

To the Reader

I printed this play with all the impatient haste one ought to do, who would be vindicated from the most unjust and silly aspersion woman could invent to cast on woman, and which only my being a woman has procured me: *That is was bawdy*, the least and most excusable fault in the men writers, to whose plays they all crowd, as if they came to no other end than to hear what they condemn in this. *But from a woman it was unnatural*; but how so cruel an unkindness came into their imaginations I can by no means guess; unless by those whose lovers by long absence, or those whom age or ugliness have rendered a little distant from those things they would fain imagine here.—But if such as these durst profane their chaste ears with hearing it over again, or taking it into their serious consideration in their cabinets, they would find nothing that the most innocent virgins can have cause to blush at, but confess with me that no play either ancient or modern has less of that bugbear bawdry in it. Others to show their breeding (as Bayes¹ says) cried it was made out of at least four French plays, when I had but a very bare hint from one, the *Malade imaginaire*,² which was given me translated by a gentleman infinitely to advantage; but how much of the French is in this, I leave to those who do indeed understand it and have seen it at the Court. The play had no other misfortune but that of coming out for a woman's: had it been owned by a man, though the most dull, unthinking, rascally scribbler in town, it had been a most admirable play. Nor does its loss of fame with the ladies do it much hurt, though they ought to have had good nature and justice enough to have attributed all its faults to the author's unhappiness, who is forced to write for bread and not ashamed to own it, and consequently ought to write to please (if she can) an age which has given several proofs it was by this way of writing to be obliged, though it is a way too cheap for men of wit to pursue who write for glory, and a way which even I despise as much below me.