MOLIÈRE: WOMEN SPECTATORS, FEMALE CHARACTERS

This thesis addresses the topic of Molière’s attitude towards women through the female characters he portrays in his plays. The representation of female characters in selected Molière plays is examined in order to discover in what ways these characters create the possibility of identification for the seventeenth century female spectator and in what ways they discourage such identification. Four main aspects of Molière’s plays are studied: *préciosité*, family structure, liberty of women and education of women. Research on this subject indicated that Molière represented female characters as both positive and negative role models. As is generally the case in satiric comedy, the negative roles carried with them ridiculous behaviors, thus inviting the female spectator to identify only with the positive role models. Molière attempted to break age old myths concerning the place of women in society with this portrayal. Moreover, he advocated the relaxation of rigid authoritative restraints placed upon women and portrayed those male characters who attempted to limit women’s freedom and their right to education in a ridiculous manner. Through his characters and the subject matter of his plays, Molière showed himself to be one of the greatest advocates of women’s rights in the seventeenth century.