MOLIÈRE’S HEAVY FATHERS:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE BEHAVIOUR AND REPRESENTATION OF
THREE TYRANNICAL PATRIARCHS

by

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Abstract

This study presents an analysis of the behaviour of three heavy fathers from Molière’s works: Orgon from *Le Tartuffe*, Harpagon from *L’Avare*, and Argan from *Le Malade imaginaire*. Molière’s heavy fathers are often instigators of conflict, perturbing order in their household and its day-to-day life (the term ‘heavy father’ was originally referred to as *senex iratus*, as identified by Northrop Frye). Inspired by the ideas of divine-right kingship and the family viewed as a monarchy, this study will examine the historical context in which the plays were written reflecting on the concept of authority and the parallelism between the father as the head of a household and the King as head of a nation. Ultimately, the study seeks to confirm how these fathers compare with the concept of the ideal head of a household based on standards of the seventeenth century. The inquiry begins by attempting to establish a heavy father’s logic that would justify and explain Molière’s heavy fathers’ tyrannical behaviour, thus suggesting that they are ideal fathers with validations for their actions. The next chapter, however, takes a completely opposite approach, citing downfalls that would point to their being anything but ideal. Specifically, it addresses the shortcomings displayed by Molière’s heavy fathers that lead to the rebellion and misbehaviour of the members of the family. The final chapter reveals through the combination of the ideas presented in the previous chapters, the distinctive idiosyncrasy of Molière’s heavy fathers that prevents them from being the ideal seventeenth century patriarch. Inherent to Orgon, Harpagon and Argan is a susceptibility to detachment: they detach themselves from the prescribed duty of a father, from family, and from reality. This is in opposition to the fundamental role of a leader whether they be the head of a household or a kingdom. Molière’s heavy fathers are not ideal seventeenth century heads of households because it is in their nature to disunite people and things while the essential function of a leader is to hold together, or *relier*. 
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................ iii

Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Deciphering a Heavy Father’s Logic (Excuses for Bad Behaviour) ......................... 5

  Absolute Power in the Seventeenth Century .............................................................. 6
  Interfamilial Relationships ..................................................................................... 12
  The Heavy Father and Obsession ...................................................................... 19

Chapter 2: Condemning a Heavy Father’s Shortcomings ....................................................... 23

  Reciprocity (or, the Lack Thereof) ................................................................. 23
  *L’Amour-propre* .............................................................................................. 30
  Delusion ............................................................................................................. 36

Chapter 3: Converging Molière’s Heavy Fathers’ Behavioural Traits ............................... 45

  Prescribed Duty ................................................................................................. 46
  Family ................................................................................................................ 51
  Reality ................................................................................................................ 55

Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 61

Works Cited ..................................................................................................................... 65
**Introduction**

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, better known by the stage name Molière, is undeniably one of the most studied figures of French literature. Through biographical and critical texts written about the playwright, it is known that his mother died when he was ten years old, and that he had a step-mother between the ages of eleven and fourteen (Michaut 28). It is due to this lack of maternal presence from an early age that scholars have suggested that Molière’s works are devoid of “true mother” figures (Michaut 29). Others have postulated that the absence of “mère[s] véritable[s]” may be due to the nature of the mother not being a typical comedic character (*Ibid.*). Conversely, Molière seems to have a lot to say about paternal authority. It is believed that Molière’s father, Jean Poquelin, was to some degree the inspiration for all the father characters created by the playwright (Larroumet cited in Michaut 52). In addition, paternal authority is quite commonly addressed in comedies as we see various portrayals of paternal figures illustrated in Molière’s works. In the following pages, one particular type of father will be studied: the heavy father or *senex iratus*.

Considered typical characters of comedy, as described in the *Tractatus Coislinianus*—a document that has been linked to Aristotle’s ideas but has no confirmed author (Frye 166)—are characters called *alazon* (impostor). Explicating the nature of this character, Northrop Frye writes: “[t]he humorous blocking characters of comedy are nearly always impostors, though it is more frequently a lack of self-knowledge than simple hypocrisy that characterizes them.” (Frye 175). When the term ‘imposter’ is used alongside the name of Molière, generally images of Tartuffe and other hypocrites come to mind. Yet, certain fathers may be considered imposters in their own right when they fail to behave according to their position in society. In addition, the *senex iratus* is considered a type of *alazon* who is characterised by his “rages and threats” and “his obsessions and his gullibility” (Frye 172). The term *senex iratus* was initially adopted by
Frye in 1957 in his book *Anatomy of Criticism* although he had already began to develop his ideas on the role of the patriarch in earlier papers. *Senex iratus* is often translated as the heavy father, angry father or irate father, and the word *senex* itself is Latin for “old man” (“Senex”).

Using Frye’s ideas as a jumping off point, a heavy father may be identified in each of the three plays, *Le Tartuffe*, *L’Avare*, and *Le Malade imaginaire*.

Traces reminiscent of the heavy father described by Aristotle may be recognized in Orgon, Harpagon and Argan. Orgon, from *Le Tartuffe* (a play written in verse in 1664), is a father who has taken in what he thinks is a pious man named Tartuffe in order to raise the morality in his household. Becoming excessively obsessed with Tartuffe, Orgon reneges on a previous promise and chooses to give his daughter to Tartuffe in marriage, and makes poor decisions regarding his estate and the entrusting of sensitive information. Harpagon, the father in *L’Avare* (a play written in prose in 1668) is a man whose preoccupation lies with money. Considered a miser by virtually everyone who knows him, Harpagon’s interactions with others are based on either how little he has to spend, or how much money he can make. This thus leads him to make poor marriage choices as well, choosing for his daughter an old man who does not ask for a dowry, and fancying for himself a young bride who is unfortunately the woman his son is in love with. *Le Malade Imaginaire* (a comédie-ballet with text in prose in 1673), presents the final father, Argan who is a hypochondriac. Refusing to give up his preconceptions about illness and doctors, Argan’s decisions are based on how matters can be used to improve his health. Thus, he forms a marriage union between his daughter and a future doctor, despite the fact that his daughter loves somebody else. Despite being written in different styles and at different points in Molière’s career, these three plays were selected for their similarity in basic plot. In all three plays a father with a particular obsession fails to create agreeable marriages.
The purpose of this thesis is to present an examination of the heavy fathers in Molière’s works. (The role of the father in Molière in general seems to have been considerably understudied at present. The initial inspiration for this study was the lack of entry for the word “father” in Gaines’ The Molière Encyclopedia, followed by the discovery that E. Angot’s book, entitled Rôles & caractères dans les comédies de Molière included a chapter on women and the family—primarily focusing on children—but there is nothing said of fathers. Moreover, specific attention to the role of the father in other sources seemed to be limited to a few paragraphs with the most significant work on heavy fathers being a chapter in Knutson’s book). Ultimately, the goal of this study is to analyse the behaviour of the heavy father in order to confirm how closely they are aligned to the notion of the ideal head of household (where households include wives, children and servants. Jean-Louis Flandrin confirms that during the seventeenth century, “servants were part of the family, and all contemporary texts bear witness to this” (140)). At times, the historical context in which the plays were written will be referenced in order to reveal how the discussion of these heavy fathers touches on some of the themes addressed by Molière that were important issues during this era.

Therefore, the first chapter will explore the possibility that Molière’s heavy fathers are indeed ideal heads of household and will also seek to justify their tyrannical behaviour. Following this chapter will be the expounding of completely opposite ideas: an exposition of the shortcomings that lead to a lack of obedience demonstrated by the members of the families. In short, it will be suggested that the heavy fathers are not ideal patriarchs. Finally, by reconciling ideas presented in the first two chapters, some conclusions will be reached. Confirmation of whether Molière’s heavy fathers are ideal heads of household will be dependent on the designation of one idiosyncrasy inherent to all three fathers that hinders their effectiveness as
fathers. The identification of such a trait and the explication of why it is a deterrent to the ideal patriarch will thus be the culmination of the study.
Chapter 1: Deciphering a Heavy Father’s Logic (Excuses for Bad Behaviour)

“Par son titre de fou tu crois le bien connaître,
Mais sache qu’il l’est moins qu’il ne le veut paraître
Et que malgré l’emploi qu’il exerce aujourd’hui
Il a plus de bon sens que tel qui rit de lui”

(La Princesse d’Elide 1.1.149-152)

The heavy fathers, Orgon, Harpagon and Argan, are similar in that they have been classified under headings such as fool, blocking character, barbon, ridicule or fâcheux. As such, they are often described as : “[...] cet impertinent, ce tiers importun qui fait irruption dans l’espace théâtral pour y créer une diversion, un « retardement », sans le plus souvent s’en rendre compte, « acteur inconscient de l’être ».1” (Desfourgeres 89). Yet, under the label of “comic paradox,” W.G. Moore argues that Molière identifies with Erasmus in the “praise of folly,” giving fools the opportunity to retaliate to this branding (Moore 772). Furthermore, as Alvin Eustis says, in accordance with many other critics, in his book Molière as Ironic Contemplator, fools too “obey a certain logic, however perverted, and turn to account a native cunning” (142). If this is true then it should be possible to decipher a heavy father’s logic which would provide reasons for their tyrannical behaviour. Therefore, while Desfourgeres’ goal in her article was to find “si l’on peut établir une psychologie du fâcheux” (99), we will tackle a similar question: what constitutes the logic of the heavy father in Molière’s plays? In an attempt to understand their behaviour, the first step in our analysis of these fathers will be to decipher and elucidate certain aspects of this logic. This chapter will include an exploration of the basis of the absolute paternal authority, the effects of disagreements in the household leading to the heavy father’s isolation, and finally, the significance of the heavy father’s obsessions and to what means they may be utilized.

1 Molière cited in Eustis 142
Absolute Power in the Seventeenth Century

One of the distinguishing features of the heavy father is his headstrong nature coupled with his despotic approach to running his household. He recognizes that his being in the ascendant implies complete submission from others, and he often abuses this prerogative in order to get his way. The mention of “[le] devoir de fille” (Tartuffe 2.3.634) or of “le devoir d’une fille” (Le Malade imaginaire 2.6.80), and quotes such as “On oublie aisément les fautes des enfants, lorsqu’ils rentrent dans leur devoir.” (L’Avare 4.5.9-10) suggest that the compliance expected from every member of the household—and especially of the children—is frequently referred to as the duty due to one’s father. As such, it is expected that the father receive obedience without protest, no matter what he wishes. As Angélique says in Le Malade imaginaire: “C’est à moi, mon père, de suivre aveuglément toutes vos volontés.” (1.5.12-13).

This idea of acquiescing to the will of one’s father is also alluded to by Dorine who says (albeit in an ironic tone): “Non, il faut qu’une fille obéisse à son père, / Voulût-il lui donner un singe pour époux.” (Tartuffe 2.3.654-655). Thus, regardless of how unreasonable the father’s request may be, duty and decorum seemed to insist on complete subservience.

However, it must be noted that Molière did not necessarily agree with this attitude. Rather, it is believed that his intent was to “problematiz[e] [...] the father’s vast authority” (Cashman 276). In accordance with this opinion, although the children in the plays recognize their obligation towards their father, many of them try—perhaps in vain—to resist their father’s obstinacy and control. For instance, when faced with an undesirable prospect for a husband, Élise makes her feelings known while still maintaining protocol and politeness. Her words “Je ne veux point me marier, mon père, s’il vous plaît.” (1.4.160-161) are accompanied by a curtsey, and without forgetting a daughter’s duty to her father, she says: “Je suis très humble servante au seigneur Anselme ; mais, avec votre permission, je ne l’épouserai point.” (L’Avare 1.4.166-167).
Mariane, another daughter who must marry a man she does not love, also references paternal authority and a child’s obedience while imploring her father to change his mind: “Relâchez-vous un peu des droits de la naissance, / Et dispensez mes voeux de cette obeissance; / Ne me réduisez point par cette dure loi / Jusqu’à me plaindre au Ciel de ce que je vous dois […]” (Tartuffe 4.3.1281-1284). Thus, while the children disagree with the decisions of their father and do not immediately submit to their bidding, it is evident that the respect owed to their father weighs heavily on their actions.

Unfortunately a child’s opposition to a heavy father’s resolve has little effect. Often angered by resistance, the heavy father is quick to put his child in his or her place. “N’est-ce pas une chose épouvantable, qu’un fils qui veut entrer en concurrence avec son père ? et ne doit-il pas, par respect, s’abstenir de toucher à mes inclinations ?” (L’Avare 4.4.19-22); “C’est une friponne, une impertinente, une effrontée, que je mettrai dans un convent avant qu’il soit deux jours.” (Le Malade imaginaire 2.9.12-14) and “Allons, qu’on se rétracte, et qu’à l’instant, fripon, / On se jette à ses pieds pour demander pardon.” (Tartuffe 3.6.1130-1131) are but a sample of words spoken by the heavy fathers chosen for this study. Furthermore, quotes such as these reaffirm their incompliance. It would appear that the heavy father is always intent on getting his way, and that his position gives him the power to do so. While such selfish behaviour and unrestrained power might generally be viewed as negative behavioural traits, during the seventeenth century men were expected to exercise a certain authority over their household. As historian Jean-Louis Flandrin writes: “Traditional society gave him the means to impose his will, but also demanded that he did impose it.” (123). Thus, it could be argued that by acting in an intractable manner, the heavy fathers are merely reacting to the precepts authorized by society.

Two forces largely contributed to the promotion of absolute paternal authority: religion and politics. In regards to religion, the fourth of the Ten Commandments and Saint Paul’s Epistle
to the Ephesians are the two main biblical sources that support patriarchy (Flandrin 118). While the first requires Christians to “Honor [their] father and [their] mother [...]” (Holy Bible Exodus 20.12), the second instructs them to “obey the master of the house in the same way that [they] obey God” (cited in Flandrin 118). To early Christians, these precepts were not solely a means to spiritual enlightenment. Rather, as Flandrin explains, the enforcement of the idea of submission to one’s father was integral to the institution of Christianity.

The first Christians made use of the relationships of subordination to the father, to the husband and to the master (*dominus*), which formed part of the most firmly established social reality in the societies in which they were preaching, to explain and win acceptance for the concept of absolute obedience to a unique God, envisaged as the universal Father and universal Lord (*Dominus*). (Flandrin 119).

It is thus recognized that giving deference to the father was beneficial, if not crucial, to the development of the Church. Early Christians found a way of indoctrinating additional followers by creating a parallel between the position of the head of a household to that of their God. Coincidentally, the association of patriarchs to God also justified paternal domination and gave fathers a virtually boundless power within their household.

By the seventeenth century, fathers were both only compared to God and expected to demonstrate a godlike power. In 1636, Guillaume du Vair, Guardian of the Seals, wrote that “[n]ous devons tenir nos pères comme des dieux en terre [...]” (cited in Mousnier 76 and Flandrin 130). Roland Mousnier further explains that as such, fathers were required to exert “un pouvoir absolu, analogue à celui de Dieu” (76). Similarly, due to the concept that parents collaborate with God in the creation and raising of a child (God giving the soul and the parents the body), parents were considered to be “Dieux visibles,” and, for this gift of life, a father must be shown perpetual reverence and gratitude, despite the way in which he treats his child (*Ibid.*). It is perhaps partly with this in mind that the heavy fathers in Molière’s plays behave in such an obstinate manner.
For instance, Mariane raises the subject of the debt of a child owed to one’s parents when she says: “Je suis fort redevable à cet amour de père.” (Tartuffe 2.1.434). To this, Orgon replies: “C’est fort bien dit, ma fille ; et pour le mériter, / Vous devez n’avoir soin que de me contenter.” (Tartuffe 2.1.435-436). Thus, Orgon recognizes the gratitude his daughter is showing him, yet he still reminds her that she must always comply with his wishes. In Le Malade imaginaire, Argan explains to Toinette: “C’est pour moi que je lui donne ce médecin ; et une fille de bon naturel doit être ravie d’épouser ce qui est utile à la santé de son père.” (1.5.96-98). As explained in the explanatory notes of the Classiques Bordas edition of the play, Argan’s conception of what is natural is based on what is most convenient for him: in the case of his daughter, what is natural is submission (Prat 265). Therefore, Argan expects that Angélique’s natural inclination as a daughter would be to gladly accept a husband who would benefit her father, as a sign of respect to him. Finally, Cléante too refers to the duty of a child to abide by the wishes of those who are responsible for their being, and that it would be wrong to go against their judgement: “[...] je sais que je dépends d’un père, et que le nom de fils me soumet à des volontés ; que nous ne devons point engager notre fois sans le consentement de ceux dont nous tenons le jour [...]” (L’Avare 1.2.8-12). Consequently, with both fathers and children aware of the obligation due to one’s father in show of thanks and respect for having given them life, and in juxtaposition with the image of God the creator, it is not hard to understand why the seventeenth century fathers and the heavy fathers of Molière’s plays might have taken on a godlike attitude.

Paternal authority was also seen to be necessary in a societal respect. The decency of the population seemed to depend on it. In the seventeenth century, political administrators believed “[s]i le père de famille est obéi, il donne à la « république » et au souverain des citoyens dociles et habitués à vivre paisiblement dans le respect des droits d’autrui. Sinon, les enfants, accoutumés à suivre leur caprice, deviennent des citoyens gaspilleurs, ruineux, paillards,
meurtriers, rebelles, séditieux, et la république court à la destruction.” (Mousnier 77). Therefore, fatherly obedience was a requisite for a well governed state. Obedience started at home with one’s father and was duly extended to one’s country and its king. Furthermore, as Jean Bodin affirmed in 1576, in his *Traité de la République*: “La famille bien conduite est la vraye image de la République et la puissance domestique le vray modelle du gouvernement de la République” (cited in Mousnier 74). Evidently, there was a great importance placed on a father justly fulfilling his duty by maintaining order in his household. Absolutism was considered indispensable and was thus justified through the perception of the household as a small scale version of the government of the country. Accordingly, the father’s role was often compared to that of the king, just as the father was compared to God.

This parallel between father and sovereign is apparent in Molière’s plays. Cashman puts forward that it is due to “the frequent references to his power by the father himself and by other characters as well” that the comparison of the father to the king is emphasized (276). She uses as an example Mariane’s reference to Orgon as “un père absolu” (*Ibid.*). However, keeping in mind that “[s]ince the origins of Christianity, the family has been considered as the monarchy based on Divine Right” (Flandrin 119), there is another way of noticing this correlation. Louis XIV believed that through Divine Right, infallibility was bestowed upon him. He even wrote that: “Ce ne sont pas les bons conseils, ni les bons conseillers qui donnent la prudence au prince, c’est la prudence du prince qui seule forme de bons ministres et produit tous les bons conseils qui lui sont donnés.” (cited in Méthivier 30). It is perhaps in accordance to the idea of Divine Right and the idea of infallibility that, in Molière’s plays, the heavy fathers seem to act. Recognizing that his position as a father is rooted in Divine Right, Harpagon sees himself fit to pass it on to another: “Comment? J’en sui ravi, et je veux que tu prennes sur elle un pouvoir absolu. […] Je lui donne l’autorité que le Ciel me donne sur toi, et j’entends que tu fasses tout ce qu’il te dira.”
Furthermore, while saying things that he knows will please Harpagon, Valère alludes to a father’s assumed infallibility: “Non, mais vous ne sauriez avoir tort, et vous êtes toute raison.” (1.5.5-6). Judging themselves to always be right, the fathers also tend to assert that they know what’s best for their household. Orgon says: “Je sais ce qu’il vous faut, et je suis votre père.” (2.2.521). Harpagon too, claims that he knows what is best and that his choices are always wise ones: “C’est un parti où il n’y a rien à redire; et je gage que tout le monde approuvera mon choix.” (1.4.185-186) ; “Je sais ce qu’il faut à tous deux; et vous n’auriez ni l’un ni l’autre aucun lieu de vous plaindre de tout ce que je prétends faire.” (1.4.107-109). Finally, when Argan explains to Béralde that he intends to choose a doctor to be his daughter’s husband, he claims to do so due to necessity, and thus he believes he is doing what is best for him and his whole family: When Béralde asks: “Sur quelle pensée mon frère, la voulez-vous donner en marriage au fils d’un médecin?” Argan answers: “Sur la pensée, mon frère, de me donner un gendre tel qu’il me faut.” (3.3.29-33); and “Il doit être, mon frère, et pour elle, et pour moi, et je veux mettre dans ma famille les gens dont j’ai besoin.” (3.3.40-41). Thus, it is possible that due to the notion of infallibility and Divine Right, the heavy father considers himself entitled and justified in behaving in such a stubborn manner.

Taking into account that by the seventeenth century, both religious and political administrators sought to promote paternal authority due to the advancements it provided in both the religious and political spheres, it may be understood how the heavy father’s logic may have led him to believe that it was his duty to rule his household in an absolute manner. Taken to the extreme, the absolutism demonstrated by the heavy fathers in Molière’s plays is perceived as stubbornness—the conviction that what he does can never be wrong. Consequently, children were required to be completely obedient. However, this compliance to decisions with which they disagree places a strain on their relationships with their heavy father.
Interfamilial Relationships

As seen in Molière’s works, the heavy father who exercises his right to oversee his household in a despotic manner tends to sever the relationships between himself and most of his family. Tensions arise when the heavy father’s determination is challenged, and his domineering behaviour is intensified by the feeling that he is a victim in the struggle against a defiant household. Driven by the resulting feeling of solitude from having antagonized the majority of his household, the heavy father is even more determined to have his way. From the very first scene of Le Malade imaginaire, the audience is witness to Argan’s self-perceived isolation. “Il n’y a personne: j’ai beau dire, on me laisse toujours seul [...]” (1.1.57-58), he says at first. Eventually, Argan’s annoyance escalates and he convinces himself that his family has left him alone to die: “[...] ah, mon Dieu! Ils me laisseront ici mourir.” (1.1.67-68). Moreover, while constantly trying to convince his family that he is ill, (“Comment, coquine, si je suis malade? si je suis malade, impudente?” (1.5.88-89)), Argan is under the impression that only Béline truly loves him and has taken care of him in his ailment. He thus plans to give her everything and in doing so, “fruser [s]es enfants.” (1.7.39-40). Therefore, Argan alienates, in turn, those by whom he himself feels alienated and those whom he feels do not agree with his convictions.

Orgon, too, finds himself detached from the majority of his household. He stands alone in his trust in Tartuffe to the point that he becomes hostile towards those who oppose his views. Those who speak against Tartuffe to Orgon often provoke anger and responses such as: “Te tairais-tu, serpent, dont les traits effrontés...?” (2.2.551), “Tais-toi, pendard!” (3.6.109) and “Si tu dis un seul mot, je te romprai les bras.” (3.6.1111). Michael S. Koppisch explains the way in which Orgon antagonizes his family by saying: “His family becomes an undifferentiated mass of resisters whose individuality is lost on him [...]. When Orgon measures his family against Tartuffe, he endows the hypocrite with an individual identity worthy of affection [...]. He does
not distinguish among the others, who are alike in their opposition to Tartuffe and, by extension, to Orgon himself.” (62-63). Plus, as was the case with Argan, Orgon resorts to wanton behaviour to retaliate against a band of opposing family members. He says:

Je sais bien quel motif à l’attaquer t’oblige.
Vous le haïssez tous, et je vois aujourd’hui
Femme, enfants et valets déchaînés contre lui.
On met impudemment toute chose en usage
Pour ôter de chez moi ce dévot personnage ;
Mais plus on fait d’efforts afin de l’en bannir,
Plus j’en veux employer à l’y mieux retenir,
Et je vais me hâter de lui donner ma fille
Pour confondre l’orgueil de toute ma famille. (3.6.1118-1126).

Thus, Orgon’s resolve to have Tartuffe marry Mariane is doubled merely by the defiance of his household in accepting Tartuffe. Indeed, as Tartuffe has taught him, under the pretext of the betterment of his soul, Orgon has become a father who views himself as alone—though in control—but detached from his family and its welfare. Orgon praises Tartuffe’s teachings and tells Cléante: “Il m’enseigne à n’avoir affection pour rien, / De toutes amitiés il détache mon âme ; / Et je verrais mourir frère, enfants, mère et femme, / Que je m’en soucierais autant que de cela.” (1.5.275-279). Therefore, it would appear that not only has Tartuffe created a rupture in this household to the point where Orgon is pitted against his family, but Tartuffe has also instructed Orgon not to concern himself with them.

Perhaps the best example of the degree to which a father’s resolution can lead him to push away the members of his household is Harpagon and his delusions about a stolen cassette. Much has been written on the subject of Harpagon’s solitude that is mainly due to his judgement that everyone is guilty of the theft of his money. “C’est un père en représentation, il se considère plutôt comme un individu sans liens, pour qui chacun est un rival potentiel ou un ennemi” writes Jean-Marie Apostolidès (155). Along the same lines, Michael S. Koppisch writes that “Harpagon believes that everyone is guilty. To the reasonable question ‘Qui soupçonnez-vous de ce vol?
his response is categorical: ‘Tout le monde’” (134). Harapagon’s children are not exempt from his paranoia. For instance, Harpagon accuses his son in the following manner: “[...] vous donnez furieusement dans le marquis, et pour aller ainsi vêtu, il faut bien que vous me dérobiez.” (L’Avare 1.4.68-70). Thus, as Harpagon admits himself, his children, too, are enemies (1.4.51-54 and cited in Koppisch 128). Therefore, by condemning everyone, Harpagon, like the other heavy fathers discussed above, alienates most of those in his life. In addition, in further similarity to Argan and Orgon, Harpagon’s obstinacy is intensified towards those who oppose his opinions, and he is ready to reward the few who he believes are on his side. When Maître Jacques lists the food required to feed ten people, Harpagon is enraged by what he considers to be a large amount. He tells Maître Jacques: “Que diable! voilà pour traiter toute une ville entière!” (3.1.109-110) and “Ah! Traître, tu manges tout mon bien.” (3.1.113-114). Thus, in his mind, Maître Jacques is yet another person who will excessively spend his money. Furthermore, when asked for an honest description of how the public views Harpagon, Maître Jacques admits that Harpagon is ridiculed by all, and that everyone considers him to be a miser. Despite having asked for the truth, Harpagon is again angered by what he hears. He says: “Vous êtes un sot, un maraud, un coquin et un impudent.” (3.2.224-225). On the other hand, words pronounced by Valère, that he knows are words that Harpagon wants to hear, become worthy of being engraved onto the very structure of the house. Largely impressed by Valère adage: “il faut manger pour vivre, et non pas vivre pour manger[,]” (3.1.126-127), Harpagon decides that he wants it to be “[gravé] en lettre d’or sur la cheminée de [sa] salle” (3.1.139).

Though it may seem as if the heavy fathers have allies who support their visions, nothing could be further from the truth. The heavy father is in fact a solitary character who is detached from his household, since even the people in whom he places his trust while rejecting the rest of his family have their own agendas and are only wearing the mask of agreement. Argan is willing
to refuse his children their inheritance in favour of Béline. However, near the end of the play, her true character is shown as she rejoices in the belief that Argan is dead: “Le Ciel en soit loué! Me voilà délivrée d’un grand fardeau. [...] Quelle perte est-ce que la sienne ? et de quoi servait-il sur la terre ? Un homme incommode à tout le monde, malpropre, dégoûtant, sans cesse un lavement ou une médecine dans le ventre, […]” (3.12.14-15 and 18-24). Ultimately, Béline’s main motivation is Argan’s money. She says: “Il y a des papiers, il y a de l’argent, dont je me veux saisir […]” (3.12.30-31). Another group of people who seem to want Argan’s money are those in the medical profession. As Toinette tries to tell him: “Ce Monsieur Fleurant-là et ce Monsieur Purgon s’égayent bien sur votre corps ; ils ont en vous une bonne vache à lait ; et je voudrais bien leur demander quel mal vous avez, pour vous faire tant de remèdes.” (1.2.46-49).

Evidently, Argan is quite a bad judge of character, trusting the wrong people.

This is a trait that is also shared by Orgon, as seen in his adoration of Tartuffe. Despite turning his back on his family and doing all in his power to give Tartuffe everything he has, Orgon will ultimately be duped by this imposter. Tartuffe’s main goal to usurp Orgon’s power is momentarily achieved when he tells Orgon: “C’est à vous d’en sortir, vous qui parlez en maître: / La maison m’appartient, et je le ferai connaître […]” (4.7.1557-1558).

Finally, while Harpagon normally distrusts everyone, he is taken with Valère who seems to understand Harpagon’s economical behaviour. Yet, Valère too is duping the heavy father as he has his own agenda. In love with Élise, Valère does what he thinks is necessary to gain the trust and respect of Harpagon: “Vous voyez comme je m’y prends, et les adroites complaisances qu’il m’a fallu mettre en usage pour m’introduire à son service; sous quelle masque de sympathie et de rapports de sentiments je me déguise pour lui plaire, et quel personnage je joue tous les jours avec lui, afin d’acquérir sa tendresse. […]” (1.1.77-82). Thus, Valère, like Béline and Tartuffe, is playing a role and disguising his true sentiment in order to seem acquiescent to heavy fathers
who are increasingly isolating themselves from their family. On the other hand, the heavy fathers who desire absolute obedience from their family (and are not getting it), turn to those who he believes are yielding to his power. While those who resist his authority are penalized, those who are shown to be faithful are recompensed. Unfortunately, it seems certain that the heavy father will place his trust in the wrong person. This confirms therefore their solitude as the infrequent person who seems to be on their side is ultimately deceptive and adversarial. Essentially, one of the traits of Molière’s heavy fathers is gullibility.

Credulousness in the face of guile is a theme that spans all three of the plays. As discussed above, it is a trait that seems to affect each of the heavy fathers by influencing their behaviour and their choices. Harold C. Knutson says the following of Argan: “Beyond this stock of traits common to blocking figures – exaggerated here in the direction of infantilism – lies Argan’s comic fault, hypochondria, which makes him vulnerable, in turn, to a more specific weakness, gullibility. Credulity stands comically in traditional tension with knavery [...]” (105). However, as seen through by the trust they give the very people in the play who wear masks, the same is undeniably true of the two other heavy fathers. Argan’s gullibility in regards to medicine is seen in quotes such as “Mais savez-vous, mon frère, que c’est cela qui me conserve, et que monsieur Purgon dit que je sucomberais s’il était seulement trois jours sans prendre soin de moi ?” (3.3.7-59). His faith in Béline is evident when he pronounces words such as “Adieu, mamie. Voilà une femme qui m’aime... [...]” (2.6.127). Furthermore, Argan even believes that he has killed Louison, although she is just pretending to be dead in order to escape punishment: “Ah! Malheureux, ma pauvre fille est morte. Qu’ai-je fait, miserable ! [...]” (2.8.52-53).

Harpagon, too, is quite gullible, he rejects advice that does not suit him, and only listens to that which is pleasing to him. As seen above, he does not see through Valère’s acting. Moreover, he believes Frosine when she says that Mariane « a une aversion épouvantable pour tous les jeunes
Harpagon is gullible in the sense that he is unable to interpret flattery. It is with ease that Frosine falsely praises his physical appearance. She says: “Comment ? vous êtes à ravir, et votre figure est à peindre. Tournez-vous un peu, s’il vous plaît. Il ne se peut pas mieux. Que je vous voie marcher. Voilà un corps taillé, libre et dégagé comme il faut, et qui ne marque aucune incommodité[…]” (2.5.160-164). Of Orgon, Dorine says: “Mais il est devenu comme un homme hêtê, / Depuis que de Tartuffe on le voit entêté” (1.2.183-184). Furthermore, Orgon’s incapability to distinguish reality from appearances is highlighted by Cléante’s speech in which he says:

Hé quoi? vous ne ferez nulle distinction  
Entre l’hypocrisie et la dévotion ?  
Vous les voulez traiter d’un semblable langage  
Et rendre même honneur au masque qu’au visage  
Égaler l’artifice à la sincérité  
Confondre l’apparence avec la vérité  
Estimer le fantôme autant que la personne  
Et la fausse monnaie à l’égal de la bonne […] (1.5.331-338).

Thus, a large lexical field with words pertaining to the theme of gullibility and illusion is introduced. *L’hypocrisie, masque, artifice, appearance, and fantôme* all point to false representations that are taken as true, while the truth (*dévotion, visage, sincérité, vérité, la personne*) are rejected by the heavy fathers.

Gullibility seems to be one of the issues that Molière also problematizes in his plays. This seemed to be so much of an issue in the seventeenth century that scholars such as Gabriel Naudé wrote the following on the topic:

[…] Aussi savons-nous que cette populace est comparée à une mer sujette à toutes sortes de vents et de tempêtes : au caméléon qui peut recevoir toutes sortes de couleurs excepté la blanche ; et à la sentine et cloaque dans laquelle coulent toutes les ordures de la maison. Ses plus belles parties sont d’être inconstante et variable, approuver et improuver quelque chose en même temps, courir toujours d’un contraire à l’autre, croire de léger, se mutiner promptement, toujours gronder et murmurer : bref tout ce qu’elle pense n’est que vanité, tout ce qu’elle dit est faux et absurde, ce qu’elle improuve est bon, ce qu’elle approuve mauvais, ce qu’elle loue infâme, et tout ce qu’elle fait et entreprend n’est que pure folie (139).
According to Naudé, many of the people of his time were easily taken in and so, were constantly at threat from those whose only motivation was to deceive. The impostors that Naudé claims to be so profuse in society are represented in Molière’s plays, to some extent, by Valère and Froisine in L’Avare, and Béline and those in the medical profession in Le Malade imaginaire. However, it is to the character Tartuffe that this quote is most pertinent. The heavy father’s quality of being easily deceived undeniably affects the way in which he rules his household. Of Orgon, Harold C. Knutson says “[...] the heavy father is the victim of someone else’s hypnotic appeal and cunning. Hence, the guilt for callous parental tyranny falls in part at least upon the real villain of the piece who in this way becomes the scapegoat.” (Knutson 63). Thus, it would seem that Harold C. Knutson seems to reduce the negative view of the heavy father’s despotism, if not excuse it, on the basis of their gullibility. Gullibility thus leads Molière’s heavy fathers to place most of their trust in the deceitful characters, further indicating the notion that nobody is completely congruent with the father and his views. Hence, Molière’s heavy fathers are often isolated.

Because the heavy father constantly craves obedience, he becomes increasingly stern towards those who he views as disobedient and he distances himself from them. Contrarily he rewards the few who support his views, regardless of their true allegiance. Gullibility is inherent to Molière’s heavy fathers. Whether this credulousness is the reason or the cause, Argan, Orgon and Harpagon have poor judgement of character. Thus, the heavy father adopts a logic that allows him to believe that only the rare member of his household is truly submissive to his authority, while the rest are resisters who collectively ostracize their father. Consequently the heavy father’s tyrannical behaviour is partially a result of his sentiment of being isolated.
The Heavy Father and Obsession

For a heavy father to feel ostracized over a disagreement, the topic at issue must be one that the father feels passionately about. In the three plays at study, each of the heavy fathers is afflicted with a specific obsession: morality, wealth and illness. Orgon’s incessant reply of “Et Tartuffe?” despite being told of his wife’s illness in act one, scene four of Le Tartuffe are enough to realize his preoccupation with this man and the idea of improved morality. After all, as Madame Pernelle explains, the reason Tartuffe was brought into the household was to foster righteousness: “Je vous dis que mon fils n’a rien fait de plus sage / Que le Ciel au besoin l’a céans envoyé / Pour redresser à tous votre esprit fourvoyé ; / Que pour votre salut vous le devez entendre, / Et qu’il ne reprend rien qui ne soit à reprendre. […]” (1.1.145-150). Harpagon’s obsession, as primarily noted through the title of the play, is with money. Harpagon is completely convinced that everyone is stealing from him. Not only does he question and search those who get near him, (“Attends. Ne m’emportes-tu rien?” (1.3.41); “Allons, rends-le moi sans te fouiller. […] Ce que tu m’as pris.” (1.3.97-99)), but he finds it necessary to regularly verify the safety of his money: “Attendez un moment; je vais revenir vous parler. Il est a propos que je fasse un petit tour à mon argent.” (2.3.2-3). Argan’s obsession concerns health, or perhaps the lack thereof. Certain that he is ill, Argan is completely despondent when all his doctors have abandoned him in the third act of Le Malade imaginaire. Argan is convinced that he will die without the prescriptions of his doctors and in his anguish declares the following grievances: “Ah, mon Dieu! Je suis mort. Mon frère, vous m’avez perdu.” (3.6.1-2); “Je sens déjà que la médecine se venge” (3.6.4-5): “Il dit que je deviendrai incurable avant qu’il soit quatre jours.” (3.6.13-14).

Yet, it is this very obsession that is a cause of their obstinate behaviour. Knutson states that “Harpagon, […] and Argan are […] enslaved by an obsession which causes them to rule their
families with a heavy hand and make selfish and callous decisions regarding the marriages of their children.” (63). Of course, the same may be said of Orgon. In a paradoxal twist, although their obsession is what drives away the majority of their household and leads to a loss of fatherly power, attached to the perseverance of the heavy father’s pursuit of their obsession also seems to be comfort in the appearance of domination and the feeling of household order. In essence, obsession, to the heavy father, brings self-affirmation.

It is mainly in Koppisch’s work that the path from obsession to self-concept is analysed. He posits, for example, that Harpagon’s “aberrant behaviour” can be explained by the importance he attributes to money (137). Wealth, to Harpagon, is a means of distinguishing himself from others and consequently, of convincing himself of his superiority. Furthermore, through temper tantrums and constant accusations of robbery, it would seem that Harpagon can utilize both miserliness and anger to demand reform, giving him a sense of control in an otherwise insubordinate household. For instance, criticizing Cléante for dressing in a manner that he considers to be overlavish, Harpagon asserts that to be able to dress so, he must have stolen money from his father (L’Avare 1.4). Moreover, after being told that his son’s money is from luck and winnings, Harpagon proceeds to instruct Cléante on the way that he should be handling his money:

C’est fort mal fait. Si vous êtes heureux au jeu, vous en devriez profiter, et mettre à honnêteintérêt l’argent que vous gagnez, afin de le trouver un jour. Je voudrais bien savoir, sans parler du reste, à quoi servent tous ces rubans dont vous voilà lardé depuis les pieds jusqu’à la tête, et si une demi-douzaine d’aiguillettes ne suffit pas pour attacher un haut-de-chaussettes? Il est bien nécessaire d’employer de l’argent à des perruques, lorsque l’on peut porter des cheveux de son cru, qui ne coûtent rien. Je vais gager qu’en perruques et rubans, il y a du moins vingt pistoles, et vingt pistoles rapportent par année dix-huit livres six sols huit deniers, à ne les placer qu’au denier douze. (1.4.77-88).

To this, all Cléante can say is: “Vous avez raison.” (1.4.89). Thus, it would seem that by accusing his son of theft, Harpagon has turned a situation in which he was upset with his son’s
behaviour, into an opportunity to impart the way in which he wants his children to conduct themselves, as well as opportunity to demand compliance.

In Argan’s case, illness is used as a way to produce sympathy and obedience. By constantly reminding those around him that angering him would afflict him, it would seem that Argan plays upon their guilt in order to draw out docility. When he tells Toinette: “Parle bas, pendarde: tu viens m’ébranler tout le cerveau, et tu ne songes pas qu’il ne faut point parler si haut à des malade.” (Le Malade imaginaire 2.2.5-7) and he tells Béralde: “Les sottes raisons que voilà! Tenez, mon frère, ne parlons point de cet homme-là davantage, car cela m’échauffe la bile, et vous me donneriez mon mal.” (3.3.189-191), Argan is using the threat of increased malady in order to stop a conversation that displeases him. As Koppisch asserts, “Argan uses [sickness] to create order. [...] Illness permits Argan to impose his will on his family and to feel assured of his own existence.” (177). Moreover, “his ill health is his path to distinction” (Koppisch 175). Thus, it is only through the insistence of illness that Argan believes he can guarantee his superiority in his household as well as the obedience of its members.

Orgon, too, uses his obsession to demand compliance in his household. However, it is through disagreement that this heavy father’s desire for self-affirmation is most evident. By saying things such as: “Ah! Je vous brave tous et vous ferai connaître / Qu’il faut qu’on m’obéisse et que je suis le maître » (3.6.1129-1130), Orgon demonstrates his desire to be in control and to defy any desires that go against his own. To further explain this, Lionel Gossman writes: “Orgon’s real desire is [...] to have himself recognized by all around him as divinely absolute and self-sufficient. [...] he cannot recognize the independence of others except as a threat to and a denial of his own. He cannot therefore love his family or entertain any relations with them other than relations of violence and tyranny.” (Men and Masks 102). Accordingly, in the play, Orgon declares that “Faire enragé le monde est ma plus grande joie [...]” (3.7.1173).
Therefore, as a heavy father’s obsession creates dissent between the father and his household, by becoming enraged, the heavy father can assert himself whilst demanding the compliance of his family. And to conclude, going back to the words of Koppisch: “All of these characters enlist their obsessions in the struggle to gain superiority over others. [...] Thus, in this, his last play, Molière shows more explicitly and definitively than his earlier works that his characters’ obsessions are but pretexts to hide a profound desire for self-affirmation through the domination of others.” (Koppisch 178).

Essentially, the heavy father’s logic is propelled by one thing: his *libido dominandi*. They seek above all the absolute power that society leads them to believe that they are due. Furthermore, when dissention arises between the father and his household, the ostracised heavy father’s covets subservience even more. In addition, because of their obsession, the heavy father feels he is able to regain the domination and self-affirmation that he seeks. However, despite this logic that may explain their despotic approach to parenting, the heavy fathers are still in disaccord with what is expected of them, and of the directives that would make them successful paternal authorities. These downfalls will be the focus of study in the next chapter.
Chapter 2: Condemning a Heavy Father’s Shortcomings

“On n’y respecte rien, chacun y parle haut, 
Et c’est tout justement la cour du roi Pétaud.”
(Tartuffe 1.1.11-12)

Under the entry for “Paternité” in Furetière’s dictionary we find the definition, “[q]ualité du pere. Il ne faut jamais violer le respect dû, & rendu en tout temps, & en tous lieux à la paternité” (Dictionnaire universel…). Yet, this requirement for constant respect and submission does not necessarily reflect reality, or at least the reality of Molière’s plays. Madame Pernelle’s allusion to le roi Pétaud, a king who is incapable of making his subjects obey him, illustrates the situation that her son, Orgon, is in. As discussed in the first chapter, this perception of not being obeyed applies not only to him, but to all three of Molière’s heavy fathers. However, what are the causes for which the fathers do not receive the respect and compliance they believe they are due? The answer to this question lies in the revealing of negative traits demonstrated by Orgon, Harpagon and Argan that deter any deference issued by their household. Thus, the next step in the analysis of Molière’s heavy fathers’ behaviour will revolve around their shortcomings. This discussion will start with an exploration of the notion of reciprocity and its relevance in the lives of the heavy fathers. This will then be followed by an analysis of amour-propre and its consequences in a heavy father’s household. Subsequently, the chapter will close with a reflection on the way in which Molière’s heavy fathers view themselves and the world.

Reciprocity (or, the Lack Thereof)

Although absolute paternal authority was extensively promoted during Molière’s time, the seventeenth century also brought forth developments towards more child privileges and justice. While scholarly research has found that the advocacy of paternal absoluteness was integral to the advancement of religious and political groups (as discussed in the first chapter),
this push for authoritativeness was countered by a calling into question of the danger of excess. Furthermore, in a seemingly paradoxical turn, it would appear that the Church was at the root of this concern. As Jean-Louis Flandrin writes, the Church incited the reassessment of “the traditional relationship of subordination” through its reproach of intemperance concerning “marital, paternal and seigneurial power” (119). Therefore, on one hand paternal authority was proscribed by the Church as it was deemed essential to its institution, yet on the other hand a concern about the risk of too much power existed. This concern is believed to be reflected in Molière’s work and is considered to be part of his ideology. “La loi morale de mesure” and “La loi sociale de solidarité” can be seen as two key fundaments of Molière’s philosophy (Saulnier 80). In accordance to these precepts, one must respect the juste milieu, as well as know one’s place and carry out the duties of one’s station, without trying to surpass it. In terms of household relationships, this means that a father’s authority must be obeyed so long as it is fair, and that the head of the household deserves respect from his son as long as he is worthy of it. Saulnier continues to explicate that “il y a là des obligations complémentaires, une balance de droits et devoirs, dettes et créances, qui définit comme un contrat social.”. Thus, further supporting the notion that Molière “problematizes [...] the father’s vast authority” (Cashman 276), it is evident that, according to Molière, a father must not possess boundless power, but rather must behave in a way that is congruous to the obedience he wishes to be shown. In other words, a sort of reciprocity must exist between the father and his household. If he expects his family to carry out his desires, he must conduct himself in a way that is deserving of deference.

This idea of reciprocity is evinced in various documents from the seventeenth century. “Il y a des devoirs reciproques du père à l’égard du fils, & du fils à l’égard du père.” affirms Furetière in his dictionary (Dictionnaire universel…). However, returning to the notion that religion was a driving force in the challenge of excess power, early in the seventeenth century,
Cardinal Richelieu wrote the *Instruction du chrestien* in which he gave the following comment on the fourth commandment:

> Ce commandement n’oblige pas seulement les enfans envers les peres, mais en outre les peres enveres leurs enfans, entant que l’amour doit estre reciproque. Ce qui fait que Dieu commandant aux enfans d’aimer & honorer leurs peres, il enjoint tacitement aux peres d’aimer leurs enfans, & n’est point besoin qu’il le face en termes exprez, attendu que l’amour des peres envers leurs enfans est si naturel, que pour les obliger à le rendre, la loy qu’ils ont escrite dans leurs cœurs, est sans aucune autre suffisante. (154).

Thus, Richelieu preaches a reciprocal love between father and child and assumes that a father’s love is so natural that a law commanding it need not be voiced. Yet despite not being written in an official manner, natural paternal love and reciprocity were important aspects of fatherhood in the seventeenth century. Natural paternal love should be understood as the affection that a father was expected to have for his child, while reciprocity entails behaviour on behalf of the father that corresponds to and reflects the respect that his child shows him. However, the heavy fathers in the Molière plays chosen for this study prove that Richelieu’s assumption is not always true. One might even posit that these fathers are almost incapable of reciprocity.

One blatant example of one of Molière’s heavy fathers failing to act in a reciprocal manner regards Harpagon, who slights Frosine when she implores financial aid. Having secured for Harpagon a young prospect for a wife, Frosine expects that she will be remunerated. She says: “Oui, je traite pour lui quelque petite affaire, dont j’espère une récompense.” (*L’Avare* 2.4.15-16). A financial reward is particularly important to her as she is involved in a trial. However, even though he is aware of this, Harpagon sidesteps the issue and shirks her request for money. Primarily focusing on the flattery that Froisine feels she needs to interject into her plea, Harpagon then moves to complete disregard for her supplication and leaves on the pretence that somebody has called him (*L’Avare* 2.5). Abandoning a helpless Froisine, Harpagon demonstrates the refusal of both sympathy and cooperation. Despite the fact that Froisine has helped him with one of his problems, he is not willing to aid her with hers. However, Richelieu’s
observation applies, of course, primarily to a father and his children. And, in each of the three plays, Molière’s heavy fathers do not fail in behaving unilaterally as well as opposing more specific instructions given by Richelieu.

In the two plays where the heavy fathers have sons, the natural love referred to by Richelieu is not easily discernable. Instead, what is apparent is that the fathers deem and treat their sons as adversaries. In L’Avare, Harpagon and Cléante are enemies in both love and money. In the second scene of the second act, the series of retorts in the form of questions attests to the monetary struggle between these two characters:

Harpagon: Comment, pendard? c’est toi qui t’abandonnes à ces coupables extrémités ?
Cléante: Comment, mon père? c’est vous qui vous portez à ces honteuses actions ?
Harpagon: C’est toi qui te veux ruiner par des emprunts si condamnables ?
Cléante: C’est vous qui cherchez à vous enrichir par des usures si criminelles ? [...] (2.2.30-37).

Perceptible through this sequence of accusations are a father and a son who are mutually ashamed of each other, which is not quite the type of reciprocity preached during the seventeenth century. Yet, though Harpagon reproaches the way in which Cléante handles his monetary affairs, it is primarily due to his father’s avarice that Cléante must seek to borrow money in the first place. Noting in particular his father’s miserliness, Cléante establishes Harpagon’s lack of reciprocity vis-à-vis his children early in the play: “[...] et qu’il faille que notre père s’oppose à nos désirs, nous le quitterons là tous deux et nous affranchirons de cette tyrannie où nous tient depuis si longtemps son avarice insupportable.” (1.2.84-87). Already anticipating that his father will not approve or support his inclinations, Cléante plans to find a way of freeing himself and his sister from their father.

The other matter that places father and son in opposition to each other is love (although Harpagon’s ability to love anything other than money remains doubtful). Harpagon says the following after discovering that Cléante pines for the girl that Harpagon intends to marry: “Je
suis bien aise d’avoir appris un tel secret; et voilà justement ce que je demandais. Oh sus! mon fils, savez-vous ce qu’il y a? C’est qu’il faut songer, s’il vous plaît, à vous défaire de votre amour; à cesser toutes vos poursuites auprès d’une personne que je prétends pour moi, et à vous marier dans peu avec celle qu’on vous destine.” (4.3.72-78). Therefore, instead of conceding Mariane to Cléante, who truly loves her, Harpagon remains headstrong and self-serving.

In Tartuffe, Damis tries to expose Tartuffe in order to liberate his father from the grasp that the imposter has on him. After witnessing Tartuffe’s advances on Elmire, Damis is determined to reveal Tartuffe’s hypocrisy:

Non, Madame, non : ceci doit se répandre. J’étais en cet endroit, d’où j’ai pu tout entendre; Et la bonté du Ciel m’y semble avoir conduit Pour confondre l’orgueil d’un traître qui me nuit, Pour m’ouvrir une voie à prendre la vengeance De son hypocrisie et de son insolence, À détrômer mon père, et lui mettre en plein jour L’âme d’un scélérat qui vous parle d’amour. (3.4.1021-1028).

Unfortunately, Damis’ effort is met with opposition by his father. Rather than believing his son, Orgon is angered by what he believes is insolence. The result is the iteration of various ways to tell his son to keep quiet: “Tais-toi, pendard” (3.6.1109); “Tais-toi.” (3.6.1110); “Si tu dis un seul mot, je te romprai les bras.” (3.6.1111); “Paix !” (3.6.1117). Thus, by behaving in such a way in response to what was meant to be an honourable act by his son, Orgon, too, proves that reciprocity and natural paternal love are not always assured.

The culmination of the disputes between father and son in both plays is the same. Molière’s heavy fathers are angered to the point that they resort to what seems to be the ultimate punishment: banishment coupled with a father’s curse. To Cléante, Harpagon says: “Laisse-moi faire, traître. […] Je te défends de me jamais voir. […] Je t’abandonne. […] Je te renonce pour mon fils. […] Et je te donne ma malédiction. […]” (4.5.38-48). Similar words are pronounced by Orgon. To Damis he says: “Vite, quittons la place. / Je te prive, pendard, de ma succession / Et te
donne, de plus, ma malédiction.” (3.6.1138-1140). However, according to Richelieu, as an extension to the idea of reciprocity presented in his comment to the fourth commandment, paternal love necessitates that a father not punish his child excessively (160). Specifically, of fathers it is written: “Ceux qui les desheritent sans cause legitime, [...] violent ce precepte tres-notablement.” (Richelieu 160-161.). Through the act of banishment, Harpagon and Orgon give in to the fault of excess and prove to be directly in opposition of the guidance of the Instruction du chrestien. Furthermore, returning to Saulnier’s description of Molière’s “loi morale de mesure” and “loi sociale de solidarité” it is understandable why these sons are not completely submissive to their fathers, as the fathers fail to respect the “obligations complémentaires” (80), and they do not behave in a manner that deserves obedience in return.

Although Argan does not have a son to banish, he does have a daughter whom he decides to put away in a convent due to her reluctance to marry the man her father has chosen for her, and also due to Argan being influenced by Béline to take such action. Argan explains his decision in the following manner: “Mon frère, ne me parlez point de cette coquine-là. C’est une friponne, une impertinente, une effrontée, que je mettrai dans un convent avant qu’il soit deux jours.” (2.9.11-14) and “[...] je veux la mettre dans un convent, puisqu’elle s’est opposée à mes volontés.” (3.11.10-11). From these quotes, Argan’s decision to send Angélique to a convent is predominantly a result of her insubordination, and as has exposed previously, Molière’s heavy fathers have a tendency to behave increasingly severely when disobeyed. Yet, this mode of punishment is also addressed by Richelieu. He writes that “Les peres qui usent de trop grande severité envers leurs enfans, qui les battent, & les maltraittent sans sujet, ou avec sujet, mais outre mesure : qui les marient à des personnes qu’ils ne peuvent aimer : qui les mettent en Religion contre leur volonté, contreviennent tres-notablement à ce precepte.” (Richelieu 159-160). Again, Molière’s heavy father acts in a contrary manner to what is required of them by
social convention. Argan strays from Richelieu’s text both by attempting to wed her to somebody she cannot love as well as sending her to a convent. Upon meeting Thomas Diafoirus, Angélique even requests that her father not force her to marry somebody she cannot love: “Si mon père ne veut pas me donner un mari qui me plaise, je le conjurerai au moins de ne me point forcer à en épouser un que je ne puisse pas aimer.” (2.6.84-86). Still, this seems to have little effect on Argan. Again, the heavy father’s lack of reciprocity is apparent.

Orgon and Harpagon too have daughters whom they try to marry off to men they have no desire of marrying. Mariane and Élise’s distaste for the men chosen for them is so great that both would rather resort to death than have to enter into wedlock with their repulsive matches. Mariane reveals this sentiment in her discussion with Dorine:

Dorine: Sur cette autre union quelle est donc votre attente ?
Mariane : De me donner la mort si l’on me violente. […]
Vois-tu, si l’on m’expose à ce cruel martyre,
Je te le dis, Dorine, il faudra que j’expire. (Tartuffe 2.3.613-614 and 681-682)

Similarly, Élise says: “Je me tuerai plutôt que d’épouser un tel mari.” (L’Avare 1.4.180) when told of Harpagon’s plan to marry her to the elderly seigneur Anselme. Thus all three fathers go against the precept that directs them not to give children spouses they cannot love. By forcing this matter, Molière’s heavy fathers show themselves to be unconcerned with the contentment of their children and above all, they show themselves to be headstrong. Hence, any insolence on behalf of the daughters may too be justified due to the lack of reciprocity shown to them by their fathers.

Despite the fact that seventeenth century religious and political institutions promoted paternal authority, there was also an aspect of reciprocity that started to develop alongside. This reciprocity was a reaction to the harm of excess, and it meant that fathers should treat their household in a way that demonstrated their natural paternal love. Molière’s heavy fathers do not reflect this mutuality, and instead behave in a way that is completely self-centered. Also, as we
will see, this egoism is a huge detriment to Molière’s heavy fathers when trying to demand the obedience of a household.

**L’Amour-propre**

Having discussed the lack of a reciprocal nature demonstrated by Molière’s heavy fathers, it is now necessary to examine their preoccupation with themselves. In a study on self-fashioning, Larry Riggs posits that Molière has established a connection between the atrophy of reciprocity and hypertrophied individualism, among other things (25). Returning to the analysis of Harpagon, Argan and Orgon choosing husbands that their daughters refuse, it is apparent that these heavy fathers fail to consider the contentment of others as they are too preoccupied with gratifying themselves.

Each of the heavy fathers at study chooses for their daughter a man who suits their needs rather than the daughter’s. Harpagon’s reason for choosing seigneur Anselme to be Élise husband can be summarized in two words: “Sans dot.” (1.5). His miserliness consumes him to the point that no argument can make him reconsider. “Sans dot” is all Harpagon feels he needs to say to justify his decision despite Valère’s attempt to remind him that a daughter’s sentiment must be considered in these matters, and that other fathers would rather place a daughter’s happiness over money (1.5.40-54). Driven by his obsession, Harpagon fails to consider anything other than his own interests while neglecting those of his children. Argan does the same when he chooses a future doctor for Angélique. He explains his choice citing his perceived sickness: “Ma raison est que, me voyant infirme et malade comme je suis, je veux me faire un gendre et des alliés médecins, afin de m’appuyer de bons secours contre ma maladie, d’avoir dans ma famille les sources des remèdes qui me sont nécessaire, et d’être à même des consultations et des ordonnance.” (1.5.79-84). Again the heavy father focuses on his own needs rather than the
happiness of his daughter. Argan even admits quite selfishly: “C’est pour moi que je lui donne ce médecin” (1.5.96). In Orgon’s case, his choice of Tartuffe as husband for Mariane is motivated by two factors: improved morality and the idea of helping Tartuffe come into riches and to prove himself as a noble (2.2.485-494). It must be noted, however, that although the outward appearance of the second motivation seems to be for the benefit of Tartuffe, its fulfillment would serve Orgon’s individualism as well. As discussed in the first chapter, he finds himself in contention with the rest of his household over Tartuffe’s reliability. Should this heavy father succeed in helping Tartuffe regain his goods, Orgon would have triumphed over his family. Consequently, this heavy father, like the other two, still puts his own interests before those of his household.

*L’Amour-propre* is one of Molière’s heavy fathers’ main faults. The way in which the denial of instant gratification leads to fury and the way in which the fathers yearn to be the perpetual centre of the household both illustrate a great narcissism (Knutson 103). A definition of *amour-propre* may be found as the first of La Rochefoucauld’s *maximes supprimées*:

“L’Amour-propre est l’amour de soi-même, et de toutes choses pour soi ; il rend les hommes idolâtres d’eux-mêmes, et les rendrait les tyrans des autres, si la fortune leur en donnait les moyens ; […]” (148). The maxim continues into a deep analysis of *amour-propre* but it is evident that even these first few lines are of extreme pertinence to the heavy fathers discussed.

Even aside from Molière’s works, *l’amour-propre* was a major topic in the literature of the seventeenth century. It is even written that “[t]he motive of virtually all the dramatis personae of later seventeenth-century French literature is self-interest” (Kay, Cave and Bowie 154). The significance of this theme is believed to be tied to the political climate and the growing sense of
individualism\textsuperscript{2} that arose during this era. Larry Riggs writes that “[a] seeming paradox of early modernity […] is that rapidly increasing and centralizing state power was the virtual Siamese twin of growing individualism and ‘autonomy.’” (23). He also puts forward that this correlation between the developments in state power and liberation may be found as a motif in some of Molière’s works saying that: “[…] The absolute monarch aspires to be the subject of desire in his realm. This is precisely what each of Molière's ridicules wants, too. The modern, autonomous individual is modeled on the absolute monarch, and vice versa. Every absolutist, and every would-be sovereign subject, is inevitably the rival of everyone else. […]” (Riggs 25).

Accordingly, in attempting to be an absolute paternal figure, Molière’s heavy fathers cannot help but want to distinguish himself from the rest of his household, thus demonstrating a desire for individualism. Yet, to feel as if he has attained this level of authority, the father demands that all his desires be fulfilled. When this does not happen, the father antagonizes the rest of his household, and chaos seems to ensue.

The way in which disorder arises when a central purpose is lost and individual desires take the forefront is referred to in Lionel Gossman’s article “Molière and Tartuffe: Law and Order in the Seventeenth Century.” He writes: “But the celebration of desire and pleasure raised problems for a society in which they were no longer oriented or governed by a generally accepted transcendental telos (God’s plan for His creation or something of the kind).” (903) And later: “Amphitryon,” for example “[…] can be interpreted as a comedy built around the disappearance of an absolute law and the arbitrariness and lack of objectivity of social rules, which can always be transgressed in the name of nature or individual desire.” (Ibid.) In Le Tartuffe, L’Avare, and Le Malade imaginaire, rather than leading their households towards what’s best for its members, Molière’s heavy fathers consider their own individual needs as

\textsuperscript{2} Individualism is defined in the OED as “Self-centred feeling or conduct as a principle; a mode of life in which the individual pursues his own ends or follows out his own ideas; free and independent individual action or thought; egoism.”
priorities. As will be seen, it is partially due to this type of behaviour that fathers are not shown deference and that disorder exists in the household.

Much has been written on the way in which Harpagon’s *amour-propre* has led to the deterioration of the social order in his household. Essentially, it is believed that “avarice is only another sickness of self-love” (Knutson 101). Koppisch, in particular, dedicates a chapter to the rivalry between Cléante and his father and to Harpagon’s shortcomings as a father who maintains order. Koppisch points out for example: “Harpagon’s children refuse to obey him, lie to him, and plot against their father’s tyranny. Harpagon mistreats his servants, who, in turn, wish their master no good. To defend themselves against him, members of the household adopt certain of his worst flaws.” (122). Impudence on behalf of both children and servants are illustrated in all three plays, and they are two of the best indications of the social disorder in the households. Moreover, as we have already discussed situations in which children do not obey their fathers, focus will now be placed on the behaviour of the servants.

The servants in the three plays do not hesitate to step out of place and behave in a somewhat brazen manner. Maître Jacques, for example, makes snide remarks such as: “Châtiment politique.” (L’Avare 3.1.11) and “Oui ; le vin pur monte à la tête.” (3.1.20) after hearing Harpagon give orders to other servants. Although he does not say these things directly to Harpagon, Maître Jacques does not refrain from vocalising his quibble. However, it is the maids who seem to have a particular tendency to stand up to their masters. In Tartuffe, the first things we hear about Dorine are spoken by Madame Pernelle: “Vous êtes, mamie, une fille suivante / Un peu trop forte en gueule, et fort impertinente : / Vous vous mêlez sur tout de votre avis.” (1.1.13.15). Thus, from the onset, the audience is aware that Dorine is not one to hold her tongue. Indeed, when Orgon reveals to Mariane his plan to have her marry Tartuffe, Dorine is quick to

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3 This behaviour calls to mind the Feast of Fools and a long comedic tradition in which hierarchical roles were reversed. The clever servant is by no means original to Molière having roots in ancient comedy, most notably being found in Plautine plays and other farcical works.
let her opinion be known. In fact, she practically calls her master crazy: “Quoi? se peut-il, Monsieur, qu’avec l’air d’homme sage / Et cette large barbe au milieu du visage, / Vous soyez assez fou pour vouloir ?...” (2.2.473-475). Evidently, her frankness frustrates and angers Orgon. He tells her: “Cessez de m’interrompre, et songez à vous taire, / Sans mettre votre nez où vous n’avez que faire.” (2.2.539-540). Toinette, too, in Le Malade imaginaire irritates the head of the household by constantly interrupting him. In Act 1, scene 2, before Argan can finish a complete sentence, Toinette interjects with a “Ha!” However, what is most surprising is that when Argan tells Angélique that she must marry Thomas Diafoirus, Toinette contradicts Argan to the point that it seems like she is stepping out of the position of servant and speaking rather as if she were the father. For instance, when Argan says: “Je lui [Angélique] commande absolument de se préparer à prendre le mari que je dis.” Toinette’s reply is: “Et moi, je lui defends absolument d’en faire rien.” (1.5.174-177). Later, she continues to take this commanding tone and says: “Non, je ne consentirai jamais à ce marriage.” (1.5.193). This manner of speaking which usurps the father’s control, is but an example of the social disorder in this household.

Even more indicative of the disruption of social order is the way in which the servants have a better understanding of what goes on in the household than do their masters. Where the head of the household should be knowledgeable to an almost omniscient degree, instead they seem to have a poor understanding of the members of their household and the matters at hand. In L’Avare, while giving out orders to his servants, it is clear that Harpagon does not realize the consequences of his avarice on the state of his household. For example, he does not realize nor accept the fact that his horses are in poor condition. Maître Jacques must plead on the animals’ behalf and he informs Harpagon that they cannot walk and that they live in a very sorry state without food. (3.1.154-159). It is therefore evident that Harpagon is blind to the poor condition in which his avarice has led him to keep his household. Furthermore, unwilling to change in his
ways, he proves to remain blind to the effects of his avarice. In *Le Tartuffe* it is Dorine who knows to what extent Mariane is in love with Valère. When prompted, Mariane tells Dorine: “Ah! qu'envers mon amour ton injustice est grande, / Dorine ! me dois-tu faire cette demande ? / T’ai-je pas là-dessus ouvert cent fois mon cœur, / Et sais-tu pas pour lui jusqu’où va mon ardeur ?” (2.3.601-604). Furthermore, Dorine knows that Tartuffe will likely be cuckolded if Mariane is forced to marry him: “Sachez que d'une fille on risque la vertu, / Lorsque dans son hymen son goût est combattu ; / Que le dessein d'y vivre en honnête personne, / Dépend des qualités du mari qu'on lui donne ; / Et que ceux dont partout on montre au doigt le front, / Font leurs femmes souvent, ce qu'on voit qu'elles sont.” (2.2.507-512). Thus, it is here the servant who must explain to the father the consequences of an unfavourable marriage. This undermines the traditional roles of a master and servant and it is the one who is usually in the dominant position who lectures and educates the other. In a similar situation, Toinette, the servant, is the confidante of the daughter. The impression is given that Toinette and Angélique have had many conversations about Angélique’s beloved, just as Dorine has had with Mariane. When asked to guess what their next conversation will be about, Dorine replies: “Je m’en doute assez, de notre jeune amant ; car c’est sur lui, depuis six jours, que roulent tous nos entretiens, et vous n’êtes point bien si vous n’en parlez à toute heure.” (1.4.9-12). Furthermore, Toinette is also aware of Béline’s deceitful nature, as Béline too has chosen to confide in the servant. Toinette admits to Mariane: “Votre belle-mère a beau me faire sa confidente, et me vouloir jeter dans ses intérêts, je n’ai jamais pu avoir d’inclination pour elle, et j’ai toujours été de votre parti.” (1.8.10-12). As a result, again it is apparent that the domestic is the most aware person of the household, when this should really be the father. If their authority was granted by divine right, then fathers should demonstrate a similar omniscience to God’s.
Hence, Molière’s heavy fathers put their personal interests before the interests of the rest of the household. This demonstration of *amour-propre* has serious consequences since ultimately, it is one of the causes for which the fathers do not receive the obedience they crave. Rather, the consequence of this *amour-propre* is disorder in the household. As our plays illustrate, order in the households of Orgon, Harpagon, and Argan has been disrupted to the point that servants as well as children are impudent towards the fathers. However, subversion also exists in the way that servants prove to be more aware of the happenings in the household, and are more insightful with regards to the effects of undesirable marriage. Fathers no longer act as fathers and this neglect of their duties may be responded to by the neglecting of obedience on behalf of the rest of the family. Furthermore, as will be discussed next, this ignorance of the situations surrounding him is in itself a large impediment to the goal of absolute authority of the heavy father.

**Delusion**

In the world presented by Molière’s plays, *amour-propre* is closely connected to delusion. Elmire even says in *Tartuffe*: “[…] Et l’amour-propre engage à se tromper soi-même.” (4.3.1358). Thus, if *amour-propre* gives rise to deception, then it is necessary to reflect on the illusions Molière’s heavy fathers create for themselves. According to Marie-Claude Canova-Green, a character might behave in a way in which he believes he is projecting his ideal self (19). Such behaviour is due to a despotic and self-centred nature, so that he may get the attention of others and so that he may dominate them and be loved by them (*Ibid.*) She goes on to say, citing Pierre Nicole, that in order to satisfy their narcissism, characters in Molière’s plays substitute their true selves with “une image phantastique de grandeur” in an attempt to hide the faults which they cannot accept (Canova-Green 19-20). Moreover, in their desire to cling to this image,
largely distorted by their imagination, the characters behave in an increasingly extravagant way, which to others appears simply ridiculous (Canova-Green 20-21). These characteristics are all demonstrated by Orgon, Harpagon, and Argan. They all crave absolute power and they all demonstrate a self-absorbed personality. While their behaviour is largely influenced by an obsession that they utilize to attain superiority and self-affirmation, they are often considered by others to conduct themselves quite absurdly. Ultimately, Molière’s heavy fathers’ “actions and speech reveal them to be quite different from what they wish to appear.” (Eustis 142).

Argan’s hypochondria is probably the most transparent self-deception in which the heavy father wants his household to see him in one way, and yet, his comportment proves the opposite. With an obsession with bad health, Argan wants to convince the other characters of the play that he is ill. However, from what others say about him, it is obvious that this isn’t so. When Cléante is introduced to Argan under the pretext that he is the substitute for Angélique’s music teacher, he makes the mistake of stating what he sees, which is that Argan looks well. Replying in defence of Argan, though nonetheless ironic, Toinette corrects Cléante and says: “Que voulez-vous dire avec votre bon visage? Monsieur l’a fort mauvais, et ce sont des impertinent qui vous on dit qu’il était mieux. Il ne s’est jamais si mal porté. […] Il marche, dort, mange, et boit tout comme les autres ; mais cela n’empêche pas qu’il ne soit fort malade.” (2.2.28-33). Additionally, all of this is agreed to by Argan. However, through this retort it is apparent that he is not observably ill and Toinette is implying that he is probably in perfect health. Yet, Argan refuses to accept that he free of malady and he yearns for others to accept his way of thinking. Béralde, too, echoes the argument that Argan appears to be no less healthy than anyone else:

J’entends, mon frère, que je ne vois point d’homme, qui soit moins malade que vous, et que je ne demanderais point une meilleure constitution que la vôtre. Une grande marque que vous vous portez bien, et que vous avez un corps parfaitement bien composé ; c’est qu’avec tous les soins que vous avez pris, vous n’avez pu parvenir encore à gater la bonté de votre tempérament, et que vous n’êtes point crevé de toutes les médecines qu’on vous a fait prendre. (3.3.49-56)
So Béralde further contends that despite the copious amount of medications the hypochondriac has taken he is still alive, so Argan must be healthy. Yet, this heavy father refuses to be convinced otherwise. In spite of being told that he appears well, Argan maintains the fantasy of his sickness.

As discussed in the last section of the previous chapter, Orgon is preoccupied with both improving himself morally as well as ensuring that he is the absolute authority in his household. However, at different points in the play, Orgon is forced to realize that he does not behave in a way that matches how he wishes others to perceive him. In terms of righteousness, Orgon believes that with the arrival of Tartuffe he has learned to become more pious. Yet, as Dorine points out, Orgon’s temper betrays him. Aggravated by the way his servant talks to her, Orgon complains: “Te tairas-tu, serpent, dont les traits effrontés...” to which Dorine replies: “Ah! Vous êtes dévot, et vous vous emportez?” (2.2.551-552). It would appear that Orgon cannot control his anger, thus breaking the illusion of his self-perceived new found piety. Regarding authoritativeness, Orgon believes that he behaves as an effective absolute leader. However, in what he feels is a moment of weakness, he is taken over by paternal emotions listening to Mariane’s plea not to be forced into marrying Tartuffe. Orgon says to himself: “Allons, ferme, mon cœur, point de faiblesse humaine.” (4.3.1293). Whether it be Orgon himself who realizes it, or if somebody else perceives it, Orgon’s behaviour is not always what he wishes it to be. Also, Orgon is incapable of securing the superiority he lusts for and fails in being an ideal head of household as he has created an illusion which foster’s his amour-propre. Yet, he is unsuccessful in convincing the rest of his household of this delusion.

Harpagon’s various deceptions about himself have been studied in depth by many scholars. Hubert provides an extensive description of the way Harpagon has deluded himself and how he wishes to impose this mindset on others:
Obviously, Harpagon intends to live up to his position in the world without for one moment departing from the most stringent stinginess. The contradiction lies in the discrepancy between the public image of himself which he so ludicrously strives to impose on others, and the reality of his sordid avarice and usuary. No doubt, he is the only person taken in by this false image of his own creation, [...] (211).

Hubert discusses the ways in which Harpagon’s vanity shapes his desire to assert his position and to affirm his being “Seigneur Harpagon” (Ibid.). As such, Harpagon is no different from the other two heavy fathers. Seeking self-affirmation and propelled by *amour-propre*, the heavy fathers believe that they portray the most optimal representation of themselves. However, this is far from the truth. For as Maître Jacques frankly reveals to Harpagon, he is regarded negatively, ridiculed even, by the public as they are aware of his worst trait, his avarice:

> Monsieur, puisque vous le voulez, je vous dirai franchement qu'on se moque partout de vous; qu'on nous jette de tous côtés cent brocards à votre sujet ; et que l'on n'est point plus ravi que de vous tenir au cul et aux chausses, et de faire sans cesse des contes de votre lésine. [...] Vous êtes la fable et la risée de tout le monde, et jamais on ne parle de vous, que sous les noms d'avare, de ladre, de vilain, et de fesse-mathieu. (3.1.203-223).

Angered by this avowal, it is clear that Harpagon refuses to accept that others see him as nothing other than a miser. In other words, Harpagon is unable to accept reality.

Yet, paradoxically, although one of the roles that Harpagon desires to embody (but fails) is that of “the man of high rank” (Hubert 212), Harpagon goes to a lot of trouble to hide the fact that he is in possession of quite a lot of money. For instance, when his son tells him: “Mon Dieu, mon père, vous n’avez pas lieu de vous plaindre ; et l’on sait que vous avez assez de bien” Harpagon takes the offensive and refutes this observation: “Comment ? j’ai assez de bien. Ceux qui le disent, en ont menti. Il n’y a rien de plus faux ; et ce sont des coquins qui font courir tous ces bruits-là.” (1.4.45-51). Although his avarice and his fear of being stolen from are the motivations for him denouncing any claims of his wealth, this is another example of Harpagon wishing to appear a certain way but making it hard for people to buy into the illusion. Harpagon’s undeniable avarice makes it hard to believe that he is not in possession of a large sum of money.
First of all, it would seem that at times Harpagon forgets himself and inadvertently divulges that he is hiding money. Although in the middle of a conversation Harpagon is distracted by a noise and says: “Ouais ! il me semble que j’entends un chien qui aboie. N’est-ce point qu’on en voudrait à mon argent ? Ne bougez, je reviens tout à l’heure.” (1.5.56). His excessive fear of being stolen from consequently leads to situations in which he indirectly proves he has some money put aside. Also, at the end of the play Cléante trades Harpagon’s cassette (which he stole) for Mariane, and thus everyone is aware that Harpagon is in possession of some money in it. Yet, Harpagon tells everyone: “Je n’ai point d’argent à donner en mariage à mes enfants.” (5.6.27-28). Lead by avarice, Harpagon tries to convince all the other characters of his lack of wealth when clearly he has some money in a cassette that has just been returned to him. His words contradict the situation which has just been proven.

In an article, Christian Biet discusses the mistaken way in which Harpagon views himself and the world. Furthermore, he attributes a symbolic nature to the glasses that Harpagon takes on as a representation of his lunacy (168). Biet writes:

[…] Harpagon va ainsi chausser ses lunettes dans l’espoir de séduire sa belle et montrer que, avec ou sans ces instruments, son aveuglement est évident pour tous. S’il ne voyait que fort peu sans elles, il est définitivement aveugle lorsqu’il les porte, et lorsqu’il les porte, il est vu comme il est et qu’il veut ignorer être : un vieux qui voit si mal qu’il est aveugle sur les femmes et le monde. Les lunettes sont ainsi ridicules et symboliques de sa demande exorbitante et du rapport de fausse maîtrise qu’il entretient avec le monde, un rapport toujours faux qu’il fasse. […] (Biet 169).

Symbolically, Harpagon’s glasses take on an opposite effect and he appears to be more ignorant than perceptive. Plagued with this incomprehension of the world and the way in which they are viewed it is understandable why a child would not want to demonstrate subservience towards his or her father. As Saulnier writes, “[l]e père de famille n’a pas le droit d’être aveugle ; le fils doit le respect à son père tant qu’il en est digne” (80). Thus, delusion seems to be one of the shortcomings of Molière’s heavy fathers that leads to the lack of obedience they desire.
These fathers’ blindness rests not only on their perceptions of themselves. The heavy fathers also fail to properly evaluate the present concerns of their household. This is apparent, for example in the way they fail to properly assess irony, so that when the truth is being presented to them they are still ignorant. When Mariane is brought to Harpagon’s household, and Cléante is showering her with words such as: “Il est vrai que mon père, Madame, ne peut pas faire un plus beau choix, et que ce m'est une sensible joie, que l'honneur de vous voir […]” (3.7.7-9) and “[...] je vous avoue que je n’ai rien vu dans le monde de si charmant que vous [...]” (3.7.53-54). As a future stepson, Cléante’s words are more than mere flattery. He is expressing his honest opinion as a man who pines for a woman. Moreover, although Harpagon believes his son’s manner of speaking is odd, it is not until he finally tricks his son into admitting it in the third scene of the fourth act that Harpagon realizes that Cléante is amourous of Mariane. Thus, for quite some time, Harpagon is blind to the already growing relationship between his son and his future wife.

In *Le Malade imaginaire* as well, declarations of love are expressed between two lovers whom circumstances keep apart. This happens in spite of the father being present in the room. In the song sung by Cléante and Angélique, the lyrics express their love for each other despite an unfortunate situation keeping them apart:

Cléante : Hélas! belle Philis,
    Se pourrait-il, que l'amoureux Tircis,
    Eût assez de bonheur,
    Pour avoir quelque place dans votre coeur?
Angélique : Je ne m'en défends point, dans cette peine extrême,
    Oui, Tircis, je vous aime. […]
Cléante : Dieux, rois, qui sous vos pieds regardez tout le monde,
    Pouvez-vous comparer votre bonheur au mien?
    Mais, Philis, une pensée,
    Vient troubler ce doux transport,
    Un rival, un rival... […]
    Mais un père à ses voeux vous veut assujettir.
Angélique : Plutôt, plutôt mourir,
    Que de jamais y consentir,
    Plutôt, plutôt mourir, plutôt mourir. (2.5.261-287)
Responding to the song, Argan considers the father who says nothing about a forbidden love to be an idiot, not realizing that he himself is the inspiration. Thus, in a comic twist Argan exposes his ignorance of the situation.

Finally, Orgon too is ignorant when Tartuffe is expressing the truth. When Damis is trying to expose Tartuffe, Orgon defends the impostor rather than listening to his son. Furthermore, even when Tartuffe says, “Ah ! laissez-le parler ; vous l’accusez à tort, / Et vous ferez bien mieux de croire à son rapport. […] / Non, non, vous vous laissez tromper à l’apparence, / Eté je suis rien moins, hélas ! que ce qu’on pense. / Tout le monde me prend pour un homme de bien ; / Mais la vérité pure est que je ne vaux rien.” (3.6.1091-1100), all of this is the absolute truth. However, Orgon simply considers it to be Tartuffe expressing his piety. Thus, if Orgon were more perceptive, he would have been disenchanted. Unfortunately, all three heavy fathers believe only what they want to hear and do not pick up on the truth. They continue their delusions and their ignorance and they don’t even let the truth enlighten them. Again, this ignorance is reason for the rest of the household not to conform to the father’s will.

Essentially, Molière’s fathers live in a fantasy world in which they themselves have created. As for Harpagon, money takes the forefront in all matters. His world has therefore become a place where no coin of his is safe and everybody presents the possible threat of theft. From the beginning of the play, when Harpagon is performing a full body check on La Flèche, the audience is taken into “the heart of his perception of reality, to his vision of a tentacular monster probing into his treasure – a characteristic which will reach hallucinatory proportings in his ‘Au voleur!’ monologue (IV, 7)” (Knutson 98). In Orgon’s case, his fascination with Tartuffe that is the cause of much conflict in his household originates in the illusions that Orgon has created for himself. Gossman writes that:

The fantastic comedy of Orgon’s fascination by Tartuffe lies in the fact that he has invented the entire situation himself. [...] The reality of the situation underlines the utter
subjectivity of Orgon’s infatuation with his idol. [...] The lofty piety Orgon finds in him on their first meeting is a carefully planned and executed comedy, designed to make an impression on Orgon. His indifference to the things of the world hides a very real desire for them and dependence on them. All the other characters in the play see this without difficulty. If Orgon does not see it, it is not because he is a fool, in any ordinary sense, but because he does not want to see it. (Men and Masks 109-110)

Orgon lives in a fantasy world where Tartuffe represents the ultimate role model. In reality, he, himself, has attributed all the positive qualities he sees in Tartuffe. In further support of this idea, Hubert writes that “Orgon identifies reality with appearance” and cannot fathom piety being anything but genuine (99). Orgon has deluded himself into viewing Tartuffe as a necessary person to have in his life. It is because he clings to this misconception, that Orgon is blind to Tartuffe’s imposture. Similarly, Argan’s illness originates from a heavy father creating his own delusion. Höfer cites Henry Ey in saying that: “L’hypocondrie est une illusion” (210). Moreover, “[l]a mélancolie hypocondriaque reposerait alors sur l’égarement de l’imagination qui a le pouvoir de fabriquer une certitude erronée et qui produit faussement une sensation physique perçue comme maladie.” (Höfer 207). Consequently, this affliction that causes the heavy fathers to live in a fantasy world and to create for themselves false realities is one of the possible reasons for which their children do not display subservience.

Argan, Harpagon and Orgon do not receive the obedience they desire because they fail in acting in a manner that is worthy of it. Their shortcomings lie in their unwillingness to show paternal love as deemed necessary by society, their creation of social disorder which is a consequence to their extreme narcissism, and their propensity to invent false realities by which they live despite the transparency of their illusions for the rest of the household. This analysis of deficiencies provides a better understanding of Molière’s heavy fathers’ behaviour and the way their households react. It also suggests that they are not ideal fathers. However, in order to confirm this idea, it is necessary to establish what the ultimate function of a paternal authority is and if and how the heavy fathers fail to fulfill it. Moreover, these shortcomings must be studied
in a broader sense alongside Molière’s heavy fathers’ logic. This shall be the approach of the final chapter.
Chapter 3: Identifying Molière’s Heavy Fathers’ Idiosyncrasy

“Il est bien vrai que, tous les jours, il nous donne de plus en plus sujet de regretter la mort de notre mère […]”
(L’Avare 1.2.88-89)

“Non, voyez-vous, ma mère, il n’est père ni rien Qui me puisse obliger à lui vouloir du bien […]”
(Tartuffe 1.1.55-56)

Orgon, Harpagon and Argan are fathers in the biological sense. They are fathers by the very definition of the word as the following may be said of each of them: “Celui qui a engendré un enfant mâle ou femelle.” (Dictionnaire universel...). However, there is more to being a father than the biological aspect. Molière’s heavy fathers have pushed the limit of what it means to be a father, as in some cases their children no longer respect their patriarchal position. In the last two chapters, we have presented reasons for which they are tyrannical and reasons for which they are not obeyed. In other words, we have exposed Molière’s heavy handed fathers’ logic and shortcomings. Keeping all this in mind, is it possible to identify an idiosyncrasy that is distinctive of Molière’s heavy fathers that may not be inherent to the senex iratus in general? Furthermore, can this characteristic be used to confirm whether or not these fathers represent the ideal father of the seventeenth century (which is to some extent represented for example by the King)? In light of the traits demonstrated by Molière’s heavy fathers that have previously been discussed, three aspects stand out with respect of Orgon, Harpagon and Argan: prescribed duty, family, and reality. These aspects may be analysed in the effort to answer the two aforementioned questions.
Prescribed Duty

As illustrated earlier in this study, absolute paternal authority was promoted by both religious and political factions. Molière’s heavy fathers reflect this ideal by indicating a belief that they should have a right to blind obedience from their households. However, the unreasonable desires of the heavy fathers are often challenged by family members and the heavy fathers only intensify the tyranny with which they govern in response. Recalling the notion that “[s]i le père de famille est obéi, il donne à la « république » et au souverain des citoyens dociles et habitués à vivre paisiblement dans le respect des droits d’autrui. […]” (Mousnier 77), it is evident that Molière’s heavy fathers do not achieve this purpose. If the whole purpose of acting as an absolute authority was to produce good, submissive citizens, then Molière’s fathers have proven ineffective. Many examples put forward in this study attest to the failure of Argan, Orgon and Harpagon to secure the obedience of their households. Although historically, these fathers are validated in their pursuit of absolute authority, their fulfillment of the instructions given to the seventeenth century father is incomplete. The lack of subservience shown to them points to their inadequacy in meeting the requirements demanded of a father of that era.

A second way in which Orgon, Harpagon and Argan have failed to comply with the directives particular to the role of a father concerns the requirement of reciprocity. During the seventeenth century, there was an increase in the amount of privileges recommended for children occurring simultaneously to the added emphasis put on absolute paternal authority. It was increasingly more favourable for fathers to behave in a way that was congruent to the obedience that their children showed them. However, Molière’s heavy fathers rarely follow such a precept. They fail to act reciprocally and they often treat and punish their children too severely. More detail on this failure of the heavy fathers was discussed in the second chapter. Through the reflection of the heavy fathers and absolutism and reciprocity it is perceptible that, in essence,
they fail to behave in a way that fully adheres to the prescribed duty of the father by the standards of the seventeenth century.

Keeping in mind that “the first idea of power that there was among men is that of paternal power; and that kings were fashioned on the model of fathers” (Beik 168), then the King is also a father, although on a larger scale, who ideally represents and fulfills the obligations of such a role. If one was to ignore the idea that the speech of the officer (l’exempt) in Le Tartuffe was possibly Molière’s way of showing empty flattery towards the King, then distinct behavioural traits of the archetypal seventeenth century father may be extracted. Drawing comparisons between words used by Molière to describe the King, and the behaviour of his heavy fathers, it is further evident that Argan, Orgon, and Harpagon have detached themselves from the specificities of a father.

Through the officer, Molière describes the king as having the ability to be fair and to respect moderation. He says: “Et sa ferme raison ne tombe en nul excès” (5.7.1912). His justice is demonstrated when l’exempt explains that one of the reasons for which Tartuffe will be imprisoned is because the King remembers Orgon’s participation in the Fronde. This is expressed when he says “Et c’est le prix qu’il donne au zèle qu’autrefois / On vous vit témoigner en appuyant ses droits, / Pou montrer que son cœur sait, quand moins on y pense, / D’une bonne action verses la recompense, / Que jamais le mérite avec lui ne perd rien, / Et que mieux que du mal il se souvient du bien.” (5.7.1939-1944). (Moreover, this incident demonstrates that the King illustrates the reciprocity required of a father figure). Conversely, Orgon is neither fair nor moderate. He is irrational and excessive. One situation in which these traits are evident is when without too much reflection, he tells Tartuffe: “Et je vais de ce pas, en fort bonne manière / Vous faire de mon bien donation entière.” (3.7.1177-1178). Orgon is so unreasonable that after realizing Tartuffe’s dupery, he declares: “C’en est fait, je renonce à tous les gens de bien: / J’en
aurai désormais une horreur effroyable. / Et m’en vais devenir pour eux pire qu’un diable.”

(5.1.1604-1606). Cléante recognizes this characteristic in Orgon too, as he says: “Vous ne gardez rien les doux temperaments [...]” (5.1.1608). Otherwise said, Orgon goes from one extreme to the next. Argan too, jumps between extremes. In one instance, he is ferociously angry at his daughter Louison. Taking “une poignée de verges” (2.8.32), he is ready to beat his insolent daughter. However, once Louison fakes her death at the hand of her father, Argan immediately switches to extreme grief. “Holà ! Qu’est-ce là? Louison, Louison! [...] Qu’ai-je fait, misérable! Ah! chiennes de verges. La peste soit des verges! [...]” (2.8.51-55). Thus, like Tartuffe, depending on the situation the heavy father may change from one frame of mind to another quite quickly. In L’Avare, Harpagon’s lack of moderation is evident through the extreme stinginess he demonstrates. The terms on which he would lend out money are extravagant:

[…] Mais comme ledit prêteur n'a pas chez lui la somme dont il est question, et que pour faire plaisir à l'emprunteur, il est contraint lui-même de l'emprunter d'un autre sur le pied du denier cinq il conviendra que ledit premier emprunteur paye cet intérêt, sans préjudice du reste, attendu que ce n'est que pour l'obliger, que ledit prêteur s'engage à cet emprunt. (2.1.64-69)

Furthermore, instead of providing the full sum in money, he lends a portion in useless items such as furniture. To these condemnable particulars, Cléante bemoans: “A-t-on jamais parlé d’une usure semblable ? Et n’est-il pas content du furieux intérêt qu’il exige, sans vouloir encore m’obliger à prendre, pour trois mille livres, les vieux rogatons qu’il ramasse ? […]” (2.1.120-123). These terms are unreasonable and even Harpagon inadvertently admits so as he chastises his son who he soon finds out would have been the borrower: “Comment, pendard? c’est toi qui t’abandonnes à ces coupables extrémités?” (2.2.30-31). Therefore, while he criticises his son for being willing to borrow at such outrageous terms, it is he himself who has laid them out.

Another quality that the King possesses is omniscience. L’exempt says: “Et par un juste trait de l’équité suprême / S’est découvert au Prince un fourbe renommé, / Dont sous un autre
nom il était informé” (5.7.1922-1924). Therefore, even if he is not directly implicated in their problems, the King has ways of knowing information. Due to his omniscience, the King cannot be fooled. It is even written that “Un Prince dont les yeux se font jour dans les cœurs, / Et que ne peut tromper tout l’art des imposteurs.” (5.7.1906-1907). The King is therefore able to pierce through Tartuffe’s hypocrisy. Unfortunately, Orgon does not possess this ability. If he were omniscient, the problems of his household regarding Tartuffe would probably not have existed. Dorine explains that “Enfin, il en est fou ; c’est son tout, son héros ; / Il l’admire à tous coups […]” (1.2.195-196). In echo to what we have discussed before, Argan too does not suspect Béline’s manipulation. He tells his brother: “Ah! Monsieur, ne parlez point de Madame: c’est une femme sur laquelle il n’y a rien à dire, une femme sans artifice, et qui aime Monsieur, qui l’aime… On ne peut pas dire cela.” (3.11.28-31). Likewise, Harpagon does not see through Valère’s falsity. When Maître Jacques lies and tells Harpagon that he saw Valère steal the cassette, Harpagon is in disbelief. “Lui, qui me paraît si fidèle?” (5.2.51) replies Harpagon. He cannot fathom that Valère is a thief.

Returning to l’exempt’s description of the King, Louis XIV has absolute power that he knows how to use properly. Knowing his power comes from God—the terms “l’équité suprême” (5.7.19202) and “souverain pouvoir” (5.7.1935) allude to this—the literary device of deus ex machina shows that the King can use his power to fix problems rather than create them. L’Exempt describes the way that the King resolves everything by saying: “D’un souverain pouvoir il brise les liens / Du contrat qui lui fait un don de tous vos biens, / Et vous pardonne enfin cette offense secrète / Où vous a d’un ami fait tomber la retraite […]” (5.7.1935-1938). Orgon, on the other hand, mishandles his power and even loses it to Tartuffe. When he tries to banish the imposter he realizes that he cannot as Tartuffe now owns all of Orgon’s goods. “C’est à vous d’en sortir, vous qui parlez en maître : / La maison m’appartient, je le ferai connaître
“Expressions like ‘savoir vivre’, ‘apprendre à vivre,’ ‘savoir’ or ‘connaître son monde’ ‘se connaître’ (that is, to know one’s place) run like a leitmotif through Molière’s dialogues.” writes Eustis (143-144). However, it would appear as if the fathers have failed to learn what it means to be a father, and the way they rule does not reflect the prescriptions that society during this era has suggested. In the seventeenth century “[e]ach person was keenly conscious of his place in the social hierarchy and defended it against climbers or excessive individualists.” (Eustis 143). However, it would seem that they are quite conscious of their position in the hierarchy of
their households and they fail to act accordingly. This act is further indication that Molière’s heavy fathers are detached from the very directives that characterize the fatherly position.

Family

The heavy fathers also fail to the extent that they are excessive individualists. As elucidated previously, it is characteristic of Molière’s heavy fathers to escalate their obstinate behaviour as a reaction to the feeling of isolation. Often, such sentiment stems from these fathers ostracising household members who refuse to submit to their will. A predisposition to gullibility compels Molière’s heavy fathers to consider impostors allies, placing their trust in those who manipulate the fathers to achieve their own ends. Thus, when the deceivers are exposed, the fathers prove to be even more solitary in their own households. This isolation indicates that Molière’s heavy fathers are detached from their families.

The same may be said of the fathers’ egoism. They have proven themselves to be excessively concerned with self-gratification and they focus so intently on their own interests that they fail to consider the contentment of others. This display of intense amour-propre results in further disobedience within the household. When faced with the conflict between individual desires and social order, the fathers are inevitably led by their obsession which inadvertently causes chaos amidst the family members. As Molière’s plays seem to suggest, noncompliance on behalf of the household is permitted when the father is no longer worthy of deference. This manifestation of extreme individualism also suggests that Argan, Orgon, and Harpagon are indubitably detached from their families. Their ignorance of the true sentiment of most of the members of the household and their manifest egoism attest to the rupture between the fathers and the households that they are supposed to govern. Further proof of this disunion to their families
is apparent through the manner in which the fathers attach themselves to certain people and items that eclipse the concern that should be focused on their household.

Argan is so attached to medicine and his doctors that in the dispute between Béralde and his doctors, Argan chooses the latter. After having angered Monsieur Fleurant, Argan says “Vous me feriez enrager. Je voudrais que vous l’eussiez, mon mal, pour voir si vous jaseriez tant. Ah ! voici Monsieur Purgon.” (3.5.31-33). Furthermore, after Monsieur Purgon hears of what Béralde has said about doctors, he refuses to treat Argan any further. “C’est mon frère qui a fait tout le mal!” pleads Argan. “Faites-le venir, je m’en vais le pendre.” he decides. Evidently, despite the long reasoning that Béralde asserts about doctors, Argan disregards his brother’s caution and opinion. Instead, his allegiance lies with his medical professionals.

Orgon’s fondness of Tartuffe surpasses any devotion demonstrated to the members of his family. Dorine validates this notion when she says: “Il [Orgon] l’appelle son frère, et l’aime dans son âme / Cent fois plus qu’il ne fait mère, fils, fille, et femme.” (Tartuffe 185-186). In particular, Orgon shows more concern for Tartuffe than for his wife Elmire. In the fourth scene of the first act, Orgon’s apathy towards his wife’s well-being is juxtaposed with a needless and excessive anxiety for Tartuffe. Orgon misconstrues Dorine’s account of the events that occurred during his absence and replies “Le pauvre homme!” to reports such as “Tartuffe? Il se porte à merveille. / Gros et gras, le teint frais, et la bouche vermeille.” (1.4.233-235). Conversely, when told of his wife’s illness, there is no sympathy. Instead he presses on with “Et Tartuffe?” as if his obsession with the man does not permit him to think of others for even a moment (1.4). In the explanatory material (“Dossier documentaire et pédagogique”) following the play in the Bordas edition of Le Tartuffe, Orgon’s delay when revealing himself from under the table in the fifth scene of the fourth act also attests to the importance he places in Tartuffe’s consideration rather than his wife’s well-being. Orgon only comes out of hiding as he is confounded by Tartuffe’s
revelation that instead of loving Orgon like a brother—the way that Orgon loves Tartuffe—Tartuffe mocks him and has no respect for him (Servet 222). Tartuffe says: “[...] C’est un homme, entre nous, à mener par le nez ; / De tous nos entretiens il est pour faire gloire, / Et je lai mis au point de voir tout sans rien croire.” (4.5.1524-1526). Thus, according to Gérard Ferreyrolles, by not revealing his presence sooner Orgon exhibits a love for Tartuffe that is greater than the love for his wife. (cited in Servet 222) He displays a greater alarm for Tartuffe’s unreciprocated affection rather than the precarious situation that Elmire is in (Ibid.). In a similar manner, other scholars have addressed the subject of Tartuffe as a rival to Elmire for Orgon’s affection. Generally, the term “indifferent” is attributed to the manner Orgon regards his wife (Lalande 126; Gossman Men and Masks 115), with the reason for this apathy being connected to his obsession with Tartuffe which in turn affects “familial power structures” (Lalande 126). This struggle for authority may also explain the disunion between Orgon and the rest of the household as well.

Although Orgon’s detachment from his family is primarily evident through his obsession with Tartuffe, essentially it is Orgon’s desire for absolutism that creates this rupture. Lionel Gossman elucidates the correlation between Orgon’s will to power, his obsession with Tartuffe, and his disconnection with his family:

It is Orgon’s distrust of his family, his fear of them and his lack of love for them that causes him to be taken in by the wiles of Tartuffe. His desire to enslave his family enslaves him to Tartuffe. Inevitably, when he is warned by his wife and children of Tartuffe’s falseness, he does not believe them. Their warnings only confirm his fear and distrust of them and throw him even deeper into the clutches of Tartuffe. Orgon’s love of Tartuffe is in inverse ratio to his love of his family; his absolute and unquestioning faith in the impostor corresponds exactly to his distrust of his wife and children. (Gossman Men and Masks 140)

In other words, the more detached Orgon is from his household, he becomes increasingly engrossed with Tartuffe. Moreover, it is because of his powerful *libido dominandi*, that an increasing sense of household defiance broadens the rift between Orgon and his family.
In Harpagon’s case, detachment from his family originates in part from this heavy father’s fear of theft. The constant use of verbs such as “renfermer” and “cacher” evoke ideas of isolation and withdrawal, which are deemed necessary by Harpagon who suspects everyone of having the intention to steal from him (Lalande 45). Accordingly, one of the most effective examples in which Harpagon proves himself to be detached from his family is when he accuses Valère of theft. Similar to Orgon, Harpagon’s preoccupation with an obsession smothers the affection that one might expect should be attributed to family members. When Harpagon accuses Valère of stealing his “sang,” his “entrailles” and above all, his “trésor,” Valère confesses to the crime, assuming that Harpagon is referring to Élise (5.3). Furthermore, despite Valère’s arguments that contain references to actions and characteristics of another human being (“Je vous le demande à genoux, ce trésor plein de charmes” (5.3.60-61); “Oui, nous nous sommes engagés d’être l’un à l’autre à jamais.” (5.3.67-68); “J’aimerais mieux mourir que de lui avoir fait paraître aucune pensée offensante. Elle est trop sage et trop honnête pour cela.” (99-101)), Harpagon continues to understand, albeit incorrectly, that they are talking about the theft of his cassette. Harpagon’s utmost affinity for money, in contrast to his concern for his daughter, is evident through the personification of his cassette. Harpagon humanises gold, while on the contrary, he dehumanises the people around him (Apostolidès 156).

Harpagon is thus further detached from his family in the sense that he cannot identify with them as he solely considers the members of his household in terms of monetary value. Concisely put by Apostolidès, “Dès qu’il entre en contact avec quelqu’un, il ne perçoit pas son être mais son avoir.” (155). Furthermore, emotional relations have been replaced by the monetary kind. Void of any sentiment, Harpagon does not understand them in others; rather, people are treated as implements in which profits must be made (Apostolidès 156). Harpagon is completely enthralled by money, just as Argan is enthralled by doctors and Orgon is enthralled
by Tartuffe, that his obsession creates a barrier between the father and his household. Being so completely enthralled by their passion, it is difficult for them to consider anything else thus effectuating a separation between them and their family. However, their obsessions also lead to one more aspect of detachment.

**Reality**

Molière’s heavy fathers’ final point of detachment concerns the illusory world in which they live. As has been established at many times throughout this study, Molière’s fathers’ behaviour is influenced by their specific obsessions. In pursuing their obsessions, the heavy fathers feel that they gain some of the obedience they so desperately crave. Essentially, obsessions are utilised as a means to distinguish themselves from others and for self-affirmation.

However, it has also been discussed that the behaviour that results from their adherence to their obsessions reveals a rather deluded self-perception as well as a distorted understanding of the happenings of their households. Molière’s heavy fathers are blind to the truth, even when it is being presented directly to them. Ultimately, these fathers are detached from reality.

The term commonly attributed to describe this aspect of Molière’s heavy fathers is “imaginaires”. With imagination being “la faculté qu’a l’esprit de se représenter des objets qui ne sont pas immédiatement perçus par les sens (soit en les reproduisant de mémoire, soit en les inventant)” and “[cette faculté] est le plus souvent associée à l’idée d’erreur, de fausseté, voire de dérèglement, et se voit opposée d’une part à l’expérience et à la vérité, d’autre part à la raison” (Prat 264), as has been seen, these tendencies are clearly manifested by each of Molière’s heavy fathers. As discussed previously, Orgon imagines all the positive qualities he respects in Tartuffe, while Harpagon imagines the constant thievery occurring in his household, and Argan imagines his sickness.
Bernadette Höfer remarks that imagination was the topic of much discussion during the Classical era, stating that this “faculté d’illusion” was often criticized in philosophical thought. She elucidates by saying that “L’imagination est soumise à des interrogations critiques quant à son contenu réel, à sa valeur, au rôle qu’elle joue dans le concept de l’union entre l’esprit et le corps, et quant à la conception de l’être divin.” (209). It is perhaps this negative aspect of imagination that Molière wishes to address. Also, slightly before Molière’s time, Michel de Montaigne, too, wrote about the force of imagination. “Je suis ceux qui sentent très grand effort de l’imagination. Chacun en est heurté, mais aucuns en sont renversés” (1.20.146) begins Montaigne. He also writes further in this chapter: “Il est vraisemblable, que le principal crédit des visions, des enchantements, et de tels effets extraordinaires, vienne de la puissance de l’imagination, agissant principalement contre les âmes du vulgaire, plus molles. On leur a si fort saisi la créance, qu’ils pensent voir ce qu’ils ne voient pas.” (1.20.149-150). Thus Montaigne describes the ways in which the powers of imagination can force those, especially of weak resolve, to see or perceive things that do not exist. This seems to be what both Tartuffe and Harpagon do. Allusions to Orgon being “fou” (1.5.311; 2.2.475) and “aveugle” (1.5.319; 4.3.1314) are indications of his tendency for misperception. Furthermore, in the scene where Orgon argues with his mother over the decency of Tartuffe, Orgon admits to having completely misjudged the situation as well as Tartuffe: “Ce sont des nouveautés dont mes yeux sont témoins, / Et vous voyez le prix dont sont payés mes soins. / Je recueille avec zèle un homme en sa misère, / Je le loge, et le tiens comme mon propre frère / […] / Et, dans le même temps, le perfide, l’infâme, / Tente le noir dessein de suborner ma femme […]” (5.3.1643-1650). Thus, Orgon himself, realises what powers he gave to his imagination, as he admits to having wrongly trusted a man. In this scene, Orgon must defend his understanding of reality, as his mother does not believe Orgon’s report of Tartuffe’s vile actions. “C’est tenir un propos de sens bien
dépourvu. / Je l’ai vu, dis-je, vu, de mes propres yeux vu, / Ce qu’on appelle vu : faut-il vous le rebattre / Aux Oreilles cent foix, et crier comme quatre ?” (5.3.1675-1678). Thus, although he has been disillusioned, Orgon’s perception and tendency to see things that do not exist are put into question. Orgon has been so prone to giving in to the powers of imagination that even when his senses have confirmed a fact others doubt his ability to distinguish between appearance and reality.

As further proof of Harpagon’s predisposition to imagining things and embracing illusions is a short quote found in the ninth scene of the third act. Harpagon automatically assumes the worst when one of his laquais comes running to tell him something. Harpagon suspects that his life is in danger: “Ah! je suis mort. [...] Le traître assurément a reçu de l’argent de mes débiteurs, pour me faire rompre le cou.” (3.9.3-6). Despite the fact that La Merluche has just come to tell him that the horses have lost their shoes Harpagon’s immediate reaction is to believe that his death is wanted over financial matters. Yet, there does not seem to be any indication why this would be so. Without any concrete reasoning, the idea that he will be killed is a creation of Harpagon’s imagination.

Montaigne continues on, describing the power of imagination to make one believe he is ill:

Combien en a rendu de malades la seule force de l’imagination ? Nous en voyons ordinairement se faire saigner, purger, et médiciner pour guérir des maux qu’ils ne sentent qu’en leurs discours. [...] Comparez la vie d'un homme asservi à telles imaginations à celle d'un laboureur se laissant aller après son appétit naturel, mesurant les choses au seul sentiment présent, sans science et sans prognostic, qui n'a du mal que lorsqu'il l'a; où l'autre a souvent la pierre en l'âme avant qu'il l'aït aux reins: comme s'il n'était point assez à temps pour souffrir le mal lors qu'il y sera, il l'anticipe par fantaisie, et lui court au devant. (Montaigne 2.12.765)

This correlation between imagination and sickness is most pertinent to Argan. Through the power of imagination Argan is even convinced that he is dying. After being abandoned by his doctors, Argan is convinced that medicine has already started taking revenge. However, Béralde
cautions him not to be too consumed with his imagination: “Tâtez-vous un peu, je vous prie, revenez à vous-même, et ne donnez point tant à votre imagination.” (3.6.8-9). Béralde recognizes that there is no proof or reason for this imminent death that the doctors have proclaimed. Béralde’s final sentence in this scene contributes to this idea that Argan clings too excessively to his infatuation with doctors. He says: “Il faut vous avouer que vous êtes un homme d’une grande prevention, et que vous voyez les choses avec d’étranges yeux.” (3.6.28-30). This final reference to d’étranges yeux is further characteristic of the imaginaires, as those who are lead by their imaginations often see things that are not really there. Furthermore, as James F. Gaines writes, “to be an imaginaire is a complex business. It does not suggest simply that one is wont to conceptualize other possible worlds—how things might be—be rather points to a dangerous detachment from the real world—of how things actually are” (Gaines 27). Thus, through their imagination and the misjudgement of people (themselves included) and various situations, Molière’s heavy fathers not only detach themselves from the prescribed duty of a father and from family, above all, Harpagon, Argan and Orgon detach themselves from reality.

There is danger in not being able to give up illusions, and as suggested by Zoberman, people are usually unwilling to abandon the ideas that they have conceived themselves and have believed in so adamantly for quite some time (184). However, for Molière’s heavy fathers there are consequences to clinging to their fantasies. Heavy fathers cannot effectively participate in “the game of everyday living” nor join it through their own volition because of the specific refusal to relinquish their illusory world (Eustis 157). Furthermore, in L’Avare and Le Malade imaginaire, the heavy fathers never seem to be able to create a rupture between themselves and their fantasies. Rather, they continue to live according to their imaginations. Harpagon and Argan do not succeed in marrying their children to the people they had hoped to, but yet they are able to continue on in their fantastical world which shields them from the complete cognition of
their failure (Knutson 64). “There is no painful anagnorisis, no gnawing realization of their own foolishness” (Ibid.). Thus, it may be assumed that these two heavy fathers may never fully join reality and will indefinitely live pursuant to their fantasies. In Orgon’s case, although he eventually becomes aware of his misconceptions, he too suffers from having given in profoundly to his imagination. As suggested by Eustis, those who are violently disenchanted and jostled back into reality “having built up no resistance, are more battered about than common mortals.” (157). Thus, there are dangers to detaching oneself from reality as does Molière’s three fathers.

As a result, Orgon, Harpagon and Argan possess a susceptibility to detachment. They are detached from the prescribed duty of a father, from their family and from reality. This idiosyncrasy is particular to Molière’s heavy fathers, and it points to their being far from ideal head of households. It would appear that such a proclivity to separation is in opposition to the critical function of a leader. As Apostolidès makes known,

Le rôle du chef n’est pas d’administrer mais de tenir ensemble, de relier des êtres aux intérêts divergents ; c’est un rôle religieux (re-ligare ou re-ligere, relier). Il ne tient pas seulement les hommes entre eux, sa présence leur assure une relation avec les dieux, devient une assurance contre ce que les humains ne peuvent contrôler : les phénomènes naturels, par exemple. (Apostolidès 20)

Thus, being in opposition from what seventeenth century authorities have deemed required of fathers, being disunited from his family and its best interest and being completely separate from the real world prevents Molière’s heavy fathers from fulfilling the fundamental role of a head of household.

Moreover, in the attempt of being an absolute paternal authority, Argan, Harpagon and Orgon emphasize their search for detachment. Explained in Furetière’s dictionary, the word absolu, as well as the words absolument, absolution, and absolutoire, are derived from the Latin absolvere, absoudre which translates in French to “delivrer, delier” (Dictionnaire universel...), in other words, to liberate, to release to untie or, to detach. Thus, in accomplishing complete
absolutism one would inadvertently carry out their complete disunion from others. In their yearning for complete subservience and autocracy, Molière’s fathers distance themselves from everything around them, contributing to their incapacity of governing their families effectively.

It is therefore confirmed that Molière’s heavy fathers cannot be considered ideal heads of households as they demonstrate a propensity for detachment which is a complete rejection of the definitive function of an effective father: to bring together.
Conclusion

This study has presented many different facets of the representation and behaviour of a certain type of character in Molière’s plays: the heavy father. The first step of the analysis was to seek out an explanation and justification for the heavy father’s tyrannical behaviour. In noting that during the seventeenth century it was largely due to religious and political institutions that absolute paternal authority was promoted, we begin to understand Flandrin’s statement that “Traditional society gave [fathers] the means to impose his will but also demanded that he did impose it.” (123). Furthermore, during this era the family was considered analogous to the monarchy. Comparable in role to the King—whose role and responsibilities were bestowed upon him through Divine Right—all heads of households were expected to manifest a godlike power which included the facility to determine what is right or best for their families. Therefore, social conventions of the time indicate that it was the father’s duty to behave in an absolute manner and this attitude is reflected in the behaviour of Orgon, Harpagon and Argan. However these fathers’ obstinacy is also fuelled by a feeling of isolation and the perception that they are not being obeyed. Poor judgement and a gullible nature are characteristics of Molière’s heavy fathers that give rise to their belief that most members of their households are resisters who reject and ostracize the patriarch. Contrarily, Orgon, Harpagon and Argan place their trust in the few whom they believe are most submissive and who fulfill their lust for obedience, although these characters are often the most duplicitous. The final explanation of the heavy father’s tyranny that is explored has to do with obsessions. It is mainly due to a preoccupation with morality, money or illness that a divide is created between the father and his household. However it is also by clinging to this obsession that Molière’s heavy fathers feel that they are in command. Orgon, Harpagon and Argan seek self-affirmation and acknowledgement by all that they have absolute power in their household. Molière portrays his heavy fathers as increasingly despotic when
dealing with matters related to their obsession. For instance, the heavy father throws temper tantrums in order to force confessions of thievery, or to produce sympathy for ailment, or to threat one’s family in order to prove one’s dominance. Ultimately, Molière’s heavy fathers’ tyrannical behaviour is in part explained by a logic that is led by a will to power.

However, despite providing what was called excuses for the heavy fathers’ obstinate behaviour, an exposition of their shortcomings was also necessary. Despite Richelieu’s claim that a parent’s love is so natural that a law commanding it is not necessary, Molière’s heavy fathers seem to counter its validity. Instead of demonstrating concern for the well-being of their family, Orgon, Harpagon and Argan prove to be self-centered and only interested in satisfying their own needs. Furthermore, they banish sons and send daughters to convents without just cause exposing their recourse to excessive measures of discipline and their lack of reciprocity towards their children. In essence, according to Richelieu’s writing, Molière’s heavy fathers are in violation of the fourth commandment, and if their children have shown themselves to be disobedient, it is because their fathers have not behaved in a manner that deserves deference. *L’Amour-propre* must then be considered to be one of Molière’s heavy father’s greatest faults. Most notably evinced in the choice of husband the heavy father makes for his daughter, it is due to *l’amour-propre* that the father picks somebody who suits his own needs rather than choosing somebody that their daughter can love. Moreover, this love for self also leads to the deterioration of order in the household to the point where even servants are more effectively dominant in the household. The fathers remain unaware of the chaos their *amour-propre* has caused because another one of their downfalls is their susceptibility to delusion. Orgon, Harpagon and Argan not only misinterpret the happenings in their own households, but they also falsely believe that they are hiding their faults from others by presenting an enhanced version of themselves. Yet, while the fathers wish to appear one way, they often prove to be the exact opposite even seeming quite
ridiculous at times. Molière’s heavy fathers delude themselves to the point that it may be said that they live in self-created fantasy worlds.

When comparing Molière’s heavy fathers’ logic and their shortcomings, it becomes evident that Orgon, Harpagon and Argan do not completely fulfill the duties prescribed by society to a seventeenth century father. Despite their attempts to ensure absolute paternal authority these fathers fail to produce completely obedient children. This defiance is then met with harsher despotism, as Molière’s heavy fathers are driven by their will to power and their desire for self-affirmation. This noncompliance of their children may be deserved as the heavy fathers fail to behave reciprocally. They do not show fairness, nor the concern a father should have for his children. As we have seen, this lack of interest for the happiness of his household stems from an extreme egocentrism. Molière’s heavy fathers’ *amour-propre* is just as strong as their *libido dominandi*. Ultimately, if their detachment from the required functions of a father is not enough for their children to feel as though their fathers are not doing their duty, then Molière’s heavy fathers’ detachment from the members of their household is a further indication that they are not ideal fathers. Finally, completely consumed by a specific obsession, and unaware that they have deluded themselves and created illusions by which they live their lives, each of the fathers in the plays studied demonstrates themselves to be separated from reality. This is the final deterrent that attests to the notion that even in the seventeenth century, the behaviour of fathers such as Orgon, Harpagon and Argan was not considered to be ideal. The essential fault of these fathers is their susceptibility towards detachment, and this confirms that the fathers are flawed when it comes to being effective patriarchs. The father is meant to be the leader of his household, and at the time it is noted that a leader’s main purpose is to bring his subjects together. However, Molière’s heavy fathers are incapable of doing so as they are detached from many facets of their lives.
Heavy fathers are but one type of paternal figure represented in Molière’s works. Seigneur Anselme in L’Avare and don Louis in Don Juan, for example, demonstrate traits that are far from the ones that Orgon, Harpagon and Argan have shown themselves to possesses. It is thus perhaps with other fathers such as these that idealness should be sought out, and further research on the image of the father in Molière’s works remains to be done.
Works Cited


**Thématique de Molière: six études suivies d'un inventaire des thèmes de son théâtre.**