

*ET C'EST LA FIN POUR QUOY  
SOMMES ENSEMBLE*

Hommage

à

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**THE BLIND READING THE BLIND :**  
**FROM *LE GARÇON ET L'AVEUGLE* (1281)**  
**TO *BLINDNESS AND INSIGHT* (1981)**

Is the so-called "black humor" of modernity not really modern ? Humor in the Middle Ages is often said to be darkly tinged with "cruelty" because medieval authors made fun of subjects we consider taboo, like the blind and infirm. Typical is the following from Emmanuel Philipot, an historian of early French comic theater :

La robuste gaîté de nos aïeux admettait volontiers dans les contes à rire une dose de cruauté qui les rendrait aujourd'hui insupportables. Le fait a été remarqué maintes fois ; bornons-nous donc à rappeler que les aveugles étaient considérés comme des personnages comiques et que pendant tout le moyen âge le public des représentations de mystères a ri aux éclats des tours que leur jouaient d'ignobles valets (30).

Philipot refers in particular to the early play *Le Garçon et l'aveugle* (ca. 1281), in which a blind beggar is beaten and mocked by his servant. His statement of the problem ("robuste gaîté [...] aujourd'hui insupportables") is calculated to elicit our indulgence with respect to the unpolished mores of "nos aïeux". In the same vein (with the same presumptive superiority that European historiography would impart to the then-emerging subdisciplines of anthropology and ethnology), the literary medievalist Gustave Cohen demanded, with mock incredulity and fatherly indignation : "Comment le Moyen Age, et même le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, ont-ils pu rire des aveugles et s'amuser des tours pendables qu'un coquin de garçon leur jouait ?" (1912:150).

Cohen compared various versions of this scene, which he admitted he found "bien révoltante", from the 13th century to the 16th. Looking mainly at Old French drama, he found ten farces, moralities and mystery plays, and the fabliau *Les Trois aveugles de Compiègne*, all of which "présentent un dialogue grossier et plaisant entre un aveugle et son valet, mais, quant à la lettre de leur texte, aucun d'entre eux ne ressemble à l'autre" (146). Faced with such evidence, he could only conclude that his revolting theme was not an isolated phenomenon, and that the Middle Ages in general had little sympathy for the blind and the infirm.

More recently (1982, 1989), in three introductory studies preceding his new translation of *Le Garçon et l'aveugle*, Jean Dufournet presented a *mise au point* synthesizing all major research devoted to the play since it was first published in

1865. The first of his studies is text-critical and interpretative. The second reviews the avatars of the play in the 14th through 16th centuries (this is essentially Cohen's 1912 project, recast by Dufournet with more information and acumen). The third broadens in scope to assess the general problem of "L'Aveugle au Moyen Age" (49-84). Here Dufournet surveys a wide selection of information (literary, sociological, demographic, medical and psychological) documenting the ambiguous status of the blind and infirm in medieval society. Ambiguous because on the one hand there was no lack of sympathy and respect for the blind : alms and charity were encouraged and even required by a social system whose stability depended on the tautness of its moorings in Christian thought. And yet the blind person remained essentially "un marginal plus ou moins suspect, méprisé, ridiculisé, par crainte des faux mendiants, hostilité à leur vie plus ou moins régulière, ou effet d'un symbolisme réduit à son sens littéral et rejoignant des superstitions millénaires" (78-79). This fear, suspicion, and hostility can be explained in part by sociological factors :

L'aveugle, passant la majeure partie de sa vie dans la rue, devint fatalement un des personnages de l'imagerie populaire, un personnage tirant vers le bouffon par ses outrances, son accoutrement, sa démarche tâtonnante, sa faiblesse qui le prédispose à être victime des tromperies, des mauvais tours et des moqueries ; et surtout un personnage suspect qui passe pour expier une faute et que l'on assimile à la masse des mendiants, vrais ou faux, honnêtes ou vicieux, infirmes ou paresseux : pour l'opinion publique, l'oisiveté, qui est en soi un crime, porte en germe tous les crimes (66).

Dependent on alms, and thus in competition with other indigents of all varieties, the blind come to specialize, as it were, in theater : "gens de spectacle, ils font partie du décor de la rue qui retentit de leur cri... De là, leur présence dans des intermèdes comiques : leur destin était, au bout du compte, de faire rire" (64). They are thus the object both of derision, and pity. This "ambiguity" is not so hard to fathom, and Dufournet opens an interesting perspective (which he does not pursue) in pointing out that, today as in the Middle Ages, "lorsque le voyant pense aux aveugles, c'est pour lui-même qu'il a peur" (79). We will return to this important insight in some detail further on. It will suffice for the moment to suggest that the "ambiguity" of the blind person, which we will explore as a transference sequence of identification and dis-identification, is rooted in the primordial human terror of separation in its various forms : mutilation, castration, annihilation. All of which point not to "cruelty", but to fear. Hence Jean Dufournet's conclusion, and our point of departure : "Bref, rire des aveugles au Moyen Age était sans doute le plus sûr moyen d'exorciser la terreur d'une infirmité très répandue" (80).

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Rather than blindness as a "theme" (content structure), we will look at it here in two other guises : a) blindness textualized as a narrative strategy (in the paradigm of invisible or disguised, the pair unseen/unseeing appears as a metonymic mirror-image of each other and functionally interchangeable in certain plot structures) ; and b) blindness theorized as a problem in reading, or rather, as Paul de Man has argued, *the* problem of reading. Both strands of my argument converge in rejecting the view of medieval comic irony as an instance of "cruelty".

*Le Garçon et l'aveugle* is the oldest comic text extant from French drama. It takes place in Tournai (Flanders). A blind beggar hires a boy to help him find his way about the city, and to collect alms from passersby as the blind man sings. Pretending to ask alms from imaginary bystanders unseen by the beggar, the boy soon reveals himself, in asides to the audience, to be not only deceitful, but coldly predatory. Complaining that no one will give them anything, he threatens to leave his new master, whereupon the beggar reveals that things are not as bad as they look : he has money hidden away at home. The audience now understands that *both* are dishonest — not what they appear. They then quarrel, exchanging obscene insults, and here the famous ruse occurs. Saying he is going to relieve himself, the boy disguises his voice and pretends to be one of the bystanders in the street ; in this role he affects outrage at the obscene language he has just heard from the beggar, and proceeds to flog him with a stick. Then, with a wink at the audience, he turns to his master and asks in his real voice, "Why didn't you call me for help ? I was close by". Having accompanied the beggar home, the boy makes off with his master's fat purse and coat, addressing to the audience the moral of the story (I'm divesting this fraud of his undeserved wealth), and to the blind man some parting jibes : "Find yourself a new valet... I'm off to enjoy your money... If you don't like it, see if you can find me !" A mildly sordid little tale, easily rewritable in any of a number of ways ; indeed it has continued to recur, in both low- and high-culture forms, in theater through the ages, and could easily *faire les frais* for an episode in any of a number of TV *feuilletons* bounced off satellites each night into the salons and saloons, the huts and high-rises of our global village.

In comparing the numerous medieval versions of this scene, Cohen dutifully set out, in the mode of his day, to track down all possible paths of transmission and influence, his goal being to ascertain the "origins" of the scene. Hopelessly enmazed in sources, he declared both competing theories of his predecessors — ecclesiastical origins (Wilmotte) *vs* popular origins (Creizenach) — to be plausible but inconclusive, and opted for the only positive (in the methodological sense) way out of an otherwise totally unsatisfactory (because inconclusive) investigation. His move — at the time a perfectly viable and reassuring critical alternative — was simply to *reverse the direction* of the genealogical search : instead of looking backwards in time, he would portray his medieval authors as "worthy forerunners of Molière". This allowed him to conclude on a rousingly positive note, affecting modestly that for him it will have been enough,

à défaut d'apporter des solutions sûres, d'avoir fait mieux connaître une de ces scènes vivantes, spirituelles, alertes de style et d'allure, d'un comique si imprévu, si franc, si ingénieux et si plaisant, qui comptent parmi les parties les plus durables et les meilleures de nos mystères... (150).

If this alone is sufficient reward for the humble researcher, it is because (in Cohen's perorational climax) the scene of the blind man and his servant shows the authors who used it to have been nothing less than "de modestes mais dignes ancêtres de Molière". But no sooner has the totemic name passed from his lips than he begins a retraction. Aware of his exaggeration and realizing that Molière never stoops to poking fun at blind people (and yet unwilling to write off his concluding hyperbole because he would then have to write off his whole argument), he tacks on, by way of qualification, a brief postscriptum in which he reduces as follows the problem posed by this scene of the blind man as dupe and victim :

J'ai dit [que cette scène était d'un comique] "ingénieux et plaisant", et ceci soulève [...] un petit problème de "Kulturgeschichte" qu'il est impossible de passer sous silence [one senses he would have liked to]. Comment le Moyen Age, et même le XVIIe siècle, ont-ils pu rire des aveugles et s'amuser des tours pendables qu'un coquin de garçon leur jouait ? (150)

But this "petit problème de *Kulturgeschichte*" is not the sort of question that warrants the attention of the serious historian of medieval French literature. The cavalier condescension of Cohen's blindness is dazzling :

Ce fut sans doute le rôle de la science moderne, de nous faire prendre en pitié ces déshérités : c'est à Haüy que nous devons le respect de l'aveugle, comme c'est à nos aliénistes que nous devons le respect du fou. (150)

From the vantage point of "our" modernity (1912), Cohen could thus admire the verve of our ancestors while deploring their insensitivity. His final gesture toward extricating himself from the confusion of his concluding remarks is to point out that in any case, the blind man evokes no sympathy from the spectator because he is a scoundrel :

Il est très vrai que l'aveugle ne vaut pas mieux que son valet. Il est paillard, cynique, dans ses actes comme dans ses paroles, ivrogne et avare... (151)

We will take up the problem here where Cohen abandoned it. To say that the blind man is unsympathetic only masks the problem : why write a story in which you make a blind man laughable and unsympathetic ?

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The logic of farce requires a character who is dupe and victim, and that that character be unsympathetic. But the characterological features comprising the category "unsympathetic" ("paillard, cynique, ivrogne, avare", etc.) are different in kind from the physical feature "blind". If we were to accept the notion that in the Middle Ages people were cruel because they made fun of the blind and infirm, and that this went on until the modern age (because Haüy had not yet taught us pity for blind people), then we would have to sort out all kinds of other problems in addition to the medieval / modern opposition. For instance, the injunctions in Biblical and classical antiquity against meanness directed against the blind and infirm. The most famous, and it was certainly well-known in the Middle Ages, is Jesus's response to his disciples regarding the blind beggar on the road to Jericho (Mark 10:46-52, Luke 18:35-43). Nor was our so-called "modern" attitude unknown to pagans. "Nam adversus miseros inhumanus est jocus", wrote Quintilian (VI, iii, 33), and it is hard to imagine "modern" viewers feeling more in the way of pity than what Aristotle attributes to Sophocles' audience at the spectacle of blind Oedipus being led off the stage by his two small daughters. (This scene is absent from the Old French version of the Oedipus story [*Roman de Thèbes*, 33-536].) Cocteau's revision of the same scene is brilliant in its play on blindness negated through theatrical illusion : invisible to Creon but not to blind Oedipus, the ghost of Jocasta appears at the end of the play to help him down the steps and onto the road. The simplicity of the language a mother uses to comfort an injured child redoubles shiveringly the pathos of irremediable loss, of unrelightable darkness : "Comment feras-tu, rien que pour descendre seul cet escalier, mon pauvre petit ?" And how could Cohen (and the continuers of his derision-for-the-blind thesis) have forgotten the extraordinary scene in *Lear* (IV, 6) where Gloucester, his eyes put out by Cornwall and Regan, asks to be led to Dover Cliff from which he intends to hurl himself into the sea ? Here again, as in the medieval farce, the blind man is duped by his guide : it is not, as he thinks, a witless beggar who is leading him, but his son Edgar in disguise ; and it is not from a towering cliff that he falls, but from a tiny hillock. The object of the ruse is to convince him that he has survived his fall from the cliff due to the miraculous intervention of the gods, anxious to save Gloucester from suicide. It is in any case clear that Shakespeare's use of the blind-man-as-dupe motif requires that the 16th-century audience feel pity and sympathy for the blind Gloucester.

One final example — a modern one — should not be omitted in our demonstration of the blindness of the "medieval cruelty" thesis. In the theater of Samuel Beckett, the potential for pathos in this very same "scène de l'aveugle et de son valet" is purposely subjected to withering irony (what Beckett called, in *Murphy*, the *risus purus* — the hilarity of the unfunny). Pozzo in *En attendant Godot* is as detestable a blind man as his medieval predecessors, and he too is beaten by those he has mistreated. (Pozzo is beaten by Vladimir, not by his guide Lucky, but the revenge motif is the same.) The audience feels no more sympathy for Pozzo than for Beckett's other blind men, and they are numerous : after Pozzo and Lucky come Hamm and Clov in *Fin de partie*, then Dan Rooney and his boy in *Tous ceux*

*qui tombent*. In all these cases, the same motif — the mutual antipathy of a bitter, ill-tempered blind man and his mistreated servant — is made to serve dramatic and philosophical purposes in which there is never any question of the audience feeling sympathy or pity for a character merely or primarily because he is blind. In Beckett, then, we have a *modern* version of the supposedly "medieval" attitude of making fun of the blind and infirm. The conclusion is clear: *ceteris paribus*, the feature "blind" is apt to evoke sympathy and pity; but since we find both sympathetic and unsympathetic blind characters in the entertainment of all periods, we must conclude that the impulse toward sympathy can be overridden and undone. The question now becomes *how*. I will approach the question from two directions: "how" first in the psychological sense (the question of identification and dis-identification requiring the successive positing of self and non-self in the same object); and "how" in the narratological sense, the latter "how" being the literary textualization of the former.

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Baudelaire in *De l'essence du rire* defines comic laughter (as distinct from joyful laughter) as a form of weakness: the involuntary expression of an illusory feeling of superiority:

J'ai dit qu'il y avait symptôme de faiblesse dans le rire; et, en effet, quel signe plus marquant de débilité qu'une convulsion nerveuse, un spasme involontaire comparable à l'éternuement, et causé par la vue du malheur d'autrui? (980)

Usually the other person's misfortune is a weakness of mind; but at times it is of a much lower type, like blindness:

une infirmité dans l'ordre physique. Pour prendre un des exemples les plus vulgaires de la vie, qu'y a-t-il de si réjouissant dans le spectacle d'un homme qui tombe sur la glace ou sur le pavé, qui trébuche au bout d'un trottoir, pour que la face de son frère en Jésus-Christ se contracte d'une façon désordonnée, pour que les muscles de son visage se mettent à jouer subitement comme une horloge à midi ou un joujou à ressorts? Ce pauvre diable s'est au moins défiguré, peut-être s'est-il fracturé un membre essentiel. Cependant, le rire est parti, irrésistible et subit. Il est certain que si l'on veut creuser cette situation, on trouvera au fond de la pensée du rieur un certain orgueil inconscient. C'est là le point de départ: *moi*, je ne tombe pas; *moi*, je marche droit; *moi*, mon pied est ferme. Ce n'est pas moi qui commettrais la sottise de ne pas voir un trottoir interrompu ou un pavé qui barre le chemin. (980-81)

*La sottise de ne pas voir...* Does such laughter bespeak cruelty? Baudelaire's point is the opposite: that it is unconscious, involuntary, and profoundly human. The incongruous laughter provoked by the unfunny distinguishes civilized (fallen) man from the perfection and serenity of the supernatural, the natural, and the innocent.

Comic laughter points to what Baudelaire calls the "essential contradiction" of the divided human :

Le rire est... dans l'homme la conséquence de l'idée de sa propre supériorité ; et, en effet, comme le rire est essentiellement humain, il est essentiellement contradictoire, c'est-à-dire qu'il est à la fois signe d'une grandeur infinie et d'une misère infinie, misère infinie relativement à l'Être absolu dont il possède la conception, grandeur infinie relativement aux animaux. C'est du choc perpétuel de ces deux infinis que se dégage le rire. Le comique, la puissance du rire est dans le rieur et nullement dans l'objet du rire. Ce n'est point l'homme qui tombe qui rit de sa propre chute, à moins qu'il ne soit un philosophe, un homme qui ait acquis, par habitude, la force de se dédoubler rapidement et d'assister comme spectateur désintéressé aux phénomènes de son moi. (982)

Commenting on this passage (and leaving aside the Pascalian infinities), Paul de Man organizes a number of insights intuitively connected but not fully worked out in Baudelaire's text : feeling of superiority; "essential contradiction" ; interiority of laughter ; *dédoublement*. The key notion here is the last one ; and, as we shall see, it is the common denominator of the other three. De Man's major clarification consists in showing this *dédoublement* to be a product of successive language pictures in time, what he calls "the rhetoric of temporality".

The nature of this duplication [*dédoublement*, l'existence dans l'être humain d'une dualité permanente, la puissance d'être à la fois soi et un autre] is essential for an understanding of irony. It is a relationship, within consciousness, between two selves, yet it is not an intersubjective relationship. (212)

It is not intersubjective because, of the two selves which constitute the relationship (an anterior and a present self), the former has already become an object, safely reified (a 'thing of the past') as a 'no-longer-me.'

At the moment that the artistic or philosophical man laughs at himself falling, he is laughing at a mistaken, mystified assumption he was making about himself. In a false feeling of pride the self has substituted, in its relationship to nature, an intersubjective feeling (of superiority) for the knowledge of a difference. (214)

But now if we apply, as we must, de Man's blindness-and-insight dialectic to his own text, we are obliged to note that his moment of greatest insight here (that irony consists in the rapid *dédoublement* of two discontinuous selves) masks a moment of concomitant blindness, as he attributes a superior ("wiser") "ironic consciousness" to the writer (the "artistic or philosophical man") as opposed to the ordinary, non-selfreflective reader or spectator. This opposition is carried over from Baudelaire's discussion where a second self able to function as "disinterested spectator" was posited in the conjectural mode ("à moins qu'il ne soit un

philosophe...") :

The man who has fallen is somewhat wiser than the fool who walks around oblivious of the crack in the pavement about to trip him up. And the fallen philosopher reflecting on the discrepancy between the two successive stages is wiser still, but this does not in the least prevent him from stumbling in his turn. It seems instead that his wisdom can be gained only at the cost of such a fall. The mere falling of others does not suffice ; he has to go down himself. The ironic, twofold self that *the writer or philosopher constitutes by his language* seems able to come into being only at the expense of his empirical self falling (or rising) from a stage of mystified adjustment into the knowledge of his mystification. The ironic language splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity. (214, my emphasis)

But in what sense is this "wiser" linguistic self a superior one ? The sentence that follows the preceding development comes close to totally overturning the "wisdom" it asserts :

This does not, however, make it into an authentic language, for to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic.

But there is worse : in the flash of the ironic moment where two selves are seen to succeed each other (identification and dis-identification), the second (now-demystified) self constituted in language at the "present" moment is, in fact, itself an already-thought, already a has-been receding in its turn into what retrospection had only just recognized was the "mystified adjustment" of the (first) alter ego. Thus in Baudelaire's example of the man falling in the street, just as in the case of the blind man duped in the farce, laughter is no more a sign of wisdom than is the sneeze Baudelaire equated it with. Since no idea of the "self," former or putative present, is any less reified than any idea of the "other" (both are neural events representing to consciousness the already *non-self in the present moment*), the mechanism of irony ultimately ends up functioning no better for the philosopher than for the ordinary spectator of the ironic event. Both live in the same treacherous rhetoric of labile temporality ; that is, in language. And so, consistent with the pattern de Man elucidates, his analysis offers something more, and something better (more profound) than what its author thought it was offering : in this case, that ironic incongruity is an effect of the discrepancy between successive constitutions of the self in time, *but always in the past*, and never to much avail against the present or future<sup>1</sup>.

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1. The leading cognitive theorist of Baudelaire's time, Franz Brentano, concluded that all such accounts of simultaneous doubling of the self were wrong, since "one cannot observe at the same time that one experiences" (*Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte*, Leipzig, 1874). Contemporary research in cognitive science nowadays

Now, how does this get textualized? While the remarks that follow are directed toward *Le Garçon et l'aveugle*, they should also work for any text that depends for its effect on the dis-identification sequence of irony. (A tempting example would be Baudelaire's own "Assommons les pauvres!" from *Le Spleen de Paris* [304-306], but that would lead us too far afield.)

The problematic nature of the comic in the scene of the blind man as dupe has to do primarily with the feature "dupe", and only with the feature "blind" in a way that is secondary, accessory, artificial — almost, indeed, abstract (in the sense that the grammatical relations underlying speech are abstract). The narrative conventions of the farce and fabliau require, as mentioned above, a dupe or victim. Whatever the plot, whether 'simple' (le mari trompé) or 'compound' (le mari et l'amant trompés) or 'complex' (le trompeur trompé — this being the most successful formula in the Middle Ages, from *Le garçon et l'aveugle* to *Pathelin*), the pleasure of the spectator always derives from the sense of ("poetic") justice at "seeing the bad guy get what's coming to him". In our example, the beggar is, in the words of the text, "fel et envieux," or, as Cohen has it, "paillard, cynique, ivrogne et avare". The fact that he also happens to be blind need not be confused with his vices, but can be seen as a functional necessity of *farce-structure*. The latter, we recall, requires that vices be punished. Since blindness is not a vice, and thus cannot (overtly) be the object of punishment, its functional valence (minus / seeing /) is here put to use to enable the author to obtain a mistaken identity, which is necessary for the just punishment to occur. That is, blindness here serves the same structural function as disguise does in dozens of other farces (cf. Bowen, 39-40); both are variants of the more general category of mistaken identity.

This appears more clearly when we contrast the narrative strategies of theater with those of romance. When Chrétien de Troyes wants to make Yvain invisible, he simply provides him with a magic ring, and Yvain disappears. Readers of Chrétien will recall the comic scene in which the invisible Yvain evades a room full of adversaries who, says Chrétien, "d'ire eschaufé, Par mi la sale le queroient", flailing about wildly with swords and sticks "*com avugles*" (the notation is a telling one) while Yvain, and the reader, watch in amusement (1074-79, 1132-43). Obviously the author of *Le Garçon et l'aveugle* is unable to render the valet invisible, so instead he simply makes the beggar blind. It was essential in either case that the valet be able to exact without reprisals the punishment required by the conventions of the genre (*à trompeur, trompeur et demi*; *à méchant, méchant et demi*), and the disguised-voice ruse can succeed only if the dupe is unable to *see* the duper. Thus the particular structural requirements of farce, as distinct from romance, can be seen to account for both choice of character, and manner of characterization, in that order. Given the necessity for a dupe, i.e. a character who is deceivable or somehow blind (literally in this case), it then becomes necessary to render that character ridiculous

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attributes this impossibility to the nature of perceptual filtration and the limited capacities of information channels in human neurophysiology.

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or odious (in this case deceitful and vile) to prevent the audience from sympathizing with a functional entity who needs above all to be dupe and victim.

It is important to note, before concluding, that this idea of "blindness" is so central, universal and permanent in comic plot structure, that it is difficult to find a comic plot *without* the element of blindness in one form or another. In *Le Garçon et l'aveugle*, blindness functions as a structural metonymy, a linear displacement of non-visibility achieved by substituting a sightless dupe for a hidden or disguised duper. Ionesco uses a different blindness metonymy in *Les Chaises* when he crowds the stage with a legion of invisible guests. Similarly, any comic *malentendu* or *quiproquo* involves the failure of a character to perceive the appropriate requirements of a situation ; he is "blinded" by a certain character trait, or by circumstances, or else he is duped, has "the wool pulled over his eyes", by another character. Finally, the most universal category of the comic, the *comique de mots*, is also ultimately a metonymic form of blindness, in which language functions simultaneously to disclose and obscure features of the mental pictures it evokes : in Molière, for example, the comic character invariably skews the words (mental representations) spoken to him, does not "get the message", or in a colloquialism more suited to our discussion, does not "see the point". In the same way, the comic intransigence which is a constant in Molière's plays (Arnolphe, Alceste, Argan, etc.) is nothing less than the *refusal* to see (e.g., Orgon to Mme Pernelle : "Je l'ai vu, dis-je, vu, de mes propres yeux vu !").

These examples of literal, metaphoric and metonymic uses of blindness as a structural device in comic representation could be easily multiplied ; but it is sufficient here to have established that vision hampered or prevented, literally or figuratively, is an essential element, perhaps *the* essential element of comic plot structure. It has nothing to do with the "cruelty" of the medieval spectator, and everything to do with what Baudelaire called our essential "double nature", *l'existence dans l'être humain d'une dualité permanente, la puissance d'être à la fois soi et un autre*, an Other we revile and deride with the obsessive insistence that can only be born of the troubled view we have of our own succession of selves in language.

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