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Madeleine Béjart: La Femme Galante

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
at Virginia Commonwealth University

By

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April 2022

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank several people. My parents, Sara and Will, who believed and supported me all my life and through my Graduate School journey even if that meant their little girl lived 3 hours away, in another state and in a big city. My little sister Emily and little brother Thomas for being the best siblings a person could ask for. I would also like to thank my grandparents, Art and Anita and Margaret and Tom for supporting me as well. The faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University, specifically Dr. Jesse Njus, Dr. Keith Byron Kirk, and Dr. Aaron Anderson who all taught me how to be an academic and challenged me in ways that expanded my mind and understanding of theatre as an artform. I would like to thank Patricia Clark at East Carolina University who first taught me how to be a teacher and inspired me to go into higher education. Finally, I want to thank my closest friends, Sabrina and Jacob, who I am proud to call my friends, classmates and colleagues.

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## **ABSTRACT**

MADELEINE BÉJART: LA FEMME GALANTE

By: Katherine E. Jackson, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022

Major Director: Dr. Aaron Anderson, Interim Director of Graduate Studies Theatre Department

The 17th Century marked the beginning of women professionally joining the acting profession and as such brought about change in the career opportunities for women. Madeleine Béjart was one of these actresses who is notorious for her liaison and working relationship with famed playwright, Molière. Through this personal relationship her role in history was relegated to that of mistress and the scandal concerning Molière's wife Armande who is speculated to either be Madeleine's daughter or sister. By using historical and biographical information on Madeleine along with two works of Molière in which she originated roles, I will explore the intricacies of being an actress on the French stage in a time where patriarchal structures made it difficult for the advancement of women and redefining Madeleine's place within history offering a chance for her to not be defined solely by scandal or her relationship with Molière.

## Artistic Aims Essay

Scholars have spent centuries studying the life and works of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin also known as Molière. Along with the notoriety that comes with creating such classic works such as *Tartuffe* and *L'École des femmes* he has remained a subject of scandal throughout history. One key figure in his rise to success and notoriety, who was there through thick and thin, was Madeleine Béjart. The actress who formed multiple theatre companies with Molière who was also his lover until he married her supposed “sister” Armande. The Seventeenth Century saw the rise of the professional actress in France. At a time when women were limited in their choices for occupations. Madeleine Béjart was one of these actresses that history remembers through her relationship with Molière and her part in his company. By separating Madeleine from the role of mistress we are celebrating the person she was, along with her contribution to the stage at a time when women were just starting to perform professionally in France. Actors and actresses in society were generally well-off, yet their profession made it so they were treated as less than by the bourgeoisie class. It was a liminal space where they were not random people from the streets, most were educated to some degree, a lot of the performers came from what we would think close to middle class/upper middle class. They had the training and knowledge to be able to fit into higher society and all the skills a person should know for working with and for the aristocracy.

The reason I chose Madeleine Béjart to study specifically was because her story and career has been overshadowed by her relationship with Molière and the scandal surrounding his marriage to Armande Béjart. Women’s achievements in theatre are often overshadowed by male figures. Most research and articles found on Madeleine focus heavily on her relationships with the Comte de Modène and Molière. Granted, the majority were written in the 19th and 20th

Centuries when academics were fine with leaving the story as such and not looking further. Also, it is difficult when it has been such a long time. More contemporary research by people like Virginia Scott, look deeper into her story and of other actresses of the time. I found the most cohesive and useful text to be Virginia Scott. She weaves narrative and research into her work that makes research easier to comprehend. The one chapter dedicated to Madeleine in her book *Molière: a Theatrical Life* granted more insight into who Madeleine was than several other writings on Molière. Through my work, I want to acknowledge that while her life was intertwined with Molière's, it is not the whole story. Her romantic relationships should not define who she is as a person, as a performer, and her legacy. Analysis of the social structures of the time in regards to the theatrical profession and women's roles in the patriarchal society. The social structure of France at the time placed actors and actresses in a position of not being referred to with honor and dignity. Even the Church ruled that actors were not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground and if they were wanting to receive a Christian burial they would have to renounce their profession.

In his work Molière wrote with his actors in mind and created roles that best suit them and himself. It is not often we can learn about the original performers of roles and how their lives and personalities influenced the characters portrayed onstage. In Madeleine's case we are lucky to have a fictionalized version of herself available for study which is one of the works that will be analyzed alongside many other original roles written for her. This thesis is a celebration and homage of Madeleine's triumphs on and off the stage. I want Madeleine's story to be told in a new light because in today's contemporary research we are working to undo centuries of patriarchal white male written narratives. Overall, the main point I will be arguing is: who was Madeleine Béjart and how did the characters Molière wrote for her reflect who she was. There



are similarities and parallels between her life and the lives of her characters. The purpose of this thesis Madeleine was just one of many actresses making names for themselves trying to break through professional and societal barriers to make art. But her portrayal of strong female characters in a time where women were property to be married off to the highest bidder in exchange for money and social mobility is monumental in gaining access to equality onstage for women. Through examining Madeleine's work and life we are able to find the person rather than the infamous lover and give her the well deserved credit for making strides in gaining power for women onstage. History has obscured many stories and historical figures especially women and now is the time to examine their lives and contributions to the theatrical realm to inspire future artists.

There are three components to this research, the first part of this work, I will be discussing Madeleine as the working woman and her biographical information as this will be useful once we move into the textual analysis in the next part. Who was Madeleine Béjart? History is a narrative told from different points of view and up until a certain point, the narrative about Madeleine is one sided. Continuously labeled as the mistress and it is time she is given the space for academic study because of how directly or indirectly changed the theatre landscape just by being an actress. She is important because she was on the ground floor of women joining the acting profession in France and having known working affiliation with Molière, one of the premiere playwrights from the 17th Century, although at the time some would say scandalous, gives a “in” into looking deeper into Madeleine’s life and shining a light on the story of a woman who made strides without even knowing it. How did she defy or fit into the society at the time? By researching and discussing the social structure in 17th Century France allows me to understand the rules that Madeleine lived by or chose not to live by and the rules her characters

lived by. Also, this information serves as a foundation to better establish who she was and what elements of her personality are present in each of the characters she played and comparing it to the social structures which Molière satirizes in his work. We know that in the 17th Century that money and status were everything and could easily be lost or gained. A person had their reputation, which acted almost as currency.

The second part will be the analysis of the select roles written for Mlle. Béjart by Molière and discussing what they say about who she was through the characters he created. Before going through Molière's work there will be analysis of how women, overall, were portrayed onstage and the archetypes available and being written for them at the time. How do these plays paint a picture of who Madeleine Béjart was? How can we use both historical and contemporary text to assist in reconstructing the lives of historical figures? There will be an analysis of two of her more well known roles in the following plays: *Tartuffe* and *The Miser, Les Précieuses Ridicule*. Focusing primarily on *Tartuffe* and *The Miser* as they are the more well-known works of Molière. In *Tartuffe*, Madeleine originated the role of Dorine, who has a very active role in the plot. She is quick witted and drives the action, which in what I have read on Madeleine seems to lean into the idea that she may have been the type of person who took on positions of authority and was seen as a mediator and go-getter within the troupe. There was an evolution of the female servant archetype from the passive confidante to the more active suivante role. This is a big achievement in the portrayal of women onstage because Dorine is sassy and not afraid to share her opinion when at the time servants would not dare to speak in such ways to those above their station. Next, *The Miser* because Frosine is described in her description as an "intriguing woman" which leads one to question what Molière means by an "intriguing" woman. Frosine is trying to get money from Harpagon to settle court debts and she is confident in her

ability to use her feminine wiles and intelligent mind to get what she wants. *Les Précieuses Ridicules* because Madelon, compared to the other characters Madeleine has played, is one of the less “serious” and more melodramatic characters. I find it as a departure from the other roles Madeleine has played. We see a different side of her personality, which is nice because as actors we strive to not be placed in a box and at this time that is how theatre worked. Specializing in specific stock characters was how troupes cast their works and seeing Madeleine play something so different is interesting. This play will be used as a sample as to how I will be approaching the larger discussion of Dorine and Frosine, the focuses of the character study.

Then to conclude there will be a discussion of the legacy Madeleine left behind through her own work and that of her daughter (or sister) Armande and how we should remember Madeleine for the talented performer she was and rewrite the history books. How much of Molière’s success was attributed to the two most important women in his life? I argue that they had a significant influence on his success because Madeleine was a leading force in the management of the troupe at least as much as she was allowed based on the constraints women faced at this time. How are legacies created? Going back to the idea that history is narrative, it goes to assume the majority can control the image of figures whether they are alive at the time or not. What is Madeleine’s legacy? Or will she forever be known as a mistress? I think that theatre history and history in general are trying to move away from one-sided and patriarchal narratives to allow women’s accomplishments to be celebrated and told from a variety of viewpoints. What were the labors accomplished by Mlle Béjart and others in her attempts to gain equal power for women on and off 17th century stages? She accomplished lots in her life, she owned property and was known to loan money to people. She was an independent woman who lived for herself and did not let men control her or claim her. This section will include discussion of the recent

news of a campaign to get Molière interred and inducted into the Panthéon which has previously been denied due to the reasoning that the Panthéon is relegated to prominent heroes of the Republic, so those who made history before the revolution are left out. Legacy is a large concept, who or what defines a legacy? She had the makings to be a star in the theatrical world but history remembers her as Molière's lover. The amount of agency and power she held within a society that placed constraints on women's professional and social mobility is to be appreciated and studied extensively.

## Part 1

### Chapter 1- la biographie

Who was Madeleine Béjart? History remembers her as Molière's lover and possibly the mother of his wife, Armande. History is also a narrative told from different points of view and up until contemporary writing, the narrative about Madeleine is one sided. Her place in the narrative has been relegated to being the mistress of Molière and the comte de Modène and it is time she is given the space for academic study because of how she directly or indirectly changed the theatre landscape just by being an actress. She is important because her career began when the theatrical landscape was changing by the introduction of professional actresses which had only been a practice for around 30 years by the time Madeleine joined the profession. Moving towards shifting the narrative of her life and finding the woman behind the monikers. In doing so, contemporary researchers can continue on working to change the study of actresses by looking at their contributions rather than their relationships to men being the only significant addition to the fabric of theatre history. Virginia Scott brings up an interesting thought, actresses being seen “not as symbols of depravity, nor as icons of grandeur” (Scott 37) This one quote presents an interesting shift in point of view on how we should view and study actresses like Madeleine. Is it more worthwhile to not place her on a pedestal? Between the gossip and anecdotes, sensationalizing the lives of performers lifts them to levels of mythic proportions so that future researchers view them as almost characters in a story rather than human beings trying to exist. However, trying not to negate their contributions to the theatrical landscape. Have we been going about the study of actresses in a wrong way, detaching ourselves because we get lost in the “celebrity” factor rather than examining them as people who wanted to perform and participate in the art of theatre. By doing so we remove the grandiose expectations of fame and can focus on

Madeline herself as a woman who enjoyed performing and gained notoriety doing so. It changes how we view historical figures as well because while they go off and do memorable things at the end of it all they were just people trying to survive and thrive in worlds that may or may not have been accommodating. This is a celebration and acknowledgement of Madeleine's accomplishments but to bring humanity back into the study of actresses and viewing them as working women who strived to create their own lives and paths just like everyone else.

### In the Beginning...

To begin our dive into her life we shall start at the very beginning. Madeleine Béjart was born on January 8th, 1618 to Joseph Béjart and Marie Hervé. Her siblings were Joseph, Louis, Genevive, and possibly Armande. Great debate has been had on who Armande's parents were and gossip spread throughout Paris society that Armande was Madeleine's daughter. But, for the purposes of this study there will be no attempt to add to the debate one way or another because it is this gossip and scandal that has overshadowed Madeline's achievements. The family moved around the city a multitude of times settling in the Marais district where the Théâtre du Marais, a map shows just how close the theatre was to the Béjart's home, well within walking distance. Joseph Béjart was one who did not hold onto a job or living situation for long. The family belonged to the bourgeois class but were not overtly wealthy or had good connections, although in numerous documents Joseph styles himself as a bourgeois de Paris. It was Marie Hervé who brought a significant amount of money into the marriage with her dowry worth around 2,400 livres that she earned through working as a *toilière-lingère* before marrying Joseph at 22 years old. Eventually, Marie Hervé filed for a separation of property in 1632 from her husband due to the instability of their family life with Joseph moving from job to job and never fully settling in one home. Marie was granted separation resulting in Joseph having to pay back 2,400 that she

brought into the marriage to begin with and paying 60 livres a year for his upkeep. Virginia Scott explains that a separation of property is not a “legal separation in the modern sense; there was to be no separation of persons. The marriage would continue but the ‘community’ would be dissolved”(Scott 35) This speaks volumes in a time where marriage was a business transaction and men having complete control over the maintenance of the household. Marie Hervé realized that her husband was leading the family dangerously close to ruin and with children to care for she took the necessary measures to ensure the wellbeing of herself and children. Her mother’s spirit and independence was evident in Madeleine for at age 18, she sought legal emancipation from her parents. In France at the time, the age of majority was 25, for both men and women. One is inclined to believe it to be perfectly reasonable that she would want to seek emancipation because by the time she turned 18 in 1636, Madeleine had already witnessed the separation of property between her parents and narrowly avoided marrying a man decades older than her when she was only 15 years old based on this no wonder she would seek to gain her independence from her parents. Thankfully, the marriage fell through as neither party gained much from the union. The first step into her new and independent life began when Madeleine received a loan of 2,000 livres to supplement the 2,000 she already had to purchase a modest house for herself. Unfortunately, due to reasons Scott stipulates that Madeleine was unable to pay the sum and so the house went instead to Nicole des Rideaux, a courtesan. There is evidence that Madeleine went on later to own property including a mill that originally was gifted to her half-aunt who was married to the brother of playwright Tristian L’Hermite by her aunt’s lover the comte de Modène. By owning property she is defying societal norms in that she owns the property as an unmarried woman which was only possible because she gained legal emancipation from her

parents in order to avoid becoming like her father and making sure she was not dependent on others who would jeopardize her security and lifestyle.

### The Illustre Théâtre

Along with her brother Joseph, Molière, and several others formed the Illustre Théâtre, the ill-fated first attempt of establishing a company. The contract was signed on June 30, 1643, with clauses dictating that each company member within the troupe owned a share, which means the financial responsibility falls on everyone. Everything aside from the theatre space itself typically was owned by the troupe members. So when it came time to move from one rented space to another the troupe would have to take everything down from furnishings to sets and costumes. Madeleine Jurgens described this troupe as “an ideal republic where decisions were taken by a plurality of votes. Only in the delicate case of the distribution of roles would a hierarchy emerge: the author, if he appeared, would be all-powerful and his choice is final ” (Jurgens 4) This contract was a means of agreement and manifesto for the running of the troupe. Even the women of the troupe have equal say in the management of the troupe because nowhere does it mention specific roles in the administration of the company. Women were included in matters that concerned the company from hiring and firing to purchases and repairs. Later, in 1674, Samuel Chappauzeau wrote on the functioning of the troupes in order to garner support for theatre and the people who work in it but to do so he had to spin the narrative so that when it came to actresses, “He cannot show them engaging in activities that are totally opposed to what a reader will approve. Hence, actresses can be seen to participate in a non-specific way in the management of their troupes, but only insofar as their actions express the accepted notion that modesty is an intrinsic female quality and that women who are not ‘modest’ and who do not defer to men are somehow defective” (Scott 146) serving as a reminder of, one: how narratives



can be changed and shifted to fit into the morals of a society, and two: while being progressive in equality women still had to submit some authority to their male counterparts. In order to help gain actors and actresses more public appeal showing that even though they have gone into the theatre profession, they still follow the carefully constructed societal standards. Fortunately, a noteworthy clause dictated within the contract benefits Madeleine and gives her some autonomy within the troupe for when it came to roles, “Clerin, Poquelin et Joseph Bédart qui doivent choisir alternativement les Héros, sans préjudice de la prérogative que les dictz accordent à ladite Magdeleine Bédart de choisir le rôle qui luy plaira;” (Jurgens 148) which translated explains that Madeleine had her choice of roles which is astounding because that is the only mention of someone in the troupe getting to pick their own roles aside from the aforementioned three men who will alternate the hero roles. It is curious as to why Madeleine specifically is able to choose, probably since she is one of the head founders of the troupe and due to her abilities and talent was most likely the troupe’s leading lady meaning it is only right that she be able to choose her roles. At its inception, the Illustre Théâtre is reminiscent of old Hollywood films where the eager, young thespians roll up their sleeves to put on a show in the local barn. The Illustre Théâtre was close to that, the first space they rented was a tennis court. Yes, a tennis court, for where else in Paris would one find a space large enough to be transformed into a theatrical space? The found space aspect of theatre at this time lent itself to the somewhat ease of moving theaters if a company since space in Paris was and is already very limited especially if you want to have an entire theatre building. Between trying to keep up with the rent and the various business expenses left the Illustre Théâtre in financial difficulties with many creditors calling to collect. This led to Molière, Madeleine and what was left of their troupe to leave Paris and start over as part of Charles Dufrense’s troupe. It is clear that the road to prominence and success

would be a long one but that is what is endearing about Madeleine and Molière is that their humble beginnings led to going down in theatre history but while Molière became glorified, Madeleine was left on the side lines. Even though it was through her management skills that would aid in their grand return to Paris after years touring the provinces.

### Her Lovers

There were two great loves in her life that were the subject of much speculation and scandal that lingers over her legacy still to this day. Now, it is important to not define Madeleine by her amorous liaisons but it helps paint a better picture of who she was because after all, she is human and as humans we tend to seek out and build relationships in order to live complete lives and function as a society. Madeline is no different, she lived and as such she loved which is only natural. The first was the comte de Modène, also known as Esprit de Raymond. This relationship marked her dalliance in the world of mistresses and courtesans. For, lo and behold like most, the comte was already married but to someone much older than he. It was with Modène that Madeleine had at least one illegitimate child, a girl named Françoise in 1638. What is remarkable is that the comte recognized her as his child. Even going so far as to having his legitimate son serve as the baby's godparent. Unfortunately, the comte ran into some trouble having taken part in a conspiracy against Cardinal Richelieu because the archbishop wanted to resign so that he could marry Princess Anne of Gonzaga but did not receive Cardinal's approval which led to the conspiracy against him. Modène left for Sedan in 1639 due to this conspiracy and stopped making payments on the country house that he and Madeleine shared, leading her to having to rent it out and ultimately returning to her parent's home in Paris. There is no official ending to the relationship as records like that do not exist but it is safe to assume that is around the time Madeleine moved onto bigger and better things.

Molière, the name that has secured itself in the history books as the comedic genius who was among the originals to bring about the comedy of manners genres. It was often that Molière and Madeleine played love interests in multiple of his early works before she moved on to playing more *suivante* roles. This is where we hear the most about Madeleine because of the love triangle or dynamic between her, Molière, and her speculated daughter Armande. But there were instances like in *Les Précieuses ridicules* where she played the love interest opposite Molière early on in her career but once Armande joined the troupe and later married Molière, it was Armande who played his character's wives often when the play has the theme of an older man cuckolded by his young wife. The relationship then between Madeleine and Molière's changed which we will be looking at deeper later on, but there was noticeable change correlated to when Madeleine began to choose more *suivante* roles for the new works being produced.

By establishing Madeleine's comprehensive biographical information, I am laying down the foundation that will come of use during the character study later on. The best way to start changing the narrative is by telling the story from the beginning and seeing the trajectory of an individual's life. Her life is certainly an interesting one compared to most women of her time and being able to present this information is empowering and adds to her the canon of strong women who used society to their advantage and worked hard while under constraints that are different than the ones experienced today. There are also similarities demonstrating how much has not changed as well as we will see as we go into the next chapter discussing the society she lived in to create a picture of what Molière was satirizing in his scripts.

## Chapter 2: Société

The social structures of France at the time placed actors and actresses in a position of not being referred to with honor and dignity. The commercialisation of theatre is prominent at this time with the Hôtel de Bourgogne and Théâtre du Marais being the leaders of established theatre in Paris before Madeleine and her troupe became the third competitor. The Church ruled that actors were not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground and if they were wanting to receive a Christian burial they would have to renounce their profession. While Cardinal Richelieu enjoyed the theatre and attempted to “rehabilitate” it there were still anti-theatrical sentiments throughout France. In order to understand the portrayal of women on stage we must first examine the world offstage for women. What happens when the lights go down and the actors go out into the world to their homes and daily lives? Why is this important for the study of Madeleine Béjart? It is important because we tend to forget that these grand figures were all human, not fictional characters in a story. By unpacking the world Madeleine lived in allows an understanding of the limitations placed upon her and other women. Molière’s comedy of manners satirizes the society they lived in and so knowing where women fell into the hierarchy.

Names were a way to denote one’s position, The title Mademoiselle in French is used when addressing young or unmarried women but when used in reference to actresses serves as another demarcation of their status in society. Another way society put actresses down was referring to them as their surname preceded by the article “la”, so instead of Madeleine Béjart, she would often be referred to as la Béjart. There are many documents and information that refer to Madeleine as la Béjart. Now some actresses could have reclaimed the connotation by using it as a form of branding, turning it into something exciting and marketable. The excitement an audience member gets from seeing “The” of anything thinking this performer is the pinnacle of

the artform. In Madeleine's case, it is interesting to see that she chose to use her given surname rather than adopt a stage name like the de Bries and du Parcs. Usually stage names were used to give an air of nobility to the performers even if it were not true. By not doing so, demonstrates a sense of pride in using her given name and she was not afraid of her real name being associated with her profession. She did not feel the need to hide behind a stage name, in fact her little sister Geneviève went by a stage name since both Madeleine and their brother Joseph went by Bédart and that would be too many Bédarts in one company. Perhaps she thought her name had the flair it needed to be successful. Money and status were everything and could easily be lost or gained in this society, and Virginia Scott brings up the point that by using this article to address someone is to degrade them to the value of an object, anecdotes where *la* is used shows how the author views these actresses as nothing better than a piece of furniture. She writes "in modern usage, 'la' seems to have been imported from the Italian, where it indicates divadom" (Scott 7) which is fine and great if the actresses is wanting to reclaim it in a positive connotation that is perfectly fine but for the purposes of this research I will side with Professor Scott and leave the use of *la* back in the past. Royal appointments were purchased rather than earned through hard work and dedication. Money, power and gender were the keys to success and Madeleine had to maneuver these and more and did so by choosing to chart her own path. She accomplished this through owning property and lending money to others. She was able to do this as an unmarried woman because she had sought emancipation from the tutelage of her parents mentioned in the last chapter. If this was an option, then why were there not more women seeking emancipation? More than likely it was the fact that opportunities for unmarried women of a certain social status were few and far between that both paid well and/or were deemed "appropriate" in the eyes of good society. In the patriarchal society, the fathers and husbands deemed what was best

unfortunately. It was either be free and live in either poverty, social banishment and/or a combination of the two.

The biases towards the acting profession is centuries old, which stemmed from the idea from the clergy and anti-theatrical promoters that an audience couldn't possibly separate reality from fiction and that all the acts portrayed onstage were real being a viable reason given to denounce theatre is mind boggling and proof of the narrow mindedness prevalent in the 17th Century. Although, it is not fair to judge too harshly because even today sometimes audience members have difficulty separating beloved (or hated) characters from their performers. Women on the stage did not fare any better, in a patriarchal society that already puts women at a disadvantage, many proclaimed actresses to be seductresses and licentious women with loose morals that are corrupting men. Which simply is not true but it would not be far out of the realm of possibility that actresses would use their talents in order to secure financial support and benefit from these stage-door Jeans who sought the company of the beautiful performers. One of the paradoxes that Scott addresses in her book, "On the one hand, they presumably attracted male audience members by the public display of their sexual bodies, and the profitability of their theatres- in which they shared equally- depended on their doing so. On the other hand, they seem to have led private lives that were respectable and increasingly affluent." Which presents an interesting way to analyze the life of actresses, by performing in public spaces as these licentious beings, it is good for business. The box office draw of seeing one of those seductive temptresses perform onstage parading their sexuality for all to see was a guaranteed way for theatres to make money. It's just good business, and the actresses in turn received the benefit as more profit means that as a shareholder they are becoming successful. Looking back to the earlier statement made in the previous chapter, viewing actresses as neither depraved or grandiose serves as a reminder

that they were business women doing what they could to ensure their own financial success and security especially Madeleine who relied on herself to create a life for herself because she was unmarried and for that time period, to not have a man to be the sole source of stability and reliance on oneself for their happiness and success if to be admired especially in the patriarchal society that demanded women be under the authority of men.

In media and society women were placed into two categories: the ideal pure submissive woman or the harlot who seduces men for her own sinful pleasure. Isabella Andreini, one of the more well known actresses at the beginning of the century and the leader of her own Commedia troupe, tried to create the former reputation, attempting to prove that actresses could lead honest lives within the gender norms and expectations of the time. Removing the “otherness” from the profession being the goal that sadly does not ever truly go away even in contemporary society. Her tombstone is engraved with the following epitaph “a woman of preeminent for her virtue, the ornament of marlity, faithful in her marital relations, religious, pious, a friend of the muses...” (Scott 94) Demonstrating an example of how image and reputation could make or break a performer’s legacy. Although, it seems that French actresses took a different path and did not subject themselves into fitting this ideal image. There were actresses who were married to other actors within the troupe and some never married. Going back to the idea that they were all just working women whose jobs were in the public eye and as such faced public scrutiny or praise.

Where does Madeleine fit? Is she a courtesan or a madonna? While it is not fair to Madeleine to place her in a box, so to speak, because no one knows what she was like unless they have invented the time machine without telling us. How much longer as a society must women be viewed through these lenses? While some researchers from less accepting times would place her in the role of courtesan because of her profession and the biases associated with

anyone working in the theatre but also because a lot of her characters are sexually liberated in the modern sense of it does not define who she is, but as a tactic to shift power dynamics in her favor. Her portrayal of characters who were very confident in their sexuality could have been misconstrued as her actual personality as we know back then that audiences at least anti-theatrical ones were set on the idea that there is no separation between fiction and reality. The *suivante* characters she plays in multiple shows are not as prudish as society may expect them to be subservient but the character is not without having their own fun first. They also go against the social norms of the quiet unseen and unheard servant.

In continuing to build the foundation of which my case/character study it is important to discuss the society of the time because Madeleine lived a life that seemed to both fit within the constraints while also living outside of it in the liminal space that is the life of an actor during this time. The world was not made with the advancement of women in mind at this time but like her and many others they found a way to create at least a modicum of success especially when women on the stage at all had only really been around for thirty years. The acting profession still in its relative infancy allowed for women to break out of the home and live life according to their own wishes. Being in the public sphere brought about writers and critics talking about and reporting on actresses. What were writers saying about Madeleine and how did these narratives shape how history views and remembers her?



### Chapter 3: Le récit

History is a narrative and whoever writes the narrative controls the perception of their subjects. This is true when it comes to the portrayal of Madeleine throughout time. Virginia Scott writes in her book *Early Modern French Actresses* that the struggle historians face with documents such as Tallemant des Réaux who recorded the gossip of Paris society and anecdotes concerning the elite titled *Les Historiettes*. These writings were not meant for publication and historians have to approach the information presented with a grain of salt due to being unable to truly discern fact from fiction. Below is a quote about Madeleine from *Historiettes* where we catch a glimpse into gossip at the time:

Let us end with la Béjard. I never saw her play; but it's said that she is the best actress of all. She is in a country troupe; she has played in Paris, but in a third troupe that was only there for a while. Her masterpiece was the character of Eucharis, whom Nero wanted to have tortured. A young fellow named Molière left the benches of the Sorbonne to follow her; he was in love with her for a long time...and finally married" (Scott 23)

Tallemant at the very beginning admits that he has not seen her perform and is making the assumption that she is the best actress of all. How can he proclaim such a feat if he has not seen her perform for himself. Not to discredit Madeleine's obvious talent but how can one proclaim that a person is the best at something for not having seen it for themselves. One must take what Tallemant wrote knowing that it may not be true, as he proclaims that Molière and Madeleine married which is simply not true because there is no evidence of such a union and if they were married it would negate his marriage to Armande. Yet, even in contemporary society gossip mongers tend to exaggerate and not always report news truthfully but we these are but the only

glimpses into the past that we have and must sift through the hyperbole and artistic license used when approaching documents like Tallemant's.

On the other hand, Georges de Scudéry account of Madeleine presents insight into who she was as a person and actress:

She was beautiful, she was galante, she sang well, she danced well, she played all sorts of instruments, she wrote very prettily in verse and in prose and her conversation was very diverting. She was one of the best actresses of her century and her acting had the power to inspire in reality all the feigned passions that one sees represented on the stage. This agreeable actress was called Jebar and, as Abindarrays sought to divert himself and efface the memory of past adventures, he went to the theatre where he saw her play the role of Sophonisbe in a manner so touching and so passionate that first he admired her and then he loved her; first his heart was tender with pity, then she stole it from him. (Scott 150)

Across all research done on Madeleine this quote is one of many, if not all, scholars use to provide information on Madeleine while revealing a lot about her as a person, moving past her physical qualities that are noted. She was obviously well-educated in the many social graces that women of a certain class were expected to be well-versed in. These quotes paint her in a respectable and positive light, highlighting her accomplishments. Perhaps Scudery was attempting to promote Madeleine and remove the marginalization of actors and demonstrate that she was just like other women with some respectable upbringing. Although she was by no means rich, her father styled himself as a bourgeois de Paris and her family descended from royal notaries. But the word *galante* is something to dig deeper and figure out hidden connotations within that one word. In contemporary times, *Galante* translated means gallant, which is usually defined as brave. But it also was used to reference Going back to women like Nicole des

Rideaux, the 17th Century the *galanterie* was a “broad term encompassing anything from mild flirtation to extramarital sexual relation” (Prest 10) so the connotation of this one word paints two different pictures. The first one if using this definition shows Madeleine to fulfill the coquettish seductress stereotype that many actresses fall into or we can use the literal translation to English being gallant meaning brave and valiant which shows a very progressive view of Madeleine being this strong individual who was brave and valiant in her life. Doing things that many women of her time were not encouraged to achieve like being emancipated in order to buy property on her own and not giving into too many societal standards. It is reflected in the characters she originated, so I like the second use of the word *galante* because it changes the narrative to one that promotes strength and independence while also moving away from the biases of the past.

All these praises sung by Scudery are very much surface level observations. At least he goes on to give credit to her intellect through describing how she “wrote very prettily in verse and in prose and her conversation was very diverting” and he praises her acting prowess which is interesting considering the acting style of the time was more focused on the voice being what portrayed everything Sabine Chaouche is quoted in text saying “to speak is to act... and ‘to speak’ is above all to appeal to the imagination of the word” (Scott 166). Acting at this time was not psychologically based as it is today, the object being presentational rather than representational and so for Madeliene to receive such accolades for her performance skills denotes a sense of talent and skill in her portrayal of these characters. If she was able to be so convincing onstage with the focus being only on how it sounded gives a lot of credit to Madeleine for being able to master the techniques used, it is entirely possible that if she were

born in a different time when characters like Epicharis and Medea are approached with the complex layers to performing them she would thrive.

After the failure of the Illustre Théâtre and touring in the provinces to avoid re-arrest due to the outstanding debts, Molière and Madeleine found their way into establishing the Troupe de Monsieur whose patron was the King's brother, the duc d'Orléans. One of the pieces written during this time was *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, a metatheatrical piece where Molière presents a fictionalized version of his troupe and himself. In the play, the company only has a short amount of time to rehearse a new play before it is to be performed for the King. Rarely do we have access to a meta-theatrical piece such as this, written in response to Hôtel de Bourgogne's critique of Molière's *L'école des femmes*. The rivalry between the two theatre companies ascends to a whole new level of pettiness which has rarely been seen in theatre history aside from the Astor Place Riots in the 19th Century. Although this is a fictional depiction of Madeleine, this text grants us a semblance of who she was and how she functioned within the functioning of the troupe. Throughout the script she is seen to be the voice of reason and asking Molière the logical questions while the rest of the troupe are in a tizzy about the short rehearsal time before performing. Which all her characters have in common, the voice of reason perhaps this was her role in the troupe. There has to be for the company to thrive and it just so happens that Madeleine fits the bill.

It is also worth noting that the character Madeleine portrays in the play within the play is given the descriptor as a "prude" which is fascinating as none of the characters history knows were for sure played by Madeleine were ever be considered prudish or even close. What was Molière's intention with choosing this perhaps since this is comedy that he chose characters that the real actors themselves would never play in real life as a means of intensifying the comedic

elements and possibly indicative that the play within the play is not good because it was so hastily written that all the character types are wrong. Another moment in this piece is when the character of Madeleine says to the character of Molière, “If you’re nervous, it’s your own fault. You should have taken the proper precautions and given yourself more than a week to put the thing together.” (Molière 2) giving insight into how at least Molière views Madeleine’s role within the troupe. Perhaps she is the one with the more administrative and directorial minded member who is adept at the management of the troupe because she understands that good quality work deserves time which they do not have and she senses how haphazardly this performance is being put together. She is not afraid to speak to Molière as an equal, calling him out on his decisions that affect the peaceful running. Perhaps this was how Molière saw Madeleine for we know that a lot of his works are eerily similar to possible anxieties and aspects of his personal life. He saw the powerful and strong woman who worked hard to make her way in the world and wanted to have that power reflected in the character as a way to juxtapose the more traditional Ingénues.

In 1914, Léopold Lacour wrote the book *Les maîtresses & la femme de Molière*. His goal with writing this book was to move away from the molieristes who chose to romanticize and sanitize the great visionary that was Molière and by moving away from this Lacour’s accounts show the “dark spots” which upon first glance is exciting especially for the early 20th Century, finally a chance for Madeleine to be given full research and her chance to shine. Yet, the title of the book is the *Mistresses and the wife* and this moment is fleeting when further down the same page where he goes on to saying that if the women “had not had the chance to be loved by Molière? Simply even, if Madeleine had not signed with Molière the act of professional association which linked her destiny as a pretty, intelligent woman to that of the future great

man?” (Lacour 23) and we are back to square one and remember that this was written by a man in 1914. Oh, how wonderful it must have been for Madeleine to have had the love of the great and prolific Molière for if it were not for him she would be just a lowly paid actress at the Theatre du Marais. I hope the sarcasm reads in that last statement but it demonstrates the larger issue of defining a woman by men. She seemed to be doing well for herself before he ever came into her life and while she did benefit from teaming up with Molière it is through her embodiment of the texts that give a two dimensional character life and become three-dimensional rocketing the plays into the pantheon of dramatic literature. The male gaze runs rampant throughout scholarly research even when it comes to the study of actresses for a long time. That is one of the reasons throughout my research that I gravitated towards Virginia Scott’s texts because she was able to write about Madeleine without placing all her worth on the relationship with Molière. Scott is able to acknowledge that their lives were intertwined but sticks to the facts and does not paint Madeleine in one way as other scholars had in the past. For example, in her book on Molière she dedicates an entire chapter to Madeleine and includes her throughout the rest of the book. Scott also recognizes her own biases and brushes with wanting to give into the narrative, stating in the introduction for example, in reference to the ages old question of Armande’s parentage saying

“I believe Armande was the daughter of Madeleine and the comte de Modène, partly because certain information intersects coherently with that conjecture and creates credible character choices, and partly- I confess- because it stirs my imagination and produces a more interesting narrative.” (Scott 7)

At the end of the day we are all storytellers in a sense and it is difficult not to want to buy into the spectacle of the past. But, what matters is that Scott sees both sides of the coin and states that

sometimes we just want to give into the narrative because she goes on to say that there are some things we will just never know the complete truth about and the stories are all we have but if we do have evidence that suggest otherwise then that should be the story told.

How might I rewrite or revisit the narratives surrounding Madeleine? The best way to approach her story is to take in as much information and anecdotes on her and re-examine it through a contemporary lens while also understanding the societal expectations that were in place. My purpose is to not make assumptions but to look at the same information that scholars have been pouring over for centuries and look at her as she was, a working woman. Accepting that she is a person and not solely placing her worth as it means in the large scale of her relationship both working and personal with Molière. Removing her from the scandal and while acknowledging that it happened does not define who she was and give her the proper credit where it is due. In doing this we can see where the narratives shift and find the nuggets of truth within them and piece together a picture of who Madeleine was. It is not so much rewriting the narratives as it is understanding where they came from and that it is best to approach them with the knowledge that there may only be some truth to what the writers were saying about her. What is important is making sure those are not the only voices being heard and shining a light on the inaccuracies. Moving along it is time to examine and discuss the world of women on the stage and how female roles were received and written before I go into the analysis of her two more well-known roles written for her by Molière.

## Part 2

### Chapter 1: Les femmes sur scène

During the 17th Century playwrights like Molière would craft characters that best suited each actor in the troupe. The standard practice of the time was for troupe members to specialize in specific character archetypes. Archetypes for female characters were by no means pushing any social boundaries due to the roots in Commedia and stock characters. Women on the stage were relegated to portraying either the Ingénue, the maid, or the whore. What we see as a limit being placed on who women are and what they can do, these roles were the standard for the society as we discuss in earlier chapters. This leads to an inquiry on how Madeliene navigated these gender roles in her own way. Unfortunately, time travel has yet to come to fruition so the best approach is to lay out the foundation for this next part which begins with a study of women on the stage and the types of roles available at the time because the société was strict in its moral rules.

Now, it is important to note that Madeleine was known as an excellent tragic actress and unfortunately for her, tragedies were not as popular and not helpful for revenue. She obviously did well in comedy but tragedy is where she shone, playing leading roles like Epicharis in L'Hermite's *La Mort de Sénèque*. Virginia Scott writes:

“Madeleine Béjart came very close to being a star, if only she had stayed in Paris and if she had been less attached to the star of Molière. She was undoubtedly a fine actress both in comedy and tragedy, but especially in tragedy, which could have set her apart had she remained in Paris during the time that tragedy was being reintroduced into the French theatre” (Scott 150)

So while there was a tragedy repertoire at the time between new works and translations of Greek tragedies. It was easy to succeed in comedy but to be good at tragedy was something to be



applauded. Unfortunately, The troupe was under the King's power as their patron so if the King wants comedy, comedy he will have. "A playwright writing for a stable troupe of known entities has the advantage of being able to tailor roles not only to the special talents of the actors, but to their shadow personae as well." (Scott 107) Molière did just that in his troupe. It has also been mentioned that the troupe just was not as good at playing tragedy and that every so often would do a couple so that Madeleine could flex her prowess but I am sure it was not often since the troupe excelled in comedy which was a well-known and easy money maker. Every now and then the troupe would perform tragedies to allow their star tragic actress the opportunity to shine. All the new plays created by Molière were solely comedies. There were French playwrights who wrote tragedy alongside translations of Greek plays being where the tragic repertoire came from the most. Comedy of Manners for a genre to be so popular is fascinating because Molière was satirizing and calling out the very people the troupe was performing for. Which is the main reason why *Tartuffe* was so controversial because the church did not like the portrayal of the clergy being shown as hypocrites (which they one hundred percent were but try telling that to the Catholic Church in the 17th Century, I would probably be tried as a witch for saying such things). What would have happened if Madeleine had chosen to leave Molière's troupe and gone to the Hotel de Bourgogne? We will never know but it is interesting to consider the possibilities.

Early forms of theatre famously excluded women beginning with the Greeks. During the Early Modern era, the types of roles being developed and performed exclusively by women at this time varied. The development of characters that appealed to the young actresses starting to join the troupes gave playwrights the opportunity to create more active female characters. The actresses never aged out of characters or moved onto more "age appropriate" characters, once you had an archetype. For it was said that actresses did not want to play older characters

like the *nourrice*, now at first glance one can be quick to assume this is just actresses being divas not wanting to give into the natural process of aging but looking past the initial reaction it is clear that for women whose livelihood was influenced by their sexual desirability. The audience (particularly men) come to the theatre at this time to witness an idealized version of women and unfortunately that means the audience could very possibly be ageist. Back then, the most desirable roles were the Ingénues, whereas today we have started moving towards the most revered roles being for older women (i.e. Meryl Streep, Helen Mirren) while at the same time it seems that our media still tends to favor the younger actresses. Madeleine played these “young” roles her whole career although it could be said that *suivantes* possibly had the ability to be a bit more mature and older but still with the desirability to an audience. Since the performers were not trying to suspend disbelief by any means it presents the opportunity to continuously play the role regardless of age is an interesting phenomenon because even in today’s media, adults play teenagers or roles that some critics believe the actor is “too old” to play. Critics back in Madeleine’s day would sometimes comment on the age of the female performers when the writers wanted to make a snide remark. In the beginning, around the 16th Century, Farce was the popular form of theatre but women played passive roles in the texts and Virginia Scott in the article *Conniving Women and Superannuated Coquettes* stating the only roles for them being: aggressive market women, *entremetteuses*, mothers who dominate their *badins*, their idiot sons, and shrews who dominate their miserable husbands. These female characters for the most part are not sexually active or only peripherally so, and many are middle-aged or older. (Scott 4)

Those types of roles do not paint women in a particularly positive light. All these characters perpetuate the idea that women once they are older are no longer considered desirable or have

stories to share. Also, highlighting the idea that all women nag and berate their husband.

Thankfully, while Molière does utilize these characters they are often played by men in drag and so women themselves do not have to portray the “undesirable” roles.

Now that we have discussed who Madeleine was and set up the rules of the world that she lived in, it is here that we take the roles. For the purposes of this case study into the roles Madeline originated, I will be using *Les Précieuses ridicules* to establish how I will be analyzing and making connections between the characters to the information established in the first part of my research. The purpose is to find the connections between Madeleine’s roles and her biography. As well as a study into the type of roles available to women and exploring how it is representative of women’s roles in society. Finding where Molière and Madeleine made subtle challenges to how society functioned. While also finding the hidden power behind these characters in a world that was not built for women to succeed in. For the case studies of the characters I will go into discussion on basic background for the play itself and any historical information that helps paint a picture of how the world works. Then, I will go into depth discussing the characters themselves and trying to find the bits of Madeleine’s personality interwoven with the fictional.

### *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659)

Madelon is one of the pretentious young ladies that the play gets its name from. This play is a critique of the *les précieuses*, the intellectual, witty and educated women who frequented the salon of Catherine de Vivonne, marquise de Rambouillet a part of the Préciosité literary style that was popular at the time. Madelon and her cousin are seen as silly by having overly romantic notions of life and how it should be. But what is ridiculous about wanting to be married to a man whom you love and wanting romance? The character of Madelon could easily

be written off as a ridiculous person as the title suggests but Molière is challenging while satirizing *les précieuses* in the way that these women go against the ideal of the “dutiful” heroine discussed in “In seventeenth-century plays, a heroine had to demonstrate complete control over her feelings if she was to be on par with her Cornelian contemporaries.” (Kennedy 69) which is exactly the opposite of Madelon, she exhibits a subversion of this type of character archetype that was written specifically to represent the ideal picture of femininity and women’s place within society offstage. She is not afraid to make her opinion known to the men in her life. One moment demonstrating her powerful will is towards the beginning of the play when she and her cousin have just humiliated their would-be suitors saying:

Here is my cousin, father, who will tell as well as I that matrimony ought never to happen till after other adventures....But to come out point-blank with a proposal of marriage,—to make no love but with a marriage-contract, and begin a novel at the wrong end! Once more, father, nothing can be more tradesman like, and the mere thought of it makes me sick at heart. (I.IV)

To speak so freely, rejecting the social norms in the ritual of marriage arrangement, especially to her father is groundbreaking in itself since the father has sole power in the family and the sole authority. If he wanted to he could have forced Madelon to marry and no one in the community would bat an eye. If it were a tragedy that would be the case but since its comedy he is resigned to the flustered father figure. Madelon knows her duty and is content with the idea of marriage but she also wants romance. While Molière is satirizing the overly romanticized notions that were integral to the *préciosité* style, it highlights a bigger issue that was not seen at the time. The issue through a 21st Century lens is why was it so outlandish for Madelon and Cathos to want romance and to be woo-ed before getting married? This is a fairly simple desire to those of us

living in today's world but for women in the 17th Century their whole lives were spent preparing to be wives and mothers. It was their one function at least for those who could afford too.

Women fell prey to marriage as a business model in society. This rejection of traditional societal norms is evident within the play and is ultimately ridiculed by the men in this play. The play begins with du Croisy and La Grange formulating a plan to get revenge on the ladies for rejecting them because their masculine pride was hurt. It should not be Madelon and Cathos' fault when the men did not give enough care to the relationship by immediately offering marriage as a means of a business transaction which was how unions were viewed during this time. As a romantic myself there were definitely moments in the script where even I could see the absurdity of their actions and ideas like changing their name to more poetic and grand Grecian names but that is where the basis of the comedy comes from but there is something to be said about promoting the idea that women can stand strong to their convictions even if it ultimately leads to ridicule but it is the fact that they made the choice to do so and get carried away.

### Connections to Madeleine's Life

This is definitely a departure from the roles Madeleine will go on to play later on in her career where other characters are single, witty and savvy, Madelon is a purely comical character. Another departure is the fact that the role is not a servant, in this piece Madeleine is playing a member of the bourgeois. Armande had not yet joined the troupe by the time this play premiered so Madeline was still one of the premiere leading ladies for the troupe. I find an underlying layer of an exploration of femininity and the strength to be found within it warranting more research at a later time. Showing women onstage who are romantics at heart but strong and outspoken about their views on it is groundbreaking even if it is being satirized. Madeleine sought independence

within her own life and chose more or less to not marry because by doing so she was able to retain some form of autonomy over herself that few women had the option of during the 17th Century. But, she was human, she had hopes, dreams and romances.

Another Molière play that has ties to this one is *Les femmes savantes*, the role of Philaminte was supposedly written for Madeleine but due to illness and subsequent death in 1672 prompted a need to recast but what is interesting about this is that Virginia Scott writes:

Roger Herzog argues that the role had been written originally for Madeleine Béjart and that her illness may account for the delay in producing the play.<sup>30</sup> Although the role seems somewhat outside of Mlle Béjart's usual *emploi*, which did not include *vieilles*, it can be seen as a complement to her role a decade earlier in *Les précieuses ridicules*.

Philaminte is an aging Madelon. (Scott 14)

Which shows that towards the end of her life Molière still thought of his former leading lady. Now that might just be me romanticizing the situation and may be far from the truth but it is nice to think about how after dedicating most of her career to Molière's troupe, Madeleine got to revisit an old character in a sense. A send off for his colleague and former lover, one last opportunity to showcase her talent that made audiences praise her back at the beginning of her career.

Moving forward, the next steps in my research is to now analyze two of Madeleine's roles. Frosine in *The Miser* and Dorine in *Tartuffe*, two of Molière's more well-known works that will grant us further insight into how women were portrayed onstage outside of the general Ingénue stock character and into the lesser studied roles that Madeleine portrayed. Looking at the text and finding the moments where we can draw possible parallels between the fictional character and Madeleine's life.

## Chapter 2: Frosine- *The Miser* (1668)

“An intriguing woman” is the character description given for Frosine in *The Miser*. What makes her intriguing? When one first thinks of an “intriguing” woman it sounds like something out of a film noir but why not flip the narrative? I believe that “intriguing” could also mean that she is an independent woman who has to rely on her sexual appeal and wit to keep her lifestyle afloat. This play was written/performed towards the end of Madeline’s career and life and brings about a character archetype not usually explored or utilized in Molière’s works.

In the play, our first interaction with Frosine is when she arrives at Harpagon’s home for the purpose of setting up the marriage match between Marianne and Harpagon. Before her meeting, she has a conversation with La Flèche, the trickster servant who later steals his master’s money. La Flèche asks her what her purpose is here denoting that they know each other previously for one reason or another to which Frosine replies:

What have I come to do? Why! what I do everywhere else, busy myself about other people's affairs, make myself useful to the community in general, and profit as much as I possibly can by the small talent I possess. (II.5)

Hers is a plight representative of women during this time: there were few ways for them including Madeleine to wield power and autonomy over themselves. Frosine is led by her head and knows that the way to a man’s coffer is through his heart and she is willing to use her wiles to get what she wants. She is a professional meddler, opportunist and matchmaker, a Dolly Levi type character who does a little bit of everything or whatever serves her in order to get paid. Her tactics include flattery and finding out men’s weaknesses and using them to her advantage, usually their lust is said weakness. Frosine continues the line by saying, “Must we not live by our

wits in this world? and what other resources have people like me but intrigue and cunning?”

(II.5) This is a moment of real heart and one of contemplation because she has been forced by one man or another into this role in life and so she must rest on whatever talents she has to make it work for her. Part of her character’s purpose is to show the audience just how miserly Harpagon is; he is not even swayed by romantic advances and is swept away like flies whereas other men may be more willing to falter and give her everything she wants. You know it is bad when even a man like Harpagon is not even swayed by the “intriguing” woman. She is just trying to earn a living but has met her match in Harpagon.

### Who is Frosine?

Frosine is not a *suivante* character but a more mature character type. At the time this play was first performed Madeleine was about 50 years old, and the characterization through the writing demonstrates the possibility that Frosine is a more mature character. I would imagine Frosine to be representative of the faded flower. A woman who was probably once praised and made her money off of her beauty but has since fallen on hard times and can not support herself. But, she is not confined to the matronly type role like the *nourrice* or elder female characters closer to the Dowager Countess from *Downton Abbey*. She knows what she is doing and has been at the game for years much like Madeleine, who by this time has a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Frosine is also a pragmatic and realistic person who sees the reality of the situation and does not sugar coat anything unless she is using it as a tactic to get what she wants. When Marianne is nervous about meeting Harpagon, Frosine tells her to not worry and that she should go into this marriage with the strict confidence and goal that Harpagon will die soon, and Marianne will be set financially for life. This unromantic view of marriage is satirizing the very



realistic understanding at the time that marriage is a transaction and business agreement and that this was one of the few protections and chances for stability women had access to. Frosine tells her that by marrying Harpagon, Marianne will be set financially so that when he inevitably dies she can do as she pleases and marry for love. Even though not specifically a *souvante* character she is still a go-between of sorts because she serves as the match-maker. Which demonstrates that women during this time were very limited in opportunities and jobs to support themselves. Obviously, Frosine came from a background where she could mingle with the rich but would be described as genteel poverty. Could it be possible that she worked as part of the *galanterie* in her youth but now that she is older and cannot continue this path she has to rely on her natural talents and craft her own work? The plan is ultimately not needed as the resolution comes in another form when the money goes missing and we find out that Marianne and Valere are the children of the wealthy Anselme originally courting Elise. Yet, before all of this, she says herself that she is not without a heart once Valere is revealed to be the suitor who has won Marianne's heart, placing her back into the gender roles prescribed to women as nurturing and care givers. Telling the lovers that:

Indeed, I should like to do so, as you know. I am not naturally unkind. Heaven has not given me a heart of flint, and I feel but too ready to help when I see young people loving each other in all earnestness and honesty. (IV.I)

This is a shift in her thinking, finding a new perspective when it comes to love and marriage. Seeing the young lovers in this predicament appealed to her otherwise cynical point of view, shifting it to one that wants to see love succeed. Though a change does not happen to Harpagon, Frosine demonstrates that change can happen. She says herself, that she is not "naturally

unkind,” she was not always so pragmatic but life must have dealt her a tougher hand where she grew to have a “heart of flint” because, as a woman alone, she had to work ten times as hard with limited resources and opportunities despite her natural abilities. Frosine was not able to live on romantic notions like the young lovers. Perhaps Frosine is a semblance of an older Marianne who was not able to marry her Valere but instead either never married or she was forced to marry her Harpagon. She is skilled at reading men, and as she said herself, finding their weak points. This is her form of getting revenge on a world that was not kind to her. Her original motivation was money but seeing how earnestly in love the young people are appealed to that long forgotten possibility that romance and stability can be achievable.

She knows how to play with words and spins narratives to work to her advantage like when Harpagon is adamant that Marianne bring a suitable dowry, but Frosine, knowing that the woman does not have the funds for a worthy dowry, spins the tale into something that she knows will appeal to Harpagon. She attempts to convince him that Marianne’s dowry is that she will save him money by how little she supposedly needs to live on. She tricks him into believing that what is important is the amount of money he would save by marrying Marianne. This was a genius move by Frosine and goes to further show just how much of a miser Harpagon is because, earlier in the play, he was adamant that he would marry off his own daughter but not give a dowry. He flips and says he will not marry Marianne without one. He hoards money like a dragon and hates to see any leave his coffers. Frosine is not afraid to tell a lie or two if that means she gets what she wants. For example, when Harpagon expresses trepidation on marrying someone so young, Frosine tells this large tale that Marianne only likes older men and scoffs at younger ones. She will do or say anything about anyone to achieve her goals.

When Marianne first meets Harpagon, Frosine acts as a filter for Marianne who is repulsed by Harpagon, but in order to make the contract go through, Frosine has to alter what Marianne is actually saying in order to continue flattering Harpagon. Throughout this scene she does not give up control. She has a hand in everything, doing whatever she can to make this contract go through so that hopefully she will be compensated for her efforts. Mastery of all these skills allows her the ability to be a “jane of all trades” and manage her way into different families looking for opportunities for potential work. These skills are put to the test when Marianne meets Harpagon for the first time and she is having to translate the true response to one fake compliment in order to appease and not insult Harpagon, the dialogue being:

**Mar.** (aside to Frosine). Oh, what an unpleasant man!

**Har.** (to Frosine). What does my fair one say?

**Fro.** That she thinks you perfect.

**Har.** You do me too much honour, my adorable darling. (II.X)

There is a moment where Frosine reads Harpagon’s palm suggesting that she has or pretends to, at least, have experience with fortune telling which is unusual in a play at this time. This shows the audience how different Frosine is from other women who would never think to dabble in the mystical arts.

The eventual resolution of the play occurs without the use of Frosine’s plan but the fact that she was able to quickly formulate something to aid the young lovers demonstrates a kindness which even she herself mentions in the script that she is not totally heartless. When it is discovered that Cleante, Harpagon’s son is the one who has Marianne’s heart Frosine quickly concocts a plan to get Harpagon to withdraw his intent to marry by masquerading a friend of hers as a noble wealthy woman because Frosine knows that Harpagon covets money more than

anything and will break his intentions with Marianne leaving her free to marry Cleante. There is no real ending for Frosine as she is sort of irrelevant in the last scenes of the play once the group returns from the fair and there is no “happy ending” for her because she has not been paid for her matchmaking services. Further perpetuating the trend for female characters to serve a passive purpose, it is not Frosine’s plan that saves the day but the men arguing and the reveal that resolves the conflict carried out by the male characters fixing the predicament. If we were to give Frosine a “happy ending” à la *Hello Dolly*, she would marry Harpagon herself following her own advice of marrying for money and knowing she will most likely outlive him and gain access to his fortune. Yet, Harpagon is more miserly than Horace Vandrgelder. Harpagon does not learn; there is no curmupance. This can show that he chooses his money over his family because once the weddings happen he will rid himself of his children and in turn his children rid themselves of him. Why does Molière not give Frosine a happy ending, or any ending for that matter. Possibly due to the fact that the role is more of a supporting character, but also looking at the larger picture, it could be representative of the norms of the time showing the audience that they all know a Frosine in their lives, dissuading women to not behave in this manner.

#### Connections to Madeleine's Life

Going back to the quotation is reminiscent of the trials that Madeleine possibly faced as an unmarried actress in a world that was not flexible in its societal norms. Madeleine had to work hard to achieve a modicum of success. She could have drawn inspiration for this character from her brief stint in the world of the *galanterie* as the mistress of the comte and by gracing the salons throughout her life watching other coquettes and courtesans use their assets to secure financial support from the noblemen and aristocrats. This is not to say that Frosine participated in this lifestyle. Then again, acting was not nearly as psychologically based. However, there must

be some use to make it worth the audience's while and continuously go to the theatre. These are the same audiences who in previous centuries could not have possibly believed that what they saw onstage was in fact not fiction.

Molière writes a lot of plots that showcase the relationship and situations between old cuckolds married to the young pretty Ingénue (often if not all the time played by his wife Armande) who is battling paranoia thinking the young wife will have an affair. This dynamic has been assumed by scholars as a possible parallel to Molière's own private life. Madeleine serves as the role of the inbetween, for it is Frosine that makes the match for Harpangon. It was not just Molière who had a large age gap with his wife, this practice was very common in the higher classes to ensure the wealth stayed between themselves and not be shuffled down to those unworthy. With Madeleine's character as a go-between setting up the match. Now, while there is no historical record indicating so, it is highly unlikely that this happened in real life because it would make no sense for Madeleine to set Molière up with her sister/daughter.

What was Molière trying to say by creating this character for Madeleine? I believe it was an opportunity for Madeleine to perform a role that had more flair and maturity while also satirizing the "meddlesome" woman. It is fascinating how Molière can both lean towards feminism and yet keep it stagnant at the same time. But is that not the complexity of a *comedy of manners*? Molière could push the boundaries of social morals by satirizing the higher class while hiding it in plain sight through the comedy. But, with Frosine there is something fascinating about the way in which she attempts to be in control of the situation and always has the upper hand when in reality she cannot achieve this. Yet, she has the confidence and tenacity to keep at it until all her ducks are in a row, so to speak. For if she is in control she can bend the will of the men around her to earn her living. Control was not something women had, and they had to find

creative ways in which to exercise it, That is how we get characters like Frosine who seem to be meddlesome as assumed by the men around her, but in reality it is women taking control of their lives and not letting it get the best of them.

Frosine offers an interesting perspective into a character archetype not usually seen on the stage and gave Madeleine the opportunity to explore new avenues of characters that were outside of her specialization. Moving forward, it is time to explore her role in another of Molière's well-known works, Tartuffe. In order to gain insight into how another of her characters could draw parallels from her real life and comparing Frosine to Dorine and finding the similarities and differences between these two characters and what it means to her life and the portrayal of women onstage.

### Chapter 3: Dorine- Tartuffe (1664)

*Tartuffe* is one of Molière's more well-known works that is produced often and Madeleine originated the role of Dorine, who has a very active role in the plot. She is quick witted and drives the action, which in what I have read on Madeleine seems to lean into the idea that she may have been the type of person who took on positions of authority and was seen as a mediator and go-getter within the troupe. There was an evolution of the female servant archetype from the passive *confidente* to the more active *suivante* role. This is a big achievement in the portrayal of women on stage because Dorine is outspoken (not in a negative sense) during a time where servants would not dare to speak in such ways to those above their station. Dorine and the *suivantes* are equivalent to lady companions, this archetype onstage that was introduced and developed during this period stemming from the *confidente* character archetype. In France, the hierarchy of servants placed *suivantes* in a liminal space in terms of status. Their duties included assisting their mistress in dressing and grooming so they had a more intimate relationship directly with their superior. Another element that sets them apart from other female servants is that they possess "if not some education, at least a talent for matters of fashion and etiquette...she would usually profit from her proximity to the mistress in sharing her more comfortable living conditions." (Gaines 32) which means this archetype was caught between two worlds. They were servants but not quite so low in their pedigree that they would serve in a chambermaid role. Being taught the skills necessary to fulfill certain social standards and give women just enough skills to make them useful but not so much that they try to break convention.

Dorine throughout the play is bold and not afraid to let her opinion be known. She plays an active role in the play. One of the voices of reason that Orgon refuses to acknowledge because of his obsession with Tartuffe. Just because Orgon is master of the house he really is not, it is his

family and servants who manage the running and success. Speaking out of turn was something servants were not able to do yet, Dorine is able to get away with it because of the lack of a firm hand within the household management.

A moment that demonstrates her confidence and powerful characteristics is in Act II Scene III, After Orgon tells Marianne she will be betrothed to the hypocrite Tartuffe, Dorine is shocked by her mistress' submission, saying:

**Dorine:** Have you entirely lost your voice and heart?

Why must I continue playing your part?

To think you allow such a mad proposal

Without voicing even a meek refusal!

**Mariane:** How can I resist such a harsh patriarch?

This conversation presents an interesting scenario being performed on stage representing the two ways women are viewed offstage. Mariane represents the traditional Ingénue character and Dorine represents the bold and independent character. By doing so Madeleine as Dorine is introducing a new way for women to “behave”. She challenges the status quo, Dorine is trying to bolster Mariane to stand up for herself. There is a transfer of power being shared and Dorine encourages Mariane to stand up for herself and not be a people-pleaser in this moment because it may seem dramatic but her life is at stake here and Dorine does not want Mariane to suffer the fates of many women at the time. Also, if Mariane married Tartuffe then Dorine would also be stuck having to live in the same household with him for the rest of her life and that is definitely something worth fighting for, her sanity and peace of mind.

In Act II Scene IV there is a comedic dynamic, when Mariane and Valere are having their lover's spat, Dorine serves as a go-between the lovers in order for them to not make the mistake



of being so mad at each other they break up. Here is where we see Dorine as an active participant in making sure everyone gets their happy ending. But not before having a little fun of her own, in the beginning of the scene she takes an observer role to see as she later puts it:

**Dorine:** [to Mariane]. I think, perchance,  
You've lost your mind through extravagance,  
And I've only allowed you to go on  
Like this to see what folly you might spawn.

Before involving herself when it seems as though Valere might leave for good. In most comedies, there always has to be a “straight man” to juxtapose the absurdity of the other characters actions and Dorine serves this purpose by getting pulled into the chaos of the household and making sure everyone gets their happy endings. She likes to let the characters live their own lives but will intervene if necessary when they get off track and begin to spiral. All for her own amusement of course because there are very few when you are a servant in this crazy family.

Her intellect is demonstrated later when Dorine is the one who formulates the plan to get Tartuffe thrown out of the house by having Elmire pretend to be interested in his advances and be “caught in the act” by Orgon. Before this ruse can begin, Dorine has to first sow the seeds in Tartuffe and see her use her sexuality as a tool in order to warm Tartuffe up so that Elmire can push him into giving into his lust. Unfortunately the plan does not succeed due to Damis getting too hot-headed and interrupts the plan before it can succeed giving Tartuffe time and opportunity to switch the situation back into his favor. Thankfully, the entire play up until this point has been the household’s reactions and opinions on Tartuffe but it is in this scene we get to see him in full

force and witness his true behavior. Right out of the gate the audience sees right through to his hypocrisy and misogyny when he tells Dorine:

**Tartuffe** [taking a handkerchief from his pocket]. Wait! By our Savior,  
Please! Before you speak, take this handkerchief.

**Dorine.** Why?

**Tartuffe.** Because seeing your bosom causes me grief.  
Through one's eyes one's soul may be wounded,  
And then sinful thoughts may grow unattended. (III.2)

Tartuffe further proves the age-old aggravation of men policing what women choose to wear (I am looking at you public school dress codes). But, Dorine knows what she's doing, this was intentional and in slightly delving into fashion history, the 17th Century was actually quite raunchy in their clothing (at least for women) where the décolletage was displayed more with the option of a *fichu* (kerchief) to cover the neckline in “in case of cold weather or pruderie” (Gaines 29) whereas in more puritanical centuries (the 19th in particular), the day time clothing women would be completely covered up and then evening was when the neckline would be lowered but in the 17th Century this was not the case at least around the 1660s when this play was written and performed. In a world where men have all the power, women must use everything they have to gain any sort of standing for advancement. Much like Madeleine and her fellow actresses who portrayed these characters, while doing it for the love of theatre and performing she and others took the power away from men by being these unattainable objects of desire being separated by a fictional world.

The two things that convince Orgon of Tartuffe's hypocrisy is when he is trying to seduce Elmire and when he is about to lose all his property and possessions. He does not believe or have

trust in his family to take them at their word. He came so close to destroying everything because of Tartuffe's sway over him and this breaks down conventions because it is the father figure who is responsible for the security and well being of his family and staff (to some extent). So Dorine, Elmire, and Marianne are all at the mercy of Orgon and his flights of fancy. No matter how hard they try to convince him to get rid of Tartuffe he does not listen, not listening to the other men in the play as well. Playing into that belief that women are not to be taken seriously and showing that no one can get through to Orgon. While demonstrating that even what appears to be the wisest and strongest willed men can easily be taken in and swayed by the hypocrisy of the church and clergy plus the dangers of being fully swept away with religion.

#### Frosine and Dorine: Spot the Similarities

Both Dorine and Frosine use their sexual appeal as a tactic in order to outwit the patriarchy and those around them. But, Frosine uses it for her own personal gain, to earn money to settle debts, while Dorine uses her sexuality in order to help others and in turn herself by getting Tartuffe herself. Elmire mentions that she is resorting to using her sex and she does not take pleasure but she knows this is a last resort. Dorine and Frosine probably do not mind it as much as Elmire because from a lower social standing they would be aware of what works the best in order to get the job done. But, Dorine also has wit seen throughout the play that helps in turns the tide in her favor by parrying Tartuffe comment mentioned earlier about her décolletage by saying: "For I could see you nude from top to toe/Without your pelt setting my cheeks aglow."(III.II) which made me laugh out loud when I read it, which demonstrates how timeless comedy can be and that Dorine does not mind as much using her sexuality as a means to an end. Any opportunity to truly mess with Tartuffe brings Dorine great joy so it is worth it.

At the conclusion of the play, Dorine takes a passive role similarly to Frosine, as Dorine does interject a couple of lines but once again the problems are solved by the men. In this case it is a *deus ex machina* and I use this term because during the *Ancien Régime*, the King of France was seen to be the closest person to God so the term *deus ex machina* works for this resolution. It is nice to see one of Madeline's characters be active in the plot which is why as time went on she specialized in *suivante* roles because they were the closest thing to having autonomy as a woman onstage. This very well could have been Madeline's life if she had not entered the acting profession or her social standing was just high enough to avoid having to become a *suivante*. The conflict was resolved by the men; but it was actually the women who saved the day. It was Elmire and Dorine that did the only productive work in getting Tartuffe exposed. So even though the King is the one who removes the problem for good, it was all because of the strength of Dorine and Elmire.

#### Connections to Madeleine's Life

Going back to the idea that *suivantes* lived in an in-between space in terms of the household hierarchy. Which in Madeleine's life was similar because she was caught between two worlds as an actress. She had the skills to move in the higher circles due to her social class but her chosen profession was marginalized within society. For all her accomplishments she would have been seen as lower due to being a performer. I like to assume that was how she liked it, because in doing so she was allowed more freedoms and opportunities than other women at the time. She made her own money, owned property and lived life according to her own terms while still being able to function within the bounds and morals of society. Why would she want to give that up? Dorine, she could also have chosen to marry and gain some semblance of financial security through those means but then she would have had to put all her stability in the hands of

someone else. Dorine is almost what Madeleine's mother could have been if she did not marry Joseph BÉjart or Madeleine herself could have become if she did not want to be a mistress or an actress.

Another similarity shared between Frosine, Dorine, and Madeleine goes beyond the script and takes us into the realm of meta in that Molière notoriously originated and played the roles of Harpagnon and Orgon respectively, both are curmudgeons and cuckolds which comes up in a lot of contemporary study of Molière due to the fact he was an older man married to a young woman. Let us look at the relationship between his two characters and Madeleine's two characters. Dorine does not like Tartuffe (I mean who would?) but she does enjoy teasing and causing him distress in their short tête à tête, always finding a way to draw out his hypocrisy either for the audience or for other characters within the play.

There is another parallel to Madeline's life and career that can be explored. Let us say that Molière is the King in this situation, the one who does the actual getting rid of Tartuffe, he will be the one who will gain the most praise for his noble actions. Molière is given all the praise and celebrity for his works which is fair because his writing is significant but what if it was the work of Madeleine and later Armande who were the real celebrities who did the work to make Molière's work so successful. It goes back to the old saying of "behind every great man is an even greater woman" but as is the case sometimes with history that the even greater woman is forgotten or a footnote in the life of the man she helped with real study into her. History only remembers Madeleine as a lover and an actress but without her supporting Molière from the very beginning all the way back to the Illustre Théâtre he may not have achieved as much fame or notoriety. It is one of those "what if" moments that one can speculate for hours on but we will never truly know. But it is exciting to create scenarios and use the information available to create

stories that are more plausible. Although, we can only create stories to a certain extent because it has to be deeply rooted in the documents and evidence that is available.

An aspect that speaks loudly throughout these comedies is that some (if not all) the men are, quite frankly, imbeciles while it is the women who were the strong, reasonable, and rational characters. In a subversion and disruption of the patriarchal structure highlighting its fragility and follies. In *Tartuffe*, it is Orgon that is seen as the impressionable damsel in distress as it is through his actions that allow Tartuffe to have the power and control he has. In *The Miser* it is Harpagon's greed that alienates and creates a mockery of himself. In *Les Précieuses* it is Mascarille and Jodelet the faux noblemen who act in a foppish manner attempting to pass as suitors to the young ladies. Empowering the female characters while keeping them in their respective gender roles (more or less) in order to not be considered too different or unrealistic to audiences and be taken somewhat seriously (as much as one can in comedy). While also going against the cultural stereotype that women were irrational while in the play they are the most rational and intelligent characters onstage. Madeleine being the independent woman she was led to Moliere writing the characters to reflect her and by doing so empowers the women in the audience to embrace their inner strength moving forward through their lives.

In conclusion, Dorine and Frosine are great characters that bring to the story a person who seems to be the straight (wo)man enveloped in the chaotic farcical situations of the other characters within the play. Out of all the characters Madeleine had played I feel as if Dorine is the, of the two discussed within this study closest to her own personality aside from the fictionalized version of herself in *Impromptu de Versailles* because even though she is a servant she still has an ability to speak her mind and be heard by others not letting society prevent any

woman from marrying her love and not giving into the preconceived notions of how women should act in the world.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Part 1 was about going through all the material available on Madeleine's life in order to create a foundation for the character analysis presented an interesting opportunity to see where scholars used common information that was available while making new discoveries and discourse on her life. Not a lot of research has been done on Madeleine in English and most of the sources I consulted were in French presenting a challenge that between my spattering of French that I took in high school and Google translate allowed the language barrier to be easier to work through. I was amazed at delving into her life stories and just how independent she was, not giving into society roles for women and in doing so challenges the public perception of how we should be viewing the past. Unraveling the past and trying to find the strength and power within Madeleine herself apart from her characters allowed her story to be heard. While yes, it was very restrictive for women there were other ways they could exert their power and find ways that were not marriage to create their own lives. That is what Madeleine did, she worked within the system she was prescribed to live in. It was shocking during the chapter on narratives about her to see how others wrote about her as a performer and finding the few quotes that were used across all the research written on her that spans centuries of scholars. Lastly, in this part I learned that just because the media and history tells one story, does not mean it is the whole story.

In Part 2, there were a lot of discoveries that I made that were intriguing, especially taking these well known characters and finding the hidden power they wield even though they would be considered secondary characters. The only downside was that they were in the servant or lower class position and not giving the high society women audience members a chance to see reflected onstage a strong character from their social class. The double meaning of words and



different interpretations centered around Frosine being an “intriguing” woman was one of the first things that drew me closer to this research trying to figure out through the text exactly what Molière meant by this and what it revealed about the character and about Madeleine herself. Also, drawing similarities between the two characters was something I had not considered before I got into the work and started to notice the similarities between the two characters who came from two widely different backgrounds and portrayed by the same actress. It is not often in contemporary theatre, do we see playwrights write for their actors as much as Molière and others at that time did because the idea of acting troupes where each member specializes in one type of role is no longer practiced as much.

### Legacy

How are legacies defined? It is through a combination of achievements (whether large or small) made by a person that has left a lasting impression on the world. Madeleine’s legacy is one that challenges our preconceived notions of life in the 17th Century showing that it was possible for a woman to live an independent life with a career not in prostitution or desitution. Armande plays an important role in Madeleine’s legacy because it is largely because of her that we have the Comédie Française and Molière’s works were not lost to time especially if it is true that Armande is her daughter it would be continuing the legacy of a family of women starting with Marie Hervé. Armande was the one who petitioned to get Molière buried in the church yard when it was not allowed for actors to be buried on consecrated ground unless they renounced their profession. A legacy does not have to be massive and earth shattering, it is what certain people mean to either the culture at large or the researchers who seek to highlight the importance of a particular figure. It is usually the people in the majority that dictate legacies and in Madeleine’s case it was unfortunately left in the hands of men who saw her as nothing more than

an actress who slept with the playwright who later married her young daughter or sister. In order to make Molière look better in the eyes of puritanical Victorian England and post revolutionary France. The lack of personal papers or diaries does not help her case and even if there were they would be lost to time.

How much of Molière's success can be attributed to the two most important women in his life? It may have been Molière's words but it was Madeleine's vibrant performances and of her castmates that sealed the works into the theatrical canon. Molière is still making headlines to this day, as of this year a movement started to induct Molière into the Panthéon as another star in its literary and cultural sky. But what about Madeleine, just because she did not write the text should she or her castmates like Mlles de Brie and du Parc not be deserving of credit and given ample study and recognition. In the *New Yorker* article that discusses the push to the Panthéon does it fail to mention or acknowledge Madeleine and the only mention of her is in reference in the quote "he married his longtime actress-mistress's daughter, who, while not his own, still had grown up around him" (Gopnik 1) she is not even mentioned by name! A prime example of how history remembers Madeleine and what this thesis is hoping to rectify to continue towards positive change. Now, obviously that is not the article's intended goal but it is disheartening that in 2022 that Madeleine still has been reduced to this role. Although not the end all be all of research databases, Wikipedia even has little to say about Madeleine at least on the English version of the site. The French Wikipedia offers a bit more information but does not go into extreme detail compared to Virginia Scott's books.

What were the labors accomplished by Madeleine in attempts to gain equal power for women on and off 17th century stages? When evaluating this question it is important to understand that it is not so much that Madeleine did anything monumental that shook the very

foundation of theatre, it is more about the smaller seemingly insignificant moments that can be viewed as changing the landscape of women on the stage. Just through her portrayal of strong female characters, even though they are in comedies, characters like Dorine and Frosine showed women being capable intellectually in ways never seen before and not having to be tragic like a Medea or Hecuba. Even Madelon challenged societal norms and standards with her overly romanticized view of the world. Madeleine proved that women on the stage can be multi-faceted and do not have to subscribe to the ideas placed upon them by men and the society as a whole. By utilizing both historical documents and the plays I was able to gain a better understanding of the complexities of women both on and off the stage in the 17th Century. Madeleine opened my eyes to look beyond what the narrative tells of her and remind myself not to get carried away and sensationalize her even if it was in a positive connotation because I wanted to present the version of Madeleine that highlights her in a way that does place her on a pedestal and show the closest to realistic version of her as a working woman worthy of praise. Although Dorine and Frosine were written through the male gaze but through the act of performing Madeleine could have shifted it into the female gaze because ultimately it is her voice and her personality shining through and I think it is fair to assume that Madeleine would be the type of person who would have something to say if she did not like a particular line, I mean if she chose the roles she played then she would definitely have something to say about her character's dialogue.

### Personal Reflection

When I began this study I came across periods of self-doubt that many scholars and academics come across from time to time. Plagued with questions like: am I making a mountain out of a molehill? Is this even important? To that, I say yes, it is important because the ways in which narratives have shaped the fame or infamy of women throughout history needs to change.

Madeleine should not be relegated to that of mistress with her accomplishments as an actress being overshadowed by scandal. For too long the accomplishments of women in theatre have been diminished or have been branded as scandalous for wanting to achieve something better or bigger for themselves. Yes, actresses were known to also be mistresses but they did that for themselves and to have a roof over their head and some semblance of security or become prosperous. At the end of the day, all these actresses were working women doing what they loved. Why was I having these feelings that it did not matter? These feelings could be indicative of how women often minimize their achievements in order to not be seen as vain and as such had carried over into my own personal work on this writing. As with Madeleine and her life, I should not be minimizing these acts or accomplishments but see it as the culmination of all these moments that inspires change. It does not happen overnight as we have seen even some of the same problems are present in contemporary views of actresses. It makes one wonder what it could have been like for her if she had chosen to go to a different theatre in order to advance her career and gain more fame for herself instead of attaching herself to Molière and their company. Everyone seemed enthralled by her abilities, one of those magical “what if” moments scholars have when viewing historic material. All I hope for Madeleine is that she felt fulfilled and content with her life and career.

### The Future

Questions for the future to consider in the study of actresses and their contributions and larger legacies are bountiful. I would think it interesting to re-examine the lives and careers of other notable actresses continuing on from the 17th Century and branching out up until the 19th or even early 20th Century due to the evolution of how society viewed the profession of acting as a whole to the perceptions of actresses. How do these same questions change in countries like

Spain or non-European countries? Analyzing how the roles those actresses play revealed about themselves or how women were portrayed as a whole. Expanding into looking at actresses from a global perspective and cultures as a means of looking at the information from outside the euro-centric viewpoint. This could lead others to reevaluate how we study and research the lives of actors and actresses and in doing so analyze their impact through textual and historical backgrounds.

## Definition of Terms

La: In French it means “The”, a definite article. Actors and Actresses in the 17th Century used/were given this prefix to denote their place in society and not being granted the polite term.

Le récit: translated means “the story”. In terms of the thesis I take it to mean the narrative or stories that have been told by others about Madeleine.

Mademoiselle: The prefix normally given in the French language to young, unmarried girls but was also used for actresses regardless of their marital status.

The nourrice: Nurse/ go-between stock character played mostly by men up until the middle of 17th century. Was later replaced by the confidente.

The confidente: Secondary stock character that was the first to be exclusively played by women in 17th Century French Theatre. These characters were around the same age of their mistress, what we would now think today as the best friend type character.

The suivantes: a lady’s maid or a companion, normally a character who serves as a confidant and/or messenger for the jeune fille/femme.

The jeune fille/femme: The young girl or young woman ingenue stock character. Usually accompanied by her suivante.

ancien régime: the political and social system in France before the Revolution of 1789. The system in which the King was chosen from God to rule and thus should be held as the center of the universe. The monarch most associated with Moliere, Madeleine and the troupe was King Louis XIV or better known as the Sun King who was a champion of the arts and wanted to

cement France's place as a cultural epicenter. Also the King that made Versailles into the grand palace that it is today. Where the distribution of wealth was not evenly spread out, so you had extreme poverty and extreme wealth.

Préciosité: The French literary style which arose in the 17th century from the lively conversations and playful word games of les précieuses.

les précieuses: The intellectual, witty and educated women who frequented the salon of Catherine de Vivonne, marquise de Rambouillet a part of the Préciosité style. Seen as silly and had overly romantic notions of life and how it should be.

Female Gaze: Representing the gaze of the female spectator, character or director of an artistic work, but more than the gender it is an issue of representing women as subjects having agency.

Male Gaze: The perspective of a notionally typical heterosexual man considered as embodied in the audience or intended audience for films and other visual media, characterized by a tendency to objectify or sexualize women.

Molierist/Molieriste: A movement in the 19th Century of intense research and academic debate surrounding Moliere and his work. Celebrating him as a shining beacon of French literary and theatrical brilliance.

Galanterie: anything from flirting to extra-marital affairs and courtesans belonged to this "world" of galanterie.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Part I- Methodology/Madeleine Biography

Harris, Joseph, and Julia Prest. *Guilty Pleasures: Theater, Piety, and Immorality in Seventeenth-Century France*. Yale University Press, 2016.

Theatre had for the longest time been denounced as immoral and corrupt. Debates during this time arose in response to the material being written and then performed on stage. Using this text to delve into the problems facing all theatre artists in this time period is helpful for coloring in the missing aspects of the culture Molière was trying to hold a mirror up to and through Molière, Madeleine had it worse being that she was an actress and a woman. This information demonstrates what the troupe faced as theatre was both condemned and applauded. Also, having this information will help me analyze women's place within this debate over morals and "guilty pleasure" as an essay within the book describes reaction to theatre at the time. Introducing the prejudices people had especially clergy and nobility against the profession and artform will lead into discussion of the methodology behind

Gethner, Perry, and Melinda J. Gough. "The Advent of Women Players and Playwrights in Early Modern France." *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 44, no. 2, University of Chicago Press, 2016, pp. 217–32, <https://doi.org/10.1086/688689>.

This article gives an overview of the origins of professional actresses in France starting from around the 1500s and the impact it had on how plays were written. Discussing the influence of Italian Commedia troupes that were performing across the country and for



Royalty. The article also discusses new female character archetypes that were introduced due to the increase in professional actresses. While also mentioning that women were playwrights at this time but not many published their works. Opening up discussion about the fact that women were playwrights but were not usually produced.

Gustave Larroumet. "UNE COMÉDIENNE AU XVII E SIÈCLE: MADELEINE BÉJART."

Revue des deux mondes, vol. 69, no. 1, Revue des Deux Mondes, 1885, pp. 123–57.

This source is an early biography on Madeleine and her relationships with Molière, Modène, and Armande. This is one of few research materials focused exclusively on Madeleine's life. Written in 1885 most likely during the resurgence of researching his life and works. While the 19th Century may not be the most reliable source for getting a true account of Molière and Madeleine's life due to the puritanical society and wanting to portray the narrative of Molière being a shining beacon of theatrical genius and possibly cover up his less than stellar accolades, it is still important to see that research has been done on Madeleine earlier than contemporary sources and there was interest in the person who was a standout performer who never quite got the chance to shine as much as others in the troupe.

Jurgens, Madeleine. "L'aventure de l'Illustre Théâtre." Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de La France, vol. 72, no. 5/6, 1972, pp. 976–1006, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40525025>.

This article on the history of the Illustre Théâtre is our first look at Madeleine's attempt to start a theatre company with her siblings and Molière. Although it was a failure this was an important moment in the life of Madeleine because from there the troupe would tour throughout the French countryside. One of the questions that can be discussed is whether

this was helpful to her career or harmful to it since she wasn't in the cosmopolitan society and glittering world of Paris. She was lauded as a terrific actress but was mostly known as excelling in tragedy rather than the more popular and money-making comedies at the time. From this text understand the troupe's early days as a rag-tag group of people who wanted to make theatre.

Jurgens, Madeleine, Elizabeth Maxfield-Miller, and France des Archives de. "Cent Ans De Recherches Sur Molière: Sur Sa Famille Et Sur Les comédiens De Sa Troupe". Paris: S.E.V.P.E. N, 1964.

This source book compiles all the available documents and research on the lives of Molière and those associated with him. This book provides me with a paper trail of sorts for Madeleine and her business affairs among other things. Descriptions of her business affairs are included along with pictures of original documents, deeds, contracts and the likes are a part of this compilation. Paper trails are hard to come by sometimes when working in the Early Modern period so it is good to have access to documents from that time period to create a well-rounded picture of the person you are studying. In having these documents I can use it to fill out the picture of who Madeleine was and the ways in which she was a trailblazer of her time.

Scott, Virginia. *Molière : a Theatrical Life*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

This book gives a detailed biography of Molière's life and his journey to become one of the most celebrated French playwrights. For my research there are many references to Madeleine Béjart, an entire chapter dedicated to her. Since her professional and personal life was so intertwined with Molière's, this text gives the reader insight into her career

trajectory and influence on Molière. While some biographies only describe Madeleine as “the mistress” Scott does a good job of giving Madeleine the importance she deserves and as a figure worthy of study.

Scott, Virginia. *Women on the Stage in Early Modern France : 1540-1750*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

This book gives insight into the culture and society that actresses like Madeleine lived and worked in. How actresses were viewed, written, and talked about by society. I will use this information to lay the foundation for exploring how Madeleine broke through those barriers as an independent woman in a patriarchal society. Understanding the time period is important to analyzing the characters written by Molière for Madeleine and seeing the ways they are pushing the boundaries of the world they lived in. Seeing what early modern actresses had to deal with and how they rose to notoriety (good or bad) from the Commedia troupes first introducing the idea of women on stage up to a little bit before the Revolution. I was drawn to Scott’s work in particular because she has the most well-rounded and comprehensive information about Madeleine that portrays her as a human and does not take sides along with presenting information about actresses as a whole during this time period.

## Part II- Her Roles

Herzel, Roger W. “The Original Casting of Molière’s Plays.” UMI Research Press, 1981.6

This source is useful because it discusses and lists the members of the acting troupe and what roles they played in Molière’s works. I am using this text as a reference to be able to

accurately account for which roles were written for Madeleine and to see the bigger picture in terms of the range she portrayed in his plays. This is important because having as much information available in the cast list helps to discuss the patterns of character types she played throughout her entire career in Molière's plays and correlate it with personal life events like the marriage of Armande and how it may or may not have affected Madeleine's career. As each of the troupe members had a specific type of character they specialized in helping to find the shifts in types as they grew older or retired completely. From this available list I will choose the plays and characters that I will explore in depth as a representation of her overall career.

Kennedy, Theresa Varney. *Women's Deliberation : The Heroine in Early Modern French Women's Theater (1650-1750)*. First edition., Taylor and Francis, 2016,  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315576329>.

This book assisted my work in establishing how heroines were expected to be presented onstage and using it as a way to see how Moliere challenged that through Madeleine's characters showing the differences between Frosine and Dorine to the stereotypical depiction of women.

Scott, Virginia. "Conniving Women and Superannuated Coquettes: 'Travestis' and 'Caractères' in the Early Modern French Theatre." *Early Theatre*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2012, pp. 191–213,  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43499609>. Accessed 25 Apr. 2022.

This text explores the different archetypes that women were portraying onstage and new types of characters that were being developed as more women were performing in troupes. It is important to understand how women were portrayed onstage and finding the

correlation to their personal lives and careers. I will be using this source to analyze character archetypes and further understand the type of roles available to women. As I mentioned previously each troupe member specialized in a specific type of role from the Ingénue to best friend and to unpack the archetypes. Understanding the function of these roles will help in the next part when I am analyzing the works of Molière and how he wrote these archetypes and the purpose they served in the text. Along with what is revealed about Madeleine in these roles written for her through Molière's eyes and the overall male gaze.

Gaines, James F. *Social Structures in Molière's Theater*. Ohio State University Press, 1984.

I will be using this source to explain the intricacies of society at this time to see how Molière subverts and satirizes these structures within his plays. The plays I have decided to discuss matters such as money or the management of a household (or lack thereof), this book discusses things from money to the bourgeois class. Also, it is important in the study of Madeleine because it helps with understanding just how stable or unstable she was financially at given points in her career. Many books discuss the cost of running the theatre companies. Everyone back then was either lending or receiving loans to support their endeavors and to gain a better insight into the inner workings of the world these people and characters lived in. Understanding for instance, the value of money is beneficial for studying *The Miser* because Harpagon is obsessively greedy about money or when unpacking the failure of the Illustre Theatre due to financial troubles seeing how much monetary value is placed on objects such as property and furnishings that Madeleine may have helped purchase for the troupe and to gauge how successful she was in her career.

Molière, and Albert Bermel. *One-Act Comedies of Molière*. New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1992.

From this collection I will be focusing on *The Rehearsal at Versailles*, a one act play written by Molière, we see fictionalized versions of the playwright and his troupe. While this is a fictional portrayal of real people this is probably the closest we will get to the personalities of the troupe. Madeleine playing a version of herself is something fascinating to study because there must be some truth to the writing. I want to try and separate the fiction element and cross reference it with what I have learned about Madeleine herself to create a picture of who she was and how Molière saw her. Since at this point in time he has married Armande which adds another interesting dynamic between the former lovers and her family.

Molière. "Tartuffe". Project Gutenberg, 2009.

This is one of Molière's more famous and well-known works and in the study of Madeleine I will use it to analyze Dorine, the character she originated. Dorine fulfills the soubrette archetype where the witty female servant has a more active role in the action of the story. In the discussion of how Molière writes for Madeleine and what it reveals about her own personality through the character and how she is showing a different type of woman instead of being the submissive Ingénue character type. Dorine takes an active role in the plot

Molière. "The Miser". Project Gutenberg, 2004.

In discussing this play I will analyze the character of Frosine, another character Madeleine originated. The way the character is described as an “intriguing woman” is an interesting archetype to analyze and how she interacts with the other characters including Harpagon, who was played by Molière. The role is one that requires a sly wit to it which Madeleine thrives at but it is not a servant character which she normally played in other works. This character is a lot more conniving, looking out for her best interests at the end of the day and will do all she can to get what she wants. The interesting aspect is that the character is not from the servant class but as someone possibly living in genteel poverty as her main goal is to get paid so she can repay a fee.

Molière. “Les Précieuses ridicules” . Project Gutenberg, 2004.

This text demonstrates a role that Madeleine played where Molière plays her love interest. The role of Madelon is such a departure from Epicharis or even Dorine. Showcasing a time where she played a character that is “silly” compared to the sharp witted characters she normally plays. Another interesting notion is that Molière plays her character’s “love interest” for what seems to be the first time since Madeleine mostly played the suivante characters in his plays. In this text Molière is satirizing the les précieuses and holding a mirror to them

### Part III- Legacy

Chevalley, Sylvie. “Armande Béjart, comédienne.” *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France*, vol. 72, no. 5/6, Armand Colin, 1972, pp. 1035–51.

In order to understand the legacy that Madeleine inspired and began it is important to look at Armande who continued her sister or mother's (who's to say at this point which narrative about that is true) work in bolstering Molière's rise to notoriety. This biography of Armande gives us insight into her life and her role in the love triangle between her, Madeleine, and Molière. Since she is the one that carried on his legacy and played a large role in the founding of the Comédie Française which is still producing today keeping the work of Molière alive and well. Apart from the question of who her parents actually are, we tend to lose the person behind the scandal and rumours that abound. Since she was in close proximity to Madeleine, Armande must have learned a lot by working with her sister/possible mother.

Lacour, Léopold. *Les maîtresses & la femme de Molière*, par Léopold Lacour; préface de m. Maurice Donnay. Éditions d'art et de littérature [c1914].

This book is a stunning example of the legacy of Madeleine such that a large portion of this book is about Madeleine's biography and her relationship with Molière and the Comte de Modène. This is a testament to her legacy because there were writers in the 20th Century writing about her and there is mention of a play called *Le Menage de Molière* which discusses the events pertaining to the marriage of Armande to Molière showing just how long this relationship and partnership has enthralled scholars and artists. What I am hoping to accomplish is separate the woman from the scandal a bit to give Madeleine the proper credit where credit is due.

Gopnik, Adam. "Molière to the Panthéon!" *The New Yorker*, 1 Feb. 2022.

[https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/Molière-to-the-pantheon?utm\\_bra](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/Molière-to-the-pantheon?utm_bra)



nd=tny&utm\_social-type=owned&utm\_medium=social&mbid=social\_twitter&utm\_source=twitter.

This article describes contemporary/recent events in the news where there is a campaign to get Molière inducted into the Panthéon. In terms of my research it is important to understand that while yes, he should be applauded for the work and contribution to theatre, we shouldn't forget the women in his life that played just as important a role in his success and notoriety. We should owe a large part of Molière's success to Madeleine because of how interlaced their lives were and her tenacity and intellect. Madeleine was described far and wide as a great actress but we hear so little about her other than Molière's mistress and possibly Armande's mother.

## VITA

Katherine E. Jackson was raised in Knightdale, North Carolina. In 2020, she graduated Magna Cum Laude receiving her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Education and her North Carolina K-12 Professional Teacher's License in Theatre.