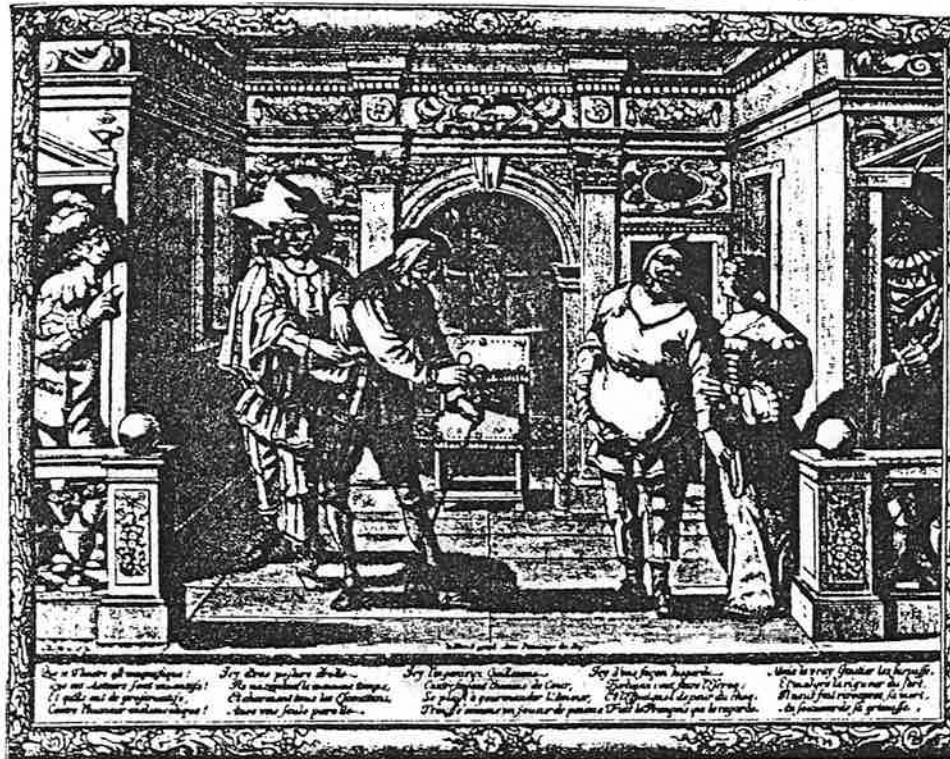


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DISCOURSE AND AUTHORITY IN LE MENTEUR

by

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At the beginning of Le Menteur, the hero Dorante arrives in Paris as a novice in the ways of the city. He lacks a great deal of essential information about Paris and Parisians, but he enjoys an apparent fund of goodwill--friendships, paternal benevolence, and the disposition of women who do not know him to believe what he says and to accept his overture of courtship. Towards the end of the play, during most of the last act, Dorante has much more information about the capital and its inhabitants, but his ability to command their respect, belief, and acceptance as friend and kin is drastically reduced. On the one hand Dorante seems to move toward integration into a social environment and on the other he seems more and more isolated from other members of the dramatic world. The movement from one situation to the other and the brilliant reintegration--or apparent reintegration--of the hero into a social network at the denouement outline for us patterns of authority as they control the world of the characters. For Le Menteur is a play about the manifestation in language of different kinds and degrees of authority, including, of course, that absolute lack of authority in language which consists in

the recognized mensonge. Lying is not, however, simply a disruption in the hero's life, an interlude after which he returns to the observance of an initial and unique authority. Instead, lying is for Dorante a passage from a traditional form of authority towards a new one, one which brings him closer to Clarice and Lucrèce.

The term authority is here understood as that quality of an utterance which gives the utterance weight and credibility among those who hear or read it, the power which an utterance exercises over the actions and the assent of the receiver.¹ Authority is not a linguistic quality, therefore, but a pragmatic, contextual one, depending on the social role of the person speaking (author, in the sense of source, guarantor, or witness), and on the nature of the situation in which his words occur. Authority can appear in the form of an imperative, but it can also characterize a purely declarative utterance. The problem of authority in language is very much a concern, almost an obsession, of the seventeenth-century drama and narrative. We find it at the base of much illusion, quiproquo, disguise, and "madness." Indeed, one of the difficulties of describing the baroque theatre is that the surface manifestations of a global "confusion" sometimes obscure the underlying structure in which the dramatic world reveals its qualities as a social organization dependent upon the same means of establishing authority as is the social world that produced the play. The brief suggestions that follow are meant only as a very limited example of one approach to the study of this authority in discourse.

There are four principal types of discursive authority in Le Menteur. Despite the awkwardness and somewhat ad hoc nature of the terminology, I will call them textuality, empiricism, nobility (générosité), and urbanity (mode).

Textual authority is the power attributed to written texts, especially (i.e. with the highest degree of authority) to those existing within a canon. It is fundamentally non-referential, that is, we believe in it not because what it says corresponds to what we see in the world around us but simply because the text itself imposes respect. Textual authority was under grave attack in the seventeenth century (e.g. by Descartes in the first part of the Discours de la méthode) but it was entrenched in the university and particularly in certain disciplines. Within the first fourteen verses of Le Menteur textual authority is mentioned twice in conjunction with one of those disciplines, the legal curriculum at Poitiers, an education in which the text (Code) and the author or authority of figures (auteurs) like "Bartole" played a fundamental role.²

The opposite of textual authority is empirical authority, which draws its cogency from the witness of the senses. Empiricism sees words as reflections of things, the discourse always pursuing things, attempting to mirror them adequately. When what is said varies from the knowledge of the senses, the senses are believed and language distrusted. Dorante's valet Cliton, who is almost always with him, maintains an empirical discourse in counterpoint to his master's lies. The empirical, as the evidence of the senses, was, like textual authority, under attack both from rationalists like Descartes and to some extent from Corneille himself in texts like L'illusion comique.

A third authority quite clearly recognizable in Le Menteur is that of générosité, a concept of which no general definition need be attempted here. In regard to discourse, though, générosité has a very precise sense, mentioned several times in Le Menteur: the généreux--or noble, as I will say in English--bases the authority of his words on

the precise equivalence of his language and his actions, both past and future. Furthermore since nobility includes members of the speaker's family, the actions of ancestors or kin provide authority for the words of any speaker within the family, and words of any one member of the family have the effect of binding the others. This correlation of words and actions applies both to past and future; when a noble, whose ancestors' actions have earned respect for his words, gives his parole, he has bound himself irrevocably for the future. Although the kind of knowledge conveyed by the speech of a noble should correspond, in all that concerns the past and present, with empirical authority, the force of noble discourse comes from who is speaking, unlike the empirical which does not depend on the respectability of the speaker for its force. Alcippe is categorical in his denial of the possibility that Dorante can lie. According to Alcippe there can be no deviation between the words and actions of a généreux:

Tout homme de courage est homme de parole,
A des vices si bas il ne peut consentir,
Et fuit plus que la mort la honte de mentir.
Cela n'est point.

(vv. 814-17)³

Géronte, confronting Dorante with the accusation of lying (V,i), spells out the relationship between language and action in the généreux:

Est-il quelque faiblesse, est-il quelque action
Dont un coeur vraiment noble ait plus d'aversion,
Puisqu'un seul démenti lui porte une infamie
Qu'il ne peut effacer s'il n'expose sa vie,
Et si dedans le sang il ne lave l'affront
Qu'un si honteux outrage imprime sur son front?

(vv. 1523-28)

It is the three-way link of word, deed, and blood that makes the conclusion of this father and son confrontation particularly strong, for the father's words are based on the authority of his nobility, and therefore his threat--"Je jure les rayons du jour qui nous éclaire / Que tu

ne mourras point que de la main d'un père" (vv. 1597-98)--corresponds to a concrete reality. By killing Dorante Géronte would maintain the correspondence between his word ("Je jure...") and his action and correct the deviance of Dorante's actions from his words.

Finally, there is a type of discourse which takes authority neither from texts, nor from empirical evidence, nor from the direct and timeless equivalence of word and action: la mode. In the opening scene, Parisian manners are placed in immediate opposition to Dorante's previous experience by the rhyme "Comme il est malaisé qu'aux royaumes du Code / On apprenne à se faire un visage à la mode" (vv. 9-10). This mode is primarily linked to women--or rather to the way men cultivate the acquaintance of women, seeking to be accepted under their loi--and with the capital. As Dorante says to Cliton:

Mais Paris, après tout est bien loin de Poitiers.
Le climat différent veut une autre méthode,
Ce qu'on admire ailleurs est ici hors de mode,
La diverse façon de parler et d'agir
Donne aux nouveaux venus souvent de quoi rougir.
(vv. 60-64)

This specific way of talking and acting, this méthode, is clearly directed at making an impression on women. The central purpose of Dorante's discussion with Cliton in the first scene of the play is to determine how Dorante would go about meeting women, and Dorante sees this as a problem of discursive authority. The women of Paris are, he thinks, unimpressed by appeal to the authority of the legal texts he has studied. He presupposes that they are not able to appreciate the concrete details of military art (as he points out explicitly at the end of the first act), but feels that it is indispensable to resemble the Parisian honnêtes gens:

Et tant d'honnêtes gens que l'on y voit ensemble
Font qu'on est mal reçu si l'on ne leur ressemble.
(vv. 69-70)

This appearance of fully conforming to the manners of the capital and of avoiding any provincialism, pedantry, or old-fashioned ways could be called "urbanity." It is clearly a form of authority in that it gives a certain weight to one's words (and in fact to all of one's signifying acts). Cliton spells out this urbanity as it applies to giving gifts (vv. 86-96).

When Dorante first arrives in the capital he seems to face a dilemma, a choice between two discourses, the textual one based on long-dead authors, and urbanity of Paris. Already the hero seems to be far from the antique and provincial bookishness of the *auctores*, for Cliton tells Dorante, "jamais comme vous on ne peignit Bartole" (v. 14). Yet elements of similarity between the textual and the urbane discourses already appear, similarities which make Dorante's rapid mastery of the latter perfectly logical. Both discourses, as earlier noted, are primarily non-referential, both work within verbal or symbolic networks that do not appeal to empirical data or to the willingness to stake one's life on the content of one's speech. To spend one's time closeted with authors whose attention is turned towards the restoration of the legal order of the Roman world implies a disconnection from everyday life; or, as Dorante says while hypothetically quoting himself,

"Si vous avez besoin de lois et de rubriques,
Je sais le Code entier avec les Authentiques,
Le *Digeste* nouveau, le vieux, l'*Infortiat*,
Ce qu'en a dit Jason, Balde, Accurse, Alciat!"
(vv. 325-28)

A legal curriculum of authors remains profoundly rooted in a system of text, citation, and commentary, not in proof by reference to the world of experience. Dorante's allusion to these authors is meant, of course, to point out that the late medieval and humanistic authorities are not urbane, they are not *à la mode* and have no authority among the women

of Paris. But Dorante's way of posing the problem reveals his formation in a verbal, or rather, rhetorical discipline:

Tout le secret ne gît qu'en un peu de grimace,
A mentir à propos, jurer de bonne grâce,
Étaler force mots qu'elles n'entendent pas,
Faire sonner Lamboy, Jean de Vert, et Galas,
Nommer quelques châteaux de qui les noms barbares
Plus ils blessent l'oreille, et plus leur semblent rares,
Avoir toujours en bouche angles, lignes, fossés,
Vedette, contrescarpe, et travaux avancés:
Sans ordre et sans raison, n'importe, on les étonne.
(vv. 333-41)

The goal of this kind of speech is not to refer to any historical event --to anything in the "real" or material world--but to create an effect in the receiver, an effect which is independent of denotative meaning and of reference.⁴ This approach to lying, in which "Jason, Balde, Accurse" are replaced by "Lamboy, Jean de Vert, et Galas" shares with the textual discourse an absence of reference, but differs from that discourse in its complete elimination of any authority outside the momentary effect created in the conversational context. The parallel between the proper names Jason/Lamboy (etc.) invites us to reflect on the different functions of these *personae* in the types of discourse indicated by Dorante. In the legal series, Jason and the others are the sources of the text. One simply cites, explicates, paraphrases or juxtaposes their words. Even when, as was often the case among humanizing jurists, one finds a way to "adapt" the text to a new meaning that one wants to establish, the *authority* of the new interpretation depends on the claim to be restating part of the canon. The names of the military figures, on the other hand, are not the sources of Dorante's words; they are simply elements or building-blocks on the same level as the names of castles and of technical terms. Dorante's authority comes from the quality of his performance as a conversationalist.

Dorante's brilliant intuition of the qualities of urbane discourse goes beyond the non-referential quality and the absence of external author and penetrates to the foundation of urbane authority in the consent of the participants. At first the lie will seem to belong to the speech of a noble, a généreux. The woman he addresses will think that he did participate in the military campaigns in question and that he understands words she does not understand. In short, she will believe that he is master of a domain from which she is excluded. The urbane discourse, in its most perfect form, is one in which the partners share an understanding that is independent of the apparent reference of their words. The lie, as assertion, is not part of the urbane discourse, for it does not have a basis in a shared knowledge and activity. The lie continues to exclude one partner to a conversation. Urbanity, or mode, requires exclusion as well, but it is a collective action of exclusion, directed against those who are outside the circle of Parisian initiates.⁵ Dorante foresees conversion of his lies into this urbane practice:

CLITON: A qui vous veut ouïr, vous en faites bien croire,
Mais celle-ci bientôt peut savoir votre histoire.
DORANTE: J'aurai déjà gagné chez elle quelque accès,
Et loin d'en redouter un malheureux succès
Si jamais un fâcheux nous nuit par sa présence,
Nous pourrons sous ces mots être d'intelligence.
Voilà traiter l'amour, Cliton, et comme il faut.
(vv. 345-51)

Urbanity, or un visage à la mode as Dorante defines it, consists of the conversational process itself. Dorante demonstrates his rather rapid mastery of this discourse immediately upon his first encounter with Clarice (I,ii), an encounter that begins with an intricate exchange within rigorously defined social roles. It is a conversation without content in any historical or referential sense; it exists solely for the pleasure of the two interlocutors and does not direct itself outside

the immediate, present, conversational situation à deux. Only with the arrival of Cliton (I,iii) does Dorante begin to support his interchange with Clarice by reference to apparent historical fact. These "facts" in themselves are of no importance to Dorante. They are entirely subordinated to the desire to maintain contact and to assure himself of "quelque accès." The presence of Cliton permits the distance between one discourse and another to become apparent, and it seems significant that the deviation of Dorante's urbane speech into lie occurs only when the representative of a thoroughgoing empiricism returns to the stage.⁶

The self-contained and present-oriented nature of the fashionable Parisian conversation makes it a perfect ground for the talent of Dorante in non-referential verbal production, a talent that links the textual with the urbane. As Dorante describes the art of lying to Cliton, this art resembles the work of a skilled forensic rhetorician always attentive to the web of argumentation that he has begun and that he will adjust according to the changing circumstances of the debate:

Le ciel fait cette grâce à fort peu de personnes:
Il y faut promptitude, esprit, mémoire, soins
Ne se brouiller jamais, et rougir encor moins.
(vv. 934-36)

Cliton later reminds Dorante of the importance of memory, and the hero underlines the truly most important single quality of the liar, esprit: "L'esprit a secouru le défaut de mémoire" (v. 1261). Once again there is a common trait to Dorante's participation in the textual and the urbane discourses, for the legal authors--especially "Bartole"--were celebrated for their agility at adapting texts to an argument. One way to crush an adversary is constantly to rework earlier materials and turn the words of an authority to mean what one needs them to mean, thus displaying the greater importance of creative skill (esprit) than of

a merely conservational labor (mémoire) and distinguishing law from archives.

In this regard it is significant that the very first of the legal authorities mentioned in *Le Menteur* is "Bartole" (v. 14), or Bartolus of Sassoferrato. Bartolus is not, as readers of notes in modern editions of the play might believe, just an indifferent paradigm of the legal scholar inserted for "local color." He was in fact the most celebrated master of the mos docendi Italicus or "Bartolism." A sixteenth-century mnemonic distich summarizes this method:

Præmitto, scindo, summo, casumque figuro
Perlego, do causas, connoto, objicio.⁷

As a recent historian of Renaissance law has said,

According to this formula the "Italian" exegesis, which purported to be a comment on the text, did not even list its contents until the stage of perlegere. . . . In none of the initial operations was the author bound to the terms, order, or even contents of the *Corpus Juris*. The introduction to the text was a purely dialectical and casuistic procedure--which meant that the original intention of the sources could be easily reshaped.⁸

Of the last stage of this Bartolistic sequence, objicere, the same scholar observes that it was, for a commentator, "the supreme test of legal virtuosity. . . . It is here indeed that we find a use of dialectic so subtle and refined as to make it seem that any opinion whatsoever could be wrung from traditional authority (pp. 13-14).

If this has been Dorante's experience of the law, it is not hard to see why he has trouble adjusting to the kind of authority that G ronte and Alcippe respect. For them a noble is expected to establish his authority by doing, not merely by saying. For G ronte, as for Alcippe, no amount of esprit can compensate for a lack of courage and, as a corollary, the past and memory have particular importance. One's actions and the actions of one's ancestors build up a fund of credibility

guaranteeing one's word. This system of authority, which is that of the feudal aristocracy, does not accept the disruption of time and space so characteristic of the man   la mode. G ronte, Alcippe, and Philiste refer frequently to things that have happened in the past and to links with the provinces. Unlike Dorante, who speaks of Poitiers only as a foil to the values of Paris, G ronte attaches great importance to what has apparently happened there and wishes to maintain certain provincial usages still in vigor among the aristocracy (IV,iv). His appeal for values, as Dorante and he know, is not to Paris or even to the court, but to France, an appeal which is at the same time a reference to history:

Et ne savez-vous point avec toute la France
D'o  ce titre d'honneur a tir  sa naissance,
Et que la vertu seule a mis en ce haut rang
Ceux qui l'ont jusqu'  moi fait passer dans leur sang?
(vv. 1505-08)

It is not as a senex that G ronte refers frequently to events of the past, but because the authority that G ronte represents is drawn from past achievement and requires continuity between past and present, memory and consistency rather than prompt reinterpretation. Alcippe and Philiste, who are of Dorante's generation, are equally attached to faithful representation of the past and to the principle of the direct link between word and action.⁹

As Han Vehoeff has noted, the masculine solidarity of preceding Cornelian comedies disappears in *Le Menteur*.¹⁰ One could, perhaps, go even farther, and note that Dorante is repeatedly attributed qualities that link him to the women of the play. The other male nobles in the play threaten or deride him for his violation of the principle that authority comes from blood (both blood that is shed and the blood that is transmitted as familial heritage). Philiste links Dorante explicitly with the mode. Speaking of Dorante's marriage with "Orphise," Philiste

tells G ron te of the fictitious evening concert and collation

Qui partait d'un esprit de grande invention,
Et si ce mariage est de m me m thode,
La pi ce est fort compl te et des plus   la mode.
(vv. 1480-82)

Numerous verbal parallels occur in description of the actions of Dorante and of the two women he is courting. For example, in his clarification of the episode of the evening concert, Philiste says of the women, "L'avis se trouve faux, et ces deux autres belles / Avaient en plein repos pass  la nuit chez elles" (vv. 798-99). Of Dorante, Philiste says several verses later, "Il vint hier de Poitiers et sans faire aucun bruit / Chez lui paisiblement a dormi toute nuit" (vv. 807-08).

In the following scene Isabelle speaks of Dorante's plaisir in lying (v. 908), and Clarice replies by affirming her intention to take plaisir (v. 913) in confounding him. Again in the next scene (III,iv) Cliton points out that "Lucr ce" will perhaps be just as expert in lying as Dorante (vv. 927-33). In the direct confrontation in the penultimate scene of the play, when Dorante has discovered the error in the names, Dorante establishes a parallel between his motives and those of Lucr ce: "Vous me jouez, Madame, et sans doute pour rire, / Vous prenez du plaisir   m'entendre redire" (vv. 1705-06). A bit later he tells her:

Je vous embarrassai, n'en faites point la fine.
Choisissez un peu mieux vos dupes   la mine.
Vous pensiez me jouer, et moi je vous jouais.
(vv. 1745-47)

This explanation is parallel to what Lucr ce and Clarice say to one another when they claim that their interest in Dorante is "Curiosit  pure, avec dessein de rire" (vv. 1421, 1425). There is reason to doubt what Clarice and Lucr ce say to one another about their motives in maintaining communication with Dorante. In fact, they seem to be lying about their motives, for Lucr ce has revealed to the audience that she

is seriously attracted to Dorante (v. 1033). Similarly Dorante is lying once again in his final explanation of his motives for all that precedes.

In his way of using language, Dorante seems to be much closer to the women of the play, and they seem to apply his use of language an entirely different criterion from that of G ron te, Alcippe, and Philiste.¹¹ The women's reaction to his lying does not resemble the father's outrage, Alcippe's horror before "des vices si bas" or Philiste's condescending derisiveness. When Clarice learns that Dorante is not the military hero he had claimed to be, she simply calls him "fourbe." She makes no reference to the system of values of a male nobility. Her announcement that she will not marry him is not, as it first seems to Isabelle, a rejection of Dorante, but, as Clarice explains, the consequence of Dorante's previous marriage. What is at issue for Clarice is not lying in the broadest sense but merely the disruption of the relationship that Dorante had seemed to be trying to establish with her. This does not stop her from wanting to continue to talk with him. Furthermore, the whole series of lies that Dorante spins out for Clarice ("Lucr ce") and for Lucr ce in III,v does not diminish Lucr ce's interest in him (vv. 1032-33). What does seem to be intolerable, for Clarice, is Dorante's final assertion during the nocturnal interview that he is willing to undergo the anger of heaven "Si j'ai parl , Lucr ce,   personne qu'  vous" (v. 1057). The scene ends when "Lucr ce" declares "Je ne puis plus souffrir une telle impudence, / Apr s ce que j'ai vu moi-m me en ma pr sence" (vv. 1058-59). The specific empirical evidence that touches Clarice is one that casts doubt on the conversational exchange itself, not one that concerns Dorante's performance outside that exchange. It is not Dorante's dishonor or his general lack of reliability that disturb Clarice but those precise characteristics that permit him to main-

tain contact with his conversational (and potentially sexual) partner.

Dorante, Clarice, and Lucrèce all explain the various lies and "disguises" (if one can use the term for a verbal impersonation of the sort that permits Clarice to take the place of Lucrèce in III,v) in terms of pleasure, game, curiosity, and diversion. On neither side does there seem to be an absolute requirement for any specific relationship between action and word, between language and experience, between what has been said and what is now said. Language is repeatedly described as both a game and as a means of discovering the qualities required for marriage (II,ii). As Clarice tells Isabelle, seeing Dorante and hearing about his qualities from others are not enough. She wants to know him "dans l'âme" and accepts Isabelle's suggestion "qu'il parle à vous" (v. 423) as the means to do so. The women's curiosity is directed, from the third to the fifth act, to finding out what Dorante will say, how he will handle himself in the increasingly complicated verbal interplay. In the final confrontation, Dorante has achieved for himself a situation in which he is the ultimate authority, because no evidence exists which can contradict his explanation of his actions. No one can contradict Dorante's account of his motivations because his motivations have left no trace.¹² Once the women accept the possibility that lying can be a permissible procedure for discovering truth (as they have done in III,v), then they must concede the correctness of Dorante's strategy provided that he produces a consistent discursive account of the "game" they are playing and that his strategy fits the basic purpose of urbane discourse--maintaining the cohesion of the group of initiates. Once he has done so, the lie is no longer a lie, because it is supported by the authority of the social consensus, even if this consensus only consists of the agreement between Dorante and Lucrèce. Urbanity has no

other test for determining authority.

Dorante's accomplishment is to modulate successfully from one non-referential discourse to another, avoiding the rigid prescriptions of générosité and the appeal to appearance made by empiricism.¹³ He has applied the interpretive skills of the textual tradition to a realm in which there are no more auctores but only the speaker and his immediate speech-situation. Instead of interpreting earlier texts, Dorante fits his earlier inventions to the changed situation, applying the mos docendi Italicus to the world of Parisian gallantry.

At the end of the play Dorante and Lucrèce have agreed to marry. They do so under the authority of parental aristocratic command. "Le devoir d'une fille est dans l'obéissance," says Lucrèce (v. 1794); we know that Dorante has no choice. In the largest view, the authority of générosité, of the homme de parole, has triumphed. But in their submission to this authority, Dorante, Clarice, and Lucrèce have found a way to give themselves the impression of controlling their own destinies and of possessing a domain from which the paternal discourse of générosité is absent. This is the territory of mode, the place where the referential world of "reality," of military achievement recedes behind the rules for social interaction. To the initiates of the discourse that prevails here the sense of "sous ces mots être d'intelligence" is a consolation for their submission to the other law. Dorante's relative triumph is his ability to avoid isolation in his defeat, to find a group in subjection like himself but capable of reinterpreting subjection through a superior mastery of language.

"Consolation" is perhaps too weak a term. There is another way to view the significance of Dorante's adventure, both in terms of Corneille's works and of the historical changes in French seventeenth-century society.

In this latter connection, we note that the two authorities which seem most to oppress Dorante, the noble and the textual discourses--both of which stand in the way of his activities as a Parisian galant--are represented as being linked to the provinces. The law student studies an obsolescent legal curriculum in Poitiers; the noble observes the rules of a provincial aristocracy from which he draws his history, revenues, and family alliances. The growing power of Paris and of a powerful and non-traditionalist monarchy weakened both of these classes. The edict against duels was seventeen years old when Le Menteur was performed. Although Alcippe's and G ron te's appeals to private blood vengeance may still represent a dominant force in the world of the play, Dorante's mode of purely verbal and playful "violence" is clearly the way of the future. Adaptability, forgetfulness of the past, eagerness to adopt the prevailing mode, cultivation of conversational skills--all these are traits that will be appreciated in the aristocracy of the court. In this perspective Dorante's adaptive behavior may be one symptom of the defeat of the aristocracy, a defeat of which the literary consequences are known to us through the works of Goldmann and B nichou.

It has long been clear that within the Cornelian canon itself problems of authority are central. The great tragedies that precede Le Menteur deal with the contradictions that occur primarily within the code of the g n reux. In general they do not deal with problems of knowledge but with problems of action. The comedies, on the other hand, contain numerous quiproquo of various sorts, and the problems of knowledge have greater weight than problems of ethical decision. Le Menteur looks forward to later tragedies (and the heroic comedy) of uncertainty in which these problems are fused and in which the question "What is true?" is equal in importance to the question "What to do?" In H raclius the whole

play works to undermine sources of authoritative testimony about the true identity of "H raclius" in a situation where neither g n rosit , nor empirical witness, nor textual evidence have any a priori weight.¹⁴ Dorante's Paris is described as a place where "Comme on s'y connaît mal, chacun s'y fait de mise / Et vaut commun ment autant comme il se prise" (vv. 81-82). Is this place without memory and without appeal to external authority not similar to moments in the life of don Sanche? Dorante knows his origin and betrays it, attempting to flee paternal noble authority. Don Sanche and H raclius will reveal even more profoundly the fragility of the hero's link to traditional authority.

NOTES

¹ Authority is linked with being an auteur, as when G ron te refers to himself as the "second auteur" of Dorante's lies because he, the father, repeats them to Philiste. G ron te thus lends his weight, his guarantee, to the misstatement. Wartburg and Huguet certify the use of the term author in the sense "guarantor" for earlier periods. It is interesting that the Tr sor de la langue fran aise traces autorit  to the meaning "garantie de la chose  crite" (III,1013).

² Referring to his legal education, Dorante speaks of a "fatras de lois" (v. 4). It is intriguing to consider that the "invention" of fatras as genre has been attributed to a scholar of law, Philippe de R mi, sire de Beaumanoir. See W. Kellermann, " ber die altfranz sischen Gedichte des unbeschr nkten Unsinn," Archiv f r das Studium der neuen Sprachen, 205 (1968), p. 2. Paul Zumthor's description of fatras is not without resemblance to Dorante's indulgence in language itself, beyond any concern for vraisemblance or for reference: "Plus que comme un ornement litt raire, le fatras semble alors con u comme un moyen d'exaltation purement linguistique, d nu  de toute r f rence   d'autres r alit s qu'aux formes brutes du langage" ("Fatrasie, fatrassiers," in Langue, Texte, Enigme [Paris: Le Seuil, 1975], p. 88).

³ I quote from Andr  Stegmann's edition of the Oeuvres compl tes (Paris: Le Seuil, 1963).

⁴ Isabelle finds a "textual" aspect to the hero. She claims that

Dorante's supply of verbal material comes from a printed text, "une gazette" (v. 865).

⁵ Préciosité is one form of urbanity, as are other forms of courtoisie and civility insofar as they replace military achievement with conversational skill.

⁶ Cliton not only represents an empirical approach but an immediately commercial one. Is it merely a coincidence that this appeal to the authority of the senses and the concern with monetary exchange occur in the same character? T. J. Reiss's very interesting use of exchange as descriptive concept, "Le menteur de Corneille: Langage, Volonté, Société" (Romance Notes, 15, No. 2 [Winter 1973], 284-96) would be even more useful if it did not define social constraints in such a global way.

⁷ Julian H. Franklin, Jean Bodin and the Sixteenth-Century Revolution in the Methodology of Law and History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 12.

⁸ Franklin, pp. 12-13. C. J. Friedrich also treats this struggle for reinterpretation behind a "learned façade" in The Philosophy of Law in Historical Perspective (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 54 ff. It is interesting to contrast the humanizing legal system which produced Dorante with the pre-humanist system described in Medieval French Literature and Law (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977).

⁹ David Lee Rubin, whose analysis of Le menteur in "On Theatricality in Pierre Corneille's later Comedies" (Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature, 7 [1977], 82-101) agrees on several points but reaches very different conclusions from mine, describes the attitude of Alcippe and Géronte as "Puritanical to an extreme" (p. 95) in their refusal to tolerate any "role-playing." Rubin contrasts this with Clarice's more nuanced position.

¹⁰ Les Comédies de Corneille: une psycholecture (Paris: Klincksieck, 1979), p. 138.

¹¹ H. A. Allentuch's description of the women of Corneille's theatre might be inverted to describe Dorante. In studying primarily the tragedies, Allentuch concludes that women "assert, in play after play, but especially in tragedies, a desire to be judged by the same standards as man" ("Reflections on Women in the Theater of Corneille," Kentucky Romance Quarterly, 21 [1974], p. 97). Dorante and the women of Le menteur want to be judged on the basis of their success in verbal railleurie, and the ability to "donner des bayes." This is not an ability in which the other males of the play excel or one which they respect.

¹² Cliton, though he has fallen victim to Dorante's lies, might think he could contradict his master here. But his mere word—not being a noble word—set against his master's would not disprove anything said in this scene by Dorante.

¹³ Clarice has undermined the traditionally most secure source of empirical information, sight, in II.ii.

¹⁴ I have treated this problem at greater length in "The Unknown King: Héraclius," A Theatre of Disguise: Studies in French Baroque Drama (1630-1660) (Columbia, S.C.: French Literature Publications Company, 1978), pp. 107-37.

COMEDY IN THEODORE AND BEYOND

by

A. Donald Sellstrom

In an essay on the "perilous balance" both within comedy and between comedy and tragedy, René Girard has said: "A great comic writer does not avoid 'ticklish' subjects, he will not shy away from 'touchy' problems."¹ Corneille, who wrote plays in both genres, broached the most ticklish subject of his career in Théodore, a tragedy; and the results were mixed. It may be, as a recent critic has claimed, that in venturing to retell the story of Christian virgin cast into a Roman brothel, Corneille wished to demonstrate the power of the new theatre to operate within the bounds of strict propriety and high-serious aims.² It is very likely, moreover, that the play should be counted among the most technically accomplished of the playwright's long career: d'Aubignac was an early admirer of its well-crafted structure, and latter-day enthusiasts can also be found.³ What is certain is that Théodore was not well received by its original Paris audiences, though it later enjoyed moderate success in the provinces. Corneille and d'Aubignac agreed that the subject matter, or the audience's reaction to the subject matter, was at fault; in a word, it was shock at the spectre of prostitution