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by

EULAH MASSEY

THE FAMILY LIFE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY AS PORTRAYED BY MOLIERE.

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INTRODUCTION

Jean Baptiste Poquelin, called Molière, stands out pre-eminently as the portrayer of the disentegrating forces which wrecked the peace and harmony of the homes of the seventeenth century. Possessed of a keen observation and an analytical mind, he was able to detect these obstacles and forces which kept the home from being what it should be. He found two types of obstacles; first, the unnatural physical; such as the despotism of the parents; second, unnatural moral, such as, hypocrisy and affectation.

Moliere believed that love was the only foundation on which a happy marriage could be laid. He maintained that love and not reason, shouldbe the accepted criterion. He saw lives and homes which were ruined because parents insisted on selecting husbands for their daughters. The social and financial standing of the suitor was of paramount interest to the father in the selection of his daughter's future mate.

It was by means of burlesque that he so vividly and forcibly described the mannerisms of his day, giving us a realistic rather than an imaginative picture, and painting men as he saw them, a mixture of good and bad. He believed that the comedy should serve the purpose of correcting the manners of men. The universality of scope and appeal of his themes makes his plays valuable and interesting to the modern student. Moliere depicted characters that are typical of what may be found in all parts

of the world. Unceasingly he lashed and bantered affectation, preciosity, pedantisme, hypocrisy, prejudices of his time, and vanity in all its known forms. He was a master stylist, possessed of a rich and fluent language. His images are free, being neither doctrinated nor prejudiced.

We say that Molière is the author of "pièces à thèses," plays in which the theme and not the action is important. What are the general themes and morals which affected the home? Moliere criticised the abuse of authority by the parents. It is not unnatural that the mothers and children should have revolted when their individual personalities and lives were not respected. Seldom, if ever, were their wishes taken into consideration; they were usually at the disposal of the father. The theme and moral developed in "Les Précieuses Ridicules" is that we must avoid affectation and the unusual in speaking; in "École des Maris" and "École des Femmes," we must have faith in the natural instincts and tendencies, and not try to thwart them. An attack is also made against despotism and ignorance; in "De Misanthrope," we are taught the necessity of being frank and sincere, but not coquettish and obnoxious; in "Tartuffe," he shows us the danger of being so "devot" as to be deceived by a hypocrite; in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," we see the utter folly of a man trying to shine in a society for which he was unfit, the "foolish vanity of the parvenu"; in "Les Femmes Savantes," we see an expressed defiance and horror of pedantisme. In general, we may say that the theme of all of Molière's plays is an appeal for confidence in nature and a horror of vanity and affectation in all their forms. He would have us select as our guides common sense, moderation, and prudence; he would say,

flee all excesses, be neither miser nor too generous, be neither too dull nor too zealous and enthusiastic.

The outline of this paper was inspired by Miss Majorie Mullins' excellent work, entitled "La Famille au XVII^e Siècle d'apres le Théatre de Molière."

PART ONE

MARRIAGE

1. affinity of age.

When we analyze Molière's plays, we see that he stood for affinity of age, affinity of sentiments, and affinity of social conditions.

In "L'École des Maris" and "L'École des Femmes," he shows the necessity of the affinity of age. Two brothers, Sganarelle and Ariste, undertake to raise and educate two young girls, whom they wish to make their wives. Ariste is very lenient and indulgent in the bringing up of Leonor, while Sganarelle is very strict with Isabelle, who is beloved by Valère. Ariste, is a more admirable man; he is sixty years old, while the strict Sganarelle is only forty. The girls are young. Sganarelle tries to impress upon Ariste's mind that he is the elder, but Ariste answers:

"Cette farouche humeur, dont la sévérité
Fuit toutes les douceurs de la societé,
A tous 'ses' procédés inspire un air bizarre,
Et jusques à l'habit, rend tout chez lui barbare".[1]

Sgnaralle enraged answers:

"Il est vrai quà la mode il faut m'assujettir.
Et ce n'est pas pour moi que je me dois vêtir!
Ne voudriez-vous point, pas vos belles sornettes,
Monsieur mon frère aîné, car, Dieu, merci, vous l'êtes
D'une vingtaine d'ans, à ne vous rien celer.
Et cela ne vaut point la peine d'en parler;

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[1] L'École des Maris, Act 1, Scene 1.

Ne voudriez-vous point, dis-je, sur ces matières,
De vos jeunes muguets m'inspirer les manières?"[2]

Again Sganarelle enraged answers:

"J'enrage, pas ma foi! l'age ne sert de guère
Quand on n'a pas cela".[3]

The play ends with two marriages: namely, that of Ariste and Léonor and that of Isabelle and Valere. Ariste seeks to justify his marriage with Léonor in saying:

"Je sais bien que nos ans ne se rapportent guère,
Et je laisse à son choix liberté tout entière
Si quatre mille écus de rente bien venants,
Une grande tendresse et des soins complaisants
Peuvent, a son avis, pour un tel mariage,
Reparer enter nous l'inégalité d'âge,
Elle peut m'epouser: sinon choisir ailleurs."[1]

It is the character Isabelle who pleads for affinity of age. Sganarelle was violent when she married Valère, but she expresses her views to him in these words:

"Pour vous, je ne veux point, Monsieur, vous faire excuse;
Je vous sers beaucoup plus que je ne vous abuse.
Le ciel pour être joints ne vous fit pas tous deux.[2]

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2 L'École des Maris Act 1, Sc.1
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid Act lll, Sc. V.
1 L'Ecole des Maris Act 1, Sc. Vl.
2 Ibid Act lll, Sc. lX.

2. affinity of sentiments.

The plea for affinity of sentiments and characters is strong in "Le Misanthrope" and "Les Femmes Savantes." In "Le Misanthrope" we see two couples, Philinte and Éliante, who are prudent and moderate, and Alceste and Célimène, who are opposites. Alceste is a supposed pessimist. Philinte gives him good advice in these words:

"Quand on est du monde, il faut bien que l'on rende
Quelques dehors civils que l'usage demande."[1]

and later he says:

"Mon Dieu des moèrus du temps mettons-nous moins en peine,
Et faisons un peu grâce à la nature humaine:

Et c'est une folie à nulle autre seconde
De vouloir se mêler de corriger le monde."[2]

Philinte is less egotistical and introspective; he is the more admirable man, calm, obliging, and complacent. He answers calmly such outburst of passion as the one against him by Alceste:

"Je veux qu'on soit sincère, et qu'en homme d'honneur,
On ne lâche aucun mot qui ne parte du coeur."[1]

Alceste's pessimism is showed in these verses:

"Mes yeux sont blessés et la cour et la ville
Ne m'offrent rien qu'objets à m'echauffer la bile;
Je ne trouve partout que lache flatterie."[2]

The case of Alceste and Célimène is one of true incompatibility of temperaments. All the things which Alceste condemns in others are done by Célimène. Alceste tries to defend himself against Philinte's attack:

"C'ást cet étrange choix où votre coeur s'engage,

La sincère Éliante a du penchant pour vous,
La prude Arsinoé vous voit d'un oeil fort doux:
Cependant à leurs voeux votre âme se refuse,
Tandis qu'en ces lieux Célimène l'amuse,
De qui l'humeur coquette et l'esprit médisant
Semble si fort donner dans les moeurs d'à présent.
D'où vient que, leur portant une haine mortelle,
Vous pouvez bien souffrir ce qu'en tient cette belle.
Ne sont-ce plus défauts dans un objet si doux?
Ne les voyez-vous pas? Ou les excusez-vous?[1]"

Alceste realizes that Philinte has spoken the truth, and he sees that there is a great difference in their characters and sentiments, but still he says he loves her:

"J'ai beau voir ses défauts, et j'ai beau l'en blâmer
En dépit qu'on en ait, elle se fait aimer;
Sa grâce est la plus forte; et sans doute sa flamme
De ces vices du temps pourra purger son âme."[2]

Alceste and Éliante give voice to Molière's ever present belief that reason does not count in love. Alceste says:

"Il est vrai; ma raison me le dit chaque jour;
Mais la raison n'est pas ce qui règle l'amour."[1]

Éliante says the same:

"Cela fait assez voir que l'amour, dans les coeurs,
N'est pas toujours produit par un rapport d'humeur;
Et toutes ces raisons de douces sympathies
Dans cet exemple-ci se trouvent démenties."[2]

References from preceding page:

1 Le Misanthrope Act 1, Sc.1
2 Ibid

Alceste is so unnatural as to think that this popular young girl will give up pleasure and live in a desert with him. Célimène answers this offer with these words:

"Moi, renoncer au monde avantque de vieillir,
Et dans votre desert aller m'ensevelir!
La solitude effraye une âme de vingtans."

This speech shows the absolute incompatability of temperament of the two supposed lovers. Eliante and Philinte are of like sentiments and sympathies; they are calm, rational beings.

In "Tartuffe" there is another example of the lack of affinity of sentiments and sympathies. There is no perfect understanding between Orgon and his wife. Elmire's interests and desires are exactly opposed to each of his.

In "Les Femmes Savantes" the temperaments of Clitandre and Armande are exactly opposed, while Clitandre and Henriette have like sentiments and desires. Armande was of that set which affected learning, while Clitandre and Henriette were normal, and natural beings. How unhappy would have been a match between Clitandre and Armande!

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1 "Le Misanthrope, Act1, Sc. 1
2 Ibid

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1 "Le Misanthrope Act 1, Sc. IV

3. affinity of social standing.

The third affinity that Molière maintained to be necessary was the affinity of social standing; not going out of one's own class. Two plays which have this as the main theme are "George Dandin" and "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme". George Dandin, a middle class bourgeois, falls in love with Angelique, the daughter of a noble. He dreams of becoming wealthy and of becoming a man of quality by this marriage. Angelique's family consents to the marriage without investigating into the social condition of their daughter's future husband. When they find out how crude he is, they scorn him. He complains to his parents of the polite and correct language used, and he realizes that the marriage is not well matched. M. de Sotenville impresses it upon his mind that he is not a "gentilhomme". The real "gentilhomme" who calls at the home of M. and M^me^. Sotenville has rights not granted him. He is made to feel that he is their inferior. His word is not believed. When he finds that his wife is going out with Clitandre, a courtisan, he is enraged, and would have reported the act, had he not been punished for having seen her by spending the night outside of the house; as an excuse for doing this, she said he was drunk.

Never is he taken into confidence by the other members of the family. There is not the least sympathy between Angelique and George Dandin. Angelique avoids the company of her husband and seeks that of courtisans, especially Clitandre. She expresses her scorn for her husband in this speech to Clitandre:

"Pensez-vous qu'on soit capable d'aimer de certains maris qu'il y a? On les prend parce qu'on ne peut s'en défendre. Mais on sait leur rendre justice, et l'on se moque fort de les considérer au dela de ce qu'ils méritent."[1]

Clitandre recognizes that this is an ill-mated match; he sees the lack of affinity of sentiments.

"Ah! qu'il faut vouer que celui qu'on vous a donné etait peu digne de l'honneur qu'il a reçu et que c'est une étrange chose que l'assemblage qu'on a fait d'une personne comme vous avec un homme comme lui!"[2]

George Dandin realizes the hoplessness of his case; he sees that it is his own fault for desiring to rise in a society for which he was not fitted. He most dramatically ezpresses his ideas on the necessity of affinity of social conditions:

"Ah! qu'une femme demoiselle est une étrange affaire, et que mon mariage est une leçon bien parlante à tous les paysans qui veulent s'élver au-dessus de leur condition et s'allier, comme j'ai fait, a la maison d'un gentilhomme! L'alliance qu'ils font est petite avec nos personnes: c'est notre bien seul qu'ils epousent; et j'aurais mieux fait, tout riche que je suis, de m'allier en bonne et franche paysannerie que de prendre une femme qui se tient au-dessus moi, s' offense de porter mon nom et pense qu'avec tout mon bien je n'ai pas assez acheté la qualité de son mari. George Dandin, George Dandin, vous avez fait une sottise, la plus grande au monde. Ma maison m'est effroyable maintenant, et ne n'y rentre point sans y trouver quelque chagrin."[1]

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[1] Georges Dandin Act III, Sc. V.
[2] Ibid
[1] George Dandin Act 1, Sc. 1

Later when he is sure that he is being deceived by his wife, he admits that it was his fault:

"Eh! bien, George Dandin, vous voyez de quel air votre femme vous traite! Voilà ce que c'est d'avoir voulu epouser une demoiselle! ... Mais vous avez voulu tâter de la noblesse, et il vous ennuyait d'être maître chez vous. [1] Ah! que je vous l'avez voulu, vous l'avez voulu, George Dandin, vous l'avez voulu, cela vous sied fort bien, et vous voilà ajusté comme il faut; vous avez justement ce que vous méritez." [2]

In "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" the same theme, the lack of affinity of social conditions, is developed. M. Jourdain wishes to be received in the best society; he desires everything that "the people of quality" have. He goes so far as to be ashamed of his parents and his wife's parents. He commands his daughter to break her engagement with Cléonte because he is not a "gentilhomme". M. Jourdain questions Cléonte as to whether he is a "gentilhomme". The latter says he is not; then M. Jourdain tells him he cannot be his son-in-law because his daughter's husband must be able to make her a marquise. It is Mme. Jourdain who pleads for the affinity of social condition. She argues with her husband and tries to convince him with this argument: "C'est une chose, moi, ou je ne consentirai point. Les alliances avec plus grand que soi sont sujettes toujours a de fâcheux inconvénients. Je ne veux point qu'un gendre puisse à ma fille reprocher ses parents, et qu'elle ait des enfants qui aient honte de m' appeler leur grand-maman." [1]

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1 George Dandin Act I, Sc. III.
2 George Dandin Act I, Sc. VII.
1 Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme Act III, Sc. 2.

PART TWO

1. Relations between parents.

In analyzing Molière's works with special attention to the family life, we see that he gives us a complete picture of the home and family. He lifts the roof from the house and tells us to look in. For convenience, we may divide the treatment of family life into two sections showing: first, the relations between the parents; and second, the relation between parents and their children. As examples of plays concerned with the relations between the parents, we may study in detail, "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme", "Les Femmes Savantes", "Le Tartuffe", and "Le Malade Imaginaire".

In "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme", we see the despotism of the father. His word is law in the family; the wife, who is his superior intellectually, must hold an inferior place in the home. She must stand by and see her home wrecked by the foolish vanity of her husband. In "Les Femmes Savantes" it is the mother who has assumed the leading role of affectation and vanity. She neither loves nor respects her husband, who is a weakling under her control. In "Tartuffe" it is again the father who rules tyrannically over his wife and home. He does not respect the word of his wife; there is a lack of understanding between them. The hypocrite, Tartuffe, has come between husband and wife. The wife, Elmire, has to resort to intrigue to convince her husband that Tartuffe is a hypocrite. In "Le Malade Imaginaire" we see the despotism of the father, who believes that he is ill all the time and believes that he must keep a doctor near, too; here is

an example of duplicity and falseness on the part of the stepmother.

Before taking each of these plays separately and showing how the characters express Molière's views, we need to know a few details about each play.

"Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" is a character study of M. Jourdain, a rich member of the bourgeois class of Paris, who suddenly decides that he wants to become a gentleman and climb the highest ladder of society. He sends for teachers of all the arts to instruct him. To his utter amazement he finds that he has been speaking prose all his life! He desires to do and have everything that the "gens de qualite" have. He becomes an easy dupe to Dorante, an courtisan, who courts his friendship for his purse. M. Jourdain has a daughter, Lucile, who is in love with Cléonte. M. Jourdain demands that she give up the engagement to Cléonte and marry some one who will be able to give her a title. Madame Jourdain is indignant at her husband's actions. M. Jourdain believes that a marquise, Dorimène, is in love with him, but the truth is that Dorante has been playing M. Jourdain false. It is Dorante who makes love to Dorimène for himself, while he deceives M. Jourdain. He tells him that he is interceding for him before Dorimène. Madame Joudain finds M. Jourdain holding an interview with Dorimene. Again M. Jourdain is duped and deceived because of his own vanity and stupidity. Cléonte's valet provides a disguised ceremony, in which Cleonte is to be "le Grand Turc", and with this title is to seek the hand of Lucile. M^me^ Jourdain readily becomes a partyto the conspiracy. M. Jourdain is highly flatter-

ed, especially when "Le Grand Turc" confers upon him the title of "Mamamouchi". At first Lucile objects, but then she recognizes her lover Cleonte in disguise. The marriage ceremony is celebrated, M. Jourdain sees his folly.

M. Jourdain, in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme", refuses to listen to his wife when she warns him against lending his money to Dorante; he says:

"Que faire? Voulez-vous que je refuse un homme de cette condition-là, qui a parlé de moi ce matin dans la chambre du roi?"[1]

He demands his wife to show him reverence, especially after he has received the title "Mamamouchi".

"Voyez l'impertinente, de parler de la sorte à un mamouchi!"[2]

So we see that in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" there were no grounds of agreement. What the mother desired for her daughter the father opposed, and vice-versa. The father played false and deceived his wife, and he was willing to marry his daughter to the first "parvenu" who could show that he was a "gentilhomme". The character of Mme. Jourdain is the opposite of that of her husband. She sees his faults and points them out to him, but he refuses to heed her warning. She tells him that everyone is making fun of his affected manners: "Qu' est ce que c' est donc, mon mari, que cet équipage-là. Vous-moquez-vous du monde, de vous être fait enharnacher de la sorte?"[1] Again she says: "On se raille partout de vous ... et il y a longtemps que vos façons de faire donnent à rire à tout le monde."[2]

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1 Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme Act III, Sc. IV
2. Ibid.
1 Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme Act III, Sc. III.
1 Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme Act III, Sc. III.

"Vous êtes fou, mon mari, avec toutes vos fantaisies, et cela vous est venu depuis que vous vous mêlez de hauter la noblesse." [2] Madame Jourdain suspected the infidelity of her husband, she tells Nicole: "Ce n'est pas d'aujourd'hui, Nicole, que j'ai conçu des soupçons de mon mari." [3] It is not unnatural that homes so invaded by disorganizing forces should ultimately be wrecked.

In "Les Femmes Savantes" the situation is the reverse of that in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme". It is Philaminte, the wife, who is the ruler of the house. She is a "savante", and is not an admirable wife or mother. Believing that household duties are beneath the dignity of an élite soul, she does not concern herself with them. Because the servant, Martine, does not "parle Vaugelas", she fires her, not taking into consideration the fact that Martine is a good cook. The husband objects and in the absence of his wife he says that he has authority, but as soon as she appears upon the scene he weakens and gives in. She does not hesitate to scorn her husband; she says the following concerning Henriette's marriage to Clitandre:

"Je lui montrerai bien aux lois de qui des deux
Les droits de la raison soumettent tous ses voeux,
Et qui doit gouverner ou sa mère ou son père,
Ou l'esprit, ou le corps, la forme ou la matiere." [1]

Philaminte affects knowledge; she admires the affected manners of Trissotin, a supposed poet. She loves flattery and is ambitious; she says to Trissotin:

"Je n'ai rien fait en vers, mais j'ai lieu d'espérer

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2 Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, Act III, Sc. III.
3 Ibid, Act III, Sc. VII.
1 Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, Act III, Sc. III.

Que je pourrai bientôt vous montrer en amie,
Huit chapitres du plan de notre académie."[1]

The temperaments of Philaminte and Chrysale could not be more incompatible. Philaminte lives in a world of fantasies and flattery, whereas Chrysale is of the world of realism, concerned more with the food he is to eat than with the language spoken by his cook. He argues with Philaminte about firing the cook.

"Oui, mon corps est moi-meme, et j'en veux prendre soin;
Guenille si l'on veut, ma guenille m'est chere.

Et dans ce vain savoir, qu'on va chercher si loin,
On ne sait comme va mon pot, dont j'ai besoin.
Mes gens à la science aspirent pour vous plaire,
L'un me brûle mon rôt en lisant quelque histoire;
Enfin je vois par eux votre exemple suivi,
Et j'ai des serviteurs, et ne suis point servi.
Une pauvre servante au moins m'était restée,
Oui de ce mauvais air n'était point infectée.
Et voilà qu'on la chasse avec un grand fracas.
A cause qu'elle manque à parler Vaugelas."[2]

To further show Philaminte's dominance over Chrysale, we may note his conversation with Ariste in his wife's absence.

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[1] Les Femmes Savantes Act III, Sc. II.
[2] Ibid, Act II, Sc. VII

"Je l'accepte pour gendre
Je réponds de ma femme, C'est une affaire faite,
Et je vais à ma femme en parler sans délai."[1]

But when his wife returns, he dares not mention his idea. His wife's word goes. She favors two ill-suited matches; namely, that of Henriette and Trissotin, and Armande and Clitandre; Armande is a "savante" like Philaminte, while Henriette and Clitandre are unlearned, sincere human beings. Chrysale expresses the difference between his temperament and that of his wife in these words:

"J'aime fort le repos, la paix et la douceur,
Et ma femme est terrible avecque son humeur.
Pour peu que l'on s'oppose à ce que veut sa tête
On en a pour huit jours d'effroyables tempêtes.
Elle me fait trembler dès qu'elle prend son ton;
Je ne sais où me mettre, et c'est un vrai dragon;
Et cependant, avec toute sa diablerie,
Il faut que je l'appelle et mon coeur et ma mie."[2]

Henriette realizes that it is her mother, and not her father, who rules the home. It is the vice and vanity of the mother that wrecks the home life. Henriette says to Clitandre:

"Le plus sûr est de gagner ma mere:
Mon père est d'une humeur à consentir a tout,
Mais il met peu de poids au choses qu'il resout:
C'est elle qui gouverne, et d'un ton absolu
Elle dicte pour loi-ce qu'elle a résolu."[3]

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1 Les Femmes Savantes Act II, Sc. IV.
2 Les Femmes Savantes Act II, Sc. IX.
3 Ibid, Act I, Sc. III.

It requires intrigue on the part of those opposing the preciosity of Philaminte to prove that Trissotin is a poor fake. She was willing to sacrifice the happiness of her daughter, and to wreck the harmony of the home. Chrysale, the weakling father, desired his daughter's happiness and welfare, but his wife's opposition was too strong.

In "Tartuffe we see another home whose peace is destroyed by the wickedness of the ruler, in this case, the father. Orgon allows a hypocrite, Tartuffe, to come between him and his family. He is warned by his wife and children that Tartuffe is a hypocrite, but he refuses to believe them. He determines that his daughter, Mariane, shall marry Tartuffe and not the one she loves, Valère. Elmire is forced to play false her husband in order to prove to him that Tartuffe is a hypocrite. Orgon believed that Tartuffe was the embodiment of all that was good. He held him up as an ideal Christian man. Orgon is ready to turn his own son, Damis, from his door, and disenherit him because he abused Tartuffe rightfully.

Orgon is enraged at the actions of Damis and the other members of his family. He says:

"Paix, dis je.
Je sais bien quel motif à l'attaquer t'oblige:
Vous le haissez-tous; et je vois aujourd'hui
Femme, enfants et valets déchaînés contre lui:
On met impudemment toute chose en usage,
Pour oter de chez moi ce dévot personnage.
Mais plus on fait d'effort afin de L'en bannir,
Plus j'en veux employer à l'y mieux retenir;
Et je vais me hâter à lui donner ma fille,
Pour confondre l'orgueil de toute ma famille.

"Ah! je vous brave tous, et vous ferai connaître
Qu'il faut qu'on m'obeisse et que je suis le maître.

Vite, quiltons la place.
Je te prive, pendard, de ma succession,
Et te donne de plus ma malediction".[1]

The situation in"Le Malade Imaginaire" resembles that in "Les Femmes Savantes". Beline, the mother, flatters and deceives her husband. She also tries to rob the children of their property. Argan, her husband, believes that he is ill, and needs constantly a doctor. His wife pities and sympathises with him. She calls him every endearing term. She tells him that he is her only careand that without him life would not be worth living, but, when out of his sight, she plans against him. Argan believes that he is really ill. He thinks that it would be wise to have his daughter marry a doctor. By not heeding her plea to allow her to marry Cléante, whom she really loves, a plan is worked out to deceive Argan by having Cléante disguise himself as a doctor.

Argan was a victim of the fear of death, and a foolish victim of his doctor, who impressed upon his mind the fact that he was ill. A doctor, Monsieur Purgon, was the disentegrating force in this family. The deceiving and treacherous actions between father and mother were unwholesome for the family life.

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[1] Tartuffe, Act III, Sc. VII.

2. Relationship between parents and children.

After having considered in detail the relationships between parents and the effects of such relationships, let us take up the second phase of the problem: the relationships between parents and their children. Molière cried out against the despotism of the parents. He believed that this spirit of tyranny and rule came from vanity and pride. In many of the plays he treats the same subject, young lovers whose happiness and marriage is opposed and interrupted by their parents. The father thinks of money and social standing rather than of the happiness of his daughter.

In several plays we find that the contention in the home is due to the behavior of the children, rather than to that of the parents. This is true in "Don Juan," and "Les Precieuses Ridicules". In "Don Juan," we have a picture of an indulgent father, whose only reward for his indulgence is an ungrateful son. Don Juan has committed almost every possible atrocity. His father seeks him and leads him to repentance. No sooner is his father's back turned than Don Juan plots against him. Don Juan says:

"Eh! mourrez le plus tôt que vous pourrez, c'est le mieux que vous puissiez faire. Il faut que chacun ait son tour et j'enrage de voir des pères qui vivent autant que leurs fils."[1]

Don Louis reproaches Don Juan for his wicked actions, but the father realizes that he has been too lenient with his son and says to him:

"Ah! mon fils, que la tendresse d'un père est aisément rappelée, et que les offenses d'un fils s'évanouissent vite au moindre mot de repentir! Je ne me souviens plus déjà de tous les deplaisirs que vous m'avez donnés, et tout est effacé par les paroles que vous venez de me faire entendre."[2]

In "Les Précieuses Ridicules" the fault is with the daughter, Cathon, and her sister, Magdelon, who affect the manners of high society. They oppose the will of their parents, who are of the bourgeois class, and who reason according to their natural standing. By their claim to preciosity and learning the two girls, Cathon and Magdelon, not only make their own lives miserable, but they make it uncomfortable for the entire family. Yet the father assumes control and decides upon the husbands for the two girls.

"Tartuffe", which we have discussed in detail in the preceding part of this paper, illustrates the usual relation between parents and children: namely, opposition. Orgon is heartless; he is willing to sacrifice his daughter's happiness and future in order to keep the hypocrite's friendship. When he sees that Tartuffe is a hypocrite, he is as fierce in his denunciation of him as he had been in his praise. To think that he had commanded his daughter to marry that scoundrel! Naturally she revolted. Orgon refused to listen to her plea, which was most pathetic:

"Mon père, au nom du Ciel qui connaît ma douleur,
Et pas tout ce qui peut émouvoir votre coeur,
Relâchez-vous un peu des droits de la naissance,
Et dispensez mes voeux de cette obeissance;

References from preceding page:
1 2 Don Juan, Act IV, Sc. V
Ibid, Act V, Sc. I

Ne me réduisez point par cette dure loi
Jusqu'à me plaindre au ciel de ce que je vous doi,
Et cette vie, helas! que vous m'avez donnée,
Ne me la rendez pas, mon père, infortunée
Si, contre un doux espoir que j'avais pu former.
Vous me défendez d'être à ce que j'ose aimer,
Au moins, par vos bontés, qu'à vos genoux j'implore,
Sauvez-moi du tourment d'être à ce que j'abhorre,
Et ne me portez point à quelque desespoir,
En vous servant sur moi de tout votre pouvoir".[1]

Earlier in the play Mariane told Dorine that she recognized the fact that her father was a tyrant:

"Contre un père absolu que veux-tu que je fasse?[2]
Un père, je l'avoue, a sur nous tant d'empire,
Que je n'ai jamais en la false de rien dire."[3]

Mariane is forced to give in to her father's desires, but Damis revolts; as a reward for his revolt he is driven from his home and disinherited. Orgon gives way to his anger and says to Damis:

"Qui, traître, et dès ce soir,pour vous faire enrager.
Ah! je vous brave tous, et vous ferai connaître
Qu'il faut qu'on m'obeisse et que je suis le maître;
Allons, qu'on se rétracte, et qu'à l'instant fripon
On se jette à ses pieds pour demander pardon."[4]

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1 Tartuffe, Act IV, Sc. III
2 Tartuffe, Act II, Sc. III
3 Ibid
4 Tartuffe Act III, Sc. VI

Orgon not only does not love his son, but he is not even respectful or courteous to him when he is in company with others. He shrieks out at Damis: "Si tu dis un seul mot, je te romprai les bras."

Very few, if any, modern youths would be as respectful to their fathers, if they were treated as Mariane and Damis were. What girl or boy would not revolt when they saw a hypocrite taking their place in their father's affections? We see that the relationships between the father and children were very unpleasant. Their home life was miserable. There was no understanding between the members of the family; instead of working together, the house was divided into two strong factions. On the one hand the domineering father, and on the other, the mother and children opposing him, because of his stupidity in allowing himself to be so deceived.

In "L'Avare" the situation resembles thatof "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" and "Tartuffe". The father, a miser, is duped and deceived as in "Tartuffe". The love of money leads him on. Again we have the story of a father deciding upon the husband for his daughter. No matter how much she pleads, he refuses to give in. Not realizing that he is being flattered, he says to Valère: "Je lui donne l' authorite que le ciel me donne sur toi, et j'entends que tu fasses tout ce qu'il te dira."[1]

Elise scorns her father. She tells him that she would commit suicide before marrying such a man.

Elise--"C'est une chose où vous ne me reduirez point."

Harpagon-- "C'est une chose où je te reduirai."

Elise--"Je me tuerai plutôt que d'epouser un tel mari."[2]

Thus we see another household wrecked by the vice of the father. He is consumed with the thought of money. ~~He fears that some one is going to steal his money~~. He fears that some one is going
He fears that some one is going

to steal his money; thus he is constantly watching and searching everyone near him. He cares not for his children and their mother, nor their welfare. He is very pleased and flattered when he thinks that Elise is going to be accepted in marriage without a dowry. How disguise deceived him! He wanted to make a marriage for Elise which would be most favorable for him—indeed, a thoughtful father.

In the discussion of the relation between parents in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" we saw how the daughter, Lucile, was the innocent victim of the father's vanity and folly. He is so desirous of becoming one of the "gens de qualite" that he has no time to think of his daughter's welfare. He says he will give her to the first "gentilhomme," who comes along with sufficient money. Little does it matter to him if Lucile loves Cléonte. In the play the mother pleads the case of her daughter, but the father answers abruptly:

"Tout ce que j'ai a vous dire, moi c'est que je veux avoir un gendre gentilhomme, j'ai du bien assez pour ma fille, et je veux la faire marquise. C'est une chose que j'ai résolue!"

Since the mother's and daughter's pleas do not obtain the father's consent, another device must be introduced to overcome the father . The disguise ceremony, the coming of "le fils du Grand Turc", servesto give the play a happy ending. Cléonte, Lucile's lover, disguises himself as a Turk, and with title and flattery wins his way into M. Jourdain's heart. Lucile did not know that he was Cléonte in disguise, so at first she protested most vigorously. Here

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References from preceding page;
1 L'Avare, ActI, Sc. V
2 L'Avare ActI, Sc. IV

is how her father answered her: "Je le veux, moi qui suis votre père allons, vous dis-je. Çà, votre main."[1]

The natural feelings and desires of the mother for her daughter are thwarted by the father's vanity. She tells her to inform her father of the fact that if she cannot marry Cleonte, she will marry no one. Madame encourages Cléonte thus: "Cléonte, ne perdez point courage encor."[2] She is most eager in helping them carry out the fake Turk ceremony.

We see how the peace of this household was destroyed by the nature of the father. What child could respect such a father who had no place in his heart for her? Could she love and respect a father who was willing to give her to the first man who came along with a title and money? Moliere condemned this act; he was ever a partisan of love in marriage.

In "Les Femmes Savantes" it is the mother who is the tyrant and destroyer of peace. The father is a weakling and a tool in her hands. Philaminte is a "savante". She is most disgusted with her daughter, Henriette, because she is not interested in learning. Henriette says she enjoys being stupid, after seeing the fools that the others make of themselves in affecting learning. Philaminte determines to reform Henriette by marrying her to Trissotin, a pedant:

"Oui, mais j'y suis blessée, et ce n'est pas mon compte
De souffrir dans mon sang une pareille honte
J'ai donc cherché longtemps un biais de vous donner
La beauté les ans ne peuvent moissoner

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[1] Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, Act V, Sc. V
[2] Ibid, Act III, Sc. XII

De faire entrer chez vous le desir des sciences,
De vous insinuer les belles connaisances:--
Et la pensée enfin où mes voeux ont souscrit,
C'est d'attacher à vous un homme plein d'esprit;
Et cet homme et Monsieur, que je vous détermine,
A voir comme l'époux que mon choix vous destine".[1]

Madame Jourdain wants Henriette to have a husband who will flatter her mother. She favors M. Trissotin, whose true self is shown when he refuses to marry Henriette because he thinks the family has lost all its money.

Henriette was loved by her father. He desired her happiness and favored her marriage with Clitandre. Neither father nor daughter could tolerate the affected ways of Philaminte and Armande, but the father was more materialistic than Henriette. There was no understanding between Henriette and her mother. They were absolutely irreconciable. Armande was as affected as was Philaminte. With a jealou sister, a heartless and affected mother against her, and only a weak father on her side, Henriette had to fight hard to maintain herself.

Armande tries to reconcile Henriette to the marriage with Trissotin.

"Cependant, bien qu'ici nos gouts soient differents
Nous devons obeir, ma soeur, a nos parents
Une mère a sur nous une entiere puissance,
Et vous croyez en vain par votre resistance!"[2]

As in many of the other plays, an unusual device must be brought in to make the play end happily. Word is received that Philaminte and Chrysale have lost their money. Trissotin immediately begins to make

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1 Les Savantes, Act III, Sc. IV
2 Ibid

excuses for canceling the wedding. Clitandre offers to help them, but Henriette refuses, saying that if he were not good enough for them when she had money, she would not let him help them. How happy she is when she finds out that the sending of the words was only a trick to prove Trissotin's true character!

"Les Femmes Savantes" is one of the best pictures that Moliere gives us of a disorganized family. The feelings of the mother and Armande toward the rest of the family are abominable. They look upon them as stupid beasts, which must be driven and made to do their will. They are not thought capable of thinking or acting for themselves.

Another play which shows us the unhappy relations between parents and their children is "Le Malade Imaginaire." In this play both step-mother and father work against the child, but they do not work together. The father is tyrannical; the step-mother is wicked and scheming. She pretends that she loves Argan. In the choice of her husband Angelique is given no part. Her father informs her that she is to marry Thomas Diafoirus, a doctor. Argan believes that he is ill , and that he needs a doctor near him all the time, so he thinks this choice of a husband for his daughter will be advantageous to him. When Angelique revolts he tells her to choose between this man and a convent.

"Choisis d'epouser dans quatre jours, ou monsieur ou un convent."[1]

When the doctor is proved a fake, Argan, to show that he is really the ruler of the family, says:"Non, mon frere, je veux la mettre dans un convent, puisqu'elle s'est opposee a mes volontes. Je vois bienqu' il y a quelque amourette la-dessous, et j'ai decouvert certain entrevue

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[1] Le Malade Imaginaire, Act II Sc. VI

secrete, qu'on ne sait pas que j'aie decouverte."[1]

Argan, duped by his second wife, wishes to deprive his children of their property. She incites him against his rebelling children:

"C'est que les filles bien sages et bien honnêtes, comme vous, se moquent d'être obeissantes et soumises aux volontés de leurs peres. Cela bon autrefois."[2]

Angelique is not weak; she refuses to submit to her father and stepmother: "Le devoir d'une fille a des bornes, Madame, et la raison et les lois ne s'etendent point à toutes sortes de chose. Si mon père ne veut pas me donner un mari qui me plaise, je le conjurerai au moins de ne point forcer à en épouser un que je ne puisse pas aimer."[3]

The chief vice of the father in this play was his vanity and willingness to sacrifice everything for his health. He said that had his younger daughter been of age to marry he would have chosen an apothecary for her husband. Fortunately for Angelique, the infidelity of Beline and the hypocrisy of Diaforius were discovered in time to prevent her marriage. She shows her love for her father when she believes him dead. She is distressed. How happy she is when she finds out that it was only a joke! They understand each other after that. Angelique realized that her father was being duped by her step- mother and the doctor. This was a home which was wrecked by vanity, authority, treachery, and revolt.

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1 Le Malade Imaginaire, Act III, Sc. XI
2 Ibid, Act II, Sc. III
3 Ibid, Adt II, Sc. V

CONCLUSION

We see from the foregoing discussion that Molière was interested in showing to the public not characters but souls, that which took place in the innermost hidden depths of the soul. That he has exaggerated unfavorable and distasteful conditions is not to be condemned, as the aim of this device was to make the picture more forcible. He eliminated the insignificant and exaggerated the significant. He preferred the complicated characters to the simple; thus we find no character who is totally good or bad, but what we do find is a mixture of good and bad, with one more prevalent than the other, and affecting other people. In "L'Avare", the most important picture is not that of the miser, but the neighborhood and the miser's family. In "Tartuffe", the most significant picture is that of the family of a bourgeois "devot" and fanatic.

He has showed us the vanity of pretending to have learning which we have not, and the folly of aspiring to shine in high society when we are unfit to be there. He has successfully pictured for us the vanity of men who live on the flattery of doctors and hypocrites. We see how these forces threatened to wreck the homes of the seventeenth century.

How has Molière portrayed the family of the seventeenth century? He has painted only disorganized families. He has given us none in which there was perfect harmony and understanding. Does this mean that all the families were disorganized? No. But they were in the great majority.

There were historical families which Molière had been introduced into. He had observed these forces in them, thus his pictures of family life were not imagined, but were realistic pictures of what he had seen.

That Molière succeeded admirably in pointing out these disintegrating forces in the family is not to be denied. We see him as the defender and protector of the home.