glorieux	Pasquin	- ¹

¹Although there features in the play a certain Lisette, who is initially presented as Isabelle's servant, it soon emerges (I,9) that she is someone whose station is above that of the normal servant, and thereafter she behaves simply as one of a number of non-servant characters.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

For ease of use, this bibliography is divided into two sections. The first lists those editions of the authors under consideration upon which the study has been based, and to which all references relate, unless otherwise indicated; the second encompasses secondary literature, together with relevant literary works other than those to which the study is specifically devoted. In identifying relevant secondary literature extensive use has been made of Otto Klapp, Bibliographie der französischen Literaturwissenschaft, vols 1-23 (Frankfurt am Main, 1960-86), which itself affords comprehensive coverage of other major annual bibliographies, such as The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies and Dissertation Abstracts International, as well as those occurring in journals such as the Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France and the Revue d'histoire du théâtre.

Section 1

PRINCIPAL EDITIONS CITED

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¹Because it is only recently that Attendez-moi sous l'orme has been attributed to Dufresny with any degree of certainty (see above, p.355, note 3), it does not feature in his collected works, but instead appears in editions of Regnard. References to Attendez-moi sous l'orme relate, therefore, to the play as it appears in the 1823 edition of Regnard's works.

Section 2

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

The body of critical literature devoted to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French drama is considerable, and no attempt is made here to provide a comprehensive review of it. The items noted are those which have contributed most to my understanding of the drama and theatre of the period, and which have consequently been of direct use to me in the preparation of this thesis - if only negatively -, whether or not they are referred to in the text. Unpublished theses whose abstracts show their contents to be not directly relevant to my subject - or my approach to it - are listed, but have not been consulted in their entirety.

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