

**Julia Prest**

**Failed Seductions and the Female Spectator:**

**Pleasure and Polemic in the *Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur***

One of the most common charges leveled against the theater in seventeenth-century France was that it promoted immorality in general and sexual immorality in particular. Where the Church sought to suppress dangerous passions and whims, it was claimed that the theater, owing in part to its preoccupation with erotic love, enflamed them. René Rapin, a Jesuit, attributed the increasing emphasis on *galanterie* (a broad term encompassing anything from mild flirtation to extramarital sexual relations) in seventeenth-century drama precisely to the increasing and unwelcome influence of the female spectator.<sup>i</sup> Likewise, Pierre Nicole, a Jansenist, outlined the process by which the inclusion of *galanterie* in plays and novels insidiously undermined society by indulging women's unrealizable fantasies.<sup>ii</sup> For Nicole and others, the theatrical (and novelistic) portrayal of *galanterie* thus threatened to undermine the sacrament of marriage through the vector of the impressionable female.

One of the most intriguing elements of the anonymous *Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur* (1667) lies in its response to this very charge. The author of the *Lettre* makes the extraordinary claim that Molière's *Tartuffe, ou l'hypocrite*, now renamed *Panulphe*,

*ou l'Imposteur*, offers a powerful attack on, and a reliable inoculation against, *galanterie solide* (a euphemism for fornication). The argument turns on an intriguing theory of ridicule: the author claims that the effect of seeing in performance Panulphe-Tartuffe's attempted seduction of La Dame-Elmire is so powerful that the extreme sense of ridicule it engenders among the theater audience is indelible and will inevitably be called to mind in any similar off-stage encounters. The play, it is argued, is thus endowed with a significant moral function that can only benefit the French nation currently in the sway of a tide of sexual immorality. The argument put forward is intriguing, yet slippery in its moral ambiguity and sometimes obfuscatory logic. Here I will attempt to unpick these claims, paying particular attention to the emphasis placed on the response of the female spectator and the author's identification therewith. I shall also speculate on the author's purpose in writing this portion of the letter, asking what contribution it might have made in the context of the *Tartuffe* controversy.

As all moliéristes know, *Tartuffe, ou l'hypocrite* was banned from public performance immediately following its courtly première at Versailles on May 12, 1664. This marked the beginning of a controversy that would last nearly five years during which time Molière battled to have the ban lifted and the young Louis XIV sought to establish himself as king and to ensure religious and political stability within his kingdom.<sup>iii</sup> The *Lettre*, dated August 20, 1667, appeared with no indication of the name of the author, the place of publication or the name of the printer, and it seems to have been circulated covertly.<sup>iv</sup> Although the identity of its author is unknown, it seems clear from the form, tone and content of the letter that it was written by a member of the circle of free-thinking

intellectuals that Molière frequented.<sup>v</sup> The letter's appearance followed in the wake of a single public performance at the Palais-Royal theater of *Panulphe ou l'Imposteur* on August 5, 1667, which had sparked the immediate renewal and reinvigoration of a controversy that was still simmering. On August 6, Guillaume Lamoignon, first president of the Paris Parlement, intervened in the king's absence and put a stop to any further performances of the play, and Molière's attempts in the days that followed to change Lamoignon's mind were unsuccessful. Nor did the playwright's (second) petition to the king, written on August 8 and delivered to the monarch in his military camp in Lille shortly thereafter, have any immediate effect. The most powerful assault on the play came on August 11, 1667 in the form of Archbishop Péréfixe's extraordinarily heavy-handed decree threatening excommunication to anybody within his diocese who performed the play, read it or heard it read.

The body of the *Lettre*, an epistolary fiction, opens with an allusion to this decree, ironically observing that the writer has committed a crime by seeing the play and indicating that he can be forgiven only if he brings his fictional addressee up to speed on what the latter has missed. If the letter is ostensibly addressed to one "Monsieur," it is in fact addressed to anybody who was not present at the lone public performance on August 5. Among other things, then, the *Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur* seeks to subvert Péréfixe's ban, for its first and longest part includes a detailed scene by scene account of the 1667 version of the play, in which the verse script is closely paraphrased in prose (usually through reported speech), but never, quite, openly cited. This account is allegedly based on the author's memory of the performance, although this is a manifestly

disingenuous claim for the level of detail and accuracy indicate that the author had access to a copy of the play, which in turn suggests that it was written, or at least conceived, with the playwright's consent. Indeed, the principal value of the *Lettre* is often thought by modern critics to lie in the fact that it provides the nearest thing available to a text that is no longer extant. The *Lettre* is also recognized for its vigorous and sometimes quirky defense of the inclusion of religious subject matter in the theater, an objection that Lamoignon had reportedly raised with Molière when they met in August 1667 and which we are told had caught the playwright off guard.<sup>vi</sup> To an extent, then, the *Lettre* may be understood to have offered a prompt response both to the new ban and to the latest argument put forward against the play.

The argument regarding religion and theater might conceivably have been intended to convince those who shared Lamoignon's view of the benefits of bringing religion to the world, though this seems highly unlikely for reasons that are outlined below. Meanwhile, the scene by scene account of the play is clearly intended to provoke those who shared Péréfixe's objections to it, particularly given that it is packed full of value-judgements and personal commentaries with regard to the moral excellence, for instance, of the Cléante figure who, as I have discussed elsewhere, is no orthodox Christian.<sup>vii</sup> The author addresses the question of any polemical intent with some irony as he moves from the first part of the letter into the second. He writes that he will not engage with the play as religious polemic, claiming that such delicate matters are not for him. Yet he also makes the passing and indubitably controversial assertion, grounded in his firm belief in the external ridiculousness of *all* forms of falsehood, that true and false devotion, like all

cases of true and false, *are* thereby distinguishable. Rather than engage (further) in this sticky debate, the author proposes instead to offer two reflections that, he claims, do not relate to the substance of the controversy.

However, his extensive engagement with the question of fornication or adultery is surely more provocative than it is mollifying.<sup>viii</sup> The most unequivocally incendiary dimension to the *Lettre* (and the most likely reason for its anonymity), though, lies in its openly, shockingly even, unorthodox view of religion, and in its secular, philosophical outlook, which is broadly that of the erudite libertine. The author writes with great authority and assurance that religion is nothing more than the perfection of reason (94); he also comments on the strange power that religion has over men's minds (78). Easily legible in its rejection of orthodox religion, the letter is instead couched in terms of a moral philosophy that is materialist and empirical, shot through with a strong epicurean bent. The moral perspective that is put forward in the letter is thoroughly secular, and as such is incompatible with the Christian religion. As Jean-Pierre Cavaillé has noted, the type of truth that is promoted here is not the divinely revealed truth enjoyed by the faithful Christian but the unqualified truth associated with human reason.<sup>ix</sup> For the author, there is no need for any type of divine intervention in matters of truth since man has been given all the tools he needs to identify it; for the same reason there is no place for a divine or religious source of morality, which is to be found instead by means of natural reason. In the Church's eyes, this is an unequivocally and profoundly libertine text, and indeed it cannot credibly have been written with the aim of winning over Molière's devout detractors. Rather, the letter's argumentation stems from an entirely different worldview

and is predicated on the tacit assumption that its readers will share the author's moral outlook. We may conclude that if the author intended to make any contribution to the polemic at all, it was in the form of a provocative riposte rather than a persuasive counter-argument, a means to stir up controversy (or at least to rail against its absurdity with likeminded individuals) rather than to appease it.

The first part of the *Lettre* is, as we have seen, given over to a detailed summary of the play. The second part is dedicated broadly to a defense of the play's morality, firstly by means of a justification of the inclusion of religion in the theater and secondly by a detailed account of Molière's alleged assault on sexual immorality. The intricate theory of laughter and the ridiculous put forward in this final section of the letter has caught the attention of a number of modern critics. It has usefully been likened in its reliance on a sense of superiority and pride to that put forward by Hobbes in his *Treatise on Human Nature* (1650) and in *Leviathan* (1651), and in its emphasis on *disconvenance* (unsuitability) and on social correction to the theory of Henri Bergson set out more recently in *Le Rire* (1900). However, insufficient attention has been paid to the extraordinary contention via which this theory is put forward, with which we are principally concerned here.

Given its intricate, sinuous and sometimes elusive nature, the anonymous author's argument will be examined here in detail. The idea is presented in the letter's opening foreword as being too speculative and still five or six months away from completion (71). The author, writing of himself in the third person, explains that he will outline a happy

byproduct of the play that he believes can be put to good use in the fight against *galanterie* and would-be male seducers (72). There is no suggestion, then, that Molière actively sought to enter the campaign against sexual immorality, but rather that this is an accidental benefit of his play. The author then goes on to present his startling claim whereby the play represents the most significant contribution to the campaign to preserve marital fidelity thanks to its ridiculous portrayal of the most common methods employed by would-be seducers (97). If modern readers are surprised by this argument, it would seem that we are not alone, for the author readily admits that some readers will find the proposition strange, but asks them to suspend their judgment until they too have seen the play (97). Anticipating the counter-argument whereby *galanterie* is the most natural of all vices and therefore almost impossible to counter, the author admits that it is indeed the most universal of sins but claims that this is owing not to an inherent predisposition among all humans but rather to the peculiarities of the French nation, especially its women (97). On the basis of the culturally constructed nature of French women's inclination towards *galanterie*, the author argues that the extreme ridicule with which the encounters and arguments that usually serve as a prelude to an illicit sexual liaison are treated in the play will ably serve to counteract the charms that lead most women astray (97).

According to the author's theory of ridicule, nature has endowed reason with qualities that help us to identify it, notably a sense of joy and of pleasure that our soul finds in all forms of morality. This is distinct from the type of pleasure that we derive from something that is not reasonable and which, for its part, provokes our capacity to perceive

something as being ridiculous (98). Reason is thus associated with a form of joy that is mixed with esteem, whereas unreason or ridicule is associated with one that is mixed with scorn. Reason is associated with *convenance* (suitability or compatibility) and *bienséance* (propriety), while unreason and ridicule are evidenced by *disconvenance* (unsuitability or incompatibility). Ridicule is nature's way of telling us to avoid something and, the author observes, if incompatibility is the essence of ridicule then it is easy to see how Panulphe's attempted seduction, like all forms of hypocrisy, is ridiculous because the secret behavior of such bigots does not correspond with their public image (98). Panulphe-Tartuffe is thus ridiculous firstly because he is a hypocrite.

Panulphe's attempted seduction, we are told, is doubly ridiculous because it is unsuccessful. When we see that Panulphe fails to convince the Elmire figure, we conclude that the means he uses are grossly at odds with the outcome, and that consequently he is ridiculous for having used those means in the first place. And because both Panulphe's austerity and his attempts at seducing Elmire are extreme, he is consequently extremely ridiculous (99). This extremity is key to the matter of transferability, which the author then addresses, rightly anticipating the problematic question of how the special case of Panulphe, who is a man of religion, would subsequently apply to men of the world. The author explains that the extremity of Panulphe's amorous attempts is such that when similar events occur at any time and in any context in the future they will remain ridiculous to the former spectator of the play, even if their impact is slightly lessened (99). It is owing to the soul's inclination towards pleasure that it will seek to reactivate the sense of pleasure that it experienced the first

time around even if the circumstances are somewhat different. The hypothetical example is given of a woman who, when under pressure from the same arguments that Panulphe uses, inevitably finding them ridiculous, will fail to reflect upon the differences between the man in front of her and Panulphe (99-100). In this instance, her capacity for reason will be overridden by her soul's inclination towards the pleasure of extreme ridicule. This confusion of two different instances of attempted seduction, one theatrical, the other real, one couched in religious terms, the other in worldly ones, is owing to the operations of the memory and especially of the imagination, which according to our author, is the natural home of ridicule (100). This erratic behavior in the human soul, the author argues, is the necessary consequence of the violent and strong impression that the phenomenon made first time around.

With particular reference to Panulphe's arguments, the author explains that because they failed spectacularly in Molière's play, they will necessarily also fail offstage when presented to a woman who has seen the play. And even a more modest sense of ridicule recalled will have the benefit of buying the woman under attack some more time before she realizes that her *galant* and Panulphe are not in fact one and the same (100). The early moments of an attempted seduction are crucial, we are told, and a sense of ridicule is the ultimate passion killer (101); indeed, for the individual who is the object of ridicule, the male seducer, it is the most shocking, the most repellent and the most odious of all sentiments. This is the case for all objects of ridicule but particularly so for the male lover. The author explains that this is owing to the fact that there is nothing more pleasing than arousing passion in another and therefore nothing more displeasing than the coldness

and apathy provoked by ridicule. The effect of the woman's cold response is to dampen the ardor or at least the effectiveness of the man's passion (102).

The author then goes on to make the fascinating claim that *all* such amorous declarations are ridiculous since any external appearances that differ from the internal substance are essentially ridiculous. All would-be seducers are dissembling hypocrites because no man would want to admit in public the feelings that he would describe in private to a woman whom he wanted to seduce (102). For our author, the *galant* who states anything other than that his goal is his own sexual gratification is necessarily a hypocrite.

Towards the end of the letter, the author seeks to drive his point home by insisting on the ubiquity of the problem of sexual immorality and of the uniquely superior nature of Molière's contribution to the fight against it. He observes that the current state of affairs is a result of a popular misconception with regard to sexual mores according to which religion directly contradicts natural reason (104). The author, it is implied, differs from many *mondains* in considering adultery to be a pressing moral issue; however, as we have seen, his morality is not strictly Christian. Similarly, we note that his point here depends for its logic on the assumed prioritization of natural reason over religion; and reason, applied via the effects of Molière's play, will succeed where religion and other more conventional methods of attempting to police sexual morality continually fail (104). In an ironic rhetorical flourish, the author notes finally that in pointing all this out he is in fact doing Molière a great disservice, because he is creating enemies for him in the shape and form of all the *galants* in Paris.

What are we to make of these claims? According to one critic, the argument is so extraordinary that it has not reappeared since.<sup>x</sup> Yet the line of reasoning, for all its extravagance, is difficult to dismiss, not least because it is so obviously the product of an intelligent and interesting mind. And the notion of laughter as a useful corrective tool enjoyed considerable currency in the seventeenth century and beyond. Molière himself had invoked the idea for the first time in his first petition to Louis XIV, written in August 1664 in which he stated that comedy's moral function was to correct men while entertaining them, and he was to return to the idea in his Preface to the published edition of *Tartuffe* in 1669, when he observed that men can easily bear to be reprimanded but cannot stand being mocked. However, the particular vice that Molière was claiming to correct in his *Tartuffe* was of course hypocrisy, and there is no mention by the playwright of any possible benefit with relation to *galanterie*. It is the application of the principle of laughter as a moral corrective to the question of sexual immorality that is particularly surprising in our *Lettre*. On the other hand, the notion that the inopportune lover is a ridiculous figure was widely accepted; it is a comic trope and one that features repeatedly in Molière's drama. The particular absurdity of the old man chasing after a much younger woman—a theme dear to Molière—would even be drawn on by Bossuet in his attempts to ensure that Louis XIV would henceforth remain on the straight and narrow. In his Easter sermon for 1681, Bossuet warned Louis XIV that any sexual exploits in kingly old age would make him an object of ridicule, but would not enable with his conversion.<sup>xi</sup> The other great preacher of the age, Bourdaloue, likewise, imputes a corrective purpose to laughter when he comments that any mockery of his devotion will either result in

useful self-correction or, if unjustified, fall on deaf ears.<sup>xii</sup> While this too is woefully inadequate when the stakes are eternal salvation or damnation, in the context of a moral philosophy that is unconcerned with the afterlife, the effectiveness of laughter in the here and now might reasonably be proclaimed to be of significant moral benefit to society.

The more problematic aspect of the argument put forward in the *Lettre* lies with the question of transferability and the crucial role played by laughter in that process. The difficulty sits not with the idea that what is seen onstage might subsequently be applied to events offstage, for this was commonly understood by people on both sides of the theatrical debate. Rather it is to be found in the idea that the particular case of Panulphe-Tartuffe's attempted seduction of La Dame-Elmire in a theatrical fiction would be applied to *all* attempted seductions encountered thereafter offstage, even if they occurred in an entirely different social context. The author is of course aware of this problem and the intricacy (and one might say obfuscation) of his argumentation particularly with regard to the operation of the imagination is clearly an attempt to render a shaky claim at least more rhetorically convincing. But the argument's rhetorical intricacy is also its downfall, for at the same time that the reader is impressed by the rhetorical skill with which it is presented, s/he is left to question its actual logic. And while the author anticipates a number of queries, these are of course selective and many questions remain unanswered. The pleasure that an individual takes in his or, in this case, her experience of another's ridicule, for instance, is problematic both because it is founded on a sense of personal pride and superiority vis-à-vis the other, which is morally dubious, and particularly because it is in conflict with nature's supposed impulse towards what is

morally good, which in turn produces another, purer form of pleasure. Why is the soul so reluctant to let go of the pleasure of ridicule when so many other potential pleasures are on offer? How exactly is one to explain the fact that the pleasurable experience of another's ridicule produces a marked coldness towards the individual in question? And can the author convincingly claim that a drive towards illicit sexual encounters is more a product of French female culture than it is natural? These are only some of the many queries that an attentive reader of the *Lettre* might raise.

The notion of transferability is particularly problematic in the context of the *Tartuffe* controversy given that the principal complaint made about the play was precisely that the memory of Tartuffe-Panulphe would subsequently taint the impression made by off-stage *dévots*. Only a few days before the *Lettre* appeared, Archbishop Péréfixe had stated in his famous decree that the play was

all the more likely to cause harm to religion owing to the fact that, while claiming to condemn hypocrisy or false devotion, [it] provides grounds to accuse indiscriminately all those who profess the most steadfast piety and thereby exposes them to the continual mockery and slander of the libertines.<sup>xiii</sup>

Some years later, one Coustel would neatly spell out the process:

On the pretext of condemning false devotion, Molière represents his Tartuffe's wickedness with such intensity and has him pronounce such repugnant teachings

that the corruption of the human heart will not fail to apply these not to a Tartuffe in the theater but to a real-life man of religion.<sup>xiv</sup>

Péréfixe's allegation does hint at the dissuasive power of ridicule, while Coustel's account of the extremity of Tartuffe's portrayal is the humorless negative image of the extreme ridicule described in the *Lettre*. Both Coustel and our anonymous author agree that the theatrical Tartuffe-Panulphe is an extreme case and that he will leave a powerful impression in the mind of the spectator that will subsequently be brought to bear on real-life experiences. But they diverge wildly on the effects of this application, which are profoundly pernicious for Coustel and morally beneficial for our anonymous author. To turn transferability on its head and apply it to something other than religion is a clever tour de force on the part of the author of the *Lettre*, but not one that can have seriously sought to change the mind of Péréfixe or even Lamoignon. Indeed the author's generalized summary of the process is indistinguishable from the very basis on which vociferous complaints about the play were made: "we shall be unable to take seriously those things that we have already perceived as ridiculous or which bear some relation to a former sense of ridicule of which we are subsequently reminded" (101).

For this and all the other reasons outlined above, we are obliged to look beyond actual persuasion as the *raison d'être* of this letter. The evident relish with which it was written offers an important clue to its purpose, as does the insistence on pleasure as a driving force in human behavior, be it the scornful pleasure to be derived from another's ridicule or the esteem-filled pleasure of encountering what is good and reasonable. A further clue

is found in the author's attitude towards his own thesis as he expresses it towards the letter's close. Anticipating the objection whereby the spectator's response might not in fact be exactly as he has described, the author admits that it is notoriously difficult even for the person in question to know what his or her response to something really is, and that the most reliable gauge of truth is the type of logical reasoning that he has applied to the matter throughout. Proof, he concludes, is provided by the vision and power of reasoning. The pleasure of reading and of writing this part of the text lies precisely with its intricate, seemingly logical argumentation, which can be enjoyed and admired even as it is disputed. This is a text, then, that is driven to a large extent by aesthetic and rhetorical pleasure.

The author's particular interest in audience response is surely one of the most interesting and pleasurable elements of this letter. If audience response is, as the author admits, notoriously difficult to pin down at the best of times, he creates an additional challenge for himself by giving so much weight specifically to the response of the female spectator.<sup>xv</sup> Although the author claims that only individuals who have seen the play are equipped to comment on its effects, he does not at any point in his discussion of *galanterie* offer a personal response to the question grounded in experience. More surprising still is the fact that he does not at any point indicate what the unmediated response of the generic *male* spectator might be to Panulphe-Tartuffe's attempted seduction. A simpler and perhaps more convincing argument in favor of the benefits of ridiculous *galanterie* would have been to claim that would-be male seducers in Molière's audience would identify sufficiently with Panulphe-Tartuffe's techniques (if not with his

person) to have a foretaste of their own ridiculousness in a similar situation in the future and thereby to undergo some inoculation against their own ridicule. Instead, the author of the *Lettre* has the male seducer experience his own ridiculousness only via the perception and subsequent coldness of the erstwhile female spectator. Only then will he feel an appropriate sense of shame or hesitancy with regard to his actions. According to this model, the supposedly beneficial effects of ridicule do not operate directly on the male audience at all; indeed, the male seducer need not have seen *L'Imposteur* at all in order to feel its effects. It is only the female spectator who puts the theory into effect.

To what extent, then, can this argument be considered proto-feminist? French women are portrayed by the author as being in the grip of a social pressure to commit adultery and are seen as the (sometimes willing) victims of the machinations of the male adulterers around them. They are thus complicit in their adultery, but are not its prime instigators. It is the men who are corrupting (*les corrupteurs*), and the women who are the victims (*les attaquées*). There is no suggestion in the *Lettre* that women are lascivious temptresses bent, Eve-like, upon leading men astray—indeed, this misogynist outlook is antithetical to the whole tenor of the letter. And the fact that responsibility for preventing fornication—as well as, crucially, the means to do so—is passed by the author to the female sex may be understood to promote a considerable degree of female empowerment, even if it is achieved involuntarily by means of an active imagination. As we have seen, according to the logic of the author's argument, the female spectator will, upon encountering a man intent on leading her astray, enjoy anew the pleasure of Panulphe-Tartuffe's ridiculousness and thereby find herself sufficiently well armed to resist her

*galant*'s advances. That she should want ultimately to resist is predicated on the twin assumptions that adultery is to be avoided and that it does more harm to a woman's reputation than to a man's. The first point is owing not to the fact that adultery is prohibited in the Bible, but rather because it is a product of unreason; likewise, the second point appears to derive not from a widespread wish to control female behavior but instead from a straightforward and sympathetic, even empathetic, understanding of the female predicament. The mental cross-dressing required by the author's emphasis on the female response also represents a welcome means to develop and display his own rhetorical prowess as well as his imaginative skill. The author's pleasure in writing his text, like ours in reading it, lies ultimately in the construction of an intricate and intriguing argument that is articulately made.

Are we to conclude that the letter prioritizes pleasure over polemic? While the pleasurable dimension to the letter's virtuosity is undeniable, the nature of its polemical contribution is perhaps not so immediately apparent. Indeed, the letter appears to have had no discernible effect whatsoever on the outcome of the *Tartuffe* controversy, and there is no evidence to suggest that it ever sincerely sought to do so. In that sense, the *Lettre*'s contribution to the *Tartuffe* controversy is above all circumstantial. Rather than attempting to change the minds of the anti-Tartuffians, the letter sought firstly to subvert their influence by circulating a detailed summary of a play that was banned, and secondly to contradict their opinions by means of arguments grounded in a moral philosophy that was antithetical to orthodox religion but quietly shared by an increasing number of individuals. And to ascribe a moral purpose to the theater on the basis of secular precepts

that allow considerable scope for pleasure was of course highly provocative. If we are ultimately unconvinced by the practical, moral application of the ridicule of Panulphe's failed seduction of La Dame, the secularized female spectator of the *Lettre* is today a more compelling and familiar figure than the dangerously weak (but powerfully tempting) female portrayed by Nicole and other anti-theatricalists. The playful, ludic nature of the argument similarly represents a challenge to the serious tone usually adopted by the religiously motivated writers of 1660s France. In this way, different types of pleasure—rhetorical, aesthetic and moral, as well as the very pleasure of polemic—are put into the service of a polemic that extends far beyond the immediate concerns of the *Tartuffe* controversy. For the letter's bold (re)secularization of a theatrical controversy that had become embroiled in a religious polemic is of a more general and far-reaching nature, and one that hints at the radical changes in worldview that would eventually lead to the end of the ancien régime itself.

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<sup>i</sup> See his *Réflexions sur la poétique d'Aristote et sur les ouvrages des poètes anciens et modernes* (Paris: Muguet, 1674), 183-84.

<sup>ii</sup> *Traité de la comédie* (1667) ed. Georges Couton (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1961), 61-2.

<sup>iii</sup> For a full discussion of the controversy, see Julia Prest, *Controversy in French Drama: Molière's Tartuffe and the Struggle for Influence* (New York: Palgrave, 2014).

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<sup>iv</sup> See Robert McBride, ed., *La Mothe Le Vayer, Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur* (Durham: University of Durham, 1994), Durham Modern Languages Series FT4, 49. All parenthetical page references to the letter in the present article are to this edition.

<sup>v</sup> McBride attributes it to Molière's friend, François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588-1672). Scholars have been slow to accept this attribution, however, and other names that are commonly put forward are Jean Donneau de Visé and Claude-Emmanuel Huillier, better known as Chapelle.

<sup>vi</sup> See *Correspondance entre Boileau Despréaux et Brossette*, ed. Auguste Laverdet (Paris: Techener, 1858), 564-65 for an account of the meeting.

<sup>vii</sup> See "Where are the *vrais dévots* and are they *véritables gens de bien*? Eloquent Slippage in the *Tartuffe* Controversy," *Neophilologus* 96: 3 (2012) [online version] or 97: 2 (2013): 283-97 [print version].

<sup>viii</sup> There is reason to believe that the scenes in which Panulphe-Tartuffe attempts to seduce La Dame-Elmire were also considered objectionable to Molière's detractors. See Julia Prest, "Elmire and the Erotics of the ménage à trois in Molière's *Tartuffe*," *Romanic Review* 102 (2011): 129-44.

<sup>ix</sup> Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, "Hypocrisie et Imposture dans la querelle du *Tartuffe* (1664-1669): La *Lettre sur la comédie de l'imposteur* (1667)," *Les Dossiers du Grihl*, Les dossiers de Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, Libertinage, athéisme, irréligion. Essais et bibliographie. <http://dossiersgrihl.revues.org/292>; DOI: 10.4000/dossiersgrihl.292, paragraph 33.

<sup>x</sup> Herman Prins Salomon, *Tartuffe devant l'opinion française* (Paris: PUF, 1962), 62.

<sup>xi</sup> Cited in Georges Couton, *La chair et l'âme: Louis XIV entre ses maîtresses et Bossuet* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1995), 178.

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<sup>xii</sup> *Œuvres complètes de Bourdaloue*, ed. Prêtres de l’Immaculée-Conception de Saint-Dizier, 4 vols (Bar-le-Duc/Paris: Guérin, 1864), IV: 362.

<sup>xiii</sup> In Molière, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Georges Forestier and Claude Bourqui et al, 2 vols, Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 2010) II: 1168.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Sentimens de l’Eglise & des SS. Peres pour servir de discussion sur la Comedie et les comediens* (Paris: Coignard, 1694), 66.

<sup>xv</sup> While it is not impossible that the *Lettre* might have been written by a woman, the argument that follows is based on the assumption that its author was male.