SOCIAL CRITERIA

IN THE

DRAMA OF MOLIÈRE

VOLUME II

PART TWO

THE HIERARCHY AS DEPICTED BY MOLIÈRE

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1. KING AND COURT.

Chapter One.

Royal Participation in Molière's Comedies.

It is logical to begin at the top of the social hierarchy in which Molière lived and for which he wrote, since his greatest works were composed in the ambiance of the court, and were intended primarily, as we have seen, for royal entertainment.

This immediately poses two questions: to what extent did Louis XIV himself appear in Molière's comedies, either in person or less directly through allusions made to him by other characters on the stage? Then, in a wider sense, what picture of kingly function, duty, and prerogative emerges from the plays?

An examination of the complete works reveals that

there are several plays, - five, to be exact (1) - in which Louis either participated personally, or in which some element of royal influence and inspiration may be traced. This would seem remarkable, since the comic genre in classical French literature is essentially concerned with "low-life" characters, or at best, middle-class protagonists. Aristocrats and kings belonged properly to the realm of tragedy in an age so acutely conscious of the tenet, "a place for everything, and everything in its right place". Yet, on closer inspection, it is seen that three of the five plays mentioned are not pure comedies in the tradition of, for example, L'Ecole des Femmes or Tartuffe. La Princesse d'Elide is described as a "comédie galante"; Mélicerte is characterized as a "comédie pastorale héroïque", and Les Amants Magnifiques, although termed simply, "comédie", is systematically interspersed with "entrées de ballet", and its original title was Divertissement royal, suggesting that in fact it was more an entertaining spectacle than a serious piece of dramatic art.

Unsatisfactory though conjecture may be, some idea can be gained of Molière's attitude to the latter

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(1) L'Impromptu de Versailles (1663), La Princesse d'Elide (1664), Tartuffe, (1664), Mélicerte (1666), and Les Amants Magnifiques (1670).

sort of commission from His Majesty, from the fact that he permitted Corneille to contribute more than half the text of the "tragédie-ballet", Psyché. (1).

Apart from the hybrid nature of the works intended to provide spectacle as well as amusement (i.e. comedy with elaborate visual effects, ballet-dancing and mime in the pastoral convention to musical accompaniment) there is also the fact that dramatists did not always adhere conscientiously to the principles set out arbitrarily by theorists of classical drama, like Jean Chapelain. (2). The social milieu of Le Misanthrope is exclusively aristocratic; in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, Dorante and Dorimène, elegant members of the nobility though they are, appear in the midst of Monsieur Jourdain's bourgeois household. Practice is usually more flexible than theory, and seventeenth-century comedy is no exception to that rule. It is not therefore altogether surprising that in Tartuffe, the King himself (clearly Louis XIV) should intervene to put to rights a situation that can only be retrieved by some deus ex machina. The nature of the intervention, in any case, is such that the agent, by not appearing physically on the stage, preserves some of that remoteness which might be expected of

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(1) Of the 2134 lines of Psyché, some 1100 are of Corneille's composition.
(2) See Part One, Chapter 4, pg.125

one in so lofty a station.

Similarly in L'Impromptu de Versailles, the characters before the audience, - Molière's troupe appearing as themselves, - are in an unenviable situation that can only be relieved by clemency on the part of the King, and, as in Tartuffe, the King's goodness finds expression in relenting towards the unhappy persons in danger of incurring his displeasure.

The above remarks serve merely as an introduction to the rôle of King in Molière's plays; obviously there is much more to be said on this subject, and a more detailed analysis will now be made of the works relevant to this section of the present study.

Chronologically, the first comedy to consider is L'Impromptu de Versailles. Staged at Versailles in October, 1663 before the King, there can be little doubt that the play was an undisguised dramatic version of the sort of situation in which comic actors and their director frequently found themselves when pressed to prepare some form of entertainment for their patron at short notice. As the title suggests, the action takes place at Versailles, in the "salle de la comédie". The director of the troupe, Molière himself, summons his players to re-

hearse for the first (and last!) time an improvised comedy to be performed immediately after the rehearsal in the presence of the King and court. None of the actors is familiar with the part to be played, and not even the director of the troupe has any clear idea of the plot upon which his players must construct their actions. Tension mounts as no progress is made with the rehearsal, and the time for the command performance steadily approaches; then, when disgrace seems inevitable, a message is conveyed to the company that the King, "par une bonté toute particulière",(1) has decided to postpone the performance of the new play, and will be satisfied for the present with whatever production can be staged at the troupe's earliest convenience. The relief and gratitude of the director on receipt of such tidings may well be imagined, and the play ends with his enthusiastic utterance of these sentiments.

Much of the interest of this comedy, for posterity, lies in the fact that it gives us an insight into the rôle of a man in Molière's position in relation to the players in his company. Moreover, it provides us with an interesting example of the way in which popular dramatic literature of the mid-seventeenth century could be used as a vehicle of expression for the ani-

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(1) L'Impromptu de Versailles, sc. XI, Couton edition, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, Vol. I.pg.698.

mosity existing between rival troupes of the period. In L'Impromptu, the company under attack is that of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. The persons associated with that establishment (1) had not only incurred Molière's contempt for their affected acting-techniques, but had also roused his resentment for their plagiarism of his ideas and their gratuitous criticism of his acting. Besides, their malicious remarks about his conjugal life invited some sort of retaliation from the "comédien du Roy". This aspect of the work, however, is not strictly relevant to the present study, and has been mentioned only in order to set the play in the context of those circumstances surrounding it. Accordingly, in the discussion that follows, little or nothing will be said of the motivation of L'Impromptu; it is essentially with the part of the King in this comedy that we are concerned here.

The first reference to the Royal Person occurs in the first scene, (2) after Molière, in his capacity as troupe-director, has assembled his performers to explain what is expected of them: in reply to Mlle. de Brie's "De quoi est-il question?", he announces that the King is due to arrive in two hours' time, and that the interval should be profitably employed

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(1) Chief of whom were Boursault, Montfleury, Beauchâteau and H auteroche.
(2) op. cit. pg. 676

in rehearsing the play chosen on this occasion for the royal entertainment. Thus the situation of Molière and his company is explicitly stated, and the comic confrontation between a harassed playwright/producer and a refractory cast takes place in an atmosphere of growing tension. No small part of the difficulties with which the former has to contend stems from the difference in attitude to the King's requirements existing between himself and his players. Their collective reaction to his dilemma is, that it is unreasonable to expect a polished production "en huit jours", as Mlle. Béjart puts it. (1). It is interesting to observe that none of the company dares to remark that the King is at fault for expecting such a feat; their judgement is implicit in their assessment of the matter, in their allusions to "l'impossibilité de la chose", and to "le peu de temps qu'on vous donne".(2). Molière's attitude is less realistic, for to him a command from the King is a command to be carried out regardless of whether or not it is unreasonable or impracticable. He is moreover far more aware of the august nature of his prospective audience, as his words in scene one show:

> "Et pensez-vous que ce soit une petite affaire que d'exposer quelque chose de comique devant une assemblée comme celle-ci,

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(1) op. cit. pg. 677
(2) Words spoken by Mlle. Béjart: ibid. pg. 677

> que d'entreprendre de faire rire des
> personnes qui nous impriment le respect
> et ne rient que quand ils veulent?" (1)

At the most obvious level, this rhetorical question may be interpreted as a compliment to the great, since it emphasizes their superiority (it is no small matter to undertake the amusement of royalty) and implies that their judgement is absolute (they only laugh when pleased to do so.) On the other hand, there is a slight ambiguity in the actual choice of vocabulary, which would suggest a degree of criticism, albeit very discreet: "imprimer" signifies an action involving coercion, and the respect that is due to kings and lords is, by inference, less spontaneous than induced. As for the remark that such persons "ne rient que quand ils veulent", it inspires the reflection that there is something capricious in the taste of the great; that their appreciation of comedy is perhaps more dependent on their mood than on the quality of the entertainment before them. It is not likely that the King himself, or any member of his entourage, would perceive such ambiguities in these lines as Molière spoke them, nor is it likely that the playwright intended them to, for his livelihood was subject to their con-

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(1) Ibid. pg. 677.

tinued favour and goodwill. But Molière was not the sort of man, as we have seen, to compromise his sincerity by including obsequious and flattering remarks about his royal patrons in his works. If in L'Impromptu, there are suggestions of the unctuousness of one whose living depends on patronage, it must be admitted that they are tempered by the language used to express the respect due to the great.

This respect, indeed, is not questioned for a moment: even when one of the members of the cast suggests that the most logical solution to the difficulty in which the "comédiens du Roy" find themselves is to inform the King that the commission cannot be executed, that the royal will cannot be done, the terms "avec respect" (1) and "respectueuse" (2) soften the refusal to comply with the requirement.

Now comes the most explicit speech pronounced by Molière in the play under consideration, - possibly in any of the plays he wrote - regarding the necessity for pleasing a monarch, and the expectations of the latter where his servants' obedience is concerned. Scandalized by the casual proposal that he should ask His Majesty for an extension of time (3), Molière

(1) In the speech of Mlle. de Brie.
(2) In the speech of Mlle. Béjart.
(3) Mlle. de Brie: "... il fallait ... demander du temps davantage".

exclaims:

"Mon Dieu, Mademoiselle, les rois n'aiment rien tant qu'une prompte obéissance, et ne se plaisent point du tout à trouver des obstacles. Les choses ne sont bonnes que dans le temps qu'ils les souhaitent; et leur en vouloir reculer le divertissement est en ôter pour eux toute la grâce. Ils veulent des plaisirs qui ne se fassent point attendre; et les moins préparés leur sont toujours les plus agréables. Nous ne devons jamais nous regarder dans ce qu'ils désirent de nous: nous ne sommes que pour leur plaire; et lorsqu'ils nous ordonnent quelque chose, c'est à nous à profiter vite de l'envie où ils sont. Il vaut mieux s'aquitter mal de ce qu'ils nous demandent que de ne s'en aquitter pas assez tôt; et si l'on a la honte de n'avoir pas bien réussi, on a toujours la gloire d'avoir obéi vite à leurs commandements..." (1)

The main point made in that piece of eloquence is, that punctual and conscientious execution of the King's wishes is more important than the standard of work produced. The secondary point is that pleasing the King is the sole justification for the existence of his subjects. Even after some allowance has

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(1) Ibid. pp. 677-678.

been made for the fact that this speech is a retort to an uncooperative actress, and is primarily intended as an argument for continuing with the rehearsal, its wider relevance to Molière's position at court cannot be overlooked.

Any indiscretion in the observation that kings expect nothing short of <u>immediate</u> obedience, and that excuses or difficulties displease them exceedingly, is countered by the use of the plural (les rois). This turns what could be interpreted as a mild reproach for intransigence, into a generalization which not even a king like Louis XIV could justifiably contradict. When Molière asserts that the entertainment that has been least rehearsed is always the most welcome to a royal audience, he is no doubt excusing in advance any deficiencies of execution inevitable in a performance prepared in great haste; and that remark is possibly intended to remind the King of the necessity for indulgence at plays past and future, as well as present. So far it has been a question only of the dramatist's obligations to his royal patron, and of that patron's taste. Now comes a more universal, and therefore more interesting, statement about the relationship between royalty and those subject to royalty. The crucial point to resolve here is whether or not the King's servant is speaking tongue-in-cheek when he says, "Nous ne devons jamais nous regarder dans ce qu'ils désirent de nous: nous ne sommes que

pour leur plaire".

If this is to be taken literally, it means that the aspirations, sufferings and needs of the individual count for nothing, and that at all costs the King's pleasure must be done. As such, it is a remarkably complete expression of humility. If, on the other hand, it is possible to interpret it in the same light as previous lines spoken by Molière in L'Impromptu, it will be seen to be tinged with ambiguity: in this case, the ambiguity of sarcasm, implying the injustice of subordinating personal feelings and values to the gratification of one man's whims and fancies. Yet to read such a meaning into these words is to assume a certain equality between servant and master, subject and King. Such a notion would be entirely foreign to seventeenth-century thinking. For all his independence of opinion, it is hardly likely that Molière would have dared to make the assumption of equality between two individuals of widely differing rank, and least of all in the court of the very King upon whom his living depended. Any suspicion of disrespect or criticism latent in his extreme statement of what is due to monarchs must accordingly be rejected. The last sentence of the speech under consideration merely takes up again the first idea expressed, namely, that a commission promptly and indifferently

carried out is preferable to a commission carried out perfectly, but late. The intricate arrangement and complicated syntax of the sentence suggest the elegant speech of the courtier, and incline one to believe that here, Molière is simply bowing to convention by including a graceful compliment to his King in the dialogue.

After this rather lengthy outburst, Molière abruptly returns to the matter in hand: the rehearsal. (1) Thereafter the saucy exchange continues between himself and his players, and the principal interest of the play centres on the choice of subject-matter to be presented. Apart from the reiteration of the fact that it is the King who has commissioned the work (2), the royal patron fades for a while into the background.

At the beginning of scene six, at a point when the "rehearsal" has disintegrated into a chorus of protest from the participants, the King's arrival is announced to complete the troupe-director's despair.

> "Le Roi a de la bonté, et il sait bien que
> la chose a été précipitée",

declares Molière. Again, this is the sort of

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(1) He says, "Mais songeons à répéter, s'il vous plaît". - pg. 678.
(2) For example, when La Thorillière enters, in sc.II.

remark calculated to appeal to the royal spectator, indicating as it does the essential humanity and reasonableness of the sovereign. It is significant that when the various "nécessaires" (1) harass the company with their repetitive cry of: "Messieurs, commencez donc," Molière refuses to believe that this uncompromising order comes from the King himself, preferring to attribute it to the officiousness of the messengers:

> "Eh! que de gens se font de fête, et viennent dire: 'Commencez donc', à qui le Roi ne l'a pas commandé!" (2)

The impression that the King is a kindly, understanding person is then confirmed by the dénouement of the last scene: Béjart (3) reassures the distraught producer that as soon as the King was made aware of the company's predicament, he gave permission for a postponement. The crisis is over, the tension relaxed, and Molière's concluding speech contains some of the hyperbole to be expected of one in his position. It might seem excessive to a twentieth-century mind that what is, after all, a relatively small concession should be termed "la plus grande grâce du monde" (4), and that a gesture costing such a little effort should constitute "extrêmes bontés". (4). It is, however, all

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(1) "Nécessaire" is the precious term for a lackey.
(2) In scene IX.
(3) Béjart is described as "homme qui fait le nécessaire".
(4) Scene XI, pg. 698.

too easy for the modern scholar analysing Molière's drama to apply post-enlightenment standards to the situations depicted in the plays. Even after one has penetrated the stylised language used to express gratitude to royalty for a favour conferred, there remains the idea that the favour itself is magnified by the very fact of the inequality existing between benefactor and beneficiary. This inequality, in Molière's time, was far from being the artificial barrier separating persons of equal worth that post-enlightenment thinking has made it. Some of the exaggeration in Molière's gratitude to his King may be explained by convention; the rest, by a very real awareness of disparity in rank.

L'Impromptu de Versailles, as we have noted, was staged in October, 1663. Between Christmas of that year and Lent in the following, a ballet version of Molière's comedy, Le Mariage Forcé, was performed at court, and the King participated. The libretto of the ballet indicates that His Majesty danced a minor rôle as one of the Egyptians in the third "entrée de ballet". As G. Couton remarks, (1), this was not one of the sumptuous, elaborate fêtes for which the first years of Louis' reign were noted. It took place in one of the Queen Mother's apart-

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(1) Vol. I of his 1971 edition of Molière's works, pg. 701.

ments at the Louvre, and the performers included a few professional dancers, several court-nobles, and the King; there were no ladies from the court present. The comedy itself served merely as a pretext for the dancing, which was after all the feature of the entertainment that mainly concerned Louis. When, the following month, (February, 1664) Molière staged the comedy itself for the Parisian public, there was no longer any element of royal participation in Le Mariage Forcé.

However, the comedy was performed in mid-May, 1664, at the end of that series of amusements known as Les Plaisirs de l'île enchantée, and although it is not certain whether the King appeared in the "entrées de ballet" on that occasion, it is possible in view of his rôle in the "Plaisirs". It was on the second day of these week-long festivities marking the inauguration of Versailles that Molière's La Princesse d'Elide had its première. Indeed, Molière and the Troupe de Monsieur, as they were then called, were the principal purveyors of entertainment during this glittering, protracted piece of extravagance.(1). The spectacular aspect of the "Plaisirs" was already manifest on the first day of these innocent diversions, when Louis, gorgeously attired as Roger (Ariosto's

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(1) It was remarked at the time that the "Plaisirs" were "un véritable festival Molière".

hero) executed feats of equestrian skill with the more eminent of his courtiers (1) and recited lines of poetry celebrating altruistic grandeur of the sort commonly attributed to himself. That day, members of Molière's troupe contributed their talents to the display, taking rôles such as those of the Centuries of Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron; Pan, Apollo and Diana. This set the atmosphere for the new play to be performed the following evening.

To lend some sort of continuity to the proceedings, La Princesse d'Elide was presented within the context of the "Plaisirs" as an entertainment offered by "Roger" and his gallant company to the Queen. The fact that it was dedicated in reality to Mlle. de La Vallière, whom the King had courted assiduously since 1661, in no way detracted from the charm of such an offering made by the King to his Queen, - at least, as far as the elegant and sophisticated audience assembled at Versailles was concerned. Some indication of Louis' eagerness to arrange the "Plaisirs" for his mistress may be discerned in the haste with which Molière was obliged to compose La Princesse. So pressing was the royal commission that the dramatist could not adhere to his original plan to write the entire play in verse: in the first scene of Act II, after 366 lines of alexandrines,

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(1) Among others, the ducs de Noailles, de Guise, and de Foix; the comtes d'Armagnac and du Lude; and the Prince de Marsillac.

comes a wry apology for the necessity of completing the work in prose -

> "Le dessein de l'auteur était de traiter ainsi toute la comédie. Mais un commandement du Roi qui pressa cette affaire l'obligea d'achever tout le reste en prose, et de passer légèrement sur plusieurs scènes qu'il aurait étendues davantage s'il avait eu plus de loisir." (1)

From this we see that the King's part in La Princesse is similar to that he plays in L'Impromptu, inasmuch as he is the instigator of a comedy to be performed before a court audience. The difference between the two plays where the King is concerned, is that the situation in L'Impromptu is hypothetical, whereas in La Princesse it is real. Moreover, in the latter play the monarch's impatience gets the better of his indulgence, - a reversal of the dénouement of L'Impromptu, - and hence the abrupt change from poetry to prose.

What of Molière's reaction to this state of affairs? Despite this inflexibility on the part of his patron, no reproach as such can be detected in the apology quoted above. In stating his intention regarding the form of the play, and the impossibility of carrying it out, the dramatist is merely excusing

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(1) Couton edition, Vol. I, pg. 791.

the disparate nature of his work and explaining that it is not meant to be so. Contemporary spectators would have wasted no time in criticising such a flaw, since harmony and unity are vital qualities in classical masterpieces. What is significant in the "avis", as Molière calls it, is the fact that the sovereign's pleasure was the cause of imperfection in La Princesse. By making this clear, no other justification is necessary: the King's wishes are sufficient excuse in themselves, and everything must be subordinated to them. One is reminded of the words from L'Impromptu: "nous ne sommes que pour leur plaire." Here, surely, is the proof of this statement's validity.

It was in the context of "Les Plaisirs de l'île enchantée" that one of Molière's most controversial plays had its première: Tartuffe. Although the elaborate fiction of Roger and his fellow-heroes caught in the spell of the enchantress Alcine, - the pretext for the entertainments - ended on the third day of the "Plaisirs", the merry-making and frivolity continued a little longer, and on May 12th, Tartuffe was performed by the Troupe de Monsieur before the court. Hostility to the comedy existed in court-circles even before the play was presented: already in April that year, if we are to believe d'Argenson's reference in the Annales de la Compagnie

du Saint-Sacrement (1), there was talk of having the "méchante comédie" banned before it could be performed. The five-year-long struggle in which Molière engaged (1664-1669) to obtain permission to have the ban lifted does not concern us here, and more will be said later of the main protagonists in Tartuffe. For the present, let us look at the King's rôle in this comedy.

As in L'Impromptu, the situation is a hypothetical one: the villainy of one man, and the gullibility of another, have caused considerable unhappiness in what was once a happy and united family. Financial ruin and political disgrace are brought on the heads of Orgon, his wife and brother and two children through Orgon's misplaced trust in the hypocritical Tartuffe; as the plot unfolds the members of Orgon's family are manoeuvred into an increasingly impossible situation, from which there appears to be no hope of escape. The crisis is at its height in the last scene of Act V, when the arrest of Orgon seems inevitable; and at that crucial moment the happy intervention of an enlightened monarch turns the tide against the self-felicitating Tartuffe and rescues Orgon from a wretched plight. In a play depending for much of its point on the spectacle of an actor

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(1) See G. Mongrédien, Documents du 17e siècle relatifs à Molière, 1965, vol. I, pg. 217.

overplaying his part, the King emerges as a spectator unimpressed by the performance (1). True, Elmire, Damis, Mariane, Cléante and Dorine are no more impressed with Tartuffe than the King, but they lack the power to correct the ills caused by the hypocrite's duplicity. When a lucid mind is united with authority, justice may be done, and an order of things threatened may be restored. (2)

That the King is intended to emerge as some sort of hero in Tartuffe is clear from the words of the officer who comes to remove the hypocrite to prison:

> "Nous vivons sous un Prince ennemi de la fraude,
> Un Prince dont les yeux se font jour dans les coeurs,
> Et que ne peut tromper tout l'art des imposteurs." (3)

This is an unequivocal statement of the King's sagacity, and in itself sufficient compliment to the royal judgement; but added to this virtue is the additional merit of humanity, as Cléante's injunction to his brother shows when he speaks of the "bonté" of the "grand Prince". (4).

It may be argued that Molière, having placed his "sympathetic" characters in a difficult position, needed a deus ex machina to resolve matters, and introduced

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(1) On this aspect, see Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect.
(2) An idea developed by J. Guicharnaud, Molière: une aventure théâtrale.
(3) ll. 1906-1908, Couton ed. pg. 983.
(4) ll. 1954-1955, ibid. pg. 984.

the King simply to fulfil the needs of the plot, regardless of whether the dénouement appeared facile. In fact, as G. Couton shows (1), Molière depicts in the ending of Tartuffe something of common practice in the seventeenth century; for the King, as supreme judge of the realm, was empowered to decide the rights and wrongs of individual cases as he saw fit. Tartuffe has denounced Orgon to the King in person, thereby involving the sovereign in the issue. (This too was perfectly possible, for Louis XIV prided himself on the free access he gave his subjects to his person.) (2). The King, having reached a decision, has entrusted its execution to an "exempt" - one of his officials - and this is the scene enacted before the audience in the last scene of Tartuffe. Thus the action of the play is less divorced from reality than is commonly supposed.

So much for the rôle of King in the play itself. It remains to examine briefly the part played by Louis in the controversy that surrounded Tartuffe even before its première. That the King bowed to religious opinion almost immediately is obvious from a report in the Gazette of May 17th, 1664 (five days after the first performance of the comedy), in which it is stated that

"... Sa Majesté, pleinement éclairée en toutes

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(1) 1971 edition of Molière's works, Vol.I, pg.1370.
(2) As is evident from the King's Mémoires, Longnon ed., pg. 24.

choses, jugea (la pièce) absolument injurieuse à la religion et capable de produire de très dangereux effets." (1)

There is little doubt that Louis was not himself opposed to the play, and that its real enemies were the gentlemen of the "Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement", an influential group at court who were instrumental in obtaining the royal interdict on performances of Tartuffe. (2) Besides, although the King went so far as to ban the play, he did not condemn it personally. Molière's attitude to his King in this matter may be deduced from the series of appeals (placets) that he composed in an effort to have the decision reversed: in the first, we find -

> "Bien que ce m'ait été un coup sensible que la suppression de cet ouvrage, mon malheur, pourtant, était adouci par la manière dont votre Majestè s'était expliquée sur ce sujct; et j'ai cru, Sire, qu'elle m'ôtait tout lieu de me plaindre, ayant eu la bonté de déclarer qu'elle ne trouvait rien à dire dans cette comédie..."

as well as references to the "plus grand roi du monde et le plus éclairé", and a humble resignation to whatever the King may decree:

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(1) Quoted in G. Mongrédien, op. cit., vol.I, pg. 216.
(2) Molière makes it clear in the Préface to the first edition of Tartuffe (March, 1669) that Louis was not hostile to the play.

"... les rois éclairés comme vous... voient, comme Dieu, ce qu'il nous faut... Il me suffit de mettre mes intérêts entre les mains de Votre Majesté, et j'attends d'elle, avec respect, tout ce qu'il lui plaira d d'ordonner là-dessus." (1)

This is, of course, the language of a man in a subordinate position craving a favour from one infinitely above him, and the terms in which Louis is mentioned are correspondingly deferential. There is no suggestion of bitterness at the King's failure to support Molière in the Tartuffe issue; merely a respectful justification of the motives behind the play and reiterated hints at the King's soundness of judgement. The last-mentioned feature is absent from the second appeal made to Louis to have the ban lifted. The point emphasized there, is that the real enemies of the play are influential at court:

"Je ne doute point, Sire, que les gens que je peins dans ma comédie ne remuent bien des ressorts auprès de Votre Majesté..." (2)

and it is less the King's wisdom than the King's power that is invoked in the later "placet". This may be seen in the choice of vocabulary, in words like "daignera" (3) and "le monarque qui fait trembler toute l'Europe" (4). In the third and final appeal,

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(1) Couton edition, pg. 891, vol I.
(2) Ibid. pg. 892.
(3) Ibid. pg. 892.
(4) Ibid. pg. 893.

there is a return of the emphasis on Louis' generosity: the word "grâce" is mentioned four times in two short paragraphs, and "faveur", twice, as well as the inevitable "bontés". All of which gives the impression that, despite prolonged disappointment, no real disenchantment with royalty influenced the "comédien du Roy". Meanwhile, other royal requirements had to be met, and a major commission came at the end of 1666, at Sant-Germain-en-Laye, when all the theatrical troupes were bidden to combine their talents in a series of entertainments beginning with Le Ballet des Muses, in which the King danced together with Madame, Mlle. de la Vallière and Mme. de Montespan. This ballet gave its name to the whole sequence of dancing, music, singing and acting that took place for the King's amusement on the occasion in question; and it was during Le Ballet des Muses that two of Molière's plays were presented: Pastorale Comique and Mélicerte. The place of the first play in the "Ballet" is debatable, but it seems that it was introduced between the third and fourth "entrées". The pastoral convention, as may be expected, is the basis of the action, and lovelorn shepherds pay court to an insensible shepherdess, are rejected, and console each other amid maudlin tears. The names (Corydon, Lycas, Filène, Iris) are the standard ones in this type of entertainment, as are the situations in

which the characters are shown. The King danced a minor rôle as one of the eight peasants who separate the fighting rivals-in-love.

The more interesting of the two works is Mélicerte. The setting is pastoral, the atmosphere, romantic; the story, that of two lovers in a Romeo and Juliet situation, but, unlike Shakespeare's characters, saved from desolation by long-lost identity rediscovered. It was precisely the sort of "precious" theme that would appeal to the audience before whom it was enacted, and it is perhaps worth noting that Molière never included it in his repertoire for Parisian audiences at the Palais-Royal theatre. It remained essentially a play for the court. ("Héroïque", - the epithet with which the genre is qualified - signifies that the persons involved in the action are of high birth.)

There is nothing to suggest that Louis took part in Mélicerte, but the comedy furnishes another example of royal interference with the dramatist's work. Only 600 lines of the play are completed, and this is explained by a footnote added by the editors of the 1682 publication of Molière's works:

> "Cette comédie n'a point été achevée; il n'y avait que ces deux actes de faits lorsque le roi la demanda. Sa Majesté en ayant été satisfaite pour la fête où elle fut

> représentée, le sieur de Molière ne l'a
> point finie." (1)

Again, it may be seen that the King was ready for the play before the playwright, and that although the work was incomplete, the King's request had to be met. The fact that His Majesty was satisfied with that portion of the work that was finished in time for the "Ballet" suggests the adequacy of the other pieces performed at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. In any case, it is likely that Mélicerte was little more than a light diversion to help fill in the time allotted to the entertainment. The King would hardly have been disposed to accept the part for the whole if the play was intended as the main feature of the amusement. Molière's failure to add the remaining scenes implies the extent to which Mélicerte was written to please his King; once Louis was satisfied, the rest ceased to matter.

Also attached to the Ballet des Muses is the comedy, Le Sicilien, performed before His Majesty by the Troupe du Roi in January, 1667. This play was a sort of afterthought, as is proved by the addition of an extra "entrée" to introduce it. It is only mentioned here because Louis appeared in the masquerade preceding the actual comedy: he took the part of a "Maure de qualité", as opposed to the

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(1) Quoted in the Couton edition, Vol. II, pg. 316.

other, inferior categories of Moors. ("nus" and "à capot").

The next play by Molière in which opportunities were created for the King to dance is <u>Les Amants Magnifiques</u>, presented at the "Divertissement Royal" for February, 1670, but already by that date there was a new austerity, a slight diminution of exuberance, in royal entertainments, and Louis had possibly taken to heart the reproach in <u>Britannicus</u> (December, 1669) concerning talents unworthy of an emperor (1). The result was that the monarch resisted the temptation to display his merit as a dancer during the "carnaval" of early 1670, preferring instead to show his dignity as a King. (Much to the embarrassment of two journalists, who, carried away by loyalty to the Crown, had proclaimed in advance the grace and majesty of the King's performance as Neptune, then Apollo, in <u>Les Amants Magnifiques</u>. Those rôles were filled by the Comte d'Armagnac and the Marquis de Villeroy respectively.)

The disappointment Molière must have experienced at Louis' non-participation in the "entrées de ballet" of his play was doubtless mitigated by the compliment paid him in the fact that he, and not Bensserade (who usually provided court-ballets) received the

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(1) (Boileau attributes the King's sudden refusal to dance, to this speech addressed to Nero, <u>Britannicus</u>, ll. 1471-1578)

commission. Besides, he could hardly have attributed the King's withdrawal from the dancing to dissatisfaction with his work, since the over-all tone of the Royal Entertainment tended towards sobriety, and the sovereign's restraint was merely in keeping with this atmosphere.

So much for the plays obviously connected with royalty. Before summing up, however, some mention should be made of a comedy of Molière's composition in which there is implicit relevance to Louis XIV. This is Amphitryon (first performed in January, 1668). The theory that there is a parallel between Amphitryon-Alcmène-Jupiter in legend, and M. de Montespan-Mme. de Montes pan-Louis XIV in fact, was first put forward in 1835. (1) Suspicion had been aroused as early as January, 1665, that the Marquise de Montespan was claiming a share of the royal attention, and this was confirmed by subsequent evidence; by June, 1667, it became clear that a new mistress was ousting Mlle. de La Vallière. To pretend that nobody was aware of this at a court where gossip was rife and where intrigue formed an integral part of daily existence, would be naïve to say the least. It was certainly not the sort of situation to be taken seriously, or to be regarded as fraught with tragic implications; and far from alienating sympathy from the King, it

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(1) By Roederer, in his Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la société polie en France.

quite possibly increased his popularity by showing his all-too-human susceptibilities. The allusions in Amphitryon to the husband's honourable dishonour

("Un partage avec Jupiter
N'a rien du tout qui déshonore"
- 11.1898-1899)

and the amused comment that

"Le seigneur Jupiter sait dorer la pilule" (1)

would not have been taken amiss, even if their relevance to the King's amours were glaringly obvious. Besides, Molière could always plead fidelity to the original version of the comedy as Plautus had written it, thereby allaying any suspicions of irreverence to His Majesty.

It is interesting to note that contemporary reaction to the "glorious weaknesses" of Louis XIV was not at all what the twentieth-century observer would expect. With the exception of the more rigorous Catholics attached to the court (2), opinion at large inclined to favour the King while showing hostility to the wronged husband. In Amphitryon, the same sort of bias emerges, despite the lucidity of comment at the end of the play. Even if the King's conduct had not been judged favourably, it is doubtful whether any remark or comic allusion

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(1) (Act III, scene x, 1.1913).
(2) Particularly Bossuet, who had some telling observations on the subject in l'Avent de Saint-Germain.

on the subject would have been suppressed, since respect for the monarch did not preclude amusement, albeit discreet, at his shortcomings.

From the above survey, several deductions may be made. First, the extent of Louis' direct participation in Molière's comedies is slight. In L'Impromptu de Versailles and Tartuffe, the King is essential for the resolution of the plot, but does not appear physically on the stage. In the case of La Princesse d'Elide, the King is a participant in the entertainment that serves as a setting to the play, and it is clear that the work itself is a royal commission. Similarly, Mélicerte formed part of the amusements at another such "Divertissement Royal", and its tone, subject-matter and characters suggest that it was written to please the King, as does its unfinished form. As for Les Amants Magnifiques, two rôles (admittedly of a somewhat decorative nature) were specifically created for the King in the ballet preceding the play itself. The fact that at the last moment His Majesty failed to fill the rôles does not alter the author's intention that he should participate.

The degree of the King's influence in Molière's work is significant. It generally takes the form of pressure to meet deadlines for special occasions such as the festivities that usually took place at court

between Christmas and Lent, or celebrations of royal achievement such as the building of Versailles.

This latter aspect of the King's share in Molière's comedies is to be seen not only in some of the plays dealt with above in detail, but also in works like Psyché (in the editor's preface to the reader, "les ordres pressants du Roi" are mentioned)(1); and in the "livret" prefacing the Grand Divertissement royal de Versailles of 1668, in which Molière's George Dandin was featured. In this introduction to the entertainment, allusion is made to the importance of punctual execution of royal commissions. (2)

The attitude to royalty on Molière's part, as far as can be ascertained from his works, would appear to be essentially one of respect; a respect which, while far from being slavish or exaggerated, is so deeply ingrained in the fundamental concept of Monarchy that it is above questioning.

It might be argued that Molière's dependence on favour at court does not make him a very reliable guide to the average man's sentiments concerning the King in the seventeenth century. Yet no small part

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(1) Quoted in the Couton edition, vol. II, pg. 821.
(2) For the "livret", see Vol. II of the Couton ed., pp. 451-452.

of Molière's income was derived, as we have seen, (1) from the Parisian audiences that filled his theatre at the Palais-Royal. Excessive praise of the King or undue deference to royal taste would not endear the dramatist to the less illustrious elements in his town audiences, unless their views on the King's worth more or less coincided with his own. If this were not the case, the eulogy of the sovereign at the end of _Tartuffe_, for example, would surely have been offensive to spectators not as involved with the King as Molière.

The curious "double standard" applied in judgement of royal behaviour is illustrated in _Amphitryon_, where, despite a few remarks suggesting a clear perception of the issues involved, no real condemnation of the "might is right" philosophy is discernible. This reluctance to judge the King is confirmed in other plays: in _L'Impromptu_, for example, where it is seen that no request emanating from the Monarch is allowed to be unreasonable; and in the various "Tartuffe placets", no reproach is addressed to His Majesty despite repeated disappointments at the royal decision to continue the ban on the play. There is no reason to believe that this respectful resignation does not reflect the general attitude of the King's subjects towards their sovereign.

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(1) See Part One, ch. 3.

It follows from this attitude of submission, that obedience to royal orders, requests and decisions was not so much a matter of choice for Molière and his contemporaries, as a matter of duty. Compliance with the King's wishes was simply the King's due in the seventeenth century, and if this involved compromising one's taste, cutting short the composition of a particular work, or lowering the standard of one's creative art, the justification was adequate as long as it involved the monarch's gratification. The royal prerogative was apparently absolute as far as the King's subjects were concerned.

While it is fairly easy to deduce from Molière's plays the extent to which a subject of the King was subservient to his sovereign in the mid-seventeenth century, it is less obvious what was expected of the King in return; for human nature is such that some sort of reciprocity of obligation inevitably operates in any human relationship. Of all Molière's plays, Tartuffe is the most informative in this regard: both from its subject-matter and from the written appeals to the King that have prefaced it since 1682. The function of the monarch in the society under his rule would appear, ideally, to be that of the King in Tartuffe. Enlightened intervention in the graver type of crisis besetting his subjects; an ability to restore order and harmony; to correct injustice, -

these, it seems, are some of the attributes and accomplishments associated with royalty in Molière's time, if we are to judge by the action of _Tartuffe_. But this is the function of a King in a hypothetical situation. Moving from the sphere of the ideal to reality, we find Molière as the suppliant dependent on royal indulgence, and the tone of the "placets" suggests a real belief, firstly, in the King's good will; and secondly in the King's power. This confirms the impression created in _Tartuffe_ itself, that a lucid governing force can "put it all right" if it is so disposed.

Finally, what of the place of the King in society? As supreme judge of the rights and wrongs of certain cases; as one whose wishes are his subjects' commands, and to whom immediate and complete obedience is imperative; as the ruler whose decisions are final and to whom alone appeals for clemency may be addressed, it is clear that the monarch in the seventeenth century was a being vastly respected. The conviction that the King is God's representative on earth, while nowhere expressed explicitly by Molière, is implicit in the rôle of King both in his plays and in the situations that surround them. Until other strata of the society Molière knew have been explored, it is not possible to determine what conception the dramatist had of this society; but already it is

reasonable to assume that at the top of the social structure was the King, respect for whom remained untarnished despite personal foibles, a degree of arrogance, and that imperiousness inseparable from one accustomed to command, and be obeyed.

Chapter Two.

Courtly Divertissement.

Although many of Molière's plays were performed for the first time before a court-audience, relatively few of them were written specifically with such an audience in view. La Grange's famous Registre, for example, tells us that the Médecin Volant (one of Molière's early farces) was played before the King and court in April, 1659. (1) That is the first mention made of the play, and it might reasonably be conjectured that this was its première. Yet, as G. Couton points out, (2) it is more than likely that Molière and his troupe had already performed the farce in question in the provinces, before coming to Paris in the late 'fifties. However much success the play might have had in court-circles, therefore, before it was presented to town audiences at the Palais-Royal, Molière almost certainly did not write it with the intention of gratifying court-tastes.

This aspect of plays presented to court-audiences will

(1) See Couton's preface to Le Médecin Volant, pg.29, vol.I.

(2) Ibid. : the point is, that La Grange could well have neglected to note earlier performances of a fairly mediocre farce.

accordingly be borne in mind in the discussion that follows, and a differentiation made between those intended primarily for King and court, and those not necessarily written for such an audience.

The main purpose of this chapter is to establish some picture of seventeenth-century court-life and taste from Molière's writings, and to determine whether the illustrious persons who followed the King from court to court were respected as a section of society, both by Molière himself and by his contemporaries.

The initial impression gained from a survey of the plays performed for the court is two-fold: first, it would appear that one of the features of these works is their conformity to a dramatic or literary convention, - particularly the pastoral convention. Secondly, there is in them a notable lack of depth: they suggest an atmosphere of light entertainment rather than one of intellectual stimulation. Granted that Molière's main purpose in writing and staging plays was to entertain his spectators (an ambition he had in common with the majority of playwrights of the Comic Muse in the mid-seventeenth century), it remains true that a work like _Mélicerte_, for example, does not offer the same wealth of interest, content-wise, as a comedy like _Le Misanthrope_.

A further characteristic of the plays intended for the

court is the haste with which Molière was obliged to write and produce them. This accounts forthe slight plot and loose, episodic structure of a comedy like Les Fâcheux, which was performed as part of the impressive "divertissements" offered by Foucquet to the King and court at Vaux-le-Vicomte in August, 1661. According to Molière himself, the work was "conçue, faite, apprise et représentée en quinze jours". (1)

From the above features of Molière's "court" plays, what can be inferred about the taste of his audience? The conventional aspect of such plays as La Princesse d'Elide, Mélicerte, Pastorale Comique, and Les Amants Magnifiques indicates conservatism and a possible reluctance to accept experiment in the sphere of entertainment. There as no doubt a comfortable familiarity in the recurring spectacle of dancing nymphs and shepherdesses pursued by satyrs and shepherds in a rustic setting, to the quaint strains of pan-pipes and lutes; a familiarity which would compensate for any lack of originality in form, or content, or both. In Psyché, where the convention is not pastoral so much as mythological, the element of spectacle is predominant (as is confirmed by the fact that choice of subject for the work was determined by a need to use the long-neglected "salle des machines" at the Tuileries.) Amphitryon was also performed at the Tuileries before King and court three days

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(1) The opening remark in the Avertissement des Fâcheux, op.cit. vol. I, pg. 483.

after its première at the Palais-Royal (13th January, 1668), and the implications of the subject (1) suggest that it was a piece of entertainment more appropriate for the court than for town-audiences. That the comedy has its origins in mythology is evident from the title, and this places it in the same category as Psyché despite the difference in tone and atmosphere between the two works.

Not all the entertainment Molière produced for the court may be assigned to a convention, however. The most successful of his plays performed in court-circles were often those in which the main element is that of farce.

Of the various genres adopted by dramatists, farce is perhaps the least demanding intellectually, for much of its effect is derived from visual rather than from cerebral perception. The popularity of comedies with farcical overtones at court implies that the expectations of court-audiences were pitched at a fairly low level. Despite the well-known motto of seventeenth-century writers - dramatists included - of "plaire et instruire"; despite the ideal alluded to by Molière, that comedy should correct men "en les divertissant" (2), it seems that the aspect of comedy emphasized at the court of Louis XIV was that of its entertainment-value rather than its moral and didactic qualities.

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(1) See preceding chapter of the present work.
(2) First placet prefacing Tartuffe, vol. I, pg. 889.

It is perhaps disconcerting that the relatively sophisticated persons who made up a court-audience in Molière's day should have had a preference for such fare as the Médecin Volant, in which Sganarelle's multiplication of identity and feats of simultaneous appearance in different places give the impression of a Punch-and-Judy show rather than a comedy for adult viewing. One might likewise be forgiven for wondering that the buffoonery that accompanied the ballets in Le Mariage Forcé and Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme should have been acceptable to a social milieu in which sensitivity to the "bienséances" was, to all appearances, acute. A play like Monsieur de Pourceaugnac is in some respects offensive to modern taste, yet when it had its première at the "Divertissements du Roi" at Chambord in September, 1669, it was greeted with enthusiasm: the grossness of language, and brutality with which the bewildered provincial is treated, did not apparently call forth the same reaction then as they would now. In order to understand this phenomenon, some awareness of a change in values is necessary.

A seventeenth-century mind, closer chronologically to the middle ages and the comic traditions which centred upon the ridicule of eccentrics and disabled people, found nothing cruel in the spectacle of ignorance exploited. Pity was irrelevant, in the seventeenth century, when reacting to a portrayal of absurdity. It is therefore logical to assume that even the best-bred persons in the

time of Louis XIV found absurdity comic rather than pitiable, and that they should have enjoyed seeing it chastised.

This does not make it any less true, however, that court-audiences displayed a taste for light rather than serious entertainment. In this may be seen an endorsement of the King's taste, the tendencies of which are clearly discernible in the royal preference for farce on the very first occasion that Molière and his company played before the court. (1)

As for the hasty composition which is often a feature of the works Molière produced for the court, one is reminded of the remark in l'Impromptu de Versailles, - that the "pleasures" that are the least prepared are frequently the most welcome to royal and court audiences. (2) To what extent this statement is true, is subject to debate; but when he made it, Molière no doubt had in mind the improvised, "commedia dell'arte" type of entertainment which owes much of its popularity to the element of spontaneity present in it. The short notice at which purveyors of entertainment, - be it music, comedy, or ballet, - were required to produce material for the various "divertissements" at court, suggests a degree of capriciousness in decisions regarding amusements for the

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(1) 24th October, 1658, in the guard-room of the Vieux-Louvre. It appears that Louis was more impressed with Le Docteur Amoureux - a "petit divertissement", than with the main piece, Nicomède.

(2) Sc. 1, op. cit. vol. I, pg. 677.

King and his entourage. Life at court, at any rate inasmuch as it affected Molière, Lulli and other persons of similar profession, was presumably sufficiently leisured and flexible to allow for sudden and impromptu entertainments in addition to those which occurred annually, and merely formed part of the routine of court-existence. (1)

In order to gain a clearer idea of the sort of plays acceptable to court-taste (for hitherto this has only been alluded to in general terms) let us now consider briefly, in chronological order, the works that Molière staged successfully in court-circles.

Le Médecin Volant is unquestionably closer to farce than to the comedy of the classical age. As the title suggests, the situation presented in the play is highly improbable, involving as it does considerable credulity on the part of the dupe (Gorgibus) and considerable agility on the part of the rogue (Sganarelle), in the usual confrontation between these stock-characters of traditional farce. Noise, mobility, visual deception and breathless pace of action, - these are the main characteristics of what is essentially a light piece of entertainment.

Dépit Amoureux was not written specifically for the court; La Grange's Registre (2) indicates that it had already been performed in Languedoc even before Molière settled

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(1) For example, there were the annual festivities ("réjouissances") at court which took place traditionally between Christmas and Lent.
(2) See Couton, vol. I, pg. 151 on the subject.

in Paris with his troupe. But it is worth mentioning here, since it was certainly presented to court-audiences shortly after its première in Paris, in December 1658; and it was greatly appreciated by the court.

While it is a more sophisticated comedy than Le Médecin Volant, Dépit Amoureux is a far cry from the disturbing and ambiguous works that Molière produced in the mid-sixties. The basic theme is very simple, consisting of the parallel loves of Eraste/Lucile and Gros-René/Marinette, and the changing frustrations encountered by the lovers mainly as a result of Ascagne's disguised identity. As in the first play discussed above, the subject-matter calls for a great degree of suspended belief on the part of the spectator. While it is rich in comic potential, its merit is not outstanding: again, it stands for lively amusement rather than for that pleasure afforded by a more intellectual type of comedy based on paradoxical visions and interpretations of what is absurd in the human condition. One is more impressed by the energy and resourcefulness of Mascarille (a figure reminiscent of Sganarelle in Le Médecin Volant) than by the lovers themselves.

In 1661, Molière's Dom Garcie de Navarre, a play by no means reconcilable with farce or any of the "lighter" brands of comic entertainment, was performed for the first time before the Parisian public. It was not

primarily intended for the court, but of the few occasions upon which it was presented to an audience, three were in court-circles. (1) The lack of enthusiasm with which the work was hailed confirms the impression that more "serious" pieces were not regarded with favour at court, however true it may be that the judgement of the public at large endorsed that of the court-audiences, in rejecting Dom Garcie.

Although Les Fâcheux (November, 1661) had its première in Paris, at the Palais-Royal theatre, it was originally commissioned by Foucquet, Louis XIV's unfortunate minister of finance, for the Fête at Vaux-le-Vicomte in August, 1661, - which means that it is in fact a play intended for royal-and-court-audience. A great success from the start, this work displays all the characteristics of lighthearted divertissement: slightness of plot, a tendency to caricature in the characters presented, and an impromptu quality suggested by the structure of the play.

This impromptu element is even more noticeable in L'Impromptu de Versailles (1663), in which plot is virtually non-existent, and the dialogue is so close to everyday speech that it suggests the natural, unrehearsed exchange of conversation usual in an improvised comedy. Despite the cheerful spontaneity of the work, it does

(1) Before the King (1662); before Monsieur (1663) and before the King a second time (1663).

not appear to have been particularly well-received at court, possibly because of the way in which aristocrats are indirectly portrayed (remarks such as: "Le marquis d'aujourd'hui est le plaisant de la comédie... il faut toujours un marquis ridicule qui divertisse la compagnie" (1) were not likely to pass unnoticed by those of that rank in the audience.) The criticism implicit in the unflattering epithets accompanying the names of the "dramatis personae" ("marquis ridicule", "marquise façonnière") renders the compliments to the court-audience in the first scene suspect. There is the additional fact that this particular comedy derives most of its vivacity from the dialogue, - not from the action, - so that the overall impression given by L'Impromptu is one of verbal, and therefore intellectual, wit as opposed to sheer exuberance and buffoonery.

The theme of Le Mariage Forcé (1664) - a comedy-ballet - is, as Molière himself points out in the "argument", the most commonly-used as the subject of comic entertainment (2): that of a man making himself ridiculous over marriage. It is the sort of material which lends itself quite naturally to farcical treatment, and Molière's handling of the well-worn theme certainly borders on farce: in scene five, for example, where the infuriated Sganarelle, after a long and unsatisfactory conversation with Marphurius,

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(1) Vol. I. op. cit., pg. 681.
(2) Ibid., pg. 707.

(a "Pyrrhonian" philosopher), is goaded into beating that learned pedant. The issue of Sganarelle's match with Dorimène is only resolved (scenes nine and ten) by the threat of physical violence, and the tone of the work as a whole is one of boisterous fun. Despite the short run of the play, it was apparently well-received at court, and it was commissioned for the "réjouissances" of 1663/1664, to please the King. (1)

Hitherto, most of the court-entertainments from Molière's pen discussed in this chapter have borne the stamp of farce, or at any rate the comic element in them has been basic and tending towards the exuberance of farce. With La Princesse d'Elide, we come to the other main type of amusement for court-circles: the pastoral comedy. Despite the convention within which he was writing, Molière still introduces a suspicion of farce into this play, in the amiable person of Moron, termed the "plaisant", (or fool in the Shakespearian sense), of the court. The liberties taken with the usual features of the pastoral convention are discernible in the argument of the second "intermède", in which we are informed that Moron takes advantage of Euryale's absence to make the woods and rocks resound with the name of Philis, his beloved. There is nothing intrinsically amusing in this; but Moron's invocations call forth "un écho ridicule" (2), which satisfies him so much that he becomes quite engrossed in a game of

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(1) See Couton, Vol. I, pp. 701-702.
(2) Op. cit. vol. I, pg. 787.

aural hide-and-seek, until interrupted by a bear. He is subsequently rescued by eight peasants armed with sticks. This episode suggests the burlesque rather than the pastoral, although the setting, names and pursuits of the characters involved belong to the latter tradition. That La Princesse d'Élide is essentially a play for the court is evident from the fact that the number of performances for town-audiences (1664/1665) was restricted to twenty-five, and the piece was subsequently produced only for court-audiences during Molière's life-time. It is the sort of entertainment more suited to the taste of the court than to that of the town.

Tartuffe, the other comedy to have its première at the Versailles inauguration already discussed (see the preceding chapter), does not fit in with the pattern of court-plays so far considered, (1) and the fate of that work confirms the impression that there was a certain rigidity of expectation characterizing court-audiences in Molière's day. With the exception of the scene in which Orgon is hiding under the table (2) while Elmire induces Tartuffe to betray his baseness before his benefactor, there is little in the play to suggest farce. It is certainly not written in the pastoral or mythological vein, and the implications of action and dialogue in it are disquieting. True, the persons responsible for having the work banned were not representative of the

(1) i.e. it belongs neither to the farce nor to the pastoral convention.

(2) Act. IV, sc. 5.

court-audience as a whole, and the King's attitude in the Tartuffe issue implies that he did not personally join in the condemnation of the play as a morally pernicious piece of dramatic literature. There were, in any case, two main elements composing the court: the older, more conservative members of the royal entourage; and the younger, livelier, more frivolous individuals (attracted to Louis' sister-in-law, Henriette d'Angleterre) who occasionally chafed against the restraints which the former endeavoured to lay upon them. One cannot generalise too freely. But it may be pointed out that if the appeal of Tartuffe to court taste had been sufficiently great, not even the respected members of the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement would have succeeded in stifling all performances of the comedy for so many years. (1664-1669).

September, 1665, saw the première of L'Amour Médecin, at Versailles; the play was commissioned by the King at short notice (Molière wryly remarks in the preface that it is "... un petit impromptu... le plus précipité de tous ceux que Sa Majesté m'ait commandés") (1), and there is no doubt that this work is designed to amuse a court audience. The elements of music and ballet are important in L'Amour Médecin, and the comedy is more completely understood by the modern reader, if this fact is borne in mind. Again, the intellectual aspect of comic art is understated here, while the earthiness of the dialogue (e.g. in Act II, sc. 2) and liveliness of the action,

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(1) Op. cit. pg. 95; vol. II.

coupled with the visual appeal of dancing and movement, make for undemanding amusement.

The next work to consider as being specially composed for the court is Pastorale Comique, which was presented with Mélicerte and Le Sicilien ou l'Amour Peintre as part of the great Ballet des Muses (1). As its title would suggest, Pastorale Comique is comedy in pastoral guise, the sort of entertainment that promises few surprises and allows little room for originality on the part of the dramatist. The slight story of bucolic love is not much more than a pretext for a parade of richly-costumed participants representing either figures from mythology and antiquity, or from foreign countries (in the fifth entrée, for example). The comedy itself is very clearly subordinated to spectacle, music and song. As for the second of the three plays presented at Le Ballet des Muses - Mélicerte - some remarks concerning the circumstances, intention, and nature of the work have already been made (2) in the present study. Suffice it to observe, here, that as in the case of Pastorale Comique, the conventional setting, simple plot and prevailing gaiety of Mélicerte would imply that the comedy was written for an audience with a preference for light-hearted, undemanding entertainment. This confirms the impression gained hitherto of court-audiences in Molière's day.

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(1) December 1666-February 1667.

(2) See preceding chapter.

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Le Sicilien, with its protagonists described as slaves (e.g. Isidore, Zaïde, and Haly) suggests a context not unlike that of old Roman comedy: the resourceful, intriguing slave through whose agency young lovers are finally brought together is very reminiscent of Terence. Moreover, although the characters themselves are not presented in the pastoral convention, there is an element of the pastoral in the serenade ordered by Adraste for Isidore at the beginning of the piece. The stereotyped characters, - Tircis, Filène, Climène - and the theme of amorous shepherds and uncompromising maidens, are introduced between scenes two and three, giving Le Sicilien a hint of antiquity which belies the more modern description of Dom Pèdre as a "gentilhomme sicilien", and Adraste as a "gentilhomme français". (1) The exotic quality of the comedy is derived from the foreign nationalities of those before the audience: Dom Pèdre is Sicilian, Isidore is Greek, and Haly is Turkish. Paradoxically, a taste for that which is exciting or rare or unusual is the characteristic of a naïve public; it is the truly sophisticated who seek entertainment in the ordinary and everyday, or in situations that are familiar. The eagerness for imaginative rather than realistic comedy displayed by court-audiences - (we know, for example that Le Sicilien was included in Le Ballet des Muses in order to have Turks and Moors among the "nations différentes que les Muses ont fait paraître") (2), - leads one to the conclu-

(1) See dramatis personae, vol. II, pg. 321.
(2) Preface to the play, ibid.

sion that there was a certain simplicity, intellectually speaking, in the gatherings that Molière was called upon to entertain at Versailles, or whichever court Louis happened to favour when festivities and celebrations took place.

One of the most interesting "fêtes" to which Molière contributed his talents from the point of view of information regarding life at court is undoubtedly the "Grand Divertissement Royal de Versailles" of July, 1668. The pretext for this display of royal extravagance was the victory of Condé which brought in its wake the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle. Added to this circumstance was the growing beauty and development of Versailles; so the celebrations were held, appropriately, amid the early summer verdure of the King's new palace. In view of the season and the strong preference already noted in court-circles for pastoral entertainments, the Fête was held out of doors: first there was a gargantuan banquet during which the "livret" for the entertainment was distributed: it consisted of a ballet and a comedy, with music by Lulli. Thanks to a contemporary commentator, Félibien, a detailed account of the proceedings has been left to posterity. We know, for example, that after the royal appetite had been satisfied (and that of the courtiers) the banquet was left to the ravages of those simple folk who had gone to Versailles as spectators, out of curiosity, -

> "... la destruction d'un arrangement si beau servit encore de divertissement agréable à toute la cour, par l'empressement et la confusion de ceux

qui démolissaient ces châteaux de massepins
et ces montagnes de confiture" (1).

In that bald statement of fact, the twentieth-century mind might well discern some irony, for there is something intrinsically disagreeable in the idea of an elegant and well-fed assembly of court-gentry deriving condescending amusement from the clumsiness of those inferior to themselves socially, and rendered more gauche by hunger. Yet to the seventeenth-century mind, this attitude of the superior to the inferior, as long as it was not malicious, was by no means blameworthy; it was logical, being founded on a recognition of social distances which were after all very real.

After the repast, the entire court as well as the "curieux" who were present adjourned to what is simply described as "un grand salon", the size of which may be estimated from its seating capacity: it seems there were 1,200 persons in tiered seats, and a greater number in the pit below. Flanking the stage, as a reminder to the audience of Louis' greatness, were two statues, one of Peace and one of Victory. The "curtain-raiser", so to speak, was the pastoral ballet with mimed sequences from the comedy to follow, the comedy in question being George Dandin. One cannot help wondering at the choice of such a subject for such an occasion, and more particularly at the seemingly inappropriate setting for a bourgeois comedy with disturbing overtones and implications:

(1) From Félibien's "Relation de la fête de Versailles", in the Oeuvres de Molière, coll. "Les Grands Ecrivains", vol. VI, pg. 618.

the charming, conventional rusticity of the pastoral is hardly consonant with the harsher realities of a seventeenth-century "mésalliance". However, despite Molière's apparent departure from standard practice in the sort of work offered here for court-entertainment, the two main characteristics of what we have hitherto established as typical comic fare for court-audiences, are present, even if they are less obvious than in the earlier pieces discussed. The pastoral convention is represented by the social origin of Dandin, who is a peasant and therefore appropriate in a rustic environment (this rather tenuous connection with the pastoral is more evident in the ballet than in the comedy itself). The farcical tradition is represented by the situation into which Dandin clumsily manoeuvres himself while endeavouring to incriminate Angélique conclusively before witnesses. (1) The action of George Dandin at this point closely resembles that of the first farce attributed to Molière - La Jalousie du Barbouillé. In both comedies, the main protagonists are the same: the irate husband consumed with jealousy, and the erring wife skilfully avoiding reprisals. The situation of the characters is the same in both plays, moreover: the husband has the initial advantage, having locked his spouse out of their home at an advanced hour of night; then there is a reversal of positions as the husband is locked out and his supplications are ignored by the triumphant wife. Despite

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(1) Act III, sc. vi.

the darker implications of the later work and the more sophisticated form, much of the original farce-element so obvious in La Jalousie du Barbouillé may be seen in George Dandin. From this it can be deduced that, whatever impressions are created by a first reading of Dandin, the play's essential characteristics are not after all inconsistent with those normally associated with court-entertainment.

In the tradition of the "comédie-ballet", - a tradition particularly suited to royal and court taste, - is Monsieur de Pourceaugnac (presented at Chambord in September, 1670). The greater part of this piece consists of the broadest farce, with the stock theme of dupe versus rogue, and very little sympathy accorded to the former. The comedy is not strictly verbal; it lies rather in situation and gesture than in dialogue. This is especially apparent in scenes eight, nine, ten and eleven of Act One, in which Pourceaugnac receives gratuitous medical advice, and in those in which the unfortunate provincial is confronted by Lucette and Nérine (scenes seven and eight of Act Two) disguised as provincials themselves and indignantly claiming paternity-rights from him for their "children". The second scene of Act Three, in which Pourceaugnac is dressed as a woman and accosted by two Swiss gentlemen apparently undeterred by his beard and other un-feminine attributes, is the point of the play where the farce-element is most striking. Outrageous situations, music, "entrées de ballet", slapstick,

disguises, and parodied provincial and foreign accents, combine to make this three-act comedy a very typical piece of court-entertainment. The concluding couplet of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, chanted by a chorus, could well be taken as the motto of both entertainer and entertained:

"Ne songeons qu'à nous réjouir,
La grande affaire est le plaisir". (1)

The element of farce is less apparent in Les Amants Magnifiques (February, 1670) than in the preceding works considered, for in this comedy, there is more emphasis on the pastoral and mythological. The King himself chose the subject-matter, which is such that it lends itself to spectacle rather than to improvised buffoonery. As in La Princesse d'Elide, the plot centres upon the choice of a husband for an amiable princess, but there the resemblance between the two works ends. Despite the witty presence of Clitidas, - the sort of character who reminds one of Moron in La Princess d'Elide - there is more restraint in the action of the later play. The rivalry between the princess's lovers is in any case merely a pretext for magnificent visual display. The piece opens with an elaborate tableau depicting marine life, in which dolphins, nymphs, fishermen, personifications of rivers, and the usual assortment of deities associated with the sea, appear to the accompaniment of music and the sound of shell-horns encrusted with pearls. We

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(1) Op. cit., vol II, pg. 638.

are told in the introduction to the play that

> "Tout ce spectacle est une magnifique galanterie, dont l'un des princes régale sur la mer la promenade des princesses." (1)

In point of fact, the fiction corresponds closely with reality here, since not only was the company entertained by Molière and his troupe every bit as "galante" as the imaginary company in the Amants Magnifiques, but the spectacle designed for the amusement of the princesses Aristione and Eriphile was equally enacted to divert Louis and the court-audience at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. The necessity to please the royal family and their elegant courtiers is reflected in the comedy itself, for Molière loses no opportunity to suggest submission to the wishes of the great, whether in the dialogue or in the action itself, which emphasizes obedience and service to those in high places. Clitidas, for example, answers an instruction from Eriphile with the words,

> "Cela est fait, Madame; il ne faut pas être courtisan indiscret." (2)

Even the "intermèdes", - mimes and dances interspersing the main acts of the play, - indicate this deference which was, it seems, part of the attitude prevailing in Molière's time towards King and court. The little "pastorale" between acts two and three is expressly to please Eriphile (and, incidentally, the real audience of the comedy):

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(1) Op. cit., vol. II, pg. 646.
(2) Act II, sc. ii.

"... pour la divertir, on lui joue une petite
comédie en musique". (1)

Similarly, the dance of the statues in the grotto where the princess and her mother take a walk is to amuse and distract the ladies, while the most splendid spectacle of all is that of the sixth and last "intermède", in which the performers undertake the ambitious task of representing the Pythian Games for the delight of their audience. The overall tone of the Amants Magnifiques is lofty and dignified, but as entertainment, it exhibits the same lack of intellectual complexity as the other works specifically written for the court.

Of a completely different nature is the comedy-ballet, Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, presented at Chambord in 1670 when the King decided to offer the court some amusement during his stay at that château for the hunting-season. D'Arvieux mentions in his Mémoires that His Majesty ordered himself, Molière and Lulli to work out

"une pièce de théâtre où l'on pût faire
entrer quelque chose des habillements et
des manières des Turcs". (2)

Oriental customs, clothes and general modus vivendi were very topical that year since the Turkish ambassador, Soliman Aga, was received at the French Court in November, 1669. The enthusiasm with which Molière's Bourgeois Gentilhomme was hailed by court-audiences

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(1) Op. cit. Vol. II, pg. 665.
(2) Mémoires, Vol. IV, pp. 252-253, Paris, 1735.

may be explained partially by the choice of subject-matter, which, in accordance with the royal commission, duly included reference to the East. Added to the topicality of the play, however, is the sheer comic exuberance of the action, which is more often closer to farce than to comedy per se: when M. Jourdain inexpertly attempts to dance, for example, or when the masters of music, dancing, fencing and philosophy become involved in an undignified skirmish over the relative merits of the art or science each represents, to say nothing of the extravagant ceremony in which Jourdain has the rank of "mamamouchi" conferred upon him with some violence.(1) Again, in the Bourgeois Gentilhomme as in so many of the pieces performed for King and court, we find that robust spirit of fun that is rather to be expected in entertainment for persons less sophisticated than the lords and ladies attendant on royalty. The comedy under present discussion differs from the usual fare for the court in that it is possible to react to it at different levels. At the primary level, it is simply a Turkish extravaganza with farcical overtones, composed with a view to pleasing the King and diverting the court. At another, deeper level, it is a comment on society; and at a still deeper level, it presents a certain view of human nature, as well as affording a perspective of the relationship between reality and illusion. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that the latter, more subtle aspects

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(1) Act IV, sc. v.

of the comedy would have escaped the notice of the average courtier viewing the spectacle of Jourdain's elocution-lesson, or enjoying the colourful Turkish costumes, and unintelligible gibberish of Cléonte disguised as the son of the Great Turk.

With the tragedy-ballet Psyché, of which Molière is part-author, the farce-element is understandably suppressed, and the accent is on stage-effect and technical ingenuity rather than on comic situation. In this work the pastoral blends with the mythological in a traditional setting of woods, rocks, pastures and river, with a discreet glimpse of the sea in the distance. (1) . Vertumnus and Flora, Palaemon and his naiads, disport themselves gracefully in this sylvan environment, inviting Venus to come to them as they sing of the "paix profonde" and "doux jeux" that they are enjoying, adding tactfully that

"On doit ce repos plein d'appas
Au plus grand roi du monde." (2)

Venus' descent from the heavens is accomplished in what is described as "une grande machine" in the prologue to Psyché, and this reminds us that the play in question was primarily intended to revive interest in, and make use of, the "grande salle des machines" at the Tuileries. Still more ambitious effects are achieved later in the play: in the first "intermède", for example, where Psyché is abandoned in a fearful desert, with "rochers

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(1) See the description in the Prologue, op.cit.Vol.II,pg.822.
(2) Ibid.

affreux", and an awe-inspiring grotto in the background; or in the following "intermède" where a magnificent palace is represented, decorated with gold and precious stones to suggest the fairy-tale quality of Psyché's rescue by Love. Another perspective of the palace is shown at the beginning of the fourth act, this time with a garden and fruit-trees. So many changes of scene, and elaborate scenes at that, involve a considerable degree of skill in stage-craft. In addition to this, the audience is further entertained by the sight of Psyché's sisters being whisked off on a cloud by the West Wind; (1) by the dramatic disappearance of both Love and the garden once the secret of Love's identity has been revealed; and by a most spectacular view of Hell aflame and the river Styx. (2)

What of the reaction of the court-audience to this work, which Robinet describes as "pompeux, grand, auguste" (3)? The première took place on January 17th, 1671, and during the winter entertainments for that season, several more performances were given. M. de Saint-Maurice, from Savoy, who happened to be at the French Court at the time, wrote of Psyché in glowing terms as "étonnante", "belle", "superbe"; (4) and Molière's desire to offer his Parisian audiences a slightly more modest version of this sumptuous spectacle would indicate a very favourable reception at

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(1) Act IV, sc. ii.
(2) Fourth 'intermède'.
(3) Lettre en vers à Monsieur, 24th January, 1671.
(4) Lettres sur la cour de Louis XIV: see Mongrédien, vol.I, op. cit. pp. 386-387.

the Tuileries. The spectators, whether at court or at the Palais-Royal theatre, would conceivably have given more attention to the scenic effects and mechanical devices, than to the actual dialogue, - which means that the many classical allusions in the play to characters of Greco-Roman mythology need not necessarily presuppose a high level of culture among the on-lookers. It is not essential, for example, to know that Vertumnus, as god of trees and fruit, dances at the head of the dryads and sylvan nymphs, while Palaemon, as the deity of rivers and streams, leads the naiads and water-nymphs. The polished choreography and carefully-designed costumes are sufficient distraction in themselves from the symbolic importance of the dancers. Once more we find confirmation of the thesis that court-audiences in Molière's day were not concerned with the deeper implications of plot and dialogue, but derived their amusement from spectacle or farce, neither of which are intellectually demanding.

Towards the end of 1671, the arrival of the German princess Elizabeth-Charlotte of Bavaria at the French Court as second wife of the King's widowed brother, called for celebration and, inevitably, entertainment. Louis XIV commissioned a ballet, which, since it was composed of the choicer fragments of ballets performed in court-circles over several years, was known as Le Ballet des ballets. To complete the entertainment, Molière was required to write and stage a pastoral and a comedy. The pastoral

is not extant, but it appears from the libretto that the characters - seven in number - enacting it, were the conventional assortment of nymphs, shepherdesses and cow-herds, and there is no reason to suppose that it was in any way a departure from the stock-in-trade of pastoral comedies. The comedy itself, - La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas - was to serve as a pretext for the various exerpts from previous ballets already mentioned. These were performed between the five acts of the "pastorale", which in turn was incorporated into the action of La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas: it is the entertainment offered by the Vicomte to the assembled company at the end of the play.

> ("Souffrez, Madame, qu'en enrageant nous puissions voir ici le reste du spectacle"). (1)

This comedy written for the Court belongs neither to farce nor to spectacle, but by its light-heartedness and somewhat impromptu air, it is reminiscent of Les Fâcheux. The plot is very slight, centring on the complicated love-life of a provincial lady, a widowed countess, with all the pretentions to greatness and unjustified complacency, that might be expected in one of her station. This theme is the main thread of the action; there is the secondary one of the thwarted love between Julie and the Vicomte, who make use of the Countess' home to meet until the differences between their respective families are resolved. Needless to say, this unsatisfactory state of affairs does not last: the Countess, labouring under the delusion that the Vicomte is in love with her, is made to realise her

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(1) Scene ix, op. cit. Vol. II, pg. 972.

mistake, and consoles herself with the affections of Monsieur Tibaudier; Julie and her beloved are free to marry, and to make the nuptials complete, the Countess' maid Andrée is to wed M. Tibaudier's lackey. Wherewith the entire company repairs to the "salle de théâtre" to enjoy the comedy organized by the Vicomte. Every eligible person involved in the plot has been matched with bewildering rapidity and nonchalance, and having disposed of sentimental problems, both protagonists and audience can concentrate upon the business of being entertained. Quite apart from the brisk pace of the action and witty dialogue, court-audiences would have been delighted with the satirical presentation of a type offensive to their taste and values: the provincial snob aping Parisian manners.

The last play to be considered in this section - Le Malade Imaginaire - was not actually performed before King and court as Molière had intended, but as the work was written with a view to entertaining a royal-and-court audience, it is relevant here to examine the nature and content of this, Molière's final comedy.

Structurally Le Malade Imaginaire resembles Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, combining as it does the elements of song, music and dancing with that of comedy. The plot, which itself is very similar to the plot of Le Bourgeois, serves as the unifying theme for the entertainment. The farcical quality of the comedy is particularly evident in the burlesque ceremony whereby Argan becomes a doctor (1),

(1) Third "intermède".

and the analogy between this ceremony and the one conferring Turkish nobility on M. Jourdain is obvious. The only essential difference between the two plays lies in the choice of object pilloried, and in the tone. In the earlier work, Molière ridicules snobbishness, while in Le Malade, his wit is directed against the medical profession and its practitioners with all their limitations, ignorance and charlatanism. Moreover, Le Bourgeois gives the impression of fantasy, despite the initial scenes in which social realism predominates. Quite apart from the extravagance of the Turkish ceremony, the action somehow dissolves rather than ends with a ballet, and the audience's attention is allowed to wander from the plot to the spectacle. The tone is light-hearted, in keeping with the whimsical nature of the comedy. We are hardly expected to take seriously, for example, the reply M. Jourdain makes to his wife's inquiry about Nicole:

> "Je la donne au truchement; et ma femme, à qui la voudra." (1)

And the final comment of the play is by Covielle, who expresses doubt as to the sanity of Jourdain:

> "Si l'on en peut voir un plus fou, je l'irai dire à Rome". (2)

Attention has already been drawn to the similarity between Le Bourgeois and Le Malade, but whereas the first is characterized by gaiety, the tone of the second is harsher. Argan is just as obsessed with medicine as Jourdain is

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(1) Act V, sc. vi, op. cit. Vol. II, pg. 779.
(2) Ibid.

with social superiority; Argan is as deficient in sound judgement and reasonableness as Jourdain, where his family is concerned. But there is a degree of selfishness and spite in Argan, which is absent from the character of the "bourgeois gentilhomme". It is not for nothing that Argan announces emphatically,

> "Je ne suis point bon, et je suis méchant quand je veux." (1)

In addition to the less amiable nature of the main protagonist in Le Malade, the attack upon the race of doctors is more explicit and more coloured with personal resentment than the more indirect criticism of the social climber in Le Bourgeois. Molière's own experience of illness and medical science explains both his familiarity with doctors' jargon and the hostility towards doctors and apothecaries discernible throughout the play. There is a sombreness in Le Malade Imaginaire which leads one to wonder what sort of reception would have been accorded the work at court. Certainly the double prologue, with its pastoral décor, rustic deities represented by Flora and Pan, and singing, dancing shepherds and shepherdesses, is calculated to gratify court-and-royal taste. The panegyric of Louis in the introductory words and in the first prologue ("Après les glorieuses fatigues et les exploits victorieux de notre auguste monarque...") (2); ("Louis offre à vos chansons la plus belle des matières") (3) confirms the

(1) Act I, sc. v, op. cit. Vol. II, pg. 1109.
(2) Op. cit. Vol. II, pg. 1091.
(3) From Flora's song in the second entrée de ballet.

impression that the Malade Imaginaire was to be performed at court, and that Molière intended it to meet the formal requirements of a piece of entertainment for such an audience. Then, too, the structure of the comedy suggests that the dramatist was tempted to repeat the particular arrangement of drama, song, mime and dance that had won him acclaim with Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. The ingredients, as it were, are the same; only the interpretation differs slightly.

From the analysis of the plays that Molière staged (or meant to stage) at court, the following deductions can be made. First, it would appear that the main characteristics of court-entertainment (farce and pastoral convention) were determined by the taste of the audience for whom the plays were written and performed. The farce-element, in particular, suggests an awareness on the part of the dramatist of the need to divert and amuse rather than to inspire or touch his spectators, the latter being the function of the philosopher and the tragedian. Secondly, the importance of spectacle in comedies intended for King and court indicates to what extent pomp, tableau and aesthetically-satisfying décor mattered in court-circles. The "livrets" of the various "divertissements royaux" are especially informative in this regard, and it is not difficult for us to reconstruct, even at a distance of three centuries, the settings in which Molière's works were staged: from La Princesse d'Elide, accompanied by

fireworks, lit by four thousand candles (1) and introduced by the most elaborate cavalcade, to George Dandin, performed against a background of sumptuous elegance ("un jardin, des statues, des vases dorés, des architectures, des terrasses, un canal, des jets d'eau véritables") (2). A playwright in Molière's position, if he were to please his illustrious public, had to make allowance for spectacular visual effects in his work, and such dissimilar plays as Psyché, (with its reliance on mechanical devices for much of the action) and Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme (with its boisterous, exotically-costumed sequence depicting Jourdain's ennoblement) show how the dramatist's art is reconciled with that of the stage-technician and choreographer. Finally, it would seem that there was little difference between the King's taste and that of the court. Inevitably, the respect demanded by, and due to, a royal patron was extended to that patron's immediate entourage. It should be remembered that when Molière alludes to his prospective audience in the Impromptu de Versailles, he includes the court-nobles in his remark ("des personnes qui nous impriment le respect") (3). Further evidence of the respectful attitude of a court-entertainer towards his public may be found in La Critique de l'École des Femmes, in which Molière presents some views upon the taste of both town and court audiences. In the confrontation between Dorante and Lysidas (a young noble and a poet respectively), the former insists on the supremacy

(1) Livret for the Plaisirs de l'île enchantée, op. cit. I, pg. 752.

(2) See Couton, Vol. II, pg. 446.

(3) L'Impromptu, sc. i.

of court-taste:

"la grande épreuve de toutes vos comédies,
c'est le jugement de la cour". (1)

Dorante also remarks upon the refinement of the court, and the superiority of its judgement, comparing it unfavourably with the "savoir enrouillé" of pedants.

It might be argued that since Dorante is himself of elevated social rank, his defence of court-taste is suspect; but in the scene preceding that in which he lauds the court, this very same character takes up the cudgels on behalf of the plebeian "parterre", suggesting that its robust good sense is more admirable than the "ébullitions de cerveau de nos marquis de Mascarille" (2). This demonstrates quite adequately the impartiality of Dorante's judgement. It is not possible to claim that the successive praises, first of the pit and then of the court, are merely skilful means of ingratiating the playwright with both sections of his two-fold audience, or that the seventeenth-century inclination for symmetry demanded presentation of both sides of the coin, so to speak. What emerges from a close study of Dorante's two speeches is a slight bias in favour of the court, for his condemnation of the "gens de qualité" is tempered by an acknowledgment that not all court-nobles deserve inclusion in the censure of ignorance, pretentiousness and vanity. He hastens to reassure his interlocutors that

(1) Critique, sc. vi. Op. cit. Vol. I, pg. 661.
(2) Ibid. sc. v, pg. 654.

> "C'est à une douzaine de messieurs qui déshonorent les gens de cour par leurs manières extravagantes" (1)

that he addresses his reproaches. The statement in the following scene, that there is real merit and discernment in court-circles, confirms the impression of a certain reluctance to criticize or make light of the higher ranks of contemporary aristocracy. Respect for court-taste is echoed in the Abbé de Villiers' Entretiens sur les tragédies de ce temps (1675), in which we find the declaration that

> "... ce n'est plus le caprice qui distribue les louanges et les applaudissements de la Cour, c'est le bon sens" (2).

True, there are indications that the judgement of court-audiences was not universally respected as being impeccable, and this has already been shown in an earlier chapter of the present work (3); but again, a lucid observation here and there on the short-comings of individual members of the aristocracy does not mean that as a section of society the "courtisans" of Louis XIV were regarded with disfavour or contempt. Rather the contrary. Molière's "court" plays show a readiness to gratify the persons for whom they were written, which can reasonably be interpreted as a recognition both of the nature of court-taste, and of the need to satisfy it. If the dramatist was occasionally provoked into

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(1) Critique, sc. v, pg. 654.
(2)
(3) See Part One, chapter two.

portraying aristocrats as foolish, importunate or objectionable (as in Les Fâcheux or L'Impromptu de Versailles) the general impression gained from his work remains one of deference towards those closely associated with the monarch described by Flora as "le plus auguste des rois" (1). The glory of the court might have been reflected glory, but it was sufficiently great to evoke admiration and even awe among those not connected with it: the mere mention of the "chambre du roi" by Dorante in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme is enough to blind M. Jourdain to the less admirable aspects of his noble friend's conduct, and to inspire in him the deepest reverence. (2) In any discussion of the nobility in the seventeenth century, a distinction must be made between aristocrats permanently at court, and aristocrats who, although they might have been presented at court, lived independently of Versailles, Chambord, Saint-Germain, or wherever the King happened to be resident. In Molière's plays there is little direct reference to the former category of "gens de qualité", except in the works specifically created for Royal Divertissements which we have just considered. Of the latter type of noble, however, there is much to be said, for they are legion in the comedies. It is to various aspects of Molière's portrayal of them that attention will now be given.

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(1) In the first Prologue to the Malade Imaginaire op. cit. II, pg. 1094.

(2) Act III, sc. iv. op. cit. II, pg. 741.

2. ARISTOCRATIC CIRCLES

Chapter One.

A Study of Two Salons.

The most obvious area in which to study Molière's portrayal of the nobility is that of social intercourse; and in the mid-seventeenth century, social intercourse among the leisured aristocrats took place principally in the salons. Three of Molière's comedies depict this phenomenon of French society in his day: La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, Le Misanthrope, and La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas. The latter play will be discussed at a further stage in the present work, since it deals rather with provincial life, and as such stands a little apart from the two first-mentioned.

Three years separate La Critique and Le Misanthrope (1) and the circumstances of the two plays are different: the first was written to counter the criticism levelled against L'Ecole des Femmes, as Molière himself states in the preface to that comedy ("... je ne mets point dans cette préface ce qu'on verra dans la Critique, en cas que je me résolve à la faire paraître"). (2) Le

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(1) The Critique had its première in June, 1663; the Misanthrope, in June, 1666.

(2) Preface to the Ecole des femmes, op. cit. vol. I.pg.544

Misanthrope, on the other hand, cannot be attributed to any specific event or source of inspiration. It was not a royal commission, nor was it composed, apparently, with any object in view other than the need to stage a new play at the Palais-Royal theatre.

The chronological distance separating the works in question, and the dissimilarity of their circumstances, make them all the more valuable as pictures of contemporary nobility glimpsed in everyday surroundings and activities.

It is significant that in neither of these comedies is there any suggestion of buffoonery or farce; action of any sort is reduced to a minimum. The plot of La Critique is virtually non-existent, as the play merely presents a conversation between the habitués of a salon; and although Le Misanthrope offers the interest of a love-story with some psychological complexity, it relies very little on gesture, movement or visual effect as do, for example, Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme or Le Médecin malgré lui. This absence of physical action, coupled with simplicity of plot, enables the spectator/reader to concentrate on the characters themselves and the social milieu they represent. La Critique is particularly interesting in this regard, since the social setting in which its protagonists are seen was something of a departure from normal practice for Molière at the time. As G. Couton

points out, (1) it was the first time the dramatist had chosen to put on the stage characters who came from that well-bred, slightly precious class of nobles who, while not actually attached to the court, had free access to it and stood for a certain way of life: wealthy, leisured, and more concerned with how to pass their time than how to use it profitably. Before La Critique, Molière had depicted only middle-class society (Les Précieuses Ridicules, L'Ecole des Maris, L'Ecole des Femmes) and the fictional, imaginative "monde galant" of Dom Garcie de Navarre. The little comedy of 1663 anticipates the more serious work of 1666 both in the section of society portrayed, and in the sort of atmosphere generated by this particular social milieu. Let us examine the first of these two plays in an endeavour to determine Molière's conception of, and attitude to, the people represented in it.

Whether by accident or design, the six main characters of La Critique may be evenly divided according to their sex: of the three women, one is a prude and purist (Climène), who has something in common with the affected poet, Lysidas; one is an intelligent, sensible young woman of the world (Elise), whose soundness of judgement is echoed in that of Dorante, a typical "honnête homme" of the time; and the third, Uranie, is a gregarious, well-informed society lady to whom the ready witticisms

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(1) See the introduction to the Critique, op.cit.I, pg.638.

of the sixth character - the Marquis - are acceptable. All these personae are neatly differentiated, and yet they have much in common: social origin, interest in theatre and literature, and sufficient leisure to devote a whole evening to discussion of a controversial play.

In the first scene, Uranie expresses astonishment and displeasure at the solitary state in which she and her cousin Élise have been left throughout the day; to which Élise replies by remarking that Uranie's house is the "réfuge ordinaire de tous les fainéants de la cour." (1) This situation, and the reaction of the two young women to it, both provide us with a basis for one or two suppositions concerning the sort of life led by such people. First, it may be assumed that visiting and receiving were an important part of daily existence for "mondaines" in Uranie's position, and that there was not much alternative occupation to which one could have recourse should visitors fail to materialize. Secondly, the word used by Élise to describe Uranie's callers implies the degree of freedom from responsibility enjoyed by those frequenting court-circles. (The strict etymological sense of the word "fainéant" is "do-nothing"). To an aristocrat, the term would have no pejorative connotations, but to one of Molière's station, brought up with the middle-class values of honest toil and "the daily bread well-earned", it is conceivable that idleness did not represent a

(1) Sc. i, op. cit.,I, pg. 643.

positive virtue. The remark in question calls forth an image of bored, unoccupied nobles gravitating from the court to whichever salon promised them the most distraction.

In the exchange between Uranie and her cousin, Molière presents two different attitudes to company: that of Uranie, who is quite uncritical so long as she is rescued from solitude, and that of Elise, whose taste is more discriminating and who considers that

> "...la complaisance est trop générale, de souffrir indifférément toutes sortes de personnes". (1)

Without indicating which is the more acceptable attitude, Molière uses this difference of opinion to show the exquisite malice of which a worldly, observant young woman like Elise is capable. First Uranie's friend, the Marquis, comes under fire for his extravagant language and inevitable punning. Elise alludes scathingly to his "jargon obscur",(2) and demolishes pitilessly the word-play on Boneuil and "bon oeil" so dear to the gentleman. Uranie attempts to defend him in vain. Next is the turn of Climène, the first visitor of the day to grace Uranie's salon; and Elise is quick to see in the circumstance divine retribution for Uranie's dissatisfaction with the lack of society to divert her. The prude is dismissed as

> "la plus sotte bête qui se soit jamais mêlée de

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(1) sc. i, op. cit., I, pg. 644

(2) Ibid.

raisonner".(1)

Her person is no more safe from censure than her intelligence, for her affected, mincing gait, her pout, and her efforts to make her small eyes seem large, are ruthlessly pointed out by Elise. Despite the anxiety of Uranie, who fears some indiscretion on the part of her cousin, Elise recounts a disastrous supper-party given by Climène for Damon (whose reputation as a "bel esprit" secured him the invitation); and, up to the very moment when the caller makes her histrionic entry, pert comments on the incongruity of a match between Climène and the Marquis are forthcoming from the witty critic.

So much viciousness without due justification (Climène's only crimes are those of affectation and failure to please those in whose society she finds herself) does little to present Elise in a favourable light. Moreover, Uranie's treatment of her servant, Galopin, is not consistent with the graciousness and poise to be expected of a lady: exasperated at the lad's inexperience, she says, "Diantre soit le petit vilain!", and calls him "animal", - neither of which expressions suggest that self-mastery normally associated with the great.(2) The rough edge of Uranie's tongue is allowed to show through, despite the polish of her speech and conduct in normal circumstances. As an observer of human nature, Molière has few illusions, it would seem, about the

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(1) sc. ii, op. cit. I, pg. 645.
(2) Ibid.

refining influence of breeding when instinctive reactions are involved. As for Elise, it is obvious that her upbringing, whatever elegance of manners it may have bestowed on her, has failed to teach her any of that tolerance and kindliness which form the basis of true courtesy.

It must be admitted that Climène's behaviour on joining her two "friends" confirms the uncharitable characterization given of her in the preceding scene. Her noisy demonstration of suffering, both mental and physical, leads one to expect tidings of some great calamity; but it turns out that she is outraged by nothing more drastic than "cette méchante rapsodie de L'École des Femmes" (1). Discussion of the comedy is the pretext for the interesting confrontation which ensues between the "précieuse" and the "mondaines". In Climène we see exaggerated nicety of language and judgement (she calls Uranie "ma chère", and her speech is punctuated with expressions like "vous me faites pitié", "un goût détestable", and "obscurité de discernement".), together with considerable condescension towards one whose taste she deems inferior to her own. In Uranie we see a straightforward rejection of the values represented by Climène, - excessive delicacy, super-refinement, and a finesse that detects obscenity in the most innocent remarks. Uranie expresses herself with elegance and fluency, but her speech is simpler than that of Climène, and while she disagrees with her visitor, she does not condescend to her. Elise, as might be

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(1) sc. iii, op. cit. I, pg. 647.

anticipated, is more subtle and therefore more devastating in her exchange with Climène, for she ironically agrees with everything the "précieuse" says, even outdoing her at times in her censure of the play under discussion, siding with her against Uranie in the delicate matter of Molière's use of a definite article:

"... ce le est insolent au dernier point, et vous avez tort de défendre ce le." (1)

It is clear to the meanest intelligence that such an endorsement of Climène's judgement can only make the lady look more ridiculous than she already appears, and by the end of the scene even Climène's vanity is not enough to persuade her that Elise is sincere in her violent admiration of her person and intelligence ("Vous vous moquez de moi, Madame".) (2) The excessive use of "Madame" in the last lines of scene three gives an air of burlesque civility to the conversation as well as suggesting a degree of spite and insincerity inevitable in a gathering of young society women. (Later, in Le Misanthrope, a similar situation arises between Arsinoé, the prude, and Célimène the coquette.)

Scene four brings the arrival of the Marquis, and with it a fresh crisis with Galopin, who indiscreetly tells the new-comer that the lady of the house is out, when she is clearly visible through the door. Uranie's restraint is severely taxed by the lackey's reminding her in front

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(1) sc. iii, op. cit. I, pg. 647.
(2) Ibid. pg. 650.

of the Marquis that

"Vous me grondâtes l'autre jour de lui avoir dit que vous y étiez." (1)

The comic aspect of the situation, - a complete reversal of that in scene two, - is unmistakeably the aspect which Molière intended to emphasize; but as a revelation of the sort of courteous dishonesty upon which polite society reposes, the "malentendu" between Galopin and Uranie is an implicit comment on the social practices of the time; a comment which is still relevant today.

Just as Climène's presence confirms the portrait that preceded it, so the Marquis' introduction to the group in the salon proves Elise's observations about him to have an element of truth: the gentleman is barely seated, when Galopin's treatment of him inspires him with a pun on the word "mine", - the felicity of which sends him into peals of mirth at his own wit. After some remarks about the lack of respect shown by servants to the great (Elise slyly suggests that age and experience will make Galopin "plus éclairé en honnêtes gens" (2)), conversation turns to the play, and a new opinion is given on its merit. The Marquis states arbitrarily:

"C'est la plus méchante chose du monde",(3)

and it emerges a little later that this criticism is prompted by the dishevelled state into which his ribbons and lace "canons" were tangled by the crowd at the per-

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(1) sc. iv, op. cit. I, pg. 651.
(2) Ibid. pg. 652.
(3) Ibid.

formance. The frivolity of this reason for condemnation of L'Ecole des Femmes is brought out by Elise's comment, that "cela crie vengeance contre L'Ecole des Femmes".(1)

At this juncture, Dorante makes his entry into Uranie's salon, and yet another perspective is thus afforded upon the comedy. Like Uranie, Dorante speaks in support of the play, despite the horror such an attitude inspires in the Marquis. The use of "tu" between the two young men is ambiguous, for it could indicate either equality and familiarity, or else contempt occasioned by their mutual disapproval of each other's judgement. The Marquis' snobbishness (already suggested by his brush with Galopin) is explicit in his remark that the most convincing evidence of the play's worthlessness is the enthusiasm with which it was greeted by the "parterre". Whereupon Dorante launches into the much-quoted speech concerning the sound common sense of the less prestigious members of a theatre-audience, and the shortcomings of the socially superior as judges of dramatic art, who are often led astray by "prévention aveugle", "complaisance affectée", and "délicatesse ridicule". (2) Does this attack on members of his own class put Dorante in a ridiculous light or make him unconvincing as a character? The Marquis' retort,

> "Te voilà donc, Chevalier, le défenseur du parterre?" (3)

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(1) sc. iv, op. cit. I, pg. 652

(2) Ibid. pg.654.

(3) Ibid.

gives some indication of the originality of such a standpoint taken by an aristocrat. The reference to Dorante's social rank - "Chevalier" - further emphasizes the incongruity of his choice of the plebeian pit as a guide to excellence in theatre-taste. Yet Dorante hastens to reassure the company that he is infuriated by the conduct of those who betray their class by their affectation ("malgré leur qualité), and lead people to believe that the entire gentry is guilty of their absurdity. This assertion is surely an indirect way of saying that the upper classes are above the very faults of which they have just been accused, and as such it may be seen that fundamentally, there is little difference between Dorante's view of the nobility and that of the Marquis. The divergence of their respective opinions comes from the fact that the Marquis is a snob, while Dorante is not. Both respect the worth and importance of the aristocracy, but Dorante, being free from the social prejudices that blind the Marquis, can see room for improvement in its ranks and acknowledge merit in less elevated orders of society.

After these generalizations, conversation turns to a discussion of other apparently reputable judgements of L'Ecole des Femmes, and we hear first of Lysandre, then of the marquise Araminte. The same sharp, merciless lucidity which is noticeable in Elise's earlier comments on absent acquaintances, may be detected in Uranie's criticism of Lysandre's dogmatic approach to exchange of opinions, and his intolerance of others. The same

harshness characterizes Dorante's remarks about Araminte: he attributes the excessive gentility of this lady to a need to compensate for her waning charms, suggesting that prudishness is a suitable disguise for the frustration attendant upon a woman no longer young and beautiful. In addition to an exaggerated moral susceptibility, Araminte is a "précieuse", unspeakably shocked by certain "syllabes déshonnêtes" (1) which she contrives to notice in every second word.

With La Bruyère-like accuracy, Molière isolates in these two verbal characterizations, traits of contemporary persons belonging to polite society of his time. It must be confessed that neither do much credit to the originals; and it is likely that the similarity of Lysandre to the Marquis, and of Araminte to Climène, is not fortuitous. Elegance of language is all very well, but when language itself becomes distorted by too much zeal for linguistic purity, admiration turns to impatience and contempt. In the characters Molière sets before us on the stage, we see the illustration of the point Dorante is trying to make: Climène and the Marquis represent the negative aspects of noble class-traits, while the others, - malice apart, - have more positive qualities. In other words, there are elements of good and bad in the upper classes: there is breeding and culture and soundness of taste and judgement, but there is also affectation, preciousness and prejudice. The sketches of Lysandre and Araminte reinforce the impression that the Marquis

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(1) sc.v, op. cit. I, pg. 655.

and Climène are not exceptional beings in their particular social milieu, but stand for a certain type easily identifiable amongst their contemporaries. Finally, there remains the sixth gentleman to complete the group in Uranie's salon: Lysidas the poet.

"Poet" is used here in the wider sense of "one who is concerned with literary activity", and the very first words uttered by Lysidas give us to understand that he is the author of a new play due to have its première shortly. With commendable foresight, the play-wright letsit be known that his work has had an excellent reception "chez Madame la Marquise" (1), and that the praises heaped upon it detained him for one hour; then, that all who heard the reading of it are committed to attend the première; then, that Uranie would do well to reserve a "loge" for the performance; and, lastly, that there are not many seats left. Despite her promise that the masterpiece will be read after supper, Uranie has great difficulty in persuading the enthusiastic dramatist to take a seat and contribute his opinion to the matter under discussion. The dialogue between Uranie and Lysidas is fascinating as a study of two opposing wills constrained by civility: Uranie owes Lysidas politeness as her guest, and Lysidas has an equal obligation to Uranie both as a lady and as his hostess. Lysidas has one thing in mind, and that is to advertise his play. Uranie's main desire is to continue

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(1) sc. vi, op. cit. I, pg. 656.

the interrupted conversation and find someone to endorse her judgement of L'Ecole des Femmes.

Upon the latter subject, the "poet" is very reserved, making such non-committal statements as:

"Je la trouve fort belle... n'est-elle pas en effet la plus belle du monde?" (1)

Even when coaxed by Dorante to be more explicit, the prudent Lysidas merely points out that L'Ecole des Femmes is not acceptable to "les connaisseurs". After which he relapses into a discreet silence while the others argue over the application of the play's moral, and Elise takes advantage of the opportunity to damn Climène with faint praise. When at last Lysidas is prevailed upon to state his views on the comedy, he prefaces his speech with the observation that he is a reluctant critic, being in general indulgent where fellow-playwrights' work is concerned. A technical discussion ensues on the subject of genre, until the matter of court-taste is brought up. Enough has been said in this regard in the previous chapter, and will not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that Dorante's reasoning at this juncture confirms his earlier statements about the nobility, its virtues and its vices. As the discussion progresses, Lysidas warms to his theme of the many deficiencies marring L'Ecole des Femmes; his initial reticence on the play's merits and demerits forgotten in his professional envy of his rival's success. Towards the end of the little play under con-

(1) sc. vi, op. cit. I, pg. 657.

sideration, the well-mannered veneer of the protagonists' conduct wears thin, especially in the case of the Marquis, who endeavours to stifle Dorante's counter-attack of Lysidas' speech by bullying him ("Réponds, réponds, réponds, réponds") (1), and later, by singing loudly to drown the other's arguments. (2) This is a sorry reflection of aristocratic courtesy, whatever its comic potential. (In fact, the comic effect of the scene in question is mainly derived from the incongruity of such behaviour in one so languid and mannered). The situation is retrieved by the announcement of supper, and the humorous suggestion that the past conversation be reproduced as an appendage to Molière's controversial comedy.

So much for La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes. With the exception of Galopin, all the characters in the work are of the upper classes, which means that the play provides a reasonable basis for conclusions about Molière's conception of those socially superior to himself. It must, of course, be remembered that as a writer of comedy, Molière's portrayal of any section of society is influenced by the need to amuse, and therefore a literal interpretation of dialogue, situation and characterization should be treated with caution. Nevertheless some general impression is created of an attitude towards those presented in a given comedy.

On the one hand, nearly all the habitués of Uranie's

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(1) sc. vi, op. cit. I, pg. 665.
(2) Ibid. pg. 667.

salon have some unpleasant trait: we have seen that Climène, Lysidas and the Marquis are affected, pompous, dogmatic and shallow. The Marquis has the additional foible of foppishness (witness his concern for his ribbons and "canons"). Dorante, Uranie and Elise, although they are more attractive than the other three protagonists, have a disagreeable tendency to demolish the character of absent friends and acquaintances, with a thoroughness that suggests scant charity or tolerance. (This is especially true of Elise.)

On the other hand, the conversation that forms the main interest of La Critique is kept at a high level, both in tone and in content. True, the Marquis exhibits lack of courtesy in his exchange with Dorante, and some of the witticisms are insipid; but on the whole, remarks, retorts, quips, rejoinders and questions passing between the six young people are of the sort to be expected in a group of well-educated, refined individuals. Despite a small lapse (in the recriminations addressed to Galopin) natural reactions are pretty well controlled by acquired civility throughout the action, and, in short, it may be said with justice that the ambiance of Uranie's salon is one of elegance and refinement. The subject of discussion, too, is in keeping with the tone of the conversation, bearing as it does on matters of taste, language and literary convention.

Some consideration shall now be given to the other comedy

mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: Le Misanthrope.

The issues raised in this later play are quite different from those presented in La Critique. Nevertheless, the background against which the drama of Célimène's and Alceste's love-affair is played out is the same: the salon of a wealthy young woman visited (and courted) by the cream of society. As in La Critique, the plot is very simple: the whole comedy centres on one basic fact, - that Alceste the unsociable, Alceste the misanthrope, is irremediably in love with a woman whose values and temperament are anathema to him. The situations arising out of day-to-day existence, - the encounter with Oronte, the visit to Célimène, arguments with Philinte, dealings with Arsinoé, the news of the outcome of Alceste's litigation, the confrontation of Célimène and her indignant admirers, - all these are illustrations of, rather than distractions from, the basic theme of the play, which is the temperament of Alceste as opposed to the temperament of Célimène.

As in La Critique, the majority of the personae are noble; the only exceptions are Basque and du Bois, Célimène's and Alceste's respective valets, and an official from the "maréchaussée de France." Again, the interaction that takes place between the principal characters affords ample opportunity for analysis of the aristocratic way of life as viewed by a man in Molière's position.

The comedy opens with an argument (one of many, as we

shall see) between Alceste and his friend, Philinte. The comic and psychological aspects of this spectacle, - the misanthrope and the debonnaire society gentleman at variance - are obvious, and it is these that impress the spectator most. But there are other deductions to be made from their conversation. Alceste's wrath is roused by his friend's effusive greeting of a person whom he hardly knows. The descriptions of the salutation -

"Je vous vois accabler un homme de caresses,
Et témoigner pour lui les dernières tendresses;
De protestations, d'offres et de serments,
Vous chargez la fureur de vos embrassements." (1)

is undoubtedly exaggerated, partly to show the extent of Alceste's rage, which queers his judgement; partly for amusing effect, since after all this extravagant display, Philinte admits he can barely recall the person's name. However, as the dialogue continues, it becomes clear that Philinte is far more representative of normal social conduct than his atrabilious friend, and one is led to wonder whether the incident that provoked Alceste so exceedingly is very far removed from standard practice in polite society after all. What emerges from Act One is the inexpedience of that complete sincerity recommended by Alceste, for he himself is made painfully aware of the difficulty of its application to real life. Whatever the values upon which middle-class and lower-class society might repose, it is clear that the conduct of "honnêtes gens" of Philinte's and Alceste's standing is governed

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(1) Act. I, sc. i, ll.17-20. (op.cit.II,pg.142.)

to an appreciable degree by a sort of moral compromise not far removed from hypocrisy. The sole justification for this "lâche flatterie", as Alceste terms it, is a desire to spare the feelings and sensibility of others. Philinte demonstrates this amply by pointing out the indelicacy of telling old Emilie that she is too old to wear make-up, or showing Dorilas how much his recital of family glory bores everyone afflicted with it at the court. In theory, honesty without compromise is a fine thing, but in practice, its capacity for wounding makes it inacceptable in dealing with others, as Alceste's "Je ne dis pas cela" (1) proves. It is logical to assume that the upper classes should be more aware of the necessity for the social lie than any other section of society, since it is they who have the leisure for those activities (conversation and exchange of opinions) involving consideration for others' feelings, and sensitivity to their reactions.

Before considering Célimène's salon itself, to which we are introduced in Act Two, it is worth noting that in Le Misanthrope as in La Critique, there is seen to exist an interest in literary matters among the higher orders of society. Uranie's friends spend the evening discussing one play, with the prospect of hearing another read after supper; and Oronte confronts Alceste and Philinte with his sonnet in Le Misanthrope as with a composition worthy

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(1) Repeated three times in consecutive replies to Oronte's anxious questions about his sonnet: Act I, sc. ii.

of sustained and serious attention. Already there is some evidence of a certain picture of aristocratic pursuits crystallizing out from the content of these plays. Far from contradicting the earlier impressions gained from La Critique, Le Misanthrope confirms the image of seventeenth-century nobility.

Now we come to the most relevant and interesting point of comparison between the two plays: the presentation of a salon. Obviously the scope and depth of Le Misanthrope are much greater than those of La Critique, since the former centres upon human nature, while the latter merely uses personae to debate a question of taste and judgement arising from a single, controversial issue. It is not to the main characters of Le Misanthrope that we must look for an insight into the social milieu to which they belong, but rather to the secondary characters: Oronte, Acaste, Arsinoé, and Clitandre. Because these last-mentioned are not shown to be intrinsically compelling in the way that Alceste and Célimène are, they bear to a much greater extent the imprint of their social environment. As with the characters of La Critique, there is nothing remarkable about them to distract one from the values and norms of the class they represent, added to which is the narrowness of the circle in which they move. It is not without justification that M. Jasinski describes Le Misanthrope as a comedy in which "l'action se joue dans

un cercle aristocratique fort étroit." (1)

It is reasonable to assume that in the habitués of Célimène's salon we see persons who conform fairly closely to real-life, and whose characterization is more or less free from caricature; for Alceste's extravagant individuality only has meaning if seen against a background of normality. The truth of this remark is borne out by the contrast between Alceste's reaction to Oronte's sonnet, and Philinte's more civil, if less honest, judgement. Without the presence of Philinte, much of the point of Alceste's criticism would be lost.

When Alceste reproaches Célimène for her indulgence of the young fops who frequent her salon (2), a detailed portrait of Clitandre prepares the audience for that gentleman's entrance three scenes later. Even making allowances for Alceste's prejudice against him, it is possible to gain from this description some idea of the manners and dress of a contemporary noble: the long finger-nail, blonde wig, abundance of ribbons, vast "canons" and stylish "rhingrave" favoured by Clitandre are by no means unusual for the period, as a glance at one of Abraham Bosse's etchings proves (3). Added to his fashionable attire is his affected laugh and high-pitched voice; and collectively, these details form a coherent whole: Clitandre emerges as the product of a well-defined

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(1) R. Jasinski, _Molière et le Misanthrope_, Nizet, Paris, 1970, pg. 203.

(2) Act II, sc. i.

(3) See _Le 17e siècle vu par Abraham Bosse_, Dacosta, 1967.

social milieu and, when we see him in conversation with his friend Acaste, or paying court to Célimène, his speech and attitude confirm the visual image we already have of him. He epitomizes the well-bred, idle, fashion-conscious young gallant of mid-seventeenth-century society. While it is true that Célimène encourages his attentions to ensure a favourable judgement in her law-suit,

"... dans mon procès, ainsi qu'il m'a promise,
Il peut intéresser tout ce qu'il a d'amis." (1)

it must be remembered that this aspect of her relationship with him is pointed out for Alceste's appeasement, and does not preclude the possibility of there being another reason for the welcome accorded Clitandre at the young widow's salon. Not only does he gratify her vanity, but he, together with Acaste and Oronte, helps to set the tone desired by Célimène. This tone is a happy balance between formal, disciplined good breeding and nonchalance, a harmonious blend of self-mastery and vivacity. This has nothing to do with the motives, - the hypocrisy, the self-interest, the backbiting and malevolence, that underlie this cultivated, brilliant social set. The positive attributes of Célimène's friends are to be found mainly in external matters; in the turn of phrase used to express a delicate nuance of thought, for example, or in the half-familiar, half-imperious address to servants. In the latter can be seen another instance of that easy elegance which is the stamp of the aristocrat, and Célimène's instructions to Basque seem all the more gracious when

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(1) Act II, sc. i, ll. 491 - 492

compared with Alceste's brusque exchange with du Bois,- in Act Four, for example:

"Ah! je te casserai la tête assurément,
Si tu ne veux, maraud, t'expliquer autrement." (1)

As one who is reacting violently against all that his class represents, Alceste is shown behaving in a manner contrary to the principle of "honnêteté" so dear to the group in whose society he finds himself. In some ways, this independence of conduct is admirable, since there are negative aspects to be discerned amid the polished gathering in Célimène's salon; yet on the other hand Alceste also brings into relief, by contrast, the more admirable features of aristocratic behaviour. So far, these would seem to consist mainly of impeccable manners and language; but there is another area in which the distinction associated with gentlefolk finds expression in Le Misanthrope: the approach to life.

At the beginning of Act Three, Acaste and Clitandre are seen in conversation awaiting the return of Célimène, and Acaste's remarks concerning the condition of a young man in his position are revealing. Even after due allowance has been made for the context of Acaste's statements, (the self-felicitating Marquis is hinting to Clitandre that it is himself whom Célimène favours) some general impression is gained of an aristocrat's attitude to life, and of his conception of his rôle in society.

Before the gentleman launches into his speech concerning

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(1) Act IV, sc. iv, ll. 1447-1448.

his achievements and aspirations, his friend has already commented upon the confidence and optimism betokened by his appearance:

"Toute chose t'égaye et rien ne t'inquiète".(1)

That observation arises from Clitandre's curiosity as a rival-in-love ignorant of the exact relationship between Acaste and Célimène - the unruffled cheerfulness of the Marquis suggests success with amorous enterprises, and as such gives Clitandre grounds for speculation. But Acaste's reply to the question, "crois-tu... avoir de grands sujets de paraître joyeux?" (2) shows that his joie de vivre comes from a plurality of sources: his youth, wealth, consciousness of high rank, and conviction that there are few tasks to which he is unequal. Despite the complacency characterizing most of Acaste's opinions about himself, there is a certain modesty in his choice of vocabulary when pointing out his merits: the code of "honnêteté" demands that vanity be disguised as far as possible. Hence, while he makes it clear that he has courage in duelling, he says "pour le coeur... je n'en manque pas" (3), rather than affirm baldly that he _is_ brave. When he alludes to his native intelligence, he softens the remark with a "sans doute", and in referring to the fine figure he cuts, words such as "assez" and "je crois" (4) lessen the conceit inherent in his assertions. Added to his scruples in speaking at length about himself (understandable in an

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(1) Act III, sc. i., l. 778.
(2) Ibid. ll. 779-780.
(3) Ibid. ll. 787-788.
(4) Ibid. ll. 791, 797, 799.

age when there was a prevailing belief that "le moi est haïssable"), Acaste's speech is marked by the sort of politeness to be expected of one gentleman addressing another. He calls Clitandre "mon cher Marquis", and even when he teases his interlocutor by his refusal to enlighten him, the tone of the conversation never becomes vulgar. The strongest expletive used by the young men is "parbleu!", - again, a comparison with the more vigorous, less refined language of Alceste is invited. (The latter's speech is full of expressions like "morbleu", "sacrebleu" and "têtebleu".)

Considering Acaste in the context of his social milieu, and bearing in mind the characterization of Clitandre already discussed at some length, and the poetizing Oronte whom we have met in the first act, it may be assumed that these young men are typical representatives of the gentry. They share a passion for conforming to whatever mode happens to be in favour, be it concerned with sartorial elegance (as is the case of Clitandre), or with pastimes (as is the case of Oronte, whose sonnet is the product of a dilettante following the prevailing fashion.) Moreover, Acaste, Clitandre and Oronte have in common a certain measure of ambition, for they are all involved to a greater or lesser degree in court-life, without being courtiers in the strict sense of the term. Oronte tells Alceste that

"On sait qu'auprès du Roi je fais quelque figure"(1);

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, l. 290.

Clitandre mentions that he has just come from the "levé" at the Louvre, and speaks with authority on the personality and appearance of those frequenting court-circles (1), while Acaste confidently asserts that he is "bien auprès du maître" (2), the "maître" being, of course, the King. Finally, the three young men are simultaneously in love with Célimène, and this fact enables us to study aristocratic practice where the fair sex is concerned. Oronte's sonnet, - we may guess from its content, - is inspired by Célimène, whose identity is tastefully disguised in the veils of pastoral convention (she is addressed as "Philis"). Certainly the poetry is insipid by modern standards, but in Molière's day it was admired, as is demonstrated by Donneau de Visé's Lettre sur le Misanthrope, in which is the following remark:

> "Le sonnet n'est point méchant, selon la manière d'écrire d'aujourd'hui" (3).

It appears that at the first performance of the play, some of the spectators even applauded the piece before Alceste's criticism demolished it, and were "ensuite tout confus."(3). As for Acaste and Clitandre, their assiduous attendance upon the young widow, and their gallantry towards her in conversation (evidenced by their defence of Célimène when Alceste attacks the lady's conduct) make it clear what their intentions are regarding her. Acaste's attitude towards paying court is summed up in his remark to Clitandre:

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(1) Act II, sc. iv.
(2) Act III, sc. i. l. 802.
(3) Included (Unabridged) in Couton's ed., vol.II, pp.131-140.

"... je ne suis de taille ni d'humeur à pouvoir d'une belle essuyer la froideur." (1) That this determination is shared by others of his class is shown at the end of the play, when Oronte demands that Célimène commit herself to him once and for all:

"Il me faut de votre âme une pleine assurance:
Un amant là-dessus n'aime point qu'on balance."(2)

Pride, and a positive approach to love, are also manifest in Acaste's piqued retort to Célimène after the revelation of her duplicity:

"Et je vous ferai voir que les petits marquis
Ont, pour se consoler, des coeurs du plus haut prix."(3)

What emerges from this survey of the attitudes of the upper classes as represented in Le Misanthrope by Oronte, Acaste and Clitandre? The overall picture is one of merits counter-balanced by faults. Aesthetically speaking, there is much to be said in favour of the blue-blooded. Elegance of diction and manners, discretion, wit, and an observance of etiquette which is not allowed to degenerate into excessive, stultifying ritualism - these constitute that excellence of form traditionally associated with the nobility. Morally, their worth is more ambiguous. On the positive side, they evince a confidence and optimism in accordance with their rank and prospects, not altogether unjustified. Yet this is spoilt by complacency and vanity, both of which are fairly obvious pitfalls for those in high places. Clitandre's stylishness is marred by

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(1) Act III, sc. i. ll.807-808.
(2) Act V, sc. ii. ll.1589-1590.
(3) Act V, sc. iv, ll.1697-1698.

effeminacy; Acaste's pleasure in his birth and valour is equally great where his more trivial attributes are concerned ("...j'ai... les dents belles surtout") (1); and Oronte is distinctly pompous regarding his poetic achievements.

There is still more to criticize. The most informative scene from the point of view of those curious to see how the aristocratic pass their time, is that in which Célimène entertains Acaste, Clitandre, Alceste and Philinte, together with Éliante. Here, as in La Critique, we have an opportunity to discover the main topics of conversation with which a salon was usually preoccupied. In Uranie's salon, the company is chiefly concerned with L'École des Femmes; but even there, allusions to contemporary figures and sharp remarks upon the shortcomings of absent friends are introduced into the discussion. In Célimène's salon, the emphasis is different, for there is no mention of a new play. Talk is entirely taken up with disparagement of acquaintances, and Célimène excels in the gentle art of picking friends to pieces, from the absurdly eccentric Cléonte to the taciturn Bélise. Nobody in the list of gentlefolk presented to Célimène for comment by her visitors escapes her causticity. She appears to be a second Elise, differing from the earlier character only in the degree of her cruelty, which is greater, and in her method, which is more systematic. Such a conversation indicates two things: first, it is revealing as to the character of the participants them-

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(1) Act III, sc. i, ll. 797-798.

selves, because although the principal speaker is Célimène, her admirers form a highly receptive and appreciative audience, encouraging every malicious observation from their cynical hostess. Secondly, it introduces us to a host of individuals who, despite their physical absence from the stage, convey a general impression of the sort of social group to which they belong. Collectively they suggest much the same existence as that led by the persons before us: for all their breeding, energy and accomplishments, they seem to achieve very little. Damon, "le raisonneur", (1), has considerable talent for saying nothing in a great many words, and can detain a friend for a whole hour with his meaningless eloquence. Timante, as Célimène epigrammatically puts it, "sans aucune affaire, est toujours affairé".(2). Then there is Géralde, perpetually talking of his horses and dogs to the exclusion of everything else, and, presumably, with nothing more important than hunting to claim his attention.(3). Young Cléon's stupidity neutralizes the charm of his excellent table, and makes friends hesitate to seek his company.(4). And so, as these various beings are offered for inspection and criticism, an awareness of the weaknesses inherent in this refined company intensifies. Talking, eating, hunting, being busy about nothing, - these are the trivial pursuits to which the ample leisure-time of the upper classes would seem to be devoted. Molière's comedy is

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(1) Act II, sc. iv, ll.576-582.
(2) Ibid., ll. 585-594.
(3) Ibid., ll. 595-603.
(4) Ibid., ll. 623-630.

all the more piquant when it is borne in mind that the very criticisms applied so liberally to Célimène's acquaintances are far from irrelevant in the case of the habitués of her salon, and of herself. This brings us to the greatest fault of the nobility as portrayed in Le Misanthrope: a lack of generosity and humanity. It is the fact that Célimène and her circle subordinate content to form, which explains certain deficiencies noticeable in them. The pettiness characterizing their pastimes (gossip, fashion, intrigue) stems from their attention to minor details at the expense of more essential issues. Seen analytically, the charm of Célimène's salon (and of Célimène herself) is the charm of perfect style; it has nothing to do with the heart. Like most things connected with appearances alone, it is not free from artifice, and Alceste's rough spontaneity serves to highlight the affectation of those in his company, even as his lack of polish contrasts unfavourably with their urbanity.

What does this imply about Molière's judgement of the higher strata of his society? While it is true that a great artist is great because he does not have a discernible standpoint, it is equally true that a total absence of judgement tends to make a work of art pointless. Molière's opinion may perhaps be inferred from the fact that neither the graceful malevolence of Célimène's followers nor the irascible sincerity of Alceste are sufficiently attractive to constitute an ideal. Alceste's indignation against

"Ces obligeants diseurs d'inutiles paroles" (1) is useful inasmuch as it is a reaction against a form of hypocrisy current amongst fashionable society in his day. But far be it from Molière to suggest that all refinement be swept away in the name of sincerity. Nor does the dramatist imply that reform is necessary in the ranks of the aristocracy. As M. Jasinski remarks, (2), "il soulève les masques". Like La Rochefoucauld, Molière simply points out; and if he were a moralist, his office would end there. But Molière is not a moralist; he is a comic writer and an artist, and any concern with social ethics in his work is therefore secondary to his concern with comic situation. There is, after all, an element of "vis comica" in the spectacle of Célimène caught in the web of her own intrigue, - crushed, as it were, beneath the weight of righteous anger loudly expressed by those whom she expertly manipulated. The dénouement of Le Misanthrope is reminiscent of one of the oldest and most time-honoured themes of comedy: the biter bit. Modern audiences might persist in seeing Alceste as a tragic figure, and Célimène's final exit as one of the most pathetic expressions of rejection, but it is surely the reactions of seventeenth-century audiences that count.(3)

So much for Molière's attitude as a comic dramatist to the society depicted in Le Misanthrope. As an artist he could not fail to have appreciated, in the "société

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(1) Act I, sc. i, l. 46.

(2) Op. cit. pg. 210.

(3) For further comments on this subject, see G. Rudler, Preface to Le Misanthrope, Blackwell, Oxford, 1952.

mondaine" he portrays, that reconciliation already mentioned of delicacy and zest for living to be observed in Acaste and Clitandre; that fine balance between condescension and graciousness in Célimène's manner to her inferiors. If hypocrisy, pettiness, intolerance and egotism are byproducts of the aristocratic code of behaviour, (and Célimène's salon gives abundant proof that this is so) that same code of "honnêteté" also engenders self-control, tact, and a sort of elegance impossible to imitate and difficult to acquire, - as a M. Jourdain demonstrates most convincingly. Set side by side, La Critique and Le Misanthrope appear to complement rather than contradict each other. Both contain the same basic ingredients: an assembly of well-bred persons reacting to each other in a clearly defined environment. The first play has a more restricted scope and a literary bias, with a hint of social satire; the second is far more complex, emphasizing as it does temperamental conflicts, and focussing attention on various aspects of "mondaine" society. The element of literary interest is present in Le Misanthrope, (the matter of Oronte's sonnet) but it is of minor importance, serving only to illustrate one of the facets of human nature displayed in this comedy. What was the main substance of La Critique becomes a secondary theme in the later work, and the central theme of Le Misanthrope is seen to have existed already as a less essential element in the comedy of 1663.

The common features presented by both plays give some

coherence to Molière's portrayal of the social class with which we are presently concerned. In La Critique as in Le Misanthrope, a particular atmosphere surrounds these aristocrats who exchange opinions, gossip and compliments so blandly. Although each individual has his or her salient characteristic, as do the persons to whom reference is made by those on stage, all involved directly or indirectly in the action are of the same social group, which somehow gives them the air of belonging to the same family. Taken collectively, they display through their individual traits (vanity, preciousness, hypocrisy), certain features making up a definable whole. Célimène and Arsinoé, for example, not unlike Elise and Climène, are differentiated by the values they represent. At first glance it would appear that a coquette and a prude can have very little in common. Yet from their conversation it is clear that both are animated by the identical brand of malice, and that they are not so dissimilar after all.

Much has already been said in this chapter of both the positive and negative qualities of the nobility as viewed by Molière in La Critique and Le Misanthrope. What finally emerges from these works, considered together, is a realistic appraisal of the higher orders. There is respect, and even a measure of admiration, implicit in the presentation of the social class in question; certainly an awareness of real merit. At the same time the dramatist is sufficiently free from social prejudice to be distinctly critical of the elegant persons whom he

characterizes. Their lack of human kindness, and myopic concern with themselves and their immediate circle, are striking. Above all, their very virtues can be distorted into vices with disturbing facility (a reflection, perhaps, of La Rochefoucauld's tenet that "nos vertus ne sont que des vices déguisés"?). Frivolity and dissipation are attendant upon leisure and wealth. While recognizing the true value of that ideal of the "bienséances" and "honnêteté" of which some of the social élite proved worthy, Molière, the clear-sighted bourgeois, had no illusions about the hollowness and potential uselessness of life as it was lived by the Acastes and Clitandres of his world. To what extent his opinion of nobility was universal, may be guessed from the fact that an extravagant or excessively individualistic portrayal of social realities would not have been acceptable to the public whom Molière had to entertain in order to ensure his living.

Chapter Two.

Glimpses of the Fashionable Nobility.

In the preceding chapter, we have seen what general image of seventeenth-century aristocracy is projected by those of Molière's plays exclusively featuring this section of society. There are other comedies which, while they do not depict the nobility as such, are nonetheless enlightening where Molière's attitude towards the élite is concerned. In these works is to be found not so much a broad characterization of the upper classes or a portrayal of their moral qualities, as an occasional glimpse of their manners and appearance.

One such inkling of genteel society seen from the outside, as it were, is to be gained from Sganarelle's outburst in *L'Ecole des maris*. At first it might be thought significant that this play, - with a tirade on extremes of fashion as worn by the gentry in the very first scene, - was not performed for court-audiences, but staged at the Palais-Royal theatre (June, 1661). Yet while the comedy was running in Paris, La Grange noted that "quinze loges ont été louées".(1)That is an impressive indication of popularity with the more prestigious members of the audience.

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(1) See Couton, Op. cit., I, pg. 409.

These were the very persons most likely to take offence at Sganarelle's speech. What is more, many performances of L'Ecole des maris were given before private audiences "en visite" (1), which implies that the comedy was acceptable to the illustrious individuals who viewed it on such occasions. Surely such enthusiasm for the play among the fashionable nobility was misplaced? Let us take a closer look at the speech in question.

The play opens with a difference of opinion between the two brothers, Ariste and Sganarelle. The reproach that Ariste, the elder, addresses to his kinsman could well be taken for a criticism of Alceste: Sganarelle is taxed with

> "Cette farouche humeur, dont la sévérité
> Fuit toutes les douceurs de la société". (2)

This immediately sets Sganarelle down as one whose temperament is anti-social, and whose manners are non-conformist. While this might be construed as a virtue in the post-enlightenment era, it hardly recommended a man in the seventeenth century, an age which was firmly orientated towards the ideal of uniformity and harmony. Ariste's observation that his younger brother's eccentricities extend even to his attire, making him barbarous "jusques à l'habit", provokes Sganarelle's eloquence on the subject of contemporary dress. Coming from any other character, such a systematic attack on fashion would no doubt cause

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(1) See chapter 2, part one, of the present work.
(2) Act I, sc. i, ll. 13-14.

grave displeasure to the modishly-accoutred spectators present in the mixed audiences filling the Palais-Royal; and it would fail to amuse elegant guests at specially-commissioned performances. But all this causticity about "petits chapeaux", "la vaste enflure des cheveux blonds",(1) huge collars "jusqu'au nombril pendants" and sleeves "qu'à table on voit tâter les sauces" (2), is expressed by a disagreeable, idiosyncratic fellow whose opinions are, presumably, not to be taken too seriously. He is seen beside Ariste, who stands for conformity:

"Toujours au plus grand nombre il faut s'accommoder" (3), and whose attire no doubt suggests adherence to the precept just quoted. Sganarelle's description of his habitual costume makes the contrast between himself and Ariste all the more striking.

From his remarks it would appear he is clad according to the fashion prevailing in the time of Henri IV (some two generations before his own.) Added to the intrinsically comic spectacle of one defending his outmoded garments is the fact that Sganarelle, the ultra-conservative, is younger than his stylish brother by about twenty years, - a reversal of the usual order of things whereby youth seeks novelty and age seeks tradition. This is an illustration of Molière's intentions as a comic dramatist: it is not his place to censure or commend contemporary practices. He

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(1) Act I, sc. i, ll. 25-27.
(2) Ibid. ll. 30-31.
(3) Ibid. l. 41.

presents a ludicrous situation and leaves the spectator to draw his own conclusions. But that is not to say that the play-wright has no mind of his own on the particular issue raised, and in this instance the comments of Sganarelle invite some reflection, even if the absurdity of this character takes some of the sting out of his words.

In the matter of fashion, there have always been excesses, and despite its reputation for sobriety, the seventeenth century was not exempt from this general rule. Within the well-defined hierarchy of society, there were accepted ways in which one was to dress, according to one's social status. The bourgeois mode of attire was plain, while higher rank was reflected in a more elaborate style of clothing and coiffure. This means that when Sganarelle attacks extravagance in dress (such as shoes which disappear under cascades of ribbons, and wigs and flounces) his criticism is directed largely against the higher orders of society, since it was contrary to practice for a bourgeois to indulge in such sartorial whimsies. Without overtly censuring the fashionable nobility, Molière, by his detailed inventory of items of male clothing from the head (petits chapeaux") to the feet ("ces souliers mignons... qui vous font ressembler à des pigeons pattus") (1) contrives to suggest that it is possible to go too far in an attempt to be elegantly attired. When Ariste remarks that "l'un et l'autre excès choque" (2), - meaning that slavish

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(1) Act I, sc. i, ll. 25-34.
(2) Ibid. l. 43.

adherence to fashion is as bad as total disregard thereof - he is expressing the typically seventeenth-century ideal of moderation, without necessarily expressing Molière's own views. That Sganarelle's criticism is relevant to the aristocracy of his time, is inferred rather than obvious. There is, however, a much less ambiguous picture of fashion-conscious nobility in Les Fâcheux, the play immediately following L'Ecole des maris chronologically.

Molière's intention, stated clearly in the preface of the play, is to depict "toutes les espèces de fâcheux qui se trouvent" (1); and he adds that "le nombre en est grand, et à la cour et dans la ville" (1). That is as explicit a remark as anyone could wish regarding the social status of the persons involved. In the first scene of this comedy, Eraste complains at length to his valet, La Montagne, about an importunate marquis whose conduct at the theatre, and whose subsequent lack of sensitivity about social commitments, have incurred the young man's wrath. Eraste is clearly of the gentry himself, as is evidenced by the "fâcheux's" addressing him as "Marquis". The opening speech of Eraste (106 lines), while it fulfils the usual function of introducing the audience to character and situation, also presents a very interesting description of manners among the blue-blooded. Eraste mentions that he was seated on the stage; a detail in accordance with

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(1) Preface, Op. cit. I, pg. 483.

usual practice, for the wealthier and more uninhibited spectators frequently left the "loges" for the stage itself. (This not only gave them a better view of the performance, but also showed off their modish clothes to the rest of the audience.) That it was only aristocrats who took seats on-stage, is evident from a remark of Chappuzeau, who refers to the difficulty experienced by actors,

> "tant les ailes sont remplies de gens de qualité
> qui n'en peuvent faire qu'un riche ornement." (1)

Significantly, the "fâcheux" is characterized by his clothes: "un homme à grands canons" (2). This draws attention to the foppishness of the newcomer, and also emphasizes his obtrusiveness. Eraste's embarrassment at the absurd exhibitionism of the marquis indicates much the same consciousness of dignity peculiar to the upper classes, as we have already seen in Dorante (La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes). The embarrassment intensifies when the marquis claims friendship with Eraste:

> "Au visage sur l'heure un rouge m'est monté
> Que l'on me vît connu d'un pareil éventé" (3).

Such a reaction implies that behaviour like that of the "fâcheux" is not universally applicable to the nobility, since it is regarded with disgust by one of that class. On the other hand, Eraste's unpleasant acquaintance is not an isolated phenomenon, for his effusive greeting of

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(1) Le théâtre français, pg. 153. (1674)
(2) Act I, sc. i, l. 17.
(3) Ibid. ll. 41-42.

someone he barely knows is reminiscent of Philinte's conduct at the beginning of Le Misanthrope. Eraste alludes with distaste to "les baisers" inflicted upon him, and the unjustified use of "tu" which suggests an intimacy non-existent in reality. Eraste's comment on this piece of presumption reminds one of Alceste:

"... on en voit paraître,

De ces gens qui de rien veulent fort vous connaître"(1).

It would appear that civility as interpreted by the gentry in Molière's day tended to degenerate on occasions into obsequiousness, as is proved by the facility with which mere acquaintances fell upon one another amid violent demonstrations of affection. The enthusiastic greeting exchanged between the "fâcheux" and "un jeune homme amplement ajusté" (2) described by Eraste towards the end of his tirade, confirms this supposition.

"Mon Importun et lui courant à l'embrassade

Ont surpris les passants de leur brusque incartade".(3)

When the "fâcheux"'s attention has at last been drawn to the comedy performed beside him on the stage, another aspect of aristocratic interests and preoccupations becomes evident. As in La Critique, it may be seen that the theatre offered leisured persons of the marquis' ilk (one remembers Uranie, Climène and Dorante) a welcome source of diversion. Not only does Eraste's friend show familiarity with the piece immediately before him, but he prides himself on his knowledge of theatre in general, and of the rules to which dramatic art in the seventeenth-century

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(1) Act I, sc. i, ll. 43-44.

(2) Ibid. l. 98.

(3) Ibid. ll. 99-100.

was subject. Again, there is a similarity between this awareness of literary and dramatic convention ("... je sais par quelles lois un ouvrage est parfait") (1), and Lysidas' wordy exposition on the technicalities of playwriting in La Critique. In the circles frequented by those of rank and title, it was apparently good form to profess some knowledge of theatre, or even to set oneself up as an authority on comic or tragic art. While such an attitude suggests a degree of intelligence and culture, it is not free from pretentiousness. Lysidas is distinctly pedantic, and the "fâcheux" who accosts Eraste, labours under the delusion that Corneille reads his plays expressly for his entertainment and edification. ("...Corneille me vient lire tout ce qu'il fait".) (2) It is quite true that great authors often prepared their audiences by reading their plays in influential salons before the works in question had their premières; but this practice was designed less for the satisfaction of the listeners, than for the benefit of the dramatist. It is therefore presumptious of the marquis in Les Fâcheux to suppose that Corneille should attach importance to his judgement, which is presumably of the most mediocre. Not only is his native intelligence suspect (in view of his behaviour in general), but the superficiality of his attention to the play would in any case preclude respect for his opinion of it. Eraste tells La Montagne that he left long before the end of the performance

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(1) Act I, sc. i, l. 53
(2) Ibid. l. 54.

"Car les gens du bel air, pour agir galamment,
Se gardent bien surtout d'ouïr le dénouement" (1).

It may be good form to be well-acquainted with all the latest plays, but, if we are to believe Eraste, it is equally good form not to be too conscientious in following a work to its conclusion; the very prerequisite for sound judgement! As a comment on the attitude of the great towards contemporary drama, this anecdote constitutes a fairly severe indictment, suggesting intellectual dishonesty and irresponsibility. This is not without relevance to Acaste's fatuous remark that he has sufficient wit and taste to "juger sans étude et raisonner de tout"(2), and to Mascarille's interesting statement that "les gens de qualité savent tout sans avoir jamais rien appris"(3).

Eraste's punishment was prolonged, he says, by the marquis' oratory, most of which concerned the latter's superior qualities and achievements. In this, the "fâcheux" is not unique, for Acaste states his own merits at length in Le Misanthrope. And like Oronte, in the same play, Eraste's interlocutor speaks grandly of his influence at court, and offers his good services in those quarters to his acquaintance with a mixture of condescension and civility, just as Oronte does to Alceste:

"S'il faut faire à la cour pour vous quelque ouverture,
On sait qu'auprès du Roi je fais quelque figure" (4).

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(1) Act I, sc. i, ll. 61-62.
(2) Misanthrope, Act III sc. i, l. 792.
(3) Précieuses Ridicules, sc. ix.
(4) Misanthrope, Act I, sc. ii, ll. 289-290.

It would seem that in the ranks of the nobility, there was a certain type of aristocrat who, mainly to swell his own self-importance, was always ready to exaggerate his credit at court and magnanimously propose extending it to persons in no real need of it. Eraste has little use for the marquis' offer, and Alceste is in similar case with regard to that of Oronte. While it would be inaccurate to say that this vanity, self-delusion and insincerity are regarded by Molière as attributes of the élite, it is certain that he not only perceived their presence in some inferior representatives of this class, but what is more, had no qualms about depicting these failings on the stage, and for a court-audience at that.

The "fâcheux"'s invitation to Eraste to join him for a spin at Cours-la-Reine in his new "galèche" (the spelling of which implies the affected pronunciation adopted by this fashionable dandy) is about as convincing as his offer of influence at court. In Molière's time, Cours-la-Reine was the place to be seen if one had social aspirations, and the allusion to it by the marquis is doubtless a piece of name-dropping inevitable in a snob. This impression is confirmed by the mention of a "maréchal" with whom the marquis had allegedly arranged to have supper: good social connections never do one's reputation any harm for being known, and Eraste's companion takes care not to let this opportunity pass him by. The picture of this "fâcheux" is by now almost complete, and it only remains to show him swiftly transferring his noisy affection to a new arrival

before Eraste slips away to keep his appointment with Orphise. The new arrival and the marquis are evidently birds of the same feather, judging by the ostentatious dress and carriage of the former, "comblé de laquais et devant et derrière" (1). The last glimpse we have of the nobleman in question is that of an exuberant embrace, the enthusiasm of which is no doubt in inverse proportion to its sincerity.

Hitherto, little attention has been given to Eraste himself. The recital over, he is seen undergoing the ministrations of his valet, and in the space of a few lines, Molière provides a realistic little sketch of an exchange between master and servant. Far from exhibiting any vanity about his appearance, Eraste is indifferent to the state of his "rabat", "canons", and hat, all of which cause La Montagne some concern. Mention of the first two items of clothing ("rabat" and "canons") show that Eraste is dressed according to the prevailing fashion, as befits a gentleman. We may assume that his carelessness about his attire is due to a preoccupation with Orphise rather than to a genuine lack of interest in the sort of figure he cuts. His truculence with La Montagne is possibly the expression of his anxiety and frustration, but remarks like:

"Ouf! tu m'étrangles, fat; laisse-le comme il est" (2) and: "Je suis fort avancé. Que la fièvre te serre! " (3)

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(1) Act I, sc. i, l. 96.
(2) Ibid. l. 134.
(3) Ibid. l. 148.

leave much the same impression as do Uranie's indignant reproaches to Galopin in La Critique. It is amusing to see how the civility of refined persons breaks down under the strain of irritation, and Molière does not hesitate to make an audience laugh at their expense. La Montagne's revenge comes in the following scene, when Eraste appeals to him to give an opinion, and he replies,

"Monsieur, je ne dis rien, de peur d'être fâcheux" (1).

Galopin likewise worsts Uranie in their second confrontation, when his obedience to her previous instructions is misplaced in a new set of circumstances. This does not necessarily imply a hostile attitude on Molière's part towards the nobility, or sympathy with the under-dog. The servant's unexpected advantage over the master merely represents the traditional comic process of reversal of position.

When Eraste encounters Lysandre, another type of "fâcheux" is presented: the self-felicitating artist cast in the same mould as Oronte and Lysidas. As such, he is a recognizable type. His social status is soon established by his reference to "la cour", of which he is an habitué; by his familiar use of "tu" to Eraste (a common affectation amongst young aristocrats); and by his modest assertion that

"J'ai le bien, la naissance, et quelque emploi passable,
Et fais figure en France assez considérable" (2).

He evinces the same interest in music as the first "fâcheux" did in theatre, but it is the interest of a dilettante.

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, l. 158.
(2) Act I, sc. iii, ll. 183-184.

He has the same tendency to glorify what is, after all, a fairly modest participation in cultural life, and is so carried away by his composition that he inflicts the last few bars on Eraste "quatre ou cinq fois de suite"; and finally shows off the choreography to accompany the music, making Eraste perform the "figures de la femme". (1) His complacency is such that it makes him totally insensitive to the needs of others, and it is only Eraste's blunt "une autre fois" that sends him off in quest of fresh admirers. His exit is marked by a little speech indicating his familiarity with "Baptiste", that is, Lulli, who had been appointed Court Musician some six months before Les Fâcheux was first staged. The observation that Lulli's taste in music coincides with his own, puts Lysandre in the same category as the marquis characterized in the first scene of the play, and who fondly imagined that Corneille valued his opinions in dramatic art. Eraste's comment at the end of scene three could easily be taken for one of Alceste's irritable utterances:

"Ciel! faut-il que le rang, dont on veut tout couvrir,
De cent sots tous les jours nous oblige à souffrir,
Et nous fasse abaisser jusques aux complaisances
D'applaudir bien souvent à leurs impertinences?"(2)

Even after one has taken into account the exasperation occasioned by Eraste's circumstances, there remains in the outburst just quoted a certain relevance to social criteria contemporary with the gentleman. There is the

(1) Act I, sc. iii, ll. 188-192.
(2) Ibid. ll. 209-212.

acknowledgement that rank counts for much, if not everything, and that it excuses or justifies the greatest excesses of stupidity, (two examples of which have already proved sources of annoyance to Eraste.) There is also in those four lines an indication of the main pitfall attendant upon politeness: hypocrisy. This is not hypocrisy of the sort pilloried in Tartuffe, but hypocrisy which consists of the social lie, a compromise with truth to make life in a community liveable. If one is not prepared to accept this brand of insincerity, the only solution left is that advocated by Alceste: to live the life of a hermit in splendid isolation. In Les Fâcheux, we are not strictly involved with the issue of sincerity and loneliness as opposed to insincerity and gregariousness. We are simply dealing with a series of portraits intended to amuse an elegant gathering, but this does not mean that no incidental comments included in the play are enlightening and significant where attitudes to society and etiquette are concerned.

Eraste's subsequent "fâcheux" are less interesting psychologically than the marquis and Lysandre, but they give some insight into the typical occupations of the leisured upper classes in Molière's day. There is Alcandre, the would-be duellist who interrupts Eraste's tête-à-tête with Orphise, and whose request for help as a second inspires a cautionary speech on obedience to the Monarch; then the aggrieved Alcipe, who brings his complaints about

a game of piquet to Eraste and is dismissed unsatisfied. Then there are the two "précieuses", Orante and Clymène, needing a referee for their impassioned debate on a matter of the heart. Duelling, gaming, discussing at length "questions galantes", - such are the activities absorbing the interest and energies of Eraste's peers. Then we come to the character suggested to Molière by the King himself after the première of Les Fâcheux: Dorante the huntsman, based, it would seem, on M. de Soyecourt who became "grand-veneur de France" eight years after Les Fâcheux was first performed.

Dorante displays the same cheerful unconcern for Eraste's feelings as Lysandre: in vain does Eraste inform him

"Je cherche ici quelqu'un, et ne puis m'arrêter".(1)

Dorante is full of his anecdote, and his need for a sympathetic audience is greater than his sensitivity to the audience's preoccupations. His language differs from that of the other "fâcheux" in that it is less affected and certainly less refined. Like the marquis and Lysandre and Alcipe, Dorante uses the intimate form of address to Eraste ("tu"); but there the similarity ends, for his speech is peppered with technical terms relative to hunting, and his turn of phrase is simple, as is to be expected of a man of action. Despite the great difference between hunting and composing a "courante", Dorante and Lysandre are nonetheless of the same race: both are selfish, narrow

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(1) Act II, sc. vi, l. 485.

in their interests, and obstinate. These characteristics are a contradiction of the very notion upon which the ideal of the nobility is founded: that of the "honnête homme", the man signalized by generosity, amenability and universality of interests. In Dorante, Lysandre and other nobles of their kind, is to be seen a combination of the comedian's irony and the moralist's accuracy of observation.

The last act of Les Fâcheux shows Eraste beset by two importunate individuals who are not of his rank: Caritidès and Ormin. Although in themselves they do not tell us much about the aristocracy, their purpose in accosting Eraste is revealing as to the function of the titled in society. Besides, one or two chance remarks made by these persons pertain to the habits of the gentry. Caritidès, for example, justifies the unusual hour at which he approaches Eraste by pointing out that in the morning the young man is seldom available "car vour dormez toujours" (1). There is no reason to suppose that Eraste is exceptional in this regard, for he is not characterized as a lazy individual. The lateness of his rising may be assumed to be nothing more than the normal routine of a nobleman's existence. When Caritidès complains of the lack of ceremony with which he is introduced to Eraste, (since he must effect the introduction himself,) he gives the impression that it is no small matter to approach the great:

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(1) Act III, sc. ii, l. 620.

"Et toujours près des grands on doit être introduit

Par des gens qui de nous fassent un peu de bruit" (1).

Some allowance must be made for the arrogance of the pedant in such a statement, it is true; but his words imply the value attaching to an audience with someone of Eraste's rank. If it were not worth impressing a noble patron, there would be no necessity for anyone to herald the visit with "un peu de bruit".

The favour required of Eraste is the presentation of a "placet" to the King, - not a very demanding service, since any subject of Louis XIV was technically endowed with the right to address himself to His Majesty. In his Mémoires for 1661, Louis noted:

"Je donnai à tous mes sujets, sans distinction, la liberté de s'adresser à moi à toutes heures, de vive voix et par placets". (2)

However, as Caritidès remarks, the Monarch's generosity and indulgence result in an abuse of requests which makes favourable reception of his own doubtful; hence the utility of one in Eraste's position, to ensure the King's receipt of the "placet". In the mid-seventeenth century, court-nobles who were physically close to the Royal Presence were regarded by the humbler members of society as reliable intermediaries between themselves and their King. This tends to negate the usual concept of the

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(1) Act III, sc. ii, ll. 633-634.

(2) See Longnon's edition (Paris, 1933) of Louis XIV's Mémoires, pg. 24.

aristocracy as a merely decorative social order, for despite the monarch's willingness to receive in person any applications from his subjects, it was difficult in practice for a commoner to penetrate to the royal sanctum, as Caritidès' own experience has proved: he cannot get beyond the "salle des gardes". In the royal apartments there were not only the multiple barriers of successive chambers, but also zealous officials to prevent people like Caritidès from having an audience with the King. ("... les huissiers sont de terribles gens!" says the Hellenist .) (1). One of the functions of nobles was to assist less privileged persons than themselves to a hearing at Court. Another was to defend the State when the need arose, and in fact the upper classes were at leisure precisely because they had to be free of mundane tasks in order to take up arms for King and country. Eraste himself tells Alcandre:

"...on m'a vu soldat avant que courtisan" (2).

While there is an awareness of the potential idleness and frivolity of the blue-blooded in Molière's works (as we have seen in La Critique and Le Misanthrope) there is no suggestion that this section of society is expendable. Given the need to flatter one of whom a favour is about to be asked, there is genuine respect in the attitude of Caritidès to Eraste:

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(1) Act III sc. ii, l. 658.
(2) Act I, sc. vi, l. 274.

"Comme le rang, l'esprit, la générosité
Que chacun vante en vous..." (1)

This respect is not even diminished by resentment at Eraste's ungracious acceptance of the commission and brusque dismissal of his pedantic acquaintance: Caritidès offers to do Eraste the honour of a laborious literary composition bearing his name "en forme d'acrostiche" (2).

Of a similar nature is the request put to Eraste by Ormin, who replaces Caritidès as the young man's tormentor. Ormin represents the "donneur d'avis" eager to enrich himself, and endeavouring to do so by offering advice to the wealthy for a consideration. One of the most promising sources of income for such a man is the supreme governing force in the land; in Ormin's case, the King. Faced with the same difficulties as Caritidès when it is a matter of access to the Royal Person, Ormin has recourse to the same expedient, namely, Eraste's intercession. Eraste's reaction to the appeal "... au moins, appuyez-moi" is lacking in cordiality not only because of the circumstances in which he finds himself, but also because of his low opinion of the worth of Ormin and what he has to offer; just as Caritidès, too, failed to inspire respect. Of the latter Eraste remarks,

"Ma foi, de tels savants sont des ânes bien faits" (3)

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(1) Act III, sc. ii, ll. 629-630.
(2) Ibid. l. 680.
(3) Ibid. l. 682.

and he judges Ormin as

"... quelque souffleur, de ces gens qui n'ont rien,
Et vous viennent toujours promettre tant de bien" (1).

Despite this disillusionment with his prospective protégés, Eraste maintains enough patience to humour them. His tone, it is true, is brusque: he tells Caritidès to come to the point ("Achevez promptement"), and declines to share Ormin's secret ("Non, non, je ne veux point savoir votre secret"). Nonetheless, he undertakes to present their respective causes to the King,and lends Ormin the sum of money he requests, both of which actions suggest a degree of compliance commendable in one of his station.

The last of the "fâcheux" to annoy Eraste before the dénouement is another aristocrat: Filinte, whose mode of addressing the marquis implies social equality, if not intimacy. In his own way, Filinte is as obstinate as any of the other importunate individuals whom we have already seen asking Eraste for advice, help or sympathy, according to their needs. He only differs from them in that instead of demanding assistance, he offers it, regardless of whether his friend welcomes his proposals. His indelicacy causes him to insist on accompanying Eraste everywhere for his protection, even to his assignation with Orphise. This does not say much for aristocratic sensitivity, nor for that breeding which is supposed to produce an "honnête homme" capable of under-

(1) Act III, sc. iii, ll. 697-698.

standing when his presence is desirable, and when it is not.

What overall image of fashionable society emerges from Les Fâcheux? And does it add to that already established from La Critique and Le Misanthrope, to form a coherent whole? In each of the encounters between Eraste and the various "fâcheux", we see a cameo, as it were, featuring some aspect of the nobility: from dilettantism to patronage, from extravagance of dress and manners to preciosity. Eraste himself not only provides the link between what would otherwise be a series of disconnected anecdotes, but also acts as a foil to the absurdity and affectation characterizing the majority of persons with whom he comes into contact. His reasonableness counters the inordinacy surrounding him, and in that contrast and balance Molière exhibits his talent as an artist. From our point of view, it is less the aesthetic aspect of the picture he presents than the social implications thereof, which are interesting. Taken collectively, the representatives of the aristocracy as portrayed in Les Fâcheux are not prepossessing. In each successive "fâcheux" we see some defect: Lysandre is complacent; Alcandre, indiscreet; Alcipe, petty; Orante and Clymène, affected; Dorante, idiosyncratic. All have in common an irritating artlessness which belies the sort of upbringing and education that they, as members of the élite, may be assumed to have had. Yet Eraste himself is also of the nobility, and he does not conform

to the pattern established by the persons of his class with whom he converses. So far is he from conforming, in fact, that he is critical of his social peers. We judge the Dorantes and Filintes of the play from Eraste's viewpoint. Our vision of those he meets is his own. This means that the final picture of the cream of society in Les Fâcheux is not as unflattering as might at first be assumed, for Eraste's sanity and intelligence constitute a saving grace, as it were, for the social group to which he belongs. It is as if he stands for the ideal, being in many ways an "honnête homme" (in spite of occasional lapses in civility understandable in one so consistently frustrated), and he is seen against a background of the aberrations of which his acquaintances are guilty.

As a class, then, the fashionable nobles of Molière's time do not stand condemned in Les Fâcheux. They are simply depicted in a way which reveals what they are, and what they might be; and since Molière is first and foremost a comic dramatist, the discrepancy between the ideal and reality is presented not so much for its moral or social significance, as for its comic potential. Setting Les Fâcheux beside La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes and Le Misanthrope, we see that all three works present a similar conception of the gentry. In La Critique, there is the same characterization of a cross-section of the upper classes as we have noted in Les Fâcheux: just as in the latter play Eraste's judgements and attributes

are seen in the context of silliness, affectation and arrogance, Dorante's views and personality are conveyed to us in the setting of Uranie's salon. The habitués thereof display much the same imperfections as Eraste's "fâcheux". As for Le Misanthrope, in which an atmosphere similar to that of La Critique is generated, Alceste's sincerity and Philinte's common sense compensate for the spite, pettiness and self-satisfaction reigning in Célimène's salon. It only remains to consider the allusions to "les marquis" in L'Impromptu de Versailles, to complete the impression gained of Molière's general attitude towards the nobility of his day.

In reply to Mademoiselle Molière's comment, "Toujours des marquis!" (1) the playwright/troupe-director is moved to make several observations upon the "marquis" as fit matter for mirth, the most telling of which is the following:

> "Le marquis d'aujourd'hui est le plaisant de la comédie; et comme dans toutes les comédies anciennes on voit toujours un valet bouffon qui fait rire les auditeurs, de même, dans toutes nos pièces de maintenant, il faut toujours un marquis ridicule qui divertisse la compagnie" (2).

This might reasonably be construed as an audacious remark coming from one whose function was, after all, to entertain at court the very "marquis" referred to as "ridicules".

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(1) In sc. i: Op. cit., vol. I, pg. 681.
(2) Ibid.

Contemporary reaction confirms such an interpretation, moreover: in a play entitled La Vengeance des Marquis,(1) a young playwright and theatre-critic of Molière's time, Donneau de Visé, comments amply on the insult directed against "les marquis" by the author of L'Impromptu. He further indicates disapproval of Molière's treatment of the gentry in an eloquent Lettre sur les affaires du théâtre, in which is to be found this explicit statement:

> "Lorsqu'il joue toute la cour, et qu'il n'épargne que l'auguste personne du Roi, ... il ne s'aperçoit pas que cet incomparable monarque est toujours accompagné des gens qu'il veut rendre ridicules, que ce sont eux qui forment sa cour; que c'est avec eux qu'il se divertit.... c'est pourquoi Elomire devait plutôt travailler à nous faire voir qu'ils sont tous des héros, puisque le Prince est toujours au milieu d'eux,... que de nous en faire voir des portraits ridicules." (2)

The remark just quoted, taken at face-value, is an expression of righteous indignation prompted by the impropriety of Molière's attitude towards certain members of the nobility. Yet the relevance of de Visé's Lettre to the prevailing opinion of "les marquis" should be judged only after the circumstances under which the Lettre was written, have been taken into account. In the first place, de Visé is not altogether reliable as a represen-

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(1) In the Diversités Galantes, 1664, Ribou, Paris.
(2) Given unabridged in Couton, Op. cit., vol. I, pp.1108-1113.

tative of contemporary reaction to Molière's work, since he was too involved in controversies himself to be objective when commenting upon the qualities or defects of rivals' dramatic art. (1) In the second place, the very title of de Visé's own play, La Vengeance des Marquis, makes it clear that in the specific issue under consideration, he set out deliberately to take up the defence of that group of persons whose foibles Molière had seen fit to present in a ridiculous light. De Visé's interpretation of the remark that "le marquis d'aujourd'hui est le plaisant de la comédie" is therefore influenced appreciably by his desire to discredit the author of L'Impromptu. This accounts for some exaggeration in his assessment of Molière's crime of "lèse-marquis", for by exaggerating it and claiming that the dramatist "joue toute la cour", he makes a case sufficiently grave for bitter denunciation. At the same time he creates an opportunity for himself to eulogise King and Court; and in view of the importance of patronage and the good-will of influential persons, his motives for doing so are fairly transparent. A more reliable and significant guide to reaction to the portrayal of nobility in L'Impromptu is to be sought in the fact that none of the individuals whom de Visé claims are wronged in that play appear to have taken the dramatist's remarks amiss. In the Lettre already mentioned, de Visé himself interprets this lack of resentment as follows: "Pour ce qui est des marquis, ils se vengent assez par leur prudent silence..." (2)

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(1) He was involved, among others, in the controversy over Sophonisbe.

(2) Couton, Op. cit. vol. I, pg. 1109.

It is highly unlikely that in the whole group of noble individuals presumably aware of Molière's raillery at their expense, there was not one sufficiently lacking in dignity or generosity to retaliate. The point is, that de Visé's remarks concerning this matter are nothing more than an attempt to exploit a possible source of dissatisfaction with the "comédien du roy", turning the situation to his own advantage. There is no real slight to the aristocracy implicit either in the observation that comic convention has come to require a "marquis ridicule" to divert the audience, or in the presentation of some amusing characteristics of the élite frequenting the King's chambers. When Molière describes the setting of his new play as being "dans l'antichambre du Roi; car c'est un lieu où il se passe tous les jours des choses assez plaisantes",(1), it is probable that most of the courtiers viewing L'Impromptu at Versailles would have been the first to agree with that statement. It would require a hyper-sensitive nature indeed to take umbrage at those words. Again, when Molière refers to certain manners and affectations current among the blue-blooded, - their restlessness ("ils ne sont pas gens à tenir leur personne dans un petit espace" (2), their high-pitched tone ("Mon Dieu, ce n'est point là le ton d'un marquis; il faut le prendre un peu plus haut...") (3), and their vanity

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(1) L'Impromptu, sc. iii. Op. cit. I, pg. 665
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.

("... avec cet air qu'on nomme le bel air, peignant votre perruque") (1), - he is merely stating facts without adding any criticisms of his own. Nor does he suggest that affectation is a universal trait of the aristocracy: he qualifies what would otherwise be a generalization by saying "la plupart de ces messieurs" (2). If criticism of courtly and noble behaviour must be detected in Molière's characterization, it should also be admitted that there is some discretion in the application of the criticism. Any section of society has its weaker bretheren, whose conduct may be censured without necessarily implying a general condemnation of all who belong to the same class. Certainly Molière is not dazzled by rank and prestige to the extent of indulging or deliberately ignoring shortcomings in those who were the privileged of society in his day. But lucidity and independence of judgement do not preclude respect. From the plays considered hitherto, which offer relevant comment upon the point at issue, it is reasonably clear that the dramatist's awareness of certain negative qualities in members of high society still leaves intact his basic conviction of their worth. Silliness invites satire, whether it is present in yokel, valet, bourgeois or marquis. That Molière should draw attention to it in the last-mentioned by no means implies hostility towards the aristocracy as a whole. It simply shows a freedom from social prejudice, which in the long run makes continued esteem for the nobility all the more valid.

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(1) L'Impromptu, sc. iii. Op. cit. I, pg. 685.
(2) Ibid.

Chapter Three.

Impressions of Nobility in "Dom Garcie de Navarre" and "Dom Juan".

Our examination of Molière's portrayal of the aristocracy would not be complete if we omitted from this study the two plays in his collected works which stand a little apart from the others: Dom Garcie de Navarre (1661) and Dom Juan (1665). In the works hitherto discussed in previous chapters, the context in which nobles of Eraste's and Alceste's ilk are presented is that of everyday reality, and it is clear from references in the dialogue that they belong to the world of seventeenth-century France. Célimène's friends attend the King's "levé" at the Louvre, for example (1), while the discussion of L'Ecole des Femmes in Uranie's salon leaves us in no doubt as to the contemporary nature of La Critique. In Dom Garcie and Dom Juan, however, a completely different atmosphere prevails. First of all, the setting is not that of the France of Molière's day: Dom Garcie is set in the Spanish town of Astorgue, "dans le royaume de Léon" (2), and Dom Juan, in Sicily. As for the period in which the action of the two plays takes place, although no specific

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(1) Le Misanthrope, Act II sc. iv.

(2) Information preceding Act I, sc. i.

dates are mentioned, it is evident that in the case of Dom Garcie, we are dealing with an older and more violent age than the century of Louis XIV (1); and in the case of Dom Juan, the mythological aspects of the hero's experience and the extraordinary fate which overtakes him at the end of the play somehow make time irrelevant.

This means that the aristocrats peopling the world of Dom Garcie and Dom Juan are not reproductions, to a greater or lesser degree, of members of their class as Molière knew them; they are not easily identified with, for example, the marquis who frequented salons in mid-seventeenth century Paris, wrote "vers galants" to their mistresses, and dressed extravagantly. Fiction plays a much greater part in their characterization than in that of one of the "fâcheux", let us say. It might be argued that there seems little point in trying to gain further enlightenment about Molière's attitude to the nobility from either Dom Garcie or Dom Juan, since both are far removed from the comedy of manners usually so edifying in that regard. Yet in _any_ characterization, however fanciful, the author's beliefs, prejudices and attitudes carry a certain weight, whether or not he himself is fully aware of their importance, and, indeed, their existence. That is why it is worthwhile to examine Molière's treatment of the blue-blooded protagonists of his two "Spanish" plays, especially as his initial conception of them was presumably

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(1) From Done Elvire's words in Act I, sc. i, e.g., we learn that she was rescued by Dom Garcie from possible rape during the sack of a town (ll. 115-120).

different from that of the personae hitherto considered. Inevitably something of Molière's attitude towards aristocrats must emerge from the characterization of the almost exclusively noble protagonists of the works in question, - even if the society to which they belong is archaic and fictional, more related to romance than to reality.

However ridiculous his jealousy might make him appear, the main character of Dom Garcie personifies many of the ideal attributes traditionally associated with one of his rank. From the very first scene, we are left in no doubt as to his very real merit: Done Elvire speaks to her confidante, Elise, of

"Toutes les qualités d'un héros glorieux" (1)

and alludes to the "éclat de vertus" common to her two suitors, Dom Garcie and Don Sylve. Throughout the first act, in the exchange between the characters, there is repeated mention of courage, honour, virtue, dignity, - in short, the typical preoccupations of proud aristocrats conscious of their high birth and faithful to the lofty aspirations they have inherited together with their titles and their wealth. Thus far, Molière's approach to depicting nobility in the context of romance (in the literary sense) is seen to conform entirely to convention. His characters speak the elevated, stereotyped language appropriate to their station and the circumstances in which they find themselves. Examples abound, - when, for

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(1) Act I, sc. i, l.6 Op. cit. pg. 341 (I)

instance, Dom Garcie has read Done Ignès' letter to Done Elvire, he comments upon the writer's chosen course of action in a rolling, well-turned alexandrine which would not be out of place in Racinian tragedy or Cornelian drama:

"Dans la haute vertu son âme est affermie". (1)

In other words, we have in the first act of Dom Garcie the diction and characterization to be expected in a play dealing with idealized persons from the top ranks of society; a society which is not immediately recognizable in contemporary reality. The only departure from this convention that Molière permits himself is in dramatic situation. Despite the admirable abstractions of which the protagonists' speech largely consists, there is an undeniable incongruity in the position of Dom Garcie at the end of the act: suspicions concerning a letter addressed to Done Elvire, and the half-teasing, half-angry reproach he receives from the lady, bring us (and Dom Garcie himself) from the sphere of the ideal to the sphere of reality. The situation is, after all, a fairly banal one. Here, we can anticipate already the tone of Le Misanthrope: warmth of feeling expressed with the restraint and elegance consonant with those whose position in society demands a good example for less distinguished beings. Done Elvire's dry remark,

"Oui. Je m'en réjouis et pour vous et pour moi" (2)

in reply to Dom Garcie's acknowledgement that the letter is penned by Done Ignès, could well be taken for one of

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(1) Act I, sc. iii, l. 376. Op. cit. pg. 35.

(2) Act I, sc. iii, l. 362. ibid. pg. 353.

Célimène's retorts to Alceste's accusations. The tone is basically the same, - refinement mixed with irony, - and the evidence of good breeding is present in both. It is also worth noting that the language in this last scene of Act One is less obviously that of the "heroic comedy" in certain lines, like the comment of Done Elvire just quoted.

With the following scene (Act Two, scene i), the departure from the lofty language of Corneille is more marked. With a few exceptions, (1) the remarks exchanged by Elise and Dom Lope suggest contemporary conversation rather than tragic, artificial diction. The most interesting speech in this part of the play is that uttered by Dom Lope, regarding the tactics of those courting the great; and both its content and its expression would lead one to believe that Molière is more concerned here with the society <u>he</u> knew, than with that featured in <u>Dom Garcie</u>. The lines

> "Et les plus prompts moyens de gagner leur faveur,
> C'est de flatter toujours le faible de leur coeur,
> D'applaudir en aveugle à ce qu'ils veulent faire,
> Et n'appuyer jamais ce qui peut leur déplaire" (2).

These observations have the lucidity and insight into human nature that may be found, for example, in the <u>Maximes</u> of La Rochefoucauld; they could serve as a comment on the

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(1) E.G. l. 399: "Fâcheux que par vos soins, jaloux que par vos yeux".

(2) Act Two, sc. i, ll. 418-421.

sort of practices which Molière, as court-entertainer, could not fail to notice in the society that he was required to serve. This means that within the context of a play depicting essentially non-realistic characters and situations, we can find indications of social attitudes similar to those contained in works more obviously fitted for such matter. (Like Le Misanthrope or Les Fâcheux). Dom Lope's remarks to Elise are enlightening as to the absence of illusion where relationships between "les grands" and lesser lights of society are concerned. First, they indicate an awareness of the cynical opportunism characterizing courtiers. Dom Lope's rhetorical question at the beginning of his discourse shows this quite clearly:

> "Et quand, charmante Elise, a-t-on vu, s'il vous plaît,
> Qu'on cherche auprès des grands que son propre intérêt,
> ....
> Pourvu que sa fortune en tire quelque fruit?" (1)

Secondly, there is an implicit criticism of the illustrious members of society in the fact that they can be influenced by the flattery of sycophants. It does not say much for their intelligence and their discernment that they can be gulled by those astute enough to detect, then pander to, their weaknesses. Furthermore, according to Dom Lope, they are not even capable of appreciating good advice when they receive it. In short, "l'adroite complaisance" achieves much more than "les utiles conseils", (2), and Dom Garcie's confidant sums up his theory of successful

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(1) Act Two, sc. i, ll. 410-415.
(2) Act Two, sc. i, l. 425.

manoeuvring in high places with the statement that

".... on voit partout que l'art des courtisans

Ne tend qu'à profiter des faiblesses des grands"(1).

This is hardly the sort of judgement to enhance the merit and admirable qualities of the class to which Dom Garcie belongs. It also strikes a discordant note in the heroic comedy that Molière apparently intended this play to be. True, Elise's reaction counters to a certain extent the impression created by Dom Lope's outburst: she reproaches him with the liberty he takes in speaking so disrespectfully of those above him (a conventional enough reaction, and in fact not very impressive coming after the striking speech which precedes it.) -

"Cependant je dirai que votre âme s'explique

Un peu bien librement sur votre politique" (2).

When all is said and done, we are left with the feeling that Dom Lope's attitude and ideas carry more conviction than those of Elise. It is not possible to say with certainty whether this was Molière's intention, but even if it were not, it is perhaps significant that the emphasis should fall - however involuntarily - upon the weaknesses of the great rather than upon the respect due to them by tradition.

The behaviour of Dom Garcie himself confirms this notion of certain deficiencies in his moral and intellectual fibre.

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(1) Act II, sc. i, l. 426-427.
(2) Ibid, ll. 436-437.

His lack of self-discipline where his jealousy is concerned does little to contradict the unfavourable assessment made of the behaviour of "les grands" as voiced by Dom Lope. Indeed, the comic effects achieved in Dom Garcie depend largely on the recurrence of the jealous nobleman's inability to curb his instincts and exercise his critical faculties before jumping to conclusions about his lady's guilt. Each act of the play brings a fresh crisis in their relationship, and in the end one feels that, however well-endowed Dom Garcie might be with the conventional and accepted qualities of a romantic hero, he appears absurd by reason of his irrepressible jealousy. Again, the picture of nobility which emerges from Dom Garcie has the same ambiguity that we have detected in other plays discussed in this section of the present study. On the one hand, there is the basic admiration for aristocratic merit that one would expect to find in the work of a man in Molière's position, following the dramatic conventions and inheriting the social prejudices of his time; on the other, there is a distinct tendency to present imperfections in the make-up of those persons representing the cream of society. Such a presentation is not consistent with the unquestioning respect often bestowed on the élite simply because they are the élite; and the fact that Molière dares to introduce certain unflattering reflections upon the character of the nobility suggests two things. First, that some reservations concerning the worth of that section of society were not unreasonable,

even in the seventeenth century. Secondly, that Molière must have anticipated his audience tolerating such views, even if some members thereof might react like Elise, objecting a little from habit and prejudice rather than from the need to refute an erroneous judgement.

On the whole, Dom Garcie represents a departure from the usual approach to the genre of "heroic comedy". The outward form of the play is conventional enough (that is, the diction and arrangement of acts and scenes are those of Corneille's "tragi-comédies"); the characters all belong to the cream of society, and have the values of their class (dignity, honour and courage counting as all-important with them); and the basic issue raised in the play is one which, in Molière's day, was the sort of subject lending itself to endless debate in fashionable "salons": should a lover be forgiven for jealousy if this is to be interpreted as a symptom of his passion? The setting of the action, moreover, both chronological and environmental, conforms to that of other works in the same genre. The atmosphere in which Dom Garcie, Done Elvire and the other protagonists of the comedy act and interact is also like that of, for example, Le Cid, with valorous deeds and protection of noble young ladies forming part of daily existence.

On the other hand, however, - and it is in this that we detect the difference between Dom Garcie and the plays

more obviously written in the "heroic comedy" tradition - this presentation of a Spanish hero's vicissitudes in love bears the stamp of some of Molière's later comedies, notably Le Misanthrope, - where tone and situation are concerned. The incident of the letter in the first act of Dom Garcie has its parallel in the work of 1666, as do some of Done Elvire's remarks to her suspicious lover. An even closer parallel bet een Dom Garcie and Le Misanthrope may be seen in the second "letter" incident, which occurs in Act Two. The dialogue between Dom Garcie and Done Elvire on this occasion in fact served Molière with the inspiration for the similar exchange between Célimène and Alceste. It is significant that such a likeness should exist between two works belonging to different genres. Alceste and Célimène are characters of seventeenth-century Paris, while Dom Garcie and Done Elvire are more romantic figures associated with another age and another place. In other words, if the external trappings demanded by the "heroic" genre were removed, we would see beneath them nothing more than a depiction of the life and manners of high society in Molière's day. We have already observed how, occasionally, the elevated, stylised speech appropriate to the tradition of "heroic comedy" gives way to a more natural idiom, which, while it is perfectly elegant and in keeping with the status of the speaker, has about it the ring of contemporary, everyday speech. Thus, despite its apparent lack of potential for enlightening us about attitudes towards aristocrati persons of

his time, Molière's Dom Garcie is in fact a source of information in this regard; and from the situations and characterization presented in the play, the impressions already gained from other works hitherto considered in the present study are confirmed. As in Les Fâcheux, La Critique, Le Misanthrope and L'Impromptu, we see that the respect for members of high society imposed by tradition, is tempered by an awareness that, for all their excellent breeding and the lofty social ideal they represent, aristocrats are capable of certain lapses. Dom Garcie's jealousy is not the sort of sentiment worthy of an "honnête homme", and through his lack of self-discipline, he is made to look as absurd as any of Molière's bourgeois protagonists.

The other play classified here for the sake of convenience with Dom Garcie, - Dom Juan, - is a more complex and thought-provoking work. To begin with, the obvious difference between Dom Juan and the other comedies lies in the fact that the action of the former is determined in advance by mythology, and its outcome a foregone conclusion. The action, in other words, holds no surprises for the audience in the way that a more original piece of entertainment like L'Impromptu does. Moreover, it is less likely to suggest attitudes to nobility in the same areas (i.e. situation and characterization) as those explored in a work like Les Fâcheux, dealing with contemporary society in a realistic manner. Yet after its own fashion, Dom Juan, too, gives some insight into Molière's conception

of the social group mainly depicted therein. This is to be found in the sort of things emphasized by the dramatist in this comedy. Among other things, Dom Juan is a play about hypocrisy, and as such it raises issues similar to those which arise in Le Misanthrope. These issues are, of course, relevant to the social context which engenders them, and lead one to debate the values governing human behaviour. The central issue in Dom Juan, once the obvious moralizing force of final retribution has been laid on one side, is that of conforming to the status quo demanded by one's birth and rank, of respecting the outward forms of socially acceptable conduct (honnêteté) by dissembling the more disruptive aspects of one's nature. For Alceste, such a course of action would be "un commerce honteux", "lâche flatterie", "trahison, fourberie" (1). On the other hand, society of any sort would become an impossibility if wilfulness, vanity and egoism such as that of Dom Juan were allowed free expression. Some kind of compromise is necessary, if the formal order of society is to be preserved; and this compromise in Dom Juan is shown to be hypocrisy, as evidenced by the nobleman's "conversion" to the values represented by his father. The cynicism and lucidity with which Dom Juan comments upon his "conversion" underlines the implications of his act.(2) In the same way that, in Dom Garcie, the dramatic convention used by the playwright

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(1) Le Misanthrope, Act I, sc. i, ll. 68, 93 and 94.

(2) Dom Juan, Act V, sc. ii.

allows at times for certain penetrating observations relevant to a more modern society than that depicted in the work in question, so too in Dom Juan the mythological nature of the hero and his adventures is momentarily forgotten as Dom Juan remarks to Sganarelle upon the prevalence of hypocrisy in the circles he frequents. A statement like: "... l'hypoorisie est un vice à la mode, et tous les vices à la mode passent pour vertus" (1) would seem, surely, to belong rather to a collection of epigrams in the tradition of La Rochefoucauld than to a comic presentation of the old legend of Dom Juan. Such is the flexibility of Molière's dramatic technique that it appears quite natural for the nobleman to make this sort of comment to his valet.

Yet, detached from the context in which Molière has placed it, the long speech on the subject of hypocrisy uttered by Dom Juan in Act Five, (scene ii), constitutes something of a judgement on society. Inevitably, one wonders whether the society concerned is that of medieval Spain (2) or that of seventeenth-century France. While there was quite likely a fair amount of that particular vice discernible in the society known to Dom Juan, it is not strictly necessary to demonstrate the fact in relating the conquests and retribution of the libertine hero. Moreover, even if references to Hypocrisy were essential

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(1) Act V, sc. ii, Op. cit. II, pg. 80

(2) Although the action is set in Sicily, the protagonists are Spanish.

to the theme of Dom Juan, the terms used by Molière in the relevant passages bear a disturbing resemblance to those found in Tartuffe and Le Misanthrope,- the two plays flanking Dom Juan chronologically. This means that many of the dom's pronouncements in his conversation with his valet are pertinent to French society in the 1660s; his declaration that "... il faut profiter des faiblesses des hommes" by adopting the mask of outraged piety, is nothing less than a reflection on the situation presented by Molière in Orgon's household.(1) Likewise, his observation that by so doing, "un sage esprit s'accommode aux vices de son siècle" (2) finds its echo in the moral resignation of Philinte, whose conception of human nature and the "vices de son siècle" is such that he can counsel Alceste not to waste his time in reforming either. ("...des moeurs du temps mettons-nous moins en peine") (3).

So much for the application of Dom Juan to the realities of society contemporary with Molière. It remains to establish what section of society is particularly involved, - if any, - with hypocrisy in its various guises, and whether or not there are positive values which emerge from the play and which are attributable to a specific social group.

From the above-mentioned exchange between Dom Juan and Sganarelle, it may be deduced that in the opinion of the

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(1) Act V, sc. ii, Op. cit. II. pg. 81.
(2) Ibid. pg. 81.
(3) Misanthrope, Act I, sc. i. l. 145.

former, those most concerned with counterfeited virtue are not so much members of society in general as members of the class to which he himself belongs. The remark that hypocrisy is "un vice à la mode", for example, suggests that it is practised mainly by the fashion-conscious; that is, by the socially superior. One might argue with justification that this is not very conclusive proof as to the prevalence of hypocrisy among the nobility; yet it is confirmed by two things. First, by Dom Juan's sense of solidarity with others of his persuasion and, presumably, of his rank: "On lie, à force de grimaces, une société étroite avec tous les gens du parti" (1). It should be remembered that he is essentially a "grand seigneur", and even when he is consorting with peasants or showering civilities upon a tradesman, his consciousness of his aristocratic birth and breeding is never allowed to be overlooked. In the second place, the characters in the play who are obviously innocent of moral posturing are for the most part not of noble origin: Sganarelle, M. Dimanche, Charlotte, Mathurine, Pierrot and the beggar, Francisque. Absence of hypocrisy does not mean absence of faults, however, as the credulity of the peasants, passivity of M. Dimanche, and cowardice of Sganarelle would indicate. The lower social orders are not, in fact, shown to great advantage in Dom Juan. With the possible exception of Francisque, the other personae of non-noble status appear

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(1) Act V, sc. i. Op. cit. II, pg. 81.

ridiculous in their several ways: Pierrot, with his clumsy love-making; (1) Charlotte, with her fickleness and naïve fantasies, playing at "la grande dame" ("... si je sis Madame, je te ferai gagner queuque chose); (2) Sganarelle, with his attempts at philosophizing; (3) and M. Dimanche, with his abortive endeavour to be firm about payment of debts. (4)

The absurdity of the last-mentioned characters lies principally in their inability to express themselves articulately. The peasants speak the dialect of their village, and their idiom strikes the ear as outlandish and inelegant. M. Dimanche is not even permitted to state his purpose in visiting Dom Juan, for his noble client skilfully cuts him short after every "Monsieur, je vous..." As for Sganarelle, it is not so much his diction as the content of his rambling tirades which makes him ridiculous. Dom Juan, on the other hand, is superbly articulate; but to what purpose? Even he is at a loss for words on one occasion, when confronted by Done Elvire shortly after his desertion of that lady. Her bitter remark, "Ah! que vous savez mal vous défendre pour un homme de cour, et qui doit être accoutumé à ces sortes de choses!" (5) underlines the worthlessness of that fine, fluent speech usually associated with the

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(1) In Act II, sc. i.
(2) Act II, sc. iv. Op. cit. II, pg. 50.
(3) E.g. in Act III, sc. i.
(4) Act IV, sc. iii.
(5) Act I, sc. iii, Op. cit. II, pg. 40.

courtier. Such verbal readiness, especially when it is devoid of sincerity, is simply another manifestation of hypocrisy. This brings us back to one of the central themes of Dom Juan. It is safe to assume that hypocrisy, the "vice à la mode", is a phenomenon observable more in the higher orders of society than in the lower ones. Yet there is nothing particularly admirable to be seen among the less illustrious members of society either. As an artist aware of the value of symmetry, Molière would hardly have seen fit to produce a work from which all positive merits are excluded. It would be a mistake to regard Dom Juan as a picture of unrelieved human weakness. Some attention should therefore be given to the characters hitherto omitted from this discussion.

Taken together, Done Elvire, her brothers Dom Carlos and Dom Alonse, and Dom Juan's father, Dom Louis, constitute a little group apart in the context of the play. They are differentiated from the "low" characters by their rank and by the fact that they are not intrinsically amusing, being neither caricatures nor idiosyncratic in any way. Then they are distinguished from Dom Juan himself in that their conduct is governed by a different set of values; they are distanced from him by their moral code. What do they represent? The answer to that question is to be found in the attributes or characteristics which they have in common. At the most obvious level, they are united in their noble birth, - they all

belong to the same social stratum, as is clear both from their titles and their elegance of speech and conduct. This elegance is discernible equally in Done Elvire's addresses to her erring "husband" and in Dom Louis' reproaches to the same person. (1) Both evince a simple dignity worthy of their station. Yet Dom Juan speaks the same language, as any of his longer speeches soon show. (2) The point is, that the latter resembles others of his class in form only, while his inner self and his intentions are determined by a defiant moral turpitude absent from his peers. The outward, external attributes of nobility are easily recognizable, but the less tangible ones require more careful consideration. It is these, - the preoccupations and aspirations at the core of daily existence - which set Dom Louis, Done Elvire and her brothers apart. As is to be expected, honour is of primary importance to them. Done Elvire's first concern, once the glamour of her escapade with Dom Juan has worn off, is with her tarnished "gloire". In her confrontation with the fickle nobleman, her demeanour is that of a great lady mortally insulted. Despite her humiliation, there is pride and some spirit in her final retort, revealing at the same time the values upon which her conception of life is based:

> "C'est une lâcheté que de se faire expliquer trop sa honte; et, sur de tels sujets, un noble coeur,

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(1) Act I, sc. iii and Act IV, sc. iv.

(2) E.g. Act V, sc. i.

au premier mot, doit prendre son parti". (1) Implicit in those words is the notion that persons of high rank should be sensitive to any slur on the reputation conferred by their illustrious name, and that such sensitivity at least enables the degraded individual to bear the shame with dignity. It is only later that Done Elvire's thirst for vengeance (the initial reaction to which her upbringing has conditioned her) is replaced by more generous, Christian sentiments. The contrast between her two speeches to Dom Juan (2) serves to suggest the inadequacy of the narrow moral code upheld by those of her class. For her brothers, the satisfaction of outraged Family Honour suffices as a solution to the moral problem raised by Dom Juan's abduction and abandonment of Done Elvire. Elvire herself, however, manages to transcend feelings of petty resentment and shows herself capable of a love that is truly great and disinterested:

> "C'est ce parfait et pur amour qui me conduit ici pour votre bien, pour vous faire part d'un avis du Ciel, et tâcher de vous retirer du précipice où vous courez" (3).

Her gesture, and her speech, are at this point worthy of a Cornelian heroine, implying as they do an impressive degree of self-mastery. The course of action favoured by her brother, Dom Carlos, on discovering Dom Juan's

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(1) Act I, sc. iii, Op. cit. pg. 41.
(2) Act I, sc. iii and Act IV, sc. vi.
(3) Act IV, sc. vi, op. cit. pg. 75.

identity, indicates both decency and humanity. He refuses to take advantage of numerical superiority and circumstances which have thrown his quarry conveniently in his way, and firmly reminds his more unrelenting brother of the recent service Dom Juan has rendered him. The sense of obligation arising from that service is a cogent reason, in his eyes, for deferring the expiation. Yet it is worth noting that he does not abandon the project of demanding satisfaction from Elvire's seducer. Basically he is just as set on retrieving the reputation of his sister as Dom Alonse, for whom "l'honneur est infiniment plus précieux que la vie". (1) In other words, both young men are obsessed with honour to an extent which precludes forgiveness, - a fact which is obvious in the case of Alonse, with his extreme pronouncements, and implicit in the case of Carlos, whose gentler sentiments are belied by his determination to execute what he believes to be his duty. As he remarks to Dom Alonse, "un moment de douceur ne fait aucune injure à la sévérité de notre devoir". (2) Neither Carlos nor his brother attain the grandeur of Done Elvire, for they show, by their view of the situation in which they are involved, that they are rooted in the opinions of others. Their's is the morality of keeping-up-appearances. Carlos, for example, argues that the family honour can only be magnified by the postponement of revenge "aux yeux de tout le monde".(3)

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(1) Act III, sc. iv, op. cit. pg. 63.
(2) Act III, sc. v, op. cit. pg. 65.
(3) Ibid., pg. 64.

Similarly, the seclusion of Done Elvire in a convent is not a satisfactory solution to the matter as far as the brothers are concerned, for such a move would suggest degradation in the public eye. The inner reality counts for less than the outward appearance:

> "Sa retraite ne peut nous satisfaire, pouvant être imputée au mépris que vous feriez d'elle et de notre famille..."

Carlos tells Dom Juan (1). That is the greatest flaw in the aristocratic code of honour; it tends to emphasize the wrong things. The lengthy piece of rhetoric Dom Louis addresses to his son concerning the place and function of a nobleman confirms this impression. For him, too, public opinion is a major consideration. He reproaches Dom Juan with "cet amas d'actions indignes, dont on a peine, aux yeux du monde, d'adoucir le mauvais visage". (2)

Stripped of the high-sounding phrases which envelop them, his ideas on the nobility may be reduced to a matter of maintaining the ancestral tradition and perpetuating the superiority of some members of society over others. (3) It is clear from his words that according to the prejudices he has inherited with his titles and blazonry, merit and high birth presuppose each other, which makes Dom Juan's conduct all the more disconcerting for him:

> "... un gentilhomme qui vit mal est un monstre

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(1) Act V, sc. iii, op. cit. pg. 83.

(2) Act IV, sc. iv, op. cit. pg. 72.

(3) For further remarks on this subject, see L. Gossman, Men and Masks, pp. 52 46 seq., John Hopkins, Baltimore,1965.

dans la nature... la vertu est le premier titre de noblesse" (1).

There are in fact no positive precepts which emerge from the speech in question, other than emulation of illustrious forbears. The words "gloire", "honneur", "naissance" and "éclat" punctuate the old gentleman's oratory with a regularity which almost implies that he uses them from habit; and Dom Juan's cool invitation to him to sit down because "vous en seriez mieux pour parler" (2) acts like a cold douche upon his father's heated rhetoric. Molière's primary intention here is no doubt to excite mirth from the contrast of two diametrically opposed attitudes, - a comic device to which he often has recourse. But once this aspect of the Dom Louis/ Dom Juan confrontation has been duly taken into account, there remain the implications to be deduced from their exchange. The younger man's remark, coming after the elder's discourse, is to some extent a reminder of reality, correcting the series of abstractions in which Dom Louis deals. Notions of grandeur and merit are admirable in their way, and nowhere is it suggested that they are irrelevant or expendable. But they must be related to reality in order to have value, and Dom Juan's reaction to his father's outburst implies the inadequacy of confining them to words alone. The danger of adhering too rigidly to certain concepts is, that the latter become formalized and vitiated;

(1) Act IV, sc. iv, op. cit. pg. 73.
(2) Ibid.

their original meaning is lost gradually through the increasing narrowness of their application.

In the case of Elvire's brothers and Dom Louis, the fundamentally sound values of aristocratic caste (pride in one's birth; honour; dignity; courage) have been debased into a conventional social code which consists in little more than maintaining a good public image. Despite the frequency with which he alludes to the values just enumerated, Dom Louis shows a greater concern with conformity to the sort of conduct expected of a nobleman, than with the criteria underlying that conduct.

It may be seen, then, that in Dom Juan both the positive and the negative aspects of human nature are depicted. As in plays previously considered in the present study, Molière does not show great indulgence for the aristocracy, but at the same time, its strengths are not neglected for its weaknesses. Indeed, the non-noble protagonists of the comedy in question offer less to esteem than the noble ones. Even the vice of hypocrisy, while it is more manifest among the social élite, is not wanting completely in the lower orders, for Sganarelle's cowardice makes him compromise his honesty in all his dealings with his master, - a fact of which he is fully aware: "O complaisance maudite! à quoi me réduis-tu?" (1) he wails after Dom Louis' dismissal by his son. As for the positive elements in the

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(1) Act IV, sc. v, op. cit. pg. 74.

play, they are mainly to be found in the high-born characters, notably Done Elvire, in whom true nobility is expressed in love and charity. Despite the limitations of their outlook on life, her brothers and Dom Louis are not wanting in sincerity and goodness. Besides, the code to which they attach importance is intrinsically valid; there are grounds for criticism only in the way that it is applied and interpreted. Even Dom Juan himself is capable of acts of magnanimity, such as his intervention in the skirmish between Dom Carlos and the thieves.(1) He also exhibits courage before the animated statue of the Commander, - a phenomenon sufficiently unnerving to affect a stronger man than Dom Juan. It is possible that the aid he gives Carlos is merely a gesture proving his ability to live up to the chivalrous ideal when he has a mind to do so, and that it is not a genuine expression of altruism. It may equally be argued that Dom Juan's attitude towards the statue of the Commander is simply a further proof of his defiance of conventional reactions. However true these suppositions might be, there is undeniably something remarkable in the person of Dom Juan, and even at his most reprehensible, he is never mediocre.

In the final analysis, one must acknowledge the superiority of aristocracy as portrayed by Molière in Dom Juan. From this work, as from the others discussed up to now in this

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(1) In Act III, sc. iii.

study, it can be seen that respect for high rank is appreciably qualified by the dramatist's insight into those human weaknesses from which not even the most privileged members of society are exempt. But this reserve does not necessarily detract from the fundamental respect still felt as the due of nobility in Molière's day.

Chapter Four.

The Provincial Aristocrat.

Thus far, the various representatives of nobility discussed in the present thesis have all belonged either to the circles of Parisian society contemporary with Molière, or to the world of romance and legend. Although the provincial aristocracy does not occupy a major rôle in Molière's comedies, two of his works (George Dandin and La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas) feature members of this group of society, and accordingly they deserve some attention.

Chronologically, George Dandin precedes La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, so this comedy will be examined first. The circumstances under which it was written and performed have already been mentioned in previous chapters of this study, and it suffices to bear in mind that the court audience before which it had its première in 1668 would have been by no means hostile to the unflattering portrayal of the provincial aristocracy as embodied by the de Sotenvilles. The unwieldy provincialism and old-fashioned manners of the rural nobility incurred the amusement and contempt of Parisians of the same social rank, so that, however ancient or reputable the provincial noble's family might have been, his more sophisticated kinsman from the Capital would tend to

judge him inferior on aesthetic grounds; and these were of considerable importance in aristocratic circles. The main point of the present analysis is to see how far Molière's presentation of the relevant characters confirms this generalisation.

The comedy in question opens with a lucid monologue pronounced by Dandin himself on the subject of marrying above one's station, and the folly of endeavouring to mix with the nobility, if one's birth does not justify doing so. The speech contains two explicit criticisms of the upper orders of society as Dandin has known them: he alludes to their avarice and their condescension. These in fact are the main facets of "le style des nobles" developed later in the play, and the opening remarks by this disenchanted, long-suffering peasant set the scene, as it were, for the conduct of Angélique and her parents. It is interesting to note that the adverse comments upon aristocracy are prefaced by a reference to the positive attributes thereof, although these are very vague:

> "La noblesse de soi est bonne, c'est une chose considérable..." (1)

Possibly Molière is reassuring his illustrious audience of his esteem for the class to which they belong; but even if this were not the case, the fact that Landin, a martyr of the circumstances imposed upon him by

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 465.

representatives of that class, can still find it in him to express respect (however qualified) for his in-laws, suggests the extent of prejudice in favour of the gentry among those of humbler birth. Even the reservations which Dandin entertains concerning the merit of members of the nobility are voiced with discretion. Instead of claiming that noble rank is intrinsically evil, he merely observes that it is accompanied by "tant de mauvaises circonstances, qu'il est très bon de ne s'y point frotter." (1) In other words, the less admirable qualities associated with aristocracy are regarded by Dandin as unpleasant by-products, so to speak, of an elevated social rank. They somehow remain external to that rank itself, and nobility per se does not presuppose the existence of, for example, avarice and petty condescension. Once this distinction has been made, the ill-used husband is free to complain at length of the treatment he receives at the hands of the de Sotenvilles. First he remarks upon their indifference towards human feelings and dignity, being mainly preoccupied with the acquisition of wealth:

"L'alliance qu'ils font est petite avec nos personnes: c'est notre bien seul qu'ils épousent..." (2)

The mercenary aspect of his in-laws' behaviour is not as distasteful, however, as their daughter's attitude to her husband, which Dandin describes in the following terms:

"...une femme qui se tient au-dessus de moi, s'offense

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 466.
(2) Ibid.

de porter mon nom, et pense qu'avec tout mon bien je n'ai pas assez acheté la qualité de son mari." (1)

The twentieth-century mind is all too ready to interpret these words as they stand, without taking into account the context in which they are spoken. It is true that Dandin's view of his position in relation to that of A Angélique has the potentially tragic qualities of pitiless lucidity and detachment, which add to the pathos of a situation wherein a man is seen as the author of his own undoing. Yet some attention should be given to the character of Dandin before we take his words too seriously. In the first place, his name - "Dandin" - has connotations of rustic clumsiness (the original meaning of "dandin" is "sheep's bell", and in pre-seventeenth-century literature, the name occurs on more than one occasion in connection with ridiculous or outlandish individuals, like Rabelais'Ténot Dendin). This immediately tends to diminish the stature of George Dandin as a tragic figure, for the farce-element latent in his name contradicts the notions of heroic suffering (as depicted by Corneille), or of intense and unhappy passion (as portrayed by Racine). In addition to this, the costume worn by Dandin (described in the <u>Inventaire après décès</u> of Molière's possessions) (2) bespeaks not only the wealth, but also the quaint, almost eccentric quality of the character. His provincial

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 466.

(2) See <u>Cent ans de recherches sur Molière</u>, pg. 567.

conservatism is attested, for example, by the fact that he sports a ruff (like the Sganarelles and Harpagon), while his double waistcoat lends him an air of clumsiness and bulk in accordance with the inelegance of one of his station in life. Once the essentially comic aspect of George Dandin is borne in mind, his assessment of his conjugal difficulties and his self-accusation, -

> "George Dandin, George Dandin, vous avez fait une sottise la plus grande du monde" (1)

- may be seen less as statements of tragic experience, as matter-of-fact remarks rendered all the more piquant by the fact that it is Dandin himself who makes them. This in turn affects the way in which we judge Angélique. While it is surely excessive to regard her as the fragile, beautiful victim of a "mésalliance" imposed upon her by her parents (which is the view taken by D.W. Lewis) (2), the clownish and ineffectual husband to whom she is committed through no wish of her own does justify her conduct to some extent, even if it does not excuse it. In the same way that the coarseness of le Barbouillé, and his treatment of his wife, mitigate the harshness of our judgement on Angélique's behaviour, so too in George Dandin the incongruity of the couple involved, and the circumstances in which their marriage was contracted, make the young wife's flirtation less reprehensible. Morally, Dandin is in the right, since loyalty is his due for the high price he paid for his alliance with

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(1) Act One, sc. i, op. cit. pg. 466

(2) In Molière, the Comic Mask, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London 1959, pp. 111-113.

the house of de Sotenville. On the other hand, he is not altogether blameless for the state of his marriage, since it appears to be a snobbish impulse rather than love which induced him to woo Angélique. In addition there is the unpleasant suggestion of materialism in Dandin's use of the word "acheté" where the acquisition of his wife is concerned. (1) It should also be noted that Dandin's regrets about marrying above his station are of a purely selfish nature. When Lubin has inadvertently revealed the growing intimacy between Angélique and Clitandre, Dandin's reaction is one of frustration, since the difference in rank between himself and his wife prevents him from exacting the usual punishment called for by her indiscretion:

"...la gentilhommerie vous tient les bras liés."(2)

At this point of the action, our attitude towards Dandin is one of qualified sympathy, for it is difficult to take him seriously, and his plight is not without its lighter side. Neither Angélique nor her parents have appeared directly on the stage, but sufficient is known about them from Dandin's two monologues and Lubin's artless conversation for some sort of judgement to be passed upon them, and it is not of the most indulgent.

The appearance upon the scene of Monsieur and Madame de Sotenville does little to improve the unfavourable impression

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(1) Act I, sc. i,ibid. pg. 466.

(2) Act I, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 468.

already created by preceding dialogue. As with Dandin himself, their name evokes some hilarity, - "sot en ville" implying that this haughty couple properly belong to the province, since they lack the intelligence and poise to hold their own with the upper strata of urban society. Their conversation with their son-in-law soon turns into a lesson of etiquette wholly irrelevant to the issue weighing on Dandin's heart. Madame de Sotenville's obsession with the correct form of address to be used by Dandin, when the latter is obviously in a state of agitation, indicates a considerable degree of insensitivity and snobbishness in the lady. In a cruder way, she is guilty of the same shortcoming as the habitués of Célimène's salon, namely, an egotistical and conceited concern with form at the expense of human feelings. In reply to Dandin's rough logic, -

> "... si vous m'appelez votre gendre, il me semble
> que je puis vous appeler ma belle-mère". (1)

- Madame de Sotenville merely reiterates the necessity of acknowledging the difference between her rank and that of her son-in-law, and thereby confirms the opinion already invited by her initial reaction to Dandin's grievances. The comic effect created by what Bergson would term "le mécanique plaqué sur le vivant", (Madame de Sotenville's narrow preoccupation with precedence repeatedly frustrating Dandin's efforts to express his natural resentment), is heightened by the attitude of Monsieur de Sotenville.

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, biid., pg. 469.

This gentleman appears to be more reasonable than his wife, and even induces her to cease her oration about the due of the aristocracy. ("C'en est assez...") (1). Moreover, he evinces some interest in Dandin's plight:

> "Sachons un peu, mon gendre, ce que vous avez dans l'esprit". (2)

Despite the condescending tone of the invitation just quoted, it would seem that Monsieur de Sotenville has more consideration for others than Madame. However, Dandin soon finds that communication with his father-in-law is little easier than with Madame de Sotenville, and for the very same reason: he is pompously corrected when he addresses Angélique's father as "Monsieur de Sotenville", and again when he is indiscreet enough to refer to Angélique herself as "ma femme". On both occasions, the trivial nature of Monsieur de Sotenville's interruptions is emphasized by Dandin's growing exasperation, and the literal interpretation he gives to the reprimand in question ("Comment? ma femme n'est pas ma femme?") (3). Problems of etiquette have little bearing on the matter of Dandin's dissatisfaction with his wife, and they serve merely to delay the confrontation between the de Sotenvilles and their son-in-law. At the same time, they illustrate the petty vanity of these provincial nobles.

So great is the de Sotenvilles' anxiety to preserve their

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 470.
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.

distance from the social contamination of a financially necessary alliance with the peasantry, that even their curiosity is subordinated to this concern. Allowing Dandin to call their daughter "ma femme" is acknowledging the direct connection between themselves and the undistinguished farmer, just as standing on ceremony with him reminds him of his social inferiority. Thus as dramatic tension builds up, our impression of the de Sotenvilles crystallizes out, to be confirmed by their subsequent defence of the marriage criticized by Dandin. They counter their son-in-law's blunt statement of his contribution to their depleted coffers by pointing out the desirability of an alliance with their respective families; yet, significantly, they are vague as to the nature of any positive advantages to be gained from such an alliance,using such ill-defined terms as "honneur", "beau privilège", and "avantage". What emerges from the exchange between Dandin and his in-laws is, that in return for a substantial sum of money, the "riche paysan" has received nothing more than a fictitious title (Monsieur de la Dandinière) and the happy expectation that his children will be born into the nobility in view of their mother's lineage. As for the "honourable" association with the house of de la Prudoterie (which is that of Angélique's mother), - the name itself, like that of de Sotenville, has the sort of connotations which render it slightly absurd, and which neutralize any pleasure that a non-noble might experience in claiming kinship with one of that family. In short, the impression

gained of Dandin's transaction with the de Sotenvilles is one which indicates the unscrupulousness of these country nobles, whose façade of high moral worth consists largely of fine-sounding words unsupported by more tangible proofs of rectitude.

Once the accusation has been uttered by the wronged husband, the de Sotenvilles' reaction is typically eloquent and evasive. They cite various examples of feminine chastity furnished by both sides of their family, taking refuge in History and Tradition rather than committing themselves on the issue with which they are confronted. It is, after all, poor consolation to Dandin to be reassured that no scandal has touched the house of de la Prudoterie for more than three hundred years. Monsieur de Sotenville's inflamed oratory about the family conscience (supposedly a very delicate organ), and the extravagant threats of his wife, -

> "... je l'étranglerais de mes propres mains, s'il fallait qu'elle forlignât de l'honnêteté de sa mère" (1)

- somehow fail to carry conviction, as does the spirited offer to exact retribution from Clitandre.

The encounter with Angélique's admirer reveals further interesting aspects of Monsieur de Sotenville's character, especially when the declarations made by that gentleman

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 472.

in the preceding scene are remembered. In the first place, Monsieur de Sotenville's thirst for the satisfaction of honour is diminished by the rank of Clitandre, whose position at court possibly makes him superior to the country "gentilhomme". Secondly, Monsieur de Sotenville is distracted from the matter in hand by his obsession with his own importance. Upon introducing himself to the young man, he makes it clear that he is a baron, and then, - not content with that, - proceeds to recall the exploits of himself, his father, and his ancestor, Bertrand de Sotenville. Not only are these exploits less glorious than the baron imagines (if we are to judge by the campaigns mentioned); they are completely out of place in the context of his conversation with Clitandre, and as such are distinctly comical. Most edifying of all is the pompous little speech made by Monsieur de Sotenville when charging Clitandre with dishonourable intentions towards Angélique:

> "Il m'a été rapporté, Monsieur, que vous aimez et poursuivez une jeune personne, qui est ma fille, pour laquelle je m'intéresse, et pour l'homme que vous voyez, qui a l'honneur d'être mon gendre." (1).

The impersonal "il m'a été rapporté" lends a spurious solemnity to the accusation, and saves de Sotenville the embarrassment of acknowledging Dandin as the source of his information. The tortuous construction of the sentence has the double function of softening the allegation (de Sotenville's cowardice leads him to remark that "entre

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(1) Act I, sc. v, ibid., pg. 473.

gentilshommes, ce sont des choses chatouilleuses") (1) and of giving the impression of legalistic jargon, which is more intimidating than ordinary speech. Finally, there is the insolent reversal of the usual polite formula used by a father-in-law in the presence of his daughter's husband: instead of saying of Dandin, "dont j'ai l'honneur d'être le beau-père", he refers to his son-in-law as the man "qui a l'honneur d'être mon gendre."

In addition to the traits of snobbishness, deviousness, and insensitivity, Monsieur de Sotenville's character is rendered still more unattractive by symptoms of cowardice. These are uppermost in the confrontation with Clitandre, - when, for example, the younger aristocrat denies the rumour of his relationship with Angélique and threatens to settle the issue by the sword, Monsieur de Sotenville is suddenly eager to give Dandin his share of the limelight, and the unpleasant responsibility that accompanies it. This, of course, belies all the earlier references to the hereditary valour of the de Sotenvilles.(2) Angélique's father is only too happy to accept the formal, outward satisfaction of honour and ignore the deeper implications of Clitandre's and Angélique's fluent but superficial denials. In the same way that Monsieur de Sotenville's courage, probity and moral worth are verbal rather than real, so too his loyalty to members of his family is an insubstantial thing which exists in words alone. This lends irony to his lofty remark to Dandin after the latter's humiliation

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, pg. 472.
(2) In Act I, sc. iv.

before Clitandre:

> "Sachez que vous êtes entré dans une famille qui vous donnera de l'appui, et ne souffrira point que l'on vous fasse aucun affront" (1)

The de Sotenvilles offer more matter for comment than their daughter, but even Angélique, as a representative of her class, is not without interest. She shows presence of mind when faced with the charge of encouraging attentions from Clitandre; and when, later, she has to parry the attacks of her disgruntled husband, her speech has a certain wit and dignity which place her in a better light than her unintelligent, hypocritical parents. To be sure, she is selfish and arrogant, as her two speeches on her rights and aspirations show, -

> "...je veux jouir, s'il vous plaît, de quelque nombre de beaux jours que m'offre la jeunesse, prendre les douces libertés que l'âge me permet..."(2).

Not only is she inbued with the idea that her youth and beauty authorize her to do as she pleases; she is morally irresponsible and shares her parents' callousness where the feelings of others are concerned. On the other hand, her situation mitigates the severity with which we are tempted to judge her. As she reminds Dandin, her feelings were not taken into account when the question of marriage arose, and the promises of conjugal fidelity she made were

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(1) Act I, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 478.
(2) Act II, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 483.

not given spontaneously. Her marriage to Dandin resembles a business contract between her parents and their son-in-law, and it is not reasonable to expect a trouble-free marital relationship where the emotional factor has been ignored. Angélique is the product, not only of her up-bringing and social environment, but also of her experience, and it is in that light that she should be regarded. She has the snobbishness of her ancestors, as her remarks about court-nobles show -

> "Que dans tous leurs discours et dans toutes leurs actions les gens de cour ont un air agréable! Et qu'est-ce que c'est auprés d'eux que nos gens de province?" (1)

and her attitude to Dandin is coloured by that contempt and lack of consideration which less generous souls evince towards their social inferiors.

Her cynicism, however, comes from her circumstances rather than from hereditary factors. In the farcical scenes of comic reversal, when Dandin is worsted at the very moment that his triumph seems assured, Angélique's resourcefulness argues strongly for the existence, in her, of a quality lacking in her parents: a sense of expediency. She is intelligent where they are not; she faces up to situations where they evade them. The de Sotenvilles are less ambiguous than Angélique, they are simple where she is complex. Yet she is recognizeable as their off-spring by reason of her

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(1) Act II, sc. iii,ibid., pg. 483.

values and even some of her traits.

After the initial scenes in which they appear, the behaviour of the de Sotenvilles is predictable, and their reactions to Dandin's subsequent attempts to incriminate Angélique merely confirm prior judgements passed upon them: their complacent comments on Dandin's good fortune in having an irreproachable wife, and their self-righteous insistence on Dandin's apology to Angélique, are consonant with their earlier conduct. No new facets of their respective characters are revealed by the action, nor by the dialogue, and there is no evolution in their attitudes. One has the impression that they remain rooted in their prejudice and that nothing will ever change their excellent opinion of themselves and the houses of de Sotenville and de la Prudoterie.

The other play in which Molière features a provincial aristocrat differs from _George Dandin_ in that it is a sketch rather than a comedy: _La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas_ consists of nine brief scenes in which we are presented with some of the absurdity inherent in provincial society. Like _George Dandin_, _La Comtesse_ has its début at court, and, as in the earlier work, the rural nobility is not spared, - which is understandable in view of the prevailing attitude amongst court-nobles towards their country cousins. The Countess herself is the only representative of the provincial aristocracy in the play, and it is accordingly with her alone that we are concerned.

Although the lady in question does not appear immediately, we learn something of her person and circumstances in the opening dialogue between Julie and the Vicomte, and this inevitably affects our reaction to the Countess. Cléante's reluctance to become involved in a tête-à-tête with what he terms "cette comtesse ridicule" (1) may at first be ascribed to his attachment to Julie; but that young woman's subsequent remarks about the Countess make it clear that there is some justification for Cléante's choice of epithet. Julie's sly little reference to her hostess's absence, and its possible cause:

> "... je ne doute point qu'elle ne soit allée par la ville se faire honneur de la comédie que vous me donnez sous son nom" (2)

- suggests a certain pettiness, and ostentatious self-importance, in the Countess (who is presumably unused to the honour of being offered a specially-commissioned entertainment). This unfavourable impression prepares us for the later verbal portrait given of the lady, whose recent visit to Paris has intensified the already considerable absurdity of her manners.

We hear that she is "un aussi bon personnage qu'on en puisse mettre sur le théâtre", which implies that her eccentricities render her larger than life, like a comic caricature. It would seem that she is obsessed with rank to the point of ludicrousness. In addition to this, she

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(1) Sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 954.
(2) Ibid., pg. 955.

is characterized by the rigidity of attitude, the prejudice, commonly associated with the provincial, since her contact with Parisian society has exaggerated her affectations instead of correcting them. Whenever exposure to new ideas or a different social enviornment serves only to confirm the preconceived notions of an individual, it may be justifiably supposed that the person in question lacks the breadth of mind to assimilate values other than those to which they have always been accustomed.

Julie and Cléante, who do not strictly speaking belong to the society of Angoulême (1), regard this extravagant female with the condescending amusement of Parisians viewing provincial phenomena from a distance. Our awareness of the Countess, coming as it does from them, is therefore influenced by their aversion to her. Her very entrance is prefaced by Cléante's uncomplimentary

"Mais voici votre Madame la comtesse d'Escarbagnas;
je sors par l'autre porte pour ne la point trouver..."(2)

The young man's malicious use of the Countess's full title emphasizes her passion for high-sounding rank, and his "votre" reminds us of the absurdity and spuriousness of her pretentions. Thus, as she makes her first appearance before us, we are not likely to overlook the lady's main shortcomings, namely snobbishness and affectation.

The conversation between Julie and the Countess is reminiscent

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(1) Cléante's initial speech indicates that he is normally attached to the Court; he and Julie are visitors to Angoulême.

(2) Sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 957.

of that between habituées of the salons of Uranie and Célimène, inasmuch as it is coloured by subtle, feminine spite, off-set by condescension. Having such an excellent opinion of herself, the Countess is openly patronizing towards Julie; and Julie's contempt for the Countess's rusticity and inferior intelligence makes her return the compliment, but with some discretion. The Countess's speech is heavily punctuated with exclamations and questions, which heightens the effect of artificiality, making the sincerity of her utterances suspect. Julie, on the other hand (like Elise in La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes), relies on irony to hold her own against her interlocutor, and the latter's failure to perceive the point of her barbed remarks adds to the comic effect of their confrontation. In reply to Julie's comment that Cléante has eyes for no one but the Countess, for example, the great lady indulges in the following complacent self-portrait:

> "Je crois être en état de pouvoir faire naitre une passion assez forte, et je me trouve pour cela assez de beauté, de jeunesse, et de qualité, Dieu merci..."(1)

Once we bear in mind Cléante's real judgement of her, and the age of her son, the Count, the words quoted are seen to be founded on nothing more than vanity and wishful thinking. In a less light-hearted work, they would be pathetic in the self-delusion that they suggest, but in the context of this little comedy, they serve merely to round out the characterization of the main protagonist.

The Countess's vanity is presented by way of moral comment

(1) Scene ii, ibid., pg. 957.

rather than social comment, but it is interesting that she should have this trait in common with the de Sotenvilles. Of a more specifically social nature is Molière's depiction of her dealings with her servants. She shows a curious and incongruous blend of hauteur and familiarity when addressing Cirquet and Andrée, (her lackey and maid respectively.) Her continual criticism of her domestics' approach to their duties is possibly accounted for by her wish to seem accustomed to better, more sophisticated service. The desired impression is perpetually marred, however, by the quaint, robust terms that creep into the Countess's speech despite herself. Words like "saboulez" (1) and "butorde", (2) "bouvière" (3) and "tête de boeuf" (4) are not in themselves outlandish, for they appear to have been in current usage at the time Molière wrote La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas; but they strike a discordant note in the speech of a lady who prides herself on belonging to fashionable and elegant society, for the picturesque, popular expressions which she uses are certainly not the sort normally associated with the gentry. This discrepancy between what the Countess is, and what she imagines herself to be, forms the principal comic element of the play, and is discernible throughout the work. Socially, the Countess believes that she is superior to all in her immediate environment; in fact, however, her lack of "savoir faire"

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(1) Scene ii, ibid., pg. 958.
(2) Ibid., pg. 960.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.

is betrayed perpetually by the very affectations with which she attempts to disguise it. She condescends as a woman to Julie, when it is in reality the latter who has won Cléante's admiration and love. She fancies that she possesses the attributes of a well-bred lady, yet her harshness with her servants, and her parsimony (evidenced by her concern with the consumption of tallow and the cost of the broken glass) contradict the notion of aristocratic generosity and courtesy. The Countess's fond belief that she is a person of culture is, moreover, constantly disproved by the mistakes she makes, - a notable example being that of her taking Martial the satirist for Martial the glove-maker. (1) Her reaction to the Latin recited for the edification of herself and her guests by her son is, indeed, that of an ignorant woman:

> "Fi! Monsieur Bobinet, quelles sottises est-ce que vous lui apprenez là?" (2)

This is all the more amusing when followed up by the lady's indignant reply to the Vicomte's attempt to explain the theme of the comedy about to be played:

> "Mon Dieu! voyons l'affaire; on a assez d'esprit pour comprendre les choses." (3)

Clearly she lacks the humility of the truly well-educated, dogmatically stating her intellectual ability moments after she has given proof of her limitations in this regard. For a woman of the world, she is remarkably prudish, as her

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(1) Sc. v, ibid., pg. 966.
(2) Sc. vii, ibid., pg. 968.
(3) Ibid.

sharp reprimand to Monsieur Tibaudier for his innocent piece of gallantry would indicate. (1) The triple repetition of the syllable "vi" in the young Count's recitation shocks his mother into expressing the wish that he be taught "latin plus honnête que celui-là", (2), which again demonstrates both her ignorance and her primness.

These are all obvious instances of the distance separating reality from illusion in the Countess's attitude towards herself and society. There are still more, subtler, suggestions of the fictitiousness of the lady's social status and of her snobbishness. She calls her butler "mon Suisse", as if the domestic in question were attached to some great and illustrious house. When inquiring after the health of her sons, she takes unnecessary care to include the titles (of dubious authenticity, in any case) of the boys, for the benefit of her guests -

> "Comment se portent mes deux autres fils, le Marquis, et le Commandeur?" (3)

The reference to the ballet Psyché, which the Countess mentions having seen when in Paris, (4) indicates that her visit to the Capital took place in July, - in other words, in mid-summer, when the Court was no longer there. This gives the lie to her claim that she was besieged by visits from admiring "galants de la cour." (5) When

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(1) Sc. vii, ibid., pg. 967
(2) Ibid., pg. 968.
(3) Sc. vi, ibid., pg. 967.
(4) Sc. ii, ibid., pg. 961.
(5) Ibid.

alluding to her late husband, the Countess speaks of him as "Monsieur mon mari", which is the sort of expression (according to de Courtin) (1) appropriate only to members of the royal family. Coming from one of the Countess's station, the pompous phrase is utterly ridiculous.

Collectively, these symptoms of self-delusion justify the observation that the Countess, like Monsieur Jourdain, lives in a fantasy-world of her own creation; a world in which she is adored, wooed, and respected for her superior breeding, intelligence and taste. The scope of the play, however, and the dramatist's intention in creating the character of the Countess, prevent us from regarding the lady in the same light as Monsieur Jourdain. She remains a sketch rather than a full-scale portrait, although this does not mean that Molière's presentation of her is superficial. On the contrary, it is interesting as a comment on the provincial nobility as represented by one of its less illustrious members. The element of caricature is strong in the depiction of the Countess, as it is in that of the de Sotenvilles, - a fact which inevitably diminishes the spychological complexity of the characters.

Taking these specimens of the rural gentry together, it must be acknowledged that they do not suggest particularly admirable qualities. Rather, they give the impression of moral,intellectual and aesthetic inferiority, which is

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(1) Nouveau traité de la civilité qui se pratique en France parmi les honnêtes gens, 1695, 8e ed. pg. 33.

in accordance with the poor opinion in which aristocrats from the provinces of France were held in Molière's day. It should be noted, however, before we make the obvious distinction between Parisian and court nobility on the one hand, and provincial nobility on the other, that to some extent the defects of the latter are those of the former. The Countess' self-felicitating snobbishness is not basically different from that of Climène in La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, and the malice of her conversation with Julie is not unlike that generated between Arsinoé and Célimène in Le Misanthrope. The de Sotenville's complacency and pride in Ancestry reminds us of remarks made by Acaste to Clitandre (1). When aristocratic shortcomings are neither tempered by discretion, nor disguised by elegant manners, but are instead exaggerated almost beyond belief for comic effect, the result is a caricatural presentation of characters who on first acquaintance appear to have little in common with their more refined kinsfolk in Parisian circles. Yet there are negative features recognizable in both types of aristocrat; a further illustration, perhaps, of the point made in the preceding chapter of the present study: that human weakness and imperfection does not know social barriers, and that Molière's perception thereof is not dimmed by undue respect for rank or status.

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(1) Le Misanthrope, Act III, sc. i.

3. THE BOURGEOIS MILIEU.

Chapter One.

The Bourgeois at Home.

If we bear in mind the traditional distinction made between comedy and tragedy by theorists of dramatic art in the seventeenth century, it is only to be expected that bourgeois protagonists should predominate in the majority of Molière's comic works. As early as 1629, Jean Chapelain observed that

> "Dans la tragédie... le poète imite les actions des grands dont les fins ont été malheureuses. Dans la comédie il imite les actions des personnes de petite condition, ou tout au plus de médiocre..."(1)

Despite an increasing degree of flexibility within the long-established conventions of dramatic art, it remains true that even in the late 1660s the "personnes de petite condition" were seldom, if ever, absent from the comic stage, whether they formed the greater part of the "Dramatis personae", or whether, like M. Dimanche in Dom Juan, they appeared as the only representatives of their class in works featuring aristocrats rather than bourgeois.

Since comedy is chiefly concerned with the portrayal of domestic crises, the most obvious area to explore in

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(1) From Opuscules Critiques, Hunter edition, Droz,Paris,1936, pg. 130. (Discours de la poésie représentative).

Molière's presentation of the middle classes of his time is that of family life. It is within this context that bourgeois values and attitudes, as Molière observed and interpreted them, are best revealed. In other words, we shall now consider the middle-class paterfamilias, with a view to discovering how sympathetic or hostile Molière's depiction of him is, and taking into account the circumstances under which the plays in question were written.

Chronologically, the first work to discuss is the little farce entitled La Jalousie du Barbouillé. However much its authenticity as one of Molière's works may be questioned, its obvious relevance to the third act of George Dandin, and the fact that it was performed quite frequently by Molière's troupe in the early 1660s (1), would suggest that on balance it is more likely to have been penned by the "comédien du roy" than not. The piece does not appear to have been intended for court-audiences, and we may conclude that it was performed before those mixed audiences in which a fair number of bourgeois spectators were normally present.

Unlike most of Molière's comedies of domestic life, La Jalousie du Barbouillé deals more with conjugal discord than with paternal insensitivity to the needs of the younger generation. All the exuberance and mobility

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(1) Scene xiii, Op. cit. Vol. I, pg. 13.

associated with the farce-genre characterize the action of this play. As the Doctor puts it:

> "... toujours du bruit, du désordre, de la dissention, des querelles, des débats, des différends, des combustions." (1)

It must be confessed that as a representation of domestic life, La Jalousie du Barbouillé leaves something to be desired, and allowance must be made for a degree of caricature in the portrayal of middle-class conjugal relationships that it offers. However, once the obvious influence of the Italian commedia dell'arte has been acknowledged, there remain in the play in question certain interesting details which lend themselves to interpretation for the student of social values in Molière's day.

The very first lines uttered by le Barbouillé in the first scene, for example, give some indication of a bourgeois husband's attitudes and expectations. His grievances against his wife, Angélique, arise from that lady's independence of outlook where her duties as a house-wife are concerned. He speaks of her liking for "la promenade, la bonne chère..." and complains that she is seldom home "au lieu de me donner du soulagement et de faire les choses à mon souhait" (2). Frivolity, extravagance, and excessive socializing are regarded by le Barbouillé as breaches of conduct in a woman, and especially in a

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(1) Scene xiii, Op. cit. Vol. I, pg. 25.
(2) Ibid. pg. 13.

wife. The selfishness of his own attitude and behaviour (it appears he is frequently drunk, and his words imply indifference to Angélique's happiness) alienates our sympathy to some extent, - which makes the dénouement less unexpected and more acceptable. It also implies a narrowness and rigidity of mind brought out in later plays, in characters like the Sganarelle of L'Ecole des Maris, and Arnolphe in L'Ecole des Femmes; attributes not normally associated with the nobility. Generosity, the positive facet of extravagance, for example, was a prerequisite of nobility from the high middle ages down to Molière's day. As for socializing, the salons in which ideas were exchanged and conversations carried on, were essentially the preserve of the upper classes. Accordingly, even in a farce such as that now under consideration, it is possible to discern the existence of bourgeois standards as opposed to aristocratic ones. Despite the rival contentions of critics like M. Bénichou (1) and Mr. Cairncross (2), who respectively see in Molière either the champion of the nobility and its values, or the defender of middle-class morality and criteria, the impression gained of the dramatist's standpoint (if such he in fact consciously had) is that of an observer noting the strengths and weaknesses of various social groups depicted in his work. It is only natural that at times the prejudices inherited from family environment and upbringing should

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(1) Author of Morales du Grand Siècle, 1948.
(2) Author of Molière, Bourgeois et Libertin, 1963.

make it appear that Molière favours a particular section of society.

In La Jalousie du Barbouillé, the contrast between the two sets of values (i.e. the bourgeois and the aristocratic) is more apparent once Angélique and her lover, Valère, appear on the stage in the third scene of the play. Molière does not indicate specifically what social rank is to be attributed to Valère, but the young man's speech, with its elegant turns of phrase and urbanity of tone, suggests a degree of sophistication appropriate to a person of some breeding. His diction contrasts sharply with le Barbouillé's vigorous and often vulgar expressions (1), just as his name - "Valère" - evokes the fashionable young gallant as opposed to the uncouth ruffian that a name like "le Barbouillé" (2) connotes.

As angélique and her lover exchange a few words before their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of the suspicious husband, we are made aware of the situation as seen from the lady's point of view:

> "... mon mari est si mal bâti, si débauché, si ivrogne, que ce m'est un supplice d'être avec lui, et je vous laisse à penser quelle satisfaction on peut avoir d'un rustre comme lui." (3)

Again, it cannot be said that Angélique is socially

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(1) His speech is punctuated with exclamations like "Ho!" and "Que diable!", and he invariably refers to his wife as "la carogne", for example.

(2) "le Barbouille" means "he of the dirty face", a traditional figure of farce.

(3) Sc. iii, Op. cit. Vol.I, pg.17.

superior to her husband, for nowhere does Molière state this to be the case; yet both her speech (which conveys an impression of refinement) and her judgement of le Barbouillé (which implies a certain fastidiousness), would indicate that this is so.

Moreover, it is tempting to see in the Angélique of this little farce the Angélique of George Dandin; in other words, the prototype of the high-born lady married to a coarse plebeian, or "rustre", as le Barbouillé's wife calls him. On the other hand, Gorgibus, father of the first Angélique, appears to be a robust bourgeois cast in quite a different mould from M. de Sotenville, whatever other similarities might exist between the two plays. It is possible that in accepting le Barbouillé as her husband, Angélique married beneath her station, but the match is certainly not so patent a mésalliance as that of the Dandin couple. This means that there is less justification for the wife's conduct in La Jalousie du Barbouillé than there would seem to be at first sight. Yet what of le Barbouillé himself?

It must be admitted that, however just his wrath might be concerning his wife, he does little to retain her affection or inspire her loyalty. She is shown at the beginning of scene eight slipping off to a ball; but it should be noted that as she does so, her husband is out drinking ("il est quelque part au cabaret: il ne s'apercevra pas que je suis sortie.") (1) Accordingly, the case for

(1) Scene viii, Op. cit. vol.1, pg. 21.

le Barbouillé's resentment is rendered all the less convincing, and inevitably his own behaviour is seen to be far from blameless. He appears unreasonable to boot in the following scene, when, several hours later, he returns from an evening's pleasure at the tavern demanding supper.(2) Most revealing of all is scene eleven, in which we see a lengthy confrontation between le Barbouillé and Angélique, and the tables neatly turned upon the husband by the wife. The most striking feature of the scene, where character is concerned, is the difference between the respective tones adopted, first by Angélique when locked out of the house, then by her husband in a similar predicament. Faced with the humiliation of being physically excluded from the house of which she is mistress, Angélique tries coaxing and endearments to persuade le Barbouillé to relent and let her in:

> "Hé! mon pauvre petit mari, je t'en prie' ouvre-moi, mon cher petit coeur!" (3)

but she is answered only by bullying, cynical retorts ("tu me caresses pour me trahir".) (4) After the failure of cajolery, Angélique tries the fairly predictable ruse of emotional blackmail:

> "Tiens, tiens, voilà mon couteau tout prêt: si tu ne m'ouvres, je m'en vais tout à cette heure m'en d[illegible]er dans le coeur." (4)

Even when her unintelligent husband fails to see through

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(1) Scene ix, Op. cit. vol. I, pg. 22.

(2) Scene xi, ibid, pg. 23.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

this piece of subterfuge, and really believes that she is dead, there is a notable lack of tenderness in his reaction, as his words show:

"Serait-elle assez sotte pour avoir fait ce coup-là"(1). It is curiosity rather than concern for her which makes him go down into the street to investigate. On discovering the truth, le Barlouillé exhibits the coarseness with which the audience has by now come to associate him; he speaks of his intention to give Angélique "cinq ou six clystères de coups de pied dans le cul" (2), for example. This is scarcely the language of a person of breeding, and we are tempted to overlook any degree of exaggeration in the wife's accusations hurled from the safety of an upstairs window:

> "Sac à vin infâme, tu ne bouges du cabaret, et tu laisses une pauvre femme avec des petits enfants, sans savoir s'ils ont besoin de quelque chose..."(3)

The latter speech is curiously reminiscent of Martine's verbal attack upon Sganarelle in Le Médecin malgré lui, and it emphasizes the basic, peasant-like vulgarity of le Barbouillé, who, bourgeois though he might be, is closer to the yokel by reason of his loutish speech and behaviour. Where Angélique used coaxing and guile, le Barbouillé, caught in the same unenviable position, resorts to churlish threats:

> "Ouvre vite, diablesse que tu es, ou je te casserai la tête." (4)

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(1) Sc. xi, op. cit. vol. I, pg. 23.
(2) Ibid., pg. 24.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.

The contrast between his behaviour and hers' serves to alienate still further the sympathy of the audience from le Barbouillé. Even in the next scene of the play, where one feels that Angélique's triumph over her husband is not altogether fair, it is nonetheless difficult to sympathise with le Barbouillé as he is subjected to the reproaches of Gorgibus (whose speech, incidentally, gives some insight into the middle-class conception of the duties of a husband and father):

> "Ne devriez-vous pas, comme un bon père de famille, vous retirer de bonne heure, et bien vivre avec votre femme?" (1)

When le Barbouillé remarks pathetically,

> "... que l'innocence est opprimée!" (2),

the effect produced by his words is that of burlesque; in the first place he is seldom to be taken seriously at all, and secondly, the impressive abstractions of innocence and tyranny lose all their force when set in the context of a noisy and rather trivial domestic squabble. The stage-directions for the last scene show that le Barbouillé is physically present on the stage, but - significantly, perhaps, - he has nothing to say.

What overall impression, then, of the main protagonist of La Jalousie du Barbouillé emerges from the action and dialogue of the work? It is no exaggeration to assert that, physically, intellectually and morally, there is

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(1) Sc. xii., pg. 24.
(2) Ibid.

little or nothing to admire in le Barbouillé. Molière presents us with a boorish, dirty, callous and ill-educated "père de famille" whose social rank is, presumably, that of a member of the lower middle classes. Not even the injustice of his plight at the end of the play is enough to counteract the essential unpleasantness of his personality, in winning the sympathy of the audience. To what extent this character may be regarded as representative, is rendered more difficult to determine by the fact that he is a figure of farce rather than a "social type" of the sort found in Les Fâcheux, for example. Yet there is undeniably a lack of respect and affection in the dramatist's portrayal of him, and this is worth noting.

The next work to consider in this study of the bourgeois at home as depicted by Molière is the little comedy entitled Le Médecin volant. (1) In this play, emphasis is laid rather on a father/daughter relationship than on a husband/wife relationship. As in La Jalousie du Barbouillé, the bourgeois father bears the name of Gorgibus, and although he does not appear until the third scene, we are already acquainted with the two main facets of his character, - avarice and credulity, - after the first lines of the opening scene. Sabine, Gorgibus' niece, and Valère, the lover of Gorgibus' daughter Lucile, are reviewing the situation, and during their conversation, Sabine alludes to "l'avarice de mon vilain oncle", and

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(1) Performed before the King on 18th April, 1659.

of the "vieillard, qui est assez crédule".(1) These indications as to what to expect when we actually meet Gorgibus are confirmed by Valère's words to his valet, Sganarelle, in the second scene:

> "Il n'y a rien de si facile en cette rencontre: Gorgibus est un homme simple, grossier, qui se laissera étourdir de ton discours..." (2)

It need hardly be observed that when the valet travestied as a doctor confronts Lucile's father, the latter is every bit as gullible as anticipated. In the first place, he is completely taken in by his daughter's so-called "illness", never suspecting that it is merely a ruse to delay the dreaded wedding of herself and Villebrequin; his agitation when we first see him (3) is adquate proof of this, and when Sabine introduces him to Sganarelle, "le plus docte médecin qui soit dans la faculté végétale, sensitive et minérale" (4), it never occurs to him to question the origins or qualifications of the strange and loquacious individual thus brought into his household. The naïve acceptance of all the nonsense Sganarelle talks (for example, he solemnly affirms that "une personne ne se porte pas bien quand elle est malade"), and the uncritical view taken of the bogus doctor's mistakes (he thinks it is Gorgibus himself who is the patient), betoken in Gorgibus an astonishing lack of intelligence.

So much for his credulity. As for the other characteristic

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(1) Sc. i, op. cit. pg. 31.
(2) Sc. ii, op. cit. vol. I, pg. 33.
(3) At the beginning of scene iii.
(4) Sc. iv, ibid., pg. 34.

attributed to him by the other characters of the play, - avarice, - it is clear from the dialogue between Gorgibus and Gros-René in the third scene that the real cause of Gorgibus' anxiety about his daughter's illness is not so much an expression of paternal affection as of concern at the delay in having the nuptials concluded between Lucile and the man of her father's choice. From Sabine's earlier speech, we know that Villebrequin's eligibility in Gorgibus' eyes is directly related to his wealth. The fact that Lucile's heart belongs to another man is of no consequence to Gorgibus. The situation of lovelorn girl/obdurate father/ resourceful lover is traditional in farce, inviting as it does the confrontation of the rogue and the dupe. The social rank of the protagonists, of necessity, is non-noble. Yet Molière could have presented this traditional situation of farce in the context of the peasantry. Instead, he portrays a bourgeois household, the head of which already resembles the Gorgibus of Les Précieuses ridicules, described in the list of characters as "bon bourgeois". That Lucile's father is no peasant is equally clear from the respectful address of the Advocate (1), who refers to him as "Monsieur Gorgibus".

Having established the middle-class rank and principal attributes of the paterfamilias in Le Médecin volant, we shall now see to what extent first impressions are confirmed by the rest of the play. Of the two traits associated

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(1) In scenes vi and vii.

with Gorgibus from the beginning of the work, it is credulity rather than avarice that is emphasized. For example, when Sganarelle takes leave of his new "client" after the consultation, (1) Gorgibus spontaneously offers him money, - a very different line of conduct from that adopted by Harpagon when required to pay for services rendered. The rapaciousness mentioned by Sabine to Valère is not, it must be confessed, very amply illustrated, despite the fact that Gorgibus' choice of a son-in-law is determined more by financial considerations than by concern for his daughter's happiness.

Lack of perception and critical awareness emerge, finally, as the most striking features of Gorgibus' character. After Sganarelle has successfully hoodwinked the worthy man and is reporting back to Valère, he comments on Gorgibus as follows:

> "Il faut avouer que ce bonhomme Gorgibus est un vrai lourdaud de se laisser tromper de la sorte." (2)

This judgement surely echoes that already passed on Lucile's father by the audience. As if that were not enough, the next episode in the farce further emphasizes the sheer stupidity of Gorgibus, for when he sees Sganarelle in his usual attire as Valère's valet, and is led to believe that Sganarelle and the "doctor" who so closely resembles him are twin brothers, he never even expresses disbelief, merely accepting that the preposterous contention is true. He persists in this error to the end of the play, and only

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(1) At the end of scene viii.

(2) Sc. x, op. cit. I, pg. 38

realizes the real position when Gros-René picks up the doctor's robes left behind by Valère's agile valet. (1) Even Gros-René (whose name does not suggest great finesse by any means) sees through the subterfuge more swiftly than his master. In the playing-off of rogue against dupe, Molière leaves us in no doubt which rôle is to be assigned to Gorgibus, and makes this bourgeois "lourdaud" something of a caricature in the tradition of farce.

Thus far, the Gorgibus of Le Médecin volant would seem to conform in more ways than one to the characterization of a bourgeois "père de famille" as already seen in La Jalousie du Barbouillé. Like le Barbouillé, he is unfeeling where his family is concerned, his speech is rough and vigorous (2), and his intelligence is minimal. Yet it may be argued that in one respect, he escapes categorization as a "typical" representative of middle-class paternity, since - unlike Angélique's husband - he tends to be sentimental.

Despite his unsatisfactory performance as a father concerned with his daughter's well-being, his eagerness to reconcile "Narcisse" (Sganarelle) and the "doctor" (Sganarelle) might be interpreted as a symptom of his interest in human relationships. But let us take a closer look at his reply to Sganarelle's appeal for help in the "rift" with his "brother":

"Allez, je ferai votre paix: je suis de ses amis,

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(1) Sc. xv.

(2) E.G.he makes free use of the word "diable", and instead of "oui", says "ou-da".

et je vous promets de vous remettre avec lui.

Je lui parlerai d'abord que je le verrai".(1)

The tone of that speech is surely one of condescension rather than of genuine compassion. Gorgibus sincerely believes that his new acquaintance is the greatest doctor in the world, endowed with superior skills; and by claiming him as one "de ses amis", the foolish man thinks to enhance his own prestige. Confidence in his powers of persuasion; complacency at his familiarity with so illustrious an individual; and rashness in a promise to achieve the reconciliation of two people before hearing both sides of the situation, - this is what emerges from the lines quoted above. Gorgibus does not, after all, appear very amiable, despite his reluctance to let two "brothers" continue estranged. Seen in the light of the motives implicit in his speech, his conduct is possibly that of interfering, and not good-natured concern. His attitude towards "Narcisse" after the interview with the "doctor" confirms the impression already gained of patronizing, almost bullying, behaviour. The dogmatic

"Ah! vous demeurerez, car je vous enfermerai." (2)

is in keeping with Gorgibus' tendency to take over and manage affairs which would no doubt resolve themselves better if left alone. He has decided that, in order to be complete, the renewed affection between the "brothers" must take the form of an embrace witnessed by himself, -

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(1) Sc. xi, op. cit. I, pg. 36.

(2) Sc. xiv, ibid., pg. 41.

regardless of whether the parties concerned wish it or not. So, instead of increasing our sympathy for Gorgibus, the reconciliation episode in Le Médecin volant has the opposite effect, since it brings to our notice his insensitivity and obtrusiveness. As in La Jalousie du Barbouillé, the character of the bourgeois "père de famille" in Le Médecin volant is such that it inspires little admiration. In fact, both morally and aesthetically, it leaves much to be desired.

The next Gorgibus to invite our attention is the stolid father of Magdelon and uncle of Cathos, in Les Précieuses ridicules. (1) Between this highly original little play and the farce just discussed come two longer works, L'Etourdi and Dépit amoureux. (2) Both contain studies of family life, and characterizations of heads of families (Pandolfe and Anselme in the first, and Albert and Polidore in the second). These are, however, less enlightening as to the attitude towards "the bourgeois at home" in Molière's day, as the figures in question are so manifestly inspired by classical prototypes in the Greco-Roman theatre, notably the plays of Terence. Their relevance to the present study is accordingly limited, and for this reason, they are omitted.

In the "dramatis personae" of Les Précieuses ridicules, Gorgibus is described as "bon bourgeois", which immediately

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(1) Performed on November 18th, 1659 at the Petit-Bourbon.
(2) Dated November, 1658 and December, 1658 respectively.

precludes any doubts regarding his social status. He is specifically presented to us as a worthy representative of the middle classes, which makes Molière's portrayal of him all the more interesting. Unlike those who bear the same name as himself in the works already examined, this Gorgibus is not patently ridiculous. In fact, when he first comes on-stage at the beginning of the second scene of the play, he appears brisk and quite business-like as he inquires after the progress of Du Croisy's and La Grange's courtship of the girls in his care. Though not particularly elegant, his speech has a directness and simplicity which are not unpleasing:

> "Eh bien, vous avez vu ma nièce et ma fille: les affaires irontelles bien? Quel est le résultat de cette visite?" (1)

Not much edified by the reply, the father indulges in a short soliloquy from which emerges a certain impatience, vigorously expressed. Here, perhaps, we see the trait in common with the other Gorgibus, father of Lucile, and le Barbouillé: an energy bordering on coarseness which, when applied to human relationships, is not only amusing (because it is inappropriate) but also, to a certain extent, offensive (because of the harshness it implies.)

The next scene brings out this feature of Gorgibus' personality more sharply. Feeling dissatisfied with the state of affairs between Cathos, Magdelon and their suitors,

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(1) Sc. ii, Op. cit. I, pg. 266.

he demands that the young women present themselves to him for an explanation, and on learning that they are occupied with their cosmetics, he is provoked to eloquence by their vanity. The speech uttered by him on this occasion is an enlightening one, since it illustrates something of Gorgibus' character while acquainting us with the "précieuses" themselves: from his remarks it would seem that they are extravagant, impractical and frivolous. This is no doubt true, as subsequent scenes of the play are to show; but the way in which Gorgibus speaks of them, his vocabulary (he calls them "pendardes", and refers to their preparations as "brimborions") and the obvious exaggeration in which he indulges ("quatre valets vivraient tous les jours des pieds de mouton qu'elles emploient") (1), - the collective effect of this is to emphasize the worthy man's impatience, intolerance, and exasperation at expenditure that seems to him unjustified. While it is natural to sympathise with him and even to see his point of view, it must be admitted that his annoyance is out of proportion to its cause.

The confrontation between Gorgibus, Magdelon and Cathos (in scene four) is one of the first of those fine studies in temperamental contrasts which represent a large measure of Molière's dramatic genius. Here, Gorgibus' speech, - which at the best of times is direct and pithy, - is rendered even more down-to-earth for comic effect, as it clashes noticeably with the hyper-refined, artificial speech of the girls. Gorgibus greets his charges with

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(1) Sc. iii, op. cit. I, pg. 267.

a somewhat heavy attempt at sarcasm:

"Il est bien nécessaire vraiment de faire tant de dépense pour vous graisser le museau" (1).

Causticity apart, the most striking feature of this opening sally is the deliberate vulgarity of "graisser" and "museau". It reduces Magdelon's and Cathos' attempts at beautification to the level of the farm-yard, and not only provokes laughter at their expense, but also, strangely, at that of Gorgibus himself. He is right to react to stupidity, of course; yet he does so in such an extreme fashion that he appears to go too far in the opposite direction, negating aesthetic values altogether and placing purely practical matters at the top of his list of priorities. Added to the implicit austerity of Gorgibus' view of things is the element of dogmatism already noticed in the Gorgibus of Le Médecin volant: just as Lucile's father takes it upon himself to impose his solution upon the "problem" of "Narcisse"'s relationship with his "brother", so too, the father of Magdelon is arbitrary in his decision regarding the future of the girls.

"Vous avais-je pas commandé de les recevoir comme des personnes que je voulais vous donner pour maris?" (2)

True, Gorgibus is showing himself no more dictatorial than the majority of seventeenth-century fathers, who disposed of daughters (and even sons) with the aplomb of chess-players moving pieces over a board; the wishes

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(1) Sc. iv, op.cit. I, pg. 267

(2) Ibid.

of the offspring were irrelevant, and the father's will, as we have seen, (1) was absolute. It should also be borne in mind that a twentieth-century mind reacts much more sharply to such a line of paternal conduct than did the average man of Molière's time. Even so, some place should be accorded to the human, personal element in matters such as marriage, and we can deduce from the plot of traditional comedies (in which the young lovers are happily united despite the father's or guardian's original choice of some unprepossessing suitor) that, seventeenth century or not, a father who consulted his daughter in the business of choosing a husband was more esteemed than one who did not. However much authority and discipline may be emphasized in a given age, the emotional factor is not to be completely disregarded. Gorgibus exercises his rights, but he does so despotically, as is confirmed by his use of words like "commandé" and "voulais" in the lines quoted. On the one hand it is difficult to believe that the contrived, ridiculous speech and manners of the "précieuses" are intended to be acceptable to the audience; on the other, it is almost equally hard to imagine that what Gorgibus represents is a valid alternative to the sort of values held and put into practice by Magdelon and Cathos.

Perhaps the best way to interpret the conflicting attitudes of the "bon bourgeois" and the affected maidens, is to see

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(1) See Part One, ch. iii of the present thesis.

in Molière's depiction thereof an essentially comic clash of interests in which neither side is to be taken too seriously, nor championed. We are simply meant to enjoy the confrontation that is set before us, and savour the ambiguity of not quite knowing who is right, - since both opposing parties are guilty of extreme behaviour. The adjective qualifying Magdelon and Cathos in the title of the play - "ridicules" - leaves small room for doubt as to the judgement their opinions invite. Yet Gorgibus, with his excessive bluntness and unsympathetic remarks like:

> "Encore un coup, je n'entends rien à toutes ces balivernes; je veux être maître absolu; et pour trancher toutes sortes de discours, ou vous serez mariées toutes deux avant qu'il soit peu, ou, ma foi! vous serez religieuses: j'en fais un bon serment." (1) -

does not seem to suggest the "right" approach to experience either.

It is perhaps not a valid enterprise, in any case, to look for such in a piece of light-hearted entertainment of the Précieuses ridicules variety. However much the theory of M. Antoine Adam concerning the relevance of Molière's Précieuses to literary coteries of seventeenth-century Paris (2) may be accurate and well-founded, the tone of the work hardly suggests a "pièce à thèse" or a literary manifesto. This impression is reinforced by the author's reluctance to see his play in print. Surely

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(1) Sc. iv, op. cit., I, pg. 270.

(2) See "La Genèse des Prècieuses ridicules" in Revue d'histoire de la philosophie et d'histoire générale de la civilisation, Jan./Mar. 1939, pp. 14-46.

it would be a very perverse theorist who opposed the circulation of his ideas, assuming these to be expressed in a successful play penned by himself? In his Préface to Les Précieuses ridicules, Molière states explicitly his intention to restrict the work in question to the theatre:

> "... comme une grande partie des grâces qu'on y a trouvées dépendent de l'action et du ton de voix, il m'importait qu'on ne les dépouillât pas de ces ornements; et je trouvais que le succès qu'elles avaient eu dans la représentation était assez beau pour en demeurer là." (1)

Whether we regard Les Précieuses ridicules as a serious attack upon Mlle. de Scudéry and her "groupe du Samedi", or whether we consider it merely as a highly entertaining little comedy with farcical overtones, the fact remains that the bourgeois father depicted in the work is definitely not a sympathetic figure. Unimaginative, blunt, and above all, insensitive, it is difficult to see in him the forces necessary to remedy the sentimental foolishness of his young charges. Thus far, the characterization of the bourgeois "père de famille" in Molière's plays may be acknowledged as being consistently hostile.

The works discussed so far in this chapter remain to a certain extent within the realm of farce, for even Les Précieuses ridicules occasionally smacks of this genre (when the disguised valets are showing off to their

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(1) Quoted in Couton edition, I, pg. 263.

appreciative and unsuspecting audience, for example).
Of the stock-figures that form the nucleus of dramatis personae in farce, the Father is not a particularly lovable character, - which, it may be argued, accounts for Molière's treatment of representatives of paternal authority. Yet the next Gorgibus to be considered, - the father of Célie in Sganarelle, ou le Cocu imaginaire (1) - is further removed from his robust predecessors than the father of Magdelon, who himself is already a "character" in his own right. As Molière's art evolves from pure farce to comedy, so too his obdurate father-figures become more interesting and complex. From 1660 (the date of Sganarelle) onwards, therefore, the head of the family in Molière's works offers a more reliable basis for assessment of attitudes towards the values for which this usually bourgeois "persona" stands.

Although not one of the playwright's more spectacular successes, it would appear from the number of times it was included in the repertoire of Molière's troupe that Sganarelle enjoyed sufficient popularity to be regarded as a good stand-by for an evening's acceptable entertainment. It was performed one hundred and twenty-two times during Molière's lifetime. Unlike Tartuffe and Dom Juan, it aroused no storm of controversy, which possibly makes it all the more valuable as a source of study for middle-class domestic life contemporary with the dramatist.

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(1) Performed for the first time in May, 1660 at the Petit-Bourbon.

From the opening scene it is clearly a traditional situation with which we are presented: the eternal confrontation between the dogmatic father and the unco-operative child, with Love as the bone of contention. Célie's tearful defiance and Gorgibus' inflexible severity immediately establish the respective positions of the two protagonists. The most notable difference between this Gorgibus and earlier versions of the same person is to be seen in the language he uses. Whereas Lucile's parent, and even that of Magdelon, are coarse and ungracious in their diction, there is a degree of refinement tempering the vigorousness of the present Gorgibus' utterances. Where Magdelon's father calls the girls "pendardes", Célie's father merely resorts to the more civil "petite impertinente"; (1) where former Gorgibuses express themselves in ordinary prose, the Gorgibus of Sganarelle conveys his wishes in rhyming couplets; and however much this may represent mere dramatic convention, the fact remains that the general impression is of elegance. Moreover, it should be observed that Célie's father is less explicit, (and therefore less brutal) than his predecessors in his threats of punishment for disobedience. Faced with his daughter's reluctance to accept the overtures of Valère, Gorgibus says,

> "Si je ne vous lui vois faire fort bon visage,
> Je vous... Je ne veux pas en dire davantage." (2)

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(1) Sc. i, l. 2.
(2) Sc. i, ll. 61-62.

The unfinished threat is certainly less indelicate than the bald alternative of the "ou vous serez mariées... ou vous serez religieuses" quoted from Les Précieuses ridicules.(1)

As far as form is concerned, then, the "père de famille" in Sganarelle is more sophisticated than similar characters in earlier plays. Yet on closer examination, his attitudes and ideas do not differ materially from those already noticed in plays like Le Médecin volant or Les Precieuses ridicules. Lucile's father is avaricious; Célie's father is no less so, with the added trait of cynicism. There is cold calculation in his remarks concerning the financial aspects of a match with Valère, who is superior to Lélie only in wealth:

> "Lélie est fort bien fait; mais apprends qu'il n'est rien
> Qui ne doive céder au soin d'avoir du bien;
> Que l'or donne aux plus laids certain charme pour plaire,
> Et que sans lui le reste est une triste affaire". (2)

This wholly unsentimental approach to the question of marriage is implicit, too, in Gorgibus' judgement of Valère as a son-in-law. His knowledge of the suitor's temperament and appearance is, he admits candidly, non-existent ("j'ignore... de quelle humeur il est") (3). All he knows is, that Valère has "vingt mille bons ducats" at his disposal, and is accordingly a most desirable addition to the family. Not only is this a reprehensible standpoint by twentieth-

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(1) Sc. iv.
(2) Sc. i, ll. 47-50.
(3) Sc. i, l. 15.

century criteria; it is unreasonable, and any unreasonable action or attitude is unacceptable to the seventeenth-century mind. While a father had the right, in Molière's day, to choose a husband for his daughter, he was expected to exercise it with discretaion, and it must be confessed that Gorgibus' "justification" of his choice leaves much to be desired.

If he resembles the Gorgibus of Le Médecin volant in his greed, Célie's father shares the autocratic ideas of Magdelon's father where his position is concerned. Just as the latter states his wish to be "maître absolu", so, too, the present Gorgibus tells his daughter that he has no need whatever to reason with her, since she is bound to do what he commands; and, although more articulately expressed, his views are strongly reminiscent of those put forward by his namesake.

"Mais suis-je bien fat de vouloir raisonner
Où de droit absolu j'ai pouvoir d'ordonner?" (1)

Moreover, he shows hostility towards the sort of literature favoured by young people of his time, just as the Gorgibus of Les Précieuses ridicules criticizes, with greater violence, the habits and pastimes of Magdelon and Cathos, whose conception of Life is based upon the novels of Mlle. de Scudéry. In the same way that the reaction of the earlier Gorgibus is too extreme to be taken seriously, and even has the effect of making the critic as ridiculous as the criticized,

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(1) Sc. i, ll. 55-56.

so the alternative reading advocated by Célie's father is such that, for all their faults, the "méchants écrits" of light romance are preferable. To a girl of perhaps twenty, Gorgibus earnestly recommends works like Pibrac's Quatrains, Matthieu's Tablettes and the ponderous Guide des pécheurs, to counteract the pernicious effects of the "quolibets d'amour" gleaned from various popular novels.

Two deductions relative to Gorgibus' character are to be made from this. Firstly, he displays a lamentable ignorance of other people's taste in making such inappropriate suggestions, and this renders his intelligence suspect. Secondly, it may be safely assumed that the edifying pieces of literature he mentions are those preferred by himself; and in the early 'sixties, they were considerably out-of-date, since the Tablettes appeared in 1616, and the other two belong to the sixteenth century. By making it seem that Gorgibus has a predilection for these weighty, old-fashioned writings, Molière is gently poking fun at traditional bourgeois conservatism and stolidity. In a more subtle manner than in Les Précieuses ridicules, he presents the same sort of contrast, - that between dreamy, idealistic youth and practical, unimaginative age. Significantly, he refrains from indicating which is right.

One further observation about Gorgibus is invited by the first scene of Sganarelle, and that is his moral irresponsibility. Ironically enough, this admirer of the

<u>Guide des pécheurs</u> unblinkingly refutes the promise given to Lélie regarding his daughter's hand in marriage. His only reply to Célie's outraged

"Mais vous-même à ses voeux engageâtes ma foi" (1)

is a cynical remark to the effect that Valère's wealth automatically cancels any previous betrothal or contract:

"Lui fût-elle engagée encore davantage,
Un autre est survenu dont le bien l'en dégage" (2).

In other words, according to Gorgibus' view of things, a gentleman's agreement is annulled by material considerations. However valid such a contention might be from a purely practical standpoint, it is hardly defensible on moral grounds, and it is a sorry comment on the character of Célie's father.

We next see Gorgibus having a very different interview with his daughter when she, believing Lélie has been unfaithful to her, submits almost too readily to the plans that have been made for her as Valère's future spouse. Even this very brief scene is enlightening as to Gorgibus' nature. He is predictably delighted at her capitulation, and begins by naïvely expressing his joy; but he abruptly reins in his exuberance, for fear of making himself look foolish in the sight of those around him:

"Parbleu! si grande joie à l'heure me transporte,
Que mes jambes sur l'heure en cabrioleraient,

(1)Sc. i, l. 44.

(2)Sc. i, ll. 45-46.

Si nous n'étions point vus de gens qui s'en riraient." (1)
This small detail suggests in Gorgibus the typically bourgeois concern with the opinion of others; the anxiety about "what-will-the-neighbours-say", which is consistent with a conservative, staid character. The importance of appearances outweighs , for such a man as Gorgibus, the intensity of real happiness, just as financial security matters more to him than his word.

Most revealing of all is the dénouement of Sganarelle, since it illustrates pitilessly Gorgibus' sense of expediency. Confronted by Lélie, - who, reconciled with his Célie, has come to claim his right to marry her, - Gorgibus calmly negates "la promesse accomplie" and is insensitive enough to repeat Lélie's very phrases, word for word, enjoying the youth's discomfiture. The dialogue is undeniably comic: in reply to Lélie's

"Quoi? Monsieur, est-ce ainsi qu'on trahit mon espoir?"
Gorgibus says,

"Oui, Monsieur, c'est ainsi que je fais mon devoir".(2)
Yet, even as it makes us laugh, it brings with it the sobering reflection that honour and duty are fragile things, when there are more tangible advantages to be gained from disregarding them. Then in the final scene, Valère's embarrassed father, Villebrequin, comes to announce his son's secret marriage to one Lise, and the young man's

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(1) Sc. xviii, ll. 482-484.
(2) Sc. xxiii, ll. 628-629.

subsequent non-eligibility for Célie's hand. Gorgibus' behaviour in these circumstances is admirably quick-witted, but at the same time it further emphasizes his basic insincerity. Having shrugged off all responsibilities towards Lélie in order to acquire a wealthier son-in-law, Célie's father suddenly performs a volte-face and coldly announces that, even if Valère were in a position to wed his daughter, her prior engagement to Lélie makes such a union impossible:

"Je ne vous puis celer que ma fille Célie
Dès longtemps par moi-même est promise à lélie;
Et que, riche en vertus, son retour aujourd'hui
M'empêche d'agréer un autre époux que lui." (1)

The motives underlying this blatant reversal of all Gorgibus' earlier arguments in favour of supplanting Lélie are obvious. His pride is hurt, since his own daughter has been passed over for another, and it is comforting to be able to pay Villebrequin in like coin by claiming that Célie's position is similar to that of Valère. In this, we see an expression of the need for maintaining appearances, readily understandable in a man of Gorgibus' outlook. Then, from a mercenary point of view, the worthy man is no doubt eager to be free of the financial burden of a daughter at home, and to take her off his hands, a poor husband is better than no husband at all; hence the haste with which Lélie is reinstated

(1) Sc. xxiv, ll. 646-649.

as Célie's favoured suitor. Gorgibus suddenly remembers the long-standing promise so conveniently set aside a few moments earlier, and Lélie is all at once "riche en vertus", - a delightful choice of adjective in view of Gorgibus' values.

So all ends happily, - the lovers reunited, the father resigned, and Villebrequin relieved; but the fact remains that Gorgibus has used Lélie to suit his own ends, and such opportunism, allied to a mean, petty nature, does not make for a pleasing image of the bourgeois "père de famille" that Gorgibus represents.

Before passing on to examine the head of the family in Tartuffe, we shall briefly consider Molière's depiction of this character in Le Mariage forcé, the little play described by Loret as "un impromptu" (1) to accompany some ballet-sequences at court early in 1664.

The comedy centres around the dilemma of Sganarelle, an elderly bachelor resolved upon marriage to Dorimène, whose youth and beauty are off-set by extravagance and coquetry. After reflection, Sganarelle decides that he and his intended bride are temperamentally unsuited, (wherein he is quite right) and therefore the preparations for their union should be halted forthwith. Yet he has not reckoned with the girl's father, Alcantor, whose determination that

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(1) In the Muse historique, 2 February, 1664.

the marriage should go through equals Sganarelle's that it should not. In the confrontation between these two individuals, Alcantor's first words reflect his eagerness to see Sganarelle as his daughter's husband:

"Ah! mon gendre, soyez le bienvenu." (1)

Seeing that the wedding has not yet taken place, this is a premature salutation, and Alcantor's excessive cordiality towards Sganarelle, as well as his pushful manner and allusions to arrangements already made for the ceremony ("Les violons sont retenus, le festin est commandé...") (2) suggests unseemly haste to conclude the affair. The reluctant bridegroom's doubts are fluently swept aside, and when finally the truth is known, - that Sganarelle does not want to marry, - the father capitulates abruptly, only to send his son, Alcidas, to the wretch, to try brute force where eloquence failed. Being cowardly, Sganarelle's resistance soon breaks down, and in the final scene of the comedy, the reason for Alcantor's anxiety to unite Dorimène and Sganarelle becomes plain:

"Monsieur, voilà sa main, vous n'avez qu à donner la vôtre. Loué soit le ciel! M'en voilà déchargé, et c'est vous désormais que regarde le soin de sa conduite." (3)

It appears that here, we have the traditional playing-off of rogue against dupe, and the rogue has triumphed. Slight though the characterization of Alcantor may be, (the genre

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(1) Sc. viii, op. cit. I, pg. 731.
(2) Ibid., pg. 732.
(3) Sc. x.,ibid., pg. 735.

does not permit a detailed psychological study) it is sufficient to convey the main traits of his personality: smooth-talking, persuasive, opportunistic and unscrupulous, he is in some ways another version of Gorgibus, differing from him only in circumstances. His daughter's happiness and welfare matter less to him than the relief of casting off the responsibilities incumbent on him as her father. Like Célie's parent, he does not hesitate to use people in order to make his own existence more comfortable, and, like the other, resorts to bullying to get his own way. It is only the prevailing gaiety of Le Mariage forcé, and the feeling that Sganarelle is sufficiently stupid to deserve his lot anyway, that prevent greater censure of Alcantor's conduct.

If the figure of parental authority in Le Mariage forcé is a rogue able to hold his own against the world, the opposite is true of the "père de famille" in Tartuffe. Enough has been said in earlier chapters of the present thesis about the circumstances surrounding this work, and we shall accordingly consider Orgon without repeating the history of Tartuffe.

So much attention has been drawn to the obvious gullibility of this person (especially in connection with the "Et Tartuffe?... Le pauvre homme!" scene) (1), that other aspects of his character tend to be overlooked. Before

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(1) Act I, sc. iv.

the celebrated exchange with Dorine, for example, when we first see him, Orgon's brisk, friendly demeanour on returning home from a two-day absence belies the remarks made about his credulity in earlier scenes. He greets his brother-in-law, Cléante, with pleasure, and, like any other head of a family in his position, wastes no time in enquiring after his household. Until his aberration concerning Tartuffe manifests itself, he appears completely normal. However, when his obsession with the parasite is seen to affect his judgement to a degree which makes him grotesque, the natural reaction for any audience is to cease taking Orgon seriously, and to regard him merely as a caricature of the Dupe. Yet, as the play progresses, it is possible to discern certain attributes besides a capacity for uncritical acceptance in Orgon; and, taken together, they add to the picture of the bourgeois family man as conceived and portrayed by Molière.

When Cléante takes Orgon to task for his ridiculous attitude towards Tartuffe, Orgon displays something of the dogmatism already noticed in other characters of his ilk. With nothing but the flimsiest evidence to support his argument, he sets out to show his relative how admirable a man he has the honoúr to shelter in his home. The most significant line uttered by Orgon is that in which he tries to describe Tartuffe in concrete terms:

"C'est un homme... qui... ha! un homme... un homme enfin".(1)

Not only does this suggest the nullity of Tartuffe's merits;

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(1) Act I, sc. v, l.272.

it also reveals the extent of Orgon's ill-founded prejudice in his favour. When this inarticulate defender of the "dévôt" manages to express what he considers to be one of Tartuffe's greatest achievements, -

> "De toutes amitiés il détache mon âme;
> Et je verrais mourir frère, enfants, mère et feeme,
> Que je m'en soucierais autant que de cela." (1)

his speech proves rather the contrary, as Cléante's ironical comment on "humanity" confirms. Orgon's lack of intelligence, his obstinacy, and his inability to reason logically, are amply illustrated in the discussion on religious practice between himself and Cléante. Not only is he wrong-minded, but when worsted by his interlocutor's superior arguments, he proves to be a poor loser, taking refuge in heavy sarcasm and begging the point:

> "Vous êtes le seul sage et le seul éclairé,
> Un oracle, un Caton dans le siècle où nous sommes..." (2).

Finally, before the brothers-in-law part, the matter of the match between Valère and Mariane, Orgon's daughter, arises. Orgon's lack of interest in the subject, and his evasiveness about his intentions, imply much the same attitude towards the keeping of promises as that evinced by the Gorgibus of Sganarelle. A promise is only valid as long as it suits the individual involved to carry it out, - such, it would seem, is the philosophy of Orgon. Before Tartuffe's inclusion in his household, Mariane's

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(1) Act I, sc. v, ll.277-279.
(2) Ibid., ll. 348-349.

father was content to have Valère as a son-in-law; but, blinded by the hypocrite's ostentatious virtue, nothing can satisfy Orgon except a more permanent tie with Tartuffe; and to this end Mariane and Valère are to be sacrificed, for Tartuffe is the person Orgon has in mind as his daughter's future husband. The motive may be different, but the behaviour is the same in the case of Orgon as of Gorgibus. There is the same cajolery employed with the girl concerned while it appears that she will be obedient to paternal wishes, and the same arbitrary disposal of her future without any reference whatever to her personal inclinations.

Dorine's reactions to Orgon's revised choice of a husband for Mariane are curiously outspoken for a servant, and more will be said in a later chapter about the position of domestics in relation to their masters in Molière's day. The relevance of Dorine's remarks to the present issue cannot, however, be overlooked. Her incredulity at Orgon's folly is an indirect compliment to his judgement, since it implies that he should not normally be capable of such extravagance. At one point she even refers to his wisdom, and there is no irony in her words:

> "Quoi? se peut-il, Monsieur, qu'avec l'air d'homme sage,
> Et cette large barbe au milieu du visage,
> Vous soyez assez fou pour vouloir?..." (1)

Orgon's exchange with Cléante has already shown how meagre his intellectual resources in fact are, but Dorine's funda-

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(1) Act II, sc. ii, ll. 473-475.

mental respect for him outside the "Tartuffe" issue, and Mariane's uncritical obedience -

"Un père, je l'avoue, a sur nous tant d'empire,

Que je n'ai jamais eu la force de rien dire." (1)

indicate that there is something in the man which compels deference. Besides, the charming Elmire gives proof of her affection and loyalty towards Orgon, and at the beginning of the play Dorine tells Cléante of her master's worthy conduct during the Fronde:

"Et pour servir son prince il montra du courage" (2).

All this off-sets the absurdity of Orgon's behaviour with regard to Tartuffe, and he is redeemed by the implication that he is well-intentioned, doing the wrong thing for the right reason. This does not, however, alter the fact that he is selfish, narrow-minded and autocratic, and these faults are not improved by his capacity to be led by the nose. It is this latter attribute which accounts for the extremeness of Orgon's convictions.

Before the revelation of Tartuffe's perfidy, Orgon's devotion to the outsider is such that natural sentiments count for nothing. Damis is turned out of his father's home for a mere trifle, Elmire's word is doubted, and even that attachment to possessions so strong in the bourgeois breast does not prevent Orgon from giving all he has to his protété. On learning the truth, Orgon goes to the other extreme, only too ready to believe the

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(1) Act II, sc. iii, ll. 597-598.

(2) Act I, sc. ii, l. 182.

worst where, moments before, he wilfully believed the best:

"C'en est fait, je renonce à tous les gens de bien:
J'en aurai désormais une horreur effroyable,
Et m'en vais devenir pour eux pire qu'un diable." (1)

Such an outburst fully justifies Cléante's remark that

"Vous ne gardez en rien les doux tempéraments", (2)

and it also illustrates Orgon's tendency to classify indiscriminately. Having suffered at the hands of one "dévôt", he assumes that all "gens de bien" are in the same category as Tartuffe, - a further proof of unintelligent reasoning, based on superficial evidence.

In his dealings with his mother, Mme. Pernelle, Orgon appears in a slightly better light, for he manages to retain some self-control (not usually his strong point) in the futile attempt to convince the bigoted old woman of Tartuffe's guilt. At last, recognizing the vanity of this undertaking, he contents himself with saying,

"Allez, je ne sais pas, si vous n'étiez ma mère,
Ce que je vous dirais, tant je suis en colère." (3)

Restraint of language and respect for the aged, especially when they are maintained in trying circumstances, can only increase esteem for one who practises them, and our opinion of Orgon is modified accordingly. In this he is far removed from the coarse, noisy vulgarity of a Barbouillé or the bluntness of one of the earlier Gorgibuses.

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(1) Act V, sc. i, ll. 1604-1606.
(2) Ibid., l. 1608.
(3) Act V, sc. iii, ll.1693-1694.

Orgon's final outburst against Tartuffe is in accordance with his petty view of things, for when Tartuffe has been taken into custody and received his due share of humiliation, the victim of his deceit is not generous enough to let his punishment rest there. It is only Cléante's admonition -

> "........... Ah! mon frère, arrêtez,
> Et ne descendez point à des indignités;
> A son mauvais destin laissez un misérable,
> Et ne vous joignez point au remords qui l'accable." (1)

which puts a stop to the torrent of abuse Orgon is preparing for Tartuffe. To do him justice, Orgon needs no persuading, beyond the speech quoted, to forgive the hypocrite and acknowledge gratefully the King's timely intervention in the affair.

From the preceding survey, it can be seen that Orgon is by no means the caricatural Dupe whose existence is justified by the rôle he occupies vis-à-vis the Rogue. Orgon's character has a complexity which renders him interesting in his own right, and not solely in terms of the action of the play.

His values and attitudes, except where money is concerned, are those of his class, namely the prosperous bourgeoisie. If some of the traits he exhibits are reminiscent of those of similar "personae" in Molière's comedies and farces anterior to Tartuffe, it is because

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(1) Act V, sc. vii, ll. 1947-1950.

Orgon is, after all, identifiable as the head of a seventeenth-century "ménage", like the Gorgibus of Les Précieuses ridicules or his namesake in Sganarelle. Like them, Orgon is not a wholly sympathetic character, and even the positive aspects of his personality do not mitigate the exasperation caused by his dogmatic obstinacy.

The next representative of the bourgeois father to be discussed is Sganarelle, in L'Amour médecin. The speed with which this three-act comedy was executed, according to Molière himself, (1) explains why the character of Sganarelle is less finely drawn than one might expect, but it nevertheless provides some basis for further observations relevant to the present study. In the list of dramatis personae, Sganarelle is described simply as "père de Lucinde", but his social rank is clearly indicated by his familiarity with various traders and shopkeepers in his neighbourhood, whom he calls "mes compères et mes amis" (2).

The first scene is edifying as to the essential characteristics of Sganarelle. We find him in sentimental mood, recalling his dead wife and expressing anxiety about his only daughter's inexplicable state of melancholy. Oddly enough, his speech is devoid of that dignity normally associated with a man in his position. His very first

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(1) See the preface to the play, Couton, II, pg. 95. The work dates from September, 1665.

(2) Act I., sc. i.

remark is rendered comic by his ignorance of the prestigious authority invoked to lend weight to a banal little saying which, to him, sums up his situation:

> "... je puis bien dire, avec ce grand philosophe de l'antiquité, que qui terre a guerre a, et qu'un malheur ne vient jamais sans l'autre!" (1)

This suggests a degree of fatuity in Sganarelle, and diminishes the solemnity of his utterances, giving an air of light-heartedness even to his lamentations. His lack of sophistication in literature does not necessarily mean that he is unintelligent, as his penetrating observations on the motives of those counselling various remedies for Lucinde's state are not those of a man easily duped. He has the cynicism and the shrewdness of a businessman, and it is perhaps worth noting that in three out of the four persons whose suspect advice he assesses, material considerations determine the course of action recommended. M. Josse, the jeweller, advises some little trinket of diamonds or rubies to cheer her up; M. Guillaume, the upholsterer, suggests a tapestry to decorate her room. One young woman is anxious to see Lucinde safely married, so that she will no longer be a rival in the match she herself hopes to make; and Sganarelle's niece advocates entry into a convent, so that she, instead of Lucinde, will inherit Sganarelle's wealth.

Such sagacity as that displayed by Sganarelle in his analysis

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(1) Act I , sc. i.

of these "conseils intéressés" makes his ultimate defeat at the hands of Lucinde's suitor, Clitantre, all the more piquant, since one feels that he is a worthy adversary. From the beginning of the play, he is presented as astute, if rather quaint and given to trite and sentimental utterances. In his efforts to discover the cause of Lucinde's distress, he is very much the indulgent and affectionate parent:

> "...ne puis-je savoir d'où vient cette grande langueur? Découvre-m'en la cause, et je te promets que je ferai toutes choses pour toi. Oui, tu n'as qu'à me dire le sujet de ta tristesse; je t'assure ici, et je te fais serment qu'il n'y a rien que je ne fasse pour te satisfaire: c'est tout dire." (1)

The favourable impression thus gained of him is, however, quickly reversed when, after the interview (or rather, monologue) with his daughter, Sganarelle is unreasonably annoyed by her reticence, to the extent of turning a deaf ear to her pleas for permission to marry. The comic effect of the tables turned is undeniable, and at the same time it shows up the pettiness which, if previous plays are borne in mind, appears to be a feature of the bourgeois character. Sganarelle resembles Orgon in the ease with which he passes from one extreme to the other: after the exhibition of violent paternal tenderness he says, in all earnestness:

> "Je la déteste... et la renonce pour ma fille". (2)

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, op. cit. II, pg. 99.
(2) Act I, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 101.

The abrupt reversal of sentiment, and the sudden deafness on hearing the word "husband" pronounced by Lucinde, are soon explained in Sganarelle's monologue:

> "...rien de plus impertinent et de plus ridicule que d'amasser du bien avec de grands travaux, et élever une fille avec beaucoup de soin et de tendresse, pour se dépouiller de l'un et de l'autre entre les mains d'un homme qui ne les touche de rien..." (1)

It is sheer naïvety to believe that Sganarelle's hostility towards a match for his daughter stems from deep affection for the girl herself. The commercially-minded father sees in her an asset that has been brought to maturity at cost to himself, and in consenting to her marriage and supplying the necessary dowry, he stands to lose the fruit of his labours. Other factors, like the happiness and fulfilment of Lucinde, or the reality of human love, are irrelevant to him; he simply avoids taking them into account. Even his alarm and concern on learning of his daughter's "illness" from Lisette are no doubt prompted by the same feelings that he would experience had it been his merchandise or his property that were in danger. The odd, incongruous mixture of facile sentimentality and calculating sagacity that make up Sganarelle's character, is clearly discernible in his conversation with the maidservant. Before he knows the cause of her agitation, he begins weeping copiously, to the extent that Lisette has to say;

> "Monsieur, ne pleurez donc point comme cela; car

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(1) Act I, sc. v, op. cit. II, pg. 103.

vous me feriez rire." (1)

This produces much the same effect as Sganarelle's outburst at the beginning of the play, and from Lisette's words, it is obvious that she does not take her master's emotional upsets very seriously. On the other hand, there is the possessive streak in Sganarelle which is roused by the new situation, and he seeks immediate means to remedy Lucinde's state:

"...vite, qu'on aille quérir des médecins, et en quantité: on n'en peut trop avoir dans une pareille aventure." (2)

It is his faith in the medical profession, however, which is his downfall. Not only does his inherent caution in the matter of money desert him (he pays the four doctors, called in to attend Lucinde, in advance); he remains deferential towards the physicians despite their patent stupidity and incompetence, which could hardly fail to escape the notice of a person as acute as Sganarelle. His purchase of the much-reputed "orviétan", following the unsatisfactory consultation with Messieurs Tomès, Des Fonandrès, Macroton and Bahys, is consistent with the character of a man given to practical methods, and impatient to achieve desired results. However, not even the sorry performance of the four doctors just mentioned is enough to make Sganarelle disillusioned about medical practitioners, as is proved by the enthusiastic reception he gives to the disguised Clitandre, and the ease with

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(1) Act I, sc. vi,ibid., pg. 104.

(2) Ibid.

which he is convinced of the new "doctor's skill. Clitandre has merely to speak (in the vaguest terms, it should be noted) of the "paroles", "sons", and "lettres" he uses to cure his patients, and Sganarelle naïvely says,

"Voilà un grand homme". (1)

Despite a few mild symptoms of suspicion (Sganarelle remarks how youthful the "doctor" looks, and how unnecessarily close the young man's face is to that of the patient), Lucinde's father is surprizingly amenable to the suggestion that a mock marriage should take place between the girl and the physician, "comme il faut flatter l'imagination des malades". Anyone more sensitive to human emotions, and less concerned with material matters, would question such unorthodox procedure; but Sganarelle's trust in Medecine, and his anxiety to see his daughter cured, suffice to make him accept Clitandre's protestation of dislike for Lucinde, and the fiction that a marriage-ceremony will put an end to her "aliénation d'esprit". It is typical of him that, once this course of action has been adopted, he is impatient to see it carried through; it is like a business transaction, the completion of which promises the end he desires. One of the most delightful features of the scene in question is the rashness of Sganarelle, usually so cautious regarding money, - he promises twenty thousand écus as his daughter's marriage-portion, and the notary solemnly writes it down, thereby binding Sganarelle to provide the sum specified! Had it been known to the worthy man that he was participating in a

(1) Act III, sc. v. op. cit. pg. 115.

real, not a therapeutic, marriage, he would no doubt have named a considerably smaller figure, especially in view of his earlier remarks about losing "son bien" and his daughter simultaneously.

Characteristically, it is Lisette who informs Sganarelle, in terms that are less than respectful, of the true state of affairs; and his impotent rage, as well as his innate bourgeois conservatism, prevent him from joining in the dancing and revelry accompanying the nuptial celebrations. Our last glimpse of him is of a comically undignified person struggling with a group of merrymakes and crying,

> "Comment, diable! Laissez-moi aller, laissez-moi
> aller, vous dis-je
> Encore? Peste des gens!"(1)

Sganarelle's exit resembles his entrance inasmuch as both are lacking in that gravity one would expect from a sedate, middle-class father in Sganarelle's position.

In very similar case is Géronte, father of Lucinde in Le Médecin malgré lui.(2) There is much that this comedy has in common with the one just discussed: not only do the heroines bear the same name, but the basic situation-and-plot is almost identical: frustrated lovers successfully outwitting an unsympathetic parent through the agency of Medecine in a travestied form. The quality of the humour is the same, too, being essentially robust with

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(1) Act III, sc. viii, ibid., pg. 120.

(2) Performed in August, 1666, at the Palais-Royal.

scatological overtones. Le Médecin malgré lui, however, unlike L'Amour médecin, was not written for a court-audience, nor is there any indication that it was executed with the haste of the earlier work, despite the rapidity of the action, which is often close to that of improvised farce.

From the outset, Géronte displays the same materialistic outlook as the other bourgeois fathers already considered. From his argument with Jacqueline, the wet-nurse attached to his household, it emerges that his daughter is to wed a wealthy, but otherwise unattractive, person of her father's choice, and not the man she loves. The reason for this state of affairs is, of course, a financial one:

> "Ce Léandre n'est pas ce qu'il lui faut: il n'a pas du bien comme l'autre." (1)

Such is Géronte's blunt statement. Thus far, he is not much differentiated from the "pères de famille" in Molière's early farces and comedies; but there is a very interesting little speech uttered by Lucinde's father, which is edifying as to the bourgeois attitude towards possessions. We have already seen that caution and conservatism are the dominant factors governing the bourgeois' management of his affairs, but seldom has such an explicit affirmation of the "bird in the hand equals two in the bush" philosophy been put in the mouth of one of Molière's comic protagonists. In reply to Jacqueline's comment that Léandre's impecuniousness is compensated by the existence of a rich uncle,

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(1) Act II, sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 239.

Géronte declares:

> "Tous ces biens à venir me semblent autant de chansons. Il n'est rien tel que ce qu'on tient; et l'on court grand risque de s'abuser, lorsque l'on compte sur le bien qu'un autre vous garde."(1)

The key-words in that speech are, "il n'est rien tel que ce qu'on tient"; they convey adequately the need, apparently so much greater for the bourgeois than for the noble, to have real, tangible assets within one's grasp. While the bourgeois attitude is practical, it lacks the aesthetically satisfying insouciance of the noble's approach to life.

The earnestness of demeanour that characterizes the bourgeois in middle age (how seriously the Gorgibuses, Sganarelles, and Gérontes of Molière's plays take themselves!) invites the wit of the dramatist, and in Le Médecin malgré lui, the worthy Géronte is frequently the butt of that exuberance natural to the lower orders of his household. The wet-nurse, Jacqueline, argues with him as with an equal; Lucas, when reprimanding his wife for impertinence, administers the physical correction intended for her to Géronte himself; and adds further irony to the situation by remarking,

> "Monsieur, je veux un peu la mortifier, et li apprendre le respect qu'alle vous doit." (2)

In vain does his master point out that "ces gestes ne sont pas nécessaires." He has barely recovered from Lucas'

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(1) Act II, sc. i, ibid., pg. 239.

(2) Ibid., pg. 240.

efforts upon his person, when Sganarelle, the renowned "doctor", is introduced to him, and through a misunderstanding, the disguised wood-cutter gratifies Géronte with a beating similar to that which he himself received from Lucas and Valère to qualify as a doctor. The interview between Géronte and Sganarelle does little to increase respect for the former's intelligence and discernment. Not only does he fail to penetrate the disguise of the woodcutter, which is both rudimentary and exaggerated (the stage-direction accompanying Sganarelle's entry is, "en robe de médecin, avec un chapeau des plus pointus); the absurdity of Sganarelle's observations about Hippocrates and hats, and later, his parody of a diagnosis followed by an equally unlikely prescription, fail to rouse any suspicion whatever in the patient's father.

In the matter of payment for the consultation, there is no question that it is Sganarelle, peasant though he is, who has the better of Géronte from the start. The grateful client requires no prompting to give money for services rendered, - a natural enough reaction in one used to being in trade, and accustomed to the notion of "nothing for nothing, and fair value for sixpence". Sganarelle contrives to give such an impression of high-mindedness and modesty in his expectations of recompense, that the question,

"Cela est-il de poids?" (1)

slyly inserted between protestations that it is not money

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(1) Act II, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 248.

that motivates him, and that he is not mercenary, loses all its significance for Géronte. The latter not only hands over the money with the assurance that it is "de poids", but he also believes that it took persuasion on his part to make the "doctor" accept it.

From the moment Sganarelle enters his house, Géronte is no longer master of the situation. Whether he approves or not, the "apothecary" is brought to his daughter; he is prevented from intervening in Lucinde's conversation with Léandre by an undignified display of affection from Sganarelle; his domestics are upset by the new "physician"'s conduct; and when his daughter finally recovers her powers of speech, she defies her father in the matter of the match arranged for her with Horace, so that the bewildered Géronte cannot say a word in contradiction. Throughout these proceedings, Sganarelle remains supremely in control of the situation, even soothing Géronte after the departure of the lovers, when the outraged parent bemoans his daughter's disobedience. As we have noticed before, the complete submission of off-spring to paternal authority was taken for granted in Molière's time, so there is nothing unreasonable in Géronte's surprise and anger at Lucinde's behaviour. What is unreasonable is his attitude towards the exercise of his prerogative as a father, and his insensitivity to the girl's feelings.

Géronte's reaction on discovering Sganarelle's identity,

and the trick practised on him by Léandre and Lucinde, is characteristic: instead of punishing the woodcutter himself, he behaves like the law-abiding citizen he is, and sends for the police ("je vous ferai punir par la justice".) (1) Not even Sganarelle's plea for a more direct form of correction can make him change his mind:

> "Hélas! cela ne se peut-il point changer en quelques coups de bâton?" (2)

he asks wistfully, realizing full well that the sort of punitive action envisaged by Géronte is likely to be considerably more severe than a few blows, since his is a "cas pendable". Géronte's inflexibility is reminiscent of Orgon's reaction to Tartuffe's downfall. Forgiveness, it would seem, does not come naturally to the bourgeois mentality. As in Tartuffe, it takes a "deus ex machina" to put things to rights. Léandre's uncle having the decency to die, and the lovers having the integrity to return and throw themselves upon the mercy of Géronte, that gentleman's wrath is appeased, Sganarelle is released and suddenly Léandre's personal merit is acknowledged, since it is now enhanced by the wealth he has just inherited. In this, Lucinde's father joins the ranks of those middle-class fathers concerned with marrying off their daughters advantageously rather than happily. The ultimate impression gained of Géronte is no better than that gained of previously-discussed "pères de famille"

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(1) Act III, sc. viii, ibid., pg. 258.

(2) Act III, sc. x, ibid., pg. 259.

in Molière's works.

Now we come to one of the best-known of all the characters created by Molière: Harpagon, the incarnation of Avarice, father of Elise and Cléante in L'Avare. (1) The history of this comedy is not of the happiest. Compared with other plays chronologically close to it, its success was always limited, partly because of the use of prose in a five-act comedy, partly because it was eclipsed by Tartuffe, which was at last performed publicly at about the same time that L'Avare appeared on the Paris stage. As a depiction of bourgeois paternity, L'Avare is not altogether satisfactory, since Harpagon is too exceptional a being to constitute a reliable study of a "typical" seventeenth-century family man. Even so, it is worth considering Molière's characterization of him to detect some less obvious indications of the man's position and values in the context of his immediate circle.

Whereas the characters examined hitherto in the present chapter are all in vigorous middle-age, Harpagon is manifestly older: not only does his cough attest old age, but the costume designed for him is one which suggests a man advanced in years, and conservative to the point of eccentricity.(2) Spectacles, and an outfit fashionable in the days of Henri IV (the other characters are in dress contemporary with the period in which the play was written)

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(1) Performed in September, 1668, at the Palais-Royal.

(2) Details of Harpagon's costume are given in the inventory of Molière's goods after his death, in Cent ans de recherches sur Molière, op. cit. pg. 568.

testify to the decrepitude, as well as the economy, of Harpagon. He is thus differentiated from the stock-character of the Father to an even greater degree than Molière's previous creations in this regard.

Similarly, the Sganarelles and Gorgibuses and Gérontes of earlier comedies, although they present a certain similarity in their personality and outlook, are not associated with one particular virtue or vice, whereas the name of Harpagon is synonymous with Greed. Before he appears on-stage, Cléante has already said much, and with great bitterness, about the parsimony with which his father's household is run. References to "l'avarice d'un père", and "cette rigoureuse épargne qu'on exerce sur nous" (1) prepare us for the demeanour, speech and conduct of the old man. That Harpagon is suspicious, ill-natured and unreasonable, is at once apparent when he makes his first appearance, scolding a hapless servant. The violence of the insults addressed to La Flèche for an imagined offence ("maître juré filou", "gibier de potence", "pendard", "espion", "traître"), (2) and the absurd notions of the vulnerability of his goods to thieves, confirm the image of Harpagon evoked by Cléante's words. Everything about the Miser's person, including his attire, is consistent with the characterization of a man wholly given over to one vice. In trivial details, as well as in his contri-

(1) Act I, sc. ii, op. cit. II, pg. 520.
(2) Act I, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 521.

bution to the main action of the play, Harpagon's avarice is demonstrated. It is as if one of the traits of the bourgeois character, - caution in expenditure, - is taken, isolated, and magnified to monstrous proportions until it becomes the whole nature of the man. This precludes a detailed study of the Miser's character itself in the present work, since it can contribute little to knowledge of that convenient generalization, the bourgeois "père de famille". Yet Harpagon's relationships with those around him, - his children, acquaintances and servants, - are edifying, and these we shall now examine.

Not surprizingly, the main character of L'Avare forfeits the trust and affection of Cléante and Elise as a result of his attitude towards them. He himself has little love to give his children, and a man who can say,

> "Cela est étrange, que mes propres enfants me trahissent et deviennent mes ennemis!" (1)

simply because Cléante has innocently remarked that Harpagon has "assez de bien", cannot reasonably expect to be loved and respected by his offspring. One sympathizes, with Cléante, in fact, when he coldly reckons on the death of his father to facilitate the loan of 15,000 francs arranged for him by Maître Simon, who tells Harpagon:

> "...il s'obligera, si vous voulez, que son père mourra avant qu'il soit huit mois." (2)

There is not a trace of warmth in Harpagon's attitude

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 525.
(2) Act II, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 536.

towards his children either, since he can reply, "Tant mieux!" to Frosine's compliment that he will out-live Cléante and Elise. (1) Significantly, the traditional respect owed by children to their male parent in the seventeenth century has disappeared from the exchanges between Cléante and Harpagon. For example, when the identity of usurer and borrower is revealed in the matter of Cléante's transaction with the anonymous money-lender, the young man's retorts to his father are devoid of that deference normally expected of a person in his position. Far from cringing before the old man's wrath, Cléante accuses him:

> "Qui est plus criminel, à votre avis, ou celui qui achète un argent dont il a besoin, ou bien celui qui vole un argent dont il n'a que faire?" (2)

This is a far cry from the submissive attitude of young people towards their fathers as portrayed in other plays from Molière's pen. Even when the issue of paternal authority is explicity raised by Harpagon on learning of his son's passion for Mariane, -

> "Ne suis-je pas ton père? et ne me dois-tu pas respect?" (3)

Cléante, unabashed, retorts that in matters such as the present one, no deference is due to fathers, and adds that Harpagon's threats do not intimidate him. As for Elise, she is considerably less docile than Orgon's daughter

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(1) Act II, sc. v, ibid., pg. 540.
(2) Act II, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 537.
(3) Act IV, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 564.

when informed of the husband chosen for her by her father, and stoutly maintains her independence of attitude, with remarks like:

"Cela ne sera pas, mon père".

"C'est une chose où vous ne me réduirez point." (1)
So much for filial obedience and devotion. Even those rare persons who, like Frosine, are polite to Harpagon, are not so from any recognition of merit or intelligence in Harpagon, but simply because they hope to achieve something by humouring him. Frosine expects a tangible token of the Miser's gratitude for her services on his behalf where Mariane's hand in marriage is concerned; Valère sees in Harpagon the potentially uncooperative father of his beloved, and treats him accordingly; Anselme's treatment of Harpagon is that of one businessman dealing with another in an affair of mutual benefit to both. Like other bourgeois heads of families already discussed, Harpagon, for all his shrewdness in transactions involving money, is quite naïve when dealing with resourceful, glib-tongued intriguers like Frosine. He uncritically accepts her ridiculously exaggerated account of Mariane's penchant for elderly men, and believes to the last word her assurances of the delight he will give his intended young bride at the sight of his quaint, old-fashioned clothes ("...que votre fraise à l'antique fera sur son esprit un effet admirable!") (2). Never for a moment does he doubt her sincerity, - which makes her invective all the more amusing

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 528.
(2) Act II, sc. v, ibid., pg. 543.

when the old man is out of earshot:

> "Que la fièvre te serre, chien de vilain à tous les diables!" (1)

Just as Sganarelle and Géronte are duped by the "doctors" attending their daughters, so Harpagon, in his vanity, is duped by a few well-turned compliments from a clever woman.

Another trait the Miser has in common with those of his social station is his anxiety about the judgement passed on him by the rest of society. He persists in asking Maître Jacques "ce que l'on dit de moi", and as this dangerous request follows the flatteries of Frosine, Harpagon obviously expects to hear nothing but the best. When his optimism is proved to be ill-founded,

> "... vous êtes la fable et la risée de tout le monde; et jamais on ne parle de vous, que sous les noms d'avare, de ladre, de vilain et de fesse-mathieu".(2)

his reaction is of the most basic (he beats his unhappy informer) and his language, forceful. The solid dignity of the middle-class pater-familias is notably absent from his behaviour, and the usual recourse to physical violence when words alone no longer serve as an outlet for outraged emotion reminds us of the element of farce, never very far from the action in Molière's plays.

Harpagon is no more esteemed by his servants than by his family and acquaintances. When La Flèche receives un-

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(1) Act II, sc. v, ibid., pg. 543.
(2) Act III, sc. i, ibid., pg. 550.

justified abuse from his master, his asides give the lie to his restraint beneath the lash of Harpagon's tongue. Comments about "ce maudit vieillard" (1), and later, in conversations with Cléante and Frosine, about "le plus malgracieux des hommes" (2), and "le mortel de tous les mortels le plus dur et le plus serré", (3), are explicit enough indications of his true opinion of Harpagon. Similarly, Maître Jacques' lightning transformations from coachman to cook, and from cook to coachman, imply a discreet irony, since the servant resents doing the work of two domestics and being paid for the work of one. Moreover, Maître Jacques' remark about the state of the Miser's horses and the "naturel trop dur" of a man without pity for them, makes it clear what he thinks of the frugality imposed upon Harpagon's household, however sincere his protestation of affection for his master might be.

From all this it can be seen that Harpagon stands alone, with only his "chère cassette" for company, in the midst of his family and servants. It is true that his obsession with money differentiates him from the other, less remarkable heads of families hitherto discussed, but it is nonetheless possible to trace the characteristics he has in common with them. There is the unrelenting attitude towards those who have wronged him or made him look foolish; there is the arbitrary manner in which he decides the

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(1) Act I, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 521.
(2) Act II, sc. i, ib id., pg. 532.
(3) Act II, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 538.

future of his children without regard for their personal inclinations. Then there is the concern with appearances and public opinion; the gullibility that accords so ill with shrewdness in financial matters, and the overweening selfishness which makes his own needs and whims the only ones that count. Not even Harpagon escapes the comical incongruity of horse-play on the one hand, and conservative stolidity on the other, - in the scene where he seizes himself by the arm and accuses himself of stealing his own money, for example. (1) He thus conforms to the tradition whereby the middle-class family man, as depicted in farce and comedy, has a curious duality in his character. Finally, there is the reluctance to spend recklessly, which, in Harpagon, is exaggerated to the point of caricature. Initially, it is a trait discernible in many an honest bourgeois whose adequate, but not large fortune, amassed by hard work over a considerable period, has taught him the value of watching his pennies. Only in Harpagon is this caution carried to the extreme which makes La Flèche remark:

> "... 'donner' est un mot pour qui il a tant d'aversion, qu'il ne dit jamais: 'Je vous donne', mais: 'Je vous prête le bonjour' ". (2)

The year following L'Avare, Molière's comedy-ballet Monsieur de Pourceaugnac had its début at Chambord, and was later performed at the Palais-Royal, with great success.

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(1) Act IV, sc. vii, ibid., pg. 569.
(2) Act II, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 538.

This means that the new genre appealed to both aristocratic court-audiences and to mixed town-audiences. In this work is the figure of Oronte, yet another in the steadily growing number of middle-class fathers represented in the dramatist's comedies. Like those we have already discussed, Oronte is bent upon what he considers to be a suitable match for his daughter, Julie. He requires the girl to give up Eraste, the young man she loves, for the wealthy and titled advocate from Limoges, de Pourceaugnac. It is clear from the first scene of the play that Oronte has not even met the man he has chosen as Julie's future husband, and the only justification for his choice is the fact that, as Nérine points out, de Pourceaugnac recommends himself by having "trois ou quatre mille écus" more than Eraste (1). Apart from that, the "Limousin" boasts an aristocratic name, albeit an outlandish one. This at once suggests snobbishness and mercenary values in Oronte, who is not only aware of the powerful attractions of Wealth (like most members of his class) but is also easily dazzled by a "de" prefixed to a name, no matter how vulgar or quaint that name might be. Again, as is the case of nearly all the bourgeois "pères de famille" characterized by Molière, Oronte displays a tendency to believe too readily all he is told: not only has he never set eyes on the person who will marry into his family, but the main factor influencing his decision - the advocate's wealth - has not even been verified by him. He has simply taken the word of Julie's uncle that de Pourceaugnac is a more

(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 594.

advantageous match than Eraste.

Thus far, Oronte appears to fit entirely into the pattern established for characters of his ilk: opportunistic, easily impressed, and insensitive to the emotional needs of his offspring. Unlike Elise in L'Avare, however, Julie is sufficiently intimidated by Oronte to seek less direct methods of defying him, and the panic caused by Nérine's mistaken identification of the gentleman attests the respect felt for his authority, if not for his judgement. (1) All these deductions as to the nature of Julie's father are to be made merely from the situation in which he has put the lovers, and from what is said of him by other characters in the play. He does not appear in person until the second act, when his reaction to the doctor's tidings about de Pourceaugnac's health gives further grounds for observations about his character. The possibility that his future son-in-law is suffering from an unspecified and disreputable disease predictably fills Oronte with horror, as his reiterated "Est-ce quelque mal...?" shows; and the rapidity with which he decides the marriage should not take place confirms that opportunism already noticed in him:

" Je n'ai garde, si cela est, de faire le mariage." (2)

Again, he relies on hearsay to form his opinions and judgements, thereby displaying a certain lack of intelligence, and is completely uncritical of the ridiculous pronounce-

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(1) Act I, sc. i.
(2) Act II, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 615.

ments of the doctor. When, for example, the latter says de Pourceaugnac will be arrested and condemned to be cured by himself should he flee from his ministrations, Oronte gravely gives his consent. A more alert individual would either laugh at the doctor, or question his meaning.

The caution inherent in the bourgeois is not wanting in Oronte, however, as his next confrontation proves. When asked by the "Flemish merchant" whether he knows a certain Monsieur Oronte, instead of acknowledging his own identity outright, he merely replies in the affirmative and waits to see what prompted the question. His answer that Oronte is "un homme comme les autres" is a masterpiece of non-committal diplomacy on being questioned further as to the sort of man Oronte might be. He betrays very little and learns much in the course of his conversation with the disguised Sbrigani, but at the same time his finesse is not sufficient to penetrate the Neapolitan's disguise. Oronte's behaviour in the trying interview with de Pourceaugnac does him little credit: he is churlish towards his daughter -

"Ma fille est une sotte qui ne sait pas les choses".(1)

unreliable when reminded of past promises -

"Si je te l'ai promis, je te le dépromets". (2)

and insincere in his sudden concern for Julie's welfare when it suits his purpose to invoke it as an excuse for getting out of his commitment:

"...vous êtes-vous mis dans la tête qu'un homme...

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(1) Act II, sc. vi, ibid., 621.
(2) Ibid., pg. 622.

> considère si peu sa fille, que de la marier avec un homme qui a ce que vous savez...?" (1)

Such self-righteousness from one who, a short time before, envisaged marrying his daughter to a total stranger without a qualm, is not in the best of taste, nor does it ring true. Sentiment comes easily to Oronte, just as the Sganarelle of L'Amour Médecin, too, gives way to emotion with a facility which makes his tears ludicrous rather than touching. Julie's father, for instance, on hearing Lucette's impassioned speech about de Pourceaugnac's exploitation of her love, says naïvely,

> "Je ne saurais m'empêcher de pleurer. Allez, vous êtes un méchant homme". (2)

In the matter of Julie's "elopement" with de Pourceaugnac, Oronte's credulity is complete: it never occurs to him that the girl's timely rescue by her ex-lover from a fate worse than death is in any way suspect, and Eraste's absurd declarations of devotion and respect to Oronte, and utter indifference to his daughter, are accepted without question by the old man. Oronte's values are such that a piece of irony like Eraste's statement that

> "... quatre ou cinq mille écus est un denier considérable, et qui vaut bien la peine qu'un homme manque à sa parole..." (3)

seems to him a valid judgement, and his vanity is great enough to lead him to believe that Eraste's action was

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(1) Act II, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 622.
(2) Act II, sc. vii, ibid., pg. 624.
(3) Act III, sc. vii, ibid., pg. 635.

prompted solely by the young man's anxiety to save the honour of so admirable a person as himself, Oronte. The situation reaches the ultimate point of absurdity when, in accepting Julie as his bride-to-be, Eraste tells her:

> "Ce n'est que Monsieur votre père dont je suis amoureux, et c'est lui que j'épouse". (1)

Whereupon Oronte solemnly thanks him and adds the sum of ten thousand écus to the dowry; which is a sorry comment on that person's discernment.

If the social status of the "pères de famille" we have studied has in some cases been debatable, there can at least be no doubt of that of Monsieur Jourdain, Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. Not only the title of this work, but also the description of the main protagonist in the dramatis personae ("Monsieur Jourdain, bourgeois"), situates Jourdain firmly in the ranks of the commercial bourgeoisie of Paris. Besides, Mme. Jourdain alludes to her husband's immediate forbears "qui vendaient du drap auprès de la Porte Saint-Innocent". (2)

The history of Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme is similar to that of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac: it was first performed at Chambord before King and court, (3) then played at the Palais-Royal before Parisian audiences. The popularity of this new comedy-ballet is understandable in court-circles, satirizing as it does the antics of a parvenu

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(1) Act III, sc. vii, ibid., pg. 636.
(2) Act III, sc. xii, op. cit., pg. 756.
(3) In October, 1670.

endeavouring to buy nobility with the fortune he has accumulated while plying the trade of draper. But the success enjoyed by Le Bourgeois at the Palais-Royal, where many members of the audience no doubt saw in M. Jourdain an uncomfortably accurate portrait of themselves, requires some explanation. In the first place, like Harpagon, M. Jourdain is in many respects a caricature, and the subordination of his other attributes to his ruling obsession inevitably renders him larger than life. This means that, despite elements of truth in the dramatist's portrayal, it is always possible to dismiss Jourdain as a figure of fantasy, particularly towards the end of the play, when he participates in the grotesque dancing of the "Turkish ceremony". Secondly, the unpalatable depiction of bourgeois pretentiousness and stupidity in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme is easily mitigated by the reflection that M. Jourdain represents a collectivity rather than an individual. As Grimarest puts it in his Vie de Molière, (1) "Chaque bourgeois y croyait trouver son voisin peint au naturel". The significant word is "voisin".

At the outset there is no mistaking Jourdain's lack of taste and his inability to grasp the intricacies of the arts he has set himself to learn. The masters of music and dancing lament their pupil's inadequacy, for not even his ample purse can compensate for the outrage done to their artistic sensibility by his clumsy attempts to

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(1) Op. cit.

follow their precepts. As the dancing-master observes,

> "... c'est un supplice assez fâcheux que de se produire à des sots, que d'essuyer sur des compositions la barbarie d'un stupide". (1)

Even the music-master, who is more disposed to indulge Jourdain in view of the remuneration for his services, refers to his pupil as "ce bourgeois ignorant". (2) Clearly the respect accorded Jourdain is not commensurate with his wealth and newly-acquired accomplishments. It is interesting to note in passing how the ex-draper's way of life is modelled upon that of the leisured nobility, for the music-master tells his colleague that the air for the "sérénade" commissioned by Jourdain was composed "en attendant que notre homme fût éveillé". Unlike the typical bourgeois engaged in trade, Jourdain can afford to sleep late in the mornings, - a further suggestion of his efforts to ape the aristocracy.

The parvenu's first words immediately betray his lack of discernment, for when he joins his teachers, arrayed in a gaudy dressing-gown, he refers to the entertainment prepared for him as a "petite drôlerie", to the mortification of the dancing-master. His speech on this occasion sets the tone for his utterances throughout the play. As we see him with successive instructors, - the music-master, the dancing-master, the fencing-master and the philosopher, - their knowledge serves as an admirable foil for his ignorance, and the precision of their language

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(1) Act I, sc. i, ibid., pg. 712.
(2) Act I, sc. i, ibid., pg. 713.

contrasts amusingly with the simplicity and incongruity of his. The vulgar little song about Janneton, which Jourdain prefers to the elegant insipidity of the lament to "belle Iris"; the naïvety of the good man's question about the pastoral convention in music; ("Pourquoi toujours des bergers?") and his child-like satisfaction with his new clothes, - all this serves to fix his character as that of a vain, unschooled, outspoken tradesman with a tradesman's view of things and a touching belief that, to be a noble, one has only to wear a noble's clothing. Despite the foolishness of his aspirations, however, Jourdain retains something of the practicality normally associated with one of his class. For example, when his instructors are involved in an undignified skirmish, he avoids participating because to do so would spoil his expensive new raiment, and besides, as he says,

"Je serais bien fou de m'aller fourrer parmi eux, pour recevoir quelque coup qui me ferait mal." (1)

This aspect of his character is further illustrated when Dorante, (whose noble rank hypnotizes Jourdain into lending him whatever amount of money he demands) raises the question of debts incurred in the past by himself. Indiscriminate though Jourdain may seem in his readiness to oblige the count, his bourgeois caution has made him keep an exact record of the sum lent to Dorante, and a detailed entry into the account like:

"Mille sept cent quarante-huit livres sept sols

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(1) Act II, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 726.

quatre deniers à votre sellier". (1)
shows the truth of the axiom, "once a tradesman always a tradesman"; for only a shopkeeper would bother to note down the "quatre deniers". This exactitude accords ill with the airiness of Jourdain's words when he is overwhelmed with Dorante's gushing expressions of gratitude. The confrontation between the "bourgeois gentilhomme" and the "vrai gentilhomme" emphasizes the distance separating middle-class manners and aristocratic ones. Despite his indebtedness to Jourdain, Dorante maintains that air of friendly condescension used by a great man towards an inferior, and Jourdain, notwithstanding his financial superiority over Dorante, still has that half-apologetic and respectful demeanour peculiar to salesmen eager to please their clients. Mme. Jourdain's cynical comments in the background express adequately the attitude of the shrewd businesswoman viewing an unsatisfactory transaction, and serve to suggest to what extent her husband's original values have changed. In fact, at every moment during the action of the play we are reminded of what Jourdain was, and invited to compare what he was with what he is trying to become.

Inevitably, in the matter of his daughter's marriage, Jourdain behaves like Orgon, Harpagon, and the less outstanding middle-class fathers of earlier comedies whose choice of a son-in-law is directly related to their own

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(1) Act III, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 742.

needs and aspirations, and has nothing to do with the girl's inclinations. Orgon wants an alliance with his adored "dévot", Harpagon decides in favour of wealth, and the Gérontes, Sganarelles, and Gorgibuses opt for matches that are advantageous to themselves rather than acceptable to their daughters. In accordance with this selfish tradition, Jourdain rejects the admirable Cléonte, whose only defect is failure to boast an impressive family-tree:

> "Vous n'êtes point gentilhomme, vous n'aurez pas ma fille". (1)

When, however, the same young man is presented to him as the son of the Grand Turk, the gullible Jourdain is only too eager to give him Lucile's hand in marriage, dazzled at the prospect of being made a "Mamamouchi". Knowing little or nothing of his daughter's suitor, other than the fact that he promises to glorify the name of Jourdain, the ex-draper peremptorily informs Lucile that she has the honour to marry the gentleman to whom she is about to be introduced. All the father can say in reply to the girl's incredulity and reluctance to co-operate in this sudden plan for her future is,

> "Je le veux, moi qui suis votre père". (2)

Those words are all too familiar, - the not infrequent expression of paternal authority despotically exercised. While it would be extravagant to claim that all fathers in Molière's day acted thus, the regularity with which heads-of-families in the dramatist's plays are depicted

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(1) Act III, sc. xii, ibid., pg. 755

(2) Act V, sc. v, ibid., pg. 776.

as arbitrary and dictatorial, is too great to be attributed to coincidence, convention, or simply lack of imagination on the author's part.

In his dealings with his wife, Jourdain's behaviour invites some amusement. He is neither autocratic nor submissive with her, but simply co-exists with the sharp-tongued, practical, obstinate female he married some twenty years previously. Her candid and unflattering comments ("Vous êtes fou, mon mari"; "vos façons de faire donnent à rire à tout le monde") (1) produce no effect upon him whatever; without beating her or raising his voice, he merely dismisses her as "ignorante", and punctuates his speeches of self-justification with injunctions like "Paix!" and "Taisez-vous, ma femme." The impression gained from the couple's conversations is one of a relationship in which neither party dominates; Jourdain courts the aristocracy, while Madame frequents bourgeois circles. Each lives a self-contained life, independently of the other; and when they are brought face to face, they are impervious to insults, threats and raillery alike. Jourdain's indifference towards his spouse may be gauged from his answer to Mme. Jourdain's inquiry about Nicole's fate:

> "Je la donne au truchement; et ma femme à qui la voudra". (2)

Comic effect apart, it is hardly the sort of remark to suggest depths of tenderness, and it is yet another comment

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(1) Act III, sc. iii, ibid., pp. 736-739.

(2) Act V, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 779.

upon the character of the "bourgeois gentilhomme".

Like Harpagon, M. Jourdain is unchanged in his persuasions and obsession at the end of the play, and in that he differs from Orgon and the other, less significant, "pères de famille" already considered in this study. The action dissolves into movement and dancing, and into this whimsical world Jourdain disappears, believing his daughter to be the bride of the Grand Turk's son, and himself a venerable "Mamamouchi" whose dress and accomplishments place him on an equal footing with the best in the land. Only members of his family, his friends, and the detached observer see him as he really is: a selfish, deluded, unintelligent parvenu whose birth and circumstances do little to justify his pretentions to Glory.

Chrysale, the bourgeois paterfamilias of Les Femmes savantes, is cast in quite a different mould from M. Jourdain. The prestige attaching to this play, regarded by Molière's contemporaries as a more polished work than was usual from the pen of a dramatist hard-pressed by royal commissions and subject to the pressure of competition from rivals, (1) sufficed to ensure Les Femmes savantes a gratifying reception from the Parisian public at its première in March, 1672. The time and effort expended on its composition (it would seem that Molière was already busy with this comedy as early as 1668) make it all the more valuable as a reflection of Molière's views and attitudes, so long

(1) Donneau de Visé, e.g. , calls Les Femmes savantes "achevées" (Mercure galant, 25 May, 1672.)

as it is not treated as a bald statement thereof.

Unlike Orgon, who, - despite his wrongheadedness - retains the privileges of authority in his household, and Jourdain, who keeps his independence of judgement in the face of outspoken criticism from his wife, Chrysale has nominal authority only; the management of his family affairs has been completely usurped by Philaminte, his domineering spouse. This unusual situation is indirectly suggested by Armande's use of the plural instead of the more traditional masculine singular when reproving Henriette for her disregard of parental authority in accepting courtship from Clitandre:

"Sachez que le devoir vous soumet à leurs lois,
Qu'il ne vous est permis d'aimer que par leur choix".(1)

Later, as Henriette and Clitandre discuss their future marriage, Chrysale's position becomes clearer: like any young suitor of the time, Clitandre naturally considers it his duty to ask the father of his beloved for her hand, and Henriette hastily interrupts him in order to correct his mistaken idea of her father's importance -

"... Le plus sûr est de gagner ma mère:
Mon père est d'une humeur à consentir à tout,
....
Il a reçu du Ciel certaine bonté d'âme,
Qui le soumet d'abord à ce que veut sa femme." (2)

This statement, tempered as it is by filial respect,

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, ll. 165-166.
(2) Act I, sc. iii, ll. 204-208.

prepares us sufficiently for the sort of person to expect when Chrysale makes his appearance upon the stage; and his actions and speech confirm first impressions. The worthy man's tendency to wander off at a tangent (his reminiscences of youthful extravagance shared with Clitandre's father are most trying to Ariste), is a symptom of his inability to adhere to one subject or one course of action at a time; hence his vacillations, and the justice of Henriette's remark that

"... il met peu de poids aux choses qu'il résout". (1)

His astonishment at Clitandre's attachment to Henriette, when apprised of it by Ariste, bespeaks a lack of perspicacity that we can by now recognise as characteristic in the bourgeois "père de famille". Equally characteristic is Chrysale's capacity for self-delusion. His practical brother, having ascertained Chrysale's reaction to a match between Henriette and Clitandre, advises a consultation with the redoubtable Philaminte; whereupon Chrysale becomes pompous and dogmatic, asserting his power and dismissing Ariste's suggestion as unnecessary:

"... Vous moquez-vous? Il n'est pas nécessaire:
Je réponds de ma femme, et prends sur moi l'affaire".(2)

Any irony in those words is purely dramatic, as Chrysale himself sincerely believes that his approval of Clitandre as a son-in-law suffices, and that support from his wife in the matter can be taken for granted. The episode of

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(1) Act I, sc. iii, l. 206.
(2) Act II, sc. v, ll. 411-412.

Martine's dismissal soon shatters this illusion, however. Despite his convictions to the contrary, Chrysale is forced to participate in the recriminations directed by Bélise and Philaminte at the servant for her indiscreet use of French Grammar; and when, after her departure, he makes a feeble endeavour to protest, his words are scorned as "un discours grossier". It is true that Chrysale is more concerned with things of the body than with those of the mind, and that, in some respects, he is lacking in finesse. But the issue in which he is involved is, after all, one of domestic service. His emphasis on material and practical factors is quite appropriate to the circumstances, and it is Philaminte and Bélise who are made to look foolish by transporting refinements of language into the lowly domain of the kitchen.

One of the most interesting speeches in Les Femmes savantes is that pronounced by Chrysale when he is goaded to eloquence by the absurdity of his wife's intellectual affectation, and likewise by that of his sister. Typically, he takes the precaution of addressing his remarks to Bélise, of whom he stands in less awe, and during the oration he feels the need to repeat this manoeuvre, -

> "Je vous le dis, ma soeur, tout ce train-là me blesse,
> (Car c'est, comme j'ai dit, à vous que je m'adresse)."(1)

One suspects that, for a man so amply endowed with "certaine bonté d'âme", the speech in question is a piece of boldness

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(1) Act II, sc. vii, ll. 607-608.

which Chrysale seldom permits himself. The sincerity of this outburst is therefore all the greater. Taken out of its context (which diminishes its comic force to some extent), it amounts to a plea for sanity and a return to the traditional way of life, whereby the woman of the house concentrates her energy upon the efficient management of her household instead of the improvement of her mind. Chrysale's homely philosophy is expressed in the vigorous language of the middle-classes. He dismisses Trissotin and his scholarly, artificial utterances in the following terms:

"On cherche ce qu'il dit après qu'il a parlé,
Et je lui crois, pour moi, le timbre un peu fêlé." (1)

On the one hand, everything that Chrysale says is perfectly valid, and his common-sense contrasts agreeably with the ridiculous ideas and preciosity of the "femmes savantes". On the other hand, however, it should be noted that this diatribe against feminine erudition tends in one direction only: the greater comfort of Chrysale. He objects to astronomy not so much because it is gratuitous, as because pursuit of it makes his servants forgetful of "mon pot, dont j'ai besoin". (2) Literature displeases him because the cook, lost in her reading, burns his roast, while the tapgirl neglects to bring him his drink because her head is full of poetry. Instead of a wife devoted to study, Chrysale would rather a wife skilled with the needle, so that his clothes are kept in good repair. He has the

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(1) Act II, sc. vii, ll. 613-614.
(2) Ibid., l. 594.

generosity to add that a "mère de famille" should also work at her daughter's trousseau; but it is interesting that he mentions the "pourpoint" and "haut-de-chausse", - items of masculine attire, - first.

This aspect of Chrysale's tirade suggests that selfishness inherent in the bourgeois character, which has been pointed out earlier in the present chapter. Obviously Chrysale is a much more sophisticated creation than le Barbouillé, but his notions are not significantly different from those implicit in the earlier character's complaints about his wife's way of running a home. Chrysale's stand against preciosity in females is likewise reminiscent of the attitude of Gorgibus in Les Précieuses ridicules, for all that the father of Henriette and Armande is a much less decisive individual.

In one respect at least, Chrysale is NOT typical of the middle-class "père de famille", inasmuch as he does not value money above less tangible assets. After the recurrent spectacle of fathers willingly sacrificing their children's happiness to Mammon, it is refreshing to witness Chrysale's airy dismissal of material considerations in the match proposed between Clitandre and Henriette. Ariste, practical as ever, points out that the young man does not pass for a wealthy person; but before he can finish this observation, his brother interrupts -

"... C'est un intérêt qui n'est pas d'importance;

Il est riche en vertu, cela vaut des trésors,

Et puis son père et moi n'étions qu'un en deux corps."(1)

The last remark is no doubt Chrysale's most cogent reason for accepting Clitandre as a son-in-law, and it invites some comment. Circumstances prove that Clitandre is indeed "riche en vertu", as his generosity after Chrysale's "financial ruin" could only come from a noble heart; but the impression gained from this exchange between Ariste and Chrysale is, that Clitandre is favoured on sentimental grounds. However close the friendship may have been between Chrysale and the youth's father, it does not guarantee that Clitandre will be a satisfactory husband for Henriette. Chrysale's judgement in this case is not as sound as it might be, and he does the right thing for the wrong reason. Similarly, on learning of Philaminte's intention of concluding a marriage-contract between Tirssotin and Henriette, Chrysale's reaction

"... Et dès ce soir je veux,

Pour la contrecarrer, vous marier tous deux". (2)

The suitability of the Clitandre/Henriette alliance as opposed to the Trissotin/Henriette alliance puts Chrysale in the right; but his reason ("pour la contrecarrer") for promoting Trissotin's rival implies an almost childish desire to get the better of the woman who has dominated him for so long. The self-assertive utterances with which Chrysale backs up his decision suggest, too, that it is less the marriage itself that stirs the man to action, than

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(1) Act II, sc. iv, ll. 404-406.

(2) Act IV, sc. v, ll. 1435-1436.

the need to show his authority as head of the family:

"Ah! je leur ferai voir si, pour donner la loi,

Il est dans ma maison d'autre maître que moi." (1)

The young couple's love serves, in fact, as a pretext for the confrontation of wills between Chrysale and Philaminte, and Chrysale's motives on this occasion should not be regarded as purely altruistic. It is worth adding that none of those witnessing this sudden display of determination is deceived as to its permanence or reliability. Henriette begs Ariste to keep her father "dans cette humeur", and Clitandre declares that Henriette's fidelity to him is his surest ally in the conflict. Nobody takes Chrysale seriously, and in view of his past behaviour, this is hardly surprising. Comic effect reaches its height when Chrysale, outraged at his daughter's scepticism about his ability to impose his will on Philaminte, bawls questions like

"Comment? Me prenez-vous ici pour un benêt?" and

"Suit-je un fat, s'il vous plaît?" and

"Est-ce donc qu'à l'âge où je me vois,

Je n'aurais pas l'esprit d'être maître chez moi?" (2)

These are followed by reminders of the absolute authority vested in a father, and his traditional right to dispose of daughters in marriage as he sees fit. Familiar though these declarations sound, they lose their weight when voiced by a man of Chrysale's mildness and pliancy.

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(1) Act IV, sc. v, ll. 1443-1444.

(2) Act V, sc. ii, ll. 1575, 1576, 1579-1580.

There is a fine irony in the dénouement of Les Femmes savantes, for the last words are those of Chrysale, and they are both positive and imperious. He instructs the Notary to draw up the contract for the marriage of Henriette and Clitandre, thus getting his way for the first time in many years:

"Allons, Monsieur, suivez l'ordre que j'ai prescrit,
Et faites le contrat ainsi que je l'ai dit". (1)

The action of the play has had the effect of restoring the natural order of things, and re-establishing the correct balance of power in the household of Chrysale, whose pleasure in his new-found authority makes him repeat, rather unnecessarily, the expression of his will. ("...que j'ai prescrit;" "...que je l'ai dit.")

Molière's last comedy, Le Malade imaginaire, (2) closely resembles Le Bourgeois gentilhomme in structure and plot, so it is not surprising that Argan, the main protagonist of Le Malade, bears a strong resemblance to M. Jourdain. Like the latter, Argan is obsessed by an "idée fixe" which causes him to choose, with selfish motives, a highly unsuitable husband for his daughter. As in Le Bourgeois, it takes a subterfuge to put things to rights for the girl and her lover, while the father's mania is satisfied and his illusions are left intact. The action of the play drifts into a fantasy of music, dancing and burlesque

(1) Act V, sc. iv, 1777-1778.
(2) Performed in February, 1673 at the Palais-Royal.

ceremony. Originally intended for court-entertainment, Le Malade had its début before a Parisian audience as a result of Lulli's machinations; and despite Molière's death at the fourth performance of the work, and his subsequent replacement by La Thorillière, this comedy proved a great popular success for the "Troupe du Roi".

Before examining the character of Argan, it is as well to establish his social rank, for in the dramatis personae, it is not explicitly stated that he is of bourgeois stock. (He is simply described as "malade imaginaire".) In the first place, his name is very similar to that of Orgon, a typical middle-class paterfamilias whose wealth places him closer to the nobility than to the lower orders of the bourgeoisie. Secondly, his choice of a doctor as a son-in-law precludes the possibility of his being noble, for such an alliance would be out of the question were Angélique the daughter of an aristocrat. Finally, his robust exchanges with the servant, Toinette, bring the comedy close to farce at times, and a noble protagonist in a farce is inconceivable in Molière's day. That Argan is wealthy is clear both from Béline's designs upon his fortune, and from Toinette's protest at Diafoirus' inclusion in her master's family:

> "Et avec tout le bien que vous avez, vous voudriez marier votre fille avec un médecin?" (1)

Whereas, in previous plays, the main persona is frequently

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(1) Act I, sc. v, op. cit. II, pg. 1107.

kept in the wings for some time before appearing on the stage, in Le Malade imaginaire we meet Argan as soon as the curtain is raised. He is engaged in the typically bourgeois occupation of sorting through his bills to find how much money he owes. The use of "jetons" (counters) to reckon the sums involved bears witness to the debtor's attentiveness to accuracy, and at the same time indicates the frequency with which he has patronized his apothecary. That he is a hypochondriac is immediately obvious, and the lengthy monologue pronounced by him is calculated to make this aspect of his character his most striking characteristic, confirming the title of the play. This does not mean that he has no other traits, however. Like most of his class, he is concerned with money, and alert for any attempt on the part of others to cheat him; he has no illusions about the apothecary's inflated prices:

> "Trente sols un lavement...Vous ne me les avez mis dans les autres parties qu'à vingt sols, et vingt sols en langage d'apothicaire, c'est-à-dire dix sols; les voilà, dix sols." (1)

However gullible Argan might be where his health is concerned, he shows considerable perspicacity in financial matters.

He is not without some vanity, which is another characteristic of the wealthier ranks of the bourgeoisie (in M. Jourdain it reaches monstrous and comic dimensions). This is indicated by his pleasure at the discreet language used by

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(1) Act I, sc. i, ibid., pg. 1100.

M. Fleurant, the apothecary, - for it flatters his self-importance to read an entry into his account like:

> "...un petit clystère... pour amollir, humecter, et rafraîchir les entrailles de Monsieur". (1)

He even interrupts his perusal to comment favourably upon "les entrailles de Monsieur"; but the sum required by Fleurant for the said "clystère" is rejected out of hand by Argan, who has no doubt been in trade himself, and knows that civility is usually in direct proportion to the amount charged for services rendered.

Argan's opening monologue terminates with an angry outburst occasioned by the absence of willing servants to respond to his call; and his impatience, together with remarks such as "voilà qui est pitoyable!" and "ils me laisseront ici mourir", (2) justify the epithets "self-pitying" and "imperious". By the end of the first scene, a clear impression has been formed of the "malade imaginaire", and it is not one which does him credit. With the arrival of Toinette, a different aspect of Argan's character is thrown into relief. Just as Dorine makes Orgon look ridiculous, and Lisette's attitude towards Sganarelle in L'Amour Médecin robs the gentleman of his spurious dignity, so too Toinette's method of averting Argan's wrath has the effect of deflating her master's gravity and self-importance. For all his ill humour and air of authority, he is reduced to a state of inarticulation by Toinette's

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(1) Act I, sc. i,ibid., pg. 1099.
(2) Ibid., pg. 1101.

scolding and screaming. At this point of the play, the action is closer to farce than to the comedy of manners. Apart from the robustness of the dialogue and the pleasure afforded by the spectacle of a bullying master worsted by a resourceful servant, the confrontation between Argan and Toinette is an interesting comment upon Argan himself. It is in fact surprisingly easy to subdue him, and the absolute power held over him by doctor and apothecary is correspondingly more understandable, as is his domination by Béline.

With Angélique, however, Argan is quite different in his manner. When informing her of the husband selected for her, he is the by-now-familiar figure of the commanding Parent used to complete obedience. The girl's initial enthusiasm for the project of matrimony is naturally welcomed by her father, but it should be noted that, whether or not marriage is acceptable to her, Argan has already made the necessary arrangements:

"Je suis bien aise d'avoir une fille si obéissante.
La chose est donc conclue, et je vous ai promise." (1)

After the identity of Angélique's future spouse has been established, however, and Argan's "dessein burlesque" is questioned, the reasons for Thomas Diafoirus' preferment become clear. As is to be expected, both relate to the advantage of Argan rather than to that of his daughter. A doctor in the family of a hypochondriac obviously bene-

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(1) Act I, sc. v, ibid., pg. 1105.

fits the latter, but in addition to this, the money-conscious father sees in young Diafoirus a valuable source of revenue for the family coffers:

> "Monsieur Diafoirus n'a que ce fils-là pour tout héritier; et, de plus, Monsieur Purgon, qui n'a ni femme, ni enfants, lui donne tout son bien, en faveur de ce mariage; et Monsieur Purgon est un homme qui a huit mille bonnes livres de rente." (1)

There speaks the cold logic of financial calculation, and inevitably human emotions take second place. Such considerations as that just quoted are supported by Argan's comfortable philosophy that "une fille de bon naturel doit être ravie d'épouser ce qui est utile à la santé de son père". (2) It would seem that obligations arising from the father/daughter relationship operate in one direction only in Argan's view, and his assertion that he is not at all good, "et je suis méchant quand je veux", is not only comical; it is perfectly true. With each successive newcomer to the stage, our knowledge of Argan's character increases. The next protagonist to engage his attention is Béline, with whom Argan is docile and affectionate. Yet his love for his second wife stems less from his inner capacity for loving, as from a feeling of gratitude for the way in which she flatters his vanity, endorses everything he says, (no matter how unjust or unreasonable,) and lavishes endearments and little attentions upon him. He

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(1) Act I, sc. v, ibid., pg. 1108.
(2) Ibid., pg. 1107.

needs her as an adjunct to his personal comfort, not as a human being with whom he can share the experience of living. For a man so acute in financial matters, he is quite lacking in perspicacity when Béline's conduct contradicts her words: he finds nothing suspect in the behaviour of a woman who brings her lawyer to his house while protesting that

> "...le seul mot de testament me fait tressaillir de douleur". (1)

Béline's crocodile tears and facile displays of sentiment are contagious, for Argan gives way to maudlin utterances himself, - until the lawyer, M. de Bonnefoy, drily remarks,

> "Ces larmes sont hors de saison, et les choses n'en sont point encore là." (2)

The pettiness often inseparable from the bourgeois mentality manifests itself in Argan on occasions, with great comic effect. For example, in following Purgon's instructions for exercise, he is sorely perplexed to know whether he is required to walk up and down his chamber length-wise or breadth-wise; a symptom both of his superstitious faith in doctor's prescriptions and of his lack of intelligence in matters not connected with money.

At the meeting with Diafoirus and his eligible son, Argan's pomposity takes the form of meaningless civilities uttered simultaneously with the elder Diafoirus' pronouncements of a similar variety. The effect, as in Argan's exchanges with Toinette, is to diminish the "malade's" dignity to

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(1) Act I, sc. vi,ibid., pg. 1112.
(2) Act I, sc. vii, ibid., pg. 1114.

the point of making him a figure of fun. This in turn reduces sympathy for him when deceptions are practised upon him. Argan shows his lack of discernment in admiring the erudition of Thomas Diafoirus, and in the sort of criticism he makes of the charming impromptu opera sung by Angélique and Cléante. (1) Aesthetically and morally, his judgement leaves much to be desired.

Opportunism, which is seldom absent in one form or another from the bourgeois "père"'s behaviour, is discernible in Argan when he demands a free consultation from Diafoirus and Diafoirus before they depart; although it must be confessed that their joint examination, followed by diagnosis and prescription, does not contribute much to his enlightenment. (2) Argan's remark that

"...je joue ici un plaisant personnage" (3)

is a valid assessment of his position, since he is duped by Béline, intimidated by Medicine, and browbeaten verbally by Toinette, for all his dogmatic and authoritative utterances. As a character, he is a curious alloy of previous characters cast in a similar mould. His ultimatum to Angélique ("choisis d'épouser dans quatre jours, ou Monsieur, ou un couvent") (4) is strikingly close to that of the Gorgibus of <u>Les Précieuses ridicules</u>, and Argan has the insensitivity of that person. When trying to extract the truth from Louison concerning Angélique's

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(1) Act II, sc. v. Argan dismisses the entertainment as "impertinent" because of lack of respect towards paternal authority therein.

(2) Act II, sc. vi.
(3) Ibid., pg. 1141.
(4) Ibid., pg. 1142.

entertainment of a young gentleman in her room, Argan's lament over the "death" of the child is reminiscent of Sganarelle's noisy concern for his "mortally ill" daughter in L'Amour médecin, - which illustrates the gullibility shared by these two characters. His subsequent cross-examination of Louison resembles that practised upon Agnès by Arnolphe in L'Ecole des femmes. (Although Arnolphe is not exactly a "père de famille", his social status and his age put him in the same category as the Orgons, Argans, Gérontes and Sganarelles of Molière's drama.) Argan has in common with Arnolphe an indiscreet curiosity coupled with a meanly suspicious mind. Finally, Argan joins the ranks of the "monstres sacrés" created by Molière, inasmuch as, - like Harpagon, Orgon and M. Jourdain, - he has a grand obsession. With Harpagon, it is Money; with Orgon, Religion; with Jourdain, Rank; and with Argan, Medicine. In each case, the father's mania has potentially devastating effects upon the off-spring as reason gives way to the ruling passion when marriage-partners are chosen; and in each case it requires the agency of saner persons to correct the aberration of the main protagonist. The third act of Le Malade imaginaire conforms to this tradition.

Between the logic of Béralde and the wiles of Toinette, Argan the credulous is induced, first to abandon the ministrations of Purgon and Fleurant, then to try the affection of Béline and Angélique respectively. It is

during this interesting exercise that a significant little portrait of Argan is given by his second wife:

> "Un homme incommode à tout le monde, malpropre, dégoûtant, sans cesse un lavement ou une médecine dans le ventre, mouchant, toussant, crachant toujours, sans esprit, ennuyeux, de mauvaise humeur, fatiguant sans cesse les gens, et grondant jour et nuit servantes et valets." (1)

The epithets used, and the vigour of the speech, suggest the sort of reaction occasioned by the appearance and conduct of a man like le Barbouillé, and some allowance must be made for the prolonged frustration suffered by Béline during her marriage to Argan. However, there is an undeniable element of truth in her words, since much of what she says is verifiable. Argan is seldom anything other than ill-humoured; he does indeed scold servants unreasonably (as any of his frequent verbal battles with Toinette shows); his absence of wit may be seen in the readiness with which he accepts situations and judgements that a more intelligent individual would either question or reject out of hand. And a person so monumentally self-centred as Argan, whose health is his sole topic of conversation, is certainly "ennuyeux". Such a person has little to commend him, and the devotion shown by Angélique at his "deathbed" is less understandable than the cruel verdict pronounced upon him by Béline.

Like M. Jourdain, Argan believes that to be the person

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(1) Act III, sc. xii, ibid., pg. 1167.

of one's aspirations, one has only to put on the clothes of that person. Accordingly there is less absurdity than might be supposed in Béralde's remark that

> "L'on n'a qu'à parler avec une robe et un bonnet, tout galimatias devient savant, et toute sottise devient raison." (1)

Angélique's reproach to Béralde that he is making rather too much fun of her father is countered by the sensible observation that it is not so much a question of laughing at him, as of humouring him; and the rest is music, dancing and fantasy. Some of Argan's illusions have been shattered, but the main one, - that he is to be a doctor, and that the magic of his medicine will cure all his ills, - is still intact, as are his characteristics of selfishness, gullibility and impatience. ("Allons, voyons cela") (2).

What has emerged from this chronological survey of Molière's portrayal of the middle-class father?

As the dramatist's art reaches maturity, there is a corresponding refinement in his treatment of the protagonist in question. The difference between a simple figure of farce like le Barbouillé and a complex, psychologically interesting individual like Chrysale, is obvious. Despite this evolution, however, there is coherence in the characterisation of what is one of the most recurrent figures in Molière's drama. To a greater or lesser

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(1) Act III, sc. xiv, ibid., pg. 1170.
(2) Ibid., pg. 1171.

degree, all the bourgeois heads of families, from La Jalousie du Barbouillé to Le Malade imaginaire, have a measure of authority which they abuse. With very few exceptions (notably Orgon and Chrysale) they are mercenary, manifesting their concern with financial gain in petty or ungenerous ways. Harpagon apart, they have a tendency to wax sentimental on occasions, - but this does not preclude their being insensitive to the needs, sufferings, and desires of other members of their family. The most universal feature of the bourgeois character as depicted in the plays discussed is surely that of selfishness. It should not be forgotten that La Rochefoucauld's Maximes appeared in 1665, bringing with them the revelation of "amourpropre" as the mainspring of all human action. Since Molière was a comic dramatist and not a moralist, the lesson of the Maximes is not explicitly stated in his work, but their influence is nonetheless present therein. In the aristocrat, selfishness is disguised to some extent by the pride considered at the time to be natural and legitimate in one of superior birth and happy circumstances. In the bourgeois, it takes less acceptable forms: callousness, opportunism, vanity, and greed. This is one of the reasons for the unfavourable impression gained of the character chosen as the subject for study in the present chapter. Another is the lack of taste and intelligence characteristic of the middle-class paterfamilias. His aesthetic and intellectual deficiencies combine to make him an obvious target for rogues, charlatans and thieves,

and at the same time diminish that dignity which is often the saving grace of the self-made man.

The picture of the middle-classes as they appear in Molière's comedies is not complete by any means; but this study of one of their main representatives in his work is in itself enough to disprove the popular notion that the bourgeoisie is idealized by the son of Jean Poquelin, "tapissier du roy et bourgeois de Paris".

Chapter Two.

The Bourgeois in Love.

Before we consider aspects of the bourgeois character as revealed in the toils of love in Molière's plays, it is essential to make a distinction between two sorts of gallant: the young and the middle-aged. It has already been pointed out that in the seventeenth century, comedy derived much of its force from perception of the incongruous. Those traits of the middle-class mentality which are so evident in the various "pères de famille" discussed in the last chapter, - prudence, caution in expenditure, anxiety about appearances, and egotism, - tend to run counter to the sort of impulses inspired by love, and particularly passionate sexual love. The notion of a stolid, unimaginative, thrifty bourgeois of middle age (and in Molière's day a man of forty was considered a "barbon" well past the bloom of youth) falling prey to an infatuation, is therefore the obvious choice as a subject fit for a comic dramatist's pen, and Molière's works are not lacking in examples of grotesque lovers.

Part of the incongruity just mentioned, however, stems from the age of the besotted individuals in question, and what is ludicrous in a man of Harpagon's years (he admits to being sixty) is not only acceptable, but natural,

in a man of twenty-five, - be he noble, bourgeois or proletarian. Once this is borne in mind, it may be seen that to speak of "the bourgeois in love" in Molière's comedies is a misleading generalization, unless the Cléantes and Clitandres are separated from the Argans and Jourdains. Since the former afford less matter for comment, they will be considered first, and collectively.

Unlike the older protagonists in plays involving amourettes and intrigues centring around young lovers, the personable youths whose love is requited are on the whole less distinct personalities. This does not mean that their characterization is weak; they simply have less memorable features than, for examples, a figure like Orgon. Moreover, they are not greatly differentiated one from another. All are in analogous situations, endeavouring to win approbation of their suit from the uncompromising father of the damsel who has caught their fancy. Generally impecunious, or at any rate not sufficiently moneyed to appeal to the prospective father-in-law, they resort to the strategy suggested either by their resourceful servant, or by the girl herself: disguises ranging from music-master to apothecary to son of the Grand Turk generally answer the purpose.

As far as appearance is concerned, the young man in love is attired stylishly, in a way calculated to please the object of his affection; and in this his dress contrasts

sharply with the traditionally sober garb of the elderly bourgeois. Some idea of the typical young beau to be seen in Molière's day may be gained from the atrabilious remarks of Harpagon, first about his own son, Cléante, then about Youth in general. Of his offspring he observes:

> "...à vous prendre depuis les pieds jusqu'à la tête, il y aurait de quoi faire une bonne constitution". (1)

Allowing for the degree of exaggeration inevitable in a miser (to whom any attempt at elegance would bespeak reprehensible extravagance,) it is fairly clear that Cléante is modish in his dress, to the extent of being clothed almost too well for one of his class; ("vous donnez furieusement dans le marquis") but in this he is no exception. Later, when Harpagon is conversing with Frosine and the subject of "jeunes blondins" arises, the studied negligence of these individuals, their affectations of pale complexion and "barbe de chat" (2), are mentioned, and remind us of Sganarelle's diatribe against contemporary fashion in L'Ecole des maris. (Although the higher orders of society are the main target thereof, certain elements of the bourgeoisie are not exempt from his criticisms.)

Situation-wise and appearance-wise, then, the young, love-smitten bourgeois conforms to a certain type. Even the names given to representatives of this character by the dramatist show little variety: Cléante, Cléonte,

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, op. cit.II, pg. 525.
(2) Act II, sc. v, ibid. pg. 543.

Clitandre, Valère. Similarity of name in the characterization of the middle-class father ceases after Sganarelle ou le Cocu imaginaire, which features the last of the Gorgibuses, but in the case of "le jeune galant" it persists throughout Molière's work.

The character of the young lover as portrayed by Molière is consistent with that of one whose merits render him worthy of the girl who loves him. Valère loyally offers Orgon his carriage and "mille louis" to enable him to flee after Tartuffe's villainy has betrayed him, despite the treatment received from Mariane's father. (1) Undaunted by the news of Chrysale's bankruptcy, Clitandre generously offers his small fortune to be shared with Henriette and her family, although Philaminte's earlier attitude towards the young man would justify a less magnanimous gesture.(2) Léandre, in Le Médecin malgré lui, has the integrity to return Lucinde to her father instead of taking advantage of the opportunity given him by Sganarelle to elope with her. (3)

It is interesting to note that the speech of the average bourgeois youth in Molière's comedies differs markedly from that of the older generation belonging to the same social class. Setting apart the elegantly-turned, rather stylized declarations of love uttered by the "jeunes

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(1) Act V, sc. vi, op. cit. I, pg. 980.
(2) Act V, sc. iv, op. cit. II, pg. 1070.
(3) Sc. xi, op. cit. II, pg. 260.

blondins", a certain gracefulness of expression remains even in their more banal pronouncements. This, like their dress, places them closer to the nobility than to the bourgeoisie from which they are sprung. A speech like that of Cléante in Le Malade imaginaire, for example, -

> "Que Monsieur fait merveilles, et que s'il est aussi bon médecin qu'il est bon orateur, il y aura plaisir à être de ses malades" (1)

- is not only a masterpiece of diplomacy (Argan must be humoured in the matter of Diafoirus' merits); it is also remarkably neat in its expression. Likewise the answer returned to M. Jourdain by Cléonte when asked whether he is of noble birth, -

> "...je trouve que toute imposture est indigne d'un honnête homme, et qu'il y a de la lâcheté à déguiser ce que le Ciel nous a fait naître, à se parer aux yeux du monde d'un titre dérobé, à se vouloir donner pour ce qu'on n'est pas" (2)

- could well be taken, out of context, for the declaration of a marquis bemoaning the frequency with which bourgeois persons adopt the titles and trappings of the aristocracy.

How can this phenomenon be explained? The answer may be sought in that social mobility which characterizes life in seventeenth-century France (3). In many cases the difference between the manners and attitudes of men belonging to different generations is accounted for by the

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(1) Act II, sc. v, op. cit. pg. 1133.
(2) Act III, sc. xii, op. cit. pg. 755.
(3) See chapter one, Part One, of the present thesis.

fact that, whereas the father is a self-made man without the benefit of a sound education, the son is given all the opportunities that accompany reasonably affluent circumstances. Apart from the difference in their social rank, the offspring of a noble family and the offspring of a middle-class family would not be materially dissimilar if judged by appearances alone.

From this it can be seen that the younger protagonists in Molière's drama are not as representative of their class as the older ones, whose judgements and actions reflect more accurately their social origins. As an artist, Molière's work is in some measure concerned with depicting truth, hence the presence of these elegant, well-educated, articulate sons of prosperous bourgeois; young men whose aspirations in love and marriage appeal to the spectator, and whose success (which inevitably crowns the vicissitudes suffered) can only meet with approval.

It is quite a different matter in the case of middle-aged or elderly bourgeois. The conflict between Thrift and Generosity, Caution and Passion, which arises when they enter the lists of love, makes for a comedy-fraught situation resolved either by a "deus ex machina" or by a change of inclination, but never by requital. We shall now consider individually the characters in this category.

The first persona inviting comment in this regard is to

be found in L'Ecole des maris: Sganarelle, younger brother of Ariste, and, - if we are to judge by his theory of the woman's rôle in a "ménage", - thoroughly bourgeois. In this work Molière contrasts two possible attitudes towards the education (in the Latin sense) of females, and at the same time presents two sorts of love: that of Ariste for Léonor, and that of Sganarelle for Isabelle. It might be objected that what Sganarelle feels for his ward and intended wife can hardly be called "love"; yet in his mean-spirited, possessive way, he is attached to her. Ariste does not love passionately so much as indulgently, and his awareness of the great difference between his age and that of Léonor prevents him from appearing ridiculous. His is a paternal image. Not so Sganarelle. Although twenty years Ariste's junior, he is certainly not young, for Ariste is described as "sexagénaire" (1), which puts Sganarelle's age at about forty. Isabelle is presumably a generation younger than her austere guardian; and instead of acknowledging her youth and understanding her needs, Sganarelle tries to age her before her time by the sort of up-bringing he imposes upon her. At the same time he fondly imagines that the principles inculcated in the girl by himself guarantee her future loyalty to him. This situation in which she is placed does nothing to generate any affection in her for Sganarelle, and, predictably, her heart is lost to a youth closer to her age.

Under these circumstances, Sganarelle's behaviour towards

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, l. 240.

his betrothed offers matter for mirth. Expecting complete submission from one whom he has trained so meticulously, he never suspects for a moment Isabelle's sincerity when she denounces Valère's attentions to herself. (In this he conforms to the tradition of the gullible bourgeois). Paradoxically, the girl's "honesty" causes Sganarelle to become more demonstrative and trusting where she is concerned. Where, before, he was bullying and aggressive, humiliating her before Ariste, Léonor and Lisette, (1) and using "vous" when addressing her, he changes to "tu", and punctuates his eulogies of her virtue with endearments such as "mamie", "mignonnette" and "mon coeur", to say nothing of "fanfan" and "pouponne de mon âme". From dominating the girl, he becomes in a sense her victim, for she dupes him completely where her feelings for Valère are concerned, besides rousing in Sganarelle himself a measure of desire unexpected in one usually so unresponsive.

What primarily interests us here is the way in which Molière presents Sganarelle's relationship with Isabelle, and the implications thereof. Initially, this dour forty-year-old gives the impression of indifference to his future wife. To him she represents little more than a useful adjunct to his domestic comfort, and there is a singular lack of tenderness and respect in the terms in which he speaks of her to Valère:

> "... une fille assez jeune et passablement belle,
> Qui loge en ce quartier, et qu'on nomme Isabelle?

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, ll. 129-130.

. . . .

... elle est destinée à l'honneur de ma couche?" (1)
Those lines imply condescension rather than affection, especially the last one quoted. However, the change occurs shortly after the exchange between Sganarelle and Valère, when the former reports back to his betrothed. Although there is not yet that wealth of loving epithets which characterizes his later conversations with Isabelle, "tutoiement" has already replaced the more formal address used earlier, and he calls her "mignonne". Simultaneous with this symptom of growing affection is the gulling of Sganarelle, who is made to carry to Valère proof of Isabelle's attachment to the young man. At this stage, Sganarelle is made to look ridiculous more through his involuntary rôle as go-between than through his feelings for Isabelle.

As the action progresses, however, his vulnerability in the domain of emotions increases; his tone when addressing Isabelle becomes more and more mawkish, and the endearments he uses are increasingly foolish. Far from inspiring sympathy (the spectacle of a mature man infatuated with a girl wholly indifferent to his attentions is not necessarily comic, and can even be potentially tragic), Sganarelle is the personification of absurdity. Not only is his attachment to his young ward incongruous in itself, given the ages and temperaments of the two persons involved; it is expressed in terms so manifestly alien

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(1) Act II, sc. ii, ll. 399-400, 404.

to Sganarelle's usual mode of speech that it is impossible to take it seriously. Added to this already considerable element of comicality in the Sganarelle/Isabelle relationship is Sganarelle's capacity for self-deception. His confidence regarding Isabelle's feelings for himself is in inverse proportion to her growing love for his rival. This lends great dramatic irony to Sganarelle's fatuous reassurances about his impending nuptials; remarks like:

"Oui, mignonne, je songe à remplir ton attente" (1) and

"Hai! hai! mon petit nez, pauvre petit bouchon,

Tu ne languiras pas longtemps, je t'en réponds".(2)

In addition, he interprets everything Isabelle says as a compliment to himself, when infact she and Valère are subtly confirming their mutual attraction under his very nose. Sganarelle falls into the trap devised for him by the lovers for the same reason as that which blinds him to the true meaning of Isabelle's double-edged remarks to Valère in his presence: his self-felicitating vanity. This brings us back to one of the essential characteristics of the bourgeois, namely egotism. When, at the end of the play, Sganarelle is worsted by Valère and Isabelle and made to acknowledge the unpalatable truth, one feels that his inherent selfishness will help him to overcome any sorrow occasioned by the loss of his bride-to-be. Even his assertion that

"J'aurais pour elle au feu mis la main que voilà" (3)

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(1) Act II, sc. ix, l.755.

(2) Act II, sc. ix, ll. 769-770.

(3) Act III, sc. ix, l. 1105.

fails to convince us of the extent of his "devotion" to Isabelle, and it is rather the declaration that he renounces forever "ce sexe trompeur" (1) which carries weight, in view of his nature and outlook.

It would appear, then, that Molière's intention in the portrayal of Sganarelle's attitude in love is to create a ludicrous figure designed to inspire irreverent mirth, rather than a pitiable individual suffering the pangs of unrequited love. Dramatic convention in the mid-seventeenth century forbade the choice of a noble for a rôle such as that held by Sganarelle. On the other hand, although we are not meant to take him seriously, L'Ecole des maris is by no means a farce, and the basic idea underlying the gaiety of dialogue and situation is of some importance. To dismiss Sganarelle as a caricature reminiscent of fair-ground farce is not altogether justified, therefore, and a more valid interpretation of his character is, perhaps, to regard him as a larger-than-life representation of certain aspects of the "bourgeois personality", - to use a convenient abstraction. Placed in the context of Love, (which by its very nature presupposes generosity and selflessness,) Sganarelle's typical possessiveness and ego-centrism are all the more evident.

A study of L'Ecole des femmes (2) soon reveals a great similarity between Arnolphe and the Sganarelle of L'Ecole

(1) Act III, sc. ix, l. 1109.
(2) First performed on 26th December, 1662 at the Palais-Royal.

des maris. Like Sganarelle, Arnolphe sets out to fashion himself a wife regardless of human inclinations or emotions; like Sganarelle he is ignominiously defeated by the very ingenuity he has striven to cultivate, and ultimately he, like Sganarelle, quits the stage "tout transporté, et ne pouvant parler". (1) Despite the resemblance between the titles, plots and protagonists of the two plays in question, there is nothing repetitive about L'Ecole des femmes. In the first place, the circumstances of Arnolphe are different from those of Sganarelle inasmuch as he has no elder brother, and is seen to command his own household. Moreover, he is a more complex character than the lover of Isabelle. His relationship with Agnès is the central theme of the play, - but at the same time he has pretentions as a social climber, as is illustrated by his desire to change his name to the aristocratic "de la Souche". (Not, it must be added, a very happy choice.) Whereas in Sganarelle's case the words "stupidity" and "selfishness" suffice to express the man's whole character, Arnolphe cannot be so easily summed up.

Each of the successive confrontations in which Arnolphe participates throughout L'Ecole des femmes reveals an aspect of his personality, so that, by the time he makes his final exit, a fully-explored portrait of a bourgeois in love has emerged from the action. From his first conversation with Chrysalde, his friend, (2) we learn

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(1) Act V, sc. ix. l. 1763.
(2) Act I, sc. i.

of Arnolphe's ill-natured, complacent scorn of unfortunate husbands cuckolded by their wives; we have evidence of his dogmatic approach to such a delicate subject as the choice and management of a wife; we see his snobbishness regarding his name; and, above all, we cannot fail to be made conscious of his self-satisfaction with his private life, and of his condescension towards Chrysalde. Already this forty-two-year-old, middle-class "barbon" has been roughly characterized, and subsequent events serve to confirm first impressions. With his servants Arnolphe displays the same truculence already observed in bourgeois heads-of-households in other comedies, and despite the intimidating effect his presence produces upon Alain and Georgette, there is no absence of buffoonery in their dealings with their master. (Arnolphe receives a blow from Alain intended for Georgette, for example.) Like Sganarelle, Arnolphe at first shows little or no affection for the girl he intends to wed, and his early speeches to Agnès could well be taken for orders to a servant, or at any rate to an inferior. This serves a double purpose, since initial indifference suggests the shallowness of the later passion, and at the same time it provides a comic element in the action: that of the biter bit, the rogue caught in his own trap. Thus far, the characterization of Arnolphe is decidedly hostile, and conventional as that of the sort of bourgeois pilloried in comedy. A more sympathetic side to his character emerges when he converses with Horace, however, and evokes

his great friendship with Oronte:

"...Oronte votre père,

Mon bon et cher ami, que j'estime et révère" (1).
While it is true that the plot demands Arnolphe's trust and affection for Horace, (in order to sustain the dramatic irony of Horace's confidences about Agnès,) the fact remains that Arnolphe's loyalty to the obligations of friendship places him in a better light, preventing the dramatist's depiction of him from becoming too simplistic. Arnolphe's generosity towards the son of his best friend, financially speaking, also implies an absence of that parsimony usually associated with one of his class.

Any approximation to dignity in Arnolphe's conduct is soon contradicted by the terms in which he expresses his wrath on learning of Horace's success with Agnès. He might wish to take the name of an aristocrat, but his speech and manners, even in potentially tragic circumstances, are not those of a noble. An exclamation like

"Je suffoque, et voudrais me pouvoir mettre nu", (2)
can only provoke laughter, however earnest the feelings inspiring it might be. Similarly, Arnolphe's sufferings during the famous interview with Agnès (3) are hardly the sort of which tragedy is made. Already by this stage of the play, the guardian's emotional dependence upon his ward is becoming apparent, for despite his

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, ll. 259-260.
(2) Act II, sc. ii, l. 294.
(3) Act II, sc. v.

arbitrary statements about her marriage, and reminders of his authority ("Je suis maître, je parle: allez, obéissez") (1), his horror and jealousy of Horace imply the onset of the change in attitude seen later. The absurdity of the "Maximes du mariage ou les devoirs de la femme mariée" shows clearly the narrowness of Arnolphe's values and his concern for appearances; two traits consistent with the bourgeois mentality as depicted in the "père de famille". (2)

In the same way that Sganarelle in L'Ecole des maris evinces a confidence and smugness (wholly unjustified in reality) about his methods of organizing his life and love, so, too, Arnolphe is deluded into believing himself secure from further attempts by Horace through his own resourcefulness and experience:

"Enfin j'ai vu le monde et j'en sais les finesses."(3)

When this self-satisfaction is shown to be unfounded, Arnolphe has to submit to a galling explanation from Chrysalde of his own perverted values. His reaction to this very correct assessment of himself is reminiscent of Orgon's angry and unreasonable rejection of Cléante's observations on religion:

"Après ce beau discours, toute la confrérie
Doit un remercîment à Votre Seigneurie". (4)

Hitherto Arnolphe's attitude towards Agnès has been

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(1) Act II, sc. v. l. 642.
(2) See preceding chapter.
(3) Act IV, sc. v, l. 1140.
(4) Act IV, sc. viii, ll. 127_-1277.

largely dominated by his obsession with avoiding cuckoldry, so that the girl herself has been little more than an accessory in his effort to show himself superior to less fortunate married acquaintances. Only when her preference for the younger suitor is explicitly stated does Arnolphe abruptly display some signs of tenderness. Yet it is the same sort of sentiment as that so ridiculously expressed by Sganarelle in L'École des maris. The foolish endearments ("pauvre petit bec") (1), the change from "vous" to "tu", the droll, cajoling tone so incongruous with the man's habitual austerity, - all is there. Arnolphe's declaration (2) of passion, punctuated by deep sighs and emphasized with grimaces, is a parody of the Smitten Swain's Lament, and Agnès' cool little dismissal -

"Tenez, tous vos discours ne me touchent point l'âme:
Horace avec deux mots en ferait plus que vous."(3)

- sets this grotesque piece of oratory in its proper perspective. Arnolphe sounds like an actor cast in the wrong rôle, - an impression enhanced by the suddenness with which he reverts to the bullying previously used to deal with Agnès. Shortly thereafter comes the series of extraordinary coincidences which resolve the action in favour of the young lovers, to the wordless discomfiture of Arnolphe.

From the above commentary on Arnolphe's character as seen

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(1) Act V, sc. iv, l. 1586.
(2) Ibid., ll.1586-1604.
(3) Ibid., ll. 1605-1606.

throughout the play, we may conclude that he is as little suited to the part of lover as is Sganarelle, and that he is more convincing as the authoritative guardian than as the humble, supplicating adorer.

A bourgeois lover of a different variety is the Sganarelle of Le Mariage forcé. In view of the aristocratic audience for whom this comedy-ballet was created, the subject (a ludicrous, middle-class, middle-aged bachelor in a dilemma over matrimony) could not fail to please. None of the elegant spectators at court could be offended by the absurdity of the main protagonist's antics as he endeavours first to talk himself into marriage, then to extricate himself from the commitment. The plot depends on the comedy of reversal for its effect; the characterization, on that of incongruity. Again, Sganarelle displays the characteristics traditionally attributed to the bourgeois, and these run counter to the notion of a man in love. His opening words, for example, tell us something of his prudence in financial matters. He instructs his servant to direct those bringing him money to Géronimo's house, and to inform those requiring the same commodity from him, that he is out for the day. There is in Sganarelle the strange combination of business acumen and sentimental naïvety already discerned in many of Molière's middle-class characters. The latter trait is very much in evidence in the discussion of matrimonial projects between Géronimo and Sganarelle. The capacity

for self-deception concomitant with naïvety blinds Sganarelle to the fact of his fifty-two years, and even Géronimo's irrefutable logic of mathematics, and assertion that middle-age is not the season for undertaking marriage, "la plus pesante des chaînes" (1), fail to convince the stubborn man to the contrary. In asking his friend's advice, Sganarelle obviously requires approbation of a "fait accompli" rather than the counsel to guide his course of action, since the wedding is to take place that very evening, and, as he says, "j'ai donné parole." (2) The dogmatism of his statement that he is resolved on marriage despite all Géronimo has said against it,.-

> "Et moi je vous dis que je suis résolu de me marier, et que je ne serai point ridicule en épousant la fille que je recherche" (3)

- is that of a person capable of entertaining only one thought at a time, and argues strongly against the intelligence of Sganarelle.

The eloquent arguments adduced by the prospective bridegroom in favour of the married state are even more enlightening as to his values and judgements. He evokes the delights of having a comely woman to pamper and pet him, then speaks of the necessity to continue the family name by peopling his house with little Sganarelles. These remarks are prefaced by a tirade of harmless vanity about

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(1) Sc. i, op. cit. I, pg. 717.
(2) Ibid., pg. 718.
(3) Ibid., pg. 717.

the excellent condition in which, notwithstanding his fifty-two years, he finds himself. The key word in his description of conjugal bliss is "posséder". The wife he intends to take represents an acquisition, and gratifies his instinct for possession, so powerful in one of his class. Moreover, she is expected to make him, Sganarelle, the centre of her universe ("qui me fera mille caresses, qui me dorlotera et me viendra frotter lorsque je serai las") (1) thereby increasing his comfort, both physical and emotional. The need for progeny natural in the male becomes, in Sganarelle, the expression of another facet of his vanity. The children he means to engender are justified in terms of himself ("je pourrai me voir revivre en d'autres moi-mêmes") (2); and he emphasizes their relationship to himself, speaking of creatures "sorties de moi" and resembling him "comme deux gouttes d'eau". All this combines to give a very different picture of love-and-marriage from that conjured up by young lovers. In Sganarelle's view, marriage is a contract whereby he does all the taking, and his spouse does all the giving. In this he conforms to the pattern established by the Sganarelle of L'Ecole des maris and Arnolphe, for whom love is subordinated to considerations of a selfish nature. All Sganarelle's declarations are coloured by vanity, moreover. Géronimo's incredulity and mirth on learning the identity of his friend's future wife are interpreted by Sganarelle as expressions of ad-

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(1) Sc. i, op. cit. I, pg. 718.

(2) Ibid., pg. 718.

miration and happiness occasioned by the suitability of the match with Dorimène:

> "Ce mariage doit être heureux, car il donne de la joie à tout le monde, et je fais rire tous ceux à qui j'en parle". (1)

Few utterances could be more pathetically self-deluded than that just quoted. Quite apart from the vast age-gap between the couple, Sganarelle is firmly rooted in the traditions of the bourgeoisie to which he belongs, whereas Dorimène is of a family which has pretentions to nobility, although not strictly aristocratic in origin. (The girl's brother "se mêle de porter l'épée", according to Géronte, and in Molière's day the exercise of arms was the preserve of the nobles.) Besides, the young woman's tastes are certainly not those of a conservative, industrious bourgeois wife. She loftily informs Sganarelle that, as his wife, she expects "le jeu, les visites, les assemblées, les cadeaux et les promenades" (2). This is not what Sganarelle has in mind to occupy his wife's time, and it contrasts strongly with the image of married life cherished by him, if we are to judge by his conversation with Géronte.

In his interview with Dorimène, Sganarelle's peculiar brand of gallantry is misplaced, and therefore highly diverting. The possessiveness earlier remarked upon becomes more manifest as the future husband indelicately

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(1) Sc. i, op. cit. I, pg.719.
(2) Sc.ii, pg. 720.

evokes Dorimène's subjection to his physical needs:

"Vous ne serez plus en droit de me rien refuser... vous allez être à moi depuis la tête jusqu'aux pieds, et je serai maître de tout..." (1)

From this it would seem that what Sganarelle feels for Dorimène is lust rather than love, and the prospect of her frivolity and extravagance is enough to deter the eager bridegroom from the nuptials so ardently desired moments before. His native caution asserts itself (too late) at the mention of all the finery she intends to purchase, and he positively takes fright when Géronte suggests that a diamond ring might be an acceptable gift for the bride. After all the impatience to wed Dorimène, Sganarelle says,

"Mon Dieu! cela n'est pas pressé." (2)

The attachment of Sganarelle is therefore superficial. Just as Arnolphe's feelings for Agnès are as deep as his desire for a dutiful wife to see to his comfort, so, too, Sganarelle's "love" for Dorimène is in fact reducible to a need for someone to cosset him in his old age and flatter his vanity.

The rest of the play is devoted to Sganarelle's attempts to find a way out of becoming Dorimène's husband, from consultation of philosophers to the sophistry of dreams and an unsatisfactory interview with fortune-tellers. It is only the cogent persuasion of a duel with Alcidas

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(1) Sc. ii, pg. 720.

(2) Sc. iii, ibid., pg. 721.

as an alternative to marrying his sister which induces this cowardly bourgeois to reconsider his refusal to go through with the ceremony. Under the blows delivered by the young man, he cries,

"Hé bien! j'épouserai, j'épouserai". (1)

Those are the last words he utters in the play, for thereafter he tamely submits to the arrangements made by Alcantor for what he calls "cet heureux mariage".

Few, if any, other characters in Molière's works reach the same degree of absurdity as does Harpagon when depicted as a suitor. This is because the dominant trait of the Miser - his avarice - is the very antithesis of love, denying every human emotion and generous impulse. We have already seen how Harpagon's greed has an erosive effect on the natural bond existing between father and children. (2) How much more ludicrous, then, is the coupling of this greed with passionate love! The first reference to Harpagon's inclination for Mariane is significantly qualified by criticism of the girl's indigence. While paying tribute to her "maintien honnête" and "douceur", Harpagon quickly adds that he will only wed her "pourvu que j'y trouve quelque bien." (3) Such concern for the material aspects of Mariane's suitability as a wife immediately renders Harpagon's emotional need for her suspect, and the inappropriateness of the match

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(1) Sc. ix, ibid., pg. 735.

(2) See preceding chapter.

(3) Act I, sc. iv. op. cit. II, pg. 527.

is emphasized by Cléante's love for the same young girl. It should be noted that Harpagon speaks of his possible marriage with the same fine disregard for human emotions as that evinced by most of his class and station.

The discussion with Frosine adds to the picture of Harpagon "in love". The old man's vanity about his questionable personal merits is reminiscent of that of Sganarelle in Le Mariage forcé: he believes Frosine's outrageous compliments because he wants to, and because his capacity for self-delusion is considerable. He makes it clear that Mariane's dowry is more important to him than the girl's other attributes; and despite Frosine's ingenuity in reckoning up the amount saved by Mariane's abstemious habits, Harpagon, with all the obstinacy of his race, insists that

> "Je n'irai pas donner quittance de ce que je ne reçois pas;
> et il faut bien que je touche quelque chose." (1)

The whole question of marriage as envisaged by the Miser is nothing short of a business proposition. Let it be said to Harpagon's credit, however, that he shows more intelligence than Arnolphe and the two amorous Sganarelles hitherto discussed, in his scepticism of the success of a match between a girl of twenty and a man of sixty ("J'ai peur qu'un homme de mon âge ne soit pas de son goût...") (2). Even so, his anxiety on this score is easily dispersed by

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(1) Act II, sc. v, ibid., pg. 541.
(2) Ibid.

fluent reassurances from Frosine.

Harpagon's courtship of Mariane is brief and in the highest tradition of burlesque. Having resolved upon the marriage, the prospective bridegroom meets the bride and sees fit to compliment her in one of the most ponderous, rambling speeches ever uttered by a gentleman bent on gallantry. Harpagon becomes grammatically entangled in a lengthy metaphor of glasses and stars, the point of which is, presumably, to convey admiration of Mariane's youth and beauty. (1) His clumsy, unpractised endearments contrast with the girl's expressions of disgust: he calls her "adorable mignonne", while she exclaims to Frosine, "Quel animal!" The comic force of this confrontation between Beauty and Avarice is all the greater with the entry of Cléante and the ambiguous remarks exchanged by the young lovers before Harpagon, - and especially the little farce of the diamond removed from the father's finger by the son and presented to Mariane. The interplay of conflicting emotions has dramatic value without being tragic, since the issue involved is not a great one. It is right that a girl about to be married should receive a gift from her future husband, and one suspects that, without Cléante's intervention, the only present bestowed on Mariane by Harpagon would be that of words.

Later, when Harpagon becomes aware of Cléante's passion for Mariane, his reaction is not quite as conventional as one might suppose from a superficial reading. The

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(1) Act III, sc. v, ibid., pp. 553-554.

anger is understandable, but the motive underlying it is not jealousy. It never occurs to Harpagon that Mariane might return Cléante's affection; he is outraged only by the son's impertinence in aspiring to woo the same person as his father. Moreover, the old man is naïve enough to imagine that his authority is sufficient to put an end to Cléante's suit. The emotional factor is completely neglected by him. The rivalry of his son is seen as an insult to paternal dignity rather than as a threat to his relationship with Mariane.

Most revealing of all is Harpagon's reaction to the strategy whereby Cléante triumphs in winning Mariane's hand. Faced with the choice between the money-chest and his betrothed, Harpagon does not hesitate. His main concern is to establish whether his "chère cassette" is intact, and - assuming that it is - he gladly sacrifices the admirable young girl to repossession of his hoard. So much for Love. Just as the Sganarelle of Le Mariage forcé is easily deterred from pursuit of his beloved when it seems marriage does not promise him the joys anticipated, so, too, Harpagon renounces all claims to possession of his future spouse when failure to do so would deprive him of his carefully-accumulated money.

A further illustration of the superficiality of attachments proclaimed by mature bourgeois individuals in Molière's comedies is afforded by M. Jourdain. The difference between this pompous parvenu and those char-

acters already considered lies in the cause of his aberration in love. Whereas for the latter, love is subordinated to their ruling obsession (as is the case of Arnolphe, and Harpagon) or simply regarded as a means to ensuring physical comfort (which is true for the two Sganarelles), Jourdain is more in love with the idea of being in love than with the actual object of his affection. Not only is his a case of love for love's sake; he wishes to engage in an "affaire galante" such as that frequently indulged in by the aristocracy. In other words, a love-affair conducted according to a specific code represents for M. Jourdain yet another proof of newly-acquired nobility, like his music, dancing, fencing and philosophy lessons, and his elaborate clothes. The presence of so robust and obtrusive a person as Mme. Jourdain serves to heighten the comic effect of the ex-draper's infatuation with Dorimène. Dorimène's other admirer, the Marquis Dorante, has a similar function, since he is a more appropriate suitor than M. Jourdain, both by virtue of his rank and his celibacy.

From Jourdain's remarks in the second act of <u>Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme</u>, it is apparent that his obsession with acquiring aristocratic manners is justified by his intense admiration for Dorimène: the ballet he has commissioned is to divert her when she comes to dine with him; the dancing-master is entreated to create a "révérence" suitable for hailing a marquise. Such is Jourdain's

naïvety that he believes there is a special way of greeting such a lady if her name is Dorimène (1). The solemnity with which he follows the ceremonious contortions of the dancing master indicates the degree of importance he attaches to pleasing her. And yet the question arises: are all Jourdain's efforts at self-improvement really inspired by a desire to be worthy of the beautiful marquise? If such were the case, Jourdain himself would be a supremely unselfish person, spending unlimited amounts of money, time and trouble in giving pleasure to another. Yet the impression created initially by Jourdain's references to Dorimène, - that he is more in love with her rank than with her person, and that his expenditure on her behalf is intended to improve his own image socially rather than to make her happy, - is confirmed by the worthy man's behaviour in the last scene of the play. As the nubile protagonists are inevitably paired off and Dorante announces his imminent marriage to Dorimène, the flimsy pretext invoked for the match (that it is to lull the suspicions of Mme. Jourdain) is at once accepted by Jourdain himself without question. This is partly because of his natural gullibility, but at the same time it should be borne in mind that Jourdain is so enchanted with his new rank of "mamamouchi" that little else matters to him. Fascination for Dorimène has given way to self-satisfaction with the latest achievement of the social climber, and accordingly Jourdain is hardly sensible of her loss, especially as Dorante's

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(1) Act II, sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 721.

glibness has retrieved his honour.

Just as Harpagon's reconciliation with his "chère cassette" is to him adequate compensation for the surrender of Mariane to Cléante, so the "bourgeois gentilhomme" can see Dorimène wed Dorante without any jealousy or regret, since his principal need (for social prestige) has been fulfilled. His attitude to love is recognisable, therefore, as being similar to that of the characters hitherto discussed in the present chapter: it is all very well as long as the ruling obsession of the person in question is gratified, but when put to the test, "love" will always take second place. It remains now to examine the way in which Jourdain approaches courtship of the lady to whom he is attracted.

The confrontation between Jourdain and Dorimène (1) is in some respects very like that between Harpagon and Mariane. Firstly, there is the incongruity of the two individuals involved. In the case of the Miser, the incongruity arises from the difference in age and temperament between the old man and the young girl. In the case of Jourdain, it stems from the difference in social rank, and is further complicated by the different levels of awareness of the two protagonists. Jourdain is even less eligible than Harpagon, since he is married. The situation, which is already ludicrous by its very nature, is rendered more absurd by Jourdain's approach to the

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(1) In Act III, sc. xvi.

object of his adoration: he endeavours to reproduce the "révérence" taught him by the dancing-master, finds the space inadequate, and unceremoniously asks Dorimène to step back, without explaining the reason for this request. With farcical action goes farcical dialogue: Jourdain's elaborately prepared speech of welcome is not unlike Harpagon's laboured compliment to Mariane. The incoherent civilities, expressed in highly involved syntax, appropriately trail away as the speaker's memory and his control of the sentence simultaneously desert him. Throughout the scene in question, there is a noticeable contrast between the utterances of Jourdain and those of Dorante and Dorimène. The homeliness of the former shows through despite Jourdain's effort to approximate to the elegant speech of the upper classes. While it is true that Dorante's commentaries, "sotto voce", to Dorimène on their host's manners are malicious and in poor taste, his mode of expression has the simplicity and grace of high breeding. Integrity and elegance do not necessarily pre-suppose one another, and Dorante is the proof thereof. This first meeting between Jourdain and Dorimène invites some interesting observations as a study in the interplay of social values. In the matter of the diamond ring given by Jourdain to the marquise per Dorante, for example, the bourgeois' natural desire for acknowledgement of the goods received is hastily dismissed as "ungallant" by the smooth-tongued Dorante. While the real reason for the necessity of Jourdain's

silence about the present is to maintain the marquise's illusion that the donor is Dorante, it is nonetheless a fact that middle-class attitudes to giving differ from those of the upper classes, whose greater wealth in general enables them to be more nonchalant about the bestowing of gifts. (The same is true of loans, and Jourdain's exactitude in this regard has already been remarked in the previous chapter of the present work).

At the sumptuous meal offered by Jourdain to his aristocratic guests, one senses again the conflict in values embodied by the "bourgeois gentilhomme". On the one hand, his middle-class sagacity and thrift must surely have shrunk from so extravagant a repast as that described at length by Dorante (1); on the other his obsession with aping the nobility makes him dismiss the splendid assortment of dishes as a paltry affair:

> "Vous vous moquez, Madame, et je voudrais qu'il fût plus digne de vous être offert." (2)

Similarly, his desire to refer to the diamond glittering upon Dorimène's finger prompts a compliment about her hands, but as soon as the lady herself alludes to the ring he quickly denies any wish on his part to speak of it, and even affirms that "le diamant est fort peu de chose." Given the reaction of Dorimène to the jewel, the sincerity of that remark is certainly suspect. Whenever Jourdain is about to launch into a gallant

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(1) Act IV, sc. i, ibid., pg. 761.

(2) Ibid., pp. 760-761.

tirade, he is neatly prevented from doing so by Dorante's reminders of present activities ("Songeons à manger"; (1) "Allons, qu'on donne du vin à Monsieur Jourdain"; (2) "Monsieur Jourdain, prêtons silence à ces messieurs..."(3)). Again, we realise why Dorante is anxious to silence any remarks from his host which might betray the identity of the giver of the ring; but at the same time these constant interruptions have the effect of suggesting how unseasonable Jourdain's gallantry is, and how little he understands one of the basic tenets of etiquette, that there is a time and a place for everything. On the few occasions when he is allowed to voice the amiable sentiments aroused in him by Dorimène, the bluntness of his compliments renders them more comical than affecting. The boldest of his remarks -

"Si je pouvais ravir votre coeur, je serais..." (4)

- is mercifully interrupted by the irruption of Mme. Jourdain upon the scene, and after Dorimène's dignified exit on Dorante's arm, the courtship of the marquise by the ex-draper is at an end. It in fact serves mainly as an illustration of Jourdain's ambition to scale the social ladder, and this, combined with the ineptitude of the "bourgeois gentilhomme", makes it difficult to take his infatuation seriously.

Two other persons of non-noble stock enamoured of an

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(1) Act III, sc. xvi, ibid., pg. 760.
(2) Act IV, sc. i, ibid., pg. 761.
(3) Ibid., pg. 762.
(4) Ibid., pg. 763.

aristocratic lady are Monsieur Tibaudier and Monsieur Harpin, in La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas. (1) The rank of these suitors may be deduced from their occupation. Tibaudier, whose name itself is not a noble one, is described as "conseiller" in the dramatis personae of the play, and as the action takes place at Angoulême, this means he is one of the "officiers de justice" at the High Court of Angoulême. As such, he does not even boast the assumed nobility of a "robin", for the station of one in his position is middling in importance. As for his rival, the name "Harpin" bears a suspicious resemblance to that of Harpagon, the miser, and the gentleman in question is, appropriately enough, a provincial tax-inspector. Neither suitor, then, is equal to the lady in rank. The reproach addressed to the Countess by Julie, concerning the humble rank of her admirers, is therefore understandable:

> "...mais un conseiller, et un receveur, sont des amants un peu bien minces, pour une grande comtesse comme vous." (2)

From the lady's answer, it would seem the attentions of these middle-class provincials are tolerated only because they gratify her vanity by increasing the number of her "soupirants". The suitors, on the other hand, no doubt court the lady for the prestige of her rank rather than for her youth or her beauty. (These latter attributes she does not apparently possess in any high degree, if

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(1) First performed at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, February,1672.
(2) Scene ii, op. cit. II, pg. 962

we are to judge by Julie's ironical references to them.)

Considering the limitations of his rank and education, M. Tibaudier makes a passable imitation of courtship "à la noble". He sends the Countess a gift, complete with billet-doux, to herald his visit to her, and bursts into poetry (of his own composition) to do her honour before her guests when he is with her. However, the gift is a humble one (a basket of pears) compared with the costly trinkets usually bestowed upon ladies by their adorers in fashionable society, and the literary merit of the accompanying note leaves much to be desired. The laboured quality of the metaphor of fruit and the Countess' reception of his overtures, detracts from any admiration inspired by the ingenuity of the conceit; and with the words "progrès à l'infini" (1), we guess at the little vanity of the author, who cannot resist the temptation to show off his erudition. (The expression is current in philosophy). In short, although the letter to the Countess is not badly written, it smacks of laborious affectation rather than the graceful (if somewhat stereotyped) expressions of devotion characterizing billets-doux penned by more socially elevated persons than M. Tibaudier. As for the poetry recited by the Countess's admirer in her presence, it is competent rather than inspired, and the lady's judgement of it may be accepted as a valid assessment:

"...pour des vers faits dans la province, ces vers-là

(1) Sc. v., ibid., pg. 966.

sont fort beaux." (1)

Certainly they are not manifestly inferior to, for example, those of Oronte's sonnet in Le Misanthrope, which have the advantage of an aristocratic author, and Parisian to boot. Yet on close analysis, they exhibit (in addition to the nullity which detracts from Oronte's lines and is one of the features of this genre of poetry) a clumsiness of construction and inappropriate figures of speech, like the "peau de tigresse" covering the Countess' charms. If the poetic efforts of M. Tibaudier are to be considered as "fort beaux", it is only because allowances have been made for the circumstances under which they were composed. It must be admitted that M. Tibaudier, in the final analysis, appears slightly ridiculous in his courtship of the Countess, although he is not as ludicrous a figure as, for example, M. Jourdain in love with Dorimène.

M. Harpin's attachment to the Countess takes a different form: that of jealousy. His boorish interruption of the entertainment given by the Vicomte, and his indelicate accusations of the Countess in front of her guests, bespeak a lack of breeding equalled only by the tax-collector's ill-nature. His speech is unpolished and vigorous, contrasting with the mannered pedantry of his rival, M. Tibaudier. He is made slightly absurd, not only by his aggressive and unjustified remarks, but also by his mode of expression: for example, his predilection for exclamations involving the word "bleu" (parbleu",

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(1) Ibid.

"morbleu", "têtebleu", "ventrebleu"), and his tendency to repetition -

> "Si fait morbleu! je le sais bien; je le sais bien, morbleu!" (1)

These traits suggest both lack of refinement and lack of intelligence. The intrusion of this loud-voiced, angry suitor upon the Countess' entertainment is in fact an illustration of one of the facets of the bourgeois mentality: possessiveness. Harpin's wrath is inspired less by the violence of his feelings for the Countess, than by his need to monopolize her time and affection. The lady herself is right in her reproach to the importunate tax-collector, that "on ne vient point crier de dessus un théâtre ce qui se doit dire en particulier". (2) (An expression of the seventeenth-century conviction that there is a time and a place for everything, and that discretion is one of the prime virtues of the "honnête homme".) Unabashed, Harpin proclaims his grievances all the louder, refuses to be placated by the Countess' invitation to join the audience, and, just before making his final exit, pays Tibaudier a deadly insult by addressing him as "tu". The overall impression created by the appearance of "Monsieur le Receveur" in the Countess' circle is distinctly unfavourable; he may be dismissed as nothing more than a mean-spirited, ill-bred individual risible in the rôle of love-lorn suitor. While it is true that Tibaudier's meek response to the

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(1) Sc. viii, ibid., pg. 969.

(2) Ibid., pg. 970.

Countess' condescending

"Oui, Monsieur Tibaudier, je vous épouse pour faire enrager tout le monde" (1)

(he replies that she does him great honour) inspires little respect for his pride and his intelligence, he emerges as the more sympathetic character, and his conquest of the Countess (for want of a better) is not altogether undeserved. The fact remains that Molière's depiction of courtship as practised by provincial bourgeois does little credit to representatives of that section of society, if we are to judge by La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas.

In Molière's last play, Le Malade imaginaire, the attitude of Argan to Béline is strikingly similar to that of Sganarelle in Le Mariage forcé. Like the adorer of Dorimène, Argan sees in his second wife a willing ear for his complaints, a comfortable shoulder upon which to repose his weary head, and a source of endless sympathy for his petty ills. Her rôle in his household is that of confidante and nurse-maid rather than spouse. This is particularly apparent in the scene following Argan's argument with Toinette and Angélique in the matter of a husband for the latter. Ruffled and plaintive, like a child who is not allowed to have his own way, Argan takes refuge in the honeyed words of sympathy, reassurance and approbation readily dispensed by Béline in answer to his querulous remarks like

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(1) Sc. ix, ibid., pg. 972.

"Mamour, cette coquine-là me fera mourir" (1)
His endearments, like those of the other amorous bourgeois in middle age hitherto considered, are more or less inelegant and sentimental ("mamie", "mamour", "mon coeur".) Moreover, his affection towards Béline is outweighed here by wrath at Toinette's candour, which has wounded his vanity. This means that the dominant feature of Argan's first exchange with his wife in the play is that of self-pitying vexation, to which succeeds a certain maudlin gratitude:

"Mamie, vous êtes toute ma consolation". (2)
In other words, "love", as experienced and expressed by Argan, may be summed up as a facet of the man's egotism. This is confirmed by the "malade's" conversation with the notary in the following scene, when the prospect of his own death moves Argan to tears and he and Béline endeavour to out-do each other in protestations of violent affection. Argan's reference on this occasion to the desirability of progeny by Béline reminds us of similar remarks made by Sganarelle in <u>Le Mariage forcé</u> (3), and, as before, such a wish for self-perpetuation, as it were, implies a degree of egotism.

In fact, the leit-motif of Argan's comments about Béline throughout the play, - up to the point at which he is finally disillusioned about the purity of her intentions - may be said to be complacency in the conviction that she

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(1) Act I, sc. vi, op. cit., pg. 1110
(2) Ibid., pg. 112.
(3) Sc. i of <u>Le Mariage forcé</u>.

loves him. The dramatic irony of an assertion like -

"Voilà une femme qui m'aime... cela n'est pas croyable."(1)

- made by the man whom Béline is determined to exploit financially, constitutes no small part of the grim humour of Le Malade imaginaire. When Béralde questions Béline's sincerity, Argan predictably leaps to her defence with the same sort of pronouncements as those uttered by Orgon defending Tartuffe ("... c'est elle qui fait tout le mal, et tout le monde lui en veut.") There is little worthy of comment in his reaction to Béralde's question, since it is natural enough; but his motives in refusing to tolerate suspicions about Béline's goodness invite exploration. In view of his earlier interviews with his second wife, and of the observations made about her by him in the course of the action, it is more likely to be injured pride than genuine love which prompts Argan to take up the cudgels on her behalf. To admit that Béline is not sincere is to admit that her apparently intense concern for his welfare is merely a façade. As it is, Argan does not believe that Toinette and Angélique care about him, and to acknowledge the spuriousness of Béline's love and solicitude would be a blow to his ego. Hence it is a further proof, albeit an indirect one, of Argan's self-importance and conceit that he argues with Béralde in favour of Béline. An additional attribute suggested by his attitude in this matter is one which Argan has in common with many of his class: obstinacy. No amount of reasoning can prevail to make him change his

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(1) Act II, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 1143.

mind once he has decided upon a course of action, or committed himself to a judgement of an individual. Having convinced himself of Béline's integrity, nothing short of the evidence of his own eyes and ears will induce Argan to change his mind. Characteristically, when Béline's villainy has been revealed to him, the enlightened husband's comments are less concerned with the wider implications of her conduct, than with the "beau panégyrique" she has just pronounced over his "corpse". Again, we see Argan relating everything to himself, and the final comment upon his erstwhile love for Béline is to be deduced from the facility with which he recovers from his disappointment. Angélique's very real concern for him compensates for Béline's calculating indifference, and his vanity is gratified by the ceremony which confers the title of "doctor" upon him.

From the above studies of various middle-class, middle-aged men depicted in the toils of love by Molière, several interesting deductions can be made. First, by reason of the incongruity of their emotional state of mind and traditional stolidity of outlook, they are invariably ridiculous and comical, to a greater or lesser degree. Secondly, the attitudes normally associated with a man-in-love bring out more sharply the aspects of the bourgeois character already noted in the preceding chapter. (For example, the middle-class penchant for thrift is thrown into relief by that generosity normally expected of one trying to please the object of his affections.) Finally, it is significant that in almost every case, the fact of being in love somehow accentuates instead of correcting

the capacity for selfishness inherent in every human being, but even more manifest in the middle-aged bourgeois. From this it can be justifiably argued that the dramatist does not, apparently, present his public with a very flattering image of the middle-class mentality. His depiction of the bourgeois in love confirms the impressions gained from his depiction of the bourgeois paterfamilias, - namely, that there is much left to be desired, on both moral and aesthetic grounds, where middle-class values and behaviour are concerned. As an artist, however, Molière would be inferior if he only showed the negative side of any given subject, and there remains the fact that many of his major comedies feature characterizations of well-balanced, intelligent bourgeois who are anything but ridiculous or mean-spirited. To complete the picture, we shall now give some consideration to this latter class of protagonist.

Chapter Three.

The Thinking Bourgeois.

A large measure of Molière's reputation as a middle-class advocate of common sense and the Golden Mean stems, no doubt, from his not infrequent inclusion of an articulate and clear-sighted individual, - usually bourgeois, - in his comedies. Yet it is surely a mistake to regard the characters in this category as mouthpieces of the dramatist, since they serve mainly to throw the folly of fellow-protagonists into relief. They represent the other side of the coin, so to speak, and as such their utterances should be interpreted in the context of dramatic situation rather than in terms of the playwright's personal philosophy of life. Inevitably, the "sane" friend or relative of the eccentric whose aberrations are threatening the happiness of the family emerges as a colourless, or at best, neutral figure. He serves as a foil for the extraordinary and memorable behaviour of the character next to whom he is seen, and at the same time he provides some sort of standard by which the more exceptional being may be judged. Thus Orgon's excesses take on more meaning when criticized by Cléante, just as the affectations and absurdity of the "femmes savantes" are brought into clearer focus by Ariste's and Chrysale's reactions; while Argan's morbid preoccupation with his health is shown for what it is by the lucid remarks of his brother, Béralde.

It is interesting to note that, of the six plays in which this type of character is featured, four are regarded as major works (*L'Ecole des femmes*, *Tartuffe*, *Les Femmes savantes*, and *Le Malade imaginaire*.) In other words, the presence of a commentator whose views are conceivably closer to those of the average member of the audience than the views of the main protagonist could ever be, suggests a certain profundity latent in the comic situations created by the dramatist for our amusement. Even in less generally acclaimed works like *L'Ecole des maris* and *Le Mariage forcé*, the impression gained from the dialogue is one which invites thought concerning the issues raised, and this is because we are presented with conflicting views on a given topic, - those of the unreasonable or deluded individual, and those of the more critically-minded, objective person.

In *L'Ecole des maris*, the latter is represented by Ariste, elder brother of Sganarelle. It is chiefly the confrontations between the brothers which enlighten us as to the nature of Ariste. His civility, maintained despite the churlishness of Sganarelle, immediately sets him down as a person of self-discipline and good-humour, both of which are positive qualities. Moreover, there is nothing thick-skinned or foolish in his refusal to become ruffled by his younger brother's rudeness; his replies to Sganarelle's insults indicate a gently ironical wit. When, for example, he is called a "fou" by his atrabilious

relative, he says,

"Grand merci; le compliment est doux". (1)

His seniority to Sganarelle entitles him to some respect, and the harsh, ungracious criticism he receives from the younger man deserves a sharp reaction. Ariste's natural restraint tempers his retort, modifying it to a mild reproach. Similarly, when answering Sganarelle's lengthy outburst on fashion and its excesses, Ariste contents himself with a sensible generalization instead of attacking his brother personally:

"Mais je tiens qu'il est mal, sur quoi que l'on se fonde,
De fuir obstinément ce que suit tout le monde,
Et qu'il vaut mieux souffrir d'être au nombre des fous,
Que du sage parti se voir seul contre tous." (2)

The discretion of his language, the moderation of his views, are thrown into relief by the brusqueness of his unreasonable interlocutor, and there is little doubt which of the two attracts our sympathy in the initial conversation between Ariste and Sganarelle. They each represent an attitude to life, and while Molière refrains from stating whose philosophy is closer to the truth, it is only natural for the spectator to feel a greater affinity for the common sense of Ariste than for the ranting of Sganarelle, whose wrong-headedness is aggravated by ill nature.

When the brothers are joined by Léonor and Isabelle, other facets of their personalities emerge. Ariste, especially,

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit. I pg. 418, l. 10.

(2) Ibid., pg. 419, ll. 51-54.

is shown to advantage in his compassion for Isabelle, and in his consideration for his own ward. His recognition of the needs of youth confirms our earlier impression of his intelligence and realism, and, again, it contrasts strongly with Sganarelle's foolish belief that natural human impulses can be repressed. Such is Sganarelle's dogmatism that none of the other protagonists (Ariste included) is allowed to finish the remark he or she has begun; yet Ariste controls his irritation, preferring to remain silent until challenged to speech by Sganarelle. When at last he is permitted to say something, he displays the same sort of practical wisdom already suggested by previous observations. He points out, for instance, that female virtue is worthless if it owes its existence to external restraints, adding,

> "C'est l'honneur qui les doit tenir dans le devoir,
> Non la sévérité que nous les faisons voir." (1)

As a judgement on human nature, that remark is worthy of a great moralist in its depth and lucidity. Not even Sganarelle's peremptory interruption ("Chansons que tout cela") deters Ariste from the theory of up-bringing which he is beginning to expound in his gentle fashion. He acknowledges Sganarelle's curt words with an amiable "soit", whereupon he states his belief in discipline moderated by kindliness and understanding where the impressionable young are concerned. Like Montaigne, he subscribes to the enlightened view that the best way of acquiring knowledge is through contact with society rather than

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 424, ll. 169-170.

through perusal of books, and the degree of personal liberty allowed by Ariste to Léonor proves the sincerity of his declaration. Moreover, he makes it clear that he has no intention of enforcing his right to marry his ward should she not have any enthusiasm for the match. It is paradoxical that the man whom Sganarelle accuses of vanity and unsuitable behaviour for one of his years (Ariste is in his late fifties), should be sufficiently modest and clear-sighted to admit the possible disinclination which his age could cause a young wife to feel for him:

"Je sais bien que nos ans ne se rapportent guère,
Et je laisse à son choix liberté entière." (1)

As if this were not adequate indication of Ariste's humility, his next remark reveals a lack of self-esteem which is admirable. Speaking of the possibility that Léonor might consent of her own free will to marry him, the reasons for her decision as suggested by him are:

"..... quatre mille écus de rente bien venants,
Une grande tendresse et des soins complaisants..."(2)

In other words, he feels that financial security will tempt her more than any exertions on his part to make himself personally agreeable. Without implying that Léonor is mercenary, Ariste believes that money will persuade more eloquently than his charm; and this attitude is convincing proof of true diffidence and self-knowledge.

Ariste's conception of conjugal life is one which permits

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 425, ll. 199-200
(2) Ibid., ll. 201-202.

much freedom to the wife, as his replies to Sganarelle's increasingly outraged interrogation prove; and if there is something comical and even extravagant in the vision of an elderly spouse cheerfully tolerating whatever social activities take his young wife's fancy, it must be admitted that this picture is a more attractive one than that suggested by Sganarelle's attitude. This impression is heightened by Léonor's contribution to the conversation, when she states emphatically that should she marry Ariste, her loyalty to him would be absolute ("il s'y peut assurer") (1), whereas her reaction to Sganarelle's speeches is neatly summed up by the words: "... sachez que mon âme ne répondrait de rien, si j'étais votre femme" (1).

Finally, Ariste's leave-taking of the company is marked by civility ; his advice to his younger brother is gently administered, and concisely expressed. He concludes with the polite formula, "Je suis votre valet", and makes his exit. His last words contrast sharply with Sganarelle's tirade, prefaced by "Je ne suis pas le vôtre" (2), - a remark designed no doubt to remind us of the ungraciousness inherent in the speaker's character. Expressions like "vieillard insensé" (3) and "coquette suprême" (4), applied to Ariste and Léonor respectively, are not only unjustified (since we have already seen the people in

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 427, ll. 243-244.
(2) Ibid., pg. 428, ll. 251-252.
(3) Ibid., l. 253.
(4) Ibid., l. 255.

question and can judge them for ourselves), but also cruel. They have the effect of reducing still further our sympathy for Sganarelle, and consequently making us better-disposed towards those of the persuasion opposite to his.

Significantly, Ariste is absent from the stage throughout the main action of the play, - in other words, he has no part in the scenes of Isabelle's progressive emancipation from Sganarelle's domination, and of the gradual crumbling of Sganarelle's "fool-proof" theory of feminine upbringing. The implication is that Ariste does not need to interfere in his brother's private life for failure to crown the latter's efforts where success had been so confidently awaited. The way in which Molière handles the dénouement of L'Ecole des maris is such that the difference between the "Ariste" philosophy and the "Sganarelle" philosophy is emphasized still further. Quite apart from the comic force of the younger man's humiliation following so closely upon his taunting condescension when he thought that Ariste was the victim of female duplicity, there is the moral aspect of the situation to consider. Ariste's conduct throughout the latter scenes of the play is consistent with that of the first encounters with his brother and ward. Confronted with gloating declarations of Léonor's guilt, Ariste's reactions pass from incredulity to hurt dismay, but he refrains from vituperation until he is more certain of the facts. Even when half-convinced that his ward has been disloyal to him,

Ariste is exceedingly restrained in his reproaches on coming face to face with the girl. His tone is almost one of apology -

"Léonor, sans courroux, j'ai sujet de me plaindre:

Vous savez si jamais j'ai voulu vous contraindre..."(1)

and when Léonor responds with the suggestion that she and Ariste should plight their troth the next day, he is only too willing to believe in her sincerity, and immediately challenges Sganarelle to substantiate his accusation. Finally, when the identity of Valère's beloved has been established and Sganarelle discomfited, Ariste suppresses all the expressions of triumph which would be natural to one in his position, preferring to give his brother advice on how to cope with his circumstances, instead of proclaiming his own wisdom. A hint of affection may be discerned in his last remark, -

"Nous tâcherons demain d'apaiser sa colère". (2)

It would seem that Ariste's personal happiness has not resulted in indifference to the feelings of others; nor, apparently, is he tempted to take revenge on Sganarelle for the ill-natured gibes directed at himself when the situation appeared to be in his brother's favour.

So much for Ariste's part in the action of L'Ecole des maris. The impression of this character left with the reader or spectator is distinctly favourable, and there is little room for doubt that Molière intended to create,

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(1) Act III, sc. viii, ibid., pg. 469, ll. 1055-1056.
(2) Act III, sc. ix, ibid., pg. 471, l. 1112.

in Ariste, a "sympathetic" protagonist. Yet at the same time it should be borne in mind that Ariste is not the main character of the play, as the degree of his participation in the drama suggests. It is Sganarelle, with his unreasonableness, his spite, and his ridiculous tastes and attitudes, who emerges as the more compelling figure.

Predictably enough, the next play relevant to this section of our study - L'Ecole des femmes - has amongst its personae a character whose rôle is similar to that of Ariste inasmuch as his common sense throws into greater relief the folly of the main protagonist. This individual is Arnolphe's friend, Chrysalde. As in L'Ecole des maris, the play opens with a dialogue between the man of clear-sighted judgement and the man of extravagant ideas. Newly apprised of his friend's intentions regarding matrimony, Chrysalde cautiously expresses anxiety about the success of such an undertaking for one of Arnolphe's temperament and persuasion. At this stage of the action, there is nothing to suggest the accuracy of Chrysalde's remarks, since Arnolphe's unfortunate experiences in affairs of the heart have not yet occurred. All that we can rely upon for our own judgement of the two men before us is the way in which they are presented. The first impression gained of Chrysalde is that he is a discreet person:

> "Nous sommes ici seuls; et l'on peut, ce me semble,
> Sans craindre d'être ouïs, y discourir ensemble:"(1)

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit. I, pg. 545, ll.3-4.

In addition, he behaves like a sincere friend anxious to prevent that suffering which he regards as the inevitable consequence of Arnolphe's decision to marry, -

"Votre dessein pour vous me fait trembler de peur" (1)

The justification Chrysalde offers for his misgivings is based on the traditional Greek notion of "hubris", - the arrogance in man which invites divine retribution, - and as such he may be considered conventional in his outlook. There is in fact little originality in his common sense, which is why he makes less impact upon us than the vociferous Arnolphe. Chrysalde's very mode of expression is that of proverbial wisdom, as may be seen from an utterance chosen at random:

" ... mais qui rit d'autrui
Doit craindre qu'en revanche on ne rie aussi de lui."(2)

As for his own philosophy of life, Chrysalde, as might be expected, opts for the golden mean, neither overtly criticising and poking fun at cuckolded husbands, nor tolerating foolishly the prevailing laxity in conjugal relationships. In this he behaves exactly as does Ariste where fashion is concerned. Similarly, Arnolphe's speech displays the same extremeness and dogmatism as that of Ariste's brother Sganarelle. Like the latter, too, he is insensitive and impolite in the remarks he makes to his interlocutor. If Arnolphe does not go as far as Sganarelle in positively insulting his companion, it may be attributed to the fact that Chrysalde is not related to him, and the liberties

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit I, pg. 546, 1.6.
(2) Ibid., pg. 547, ll. 45-46.

that may be taken with a brother may not be taken with a friend. The warnings issued by Chrysalde to Arnolphe are given almost apologetically, and softened by such expressions as "cher compère" (1). The replies made by Arnolphe, on the other hand, are brusque and condescending. He does not allow his friend to finish what he is saying, constantly cutting him off in mid-sentence. Moreover, he dismisses Chrysalde's utterances with patronizing words like "Il est vrai," (2) and "fort bien" (3), proceeding thereafter to silence him with long and vigorous pieces of oratory punctuated by the lofty "notre ami" which Arnolphe considers consonant with his new identity as Monsieur de la Souche.

When the friends come to discuss the ideal qualities in a wife, we learn more of their respective value. Chrysalde's reference (characteristically interrupted by Arnolphe) to "l'esprit et la beauté" (4) implies a preference for attributes having intrinsic merit, whereas Arnolphe requires the less admirable features of docility, stupidity and obedience in a wife, - a reflection of his own egotism, since the girl or woman without sufficient wit or spirit to contradict and criticize him may be relied upon to do <u>his</u> bidding. Chrysalde rightly points out that "honnêteté" can hardly be expected of one whose intelligence is as

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit. I, l. 65.
(2) Ibid., pg. 546, l.9.
(3) Ibid., l. 21.
(4) Ibid., pg. 548, l. 106.

mean as that advocated by Arnolphe in a wife. This observation reflects Chrysalde's common sense even while it draws attention to the arbitrary and unrealistic judgement of his friend. From Arnolphe the comment calls forth heavy sarcasm (a weak weapon when reason cannot be used to combat one's adversary): he refers to Chrysalde's speech as "ce bel argument", "ce discours profond" (1), and finally reiterates his conviction that his ideas are the correct ones ("vous ne m'aurez rien persuadé du tout".) (2). In the face of such dogmatism, Chrysalde wisely refrains from further comment ("Je ne vous dis plus mot" -) (3), and adheres to this promise as Arnolphe's absurd notions of conjugal life are imposed on him. It is a prudent man who can realise when speech is unseasonable, however tempting it might be to contradict views with which he cannot agree.

Before he and Arnolphe part company, Chrysalde does venture some remarks upon the subject of his friend's new name. These are prefaced with a question dictated by that logic which characterizes Chrysalde's judgements and ideas:

> "Qui diable vous a fait aussi vous aviser,
> A quarante et deux ans, de vous débaptiser,
> Et d'un vieux tronc pourri de votre métairie
> Vous faire dans le monde un nom de seigneurie?" (4)

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit.I, pg.549, 1.117.
(2) Ibid., 1. 122.
(3) Ibid., 1. 123.
(4) Ibid., 11. 169-172.

The expression "diable" suggests some impatience, which is only to be expected if we consider the circumstances in which the question is asked. Prolonged exposure to dogmatic complacency of the sort Arnolphe inflicts on his acquaintances and servants inevitably ruffles the most placid nature. Chrysalde's emphasis on Arnolphe's age implies the folly of wanting to alter that which has been perfectly good enough for more than half an average human's life-span; and his bald statement of the origin of Arnolphe's pretentious new title further illustrates the gratuitousness of this latest piece of extravagance. Having received an unsatisfactory reply, Chrysalde proceeds to comment upon the practice of substituting fanciful, high-sounding names for those received at birth. His speech is a more elegant version of that uttered by Gorgibus in Les Précieuses ridicules (scene four) when he learns of the idiosyncratic names Magdelon and Cathos have chosen in preference to those bestowed on them by their parents. Chrysalde's reference to the peasant, Gros-Pierre, who made a ditch around his dwelling and called himself "Monsieur de l'Isle", is a subtle way of communicating his view of Arnolphe's project without giving direct offence; indeed, he takes the precaution of reassuring his interlocutor before mentioning Gros-Pierre ("sans vous embrasser dans la comparaison...") (1). This latter remark, paradoxically, has the effect of stressing still further the relevance of Gros-Pierre's ludicrous snobbish-

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(1) Ibid., l. 178.

ness to the case of Arnolphe; a relevance which Arnolphe himself is not slow to sense, as his dry

"Vous pourriez vous passer d'exemples de la sorte" (1)

shows. Whatever reservations he may entertain about the wisdom of his friend's change of name, Chrysalde capitulates gracefully in the matter of "Monsieur de la Souche", just as he submits to Arnolphe's arbitrary judgement about the choice of a wife. In this he displays not only common sense (it is no use trying to change the views of someone who does not wish to have them changed), but also a certain sensitivity to his fellow-beings' aspirations. This does not preclude the possibility of adhering to his own private convictions, however, as his aside on leaving Arnolphe shows:

"Ma foi, je le tiens fou de toutes les manières".(2)

We do not see Chrysalde again until a much later stage of the action. This is at a moment when Arholphe's formula for the Perfect Marriage is showing signs of inadequacy. Chrysalde's function at this stage is to throw into relief the change in Arnolphe, whose complacency has been substantially modified by Horace's confidences concerning his successful conquest of Agnès. At first Chrysalde assumes nothing has occurred to defer the supper promised him by his friend, but Arnolphe's truculence and harassed expression lead him to inquire, not without some amusement, about the state of the other's love-life. The reply inspires one of the longest speeches uttered by Chrysalde in the play, -

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(1) Ibid., l. 183.

(2) Ibid., l. 195.

a series of reflections upon the criteria of moral worth, and the desirability of avoiding extremes in behaviour and attitudes. On the first issue raised, Chrysalde's generalizations are based, as we would expect, on common sense. He has perceived that Arnolphe's obsession with cuckoldry has resulted in the distortion of his values, so that the usual criteria determining judgement of moral matters mean little or nothing to him. Chrysalde states the matter succinctly:

"Etre avare, brutal, fourbe, méchant et lâche,
N'est rien, à votre avis, auprès de cette tâche;
....
On est homme d'honneur quand on n'est point cocu."(1)

Chrysalde's eloquence is directed against the silliness of an attitude such as that of Arnolphe, but it should be noted in passing that the reproaches and criticisms are softened by the frequent use of the impersonal "on". Like Ariste in L'Ecole des maris, Chrysalde remains polite and considerate, even in drawing attention to the faults of his interlocutor.

As for the second question, - that of the golden mean as the optimum solution to the problem of how best to cope with a wife's infidelity, - Chrysalde again shows himself practical and clear-sighted, even if his remarks are lacking in originality. His words are strongly reminiscent of those of Ariste when the latter speaks of fashion:

"Il y faut, comme en tout, fuir les extrémités" (2)

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(1) Act IV, sc. viii, ll. 1232-1235.
(2) Ibid., l. 1251.

is the way Chrysalde sums up the ideal reaction to cuckoldry, and the rest of his speech is an amplification of this general precept. Like most commonplaces, his comments carry conviction, since they reflect the truth of experience and give the impression that they have been heard before. While they are not as interesting as the extravagant, illogical outbursts of Arnolphe, they are curiously restful in their appeal to reason. They provide, as it were, a respite from the unrealistic wilfulness and extreme attitudes of Chrysalde's friend, with whom it is not easy to identify.

The sarcasm from Arnolphe which greets Chrysalde's sensible counsels moves the other to point out the inevitability of Fate and the folly of believing that one can shape one's own destiny. It might be argued that to bow before the unavoidable, - which is what Chrysalde would seem to advocate, - is a negative, passive approach to life. Yet what in fact Chrysalde suggests is, that one should make the best of a situation that cannot be altered by human agency:

> "Je dis que l'on doit faire ainsi qu'au jeu de dés,
> Où, s'il ne vous vient pas ce que vous demandez,
> Il faut jouer d'adresse, et d'une âme réduite
> Corriger le hasard par la bonne conduite." (1)

A wise person, according to Chrysalde, will deal with anything unsatisfactory or disappointing in his circumstances by adopting a philosophical attitude and retrieving the

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(1) Act Iv, sc. viii, ll.1282 - 1285.

situation as far as he can through moderation and intelligent action. Again, there is little in such advice to justify the epithet "original"; but it is asking something of common sense which it is not in its nature to supply, to look for originality in the remarks it inspires. Accordingly, we respect Chrysalde rather than admire him. The last piece of comfort he endeavours to administer to his crestfallen acquaintance before taking leave of him belongs likewise to the realm of proverbial wisdom: that one should count one's blessings. When this fails to cheer Arnolphe, Chrysalde has the discretion not to pursue any further a conversation which affords so little pleasure to either of the participants, and withdraws without resentment.

Chrysalde's third appearance on the stage in L'Ecole des femmes occurs in the final scenes of the play, and it is appropriate that this lucid commentator of Arnolphe's arrogance and wrong-headedness should be present at the defeat of the complacent guardian of Agnès. His rôle at this stage of the action is not to provide a reasonable foil for Arnolphe's unreasonableness, nor to suggest a sane philosophy of life. As the long-lost brother of Enrique and uncle of Agnès, his function is to reveal the truth about the circumstances surrounding the girl's birth, thereby facilitating the match between Agnès and Horace. Other than this purely informative part in the action,

Chrysalde is not a conspicuous figure at the end of L'Ecole des femmes, since attention is focussed rather on the happy young lovers and the outraged Arnolphe. Nevertheless, his tolerance and practical wisdom still find expression in one or two remarks, - when he mildly observes, for example, that a marriage should not be contracted between two people against the wishes of one of the parties involved (1), or when he consoles Arnolphe with the reflection that the soundest expedient for avoiding the cuckoldry he so dreads is not to marry at all. (2)

Significantly, the last words of the play are uttered by Chrysalde, who reminds his emotional brother that the street is not a fit place for waxing sentimental, and that some financial transaction should be made between Enrique and Arnolphe to compensate for the expense of Agnès' up-bringing. His quiet, level-headed sagacity complements the exuberance of the other protagonists, and the closing remark of the play -

"Et rendre grâce au Ciel qui fait tout pour le mieux",(3)

is a prudent reminder of that philosophical fatalism which Arnolphe chose to ignore, to his cost. Those last words have about them an optimistic serenity which accords not only with the character of Chrysalde, but also expresses adequately the whole atmosphere of L'Ecole des femmes.

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(1) Act V, sc. vii, ll. 1684-1686.
(2) Act V, sc. ix, ll. 1762-1763.
(3) Ibid., l. 1779.

The next "thinking bourgeois" to invite comment is Géronimo, friend of Sganarelle in Le Mariage forcé. The brevity of the work does not allow for as detailed a characterization as that found in plays of the scope of L'Ecole des femmes; but even so, the two individuals presented in the first scene are unforgettable by reason of their vitality, and the way in which the sanity of the one defines the absurdity of the other. Like Chrysalde, Géronimo is made the confidant of his marriage-minded friend, and like Chrysalde, his physical presence on the stage is infrequent. He acts as a commentator of Sganarelle's folly, not so much by his general moralization as by his incredulity and mirth when acquainted with the ridiculous match between Sganarelle and Dorimène. He is less diffident than either Chrysalde or Ariste when voicing his opinion, and the somewhat dogmatic note of his advice may be explained by the degree of his familiarity with Sganarelle, whom he has known for thirty-two years. His very first remark catches his friend at a disadvantage (he overhears Sganarelle's instructions to servants concerning his whereabouts and availability), and this sets the tone for their subsequent conversation. Throughout the verbal exchange, it is Géronimo who has the better of Sganarelle, albeit in a subtle way. He shows himself a good-humoured, patient listener during the long preamble to the announcement of Sganarelle's matrimonial intentions; he is willing to give whatever advice his friend requires ("Vous n'avez qu'à me dire ce que c'est".) (1), and he assents to the

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(1) Sc. i, op.cit. I, pg. 716.

wordy generalizations of his interlocutor ("Vous avez raison", "Cela est vrai".) (1) Géronimo's self-mastery breaks down, however, when the word "marry" is introduced into the conversation, and his astonishment is undisguised as he questions the evidence of his ears. Diplomacy makes him inquire what age the prospective bridegroom has reached, and while deducing from chronology and mathematics a fact of which he is surely aware at the outset, Géronimo has time to prepare the speech that expresses fully his own view of the situation. Prudence induces him to remind Sganarelle that what he is about to say is prompted by the appeal for complete honesty which prefaced the request for advice in the first place. He suspects no doubt, that his opinion will not be welcome to Sganarelle, but he is sufficiently confident to state bluntly that marriage, an uncertain and risky enterprise even for the young, is sheer folly when undertaken "dans la saison où nous devons être plus sages". (2) His logic is of the simplest, and his counsel is based on nothing more than plain common sense. Being a man without pretentiousness, he expresses himself in the most direct fashion, pointing out the illogicality of taking on the responsibilities and obligations of wedlock after more than half a century of freedom. Thus far his dealings with Sganarelle are uncomplicated by the obstinacy of the latter, and the resentment, not unmixed with hilarity, that such obstinacy is soon to occasion.

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(1) Sc. i, op. cit. I, pg. 716.

(2) Ibid., pg. 717.

As soon as Sganarelle defiantly states his determination to take a wife, and implies that the fortunate damsel has already been chosen, Géronimo's attitude changes completely. His

> "Ah! c'est une autre chose: vous ne m'aviez pas dit cela" (1)

bespeaks both amusement and irritation. It is provoking to have expended one's oratory conscientiously for nothing, so the under-current of annoyance implicit in those words is quite understandable. At the same time, Géronimo is laughing at Sganarelle, for he realises that it is not advice the besotted man requires, but approbation of a course of action already decided and taken. Géronimo's subsequent questions relative to Sganarelle's feelings and his negotiation for the girl's hand are asked out of curiosity and incredulity: they have nothing to do with a desire to be of further assistance to one so set in his ideas. This is obvious from Géronimo's reiterated injunction to Sganarelle to marry as soon as possible. On the purely comic level, the reversal of Géronimo's advice is a highly satisfactory way of dealing with Sganarelle. On the moral and psychological level, it reveals the wisdom of the confidant who has the humility, and the intelligence, to acknowledge defeat gracefully in the realisation that nothing he can say or do to dissuade a friend from an imprudent project will have any effect. All that can be done is to leave him to his own destruction, and the less said, the better. The brevity of Géronimo's replies to

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(1) Sc. i, op. cit.I, pg. 717.

Sganarelle's impassioned speeches about his physical superiority and the desirability of conjugal life, reflects his lack of interest in the whole matter. The gentle irony of a remark like:

> "...je vous conseille de vous marier le plus vite que vous pourrez" (1)

causes even the thick-skinned Sganarelle to question the sincerity of the speaker ("Tout de bon, vous me le conseillez?" (2); and indeed, right up to the moment when Géronimo takes his leave of Sganarelle, we have the impression that the latter affords his friend rich matter for mirth. There is the cumulative effect of Géronimo's inquiries as to the identity of the bride-to-be, heightening the absurdity of Sganarelle's already injudicious decision to marry; and the spontaneous exclamation, "Vertu de ma vie!", from Géronimo once no doubt remains that it is the young coquette Dorimène whom Sganarelle intends leading to the altar, confirms our growing conviction that Géronimo's judgement represents sanity, while Sganarelle's aspirations are as ludicrous as the man who conceives them.

It should be noted that Géronimo is not above a little compromise with Truth, for in answer to Sganarelle's suspicious "qu'en dites vous?",he hastily changes his guffaw of amazed amusement into a more polite expression of approval and good will ("Bon parti!") (3). This does not betoken insincerity so much as a sense of the fitness of things. Since nothing is to be achieved by criticizing

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(1) Sc. i, op. cit. I,pg.718.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., pg. 719.

Sganarelle's choice of a wife, it is more advisable to let him persevere in his illusion that he is a wise man with a happy prospect before him. Something of Géronimo's true feelings is revealed, however, in his sly promise to attend Sganarelle's wedding "en masque", for this suggests that the whimsical nature of the match warrants the unreal atmosphere created by guests in fanciful or grotesque costume. Besides, there is a hint of the circus in a "mascarade", and in view of the incongruity of the couple in question, the element of buffoonery inherent in such a form of festivity is not inappropriate. Géronimo's exit is prefaced by a brief but telling comment on Sganarelle's nuptials:

> "La jeune Dorimène, fille du seigneur Alcantor, avec le seigneur Sganarelle, qui n'a que cinquante-trois ans: ô le beau mariage! ô le beau mariage!"(1)

There is nothing in those words as they stand to give offence to a person as prejudiced as Sganarelle; they would seem to be a mere statement of fact, followed by a compliment. Yet to one more detached from the situation, there is innuendo in the use of the adjective "jeune", and in the precise reference to the bridegroom's age, which is rendered all the more striking by the deprecating "qui n'a que". As for the repeated approbation of the match, the word "beau" has overtones of heavy sarcasm. Sganarelle is damned with violent praise by his intelligent friend.

Géronimo only appears once more in the play, and that is

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(1) Sc. i, op. cit. I, pg. 719.

immediately after Sganarelle's interview with Dorimène, (in the course of which even he begins to realise dimly that life with such a partner might be difficult and expensive.) The whole point of the second encounter between the friends is to present that sort of comic reversal in position between two protagonists which is the stock-in-trade of comedy since the middle ages. Géronimo's reservations about the wisdom of matrimony at a late age have now been suppressed and he blandly assumes that his friend will be enchanted to learn of the availability of a diamond as a suitable wedding present to offer Dorimène. Sganarelle, on the other hand, has grown considerably less enthusiastic about marriage in the interim, and his off-handed response ("cela n'est pas pressé") (1) evokes a series of surprised, slightly malicious questions from his friend, - whose ignorance of the cause of this sudden reluctance is possibly less complete than it seems. The rambling tirade from Sganarelle, in which that person endeavours to justify his qualms by fabricating a sinister and unlikely dream, is interrupted by the quick-witted Géronimo before it gets out of hand. Géronimo invokes "quelque petite affaire" as an excuse for a precipitate departure, adding that his ability at interpreting dreams is slight, and recommending (so as not to appear totally unhelpful) that Sganarelle seek professional assistance in the matter. His parting shot is a reiteration of the advice he offered earlier, and this is rounded off

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(1) Sc. iii, ibid., pg. 721.

with the polite, conventional "votre serviteur". One feels that, on the whole, Géronimo has extracted himself from a potentially difficult position with poise and dignity. He has the diplomacy of an Ariste without his gentleness; and the combination of a robust sense of humour with sound common sense, which distinguishes Géronte, makes this vigorous middle-aged bourgeois one of the livelier representatives of the more or less stock character under present consideration.

Although his function is similar to that of Géronte, Orgon's brother-in-law Cléante, in Tartuffe, is cast in a somewhat different mould. For one thing, he is more reserved, and his speech accordingly gives the impression of being more deliberate and polished than that of Géronte. In addition to this, he is more serious; he is given to the same sort of general moralizing we have already noticed in Chrysalde. In the opening scene of the play, Cléante is the last of the five protagonists confronting Madame Pernelle's wrath to attempt to speak, and this suggests already a considerable degree of restraint. Our respect for him is further increased by the grudging compliment paid him by the hyper-critical Madame Pernelle herself, - who, it should be noted, wastes no time for apologies in censuring her other relatives:

"Je vous estime fort, vous aime, et vous révère" (1) is the remark which prefaces her attack on the "maximes

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit.II.

de vivre" advocated by Cléante in Orgon's household. In the scene in question, Cléante says little, except to point out that the best method of coping with gossip is to disregard it and try to live as blamelessly as possible, - a sensible enough philosophy, especially when contrasted with Madame Pernelle's exaggerated concern with public opinion. Although present throughout several intervening scenes, Cléante remains in the background until left alone with Orgon, at which point the usual interesting confrontation between sagacity and folly takes place, and Cléante is allowed to voice his opinions freely. Despite Orgon's offensive dogmatism, imperfectly formulated arguments and extravagantly foolish statements, Cléante tolerates all his brother-in-law says, and treats him with patience and good humour. This does not mean that he is uncritical of Orgon's attitude towards his family, and his view of life in general. Nor is he too inhibited to point out unpalatable truths to Orgon, even at the risk of incurring his resentment. Indeed, their conversation begins with Cléante enlightening Orgon about Dorine's treatment of her master ("A votre nez, mon frère, elle se rit de vous"), and challenging him to justify his excessive devotion to his protégé, Tartuffe. Moreover, his comments on Orgon's new set of values derived from Tartuffe's teaching, although brief, display both insight and candour, not without a certain dry wit. For example, his exclamation,

"Les sentiments humains, mon frère, que voilà!" (1)

is a perfect judgement of Orgon's brash statement of

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(1) Act I, sc. v, ibid., l. 280.

indifference to family and friends as a result of his "spiritual enrichment". Religion is always a delicate topic when the parties involved in its discussion hold radically differing views, and inevitably the controversial figure of Tartuffe soon occasions between the two men a sharp difference of opinion on the subject of religious observance. Cléante, with his clear-sightedness, is not long in putting his finger on the crux of the matter:

> "Hé quoi? vous ne ferez nulle distinction
> Entre l'hypocrisie et la dévotion?" (1)

The symmetrical arrangement of his vocabulary and the controlled rhythm of his speech (he juxtaposes words like "masque"-"visage", "artifice"-"sincérité", "apparence"-"vérité", "fantôme"-"personne", and "fausse monnaie"-"bonne") (2) create an effect of calm lucidity which counterbalances the incoherent illogicality and emotionalism of Orgon. Whereas Cléante softens the harshness of his utterances with a reassurance that his remarks on hypocrisy in religion are only directed at his brother-in-law "en passant", Orgon has no such delicacy of sentiment where Cléante's feelings are concerned, and he resorts to sneering in answer to the other's speech. Before Cléante resumes his arguments against people of Tartuffe's ilk, he quietly refutes the exaggerated accusations of Orgon, refusing to be drawn from his purpose by the irritation natural in one charged with being "un docteur révéré", "le seul sage" and "un oracle" (3) simply because he

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(1) Act I, sc. v, ibid., ll.331-332.
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid., ll. 346 et seq.

indulges in a little serious comment on moral matters. The remainder of his long tirade on sanctimonious professionals of religious devotion consists of an amplification of his first discourse. The language he uses is strong ("odieux", "sacrilège", and "le dehors plâtré d'un zèle spécieux" being but a few examples), but even his indignation is tempered by that moderation so dear to the seventeenth century mind. The structure of his fifty-seven line long oration reveals the discipline of a well-ordered mind, for the first half deals with the despicable charlatans of religion, who rouse his wrath, while the second part is concerned with more positive precepts: he speaks with admiration of the truly pious, whose example is more powerful than words in suggesting the correct approach to religion. He does not hesitate to condemn the obvious failing in Tartuffe's recommendations for a virtuous life: intolerance. In this, too, he shows perspicacity and soundness of judgement. Finally, he again reassures Orgon that he is not criticizing him personally:

"C'est de fort bonne foi que vous vantez son zèle"(1) he says, and blames Tartuffe's skill in deceit rather than Orgon's lack of intelligence and discernment for the misguided admiration lavished on the "dévôt" by Orgon. Unmoved by this piece of generosity, Orgon continues in the sarcastic vein of his earlier retort, and Cléante decides, wisely, not to pursue a conversation which can only lead

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(1) Act I, sc. v, ibid., l. 406.

to bitterness. Unlike Géronte, whose ironical humouring of Sganarelle represents his abandonment of a lost cause, Cléante's withdrawal takes the form of silence. The only thing that makes him remain in his brother-in-law's company is his undertaking to plead the cause of Valère with Mariane's father. In this invidious task he manages to combine tact with persistence, but he is no match for the obstinacy of Orgon. Not even his direct manner succeeds in extracting some positive answer from his interlocutor, whose only reply to the question -

"Valère a votre foi: la tiendrez-vous, ou non?"(1)

is to quit the room with a brusque "Adieu". Our estimation of Cléante's character cannot fail to rise in view of his conduct during the interview with Orgon. He shows to even better advantage when, much later in the play, he confronts Tartuffe himself. After Damis has been turned out of Orgon's house with some violence, and the Hypocrite's triumph is complete, Cléante's critical assessment of Tartuffe's behaviour in the crisis illustrates the practical application of those general precepts mentioned in the conversation with Orgon earlier. The true Christian, in Cléante's opinion, would intercede for Damis with his outraged parent instead of profiting from the estrangement between father and son. The tone adopted by Cléante when acquainting Tartuffe with this view is civil, but one may detect the depth of contempt in an apparently rhetorical question like

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(1) Act I, sc. v, ibid., l.424.

"N'est-il pas d'un chrétien de pardonner l'offense,

Et d'éteindre en son coeur tout désir de vengeance?"(1)

The relevance to Tartuffe's own conduct in the Damis-Orgon affair is obvious. The Hypocrite's lofty abstractions and devious reasoning fail to impress Cléante, who in any case has seen through his performance from the start; and while preserving formal politeness (he still addresses Tartuffe as "Monsieur"), Orgon's brother-in-law firmly maintains his belief in forgiveness as the only acceptable course of action in the circumstances. He counters every one of Tartuffe's spurious arguments with observations based on a mixture of common sense and Christian theology, until his interlocutor has no verbal resources left, and is obliged to use "certain devoir pieux" as an excuse for beating a retreat before so implacable an opponent. Cléante's "Ah!" on Tartuffe's exit is ample enough evidence of his scepticism concerning the real cause of the abrupt departure of the Hypocrite. Up to this point of the play, Cléante's wisdom has been verbal and theoretical, for it has not been related to specific circumstances. In the final act, however, we see him remaining level-headed while chaos and havoc reign around him in Orgon's household once Tartuffe has shown his true colours. Predictably, Orgon is distraught and incapable of rational behaviour, his rage and disappointment leading him to violent extremes of judgement, which Cléante gently but steadily corrects ("...toujours d'un excès vous vous jetez dans l'autre")(2).

(1) Act IV, sc. i, ll. 1193-1194.

(2) Act V, sc. i, l. 1610.

However strong the temptation might be for a man in Cléante's position to say, "I told you so", this perspicacious observer of human nature is sufficiently generous to hold his peace, and concentrate his attention rather upon finding the best way out of the difficulties with which he and the rest of Orgon's family are confronted. He restrains Damis from doing physical violence to Tartuffe, for resorting to brute force can only aggravate an already uneasy situation. He intervenes in the amusing but fruitless quarrel between Orgon and Madame Pernelle over Tartuffe's turpitude, pointing out that

"Nous perdons des moments en bagatelles pures,
Qu'il faudrait employer à prendre des mesures." (1)

In other words, his moderation and single-mindedness contribute to the preservation of some vestiges of sanity in Orgon's troubled household until the final catastrophe overtakes the family with Monsieur Loyal's visit.

Only once more does Cléante come to the fore before the play ends, and that is when Orgon, in his relief at the unexpected salvation from what appeared to be an impossible predicament, is about to vent his bitterness upon Tartuffe. In accordance with his principle of charity and forgiveness, Cléante restrains his excited relative from cheapening his victory by petty conduct ("...ne descendez point à des indignités")(2). Our sympathy with the winning side

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(1) Act V, sc. iii, ll. 1697-1698.
(2) Act V, sc. vii, l. 1948.

is accordingly ensured, justice is satisfactorily done, and Tartuffe ends on a note of tranquillity and harmony. Without Cléante's dignified and exemplary presence, it is quite possible that the finale would be less complete, both morally and aesthetically speaking.

In Les Femmes savantes, we find the same comic material as in the plays already considered in the present chapter: obsession or aberration played off against reason and common sense. The latter are represented, not by a single individual, but by a little group of three in this work, Molière's penultimate comedy. The characters involved are Chrysale, Ariste, his brother, and Clitandre, his prospective son-in-law. Chrysale has already been discussed in an earlier chapter, so little will be said about him now. Besides, his extreme pliancy and inability to maintain his views in the face of opposition from his redoubtable wife, make it difficult to take him seriously. He is a more sympathetic character than any of those in the opposing camp (the "précieux" of Philaminte's salon and the ladies themselves), and his immense speech on the place of a woman in the home contains much that is sound. However, there is something of the buffoon in Chrysale, which renders him less satisfactory than either Ariste or Clitandre as a character whose utterances are to be respected. It is the other two individuals whom we shall therefore consider.

Clitandre is interesting inasmuch as he is one of the

few "thinking bourgeois" not of middle age. In some respects he conforms to the pattern of young men-in-love, but he is differentiated from the Valères and Léandres of other plays by his tendency to verbalize on subjects of interest to the moralist, - more specifically, on the topic of female participation in intellectual activities as opposed to domestic ones. When he first appears on the stage, it is to declare his love for Henriette before Armande, and this delicate situation is handled by him with integrity and tact. His honesty concerning his feelings for Henriette, and his indifference towards her elder sister, is sufficiently wounding to Armande's pride, and the young man avoids any remarks of an unnecessary nature suggesting triumph or revenge for unrequited love. This already disposes us favourably towards him, so that by the time he acquaints Henriette with his opinion of "les femmes docteurs", we regard what he says as worthy of serious attention.

The two main issues with which Clitandre is concerned are, firstly, the compromise between knowledge and intellectual humility that the ideal woman should make, and secondly, the impossibility of admiring literary charlatans without being dishonest. He has already proved himself to be articulate in the "declaration" scene, and on this occasion, alone with Henriette, his speech takes on an epigrammatic quality normally associated with a polished speaker. Well-turned phrases like "elle sache ignorer

les choses qu'elle sait"(1) and "qu'elle ait du savoir sans vouloir qu'on le sache" (2) illustrate the grace of his expression as well as the fineness of his perception. He is fluent without being glib. Despite the sophistication of his utterances, however, his ideas are basically those of the blunter Chrysale. He merely affords us another perspective of the same view, as it were, where feminine preoccupations are concerned. On the subject of intellectual honesty, he is rather more original, and it is to his credit that he is not willing to join the chorus of approbation for the ponderous writings of Trissotin in order to improve his chances of winning Henriette. The sly counsel of Henriette herself -

"Vous devez vous forcer à quelque complaisance" (3)

- fails to induce her suitor to compromise his taste and judgement in feigning an admiration he does not feel. For him, praise of Trissotin's work would be tantamount to dishonour, however much he might stand to gain from such a course of action. The most he is prepared to do to consolidate his position in Philaminte's household is to find favour with Bélise, and it is in this frustrating endeavour that we next see him.

The elderly spinster's conviction of Clitandre's passionate attachment to her person, coupled with her too-ready flow of speech, leaves Henriette's lover in no position to show either rage or forbearance; he has no choice but to wait

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(1) Act I, sc. iii, op. cit., II, pg.993, l. 222.
(2) Ibid., l. 224.
(3) Ibid., l. 240.

for the tide of her eloquence to ebb. By the time it does so, however, Bélise has swept majestically from the room, and Clitandre's reaction to the interview is as indignant as may be expected in the circumstances. His exasperated

"Diantre soit de la folle avec ses visions!"(1)
is admittedly not the most polite remark to make about elders and betters, but in a person of Clitandre's youth and aspirations, its spontaneity, and the extreme provocation to which he has been subjected, mitigate any censure one might be tempted to make of it. Being a young man given to positive remedies, Clitandre, instead of giving up the project of finding a mentor after his dismissal by Bélise, decides to try his luck with "une sage personne". It is appropriate that the individual of his choice should be the practical, good-hearted Ariste, whom we meet in the following scene.

Ariste's readiness to assist the young lovers, his patience with his sentimental, rambling brother, and his discretion regarding the need for Philaminte's endorsement of Chrysale's decision to accept Clitandre as a son-in-law, all argue strongly in favour of this charming, sensible person. He has the same common sense as his namesake in L'Ecole des maris, and he is easily identifiable with that group of kindly, intelligent, mature bourgeois whose lucidity counters the idosyncrasies of their friends or relatives.

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, l. 325.

Chrysale's brother differs from them, however, in that his contribution to the action of the play is more direct. In fact, at the end of Les Femmes savantes, he is a sort of deus ex machina through whose agency the worthlessness of Trissotin is exposed. He verbalizes less than the other characters of similar function whom we have already discussed, and this is because Clitandre fills this rôle quite adequately, together with Chrysale. Where the Cléante of Tartuffe has a restraining influence on impetuosity, and provides a clear-sighted commentary on the human weakness surrounding him, but does little to promote the happy ending to the crisis in Orgon's affairs, Ariste says less but acts more. Both have positive attributes, but in different ways. Despite the fact that he is a man of action rather than words, Ariste is not incapable of some straight talking when this is necessary. Chrysale's vacillation regarding the proposal of Clitandre as son-in-law to Philaminte calls forth sarcasm and indignation from his brother, who asks bluntly,

"N'avez-vous point de honte avec votre mollesse?"(1). The asperity of tone Ariste adopts on this occasion is not prompted by spite, however; he realises that the only way to bring Chrysale to his senses is to address him peremptorily. The swiftness with which Ariste reverts to his usual amiable manner indicates this clearly, as does the encouragement he gives his unreliable brother:

"Vous voilà raisonnable, et comme je vous veux." (2)

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(1) Act II, sc. ix, l. 659.
(2) Ibid., l. 706.

This hearty approbation is continued when, later, Chrysale has firmly stated his desire for the union between Henriette and Clitandre to take place; ("Fort bien: vous faites des merveilles") (1) and throughout the play, Ariste is like Chrysale's alter ego, constantly indicating the correct path to follow in the various complications besetting the Henriette/Clitandre match, and in dealings with Philaminte. Both Ariste and Clitandre appear in a good light in their respective encounters with the other protagonists of the play, - Clitandre for his sincerity and directness, and Ariste for his steady judgement and energy. When, for example, Clitandre overhears Armande's unfairly prejudicial remarks about him to her mother, he confronts the women with dignity and challenges the younger one to explain herself. Again, his language has that concision, reminiscent of the epigram, noticed in earlier speeches. It suggests self-control as well as elegance of diction. When he asks Armande,

"Est-ce moi qui vous quitte, ou vous qui me chassez?"(2) he has captured in a few words the whole crux of the matter, the essence of his unhappy relationship with Armande. Control does not mean lack of emotion, though, and the terms in which Clitandre evokes his initial devotion to Henriette's elder sister are moving. It is only the silliness of the girl's answer which makes him change his tone from gentleness to irony, and from irony to bluntness ("Il n'est plus

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(1) Act III, sc. vi, l. 1114.
(2) Act IV, sc. ii, l. 1188.

temps, Madame: une autre a pris la place") (1). Like Ariste, he only uses hard words when circumstances render these unavoidable. The confrontation between himself and his rival, Trissotin, is another occasion which justifies the use of less diplomatic language than that which he usually employs. Trissotin passes for a man of wit in the circles he frequents, and however despicable he might be as a person, it is true that, as long as he confines himself to words alone, he is capable of exhibiting a façade of intelligence which people like Philaminte find impressive. When faced with the forthright charges of Clitandre, Trissotin is not wanting in verbal dexterity to defend himself, as a remark like

"J'ai cru jusques ici que c'était l'ignorance
Qui faisait les grands sots, et non pas la science"(2)

shows. Certainly it does not bear close scrutiny; but superficially, it carries some weight by reason of its balanced antithesis. Yet Clitandre, enemy though he is of elaborate speech, gratuitous intellectual exercise, and pedantry, fights Trissotin with his own weapon, neatly capping the poet's barbed comments in language by no means inferior to the rhetorically polished speech of his adversary. Their sparring culminates in a long and interesting speech from Clitandre on the futility of the laborious works of learned scholars who delude themselves into believing the State owes them recognition for their efforts. (3) His words confirm the opinion we have already formed of his

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(1) Act IV, sc. ii, l. 1241.
(2) Act IV, sc. iii, ll. 1293-1294.
(3) Ibid., ll. 1353-1382.

judgement. All that he says is based on common sense, and attests the speaker's impatience with spuriousness in general, be it of word or of deed. Philaminte's accusation, that Clitandre's tirade is inspired by jealousy, is discredited to some extent by the character of the lady herself. Besides, the validity of the young man's remarks renders speculation about their inspiration unnecessary. In the little conversation with Armande immediately following the Trissotin/Clitandre clash, moreover, Clitandre's self-mastery in the face of Armande's smug and insincere commiseration over the ruin of his plans for marrying her sister, argues against the notion that he would let resentment run away with him to the extent of distorting his judgement.

There is no more speechifying from Clitandre as the action of the play draws to an end, and indeed, it would be unseasonable were he to indulge in moralizing at a time when his whole future happiness with Henriette is in the balance. One of his best moments comes with Ariste's ruse, when, despite the meagreness of his own fortune, he offers to rescue Henriette and her family from "financial ruin" once Trissotin's cupidity has been exposed and that literary charlatan disgraced forever in Philaminte's eyes. The sacrifice is all the more laudable since Clitandre sincerely believes the news imparted through Ariste, that Chrysale and Philaminte are penniless. His words to Henriette are few, but touching:

"Tout destin, avec vous, me peut être agréable;

Tout destin me serait, sans vous, insupportable."(1)

As an expression of love, that declaration leaves little to be desired, and the words just quoted are the last uttered by Clitandre in the play. This means that it is as a lover rather than as a thinker that Clitandre emerges at the end, - which is appropriate for one of his years. As for Ariste, his initiative in acting as he does to help the lovers has the effect of increasing our already considerable respect for him.

The advocate of common sense in Molière's last comedy (Le Malade imaginaire) is represented by the hypochondriac's brother, Béralde. Contrary to the tradition of earlier plays, Béralde does not appear until an advanced stage of the action (at the very end of the second act); and when he does so, the conflicting views of himself and Argan are not given utterance. In fact, his visit to Argan gives the impression that it is a mere necessity for the structure of the play: his introduction into Argan's household of a troupe of exotically costumed singers and dancers to cheer up the invalid, affords a pretext for bringing the second act to an end and justifies the visual entertainment demanded by the genre. In the short exchange between the brothers which precedes the second "intermède", we do not learn much about the character and persuasions of Béralde. However, even in this brief scene, Argan's brother displays

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(1) Act V, sc. iv, ll. 1747-1748.

a certain dry humour and clarity of vision. The initial words of conversation are of the most banal, but when Argan has petulantly stated, in reply to the usual inquiry after his health, that

"Je n'ai pas seulement la force de pouvoir parler"(1), and immediately afterwards reacts with violence of a highly articulate variety to an allusion to Angélique's match with "un parti", Béralde remarks wryly that he is pleased to note Argan's strength appears to be returning to him. It is to Béralde's credit that he does not tease Argan further about this inconsistency, and that he has the discretion to defer discussion of Angélique's matrimonial prospects until a later and more propitious hour. The only indication of his attitude towards medicine and doctors at this stage is his assertion that the singing-and-dancing "vaudra bien une ordonnance de Monsieur Purgon." (2).

With the beginning of the third act, Béralde's presence and participation in the action become a feature of Le Malade imaginaire, and this is natural and logical, since this is the act of Argan's enlightenment, both about medical practitioners and about Béline's affection for himself; and Béralde stands for unclouded perception of the two kinds of deceit practised by Monsieur Purgon and Béline respectively. With Béralde's intelligence and Toinette's energy and inventiveness, Argan is not allowed to persevere for long in his delusions. From his promise to Toinette,(3),

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(1) Act II, sc. ix, op. cit. II, pg. 1147.
(2) Ibid.
(3) Act III, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 1150.

Béralde may be seen to be fully committed to furthering the interests of Cléante and Angélique, just as Ariste, in Les Femmes savantes, undertakes to assist the match between Clitandre and Henriette. This tends to dispose us favourably towards Argan's brother, for the cause of Young Love is inevitably regarded with a sympathetic eye. In addition to this, Béralde further commends himself to us by his tactics when reasoning with Argan. Knowing the excitable temperament of his brother, he proceeds with caution before broaching the dangerous topic of Angélique's possible marriage with Cléante. His appeals to Argan to remain calm are such that the latter, never very patient at the best of times, remarks, "Voilà bien du préambule"; (1) but the reaction provoked by Béralde's discreet suggestion of self-interest in Béline's eagerness to see Angélique in a convent, amply justifies the "préambule". Recognizing the symptoms of a tantrum, Béralde (not without a certain tongue-in-cheek irony) quickly reassures Argan of his conviction that Béline is an excellent lady, and endeavours to keep the conversation upon the topic of present interest to himself, Cléante and Angélique. However, after one or two wise observations from Béralde on the advisability of choosing a suitor to the taste of the prospective wife rather than to that of the prospective father-in-law, the subject changes from matrimony to medicine, and it is at this point that the confrontation between common sense and folly (to which we are by now accustomed in Molière's plays) takes place.

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(1) Act III, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 1151.

The discussion between Argan and Béralde is prefaced by a vigorous assertion from the invalid's brother that Argan's health is admirable in spite of, rather than because of, the attentions of Monsieur Purgon. This is a statement of fact, and as such throws into relief the magnitude of Argan's illusions about himself and the medical profession. Curiously enough, Argan does not fly into a rage at Béralde's direct attack upon all that he holds most dear, - possibly because he is too shocked even to be angry at such sacrilege. From the audience's point of view, it is as well that he remains cool enough to continue the conversation, which is stimulating intellectually. The contrast between the brothers as their respective views become clear is the contrast between reality and fantasy, reason and superstition. At times, Béralde would seem to go too far in contradicting Argan, - when, for example, he claims that medicine is "une des plus grandes folies qui soit parmi les hommes (1), or when he ridicules the practices of doctors and their inability to cure patients. It should be remembered that as a comic dramatist, Molière is concerned with presenting opposing viewpoints rather than suggesting the rights and wrongs of certain attitudes to given issues. Occasional exaggeration in Béralde's remarks serves to heighten the difference between the two protagonists under present discussion, quite apart from the amusement his statements give to those detached from the argument. It is certainly more likely that we shall

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(1) Act III, sc. iii, ibid., pp.1152-1153.

identify with Béralde rather than with Argan, since most of Béralde's comments and precepts are sensible rather than not, whereas Argan is obsessed with health to the point of absurdity. It is possible, moreover, that just as Clitandre, in Les Femmes savantes, uses language similar to that of Trissotin when arguing with that pedant, so, too, Béralde has recourse to the same extravagant utterances as his brother when discussing medicine. He does not necessarily believe to the letter every word he says, even if Argan lacks the intelligence not to take him literally.

The longest of Béralde's speeches in the scene we are considering deals, significantly, with the distance separating reality from illusion, (1) and this, even more than medicine and romantic intrigue, is what Le Malade imaginaire is all about. Let us look, for example, at his generalization in this regard:

> "Mais quand vous en venez à la vérité et à l'expérience, vous ne trouvez rien de tout cela, et il en est comme de ces beaux songes qui ne vous laissent au réveil que le déplaisir de les avoir crus." (2)

Although related to Argan's whimsical belief in the efficacity of Medicine, this remark has a wider relevance which is only brought out at the end of the play, when Argan has yielded to Béralde's persuasion and become a doctor in his own right. The nuptial celebrations of Cléante and Angélique include costumed dancing (Béralde refers to

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(1) Act III, sc. iii, ibid., p. 1154.
(2) Ibid.

this as "le carnaval"), and the atmosphere of glittering unreality generated by this fairy-tale ending is a comment, perhaps, on the whole situation presented in Le Malade. We are what we want to be only in our imagination, and if we are to remain happy, the reality of our identity and circumstances should not be explored too thoroughly. It is the clear-sighted Béralde who perceives this, and it is he who is responsible for the only possible solution to Argan's problem where medicine is concerned. This aspect of Béralde's function in the play lends him an extra dimension, as it were, over and above the usual one associated with characters filling the "sensible" rôle in comedies of domestic life. This does not mean, however, that his part as adviser to his ludicrous and selfish relative is understated. In the matter of Monsieur Fleurant's "petit lavement", for example, Béralde intervenes in the most practical way, preventing Argan from unnecessary recourse to Monsieur Purgon's prescriptions. It is interesting to note that, when the outraged practitioner himself bustles in to investigate the cause of his patient's rebellion, Béralde says not a word, and in fact slips away until the affair should be sorted out between Argan and his doctor. It is not so much a matter of cowardice, as a sense of discretion, which prompts this course of action. Having indicated to his brother the path of reason, Béralde refuses to interfere further; it is up to Argan to decide for himself. Béralde returns when Purgon has departed. At this point, blunt speech

is required to restore some measure of self-control to the hypochondriac, who is hysterical with apprehension following Purgon's "curse". Béralde rises to the occasion with remonstrances like -

> "Ma foi! mon frère, vous êtes fou..." "Le simple homme que vous êtes!" (1)

When Toinette's stratagem of presenting Argan with a replacement for Purgon is put into operation, Béralde's dry wit and control of situation are shown to advantage. Throughout the elaborate joke played by servant on master, he makes double-edged comments of a general nature which do not betray Toinette, but at the same time do not compromise his honesty:

> "Il est vrai que la ressemblance est tout à fait grande. Mais ce n'est pas la première fois qu'on a vu de ces sortes de choses..." (2)

Like all things of the imagination, however, the joke must end, and reality returns with Béralde's insistence on the justice of Angélique's cause. Like a faithful messenger, Béralde does not lose sight of his commission for long. Mention of Angélique's future involves mention of Béline's aspirations, and just before Toinette's triumphant ruse to reveal Argan's wife in all her hypocrisy, Béralde indulges in some plain talking on the matter of Argan's blindness to Béline's faults. Comparing his words on this occasion with those uttered by him earlier on the same subject, it

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(1) Act III, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 1159.
(2) Act III, sc. viii, ibid., pg. 1161.

may be seen how Béralde can adapt to circumstances. At this stage he has little to lose by provoking his brother, so the truth can be spoken freely, whereas earlier, it was necessary to placate Argan if any progress with Cléante's cause were to be made. Finally, once Argan has revised his opinion of both Béline and Angélique, and all promises well for the young lovers, Béralde makes his inspired suggestion that Argan should become his own doctor. As the play ends, the interplay of dream and reality is emphasized by Béralde's own words:

> "Nous pouvons aussi prendre chacun un personnage, et nous donner ainsi la comédie les uns aux autres." (1)

In a sense, Béralde emerges as a dominant character, a sort of master of ceremonies, despite the fact that Argan is the more compelling creation of Molière's imagination.

In this chronological survey of the "thinking bourgeois", - the middle-class man of intelligence and critical judgement, - in Molière's plays, we have considered a number of individuals who complete the picture of this group of protagonists in the dramatist's work, who are neither of the nobility nor of the plebs. Not all bourgeois are monsters devoured by avarice, snobbishness, or pseudo-religion. There are those who are kindly, humorous, well-balanced and humane. If at times they appear colourless in comparison with the eccentrics whose foibles and obsessions they criticize, it is not because the dramatist esteems them less or rates their importance lower.

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(1) Act III, sc. xiv, ibid., pg. 1171.

Just as in a painting, the neutral tones are essential to highlight the bolder colours, and so the Aristes and Béraldes have their place beside the Orgons and Arnolphes of Molière's drama. Despite the similarity of their collective function, it should be pointed out that they are neatly differentiated one from another; one is earthy and forthright, another is urbane and polished; one is a man of action, another is a man of thought. It is not a valid criticism to accuse Molière of creating them according to the same matrix.

Most important of all, the "thinking bourgeois" in Molière's plays adds to the impression of psychological authenticity, since these are the characters who, by their very ordinariness, impress us with the illusion of reality. They should not be underestimated.

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4. THE LOWER ORDERS.

Chapter One.

The Intriguing and Resourceful Valet.

Comedy, by its very nature, implied for the seventeenth-century mind a presentation of life as lived by the lower orders of society. This is partially explained by the traditional distinction already mentioned in this thesis between comic and tragic protagonists. Moreover, the lack of inhibitions characterizing those whose station does not demand decorous or exemplary behaviour offers rich material to the writer of comedy. It is therefore only natural that Molière's work should contain much that is enlightening about the least distinguished members of the society he knew, and to complete this survey of the hierarchy as depicted by him, it remains to consider the valets, maids and peasants whose presence animates a fair number of his comedies.

It is logical to begin with one of the best-known figures of comedy since the days of Plautus and Terence, - that of the intriguing and resourceful valet. Predictably, it is in Molière's earlier and less original comedies that this character makes his most frequent appearance. As the dramatist matures and the style and content of his work become less dependent on the comic tradition that

precedes him, other characters take the place of recognizable "fantoches". It may be argued that so stereotyped a figure as the "clever manservant" can contribute little to our knowledge of real-life domestics in Molière's day, and of prevailing attitudes towards them. While this is true of the unrelenting father-figures in comedies of classical inspiration, however, there is cause to believe that the depiction of a valet more masterly than his master reflects one of the facts of everyday existence in seventeenth-century France. Proof of this may be found in contemporary anecdotes, - for example, in a remark by the famous advocate Patru, concerning one of his colleagues at the Académie Française. The gentleman in question had been playing at dice in the venerable "Pomme de Pin", and his valet, Bassan, finally dragged him off by the coat, saying, "Morbleu! vous perdez tout notre argent, et puis tantôt vous me viendrez battre". This sort of situation (1) is worthy of the tradition of Scapin, Mascarille and Sganarelle.

The first time we encounter the name of Sganarelle, with its connotations of Italian farce (the ending -elle evokes Polichinelle and Briguelle), is in Le Médecin volant. At this stage of his chequered career in Molière's works, the character bearing this name is a valet (later we see him as an elderly and foolish bourgeois, and after 1666

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(1) Quoted in Le Molièriste, Vol. I, no.11, Feb., 1880, pp.339-340 in a contribution by Eugène Noël.

he disappears from Molière's plays altogether.) Sganarelle appears in the second scene of this little farce immediately after some highly unflattering remarks about his ability from Valère, his master. There is the basic comic technique of reversal-of-position in the contrast between Valère's contemptuous deprecation of his servant, and the wheedling tone of his supplication for help in the conspiracy against Gorgibus, - a conspiracy in which Sganarelle is required to play a major rôle. In the confrontation between master and servant, two facts emerge that are edifying as to Sganarelle's character. The first is his good opinion of himself, evidenced by the self-important recommendations he makes concerning his reliability. The effect of these is somewhat spoilt by Valère's recent references to Sganarelle as "un lourdaud" (1), and by the examples the valet cites of commissions satisfactorily executed (ascertaining the price of butter at the market, telling the time, and watering the horse). The second, and more interesting, indication of Sganarelle's personal characteristics is the ease with which money can induce him to attempt any undertaking. The mention of "dix pistoles" suffices to conquer his initial reluctance when requested to masquerade as a doctor, and he is not above reminding Valère (whom, it should be noted, he treats with a certain camaraderie bordering on disrespect) about the promised reward before the two part:

> "...venez seulement me faire avoir un habit de médecin, et m'instruire de ce qu'il faut faire, et me donner mes licences, qui sont les dix pistoles promises". (2)

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(1) Sc. i, Op. cit. I, pg. 32.

(2) Sc. ii, ibid., pg. 33.

After Sabine's impressive preamble on introducing Sganarelle to Gorgibus, the newly qualified "doctor" is thrown on his own resources to maintain a convincing performance as "le plus habile médecin du monde". It must be admitted that in this difficult task, he acquits himself better than Valère seemed to anticipate. The confidence of his demeanour, combined with the incomprehensible and pedantic jargon he affects, dazzles a man of Gorgibus's meagre intelligence. When Sganarelle's knowledge of Latin deserts him, he covers up by briskly demanding to get on with the examination, and not even the blunder of choosing the wrong patient (he begins on Gorgibus) disconcerts him; he calmly announces that

> "le sang du père et de la fille ne sont qu'une même chose". (1)

This command of the situation earns Sganarelle some respect, for despite his obvious lack of education and the coarseness of his behaviour (his drinking of the patient's urine being one of the commonplaces of broad farce), there is no denying the quickness of his wit, which is superior to that of the other protagonists. One of the most diverting features of Sganarelle's performance is his ability to make the sort of remarks which no person of average intelligence would dream of taking seriously (for example, he declares that "une personne ne se porte pas bien quand elle est malade"); and he does so with such gravity that his absurd commonplaces sound like utterances of great profundity. In the matter of a prescription, Sganarelle proves once again his presence

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(1) Sc. iv, op. cit. 1, pg. 34.

of mind when he avoids having to write, - since, of course, he is illiterate. Not only does his recommendation that Lucile take fresh air in the garden serve his master's purpose; it also obviates the necessity of committing words to paper, which would be a serious embarrassment to him.

A more formidable threat is presented by the appearance of the Advocate, whose curiosity is aroused by Gorgibus's superlatives concerning the learned "doctor" in his house. When Sganarelle and the Advocate come face to face, the elegance and preciseness of the latter's speech, and his syntactically correct Latin, contrast strongly with the bastard speech of his interlocutor, who hurriedly summons up whatever foreign-sounding words come to mind. It is to Sganarelle's credit, however, that he does not panic. He is wise enough to allow the Advocate to talk on until he has tired of his own carefully-turned eloquence, and is ready to go. (Such is the Advocate's complacency that he doesn't even notice the slightness of Sganarelle's contribution to the conversation.) When Gorgibus asks his opinion of the Advocate, moreover, Sganarelle has recovered his wit sufficiently to make a condescending reply:

"Il sait quelque petite chose..." (1)

Then the question of payment arises, and the "doctor" displays well-simulated surprise on being presented with a purse of money, which is taken amid protestations of complete disinterest in remuneration ("je ne suis pas un homme

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(1) Sc. viii, ibid., pg. 38.

mercénaire"). One remembers the "dix pistoles" already received from Valère, and it must be acknowledged that Sganarelle's flair for financial transactions compensates to an appreciable degree for his lack of learning.

Once restored to his identity as Valère's valet, Sganarelle's self-satisfied report of his adventure brings to mind earlier remarks betokening his excellent opinion of himself. In other words, his characterization is consistent. By this time, however, he has shown that his smugness is not unjustified in view of his masterly conduct as Lucile's doctor. The dénouement of the play confirms our judgement of his skill in making the best of difficult situations. First, there is his inspired excuse of a twin brother when Gorgibus makes his inopportune appearance and sees him as a manservant; then, there is Sganarelle's lightning change of costume and identity when circumstances demand that he appear as a doctor to hear Gorgibus's plea for reconciliation with his erring twin brother; and finally, up to the moment of his exposure by Gros-René, there is Sganarelle's enactment of the parts of two individuals simultaneously, which is carried out with such virtuosity that even the sceptical Gros-René himself is moved to say, "par ma foi, il est sorcier." (1) Even at the end of this "tour de force", Sganarelle is not at a loss for words in the face of Gorgibus's wrath. He pleads his master's cause simply, appealing to the better nature of Lucile's father and point-

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(1) Sc. xv, ibid., pg. 43.

ing out the inevitability of the fait accompli. It is no doubt as much through this well-reasoned speech as through the disarming behaviour of the young lovers, that Gorgibus relents so swiftly, to the joy of all concerned. Sganarelle emerges from the play as a person of great aplomb and quick wit. His is not the intelligence of a Béralde or an Ariste; it is closer to animal cunning than to sagacity, but combined with physical energy, it proves a formidable force to be reckoned with. To what extent Sganarelle is typical can only be determined once other valets in Molière's work have been considered.

Another of Molière's early comedies, L'Etourdi, (which, like Le Médecin volant, dates from the mid-to-late 'fifties) features the antics of a Sganarelle-like valet named Mascarille. The name suggests a mask (Spanish "mascara", Italian "mascarati", mean "mask" and "daubed face" respectively), and this is particularly appropriate in view of the fellow's frequent recourse to disguise. This is not only the disguise of face or figure, - although at one point in the action Mascarille participates in a masquerade (1); - it is rather the cloaking of his true purpose and intentions as he accosts the various people who are of possible aid to him in bringing about the union of his master and Célie. Despite the cynicism with which he greets Lélie's appeal for help in the impasse in his love-life, Mascarille endears himself to the audience by his willingness to assist his

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(1) In Act III, sc. viii.

master. Throughout the five-act play, there is a constant contradiction between Mascarille's inflamed speeches against helping a man as unlucky as Lélie, and his yielding to humane impulses prompted by the lover's helplessness. Yet it is not solely a tender heart which makes Mascarille act as he does. He is what Lélie says he is in the first act: a person never at a loss, no matter what the odds.

"Je sais que ton esprit, en intrigues fertile,
N'a jamais rien trouvé qui lui fût difficile..."(1)

Besides, Mascarille himself vaunts his capacity for successful intriguing in no uncertain terms:

"........ je veux que l'on s'apprête
A me peindre en héros un laurier sur la tête,
Et qu'au bas du portrait on mette en lettres d'or:
'Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator! ' " (2)

The self-assurance of the master-plotter is but thinly disguised by the burlesque quality of the image in that speech. As in the case of Sganarelle, however, Mascarille does not deserve censure for those immodest words, since they relate to fact. He _is_ a superb schemer, always one step ahead of his opponent, and never daunted by new or unexpected developments. He is ever-flexible, able to alter plans at the last moment or change tactics as circumstances threaten his original course of action with failure. Not only does he have this fine sense of expediency; his shrewdness concerning human nature enables him to tackle

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, op. cit. I, pg. 54, ll.15-16.
(2) Act II, sc. viii, ibid., pg. 92, ll.791-794.

people with an eye to exploiting their weaknesses, aspirations and emotions. He knows in advance how they will react to his suggestions or his conduct. Thus he uses the fiction of Nérine's "passion" for Anselme to gratify the old man's vanity and distract him from his vigilance over the purse containing two thousand francs, which is vital for the purchase of Célie's freedom. Similarly, his feigned disapproval of his young master's behaviour calls forth from Pandolfe exactly the reaction anticipated by Mascarille, facilitating the plan for buying Célie by proxy. Not even successive defeats through the blundering of Lélie can cause Mascarille to abandon hope; he becomes angry, but never despondent. He is an artist of intrigue above all else. This poses a problem where the characterization of Mascarille is concerned.

In the case of a character who is as involved in action as Lélie's valet, there is an inevitable tendency to overlook psychology and to concentrate rather on plot-participation. In other words, Mascarille's rôle in generating episode upon episode distracts the spectator from any implications about his inner self which might emerge from dialogue. The limitations imposed on the dramatist by the farce-genre render it difficult to regard personae conceived as mainsprings of action in quite the same way as one regards, say, Alceste or Orgon. However, <u>L'Etourdi</u> is not altogether devoid of matter for comment concerning Mascarille's nature and his place in society. He has similar traits to Sganarelle, -

he is supremely self-confident, he evinces the same independence of attitude towards his master, and he has the same brand of cunning, as Valère's servant. He has, however, more pride than Sganarelle, and more initiative, since Sganarelle's impersonation (however brilliantly executed) is a task thrust upon him by another party, whereas all Mascarille's enterprises are undertaken by himself in the absence of suggestions from his master. His monologue at the beginning of Act Three is the clearest statement of his sense of duty towards himself as "un fourbe sublime", and of his concern for his reputation:

> "Et quoi qu'un maître ait fait pour te faire enrager,
> Achève pour ta gloire, et non pour l'obliger." (1)

Mascarille differs from Sganarelle in the matter of remuneration for services rendered, moreover. Where the "médecin volant" is primarily concerned with financial gain, Mascarille evinces a surprising indifference towards bribes and other inducements connected with money. He firmly rejects Hippolyte's offer of her purse (2) when she learns of the assistance he has lent her cause, and his assertion that "l'espérance du gain n'est pas ce qui me flatte" (3) is innocent of tongue-in-cheek irony. His behaviour at the end of the play, when the sets of lovers are happily united, confirms his lack of interest in tangible recompense for his efforts on their behalf. All he desires is "quelque

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(1) Act III, sc. i, ibid., pg. 97, ll.917-918.
(2) In Act I, sc. viii.
(3) Ibid., pg. 74, l. 427.

fille" (1) to make him feel part of the general festivity, and he is perfectly content with Anselme's promise that a suitable female can be supplied. He further differs from Sganarelle in the degree of his education. Sganarelle is able to camouflage his lack of learning by his quick wit, whereas Mascarille is actually better-informed than his master,-as is proved by his swift correction of Lélie's foolish error as to the locality of Turin when servant and master are fabricating the history of Trufaldin's long-lost son. (2)

The impression of Mascarille with which we are left at the end of L'Etourdi is that of a brisk, intelligent, practical, vainglorious individual free from the pettiness of desire for gain. However, he remains a caricature rather than a fully developed portrait by reason of his close resemblance to the stereotyped figure of the Resourceful Servant. As for his place in society, his manifestly superior intelligence wins him the grudging respect of Lélie, who tolerates his impertinence because he needs his help. Being articulate and lively, he is at ease in conversation with those who are his betters socially. With Anselme and Pandolfe, for example, he is respectful without being servile, and his insight into their values and aspirations gives him a slight advantage over them. With Hippolyte he is familiar, and even insolent; Lélie and Léandre he treats as equals. Although the rather pompous Lélie refers scathingly to

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(1) Act V, sc. xi, ibid., pg. 148, l. 2063.
(2) Act IV, sc. ii, ibid., ll. 1407-1414.

Mascarille's subservience when his help is less indispensible ("Quand il m'est inutile il fait le chien couchant")(1), it is the valet's conduct in the drama before us which forms the basis for our judgement, not his conduct in other circumstances. On the whole, the final picture of Mascarille which emerges from the play is that of a person respected and accorded a certain rough affection by those with whom he has dealings.

The debt to servant-figures in the comedy of classical antiquity is less pronounced in Les Précieuses ridicules, despite the recurrence of the name of Mascarille in this work, contemporary with Le Médecin volant and L'Etourdi (1659). The basic concept of the plot is the same as in the two comedies previously discussed: being crossed in love, the young master inveigles the servant into exercising his wits to remedy the situation. The novelty of Les Précieuses consists partly in the plurality of suitors, valets, and courted girls, and, - more important, - in the issue of feminine pursuits and occupations raised by the dramatist.

The names of the two valets, Mascarille and Jodelet, imply characters belonging to broad farce, and stereotyped as well, since both are associated with the mask: the well-known actor, Jodelet, who joined Molière's troupe at Easter in 1659, played with daubed face, and the origin of Mascarille's

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(1) Act IV, sc. i, ibid., l. 1378.

name has already been mentioned in the present chapter.(1) Despite this, the servants are differentiated by their characteristics, for Mascarille is the more boisterous and imaginative of the two, while Jodelet merely follows the lead given by his fellow-valet, albeit with subtlety and cunning. Jodelet is the quieter, passive individual whose talents are imitative rather than inventive; he is a useful accomplice, and he acts as a foil for the brilliance of Mascarille. As is to be expected, it is the "Marquis de Mascarille" who graces the parlour of Magdelon and Cathos first, - the "Vicomte de Jodelet" appears much later, when the visit is almost at an end. Before the fictitious nobleman is introduced to the "précieuses", we see him in an undignified skirmish with the humourless persons who have carried his sedan-chair. His costume, if we are to believe the account of Mlle. Desjardins, (2) is of the most extravagant, - a parody of high fashion as worn by the élite in Molière's day. His speech is consonant with the burlesque persona adopted by him to serve his master's purpose: first his loud remonstrances with the chair-bearers, then his mincing references to the effects of weather upon clothes, suggest the actor overplaying his part, the servant delighting in the new licence given him by fine raiment and a position of unaccustomed prestige. However unconvincing his performance might be to the critical eye of the uninvolved onlooker, it should be noted that Mascarille dupes

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(1) See pg. 509

(2) In the "Récit de la farce des Précieuses", - see Couton, op. cit. pg. 1218.

the "porteurs" completely, and, moreover, that his reluctance to pay them for their services is not necessarily a symptom of humble social origin. Even the wealthy and privileged in the mid-seventeenth century were not above attempting to evade petty payments of this nature. (For example, the modest fee for attending performances in the theatre was frequently neglected by the young noblemen who went to while away an hour or two in the pit, according to contemporary sources.) On the whole, Mascarille manages to extricate himself quite gracefully from the difficult situation in which his arrogance (the "soufflet") and his parsimony have placed him, and he even has a little time in which to put his appearance in order before the entry of Magdelon and Cathos.

In the encounter with the girls, the "marquis" has ample opportunity for displaying to the full his capacity for mimicry, which is considerable. At first sight, one might be forgiven for being impressed by the culture and command of precious language evinced by Mascarille. His elaborate compliments to Magdelon and Cathos, his passable attempt at an "impromptu", his knowledgeable pronouncements on literary genres, and his syntactically complicated way of expressing himself, all contribute to the impression of one accustomed to the noble style of life since infancy. Yet on closer examination, it may be seen that this veneer of aristocratic upbringing is reducible to nothing more than a comic technique, just as the impressive quotations from Hippocrates uttered

by Sganarelle in the farce, Le Médecin volant, are burlesque and meaningless. Everything Mascarille does and says is carried just a little too far to be in accordance with elegant practice. Good breeding demands that the seventeenth-century gallant should comb his hair (or wig) before sitting down to conversation with ladies. Mascarille complies with this custom, but spoils the effect by extending his ministrations to his whole toilette while the "précieuses" wait. (1) Avid though they might be for flattery, even Magdelon and Cathos feel that the compliments of Mascarille are excessive:

> "Votre complaisance pousse un peu trop avant la libéralité de ses louanges..." (2)

The recital of his achievements in the field of literature, too, is rather too grand to be altogether credible. For a single person to pen "deux cents chansons, autant de sonnets, quatre cents épigrammes et plus de mille madrigaux, sans compter les énigmes et les portraits", (3) more energy and more years than Mascarille can boast would be necessary if the output claimed were to have any sort of merit. Quite apart from this consistent tendency to exaggerate, Mascarille also betrays the fictitious nature of his identity by his naïve pleasure in his fashionable clothes. While those of noble birth are not immune to personal vanity, it is hardly in accordance with their station to make an inventory of their attire, complete with prices, in polite society.

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(1) Sc. ix, op. cit. I, pg. 274.
(2) Ibid., pg. 273.
(3) Ibid., pg. 275.

Someone who has worn stylish garments all his life does not, in any case, lose his head over the perfume on his gloves, the number of yards in his "canons", and the quantities of feathers adorning his hat. The "précieuses", however, prove as uncritical as the chair-bearers before the noisy, confident performance of Mascarille.

Jodelet's addition to the company has the effect of reinforcing his fellow-servant's already considerable self-assurance. Far from stealing Mascarille's thunder, as it were, Jodelet is an extra admiring on-looker, and echoes every remark or question uttered by his friend. He readily lends himself to the fiction of an illustrious military past invented by Mascarille, and the references to "le service" by both valets have a highly diverting double meaning, for "service" means both military career and domestic service. The farce-element latent in the whole situation reaches its climax in the display of honourable wounds in increasingly unmentionable places as each "nobleman" tries to outdo the other before the admiring female audience; and at this point, perhaps, the true origin of Mascarille and Jodelet is at its most noticeable. Their antics smack of the kitchen rather than the parlour; and it is only Mascarille's suggestions for divertissement which save the situation from deteriorating further. The two interruptions from the outraged masters, and the ignominious shattering of the illusion created by Mascarille and sustained by himself and Jodelet, fail to discountenance the enterprising servant.

The seriousness of his correction, shared by Jodelet, is not great, admittedly, since it appears both are used to physical violence as a manifestation of displeasure from their respective employers. The blows of Du Croisy and La Grange do not impair the ready wit of Mascarille, either, nor the swiftness of Jodelet to imitate his friend's tactics. Proof of this is the retort directed at the musicians, first by Mascarille, then by Jodelet, when the matter of payment arises. Finally, - such is the intoxication of Mascarille with his temporary status as a marquis, - Magdelon's vituperative dismissal of the erstwhile "nobles" meets with a dignified, wholly inappropriate speech from the valet on the injustice of his treatment, -

> "Traiter comme cela un marquis! Voilà ce que c'est que du monde!" (1),

and this is followed by injured remarks on the fickleness of people. It may be claimed that the line quoted is not to be taken seriously, and that Mascarille is speaking ironically. Yet his previous conduct, and the enthusiasm with which he has embraced his new station in life, would justify the opposite view, namely, that he really believes himself a marquis and that, in his mind at any rate, the illusion continues. (Rather like Monsieur Jourdain at the end of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme.) Still, as is to be expected in a servant, there is the element of realism which coexists with the element of imagination, and it is the former that makes Mascarille invite Jodelet to accompany him on a quest for better fortune. The ex-marquis's part-

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(1) Sc. xvi, ibid., pg. 286.

ing shot is a comment on reality and illusion, fraught with dramatic irony in view of his own position:

"...je vois bien qu'on n'aime ici que la vaine apparence, et qu'on n'y considère point la vertu toute nue."(1)

The last glimpse we have of the two valets, stripped of the aristocratic finery which so impressed Magdelon and Cathos, is their departure from the scene of their humiliation, their injured dignity preserved somewhat by the conviction that their circumstances are shortly to be improved. Optimism springs eternal in the breast of the resourceful manservant, and Mascarille lives up to tradition in this regard. He displays similar traits to those of Sganarelle and his namesake in L'Etourdi, inasmuch as he is never daunted by setbacks; he is self-assured to the point of smugness; and he lives by his wits from moment to moment. His dignity, like that of his predecessors, has a burlesque quality derived partly from the fact that it is seen in the context of farce, and partly from its incongruity with his social status. Jodelet exhibits the same characteristics, but in him they are qualified by his less lively personality.

After 1659, the year in which Les Précieuses ridicules had its première, no more enterprising manservants divert Molière's public in new plays until 1667, when the "Troupe du Roy" performed Le Sicilien ou l'Amour peintre before the King at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. The exotic character of this one-act comedy, and the presence of slaves, contribute to the impression of a work inspired by the Menander/Plautus/

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(1) Sc. xvi, ibid., pg. 286.

Terence type of comedy. The situation in which the protagonists are placed, too, is the stock-in-trade of classical comedy: a young and desirable female held captive; two rivals-in-love, one of whom has an intriguing, intelligent valet to further his cause; and willing assistants of the parties to be united. The servant of Adraste, Hali, is as full of initiative as the valets already considered hitherto, but his master is less dependent on him than Valère is on Sganarelle, or Lélie on Mascarille, since some of the ruses employed to worst Dom Pèdre are devised by Adraste himself. However, Hali can take a good measure of credit for the ultimate success of his employer in removing Isodore from Dom Pèdre's household. His first appearance on the stage is accompanied by a monologue in which he bemoans his lot as a slave, for such he is, even though he is described in the dramatis personae as "valet d'Adraste". His comments on this occasion deserve some attention, since they are revealing as to his condition and status:

> "Sotte condition que celle d'un esclave! de ne vivre jamais pour soi, et d'être toujours tout entier aux passions d'un maître! de n'être réglé que par ses humeurs, et de se voir réduit à faire ses propres affaires de tous les soucis qu'il peut prendre!" (1)

The main complaint of Hali would appear to be that his financial and social dependence on his master leave him no personal liberty. It is, moreover, galling to one of his temperament and intelligence to obey orders dictated by

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(1) Sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 325.

emotions and caprices rather than by reason and logic. This opening speech prefacing the action, therefore, has the function not only of acquainting the audience with the facts of the situation, but also of demonstrating an important feature of Hali's character, namely his critical awareness of his position in relation to his superiors. Unlike the Mascarille of L'Etourdi, he indulges in intrigue because he has been instructed to do so, not because his own inclinations can find gratification in scheming for its own sake. His tone when speaking to Adraste confirms the impression gained in the first scene, of certain reservations on the part of the servant where the master's intelligence and worth are concerned. In reply to Adraste's question, "Est-ce toi, Hali?", Hali asks with some belligerence,

"Et qui pourrait-ce être que moi?" (1)

- which is hardly the sort of response one would expect from a slave in awe of his owner. As is the case with the majority of resourceful manservants, Hali has some talent for finding satisfactory solutions to difficulties, as his handling of the problem of the "bécarre" as opposed to the "bémol" shows. Of necessity, there is something of the diplomat latent in all those in servile positions, - due, no doubt, to the need for satisfying as many people as possible simultaneously. After the ineffectual effort (suggested by Adraste) at enticing Isodore to a window with a serenade outside Dom Pèdre's house, Hali shows a little more interest in the proceedings, and is even moved to

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(1) Sc. ii, ibid., pg. 326.

utter a little speech of Mascarille-like confidence in his powers of machination. His "Laissez-moi faire seulement" (1) is reminiscent of Lélie's valet when challenged by the adverse issue of scheme after scheme. In other words, the psychology of the frustrated virtuoso is operative in Hali, and when he finally concentrates all his energy upon the task of affording Adraste ingress to Dom Pèdre's house, he does so more from pique than from a spontaneous desire to organize a stratagem promising fulfilment of his master's wishes. His ruse has qualified success inasmuch as he does manage to convey to Isodore the feelings Adraste entertains for her; but Dom Pèdre's penetration of Hali's disguise as a Turkish musician results in the impostor's ejection, amid a torrent of abuse. Certainly Hali is not ignorant of music. He knows enough of the art to bluff his way through the slaves' performance before Dom Pèdre and Isodore, just as Sganarelle in Le Médecin volant knows enough of medical jargon to deceive Gorgibus. It is not, in fact, any inadequacies in Hali's music-making which arouse Dom Pèdre's suspicion, but the meaning of the lyrics sung by the "musician".

The familiar technique of comic reversal of situation may be discerned in Hali's "volte-face": from complaining of the activities in which Adraste's passion for Isodore involve him, (2) he adopts the opposite attitude when it seems his master can manage quite well without any help from him. On learning of the plan whereby Adraste will

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(1) Sc. v, ibid., pg. 330.
(2) In the opening monologue, sc. i.

masquerade as the portrait-painter, Damon, Hali asserts with some obstinacy:

> "Il ne sera pas dit que je ne serve de rien dans cette affaire-là" (1),

and he at once devises a secondary plan to provide more privacy for the lovers. It is true that his performance as the outraged Dom Gilles d'Avalos proves a useful distraction of Dom Pèdre's attention from conversation between Adraste and Isodore, and the pretext invented for thus accosting the jealous nobleman is a convincing one. Nonetheless, it would seem that Hali participates in the intrigue out of cussedness, and this fact, together with his withdrawal from the action before the happy dénouement of the play, makes him a less sympathetic character than the average valet in Molière's comedies. He is signalized by contrariness, and although his versatility is sufficiently great to enable him to carry off such widely differing rôles as Turkish musician and Spanish nobleman, he is not as successful an intriguer (despite his convictions to the contrary) as the Mascarilles and Sganarelle already considered. This is mainly because he is not as indispensable as they in the execution of his master's plans; but as far as innate ability is concerned, it would seem that he is not less inventive than they are.

A far more compelling individual is Léandre's valet, Scapin, in Les Fourberies de Scapin, - the last comedy featuring

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(1) Sc. ix, ibid., pg. 336.

this type of protagonist in Molière's work. The play in question owes much to Terence's Phormio, and, inevitably, Molière's Scapin has something in common with Terence's Geta. However, the servant created by the seventeenth-century dramatist is more than a mere "fantoche" of Roman comedy in a modified form. We see from the dramatis personae that Scapin is not just another manservant; he is qualified by the word "fourbe", with its connotations of mental agility, energy, and inspired exploitation of circumstances towards a given end. He has the intelligence of Geta, and the vivacity of the Italian stock character of farce, Scappino, from whom he derives his name. A man of some experience, he appears older than his love-smitten master. (The valets previously discussed have been more or less contemporaries of their employers.) This may be deduced from his affirmation of sympathy with the cause of "jeunes gens" (1), and from his dark references to "un petit démêlé" with Justice in his younger days. (2) Besides, his gentle cynicism throughout Octave's highly sentimental recital of his encounter with Hyacinte suggests the outlook of one past the ardours of first love. Like many of his profession and talents, Scapin has an excellent opinion of himself where his ability to surmount the vicissitudes of fate is concerned:

"A vous dire la vérité, il y a peu de choses qui me

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, op. cit. II, pg. 899.
(2) Ibid.

soient impossibles, quand je m'en veux mêler". (1) This immodest statement is soon proved justified by Scapin's management of his master's love-life, as well as that of Octave. Cowardice is the last charge that could be laid at his door, for he not only tries subtle means to achieve his goal; when violent reactions from irate fathers or outraged lovers are to be dealt with, Scapin is never wanting in courage to face the person in question. He coaxes Octave's furious parent into a reasonable mood on that gentleman's return from abroad; he faces the wrath of Léandre without attempting to escape when his master demands satisfaction for the betrayal to his father; and he handles with skill the indignation of Géronte when that parsimonious merchant is parted from his five hundred écus. In addition to a ready wit that can manage any situation and any person, however difficult, Scapin has a sense of boisterous fun, which manifests itself in practical jokes. The method he employs to extract money from Argante is already a clear indication of this; for Scapin is completely master of the delightful situation in which the trembling old man hides behind the servant who gravely assures Silvestre that

> "...ce père d'Octave a du coeur, et peut-être ne vous craindra-t-il point." (2)

Only a practical joker could stage such a glaring contradiction between reality and conjecture. Later, when the young men are to be suitably provided with their respective

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, op. cit. II, pg. 899.
(2) Act II, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 922.

sums of money, Scapin gets his own back on Léandre for earlier intimidation by pretending that he has not been successful in obtaining the amount required from Géronte, although Octave's father proved forthcoming with the two hundred pistoles; and even when the five hundred écus are enticingly dangled before Léandre's nose, Scapin refuses to hand them over until permission has been given for Géronte's punishment at the valet's hands. This prepares us for the buffoonery of the final act, in which Scapin's inventiveness is given full rein. All the mobility of farce is there: the ludicrous situation of the master in a sack on the servant's shoulders; the duplication of identity as Scapin, like the "médecin volant", acts his own part and that of another, fictitious individual; the dramatic irony of the blows administered to Géronte with all the vigour occasioned by memories of drubbings received by Scapin from his master in the past; and finally, as the "fourbe" overreaches himself by pretending to be several persons at once, there is the abrupt collapse of the whole fantasy. Géronte is belatedly enlightened, and Scapin wisely takes to his heels, - more through expediency than through fear, as his reply to Silvestre's warning shows:

> "Les menaces ne m'ont jamais fait mal; et ce sont des nuées qui passent bien loin sur nos têtes". (1)

The event proves him right, and his confident assurance to his friend that "je trouverai moyen d'apaiser leur courroux" is justified by the old men's reaction when the author of

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(1) Act III, sc. viii, ibid., pg. 942.

their ills is carried on "in extremis" in the last scene, to make his peace with them. Right to the end, Scapin is in control of the action, and before the joyful progress to the banquet which usually concludes the drama of a "recognition" scene, he makes a sudden recovery, to be borne off in triumph.

Exciting and admirable though he is, Scapin is not the sole representative of the resourceful valet in Les Fourberies de Scapin. Of course he captivates the audience by his vitality and imagination, and he is never far from the centre of the stage. Beside him the other characters are a trifle pallid, their presence justified by the necessity of foils for Scapin's cunning. However, the other man-servant in the play, - Octave's Silvestre, - is a worthy disciple of Scapin's teaching. We first see Silvestre admonishing his young master for undisciplined conduct in his father's absence, not so much because he is an advocate of good behaviour, as because he is aware that Argante's wrath will be visited on his own shoulders when the old man finds matters amiss on his return. The philosophy common to all the domestics considered in this chapter is shared by Silvestre as well, - that one must look after one's own interests, since no one else is likely to. Octave's servant, like Scapin, is far from respectful when addressing his master; partly because of the latter's youth as compared with his experience, and partly because of the servant's awareness of the master's dependence on him for advice. From the several eulogies of Scapin's

brilliance uttered by Silvestre, it is obvious that Octave's valet admires his friend greatly, as a man of average talent admires a man of genius. However, in the scene of Argante's discomfiture, Silvestre is not far inferior to Scapin, and his impersonation of a "spadassin" is fully convincing.(1) He is cast in the same mould as Scapin, just as Jodelet, in Les Précieuses ridicules, resembles Mascarille without outshining him.

To sum up, what may be said of the valet-and-rogue cleverer than his master? There is a tendency, understandable enough, to give the "fourbe" type of servant the dominant part in the action, since his intelligence is the organizing force which guides the action. The superiority of the servant is interesting as a paradox of seventeenth-century classical literature, conscious as it is of hierarchy and order. But it should be remembered that in comedy, and indeed in any work of the imagination, there are elements of exaggeration and fantasy. The occasional reversal of the usual order of things as observed in everyday life is one of the liberties which an author may permit himself, without incurring the anger or criticism of his public. It should also be borne in mind that not all the manservants depicted in Molière's comedies are as witty as Scapin, as lively as Sganarelle, or as level-headed as Mascarille.(2) Amphitryon's Sosie is something of an oaf, just as Dom Juan's Sganarelle is foolish, cowardly, and inarticulate. Gorgibus's Gros-René,

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(1) In Act II, sc. vi.

(2) For more on this subject, see J. Emelina's Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre de Molière, Pub.des Annales de la Faculté des Lettres, Aix-en-Provence, 1958.

for all his perspicacity in Le Médecin volant, is a ponderous and unpleasant individual. Molière by no means portrays the valet as a consistently admirable, intelligent character; and if, in a few of his many works, we encounter a servant superior in wit to his master, this should not be taken as evidence that the dramatist is attacking the social hierarchy of his time.

Chapter Two.

The Outspoken Maid.

It is conceivable that a comic dramatist of Molière's genius should not confine himself to one particular type of character in the depiction of a generic persona like the domestic servant, and especially when the persona in question is one inherited from the tradition of Graeco-Roman comedy. A comic device more subtle, and more original, than that of the sly intriguer or the jovial half-wit, is that of the servant (usually female) whose native common sense has been exaggerated to the same degree as the aberration of the master. Thus, while the insolence of Orgon's Dorine and the whimsical disrespect of Argan's Toinette are not necessarily distortions of reality, they may be regarded as the dramatist's means to an end; and for the seventeenth-century entertainer, this end is the amusement of the audience. The element of caricature should not be discounted in plays featuring the judicious impertinence of maidservants, just as the fact of the playwright's debt to every-day life as he knew it should also be taken into account. From this fusion of imagination and reality comes a picture of the "servante" and her place in the middle-class household, and to this we shall now give some attention.

Chronologically, the first candid and undiplomatic young

woman to appear in Molière's work is Lisette, the companion of Léonor in L'Ecole des maris. Her participation in the action itself is slight; her function in the play is rather that of an additional commentator of Sganarelle's folly, and her lowly station makes her blunt remarks all the more amusing. She only appears twice: in the second scene of Act One she criticizes Sganarelle's treatment of Isabelle with the impunity of one not employed by the person under attack, and in the final scene she has the last word on enlightenment of unreasonable husbands. To Léonor she is familiar, treating the girl with rough affection as an equal. There is no hint of servility, or indeed of respect, in her tone when in conversation with her mistress and Isabelle. Her reaction to a remark from the latter, that her ability to take a walk is little short of a miracle in view of the nature of her guardian, is characteristically vigorous:

"Ma foi, je l'envoirais au diable avec sa fraise..."(1) and not even the sudden appearance of the owner of the "fraise" intimidates her into silence or civility. Immediately following Léonor's restrained criticism of Sganarelle's behaviour towards Isabelle, Lisette boldly takes up the thread of the argument in a hard-hitting speech which spares Sganarelle nothing.

This outburst represents the longest speech uttered by Lisette in the play, and the best assessment of it comes from Ariste, who counters Sganarelle's outraged reaction

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, op. cit. I, pg. 420, ll.83-84.

by pointing out that

"Mon frère, son discours ne doit que faire rire.
Elle a quelque raison en ce qu'elle veut dire..." (1)

With his usual soundness of judgement, Léonor's guardian has discerned the two main features of Lisette's attempt to express her views: she is both amusing and thought-provoking. Being unschooled in rhetoric, she tends to mix her metaphors somewhat, and her allusion to the Turkish custom of enslaving women, while its relevance to Sganarelle is perfectly clear, is muddled in its expression. On the other hand, her conception of female honour in particular, and of human psychology in general, is sound and clearly stated, so that Ariste's mention of "quelque raison" is seen to be justified. Lisette has a shrewd, if rudimentary, knowledge of her fellow-beings, and her observation, that the surest way to entice the potential offender to offend is by prohibition, is not without subtlety. The hyperbole of her language is natural in a female of strong opinions, and it is not unconvincing, even as it lends a burlesque quality to her tirade. We sympathize with her because she expresses views coinciding with those of the "reasonable" protagonists of the play, like Ariste and Léonor, but one tends to laugh <u>at</u> Lisette rather than with her, for she takes herself very seriously. Besides, she shares with most low-life characters in comedy a slight air of eccentricity, which does not accord with the basic sanity of her judgement. Although Ariste's dignity and wisdom contrast aesthetically with Sganarelle's

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(1) Ibid., pg. 424, ll. 163-164.

absurdity, it is interesting to note that Lisette and Sganarelle are in some respects more suitable opponents on the issue of cuckoldry and its avoidance, for they have similar traits. Both adhere to their convictions with dogmatic obstinacy; both are quaint in their expression; and both are incapable of self-mastery when arguing. Their verbal conflict represents diametrically opposed opinions on a given subject, whereas Sganarelle's contradiction of Ariste's assertions is less completely counterbalanced; his adversary is too courteous to use his weapons of abuse and sarcasm. The only occasion upon which Molière permits Sganarelle and Lisette to indulge in an exchange of vituperation is towards the end of the lengthy confrontation between the brothers and their wards. This is no doubt because the liveliness of the debate would soon degenerate into physical battle and distract the audience from the actual issue under discussion. Despite the brief nature of the encounter direct between maidservant and bourgeois, however, there are one or two deductions to be made therefrom. As with her own mistress, Lisette is seen to stand in no awe of Sganarelle, notwithstanding the distance separating them socially. There is even some brutality in her statement that Sganarelle's behaviour invites cuckoldry as its just reward, -

"...c'est pain bénit, certes, à des gens comme vous." (1)

As for Sganarelle's reaction to this piece of impudence,

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(1) Ibid., pg. 427, ll. 245-246.

it is characteristically undignified and abusive. (He calls her "langue maudite et des plus mal apprises.") Although Ariste endorses the substance of what Lisette says, and can understand the cause for such unwelcome candour from a mere servant, he dismisses her remark as "sottise", not only to placate his brother, but also because Lisette has spoken out of turn.

The girl does not reappear until the final scenes of the action, and her contribution to the dialogue is slight. She merely re-iterates her view expressed earlier, that Sganarelle has received his deserts ("ce prix de ses soins est un trait exemplaire") (1). Apart from these utterances, which are in character, it is Lisette who rounds off the dénouement with a couplet addressed to the audience:

> "Vous , si vous connaissez des maris loups-garous,
> Envoyez-les au moins à l'école chez nous." (2)

That injunction has the confidence, the self-assurance, that we have already noticed as a feature of speeches from man-servants urging reliance on their talents for remedying undesirable situations. This, coupled with the repetition of "vous", implies again the bossiness tinged with patronizing friendliness which characterizes Lisette. She is not a major protagonist of <u>L'Ecole des maris</u>, nor does she stand out by reason of her personality. She is only of interest inasmuch as she represents an early, embryonic version of

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(1) Act III, sc. ix, l. 1096.
(2) Ibid., ll. 1113-1114.

the Dorines and Toinettes to come later in the great comedies.

Few maids in Molière's work exhibit such temerity in addressing their employers as Orgon's servant; and in the opening scene of Tartuffe, Dorine's independence of attitude is emphasized all the more by the contrast between herself and Flipote, Madame Pernelle's personal maid. The latter says not a word throughout the argument over Tartuffe's merits and demerits, and meekly endures the gratuitous insults (like "gaupe") which her unreasonable mistress visits upon her, together with a slap on the cheek for inattention.(1) Dorine, on the other hand, says more than any of her social superiors to disprove the sweeping generalizations of Orgon's mother concerning the moral deficiencies of her son's household. Wrong-minded though most of Madame Pernelle's judgements may be, there is a measure of easily verifiable truth in her assertion that Dorine is

"........ une fille suivante

Un peu trop forte en gueule, et fort impertinente".(2)

A "suivante" is a lady's companion rather than a maidservant, and it is typical of Dorine's impudence that she should style herself a "suivante" when in fact she is a general domestic in Orgon's household. The reminder from Madame Pernelle of Dorine's station is intended to silence the girl, but it is impossible to do so for long, and the confrontation between the old lady and the rest of Orgon's relatives rapidly turns

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit. I, pg. 901, ll.168-171.

(2) Ibid., ll. 13-14.

into an argument between Dorine and Madame Pernelle. One of the first things to be noticed in the servant's speech is the fact that she is articulate and intelligent. Her comments on the less admirable "ménages" in the neighbourhood reflect keen observation and penetrating judgement, and are interspersed with generalizations based on common sense. These are not original, but they echo experience and bear repetition, - for example, Dorine states that

"Ceux de qui la conduite offre le plus à rire
Sont toujours sur autrui les premiers à médire". (1)

This is one of the oldest commonplaces of the moralist, but it has extra piquancy by virtue of its relevance to Madame Pernelle herself, and extra importance by virtue of its bearing upon the whole issue raised in Tartuffe, of moral judgement based on superficial evidence and appearances. Quite apart from the content of Dorine's speech, which is intellectually stimulating, the vocabulary used and the simplicity of the syntax make for a direct, readily comprehensible mode of expression consonant with the ideas of a person of Dorine's outlook. Her participation in the dialogue of the first scene of the play is a fair sample of her verbalizing in the rest of the work, and her conduct, too, is consistently energetic, - notably in the reconciliation scene between Mariane and Valère. If it were not for firm intervention and even physical force from Dorine, the sulky lovers would go their separate ways to loneliness and heartache. Throughout her dealings with Mariane, the servant maintains some-

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(1) Ibid., ll. 105-106.

thing of a tongue-in-cheek attitude; she knws her young mistress thoroughly and can predict her every mood and reaction, and this gives her sufficient confidence to tease Valère's beloved. In the wisdom of her experience, however, Dorineknows when to stop tormenting the young girl, and Mariane's obscure threats of self-destruction if left unaided elicit affectionate reassurances from the maid:

> "Ne vous tourmentez point. On peut adroitement
> Empêcher..." (1)

Dorine behaves in this matter in much the same way as the resourceful valets discussed in the preceding chapter of the present thesis. Her conduct, like their's, is predictable; it follows a clearly defined pattern. First comes willingness to assist thwarted love, then this is succeeded by a feigned disinclination to oblige when the recipient of help has displeased the helper. Finally there is redoubled eagerness to take up the cudgels on behalf of the lovers, either through pity or through an irresistible desire for intrigue. This contrariness is all part of the servant's sense of fun, which is robust and tinged with malice. It serves to emphasize the dependence of master upon servant, of upper-dog on under-dog, and this is a paradox which offers matter for mirth.

Another feature of Dorine's behaviour which is reminiscent of Mascarille and Scapin is her cheeky self-confidence, justified in the event. For example, she is more in control

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(1) Act II, sc. iii, ll. 683-684.

of the exchange between Mariane and Valère than either of those young people, and one has the feeling that she allows them to continue their absurd quarrel until her common sense cannot stand the situation any longer. At that point her sensible, kindly interference forcibly reconciles them, and she sums up the matter with a typically down-to-earth remark:

"A vous dire le vrai, les amants sont bien fous! " (1)

Shortly afterwards she has to take remedial action of the opposite sort to separate the lovers before they are discovered together, and as with the reconciliation, much running backwards and forwards, and pushing and pulling is necessary to achieve the end desired. This mobility is perhaps the aspect of Dorine's rôle which most recalls the element of farce inherent in various forms of comedy throughout the ages. Like the "médecin volant", Orgon's maid is seldom still, - or silent, - for long. Although she does not go so far as to "double" her identity or become involved in impersonations, she has to resort to great physical agility on several occasions, - like the reconciliation just mentioned, or the avoidance of violence from Orgon in the confrontation between himself and his daughter. The slapstick variety of comedy in this scene counters the tension generated by the battle of wills as Orgon makes it plain that he requires Tartuffe as a son-in-law, and Mariane's tacit resistance to this project is voiced by Dorine. The father's undignified efforts to impose silence on his servant, and the

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(1) Act II, sc. iv, l. 787.

servant's skilful evasion of punishment, leave no doubt as to who is master of the situation. Buffoonery apart, the scene in question contains much that invites our admiration of Dorine's courage and intelligent generalizations on the criteria for choosing a husband. Her views on cuckoldry co-incide with those of Léonor's Lisette, in that she considers that the fidelity of a woman is dependent on the qualities of the spouse to whom she is committed. As an argument intended to make Orgon think twice before promising his daughter to a man unlikely to retain her loyalty, this observation shows some ingenuity on the part of Dorine. At the same time, it has a wider relevance which makes it worthy of consideration as the comment of a moralist.

Curiously enough, for all her criticism of Orgon's folly, Dorine is genuinely fond of her eccentric and misguided master. She tries to correct his mistakes to save his good name rather than to assert the superiority of her judgement; and however amusing her loud protestations of loyalty and affection may be, they have about them the ring of truth:

> "Et je veux vous aimer, Monsieur, malgré vous-même".(1)
>
> "Votre honneur m'est cher, et je ne puis souffrir
> Qu'aux brocards d'un chacun vous alliez vous offrir".(2)

This devotion extends to other members of the family as well. We have already seen the maidservant's unselfish efforts to ensure the happiness of her young mistress and Valère, and when Damis wilfully insists on eavesdropping on the interview

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(1) Act II, sc. ii, l. 546.
(2) Ibid., ll. 547-548.

between Tartuffe and Eilmire, Dorine does her best to dissuade him, for she knows it is not in his interests to do so. It is true that she is interfering, and frequently presumptious; but she may be pardoned because her actions are always on behalf of others, and she has little or nothing to gain from behaving as she does. At times in the play, the comic element accompanying Dorine's presence on the stage is suppressed, and there is little to indicate that it is a servant who is speaking: the appeal to Cléante to use his influence with Orgon in the matter of Mariane's marriage, for example, is couched in terms of dignity and compassion, and taken out of context, it could be attributed just as well to Elmire as to Dorine. (1) The natural ebullience of Dorine's personality, however, is not long dormant, and her spirited reminders to Orgon of his earlier, ill-founded admiration of Tartuffe at the very moment that her master is endeavouring to convince Madame Pernelle of Tartuffe's villainy, provide some light relief from the gloom of Orgon's circumstances. Apart from this entertaining aspect of the servant's remarks on such an occasion, there is the additional element of their justice; she provides not only laughter, but also a lucid commentary on the fickleness and inadequacy of the main protagonist's judgement. In this respect she resembles Lisette in L'Ecole des maris, whose pronouncements make us laugh, but at the same time contain "quelque raison".(2)

Finally, the "raison" of Dorine's comments and assertions

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(1) Act IV, sc. ii, ll. 1269-1275.

(2) C.f. Ariste's comment.

deserves some attention. Apart from the obvious merits of her moral generalizations (which are of the sort uttered by Cléante), Dorine's perception of human nature is more shrewd than that of any other protagonist in Tartuffe. It is she, for example, who realizes the true feelings of the Hypocrite for Elmire before any visible symptoms of his passion are discernible. She suspects jealousy to be the real cause of his aversion to visits paid to Orgon's wife by gallant gentlemen:

"Veut-on que là-dessus je m'explique entre nous?
Je crois que de Madame il est, ma foi, jaloux." (1)

Moreover, she rightly assumes that an appeal to Tartuffe from Elmire will achieve more for Mariane and Valère than threats or cajolery from anyone else:

"Sur l'esprit de Tartuffe elle a quelque crédit;
Il se rend complaisant à tout ce qu'elle dit..."(2)

She has the womanly intuition which Cléante, for all his sagacity, lacks, and this gives her, servant though she is, an advantage over Elmire's brother.

The impression created by Dorine's characterization is that there is on the whole more to praise than to censure in her. Outspoken, warm-hearted, loyal, perceptive and energetic, she bustles and scolds her way through the play, organizing and advising whether her assistance is welcome or not. At times we overlook the fact that she is a mere domestic, partly because she can hold her own with any of her social

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(1) Act I, sc. i, ll. 83-84.
(2) Act III, sc. i, ll. 835-836.

betters, and partly because, despite frequent rebukes from her master, she is respected and tolerated in his household.

Another Lisette who displays similar characteristics to those of both Dorine and her namesake in L'Ecole des maris, is Lucinde's maid in L'Amour médecin. She first appears coaxing Lucinde to reveal the cause of her melancholy after the girl's father, Sganarelle, has failed to elicit any information from her. The gentleness requisite for success in this undertaking softens the governessy, authoritarian air she adopts with her superiors, and the tone she uses to Lucinde is very different from the one in which she recommends her methods to Sganarelle. ("Laissez-moi faire, vous dis-je.") (1) Clearly she has scant respect for the father, and not much more for the daughter, as her impudent mimicry of Lucinde's negative responses shows. Like Dorine, she has the initiative to assess and organize a given situation, for her own enjoyment and the sake of her young, love-lorn mistress. She turns the tables neatly on Sganarelle by pretending deafness to his questions about her voluble consternation, - which is a just reward for his earlier reluctance to acknowledge her attempt to tell him the cause of Lucinde's "decline". (2) This early indication of her talents is later confirmed by the plan she devises to unite Clitandre and her mistress, and her motives in thus aiding the lovers are explicitly stated by her. In the first place, she dislikes Sganarelle, and would

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(1) Act I, sc. i, ll. 83-84.

(2) In Act I, scs. iii and v, op. cit.II, pp.101 and 103.

derive great pleasure from doing him an ill turn ("voilà un vilain homme; et je vous avoue que j'aurais un plaisir extrême à lui jouer quelque tour.") (1) In addition to this, she can never resist the temptation to further the cause of Young Love, as she frankly tells Clitandre (2). The degree of self-interest in her actions renders her less lovable than Dorine, but her loyalties are in the right quarter, in view of the unattractive qualities of Sganarelle and the inevitable sympathy roused by unhappy lovers.

Like most of her fellow-servants, male and female, Lisette has a high opinion of her capabilities. Not only does she have great confidence in her powers of machination, -

> "...si cette aventure nous manque, nous trouverons mille autres voies pour arriver à notre but" (3);

she also believes that she is an excellent judge of people ("je me connais en gens") (4). We only forgive this arrogance because it is based on fact. Her intelligence enables her to worst Sganarelle at every turn: even when imparting to him the tidings of Lucinde's "illness", the maid enjoys a joke at his expense. After her elaborate and sinister description of Lucinde's soliloquy in her room at "la fenêtre qui regarde sur la rivière", Sganarelle naturally assumes the worst, and it is a hilarious anti-climax when Lisette gravely informs him that

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 102.
(2) Act III, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 114.
(3) Ibid.,
(4) Ibid.

> "elle a fermé tout doucement la fenêtre, et s'est allée mettre sur son lit." (1)

Her pithy remarks on medicine are not unlike those of Dorine on hypocrisy. She has no illusions whatever about the charlatanism of doctors as she has known them, and some of the most memorable lines in the play are those uttered by her on the subject of medical practice. Some of these, like the witticism about dying of four doctors and two apothecaries, have reverberations of classical antiquity (the original version is to be found in Pliny); others, like the prediction that "vous allez être bien édifié: ils vous diront en latin que votre fille est malade," (2) merely bear witness to Lisette's practical common sense. The most frequent injunction to her from her master is "taisez-vous", - a further feature of her rôle which is reminiscent of that of Dorine. She is less animated and less given to buffoonery than Orgon's maid, however, and her liveliness is verbal rather than active.

Apart from her ingenuity in helping Clitandre and Lucinde, and her scepticism concerning the efficiency of doctors, Lisette's main impact on the audience consists in her heedless impertinence in dealings with her master, with Lucinde, and with the four doctors. Her position as a domestic servant appears to have no restraining effect whatever on her readiness to express her views or inflict her judgements

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(1) Act I, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 104.
(2) Act II, sc. i, ibid., pg. 105.

on others. She reproves Lucinde as she would an equal for the girl's secrecy regarding Clitandre, and indicates the magnitude of the favour which she, Lisette, is bestowing on Lucinde by assisting her. (1) To Sganarelle she is condescending, and openly laughs at him, - for example, when he is stricken at the news of calamity affecting his daughter, she begs him,

> "Monsieur, ne pleurez donc point comme cela; car vous me feriez rire." (2)

In the argument over the merits of the medical profession, too, she refuses to be intimidated by her master's dogmatism, energetically defending her own sensible convictions in the face of his pompous exclamations, like "mais voyez quelle impertinence! " (3) She does not hesitate to correct Sganarelle before strangers, moreover. When the disguised Clitandre is introduced to Lucinde's father, and the latter expresses surprise at the youthful appearance of the "doctor", Lisette sharply points out that

> "La science ne se mesure pas à la barbe, et ce n'est pas par le menton qu'il est habile". (4)

She treats Sganarelle, in fact, as if she were a member of the family rather than a servant employed by him; and Sganarelle's reaction is curiously tolerant, for despite his verbal correction of her conduct, he does not dismiss her, and even submits docilely on occasions to her orders. When she tells him of the new and prodigiously gifted "doctor"

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 102.
(2) Act I, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 104.
(3) Act II, sc. i, ibid., pg. 105.
(4) Act III, sc. v, ibid., pg. 115.

who will cure his daughter, she insists on his manifesting delight before knowing the justification for doing so; and Sganarelle, after some mild protests, humours her whim. (1) Certainly this ludicrous situation emphasizes Sganarelle's stupidity rather than Lisette's influence over him, but the fact remains that she has her own way in the matter; and thus it is throughout the play. As the marriage-contract between Clitandre and Lucinde is concluded, Lisette preserves a masterly silence, thereby proving that she can hold her peace when it is expedient to do so. She only becomes vocal once Clitandre and his bride are safely out of reach of Sganarelle's wrath, and then it is to inform the deceived father of the trick played upon him. What is more, she imparts the unwelcome news none too gently, which confirms the dislike for Sganarelle she alludes to earlier in the play. The final impression we have of Lisette, then, is that of the exultant intriguer whose better nature does not prevail when it comes to triumphing over the defeated adversary. She is presented as a highly capable, intelligent person, but there is not much warmth in her nature.

Even lower in the household hierarchy than a lady's maid (the station held by the two Lisettes and Dorine) is the kitchen-girl. Since one of the latter rank seldom came into contact with the lady of the house, there are not many instances of this type of servant in Molière's work, but an exception is Martine, in Les Femmes savantes. This victim of Philaminte's dogmatic passion for linguistic perfection

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(1) In Act III, sc. iv.

is first seen bemoaning her lot in the inelegant speech of the peasantry, to the ranks of which she belongs. She immediately rouses sympathy through her undeserved suffering at the hands of an unreasonable individual, and besides the pathos of her situation, she further appeals to the audience by her meek acceptance of dismissal. In her conversation with Chrysale, she does not blame Philaminte for injustice; nor does she suggest that her mistress might be mistaken. She simply states the fact of Philaminte's decision to dispense with her services:

"Oui, Madame me chasse".

"........................ On me menace,

Si je ne sors d'ici, de me bailler cent coups." (1)

This uncritical attitude towards her employers, however, does not last. When the main protagonists are assembled later to discuss Martine's "crime", the servant is moved by all the violent criticism of her speech to challenge the merit of speaking the precious, affected jargon current in Philaminte's salon. She does so without rancour, and there is even a suggestion of apology in her criticism. For example, she prefaces her assertion that the language of the "femmes savantes" is inappropriate for her, with a placatory

"Tout ce que vous prêchez est, je crois, bel et bon"; (2)

and she tends to use generalizations rather than to attack Philaminte and Bélise directly. ("Quand on se fait entendre, on parle toujours bien") (3). She has the courage, however,

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(1) Act II, sc. v, op. cit. II, pg. 1004, 11.423-425.
(2) Act II, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 1008, 1. 473.
(3) Ibid., 1. 477.

to maintain her view that the main purpose of speech is communication, and that so long as this requirement is fulfilled, the gratuitous elegance of "biaux dictons" is expendable. Simple as this opinion might be, there is no denying its rightness. Moreover, the rest of the confrontation between the servant and her mistresses serves to illustrate very amply the truth of Martine's accusation that precious turns of phrase "ne servent pas de rien" (1), for there is a constant misunderstanding between the interlocutors. This is occasioned partly by Martine's ignorance, but to a significant degree, it is also due to the fact that Philaminte and Bélise presuppose familiarity with technical terms relating to grammar and syntax, - which is absurd when one bears in mind the sort of education that Martine, as a peasant, may be expected to have received. The entire conversation, in fact, proceeds at cross-purposes through misinterpretations. Martine takes the word "grammaire" to mean "grand'mère", for example, because the concept of a body of rules governing language and its structure is alien to one whose place is in the kitchen. On the level of pure comedy, the servant's mistakes of this variety are hilarious; but they have a deeper implication inasmuch as they prove the validity of Martine's judgement, and throw into relief the narrow, fanatical dogmatism of the "femmes savantes". Once this point has been made, Martine is allowed to withdraw from the action, and apart from a brief appearance to reassure her master of verbal support

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(1) Act II, sc. vi, ibid., pg.1008,1.478.

in the struggle with Philaminte over the Henriette/Clitandre match, we do not see her again until the very last scenes of the play.

However fanciful the situation in which a kitchen-wench roundly informs the mistress of the house what criteria she should adopt in the choice of a son-in-law, there is certainly much of interest to be discerned in such an encounter. All Martine's initial timidity is gone as she boldly states her conviction of male superiority in the domestic context. The images she uses to illustrate her arguments are characteristically simple, drawn from the sphere with which she is accustomed to deal, namely the farmyard and the kitchen:

"La poule ne doit point chanter devant le coq." (1)

It is also worth noting that this last-quoted line is an old proverb, and attests the conservatism of Martine's views, as well as ringing true from one whose education is derived more from the wisdom of experience than from books. Paradoxically, all the eloquence and verbal ammunition to counter Philaminte's determination to have her way come from a woman, while Chrysale, whose masculine authority is thus vaunted, contents himself with brief endorsements of the servant's outbursts. Philaminte's caustic reference to her husband's "digne interprète" (2) is not altogether unjustified, for the situation is indeed ludicrous. This does not, however, alter the importance of the substance

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(1) Act V, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 1066, l. 1644.
(2) Ibid., pg. 1067. l. 1672.

of Martine's speeches. Despite the homeliness of her language, there is a certain coherence in her arguments. She begins with two or three generalizations about the necessity for the predomination of husband over wife in domestic matters, then she reinforces these generalizations with a spirited affirmation of her own tastes and preferences where marital authority is concerned. From herself, she then brings the subject round to the issue of present interest to the parties involved, namely, the superiority of Clitandre to Trissotin and the desirability of a match between the former and Henriette. She formulates her argument very simply, and, unlike her pedantic mistress, very clearly. Speaking of Henriette, she says:

"Il lui faut un mari, non pas un pédagogue." (1)

Finally, from the particular she returns to the general, reiterating her mistrust of book-learning and erudition as indices of merit in a prospective husband. ("Les livres cadrent mal avec le mariage") (2). Martine's speech, unlike that of the Lisette of L'Ecole des maris, is not regarded by her social betters as a subject fit for mirth despite its basic common sense. Philaminte, of course, is greatly annoyed by it, but Chrysale gravely remarks that "Elle a dit vérité". (3) In other words, although Martine is a mere servant, and one of the humblest at that, her ideas are not dismissed as the absurd notions of the uneducated, unpolished plebeian. She represents the opposite end of the gamut to that of Philaminte, Bélise and

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(1) Act V, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 1066, l. 1658.
(2) Ibid., pg. 1067, l. 1666.
(3) Ibid., l. 1672.

their entourage, and as such she has her place in the discussion of values; her voice, no less than those of Clitandre, Ariste and Chrysale, deserves to be heard. She has none of the characteristics of the cunning intriguer, and her rôle does not call for the energetic activity of a Dorine. Her contribution to the actual plot of Les Femmes savantes is almost non-existent. Her importance resides in her verbal participation in the debate preceding Trissotin's disgrace, and in her progress from timid, subdued resignation to self-assured, articulate defence of her opinions. She affords another perspective on the central problem of the play, and she is therefore intellectually satisfying as well as entertaining.

Of a very different order is Argan's maidservant, Toinette, who, next to her master, is the most compelling character in Le Malade imaginaire. She is described simply as "servante" in the dramatis personae, which means that she is not a lady's maid, but rather a general factotum in Argan's household. The element of robust clownishness which lightens the sombre tones of Molière's last comedy is introduced with Toinette's noisy and undignified entry as she answers her master's impatient summons. Far from being apologetic for the delay in coming, she scolds him vigorously for his imperiousness and blames him for a minor injury to herself occasioned by his urgency. The girl's vivacity argues against the seriousness of the "wound", and one suspects that it is merely a pretext for grievance

to counter the old man's querulous reproaches. That their relationship is one of equality is plain from Toinette's bald statement that

> ".... l'un vaut bien l'autre; quitte, si vous voulez".(1)

She stands in no awe of Argan, either, and even challenges him to rebuke her ("Querellez tout votre soûl, je le veux bien".) (2) Like the Lisette of L'Amour médecin, she is intelligent enough to be sceptical of the efficacity of doctors' and apothecaries' ministrations, and her remark that

> "Ce Monsieur Fleurant-là et ce Monsieur Purgon s'égayent bien sur votre corps; ils ont en vous une bonne vache à lait" (3)

shows that she has no illusions about the motives underlying all the solicitude evinced by those gentlemen for Argan's health. Our first impression of Toinette, then, is that of a lively, boisterous, shrewd young woman whose common sense provides a salutary contradiction of her master's superstitious belief in mercenary, inept medical practitioners. It is an impression which the rest of the play confirms, for the maid's characterization is consistent: her exuberance is a foil for Argan's artificial debility, just as her cool, logical assessment of the reality surrounding her contrasts with his excitability, and imaginative creation of a fantasy-world in which Béline is a paragon of virtue, and all ills can be cured by Medicine.

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, op. cit. II, pg. 1102.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

It is Toinette, significantly, who explodes both those myths, first by her masquerade as a doctor, and then by her stratagem to expose the turpitude of Béline. For all Béralde's lucidity, he is not as competent as the servant-girl in remedying the ills attendant on his brother's folly. Inspired though his suggestion that Argan become a doctor himself might be, it would not have been feasible without Toinette's prior intervention. The poise with which she duplicates her identity, appearing first as the "doctor", then as herself, then as the "doctor" again, bespeaks superb organizing ability, as well as physical agility reminiscent of the "médecin volant". She has just enough knowledge of medical jargon to dazzle her patient, sprinkling her speech with such terms as "pestes", "hydropisies", and "pleurésies", and even resorting to elementary Latin to lend an air of respectability to her pronouncements. ("Ignorantus, ignoranta, ignorantum".) (1) Added to this is an air of great authority which is calculated to intimidate the most recalcitrant invalid, and which silences objections from Argan to the extent that the ridiculous recommendation that he have an arm and an eye removed (on frivolous grounds) does not rouse his suspicion as to the "doctor's" reliability. Toinette's skill in assuming different rôles, in acting out other parts, is again demonstrated in the matter of Argan's enlightenment concerning Béline. Twice the maid has to appear hysterical and grief-stricken, - first for Béline, then for Angélique. On both

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(1) Act III, sc. x, ibid., pg. 1164.

occasions she is completely convincing, and her performance is not without a certain wry humour. To Béline, for example, who reproves her for her loud expressions of woe at Argan's "death", Toinette demurely remarks,

"Je pensais, Madame, qu'il fallût pleurer." (1)

This tongue-in-cheek wit is a further indication of her intelligence, and is related to her tolerant cynicism of others. Another instance thereof is her reaction to Angélique's dreamy vapourings over Cléante. The conversation between young mistress and maid is a sort of catechism rehearsed many times, with predictable questions and answers. Toinette is required to endorse all the statements of the young man's physical and moral perfections as enumerated by Angélique, and she complies with good humour and gentle irony. Her honesty, however, will not permit her to raise Angélique's hopes of requited love without justification, and her answer when asked if Cléante loves Angélique as much as he claims he does, proves this:

> "Eh! eh! ces choses-là, parfois, sont un peu sujettes à caution. Les grimaces d'amour ressemblent fort à la vérité; et j'ai vu de grands comédiens là-dessus." (2)

There speaks the woman of experience, who, although by no means old herself (according to Argan she must be in the mid-to-late twenties), has lost many of the foolish illusions

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(1) Act III, sc. xii, ibid., pg. 1167.
(2) Act I, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 1104.

of youth. Her treatment of Argan once his resolution to marry Angélique to Thomas Diafoirus has been declared, is very like that of Dorine when acquainted with Orgon's intentions regarding Mariane. Angélique herself opts out of the confrontation and leaves the argument in the capable hands of the maid, who easily outmanoeuvres Argan both verbally and physically. (1) Indeed, on almost every occasion when master and servant are face to face, there is the element of horseplay, followed by Argan's defeat. Even Béline's presence does not succeed in quelling Toinette, who ruins all that lady's efforts at making her husband comfortable, by roughly thrusting a pillow on his head. Needless to say, she flees immediately from her worsted adversary. It is Toinette who controls all the action of the play through her initiative and dynamic energy, and none of the other characters are a match for her. She has a protean quality, altering her mood, her tone, and even her identity to suit the circumstances. With Argan she is impudent and outspoken; with Béline, reserved and cunning; with Angélique, generous and affectionate; with Béralde, conspiratorial. The unifying factor in her characterization is her vitality, and it is this which carries conviction and renders her authentic in the most unlikely situations. The way she handles her autocratic, self-pitying master is not convincing except in a work of the imagination, but the reaction of a lucid, criticial mind to human folly and superstition

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(1) In Act I, sc. v.

is totally so. The same is true of Dorine, and to a lesser degree, of the two Lisettes.

How, then, are we to judge the "outspoken maid" as portrayed by Molière? Clearly this type of protagonist is not wanting in courage and intelligence. As with the valet more sharp-witted than his master, the maidservant more reasonable than her social betters constitutes a paradox in seventeenth-century literature, - one which is quite acceptable in a fictitious or hypothetical situation. This aspect of the character set apart, there remains the relevance to daily life of Molière's depictions of female domestics in confrontations with their employers. Just as vanity, jealousy, arrogance and pettiness do not obey the artificial restrictions imposed on society by man in his attempt to categorize the species, and these failings are discernible in the elevated ranks of society; so, too, intelligence and enterprise may be observed to wander occasionally from the élite into the proletariate, and exist cheek by jowl with vulgarity and inelegance. Any alert commentator of human nature (and most seventeenth-century authors are such, to a greater or lesser degree) cannot fail to perceive and acknowledge this. Molière's Toinettes and Dorines are not as fanciful as one might at first believe. Whatever their mental superiority over their masters and mistresses may be, they are kept in their place by constant reminders of their station, and references

to their impertinence. While it is true that the master (or mistress) is dependent on the good-will and co-operation of the servant, it is equally true that the servant without the master would no longer have a "raison d'être". In other words, we are conscious of the servant's activities within the limitations of the situation in which she is placed by her status as a domestic. For example, Martine's challenge to Philaminte at the end of Les Femmes savantes derives added significance from the fact that she IS a mere servant speaking to the lady of the house, just as Toinette's comical disapprobation of Argan's plans for his daughter is striking precisely because her station is so far inferior to his.

Finally, the fact that not one of the maidservants suffers any punishment worse than mumbled threats or harmless pursuit by their none-too-nimble masters, implies that their impertinence is pardonable under the circumstances. While it is not recommended for all occasions, it is a welcome reaction to the stupidity and wilful blindness to reality, encountered frequently in the middle-aged head of the household.

Chapter Three

Servant and Master in Parallel Position.

Although studies of individual servants, male and female, offer some basis for conclusions about the attitude to those at the bottom of the social scale in Molière's day, a more accurate assessment is possible if specific comparisons are made between servant and master when these protagonists are seen reacting simultaneously to the same circumstances. This interesting phenomenon is featured in a number of the comedies, and these will now be examined individually.

One of the remarks made by Gros-René to his master, Eraste, in the opening scene of Dépit amoureux, states unequivocally the parallel position in which both employer and employed are placed by their respective passions for Lucile and Marinette:

"Avec vous en amour je cours même fortune". (1)

As the title of the play suggests, the theme of Dépit amoureux is that of complications in love. The plot derives added complexity from the plurality of the couples in love, as well as from the mistaken identity, disguises, and fantastic recognitions which are the stock-in-trade of

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(1) Act I, sc. i, l. 69.

Menander's and Terence's comedies. The "doubling" of Eraste's love for Lucile with that of Gros-René for Marinette is not essential to the plot, and may be regarded as a gratuitous element introduced into the comedy simply for amusement. The fluctuations in the fortune of Eraste's and Lucile's love-affair are reproduced in the love-affair of their servants. Although the details are identical (Gros-René's rival-in-love, by some extraordinary coincidence, is the valet of Eraste's rival-in-love, Valère), and the alternation of confidence with despair and anger is common to both Eraste and Gros-René, the servant's romance is differentiated from the master's by its tone, which is distinctly burlesque. All that passes between Gros-René and Marinette is a sort of parody of the dealings between Eraste and Lucile. This is more noticeable in the language than in the situations of the lovers. Eraste and Lucile both speak the sober, restrained language of the upper middle classes, whereas the valet and the maid use extravagant hyperbole when in conversation. An example of this may be seen in the endearments exchanged between Gros-René and Marinette at the beginning of the play: each tries to outdo the other in finding terms denoting violent affection, and they progress from the conventional "mon désir", through "mon astre" and "beau tison de ma flamme" to the exorbitant "chère comète, arc-en-ciel de mon âme", (1) which Gros-René could only have found in some literary work, for it is certainly not an

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, ll. 188-190

expression current in everyday speech. It is not only the manner in which Eraste's valet expresses himself that is contrary to his master's mode of speech; it is also what he says. Modesty, and the powerful "bienséances" governing conduct in Molière's time, prevent a person of Eraste's standing from vaunting his qualities brashly, but no such restrictions stop Gros-René from informing Marinette that

"L'opinion que j'ai de moi-même est trop bonne
Pour croire auprès de moi que quelque autre te plût".(1)

As the master and his valet gradually accept the truth of Mascarille's tidings concerning the secret "marriage" of Valère and Lucile, one has the impression that Gros-René renounces his intentions regarding Marinette because his master has adopted this course regarding Lucile; not because Marinette herself has done anything reprehensible to deserve such treatment. Again, when the maid herself is charged with her mistress's duplicity by Eraste, Gros-René repeats after his own fashion the reproaches uttered by his master. As with his endearments, his insults are couched in absurdly exaggerated language, - a burlesque echo of all that Eraste has said. Where the latter calls Marinette an "âme double et traîtresse", her ex-lover calls her a "femelle inique", a "crocodile trompeur", and in a gloriously mixed metaphor alludes to the "Lestrygon", which has Homeric overtones and sounds impressively cultured. (2) As with any effect that is overdone, the

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, ll. 114-115.
(2) Act I, sc. v, l. 332.

result of all this lavish eloquence is the diminution of the gravity of the whole affair, and far from being moved by the potential tragedy of estranged lovers, the audience reacts with hilarity. Thus it is throughout the play; in moments of crisis (and there are many), the servant's repetition of the master's (or mistress's) laments and scoldings serves to remind us that we are spectators at a comedy, and should not take the situation too seriously.

On the technical level, the servants' presence is justified for the above-mentioned, obvious reason. Yet their inclusion in the action affords an opportunity for social comment as well, comic devices apart. Their readiness to ape their betters regardless of the differences, however slight, in their circumstances, implies a lack of judgement and a snobbishness not easily reconcilable with the sharp wit and common sense characterizing the domestics considered in earlier chapters of the present work. It may be suggested that Gros-René's eagerness to embrace the same attitudes as his master, even in so intimate a matter as his own love-life, is a symptom of intense loyalty, just as Marinette's blind endorsement of Lucile's judgements indicates great devotion to her mistress. Yet if this were indeed the reason for Gros-René's and Marinette's behaviour, it does not say much for their intelligence that they should reproduce their employer's actions in their personal affairs. Gros-René's

"Et moi de même aussi: soyons tous deux fâchés,

Et mettons notre amour au rang des vieux péchés" (1)
when Eraste has expressed disgust at the rejection of his penitent advances to Lucile, is not only comical; it is foolish, implying as it does the complete lack of initiative in the valet's conducting of his courtship of Marinette. It would appear that he needs to take his cue from his master, even in matters pertaining to emotion. Marinette, for her part, is no different, as the scene in which she and Lucile sing a hymn of hatred against the male species shows. (2)

On the whole, servants do not show to any great advantage in Dépit amoureux, and the reason for this could well be the dramatist's need to counterbalance a suggestion of equality which emerges from the identical circumstances in which masters and servants find themselves in the play. However quaint Gros-René's and Marinette's aping of Eraste and Lucile might be; however ludicrous their endearments and insults, and efforts at philosophizing or speaking Latin (Marinette prides herself on her knowledge of that tongue), the fact remains that the love, disappointment, and ultimate relief and joy shared by the two socially dissimilar couples throughout their vicissitudes, are the same. Equality of sentiment does not mean equality of station, however, and by exaggerating the reactions of the servants and emphasizing the difference between their

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(1) Act IV, sc. ii, ll. 1227-1228.
(2) Act II, sc. iv.

mode of expression and that of their betters, Molière both enhances comic effect and reflects the conviction of his contemporaries, that there is a place for everyone in the social hierarchy, and that this order of things should be respected.

In Dom Juan we see a similar presentation of valet and master exposed to the same external circumstances, but their respective reactions are very different, and there is little mutual respect or liking between the Dom and his servant, Sganarelle. The picaresque quality of this ambiguous comedy lends itself to depiction of character through response to, and involvement in, events befalling the protagonists in the course of the action.

Sganarelle's critical attitude towards his master is unequivocally stated in the conversation with Gusman, and the full weight of the valet's disapprobation is felt in his mounting indictment of Dom Juan's dealings with the female sex. He uses the strongest terms to describe the Dom, - such as "enragé", "chien", "Diable", "Turc", and "Hérétique". The most explicit statement of the relationship between manservant and master is to be found in the concluding lines of Sganarelle's tirade:

> "...il faut que je lui sois fidèle, en dépit que j'en aie: la crainte en moi fait l'office du zèle, bride mes sentiments, et me réduit d'applaudir bien souvent à ce que mon âme déteste". (1)

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(1) Act I, sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 34.

Even before the Dom makes his first entrance, then, we are made fully aware of Sganarelle's opinion of him, and also of the hypocrisy inherent in the valet's dealings with his master. Sganarelle evinces none of that half-respectful, half-patronizing affection characterizing the attitude of servants previously considered in this thesis. As for Dom Juan himself, his treatment of Sganarelle is curiously ambivalent. On the one hand, he makes no secret of the fact that he despises his servant, scoffing at his clumsy attempts to philosophize ("voilà ton raisonnement qui a le nez cassé") (1), and mocking his cowardice ("je te veux bien faire toucher au doigt ta poltronnerie") (2). On the other hand, Sganarelle, for all his inadequacies, is essential for Dom Juan's performance as a "super-noble" superior even to his own nobility, - the rôle in which his own arrogance and vanity have cast him. It is not for nothing that Sganarelle is the ever-present audience before whom the Dom shows off his independence of the morality governing that society to which he belongs. His perpetual appeals to his valet's opinions and judgements; his invitations to him to express admiration for his audacity; and the pleasure he takes in involving Sganarelle in activities distasteful to him, all indicate a paradoxical need of the very person for whom Dom Juan feels nothing but contempt. It is, after all, no use playing a part if there is no one to applaud, or even react; and the nobleman's

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(1) Act III, sc. i, ibid., pg. 58.
(2) Act III, sc. v, ibid., pg. 67.

performance requires a spectator. Dom Juan and Sganarelle are therefore side by side throughout the diverse vicissitudes of the action. In the confrontation with Done Elvire, Dom Juan is defiant and, after some initial embarrassment, offensively brazen. His servant, on the contrary, is shamefaced and inarticulate; and when required by the Dom to explain the abandonment of Done Elvire, Sganarelle beats about the bush ineffectually, - his usual method of coping with a difficult situation. He endeavours to take his cue from his master, however, and endorses Dom Juan's sneering exclamation of "Sganarelle, le Ciel!" with an unconvincing

> "Vraiment oui, nous nous moquons bien de cela, nous autres". (1)

His true feelings on the matter only find sotto voce expression at the end of the scene, once Dom Juan is out of earshot: "quel abominable maître me vois-je obligé de servir!" (2) This first encounter sets the pattern of later episodes in the play. The master is always ready to confront danger, from the trivial (like Monsieur Dimanche's debt-collecting visit) to the impressive (as is the case of the animated statue); the servant is always eager to adopt evasive tactics, to avoid, or run away. Sganarelle is only courageous when Dom Juan is not present. His censure of his master is lucid, even if his dogmatically expressed ideas on, for example, religion or ethics are hopelessly muddled and incoherent; and at times one is

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(1) Act I, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 41
(2) Ibid.

tempted to regard the valet as the mouthpiece of sound Christian morality. This impression is soon dissipated, however, by the sheer absurdity of the character. Let us consider Sganarelle's reaction to his master's adoption of that "fashionable vice", hypocrisy. On discovering that the contrition and self-accusation voiced by the Dom to his father are merely part of a cynical façade, Sganarelle is at first bereft of speech, and can only mouth the exclamation, "quel homme!" After his master's lengthy exposition on Hypocrisy, with comments on the exploitation of human weakness, the valet cannot contain himself any longer, and bursts into what starts off as a promising condemnation of moral dishonesty:

> "Il ne vous manquait plus que d'être hypocrite pour vous achever de tout point, et voilà le comble des abominations..." (1).

It does not take long for his discursive intelligence to break down under the strain of prolonged mental activity, however, and the compelling statement that "il faut...qu'en valet fidèle je vous dise ce que je dois" (2) is followed by a rambling, disconnected series of observations which have nothing whatever to do with ethics. Dom Juan's sardonic judgement of this piece of nonsense is justified under the circumstances. ("O le beau raisonnement!") (3) This failure on the part of Sganarelle to rise to the occasion

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(1) Act V, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 81.
(2) Ibid., pg. 82.
(3) Ibid.

is but one instance of the servant's inability to emerge from the play as a strong, dominant figure. His most powerful resolutions to challenge his master disintegrate with the rapidity of aspirin in water, and he invariably ends by tamely conceding that Dom Juan is right. This approval and encouragement of the Dom's actions, moreover, is not merely verbal: at times Sganarelle is obliged to participate actively in the very dealings he inwardly detests. The treatment of Monsieur Dimanche, for example, by Dom Juan is taken up by Sganarelle perforce, and moments after the valet has gratified his master with some of his "sottes moralités", (1) - which lends deeper irony to his skilful manipulation of the tradesman. Dom Juan himself could hardly have bettered the tactics whereby the expectant creditor is firmly propelled towards the door while his attempts to speak are silenced with well-timed and unanswerable remarks like "Bagatelles" and "Fi!". In short, neither servant nor master is right in his approach to experience. Morally speaking, both are in the wrong by virtue of their actions, and the only difference between them is that Sganarelle has certain scruples, but is too cowardly to act upon them, while Dom Juan has no scruples and acts as a law unto himself in a manner contrary to conventional morality. Their relationship reposes on a perpetual struggle; affection has no place in it. Each puts on a show for the benefit of the other, and in their different ways, each is reprehensible. The master's

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(1) Act IV, sc. i, ibid., pg. 68.

faults are obvious and need no enumeration here. Sganarelle is credulous, unintelligent, pusillanimous, and devoid of any real human feeling. He is consumed with resentment for the endless humiliations to which Dom Juan subjects him, and however true his accusations may be, he does not make them because they are true, but because to him they represent a means of revenge (albeit only verbal) on a tyrannical master. This is typical of a "slave mentality". Moreover, he only sympathizes with the victims of Dom Juan's callous arrogance because he is one himself, and it is therefore fellow-feeling rather than the warmth of kindliness or compassion which prompts his defence of, for example, Done Elvire, Charlotte and Mathurine. Paradoxically, it is Sganarelle's weakness, not any moral strength, which safeguards him from Dom Juan's viciousness. A more intelligent, or more cunning individual, would have profited from the Dom's example of stylish amorality, but Sganarelle contents himself with ineffectual mutterings on the sidelines and does nothing positive either to correct or to outdo his master in the path he has chosen. In fact, Sganarelle's only advantage over Dom Juan resides in an inner independence which is only apparent at the very end of the play, when the servant cries,

"Mes gages, mes gages, mes gages!...."(1)

as the master disappears in dramatic, fiery destruction. It has been suggested (2) that the attraction held for

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(1) Act V, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 85.

(2) By L. Gossman, in Men and Masks, John Hopkins, Baltimore, 1965, pp. 50-51.

Dom Juan by his insignificant servant is this very factor of inner independence; for if Sganarelle genuinely admired the Dom and was devoted to him, he would be relegated to the category of past conquests and lose his appeal for the power-hungry nobleman. For Dom Juan desires above all to bend others to his will, to the point of obsession (which is why he tries to make Francisque abjure God; he, Dom Juan, wants recognition that he is superior even to God.) Assuming that this _is_ the implication of Sganarelle's final, anguished cry, it will be seen that this apparent victory and revenge do not argue much in favour of the under-dog (a tempting supposition on superficial examination.) They reflect rather the pettiness of Sganarelle's mind and values, so that the finale of _Dom Juan_ is anything but a glorification of the servant at the master's expense.

The master-and-servant theme reappears in Molière's version of the hoary comedy, _Amphitryon_. Despite the conventional nature of the subject, and the fantasy-element dominating the resolution of the action, this work is in some respects as disturbing and ambiguous as _Dom Juan_, written three years earlier.

The atmosphere generated in the opening scene immediately contradicts the notion of mythology presupposed by the title. While it is true that the protagonists engaged in conversation are Night and Mercury, and that we are reminded of this by the poetic language and suitably

evocative costumes and décor (Mercury is "sur un nuage" and Night is seated in her horse-drawn chariot), the fact remains that they are nothing more than two servants discussing the whims of their master. Both have received instructions from Jupiter, and these must be carried out efficiently and promptly to further his chances of success with Alcmène; just as a "grand seigneur" would issue orders to his servants if their assistance was required in some amorous intrigue. This humanization, so to speak, of mythological abstractions prepares us for the fanciful Amphitryon/Sosie/Jupiter/Mercury situation, making it more concrete, less far-fetched. Amphitryon and his man-servant are placed in identical situations as a result of Jupiter's lust for Alcmène. Both are replaced by "doubles" who usurp their place in Amphitryon's household and deceive their respective wives, Alcmène and Cléanthis, completely. Both are disconcerted at the counterfeit of reality confronting them on their return, and both suffer through the changes wrought by the intruders in their absence. Thus far, the resemblance of Amphitryon's fortune to that of Sosie would seem to be complete.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between Sosie's reaction to this problem of appearance and reality, and the reaction of his master. In the first place, Sosie is older and more experienced than Amphitryon (he alludes to "vingt ans d'assidu service" in his opening speech),

and his perception of the difficulties raised by Mercury's and Jupiter's impersonation is accordingly more complicated. Secondly, as one accustomed to a position of subordination and acceptance, he is more prepared than his dogmatic young master to acknowledge the possibility of his "alter ego's" existence. Like Dom Juan's Sganarelle, Sosie is, moreover, something of a coward. Faced with Mercury's bullying, he yields in the matter of his name, which Mercury has appropriated, with a muttered

"Que son bonheur est extrême
De ce que je suis poltron!" (1)

After a prolonged and painful interview, Sosie at last acknowledges the fact of Mercury's existence as himself, Sosie; for, like all facts, it is rooted in truth and reality. When it is Amphitryon's turn, however, to be acquainted with this unpalatable piece of news, the general's reaction is quite different. He refuses point blank to accept what Sosie says, resorting to physical violence in an endeavour to make his servant change his story. This, in addition to Sosie's placatory remark that the truth is whatever his master wishes it to be because "je suis le valet, et vous êtes le maître" (2), implies that for a person used to exacting obedience, like Amphitryon, certainty is not a matter of recognizing reality, but rather a matter of prejudice. He does not even begin to entertain doubts as to the validity of his

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, op.cit. II, pg. 377, ll. 402-403.
(2) Act II, sc. i, ibid., l. 698.

conviction that Sosie is behaving disrespectfully towards him by recounting an impudent fiction and trying to pass it off as fact. However, for Sosie, not even violence can alter truth, nor does his inner self accept Amphitryon's judgement of reality, (although for the sake of expedience he does not press his point.) There is a contradiction between theory and practice in Sosie's handling of the situation, for he is outwardly respectful, silenced by his master's forceful refusal to believe him; and yet his reason tells him that he is right and Amphitryon is wrong. This certainty is expressed in the servant's resentful aside:

> "Tous les discours sont des sottises,
> Partant d'un homme sans éclat;
> Ce serait paroles exquises
> Si c'était un grand qui parlât." (1)

The criticism of the existing social order (with its built-in prejudices) implicit in that short outburst, is an interesting anachronism in the context of the seventeenth century. It should, however, be interpreted in the light of the circumstances in which it is uttered. Sosie is still smarting from the drubbing received from Mercury, and for him, Amphitryon's scepticism of his adventure is insult added to injury. His only way of getting even with his master is to comment on the inconsistency of his attitude, and it happens that on this occasion, right is on Sosie's side. This does not necessarily mean that

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(1) Act II, sc. i, ibid., ll. 839-842.

his remark, just quoted, reflects the dramatist's view of the social hierarchy as an unjust and indefensible institution. It is all too easy to take such speeches out of context and adduce them as evidence of Molière's disenchantment with the social order of his day.

Of the ill-assorted pair, Sosie and Amphitryon, it is the former who excites more sympathy in their common predicament. To be sure, there is little to admire in the man himself; he is timorous and debased, rather like Dom Juan's valet, and, like Sganarelle, he has the typical servant's outlook on life as a slippery contest between the two main elements in society: the governors and the governed. On the other hand, his very victimization at the hands of both Mercury and Amphitryon, as well as his treatment by Cléanthis, tends to make us regard him as a creature to be pitied rather than censured. Besides, Amphitryon's reaction to the situation in which Jupiter's stratagem has involved him illustrates the basic arrogance of his nature. His answer to the irrefutable presence of his double before his eyes is the same as that returned to Sosie in the first encounter between master and servant: he resorts to physical violence in the belief that his prowess with the sword will alter the circumstances. Neither his valour nor Sosie's cowardice can effect this, however, and it is not fortuitous that the Theban captains prevent their general from harming his double on the grounds that they are uncertain who is the real Amphitryon and who is the

impostor:

"Nous ne souffrirons point cet étrange combat
D'Amphitryon contre lui-même." (1)

In other words, the issue is not as simple as Amphitryon would have it, and although Sosie's approach to the problem is equally ineffectual, there is more to be said for his appeal to Mercury ("Faisons en bonne paix vivre les deux Sosies") (2) than for the general's reliance on brute force to solve the issue.

The dénouement of Amphitryon is particularly arresting in its hint of irony as it illustrates the "might is right" philosophy. As is to be expected, it is Sosie, not Amphitryon himself, who penetrates the mystification of the husband's honourable dishonour ("Le seigneur Jupiter sait dorer la pilule") (3). Amphitryon says not a word as all is revealed, and this is only appropriate, since he has consistently refused to acknowledge the reality underlying appearances, so must now accept the appearance of honour for the real thing. Sosie's use of the title "seigneur" when mentioning Jupiter is deliberate, moreover. Just as the prologue between Night and Mercury suggested everyday life rather than mythology, so, too, the outcome of the play resembles a phenomenon of daily human existence, namely, the cuckoldry of a husband by a

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(1) Act III, sc. v, ibid., ll. 1644-1645.
(2) Act III, sc. vi, ibid., l. 1766.
(3) Act III, sc. x, ibid., l. 1913.

lord cleverer and more powerful than himself. The myth of Jupiter's conquest of Alcmène's virtue is merely a decorative motif covering a banal and easily recognizable situation; and this reduction of the supernatural to merely human proportions implies the relevance of Amphitryon's case to life as lived by Molière's contemporaries. Characteristically, Sosie is better equipped to assess the issue of his and Amphitryon's misfortunes than is his master, and the final word is given to him:

"Sur telles affaires, toujours
Le meilleur est de ne rien dire." (1)

Finally, let us consider the parallel fortunes of the couples, bourgeois and plebeian respectively, in Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, - a more light-hearted, uncomplicated work than either Dom Juan or Amphitryon. The somewhat loose structure of this comedy-ballet permits the insertion into the main plot of various episodes not strictly connected with the basic theme of the draper-turned-gentleman. Thus our attention is suddenly diverted from the intrigue between Dorante and Monsieur Jourdain (concerning the entertainment of Dorimène) to the promotion of Lucile's match with Cléonte, which Madame Jourdain favours with typical determination and energy. It is not long before the maidservant, Nicole, states the relevance of that match to her own aspirations regarding Cléonte's

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(1) Act III, sc. x, ibid., ll. 1942-1943.

valet:

> "...si le maître vous revient, le valet ne me revient pas moins, et je souhaiterais que notre mariage se pût faire à l'ombre du leur." (1)

In other words, we are left in no doubt that the fortune of the servants in love depends upon that of the master and mistress, and the familiar theme of the double match, already featured in Dépit amoureux, is introduced into this episodic comedy.

The initial confrontation between Nicole, charged with an optimistic commission from her mistress, and Cléonte and Covielle, who are inexplicably disgruntled, is not much different from the encounter between Marinette and the two prospective husbands, Eraste and Gros-René, in Dépit amoureux. Not only is the situation identical in both plays; the sequence of reactions in the protagonists is also the same. First comes the chilly reception of the maid's enthusiastic greeting, followed by astonishment from the one side and causticity from the other. Next we have the appeal to the valet for enlightenment, in view of the master's unrelenting anger; and finally, after her failure to obtain satisfaction from the valet either, the bewildered messenger is left with no alternative but to report back to her mistress. Thus far, the depiction of dealings between the characters involved is neither original nor particularly compelling. It is necessary, however, for the scenes that are to follow; and these are

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(1) Act III, sc. vii, op. cit. II, pg. 747.

delightful examples of Molière's genius for combining comic technique with psychological authenticity. Despite the resemblance between the ensuing conversation of Cléonte and Covielle, and that of Eraste and Gros-René,(1) there is one significant difference from the similar scene in the earlier work. Whereas Gros-René laboriously repeats all that Eraste says, with a few burlesque changes of his own, Covielle is far more concise in his utterances. Instead of reproducing, he merely endorses his master's remarks, reminding Cléonte of the analogy between his circumstances and those of Lucile's injured suitor. Because he says less, the impression gained is one of greater vivacity; the mechanism of humour is less laboured. Moreover, the absurdity of Covielle's "capping" of Cléonte's observations resides not so much in the choice of vocabulary, as in the choice of illustrative example. Where the master speaks of tears shed at the feet of his beloved (a conventional enough image for a well-bred young man to evoke), Covielle gravely recalls buckets of water drawn at the well for Nicole. The completely dissimilar expressions of affection have just enough in common to suggest that master and servant are in like case, but their very dissimilarity makes for comic incongruity. At the same time, in themselves, they are appropriate to the social condition of the respective speakers. Throughout the conversation, Covielle's concrete instances of devotion to Nicole echo the abstract evocations of romantic love

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(1) Dépit amoureux, Act IV, sc. ii.

Cléonte associates with Lucile: the one refers to the heat of his passion, the other, to the heat of the fire when he assisted in the roasting of the joint; the one speaks vaguely of "grands châtiments", the other, of "soufflets". (1) Neither is more admirable than his fellow-sufferer; they simply express the same resentment and the same ardour according to their different experience of life. Love, like death or suffering, tends to be a leveller of social status, for it knows no boundaries and assails lord and peasant alike. Yet Molière discreetly reminds us that the reality of social differentiation cannot be altogether discounted, as the exchange of commiseration between Cléonte and Covielle shows.

Later, when the two pairs of young people are involved in explanations, arguments, cajolery and reconciliation, the same contradiction between the equality of their emotions and the inequality of their social condition is discernible in their conversation. Like Covielle, Nicole speaks the robust language of the domestic servant and uses "tu" to her ex-admirer, while Lucile's speech is more restrained, and her address to Cléonte is more formal. This difference is emphasized rather than disguised by the servant's reiteration of all the mistress's questions and injunctions. For example, when Lucile inquires what the cause of Cléonte's displeasure might be ("Quel chagrin vous possède?") Nicole's picturesque version of the same inquiry is immediately

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(1) Act III, sc. ix, ibid., pg. 749.

juxtaposed with her mistress's words: "Quelle mauvaise humeur te tient?" (1) The same is true of Covielle's language as compared with that of Cléonte. After the latter's dignified statement of rejection of Lucile's love, - which, were it in alexandrines, would not be out of place in high tragedy, - Covielle brings the whole situation back to the level of the everyday with his simple peasant utterance, "Queussi, queumi". (2) Similarly, when the dialogue is reduced to a bare minimum as the females entreat the outraged menfolk to listen to their excuses, the few terse words uttered by Cléonte and his valet reflect this same tendency. Where the master's remarks have the sobriety of the upper middle-class speaker, the servant's echoing phrases are quaint and even grotesque,- like Covielle's "Tarare" (defined by Richelet in 1680 as a "refus burlesque") as the equivalent of Cléonte's "Point du tout."(3) Moreover, the greater degree of heartiness inherent in the servant's approach to life in general and love in particular is manifest in the respective comments of Cléonte and Covielle when the reconciliation has been effected: the master observes gracefully that

> "....que facilement on se laisse persuader aux personnes qu'on aime!" (4)

- to which the valet, not to be outdone, replies in his homely fashion,

> "Qu'on est aisément amadoué par ces diantres d'animaux-là!" (4)

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(1) Act III, sc. x, ibid., pg. 750.
(2) Ibid., pg. 751.
(3) Ibid., pg. 752.
(4) Ibid., pg. 753.

Throughout the scene in question, the servants have consistently followed the lead given them by their capricious master and mistress; when Lucile scorns Cléonte, Nicole spurns Covielle, and when Cléonte states his resolution to die of love and woe, Covielle conscientiously seconds him. This trend is reversed after Monsieur Jourdain's refusal to accept the non-noble Cléonte as his son-in-law, however, and the tone adopted by Covielle when reproaching his master for his unnecessary high-mindedness in the interview with Lucile's father, is one of exasperation such as an equal might use. It is Covielle, moreover, who suggests the Turkish masquerade as a solution to the impasse in his master's courtship of Lucile, wherein he displays more initiative than his crestfallen employer, as well as a shrewd, if rudimentary, knowledge of human nature. (1) In the execution of this extravagant scheme, Covielle's rôle is far more exacting than that of Cléonte, for it is he who has to prepare the ground with Monsieur Jourdain before the son of the "Grand Turk" makes his impressive entrance. All that Cléonte is required to do is to look stately and make some exotic noises. This is possibly a reflection of the different functions of servant and served: the former is all bustle and efficiency, the latter, simply a rallying-point for homage. Yet each needs and presupposes the other, for both have their appointed place in society. It is interesting that, whether in the banal context of frustration in love or in

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(1) Act III, sc. xiii, ibid., pg. 757.

the exceptional context of supernatural phenomena, neither servant nor master suffers by comparison with one of a different social order when these two are depicted in parallel positions. Naturally there are well-defined characteristics associated with these representatives of the different strata of society. The servant tends to be lively, coarse, and frequently ridiculous, either through cowardice (like Sganarelle and Sosie) or through burlesque mimicry of his betters (like Gros-René and Covielle). The bourgeois master (represented by Cléonte and Eraste) is inclined to sentimentality and passivity, but is redeemed by a certain dignity, and the spontaneity of youth, just as the servant's vulgarity is redeemed by energy or, as is the case with Sosie, by a degree of lucidity which even his master lacks. The noble master, of whom Dom Juan and Amphitryon are examples, is courageous, but limited morally (which is true of the former) or intellectually (which is true of the latter.) In other words, by the time the virtues and failings of the two types of protagonist have been set side by side, it will be seen that servant and master are pretty well even. What also emerges from this comparative study, significantly, is that however much the universality of their emotions and the similarity of their moral composition might equate them in one sense, the way in which they are presented does not permit us to forget that the one is the master, and the other, his social inferior.

Chapter Four

The Peasantry.

The only section of the social hierarchy, - as Molière knew it, - which has not yet received any attention in the present study, is that related to the servant-class just considered, but inferior to it by reason of the contempt with which Parisians in Molière's day regarded countryfolk; to wit, the peasantry. The subject-matter of many of the comedies, by its very nature, precludes the presence of peasants, unless it is in the guise of domestics that they appear occasionally in bourgeois households, - like Martine in Les Femmes savantes, for example. Apart from the quaintness of their pronunciation, there is nothing much to distinguish them in such circumstances from the ordinary, city-bred servant.

Before we examine the representatives of peasantry in Molière's plays, a distinction should be made between provincials and countryfolk as such. Where the latter are poor and coarsely clad, and live close to the soil, the provincial is characterized by his or her inept imitation of Parisian fashion and way of life. The peasant is not, therefore, to be regarded in quite the same light as, say, the de Sotenvilles or Monsieur Thibaudier, since he is

not guilty of their affectation of elegance, nor of their bad taste. His circumstances, in any case, render pre-occupations with a stylish mode of existence irrelevant, since existence to him is far more basic.

In Dom Juan, peasants put in an episodic appearance, and although we have an edifying glimpse of them, it is only a fleeting one. After the ship-wreck incident, we meet Pierrot, Charlotte and Mathurine; and, later in the action, Francisque "le pauvre", whose status is rendered ambiguous by the fact that his poverty appears to be voluntary, for mystical reasons. Despite this ambiguity, he will be included in this discussion for the sake of convenience, since his lowly condition places him on a similar level to that of the three peasants. From the conversation between Charlotte and Pierrot, it is clear that they are vaguely betrothed, and this in itself is enough to place Charlotte in danger of attention from the man whom Pierrot has saved from the sea. Besides, Pierrot's complaints that the girl does not care for him "comme il faut" (1), together with the curiosity Charlotte evinces concerning the gentleman who nearly drowned, implies an absence of warmth in her feelings for her peasant lover. In all fairness to Charlotte, however, it must be admitted that Pierrot is a tedious admirer, for all his perseverance. The girl's opening remark ("... tu t'es

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(1) Act II, sc. i, op. cit. II, pg. 44.

trouvé-là bien à point.") (1) indicates plainly that the story of the rescue has already been related to her, but Pierrot is so pleased with his part in the drama that he proceeds to inflict another recital of the episode upon his listener. Not only is the news stale by this time; it is for good measure recounted in the most wordy and repetitive fashion. Here is an example:

> ".... j'estions sur le bord de la mar, moy et le gros Lucas, et je nous amusions à batifoler avec des mottes de tarre que je nous jesquions à la teste: car comme tu sçais bian, le gros Lucas aime à batifoler, et moy par fouas je batifole itou. En batifolant donc, pisque batifoler y a,...." (2)

This is quite irrelevant to the matter at issue, and even if it were not so, it hardly constitutes a lesson in compelling narrative style, nor does it argue powerfully for the intelligence of the speaker. Then there is the peasant lad's complacency, which is sufficiently great to overcome the naïve admiration he feels for Dom Juan's wealth and rank. ("tout gros Monsieur qu'il est, il seroit par ma fique nayé si je n'aviomme esté là.") (3) Finally, his activities designed to recommend himself to Charlotte do not appear to be inspired by much imagination: they consist in purchasing ribbons, robbing bird's nests and paying the local musicians to play on the girl's birthday. Compared with the dashing nobleman, Pierrot must indeed

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(1) Act II, sc. i, op. cit. II, pg.42.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., pg. 43.

cut a sorry figure in her eyes. On the other hand, he is not from the lowest reaches of the peasantry, for he has sufficient money to risk a modest wager, (1) and his gifts to his beloved are not the necessities of life; he woos with ribbons, not bread. Besides, Charlotte herself is obviously a presentable representative of her class, for Dom Juan would not conceivably flirt with a clumsy herd-girl.

Lack of imagination does not mean lack of vitality, and Pierrot's choice of example when attempting to define the ideal expression of female love proves this. It would seem that stout Thomasse's affection for "Robain" takes the form of practical jokes, from ambushing the youth in the street, to pulling his seat from under him and sending him sprawling; and it is this that Pierrot wistfully regards as the highest form of compliment that a damsel can pay to her suitor. He goes so far as to reproach Charlotte for her restraint in never gratifying him with a blow ("je passerois vingt fois devant toy que tu ne te grouillerois pas pour me bailler le moindre coup...") (2). Certainly love-making among the peasantry, if we are to judge by Pierrot's criteria, smacks of the kermesse rather than the secluded moonlit arbour; but its very roughness is not without appeal. And if the entreaties of Pierrot and the retorts of Charlotte lack polish, they do not lack sincerity.

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(1) The sum of ten "sols".

(2) Ibid., pg. 45.

The girl is shown in a very different light in her dealings with Dom Juan, however. Gone is the impression of blunt simplicity created by her earlier interview with her fiancé. She emerges as an accomplished coquette when her femininity is called forth by glib compliments, and even the apparent humility of such responses as "pour vous servir", "je n'ai pas d'esprit pour vous répondre", and "je suis une pauvre paysanne" (1), is belied by her swift assumption of a condescending air when confronted later by an outraged Pierrot. Her former deprecation of her looks, cleanliness and intelligence is forgotten as the dazzling prospect of being "Madame" vitiates all past promises to her betrothed, and it is remarkable how effortlessly she can conjure up a vision of her future transactions with Pierrot:

> "Va, va, Piarrot, ne te mets point en peine: si je sis Madame, je te ferai gagner queuque chose, et tu apporteras du beurre et du fromage cheux nous." (2)

Latent snobbishness apart, Charlotte reveals unsuspected depths of cunning in her ability to adopt a more genteel mode of speech when addressing Dom Juan: with Pierrot (who has presumably known her all her life) she is unaffected, speaking the local patois; but in conversation with the nobleman, - whom she obviously wishes to impress, - she pronounces "bien" the way a Parisian would, (to Pierrot she says "bian") and the phrases with which she answers the Dom's flattery are those which would not be out of place in higher circles than the ones she is used to

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(1) Act II, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 47.
(2) Act II, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 50.

frequenting. (For example, "Je vous suis bien obligée")(1). In the degrading squabble with Mathurine over the affections of Dom Juan, Charlotte does not show to much advantage, either. It is true that her reactions are justified under the circumstances; but she, like Mathurine, displays a possessiveness and a pettiness which culminate in a spiteful desire for physical violence to be done to her rival. All in all, she is not a particularly lovable character. As for Mathurine, she is very lightly sketched, and the brevity of her appearance, together with the similarity (both physical and moral) between her and Charlotte, makes it difficult to assess her in detail. It may be assumed that she is cast in the same mould as her rival, not differing materially from her in her main characteristics. And what of Pierrot? His rusticity and clumsiness at love-making have already been signalized. In addition to these traits, he is not endowed with much spirit, even if he does not want courage. Although his rescue of Dom Juan and his entourage no doubt required intrepidity and strength, his reaction to the Dom's repeated face-slapping in the confrontation over Charlotte is that of a poor-spirited yokel. He meekly submits to the insults, contenting himself with a series of uncouth and ineffectual oaths between blows. ("Testigué", "jernigué", "ventrequé", "palsanqué", and "morquenne") (2). In the end he takes refuge behind Charlotte, asserting that he is afraid of no one, - not a convincing claim in view of his behaviour. Even Sganarelle, poltroon that he is, shows pity and condescension towards Pierrot:

(1) Act II, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 47.
(2) Act II, sc. iii, pg. 50.

> "Eh! Monsieur, laissez là ce pauvre misérable. C'est conscience de le battre. Ecoute, mon pauvre garçon, retire-toi..."(1)

As he takes this sound piece of advice, Pierrot reveals the slightly gossipy trait usually associated with small-village mentalities, for he darkly announces his intention of telling all to Charlotte's aunt. On the whole, he gives the impression of weakness and impotence despite his glorious rôle in the rescue. The facility with which Dom Juan worsts him, and the ease with which he extricates himself from the Charlotte/Mathurine embarrassment, shows that these simple folk are no match for the experienced and unscrupulous nobleman. Yet we sympathize with them because they are victims, not because they are intrinsically admirable; in fact, there is little to commend them.

It is quite a different matter with Francisque the hermit. Whether Dom Juan's encounter with him is to be interpreted as a providential warning (which is M.L.Jouvet's theory) or whether it is merely another pretext for demonstrating the amorality of the Dom, (which is one of the views put forward by M.J. Scherer) the fact remains that the beggar manages to hold his own against Dom Juan. If it is true that one of the functions of comedy is to present the unexpected triumph of weakness over strength, then the encounter between the nobleman and the beggar is satisfying by comic criteria. After the condescension and derision

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(1) Act II, sc. iii, pg. 51.

with which Dom Juan greets Francisque's admission of dire poverty, - "Tu te moques: un homme qui prie le Ciel tout le jour ne peut pas manquer d'être bien dans ses affaires," (1) - the action of tossing the beggar the coin "for the love of humanity" betokens utter moral bankruptcy. Dom Juan is forced to acknowledge that the will and beliefs of those vastly inferior to him in social status and power, cannot be bent to please his whims. His gold "louis" lacks the force to buy the moral degradation of a simple man, and the realization of this is disconcerting to him. There is no doubt that the victory goes to Francisque, and his assertion that

"... j'aime mieux mourir de faim" (2)

is surely the most positive and sobering refusal the Dom has ever encountered. The "Va, va," with which the gift of the coin is prefaced is an indication of impatience, as well as an affectation of nonchalance to hide annoyance and humiliation.

Peasants do not appear again in Molière's plays until Le Médecin malgré lui, some eighteen months after Dom Juan. This comedy is something of an exception in the dramatist's work, since it features the peasantry to a greater extent than any other play; in it Molière exploits rustic realism rather than bourgeois caricature. The boisterous opening

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(1) Act III, sc. ii, ibid., pg. 59.
(2) Ibid., pg. 60.

quarrel between Sganarelle and Martine sets the tone for the whole work: it breathes a Bacchic gaiety, crude yet appealing in its cheerfulness, and it proceeds at a breathless pace. All the elements of popular entertainment are present, from the beatings and conjugal altercations which no one takes seriously, to the disguises, purses received and demanded, and malicious practical jokes played upon the protagonists by each other. Where, in Dom Juan, this robust horseplay is only alluded to rather than portrayed directly on the stage, it is the mainspring of the action throughout Le Médecin malgré lui.

That the central character of Le Médecin, Sganarelle, is a peasant pure and simple is clear from his profession (that of woodcutter). He is presented in accordance with the tradition of peasant-representation fixed by popular concept and scholarly aesthetics alike. He has a tremendous zest for life, which he regards as a never-ending source of opportunity for sensual enjoyment (as his glorification of the worthy bottle and his hopeful pursuit of Jacqueline's copious charms suggest.) In addition to this, he has a streak of cruelty which manifests itself in his readiness to indulge in wife-beating ("Ma femme, vous savez que je n'ai pas l'âme endurante, et que j'ai le bras assez bon") (1), and in the delight with which he uses the stick upon Géronte. Like most of his class, Sganarelle

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(1) Act I, sc. i, ibid., pg. 227.

has just enough learning to be ridiculous. The ode composed to his bottle is a ludicrous specimen of poetic composition, both in its subject-matter and in the choice of vocabulary. (For example, a line like "Vos petits glouglous" (1) is scarcely the stuff of which poetry is made.) Moreover, he cites the august name of Aristotle in connection with the banal observation that a wife is "pire qu'un démon" (2); and it is conceivable that this homely judgement has been attributed to the Greek philosopher merely to confer some respectability upon it, and to silence Martine. It is true that Sganarelle has a smattering of Latin; but it is derived mainly from what he calls the "rudiment"(his Latin primer), and as such it consists of elementary grammar-rules and declensions of simple adjectives. The species of Latin he speaks in his capacity of Doctor in Géronte's house is distinctly baroque, and the "Greek" and "Hebrew" to which he has recourse when in difficulties with his mother tongue and Latin, are even more so.(3) As one of humble birth and little learning, he is aware of the prestige of erudition on the one hand; and on the other, he cynically exploits the ignorance of his admiring audience with a travesty of knowledge not easily distinguishable from the jargon used by genuine doctors and philosophers. Lucas' naîve remark,

"Oui, ça est si biau, que je n'y entends goutte" (4)

is less grotesque than may be supposed at first sight.

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(1) Act I, sc. v, ibid., pg. 233.
(2) Act I, sc. i, ibid., pg. 225.
(3) Act II, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 246.
(4) Ibid.

The most interesting aspect of Sganarelle's experience in the play, is that he is both the victim and the beneficiary of circumstances beyond his control. It has been suggested(1) that as a protégé of Bacchus, he has a right to join that tradition-hallowed society of Shakespeare's clowns and rustics, of the Sir Toby Belch and Falstaff variety. Like them, he imbibes optimism with his wine, an insouciant "sac à vin" who carelessly embraces whatever lot fortune is pleased to send him. Even when it appears that he cannot escape a hanging for his part in the abduction of Lucinde, he still has it in him to pun with his wife: his "retire-toi de là, tu me fends le coeur" (2) is a brilliant play on the verb "fendre", in view of his profession before attaining the elevated rank of medical practitioner. Not only does this witticism in the face of death and punishment suggest that he will escape the gallows; it is also a reflection of his cheerful peasant philosophy of life, that something will always turn up, and that it is no use troubling about adversity until it is upon one. In the event, he is, of course, proved right. Another facet of this philosophy is the belief that one should take all one can, materially speaking, when opportunity presents itself. Unlike Harpagon, whose avarice has the dimensions of tragic passion, Sganarelle is guilty of that brand of rapacity which is the endemic disease of the opportunist, as his dealings with Géronte, Léandre, Thibaut and Perrin illustrate. Financial gain is not the be-all and end-all

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(1) By M.L. Emery, in <u>Molière, du métier à la pensée,</u> Cahiers Libres, 1956.

(2) Act III, sc. ix, ibid., pg. 259.

of existence for Sganarelle, but even so, he is delightfully uninhibited about his expectations of payment for advice or assistance given. He is always ready to proffer an outstretched hand, palm up, as he asks the familiar question, "Que voulez-vous que j'y fasse?" With his exuberance, cunning, earthiness and wine-bibbing, his optimism and mercenary tendencies, Sganarelle is a worthy representative of his class. The fact that he does not speak in patois lends him a certain universality; he is the incarnation, so to speak, of peasant values and attitudes.

The other peasants in Le Médecin malgré lui offer material for comment as well, although obviously they are not as compelling as the main protagonist. Of Géronte's servants, only Lucas and Jacqueline belong to the peasantry; Valère (if we can judge by the costume worn by this character) is higher in the household, and is a sort of bailiff. Lucas provides a foil for Sganarelle's sparkling personality, for he is a dour, jealous, mean-spirited individual, who has a temporary triumph at the end of the play when he reveals to Géronte the trick played upon him by the "doctor" and his "apothecary". This malicious pleasure is short-lived, however; poetic justice could never allow a person of Lucas' calibre to worst the quick-witted Sganarelle. Throughout the play, in fact, Lucas is a secondary character, from the scene in which he endorses all Valère's appeals to the woodcutter to cure Lucinde,

to the final one in which, predictably, he has nothing to say. His clumsy patois and unimaginative comments set him down from the start as a dim-witted yokel, yet occasionally he provokes laughter by his very naïvety. His remark on Sganarelle's dress as described by Martine ("C'est donc le médecin des paroquets?") (1) is not without wit, and his judgement of the "doctor" once he has actually met him is involuntarily sound: "velà un médecin qui me plaît: je pense qu'il réussira, car il est bouffon".(2) However much of a non-sequitur that statement might be, it is precisely because Sganarelle is a "bouffon" that he manages so well in his impersonation, - although Lucas, of course, is not to know this at such an early stage of acquaintance. Lucas' attitude to his master is deferential, but to his wife he is autocratic and peremptory, to such an extent that one does not begrudge her the excitement of some admiration from Sganarelle; and Lucas' treatment of her justifies the complaints she makes of her lot as his wife:

> "Que velez-vous, Monsieur? c'est pour la pénitence de mes fautes; et là où la chèvre est liée, il faut bian qu'alle y broute." (3)

It would seem that she is not in much better case than Sganarelle's Martine, but where Sganarelle's cavalier attitude towards his spouse is redeemed to some extent

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(1) Act I, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 232.
(2) Act I, sc. v, ibid., pg. 238.
(3) Act III, sc. iii, ibid., pg. 253.

by his gaiety, Lucas is dry and humourless, and possessive to boot. Sganarelle's list of uncomplimentary names for him ("franc animal", "brutal", "stupide", "sot") are not without foundation. He represents another aspect of the peasantry: where Sganarelle epitomizes the Rabelaisian heartiness of simple folk, Lucas stands for their caution (he prudently avoids saying "diable", for example, preferring to use the discreet corruption "guèble"); narrowness; credulity; and possessiveness.

His wife, Jacqueline, is a more amiable person on the whole, although she, too, has some negative traits. She shares Lucas' tendency to superstition, as is suggested by her mistrust of doctors ("j'aime bian mieux qu'an ne me guérisse pas.") Her submissiveness to Lucas does not extend to Géronte, moreover, for she does not hesitate to tell her master what she thinks of his ineffectual methods of trying to cure his daughter. With the insight of common sense, she diagnoses Lucinde's trouble at once:

> "...votre fille a besoin d'autre chose que de ribarbe et de sené... Que ne preniais-vous ce Monsieur Liandre, qui li touchait au coeur?" (1)

The example with which she lends substance to this theory is of the simplest. Her sad tale of Simonette's marriage with Thomas, and subsequent decline, - all in the name of Mammon, - serves to show Géronte how misguided he is in selecting a son-in-law on the basis of capital-and-income.

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(1) Act II, sc. i, ibid., pg. 239.

Obviously Jacqueline is speaking as a woman, and it is only natural that sentiment should matter to her far more than high finance. Yet this apart, her views indicate a sound knowledge of psychology; a knowledge based on intuition rather than science, born of experience rather than book-learning. As is often the case, this home-spun philosophy, expressed with proverbial concision ("contentement passe richesse"), is a more valid assessment of human aspirations than more scholarly reflections upon Man and the meaning of Life. It is safe to say that Jacqueline is superior to her husband intellectually, even if she is his equal socially. On the moral level, she has sufficient integrity not to succumb to the energetic and persistent advances of Sganarelle, - however great the temptation to defy and betray her surly husband.

At the very bottom of the scale (for such we can discern, even within the ranks of the peasantry) are the ignorant rustics, Thibaut and Perrin, who come to consult the renowned "doctor" attendant on Lucinde. They appear very briefly, but the confrontation between their credulity and Sganarelle's guile is one of the more memorable scenes of the play. Certainly the playing-off of rogue against dupe or dupes is not original in Molière's comedies, as we have remarked already; but the characters of Thibaut and Perrin are something of a novelty in the dramatist's repertoire of personae. Their naïvety is slightly differentiated, for the son (paradoxically, in view of his youth

and inexperience) is less optimistic about the milk of human kindness than his simple parent: he realises that Sganarelle's incomprehension of their case will soon be remedied by a modest donation. Moreover, he speaks of "queuque remède" where Thibaut speaks of "queuque petite drôlerie", which implies a greater degree of awareness, and possibly education, in Perrin. Be this as it may, father and son are equally trusting when it comes to accepting blindly the prescription of the "doctor"; and not even Sganarelle's grave injunction to bury the woman "du mieux que vous pourrez" (1) in the likely event of her death, causes them to question his ability. His confidence and fluent tongue suffice to convince them utterly, for they are uncritical and superstitious.
Just as Sganarelle and Lucas represent the two poles, as it were, of peasant sensibility, Jacqueline (with her common sense and intuitive insight) and Thibaut (with his limited comprehension) stand for the poles of peasant intelligence. Altogether a very complete picture, part-realistic, part-traditional, of countryfolk emerges from Le Médecin malgré lui.

Whereas in the play just considered, the potential cruelty inherent in laughter is disguised by the tempo and gaiety of the work, the next comedy portraying peasants in the opus of Molière is very different, for it emphasizes irony;

(1) Act III, sc. ii,ibid., pg. 252.

and irony is more often the tool of tragedy than of comedy. The play in question is George Dandin, which had its première two years after Le Médecin. With realism replacing the whimsy of the earlier work, and the main protagonist appearing as a dull, not-particularly-endearing victim of his own vanity, the later play is the very antithesis of gaiety. Despite the potential robustness of a subject which would seem to invite a Rabelaisian treatment, the impression which finally emerges from George Dandin is one of sobriety. The peasant protagonists (Dandin himself, Claudine, Lubin and Colin) do not evince the same joyous, undisciplined attitude to life as do Sganarelle, Martine and Géronte's servants in Le Médecin malgré lui. It is true that Dandin's circumstances do not justify cheerfulness, but the atmosphere generated by the work is not explained merely by the situation of the main protagonist. Its cause lies deeper. The characters themselves have a hardness which makes for a certain air of pessimism attaching to the play even in lighter moments. For example, Lubin's indiscreet account to Dandin of Clitandre's successful overtures to Angélique under her husband's nose is highly amusing in terms of comic situation, but the speaker's pettiness and materialism detract from the heartiness of the laughter his error in addressing himself to Dandin would normally inspire. From Lubin's remarks, it is clear that he judges people in accordance with their willingness to give him money (of Clitandre he says, "... c'est le plus honnête homme que vous ayez jamais vu. Il m'a donné trois pièces d'or...")(1).

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, op. cit. II, pg. 467.

There is, moreover, an element of spite in the enjoyment with which he anticipates "the husband's" discomfiture in being cuckolded:

> "... cela sera drôle; car le mari ne se doutera point de la manigance, voilà ce qui est de bon; et il aura un pied de nez avec sa jalousie: est-ce pas?" (1)

Similarly, when we meet Claudine a few scenes later, her self-possession in the face of accusation, although it is amusing, betokens the same sort of slyness apparent in Lubin. A remark like:

> "Hélas! que le monde aujourd'hui est rempli de méchanceté, de m'aller soupçonner ainsi, moi qui suis l'innocence même!" (2)

is not only a blatant contradiction of fact; it gives the impression that the maidservant is thoroughly enjoying her advantage over her employer. That Dandin deserves this fate through excessive ambition is irrelevant. The fact remains that the peasants belonging to the lower orders in the play have the hardness of Sganarelle (in Le Médecin malgré lui) without his joyful zest for life. Even their love-making lacks that robust persistence which characterizes Sganarelle's pursuit of Jacqueline. Rebuffed by Claudine, Lubin resorts to insults and sulks ("Adieu, rocher, caillou, pierre de taille, et tout ce qu'il y a de plus dur au monde.") Later, despite the girl's in-

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(1) Act I, sc. ii, op. cit.II, pg. 468.
(2) Act I, sc. vi, ibid., pg. 475.

difference, Lubin simply assumes that their marriage will take place and congratulates himself (somewhat prematurely) on the intelligence of his future wife, whose aplomb in dealing with Clitandre is such that the difference in their rank is scarcely noticeable. Indeed, Claudine's confidence in herself even induces her to dismiss Clitandre's offer of remuneration on the grounds that

> "... je vous rends service parce que vous le méritez, et que je me sens au coeur de l'inclination pour vous." (1)

This is a very different reaction from the frankly mercenary outlook of Sganarelle. Claudine's words have the ring of pride, and suggest a degree of equality between herself and those who are her betters socially. Even Lubin, for all his naîvety and rusticity, has some illusions concerning his intellectual refinement. He smugly informs Clitandre that "si j'avais étudié, j'aurais été songer à des choses où on n'a jamais songé." (2) This contention is illustrated by a singularly foolish question (he asks Clitandre why there is no light at night); then the peasant-lad would recommend his native intelligence to Angélique's lover by relating his attempt to decipher elementary Latin.(3) Again, this is quite unlike the bland nonchalance with which Sganarelle fabricates his own brand of medical jargon in <u>Le Médecin malgré lui</u>.

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(1) Act II, sc. iv, ibid., pg. 484.
(2) Act III, sc. ii, ibid. pg. 491.
(3) Ibid

The main difference between the latter and Lubin is that Lubin takes himself seriously, whereas Sganarelle takes himself - and life - completely for granted. As for Claudine, her cynicism manifests itself in the tongue-in-cheek utterances relative to Angélique's chastity and Dandin's villainy, which she is ever willing to contribute to conversations in the presence of the de Sotenvilles. Altogether she and her indiscreet admirer do not emerge as particularly amiable individuals.

The other lowly protagonist, Colin, makes only a brief appearance when summoned by Dandin to call the de Sotenvilles, and the scene in which we meet him is one characterized by horse-play. He enters in an unorthodox fashion, via the window, and throughout Dandin's attempts to give him instructions, he obstinately avoids his master, so that the two of them are constantly at opposite ends of the stage. The reason for this physical distance maintained between them would appear to be Colin's cowardice: when Dandin appeals to him to approach, he answers, "Point: vous me voulez battre." (1) His words are few, and his characterization very slight. Indeed, if he is remembered at all, it is as a fatuous, rather pathetic figure whose antics provide some light relief from the prevailing sombreness of the play as a whole.

From this, it may be seen that there is little to commend

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(1) Act III, sc. iv, pg. 494.

the peasantry as depicted in George Dandin, - that is, if we do not take into account the main protagonist himself. However unattractive Dandin's qualities may be, it is true to say that there is in him something of the eternal peasant, (for a peasant he certainly is, despite his wealth and social ambitions); and the spectacle of an underdog bearing up stoically under the weight of misfortune and displaying a full awareness of his responsibility for his sufferings, is not altogether unworthy of sympathy. As each successive act of George Dandin culminates inevitably in the husband's abasement before his quick-witted, devious wife, it is not always possible to bear in mind the traditional reaction expected of an audience in Molière's day to a situation such as that of Dandin. However much this dour, hard-working, plain-living peasant may repel sympathy; however much his sufferings may be judged as logical retribution for excessive ambition, and his folly treated as cause for mirth rather than pity, it remains true that his is a predicament that no deus ex machina can remedy. The only expedient left to Dandin is that of suicide -

> "... le meilleur parti qu'on puisse prendre, c'est de s'aller jeter dans l'eau la tête la première".(1)

Even if this desperate statement is not to be taken seriously, it does in fact reflect the truth: the only way in which Dandin can find release from his conjugal problems is to take his life. His is a situation which no royal edict

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(1) Act III, sc. viii, ibid., pg. 503.

can alter, and no extraordinary revelation of kinship or disguised identity can amend. This inevitably lends a sober note to the play, quite apart from the prevailing unpleasantness of the other protagonists. It does not, however, imply that we are to consider Dandin the most amiable of the characters involved in the action, simply because he is a victim.

The resemblance between him and le Barbouillé is not obvious in early scenes of George Dandin, but in the third act, the reversal of Dandin's position as the innocent and outraged spouse reminds us forcibly of the situation presented in the farce which is attributed to Molière as one of his first works. Dandin is merely a more complex, interesting version of the coarse stock-figure whose wife bears the same name as Dandin's Angélique. Viewed in this light, the characterization of George Dandin himself may be assessed more accurately. He is cast in the same mould as le Barbouillé inasmuch as he shows little sympathy towards the inclinations of others. Just as the earlier character's attitude to his wife suggests egotism and insensitivity, so, too, Dandin's deliberate purchase (for that is what it amounts to) of Angélique without any reference to her feelings on the matter, (2) implies a degree of callousness not greatly unlike that of Lubin and Claudine. Dandin *is* victimized, but he is only receiving the due reward invited by his own behaviour. Once this fundamental fact is born in mind, it may be seen

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(1) C.f. Act II, sc. ii, ibid., pp. 482-483.

that Dandin differs from the other protagonists of the play only by reason of his position in relation to their's; psychologically he is no better or worse than Angélique, the de Sotenvilles, the peasant-domestics, and Clitandre. This means that a coherent picture of human nature in its pettiness, arrogance, wilfulness and cruelty emerges from George Dandin; it is especially interesting to note that the aristocratic protagonists are not portrayed in a better light than their social inferiors, and that at the same time, not even the fact of Dandin's sufferings is adequate compensation for the man's innate lack of appealing qualities. As in Dom Juan, we are left with the chill impression that there is not much to redeem either the higher or the lower orders of society.

Finally, then, what may be said of Molière's depiction of the peasantry?

From the plays discussed in this chapter, it would seem that representatives of this class offer little cause for admiration. Quite apart from their obvious deficiencies on aesthetic grounds, (for they are almost all clumsy and uncouth, speaking "patois", arguing and blundering their way through the situations in which the dramatist portrays them), - they are not characterized by moral worth either. Even the boisterous, and not unattractive, Sganarelle emerges as a fundamentally dishonest, selfish individual. On the whole, as a collectivity, peasants in Molière's

plays are signalized by their lack of generosity. While it is only natural that they should not be refined (in view of their circumstances and the limitations of their way of life), there is nothing inherent in their condition to presuppose egotism, malice and avarice. Yet this is how they appear in the comedies featuring them. There is nothing in Molière's work to suggest the simplicity and spontaneous goodness that a life lived humbly, close to the soil, is assumed to generate, - at any rate, in the opinion of moralists and thinkers more idealistic, perhaps, than Molière. At the same time, there is no attempt on the part of the dramatist to relate the moral inferiority of the peasant to his social condition, nor to justify and explain its existence. The few peasants whom we do encounter in Molière's work are merely shown playing their part in the action, and we accept them as they are, without necessarily seeing them in terms of their place in the social hierarchy. It is reasonable to assume that it is not Molière's intention that we should.

CONCLUSION.

From King to peasant, the whole social hierarchy of Molière's day has been considered in terms of the dramatist's depiction of various representatives of the classes making up society. It now remains only to draw certain tentative conclusions relative to the social criteria implicit in this portrayal.

In view of the vagueness of that convenient generalization, "social criteria", it is essential to clarify the definition of the term before attempting to assess its relevance to Molière's work. This task is simplified if the criteria are divided into innate qualities and acquired qualities. In the former category may be placed such attributes as intelligence, moral integrity and physical beauty, while to the latter one may be assigned wealth, prestige, sophistication and erudition. In each case, the possession of the above-mentioned characteristics tends to inspire admiration or respect, while the lack thereof has the opposite effect upon one's opinion of the individual involved. To a greater or lesser degree, every character in Molière's plays is subject to judgement according to one (or several) of those criteria. This is an obvious statement, and does not invite argument or discussion. What we are concerned with here is the question of whether the individual criteria enumerated are as operative in assessment of people in Molière's

time, as the place of those people in society. In other words, is the seventeenth-century mind prejudiced to the extent that it judges, not in terms of innate or acquired qualities, but in terms of position in the social hierarchy? The answer to this question, based on the preceding study of Molière's works, may well prove useful in understanding the dramatist's own attitude towards both the society in which he lived, and the reflection of it mirrored in his comedies.

For the sake of convenience, in the following discussion of the issue in question, innate qualities will be considered separately from acquired ones, since they pertain to the individual rather than to his social environment, while the opposite is true of acquired attributes. Both will be examined with reference to the social hierarchy and Molière's plays, after which it will be possible to determine the influence of position in society upon the estimation of a given person.

Of all the intrinsic qualities, that which tends to level social inequalities the most is intelligence, since it enables the person fortunate enough to be endowed generously with it, to surmount many of the difficulties attendant upon lowly birth and impecuniousness. It is therefore logical to give some attention to this factor first. The recurrent phenomenon in Molière's work of cunning and re-

sourceful servants whose quick wits render them virtually superior to their master or mistress (once the element of comic tradition inherited from playwrights of antiquity has been recognized), inclines one to the belief that common sense and astuteness are attributes of the lower orders of society rather than of the élite.(1) Yet this contention would presuppose the absence of mental agility in more distinguished members of society; and Molière's plays are not wanting in lucid, sagacious bourgeois and aristocrats. One has only to recall the sensible utterances of Ariste in L'Ecole des maris, or of Béralde in Le Malade imaginaire, to realize that middle-class protagonists are just as capable of sound judgement as plebeian ones. Similarly, the effective stratagem whereby Ariste reveals the turpitude and insincerity of Trissotin in Les Femmes savantes proves that successful intriguing is not the preserve of valets like Sganarelle and maids like Toinette. As for the nobility, Philinte's judicious compromise between absolute honesty and obsequiousness suggests an ability to grasp the problems presented by sophisticated social intercourse, and - more important - to find a solution to them. For all his moral deficiencies, Dom Juan makes some penetrating comments on the vices of his time, which show a shrewd, perceptive mind. ("...tous les vices à la mode passent pour vertus.") (2) Dorante, in La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, emerges as a person

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(1) See chapters one and two of the fourth section of Part Two.

(2) Dom Juan, Act V, sc. ii, Op. cit. II, pg. 80.

of intelligence and sensitivity, whose opinions are to be respected. Even his namesake in Le Bourgeois gentilhomme displays a capacity for wiliness (in exploiting Monsieur Jourdain's snobbishness) not unworthy of Scapin and Mascarille. It would seem that intelligence, whether it is put to admirable or despicable use, is not confined to any specific social group in Molière's plays. Judging by his enlightened intervention at the end of Tartuffe and L'Impromptu de Versailles, the King himself may be regarded as having his share of this desirable attribute, and as such the only difference between his wisdom and that of a servant such as Covielle is, that their differing stations necessitate dissimilar tactics in the employment of their respective wits for the benefit of others.

The most superficial, - and yet in some respects the most compelling, - of innate qualities influencing judgement of one's fellow-beings, is that which appeals to the aesthetic sense, namely, beauty. Does this feature appear to have the same breadth of application at all levels of society as intelligence, according to Molière's depiction? Obviously at the top of the hierarchy, it is to be found in abundance, and it is no surprise to the reader or audience to encounter fair princesses like Eriphile (Les Amants magnifiques), Psyché, and the Princesse d'Elide, or comely royal youths like Euryale, Aristomène, Théocle (La Princesse d'Elide), Iphicrate and Timoclès (Les Amants magnifiques). Their physical

beauty is little more than a convention, and represents to some extent a visual reminder of their superior rank. Aristocratic young women like Célimène (Le Misanthrope) Done Elvire (Dom Juan) Angélique (George Dandin) and Dorimène (Le Bourgeois gentilhomme) are equally pleasing to the eye, if we are to judge by the references to their perfections by other protagonists; and lower still on the social scale is to be found a considerable number of middle-class beauties courted by middle-class beaux no whit inferior to them in looks. Even when Nature has not favoured the girl in question with obvious comeliness, there is in her that which is just as important: charm. Such is the case of Monsieur Jourdain's Lucile, of whom Cléonte says, "ses manières sont engageantes, ont je ne sais quel charme à s'insinuer dans les coeurs".(1) One would expect the proportion of pretty faces to decrease once the action is transported from the salon to the kitchen, in view of the coarsening effect of physical toil and harder living conditions. Yet this expectation is belied by such appetizing females as Jacqueline, Géronte's wet-nurse (Le Médecin malgré lui), Claudine, maid-servant to Angélique (George Dandin) and the peasant-girls Charlotte and Mathurine, who are sufficiently attractive to catch the eye of Dom Juan, despite the lack of personal adornment and hygiene incidental to their position and occupation. From this we can deduce that in the dramatist's view, beauty, like intelligence, knows no

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(1) Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, Act III, sc. ix, Op. cit.II,pg.750.

social barriers, and it can manifest itself in duchess and scullery-maid alike. On the other hand, it is true that there is an understandable enough tendency for physical perfection to be emphasized more as a characteristic of the gentlefolk than of the lower orders of society; but it should be remembered that in the case of the former, native gifts are enhanced by the grace of good breeding. This distinction is more noticeable where males are concerned. On the whole, masculine representatives of the peasantry are portrayed as rustic, clumsy creatures whose dismal lack of polish renders them aesthetically unsatisfactory, regardless of whether or not they are blessed with natural good looks. (Pierrot and Lubin are examples of this type of protagonist.)

More subtle and complex than either intelligence or a prepossessing presence is the criterion of moral integrity. The general pattern of comedy is to unmask hidden motives, and in an age which produced a work such as La Rochefoucauld's _Maximes_, and delighted in the exposure of hypocrisy and "amour-propre", it is only to be expected that comic dramatists like Molière should deal with issues involving aspects of man's conscience, strengths and weaknesses. Although there is some relevance to ethics in virtually every play penned by Molière, the matter of hypocrisy is specifically featured as the main theme of three of the comedies: _Tartuffe_, _Dom Juan_ and _Le Misanthrope_. In the two first-mentioned, we are presented with actual specimens

of the vice in question, - one non-noble, the other, aristocratic. In the third, the main protagonist is a critic of hypocrisy, and belongs to the same social rank as Dom Juan and other members of the élite, whose conscience would not appear to be over-sensitive in matters of intellectual honesty. Accordingly, it cannot be claimed that any one class of society emerges as particularly reprehensible where hypocrisy is concerned. On a more materialistic level, there is the question of charlatanism, - one of the most obvious themes of comedy, which so frequently portrays the confrontation between rogue and dupe. In Molière's numerous "medical" comedies and farces, the impostors of science are in most cases servants who, despite their willingness to further their masters' cause, are not averse to extracting what remuneration they can from their panic-stricken "client". Even Diafoirus, Purgon and Fleurant, whose determination to milk Argan of as much money as they can borders on cynicism, are not of the higher orders of society, - although, obviously, they are not as plebeian as the Sganarelles and Mascarilles who so competently don the robes of Medicine to dupe credulous bourgeois. Cast in the same mould as Purgon are Monsieur Jourdain's music and dancing masters, whose conversation at the beginning of Le Bourgeois gentilhomme leaves one in little doubt of their intentions regarding their patron.(1) Philaminte's mercenary protégé, Trissotin, is yet another representative of the parasite

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(1) Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, Act I, sc. i, Op. cit.II, pg. 712.

out to get the maximum financial benefit from his association with a wealthy, middle-class household. Neither servant nor noble, he is to be placed somewhere in the ranks of the lower middle classes. Higher up the scale of intriguers and fortune-hunters (for rogues like Sbrigani in Le Sicilien and "femmes d'intrigue" like Nérine in Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, and Frosine in L'Avare may be assigned to the same category as Trissotin) we find Dorante, who courts his lady with Monsieur Jourdain's money, and the de Sotenvilles, who cold-bloodedly marry off their daughter to a person for whom she has no affinity, in order to restore the family fortune. As for Dom Juan, - hypocrisy apart, - he stoops to commercial dishonesty in his dealings with Monsieur Dimanche, thereby betraying all the ideals for which he, as a nobleman, is supposed to stand. At the top of the scale is Jupiter in Amphitryon, - a figure of ambiguous identity who, despite his divine powers, is reduced to subterfuge and deceit to get his own way. In other words, from the highest to the lowest orders of society, human weakness is discernible in Molière's protagonists, when these are judged from a negative point of view. In more positive terms can we detect uncompromising virtue as the characteristic of a given class of society? Setting apart the "sympathetic" personae who, while they display symptoms of rectitude, are not signalized by a passion for following regardless the dictates of Conscience, (and these, it should be noted, are to be found at all levels of the social hierarchy) there are only two of Molière's

characters who exhibit exceptional moral integrity: Francisque the beggar in Dom Juan, and Alceste the nobleman in Le Misanthrope. Whether the former's ability to resist temptation is merely a pretext to emphasize the Dom's depravity, and the latter's obsession with honesty a comic device to illustrate a potential attitude towards social intercourse, is irrelevant. The point is, that the individuals in question are from totally different sections of society, - a fact which would seem to suggest the universality of virtuous principles courageously applied.

Intrinsic qualities, then, - an important basis for criteria, - are not apparently regarded by Molière as divisible according to social rank. Human nature is the same for a King as for a serf, if we may judge by the dramatist's depiction of innate attributes in his characters. What of acquired attributes?

Few possessions inspire more respect than that of wealth, and the spectacle of persons wanting that commodity, and endeavouring to obtain it at the expense of others more affluent and less intelligent than themselves, is one of the common-places of comedy. Molière's works offer abundant matter for comment in this respect. The most predictably impecunious class of society is that of the plebs, and it is therefore only natural that a high pro-

portion of Molière's plays should feature the attempts of peasants, servants, and lower middle-class individuals to better themselves financially. The methods used by these fortune-seekers are seldom conventional (Scapin and Mascarille resort to the most extravagant fictions to extort money from their masters' fathers, while Sganarelle the "doctor" puts up an outrageous performance before his carefully-camouflaged demand for payment.) The vital question of our attitude towards them is easily answered if we consider for a moment the victims of their exploitation. It is true that these enterprising, acquisitive persons are of questionable honesty, and this aspect has just been discussed; but on the other hand, the naïvety, egotism, gullibility and lack of perspicacity characterizing those off whom they prey, tend to mitigate the harshness with which we are tempted to judge them. This is just as valid a statement for minor characters as for principal ones, from the tailor's apprentice in Le Bourgeois gentilhomme to Léandre's valet in Les Fourberies de Scapin.

The traditionally middle-class penchant for economy, and the bourgeois lack of initiative, make for a less compelling depiction of attitudes to wealth in those orders of society between the proletariate and the aristocracy. With the exception of Harpagon, all the stolid, comfortably-off burgesses in Molière's comedies have acquired their fortunes through long years of conscientious toil (Monsieur Jourdain's affluence, for example, is due to his successful

trading as a mercer.) Collectively, they present a picture of honesty without glamour in their acquisition of prosperity, and in most of them frugality degenerates into parsimony: even the liberal Jourdain recalls to the last farthing the amount Dorante owes him, while Harpagon carries to its ultimate extreme the caution in expenditure associated with the middle classes. On the whole, they are not a particularly attractive group of individuals, although many of them are unforgettable by virtue of their aberrations. Not even their money (despite Jourdain's music master's contention) is adequate compensation for their intellectual and aesthetic limitations, and they inspire little respect. The characters of Harpagon and Argan are especially devoid of traits likely to appeal to an audience, since both are monumentally selfish, and inhuman to their children although they are capable of mawkish sentimentality. Both prize money, and both possess it in appreciable quantities; yet they are regarded as fair game for rogues rather than as men to be respected for their financial soundness.

The most interesting feature of the bourgeois acquisition of wealth is the narrowing of social distances between the upper middle-classes and the lower echelons of the nobility; particularly when the latter are not as opulent as their rank would normally lead one to suppose. The de Sotenville/Dandin situation, like the Dorante/Jourdain one, presents highly relevant material for discussion of social mobility. The reaction to the respective characters is not necessarily

the one we might anticipate. Victims though they are, Dandin and Jourdain do not emerge from their exploitation at the hands of impecunious aristocrats as persons worthy of sympathy. They are in fact no more likeable than the unscrupulous parasites attracted to them by their wealth. This tends to neutralize the degree of censure that the behaviour of the de Sotenvilles and Dorante would normally invite. As for wealth in the ranks of the aristocracy proper and of court-circles, it is a matter which does not appear to trouble for a moment the elegant heads of Célimène, Uranie, and those of their social milieu. The careless liberality with which Eraste (Les Fâcheux) gives financial assistance to Ormin further illustrates the typically "noble" attitude towards money: it is simply taken for granted. It is more in bourgeois circles that wealth is important, - a fact attested by the middle-class father's concern with the financial status of his prospective son-in-law. (Such are, for example, Oronte in Monsieur de Pourceaugnac and Géronte, in Le Médecin malgré lui.) The higher an individual's rank, the more money is regarded as a commodity unworthy of serious consideration, however much its loss might prove inconvenient in practical terms. Significantly, the possession of an abundant fortune does not inspire sincere respect for the owner thereof; it merely encourages ironical flattery (the case of Monsieur Jourdain and Argan) or grudging tolerance of shortcomings (the case of Dandin).

Allied to the acquisition of wealth is the acquisition of

prestige and power. These latter attributes, however, are not much featured in Molière's plays, and are only alluded to obliquely by minor characters. They are entirely absent from works centring around plebeian protagonists, and from the evidence of comedies like Le Misanthrope, in which Oronte and Acaste speak complacently of their influence at Court, and Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, in which Dorante dazzles Monsieur Jourdain with a casual reference to conversation in the King's ante-chamber, it would seem that power is considered the preserve of court-aristocrats. The upper ranks of the bourgeoisie apparently approximate to some degree of influence through service to the royal person, - Orgon, for instance, deserves well of His Majesty through his efforts for the King's cause on the battleground,(1) while Cléonte can boast six years of military service as a recommendation to compensate for the deficiencies of his birth.(2) Monsieur Tibaudier and Monsieur Harpin, by virtue of the offices they hold, can qualify as admirers of a lady of noble birth, even though they remain socially inferior to her.(3) Despite these symptoms of social mobility, however, the general impression gained from Molière's plays is, that prestige is reserved for those whose lineage warrants a place at Court and respect in society. A small, but telling, comment on the pretentions

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(1) Tartuffe, Act I, sc. ii, Op. cit. I, pg. 902.

(2) Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, Act III, sc. xii, Op. cit.II, pg. 754.

(3) La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, see list of personae.Op.cit.II, pg. 953.

of upper middle-class individuals behaving above their station comes from Géronimo in Le Mariage forcé, when he speaks of Alcidas "qui se mêle de porter l'épée", (1) implying that the young man has no business to devote himself to aristocratic pursuits. Similarly Harpagon is critical of his son's dress as being too elaborate and too costly to suit one of his rank ("vous donnez furieusement dans le marquis") (2), while Madame Pernelle's censure of Elmire is based on the fact that she dresses too richly and indulges in the activities of a great lady.(3) In other words, middle-class folk should live according to their means and their station; and power and prestige are not necessarily a part of the bourgeois condition. As for the peasantry, Dandin's plight is ample enough comment on the folly of those of humble birth whose social ambitions tempt them too far.

If wealth and power are essential, but not manifest, attributes of the nobility and certain of the higher echelons of the middle-classes, the same is not true of sophistication in manners and fashion. This index of social superiority is perhaps the most striking feature which differentiates the Parisian from the provincial, and the noble from the bourgeois. At the bottom of the hierarchy, it is almost wholly lacking, except in the form

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(1) Le Mariage forcé, Sc. i, Op. cit. I, pg. 719.
(2) L'Avare, Act I, sc. iv, Op. cit. II, pg. 525.
(3) Tartuffe, Act I, sc. i, Op. cit. I, pg. 897.

of burlesque, - when Mascarille and Jodelet parody the airs and graces of their superiors, for example, in Les Précieuses ridicules. Despite the ludicrous exaggeration of their dress, speech, and gestures, some picture of a life-style which could only be that of the leisured nobility emerges from the performance of these two servants as they call forth all their resources to impress their gullible female audience. In Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, a less caricatural image of the aristocratic way of life is projected through the main protagonist's aspirations to reproducing the habits of the élite, and his endeavours to achieve gentility. In no other play of Molière's does the refinement of the higher orders of society appear such an ideal worth striving for; and the ineptitude of the bourgeois to attain it (despite great expenditure of money and enthusiasm) implies that it is the preserve of those born and bred to it. Not much better than Jourdain in her attempts to imitate Parisian elegance is the Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, whose rustic salon, pseudo-knowledge of the "smart" way of doing things, and self-felicitating conviction that she is the arbitrix elegantiarum of her milieu, evoke both the antics of Mascarille and the earnestness of Monsieur Jourdain. Once we come to the plays featuring exclusively aristocratic characters, it is easier to discern the dramatist's conception of that good breeding and sophistication inherent in the nobility. The salons of Célimène and Uranie, the dealings of Eraste with his peers in Les Fâcheux, and the nonchalance with which Dom Juan lounges through his extraordinary adventures, all

suggest that happy savoir-faire so difficult to achieve and almost impossible to imitate. Even Clitandre (George Dandin) and Dorante (Le Bourgeois gentilhomme) are stylish, despite their moral shortcomings. On the negative side, there is the danger that excessive elegance may degenerate into foppishness, and refined manners, into affectation; and Molière discreetly implies this in his characterization of minor protagonists like the Marquis in La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes, and Acaste and Clitandre in Le Misanthrope, as well as referring more explicitly to the matter in L'Impromptu de Versailles. (1) This should not, however, lead one to suppose that the dramatist is contemptuous of aristocratic behaviour; he is merely aware of the potential aberrations it might occasion, and as a comic playwright he profits occasionally from the absurdity inherent therein. It is quite possible to admire the ideal form of a given phenomenon while censuring its extremes, or parodying them. Unlike wealth, which can be acquired by anyone at any level of the social hierarchy, it would seem from Molière's comedies that poise and polish, at their best, are found among the higher rather than the lower orders of society.

Not far removed from knowledge of etiquette and prevailing fashion is knowledge per se. This is, of course, related to the innate quality of intelligence, but differs from it

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(1) L'Imptromptu de Versailles, Sc. i, Op. cit.I, pg. 681.

inasmuch as knowledge may be acquired from books, and is accessible to all, whereas intelligence can only be developed; it cannot be increased. At the top of the social scale, knowledge, like wealth, seems to be taken very much for granted. Mascarille's witticism at the expense of the nobility, - ("Les gens de qualité savent tout sans avoir jamais rien appris") (1) despite its flippancy, has some relevance to fact. The absence of obvious book-learning, and the horror of pedantry among cultivated habitués of aristocratic salons, does not mean that these flowers of upper-class society are ignorant or incapable of showing interest in literature. As we have seen in the present thesis, (2) there is among them a considerable concern for both poetry (mainly of their own composition) and plays. Uranie's friends spend a whole evening discussing the merits and demerits of L'Ecole des femmes, and also the difficulties with which the comic dramatist has to contend. Similarly Eraste, at the beginning of Les Fâcheux, alludes to his visit to the theatre, where he was importuned by a person of the same social rank as himself, - in other words, a marquis. Cléante, in La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, commissions a comedy for the Countess's entertainment. As patrons of the arts, aristocrats do not confine their attention to drama. Monsieur Jourdain's "sérénade" for Dorimène is ordered because such is the practice of the nobility;

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(1) Les Précieuses ridicules, sc. ix, Op. cit.II, pg. 277 .
(2) See chapter one, second section of Part Two.

and Lysandre, Eraste's friend in <u>Les Fâcheux</u>, prides himself on the "courante" he has composed himself, complete with choreography, while his reference to "Baptiste" (1) implies a degree of familiarity with the great Lulli, which is apparently a source of satisfaction to the young nobleman. In the matter of direct participation in artistic activities, it has already been pointed out (2) to what extent court-nobles contributed to the spectacular entertainments conceived or commissioned by the King. A superficial competency at turning verses is another sign of aristocratic breeding, and the reaction of Oronte to Alceste's criticism of his sonnet is some indication of the seriousness with which dilettante poets were capable of regarding their efforts (despite careless protestations of the speed and ease with which the poetry is tossed off). Mascarille's travesty of an "impromptu", and Trissotin's laboured sonnet on the fever of the Princesse Uranie, as well as Monsieur Tibaudier's stanzas of reproachful affection to his Countess, are all inspired by aristocratic practice. So long as literary or musical talent is not over-emphasized, it would seem to be considered a most respectable adjunct to the "noble" way of life. As one descends into the ranks of the bourgeoisie, knowledge adopts a different, more utilitarian form. Except for the masters engaged in the cultural edification of Monsieur Jourdain, and the professional scholars Trissotin and

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(1) <u>Les Fâcheux</u>, sc, iii, Op. cit. I, pg. 496.
(2) See chapter two, first section of Part Two.

Vadius in Philaminte's middle-class salon, bourgeois exponents of specialized fields of knowledge are nearly all doctors, notaries or tutors. Molière's presentation of them betokens a curiously ambivalent attitude, since they are evidently respected by those having recourse to their services, while in themselves they are depicted as narrow, unintelligent, and pedantic. In the case of the doctors, (always a target for the dramatist's satire, occasioned by personal resentment), dishonesty and arrogance are added to the other unattractive qualities characterizing this group of individuals. (The obvious examples of this type of protagonist are Purgon, Diafoirus senior and junior, and Fleurant in Le Malade imaginaire.) As for the legal gentlemen who appear in the final scenes of domestic dramas to draw up the marriage-contract for starry-eyed couples, they are on the whole a dry, impassive, hidebound species whose dreary meticulousness contrasts amusingly with the atmosphere of joyful festivity surrounding them. They are a necessary, but not particularly admirable, instrument in the realization of young dreams. As for tutors, neither the "philosophe" employed by Monsieur Jourdain, nor Monsieur Bobinet (tutor to the son of the Comtesse d'Escarbagnas) are distinguished by native wit or sensitivity to the intellectual level of their pupils: they are pompous and pedantic.

Finally, hovering on the dividing-line between reality and fantasy, and of doubtful social origin, are those absurd,

wordy, and utterly incompetent "philosophers" whose opinion is earnestly sought by credulous bourgeois of uncertain mind: such is the "Docteur" in La Jalousie du Barbouillé, and such, too, are Caritidès (Les Fâcheux), Pancrace and Marphurius (Le Mariage forcé), and, - although described as doctors of medicine, - Tomès, des Fonandrès, Macroton, Bahys, and Filerin (L'Amour médecin), whose contradictory jargon is closer to the abstractions of philosophy than to the recommendations of medical science. In this category may be placed, too, the agile charlatans from the bottom of the social hierarchy: the pseudo-doctors and apothecaries whose fluent imitations of medical Latin and specialized terms are so little different from the speech of real practitioners that they are indistinguishable from their original models. The accuracy of the untrained impostors' reproduction is in itself a comment on the gratuitousness of the sort of information peddled by so-called men of learning.

In conclusion, it may be said that, like the other acquired qualities forming a basis for criteria, learning is theoretically open to all, and in itself is an admirable thing; yet it is liable to be travestied in inept and clumsy hands, and may be debased into meaningless or absurd trivia which invite censure and ridicule. The lower orders of society are less likely than their betters to assimilate gracefully and successfully the positive elements that

justify the prestige attaching naturally to knowledge.

Following this review of the various qualities, both intrinsic and extrinsic, upon which criteria are founded, it is possible to assess the extent to which position in the social hierarchy of Molière's time appears to have affected the opinion formed of an individual. Two alternative theories immediately suggest themselves: either rank is the supreme criterion, to the exclusion of every other attribute; or else it is merely a secondary criterion which, when it reinforces the judgement already invited by other qualities in a given person, only does so fortuitously.

So long as we confine ourselves to innate qualities, the latter theory holds good. Throughout Molière's works there are to be found people from all walks of life, from aristocrat to peasant, who are dull-witted, evil-minded, gauche and unsightly; just as there are those who are brilliant, upright, or aesthetically pleasing. In other words, social rank does not guarantee the perfection of those favoured with the privileges attendant on high birth, nor does it presuppose imperfection in those without such advantages.

As soon as acquired attributes are taken into account, however, the whole question assumes greater complexity. Whether Molière does so consciously or not, the impression

gained from a comprehensive survey of his characterizations is, that people belonging to the élite are on the whole more capable of turning to good account such things as wealth, influence, and learning, than are non-noble persons. When a middle-class protagonist has a fortune not commensurate with his station, he is shown squandering it on an unworthy protégé or a treacherous wife, or else refusing to do anything with it at all except hoard it.(1) Bourgeois attempts at social climbing to achieve greater prestige are far from happy, and are dictated by nothing more than ill-founded vanity.(2) As for the acquisition of knowledge and culture, the contrast between the salons of great ladies and those of middle-class matrons or provincial bourgeoises is in itself sufficient indication of the dramatist's view of debasement suffered by intellectual pursuits when these are embraced by persons ill-suited to them.(3) However great the shortcomings associated with the upper classes may be, - and Molière is as aware as anyone of the laziness, affectation, and complacency which often characterize the high-born, - the fact remains that there is more respect and admiration apparent for those well-placed in the hierarchy than for those of humble circumstances.

In the final analysis, then, it will be seen that in the

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(1) The case of Orgon, Argan and Harpagon respectively.

(2) E.g. Arnolphe and Monsieur Jourdain. George Dandin fares no better.

(3) E.g. Célimène's salon as compared with that of Philaminte, or Uranie's contrasted with that of Magdelon and Cathos.

question of the importance of social rank as a criterion in Molière's drama, it is necessary to acknowledge a certain dichotomy in the dramatist himself. As a man of reason and perspicacity, he inevitably observes and records weaknesses in privileged individuals, and admirable qualities in those not so privileged socially. Hence the presence of innate characteristics at all levels of the hierarchy as he knew and depicted it. On the other hand, as a man living in an age when social prejudice was such that a person's place in society counted for more than the sum of his or her intrinsic and extrinsic qualities, Molière cannot help but exhibit some symptoms of prejudice himself, however contrary to reason, - and these are discernible in his treatment of acquired attributes. The notion of hierarchy is so deeply ingrained in the seventeenth-century conception of man in a social collectivity, that Molière would not be of his time were there no indications of this view in his work; and like every truly great artist, he is both a representative of his times and a universal genius.

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