CHAPTER THREE

EXEMPLARY NOBILITY AND UNWORTHINESS

Between the spring of 1665 and the late autumn of 1666, Molière completed and staged two great plays that explore the innermost structures of the nobility, *Dom Juan* and *Le Misanthrope*. In discussing the social framework of these comedies, it is imperative to avoid the many pitfalls of anachronistic prejudices. Lucien Goldmann, for instance, presents an orthodox Marxist viewpoint when he characterizes the ancien régime nobility as idle and divorced from the means of production; yet, such statements presuppose a dichotomy of material and idea, as well as an equation of industrial expansion with progress—concepts alien to the perceptions of seventeenth-century Frenchmen.¹ Louis XIV’s nobles enjoyed power, respect, and material benefits that induced many bourgeois to abandon lucrative careers and to risk fortunes to join their ranks. Far from considering itself to be a mechanism of production, where positions must be justified by economic output, this social order took the image of preserver of an age-old status quo, the alternative to which was sporadic anarchy. The officer corps of the nation’s army, as well as some entire specialized units, maintained a predominantly noble character, even though more and more commanders, especially in the engineers, were of relatively recent nobility. Louis XIV himself did much to revive the military mystique of the second order when he led several successful campaigns in his youth. The noblesse did face problems of
identity, values, and organization caused by the growing numbers of anoblis, the deepening schism between the court nobility and the impoverished gentry, and the tendency of the king to draw upon the civilian officers for much aid and advice. Nevertheless, the obsolescence of the nobility was the last thing on anyone's mind at the time, and the works of Sorel, La Bruyère, and others are replete with examples of commoners scrambling to buy, or to usurp, noble status. It may be stated as an axiom that Molière's audience was conscious of the aristocrat's dominant and enviable position at the top of the active secular hierarchy.

Any attempt to depict the collective mentality of the noblesse as reflected in the discourse of the mid-century comedy of manners must take into account the temporal factors that contributed to the differentiation of behavior at that moment in history. Noblemen of the grand siècle were not simply turned loose on the world, armed with ill-gotten wealth, libido, and lettres de cachet, as were some of their counterparts in eighteenth-century novels. Aristocratic status carried an important concomitant obligation to shun unworthiness in its many forms. Treatises on nobility were in general agreement that noble behavior had to be exemplary, and that it was incumbent upon the individual to pass on an "unsullied" name to his descendants, in recognition of his own duty to the lineage. Nobles were not compelled to demonstrate brilliance, to amass fortunes, or to achieve anything at all extraordinary. However, they were expected to sacrifice even their lives if collective or personal honor should demand it. In this codified existence, many of the most unworthy acts came under the heading of dérogeance or déchéance, that is, behavior that causes the loss, temporary or permanent, individual or familial, of noble status. It should be pointed out that neither seventeenth-century social theorists nor more modern ones are in complete agreement as to the defini-
tion and extent of loss of nobility—a state of confusion to which the legal heterogeneity of monarchial France did much to contribute. Most authorities do concur that crimes of treason and lèse-majesté caused a loss of status that supplemented whatever corporal penalties were imposed. Some go on to include a variety of other “infamous” crimes, such as counterfeiting, larceny, and even bankruptcy! Explicit proof of Molière’s interest in the question is supplied by Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, where the protagonist worries that if he is hanged for bigamy, an infamous crime, his entire family might lose its claim to nobility (3. 2). The majority of theorists agree that commerce or manufacturing, especially on the retail level, constituted dérogance, although there were old exceptions for glass-making and more recent ones for certain types of maritime commerce. The province of Brittany was particularly permissive in that it allowed for a sort of dormancy of nobility during commercial activity, after which the individual could resume his noble status and behavior simultaneously. Beyond the more obvious unworthiness of crimes and commerce, certain theorists extend the range of derogatory behavior to a much broader area, which is variously classified as nominal dérogance or as la mort civile. In fact, during Louis XIV’s reign, any aristocrat or officer who failed to “vivre noblement”—to obey the codes of honor, dress, speech, decorum, and so on—could not expect to receive full respect and might even arouse suspicion as to the validity of his claim to nobility.

In Molière’s lifetime two events served to make both noblesse and roturiers more sensitive than ever to the precariousness of social privilege. The first of these was the inauguration of a large-scale program of recherches de noblesse, or, more ominously, réformations. To review the status of all the noble families of the realm, the king established commissions, consisting largely of civil officers, to inquire into their backgrounds—a
process that went on intermittently through most of Molière's creative period. Although some aristocrats applauded this scheme (at least publicly) as a means of purging the order of usurpers and _anoblis_, the government ministers acted from the more pragmatic motivation of returning a large number of exempt individuals to the rolls of the _taille_ tax. To many families, the process was undoubtedly humiliating, since it involved justifying their cherished preeminence before supposedly inferior magistrates, in terms of the judges' own legalistic jargon and documentary expertise. It could also be costly, for official certification and unofficial extortion were sometimes inevitable. In the end, some "false nobles" were ferreted out, but powerful upstarts like Colbert could cause even patently imaginary genealogies to be accepted through their political influence.

The second unsettling event for the nobility was a mass prosecution in the Auvergne carried out by a special royally appointed court. Charged with ending the lawlessness and brigandage which plagued that province, these _Grands Jours_ took their ruthless toll and resulted in some well-publicized hangings. Once again, the fate of aristocrats lay in the hands of socially inferior judges. Like the _réformations_, the _Grand Jours d'Auvergne_ were full of troubling implications for the _noblesse_: they called attention to the existence of significant numbers of unworthy among their ranks and to the fact that these unworthies would be held accountable for their actions by an all-powerful king. What so many nobles had come to accept as eternal honors and privileges in the social hierarchy were in fact revealed to be very vulnerable.⁸

Despite the fact that Dom Juan Tenorio is perhaps the most outstanding negative exemplum for noble behavior in French classical literature and despite his appearance on the Paris stage in February 1665, when both the events in Auvergne and the _recherches de noblesse_ were nearing a crucial peak, Molière's
Dom Juan ou le Festin de Pierre has seldom received attention as a comedy of hierarchical irresponsibility. The eponym, played by Molière's urbane young leading man, La Grange, is a knight of the highest station who violates the codes of social relationship in every imaginable way. He has abandoned his wife, Elvire, before the play begins, and repudiates her again to her face in acts one and four and indirectly in act five, just as he has previously done with countless other women. Her brothers, Carlos and Alonse, bent on restoring their family's injured honor, dutifully pursue Dom Juan and manage to catch up with him in the third act, only to be obliged by ironic circumstances to grant him a temporary reprieve. He has killed a fellow aristocrat sometime in the past, and when he blasphemes in the dead man's tomb, a statue comes to life and also begins to close in on him. In the course of the first three acts, Dom Juan tries to kidnap a young bride, escapes from a shipwreck, tricks two country lasses with false proposals, flees incognito from the peasant village, gets lost in the woods, takes part in one sword fight, narrowly avoids another, and unexpectedly encounters the supernatural. Throughout this fast-paced baroque journey, he endures the constant prattle of his valet, Sganarelle, who neurotically but convincingly combines the archetypal roles of the good and evil parasites into a single erosive, disorderly character, played by Molière himself.

The broad outlines of this legend had been in place since the early part of the century, when the Spaniard Tirso de Molina originated the figure of Dom Juan in his Burlador de Sevilla. Parisian audiences were quite familiar with the story, since several versions in French and Italian had been presented to them on stage and in print during the decade preceding Molière's play. Conscious of these limitations, Molière strove to offer the public a revival of the lucrative atheist-blasted-by-heaven tradition, while at the same time fulfilling his desire to construct a
thought-provoking comedy on the lines of contemporary society.

The author had the misfortune to succeed a bit too well, to make Dom Juan so glib, so realistic that the legend was propelled to new heights; and the character—a wretched villain in Tirso’s play, a clever scoundrel in his own—was eventually dubbed by Enlightenment men of letters an anticlerical hero, a philosopher, an engaging man of the world, and became a libertine demigod of love in Mozart’s opera Don Giovanni. Post-Revolutionary generations have scoured the text for every shred of philosophical content, and though Dom Juan’s statements are no more than shreds of philosophy, critics were spurred on by the play’s controversial aspects: its emergence so soon after the suppression of the first Tartuffe, the presence of false devotion and sacrilege, the abrupt reediting and mysterious disappearance of Dom Juan from the troupe’s repertory. All these details lead to speculation over undocumented struggles with the shadowy, archconservative Compagnie du Saint Sacrement and possible links with Molière’s rumored libertine literary activity, the translation of Lucretius reported by Grimarest. In fact, critics of this work diverge widely in their interpretations, and it even has been suggested by the staunchest partisans of a resplendent, libertine Dom Juan, those who seek to localize in him the myth of Promethean revolt, that attempts to restore the character’s social context are bourgeois plots aimed at destroying his universality.

Unfortunately, those who admire a glorious libertine image of Dom Juan are prone to repeat what Rousseau did to Alceste, that is, to endow the character with a personality other than that which the author created. Objectivity is very necessary in order to comprehend Dom Juan’s often overlooked significance as a study in déchéance. After all, Molière’s Dom Juan is remarkably tight-lipped for a philosopher. His utterances on the nature of
the universe are limited to some undeveloped taunts at the heavens, a simple mathematical equation, and an injunction on the need to disregard (not avoid) social commitments, so as to be ready to indulge in any opportunity for pleasure that presents itself. His interest in truth and knowledge, other than carnal, is definitely limited, and one does well to remember that when Sganarelle says, "il vit . . . en pourceau d'Epicure" (1. 1), he illustrates his master's brutal degradation and lack of orderly thought.

Dom Juan explains all there is to his "philosophy" when he states, "Je crois que deux et deux sont quatre, Sganarelle, et que quatre et quatre sont huit" (3. 1). The statement is shallowly plagiarized from an anecdote about the dying prince Maurice de Nassau recounted by Guez de Balzac and Tallemant des Réaux; a contemporary critic noted that it served merely to identify the character as an atheist too fashionable and sybaritical to waste much time in the rigorous search for truth. Sganarelle, who believes in spooks, mocks the mathematical credo, which is too fragmentary and superficial to be associated with the schools of leading philosophers such as Gassendi or Descartes. Above all, Molière's slick, fatuous Dom Juan, having mastered the arts of appearance, is an opportunist who is willing to sacrifice his fellow humans' lives and dignity in order to indulge his appetites. Sganarelle labels him truly as "un grand seigneur méchant homme" (1. 1) and "l'épouseur du genre humain" (2. 4). Religion and philosophy, like gallantry, are simply garments this dandy tries on or discards as his whims evolve, for he can mouth the dictums of Lucretius and those of François de Sales with equal ease.

Molière significantly chooses to place major emphasis, in terms of stage time and strategic juxtaposition, on the relationship of Dom Juan and Sganarelle as master and servant. Forming the only basic social attachment that Dom Juan can accept
for long, they are together almost constantly. One of the only exceptions is the opening scene of the play, the famous and mysterious "tobacco scene," but even here Sganarelle is not really separated from his master. That the valet has taken on the trappings of luxury as a result of his proximity to Dom Juan is evident from his attitude toward snuff, the use of which he associates with courtly behavior:

C'est la passion des honnêtes gens, et qui vit sans tabac n'est pas digne de vivre. Non seulement il réjouit et purge les cerveaux humains, mais encore il instruit les âmes à la vertu, et l'on apprend avec lui à devenir honnête homme. [1. 1]

Sganarelle has also managed to acquire other benefits, such as better than average clothes, for we learn in act two that his attire has made a great impression on Pierrot: "Ceux qui le servont sont des Monsieux eux-mêmes" (2. 1). Moreover, beyond these superficial objects, Sganarelle has acquired a vision of society that is just as careless and stilted as that of his master, for his appreciation of tobacco is based on the idea that reciprocal giving and taking of the weed is the very basis of aristocracy: "Ne voyez-vous pas bien, dès qu'on en prend, de quelle manière obligante on en use avec tout le monde, et comme on est ravi d'en donner à droite et à gauche, partout où l'on se trouve?" (1. 1). This parody of a popular if minor literary topic of the 1660s serves to illustrate Sganarelle's confusion and corruption. Although in the ensuing dialogue with Gusman Sganarelle puts aside his affected language and derides his master's depraved behavior, he justifies his own continued service by claiming, "La crainte en moi fait l'office du zèle" (1. 1). Like Dom Juan, the valet refuses responsibility for his actions and tells Gusman that if news of their conversation reaches the master's ears, he will accuse Gusman of lying. As Patrice Kerbrat's sensitive portrayal of the role in the 1979 Comédie-Française
production showed, Sganarelle, alternately ambitious and servile, helpful and cowardly, superstitious and materialistic, has a great emotional and social stake in Dom Juan’s affairs.

If Sganarelle’s attitudes demonstrate internal conflicts, so do Dom Juan’s, for the aristocrat vacillates in his relationship with his servant from unseemly fraternization to excessive intimidation and violent threats. Early in the play, Dom Juan lets down all barriers of expression between himself and his valet: “Je te donne la liberté de parler et de me dire tes sentiments” (1. 2). But when Sganarelle stumbles onto the forbidden topic of divine retribution, even in the indirect form of a “story,” Dom Juan is quick to anger; “Hola maitre sot, vous savez que je vous ai dit que je n’aime pas les faiseurs de remontrances” (1. 2). When, in a later scene, Dom Juan strikes Sganarelle by mistake instead of Pierrot, he does not seem to regret it and snickers, “Te voilà payé de ta charité” (2. 3). He threatens Sganarelle with even more severe punishment if the valet continues to try to change his ways:

Ecoute. Si tu m’importunes davantage de tes sottes moralités, si tu me dis encore le moindre mot là-dessus, je vais appeler quelqu’un, demander un nerf de boeuf, te faire tenir par trois ou quatre, et te rouer de mille coups. M’entends-tu bien? [4. 1]

In alternating between excessive familiarity and excessive brutality, Dom Juan both slackens the laws of separation of états and overemphasizes power, rather than respect, to maintain his authority.

The bizarre nature of this master-servant pair becomes most clear at the moment when Dom Juan proposes to exchange clothes with Sganarelle in order to escape his pursuers. Such an expedient certainly verges on dérgeance through violation of the sumptuary codes that were reinforced during the reign of Louis XIV: to change into the garments of an underling, partic-
ularly when avoiding a confrontation where honor was at stake, was to deny one's class. Sganarelle's negative response to the plan is an interesting instance of cowardice, for he forsakes the chance to live nobly if it means the risk of life and limb, and admits no more responsibility for his master than the master does for him:

DOM JUAN: . . . Bien heureux est le valet qui peut avoir la gloire de mourir pour son maître.

SGANARELLE: Je vous remercie d'un tel honneur. O Ciel, puisqu'il s'agit de mort, fais-moi la grâce de n'être point pris pour un autre! [2. 5]

Dom Juan's notion of a noble sacrifice is rather amusing, for he seems to ignore the fact that it is the aristocrat, rather than the valet, who should scorn death. Even the naïve Sganarelle realizes that in dying one should always attempt to establish one's identity, if not one's honor.

The self-centered distortion by Dom Juan of the master-servant relationship is accompanied by a general devaluation of all family bonds, the most important and most obvious of which is the one between husband and wife. Sganarelle in the first scene of the play reveals to Gusman the perverted nature of Dom Juan's views on marriage:

Tu me dis qu'il a épousé ta maîtresse: crois qu'il aurait plus fait pour contenter sa passion, et qu'avec elle il aurait encore épousé toi, son chien et son chat. Un mariage ne lui coûte rien à contracter; il ne se sert point d'autres pièges pour attraper les belles, et c'est un épouseur à toutes mains. Dame, damoiselle, bourgeoise, paysanne, il ne trouve rien de trop chaud ni de trop froid pour lui; et si je te disais le nom de toutes celles qu'il a épousées en divers lieux, ce serait un chapitre à durer jusques au soir. [1. 1]

Literature offers many examples of the *amant volage*, but Molière's Dom Juan is a unique case of a *mari volage*, a sort of
professional bridegroom who has no objection to marriage in name, but only to its lasting obligations. For the protagonist, the greater the number of marriages, the greater the amount of sexual enjoyment. Such a concept is obviously foreign to ancien régime mores, which saw marriage as a solemn mutual duty.

It is essential to understand that the French nobleman of Molière's time did not necessarily expect to make a marriage that was founded on passion. Although married life could bring joys, it was first a duty, involving the cooperation of the bride, the groom, and both families. The latter supplied the young couple with their condition and with an honorable name, and the couple in turn provided for the continuity of the lineage. The gentleman and the lady enjoyed an equal status guaranteed by family and peers. If romantic love was not a part of this respectful social bond, tant pis! Other liaisons were socially and even religiously condoned, provided the aristocrat assumed the proper role toward the beloved. The best-known practitioner of this code was the king himself, who took a series of semiofficial mistresses and carefully raised his bastard children as princes.

Dom Juan continually perverts the existing norms of sexual and marital conduct. As a suitor, he is far from a model of gallantry: his idea of a good courtship is one that proceeds apace. Perhaps his long, tedious wooing of Elvire left him with a distaste for the more time-consuming amatory customs, for his approach to women with marital or religious obstacles is to resort to immediate violence. Before the play begins, he has already kidnapped Elvire from a convent, then married her to legitimize his lust. Yet, even this constituted rape in the seventeenth century and was punishable by hanging; according to the gruesome adage in Loysel's Institutes coutumières, "Il n'y a si bon mariage qu'une corde ne rompt." Later, when he finds himself attracted to a woman formally engaged, he decides to try full-scale piracy in order to force his affections on her: "Toutes choses sont préparées pour satisfaire mon amour, et j'ai
une petite barque et des gens, avec quoi fort facilement je prétends enlever la belle” (1. 3). Violence can be convenient, for it is the shortest distance between two points.

Dom Juan's violent acts had many precedents in contemporary society, as the records of the Grands Jours d'Auvergne amply demonstrate. Another grand seigneur méchant homme, Gilbert de Trintry, shot dead a peasant who was sleeping in the field, cut off another's hand, and also, the judges note, killed the guinea fowl belonging to a third! Guillaume de Beaufort-Canillac assassinated a fellow noble in a rigged pistol duel. His evil kinsman, Jacques-Timoléon, marquis de Canillac, employed a private army of scalawags with names like “Brise-tout” and “Sans Fiance” to terrorize his neighbors. His son and namesake rustled cattle, held captives for ransom, killed fellow noblemen, and had pregnant women mauled by his followers. Another Canillac, Charles, hunted a curate in a field with a gang of friends and riddled his corpse with bullets; still another, Gabriel, was executed for ambushing a gentleman. Defying law and order, the Combalibeuf family murdered a finance officer, the Bastides beat a huissier nearly to death, and the sire de Veyrac pillaged a notary's house. The marquis du Palais and his gang of thugs attacked a group of peace officers, killing three and capturing the rest. Louis de Mascon attacked an enemy's elderly mother with a pitchfork. Guy de Leans, sieur des Héraux, tortured two innocent workman. The grand prévôt de Bourbonnais made two valets fight a duel to the death and had the victor strangled. The baron de Sénégal imprisoned an enemy in a small, damp box for several months until his clothes decayed and his skin was covered with white mold. Gaspard d'Espinchal sexually mutilated his page and was suspected of infanticide. The list goes on, and the offenses are not limited to the Auvergne but spread across the land. The audience could not help but identify Dom Juan with this class of real degener-
ates, who resembled Molière's protagonist in that they could be charming one minute and bloody the next.

Molière reinforces Dom Juan's criminality by giving his play the dramatic tensions of a cops-and-robbers tale in a way that differs from previous French versions of the story. For three acts the protagonist and his stooge light-heartedly plot enlèvements, seductions, and blasphemies, evading family and justice-doers alike, and taunting the heavens along the way. Dom Juan slips free of his responsibilities toward his wife with ease. Accustomed to aristocratic parity and to treatment befitting her station, Elvire is more insulted than heartbroken when she learns that he has jilted her permanently: "C'est une lâcheté que de se faire expliquer trop sa honte; et, sur de tels sujets, un noble coeur, au premier mot, doit prendre son parti" (1.3). Neither natural phenomena, such as the storm that takes place before act two, nor the vengeance of Elvire's brothers seem capable of stopping the irrepressible scoundrel, and it almost appears that his dream of becoming the Alexander the Great of erotic pleasure might be within his grasp. Feeling bold and intelligent as a result of the doctor's gown he wears in act three, Sganarelle undertakes to correct his master's cynicism, but his optimistic exploration of man's powers literally falls flat on its face. The failure of Sganarelle's mock-Cartesian proof of existence through spinning prefigures the ultimate collapse of Dom Juan's intellectual opportunism, which might well have as its axiom delecto, ergo sum. Servant and master both would qualify as examples of what Pascal called demi-habiles. Indeed, pleasure keeps eluding Dom Juan through a series of frustrating mishaps: his pirate ship is blown off course, the arrival of a posse prevents him from enjoying the conquest of two simple-minded farm girls, a miserable beggar stubbornly refuses his gold, and finally the very stone of a victim's statue comes to life to check his mockery of the supernatural.
Sensing something out of place, the criminal retires to his lair, where he continues to rail at the warnings brought by his purveyor, his repentant wife, and his disgusted father. He turns the discourse of cordiality against them and sneers as they depart, crestfallen, without having swayed him an inch. Nevertheless, heralded by a ghostly apparition, the statue penetrates his hideout and issues a challenge for a final showdown. To escape the weapons that heaven has promised to turn against him, Dom Juan attempts the ultimate trickery in act five by feigning to become devout, but to no avail; for although he continues to manipulate mortal opponents like his father, his servant, and Dom Carlos, the unearthly vindicator seeks him out and destroys him.

Molière's brilliant restructuring of the traditional Dom Juan drama, familiar to French audiences through the versions by Dorimon, Villiers, and the Comédie Italienne, tightens the focus on the manhunt for the antihierarchical criminal. Much of the protagonist's most shocking behavior, including his abduction of Elvire and the commandeur's murder, are placed before the beginning of the play and recounted by characters like Gusman and Sganarelle. A series of powerfully symbolic scenes are concentrated in act four after the fast-moving pursuit, at the moment of reprieve when the aristocrat is trying to enjoy his feast. Before confronting the protagonist with his stony nemesis, Molière created innovative interviews with the slow-witted bill collector Monsieur Dimanche, Elvire, and the ghostly apparition. All three scenes stress the fleeting nature of happiness and the inevitability of a final accounting for one's deeds. In addition, Molière relocated to this sequence Dom Juan's conversation with his father Dom Louis (in all earlier versions it had taken place in act one or two), thus avoiding a preemptive condemnation and strengthening the paternal figure—a strategic move suggested to him perhaps by Corneille's Le Menteur,
which his troupe often performed. Even Sganarelle contributes to the thematic grasp for pleasure by voraciously devouring morsels from the feast, only to choke when his master sadistically interrupts or orders the plates changed. It is true that Dom Juan momentarily routs his correctors with ridiculous sallies, but the inherent foibles of human justice only underscore, as Pascal pointed out, the necessity of divine punishment.

It is left to Dom Louis as symbol of the family and its system of obligations to condemn explicitly his son’s “amas d’actions indignes . . . cette suite continuelle de méchantes affaires, qui nous réduisent, à toutes heures, à lasser les bontés du Souverain” (4.4). This character is no irritable old codger, but a devoted paterfamilias who has used every bit of his influence at court to extract pardons for his peccant son. His memorable speech is designed to warn Dom Juan of impending danger and to appeal to him with rational arguments for familial duty and for a return to the race from which he has alienated himself:

Et qu’avez-vous fait dans le monde pour être gentilhomme? Croyez-vous qu’il suffise d’en porter le nom et les armes, et que ce nous soit une gloire d’être sorti d’un sang noble lorsque nous vivons en infâmes? Non, non, la naissance n’est rien ou la vertu n’est pas. Aussi nous n’avons part à la gloire de nos ancêtres qu’autant que nous nous efforçons de leur ressembler; et cet éclat de leurs actions qu’ils répandent sur nous nous impose un engagement de leur faire le même honneur, de suivre les pas qu’ils nous tracent, et de ne point dégénérer de leurs vertus, si nous voulons être estimés leurs véritables descendants. [4.4, italics added]

This apologia for exemplary noble behavior rings like an echo of social works such as those of Loysel, Domat, Chappuzeau, and especially of the Portuguese treatise La Noblesse civile et chrétienne ("Puisqu’il est donc manifeste que la Noblesse a sa naissance et sa mort, ceux la véritablement meritent d’estre eslevés
jusques au Ciel, qui ont acquis ce lustre glorieux à leurs familles, comme les autres merient d’estre hays de tous les hommes, qui ont terny ce lustre par les taches des vices”) and La Mothe Le Vayer’s *De la noblesse* (“La vertu sert de fondement à la vraie Noblesse . . . une noblesse nue et sans merite est un O en chiffre, mais si elle sert de base aux belles actions elle en augmente le prix”). Dom Louis’s blistering accusations are directly borne out by the conceited young man, who first imper­tinentley suggests that his father take a seat and then calls sardonically after him as he leaves: “Eh! mourez le plus tôt que vous pourrez, c’est le mieux que vous puissiez faire. Il faut que chacun ait son tour, et j’enrage de voir des pères qui vivent autant que leurs fils” (4. 5). Because Dom Juan insults the lineage that binds him to his *condition*, he deserves to be stricken from the rolls of the nobility. His wish that Dom Louis should die quickly cheapens him by reducing him to the level of an ordinary spendthrift, impatient to squander the family sav­ings as he has already squandered its reputation.

The utter contempt of the “grand seigneur méchant homme” for the system of relationships in the *société d’états* may also give a new meaning to the famous “deux et deux sont quatre,” which is generally interpreted as a statement of libertine materialism. Together with Dom Juan’s inability to distinguish between unlike elements (Sganarelle stated that he would marry servant, dog, and cat as well as lady), this simplistic arithmetic betray a social atomism inimical to the estate system. The statement “Two and two makes four” implies that all units are alike, that only quantitative calculations matter and that qualitative differences do not exist. Consequently, Dom Juan makes no difference between *paysanne, bourgeoise, and aristocrate,* they are the same to him, and each conquest gives him a new occa­sion to gloat. This formula also explains why Dom Juan’s activi­ties jeopardize not only the nobility but also the entire pluralis­tic social structure.
The challenge posed to the French hierarchy as a whole is articulated at each separate level, from the impoverished peasant village to the loftiest circles of the nobility, including *en passant* the mercantile bourgeoisie. Most of the second act is devoted to Dom Juan’s adventures among the rustics, after his pirate enterprise is thwarted by bad weather. He enters this environment as a debtor, for he has been saved from the sea by Lucas and Pierrot: “... Tout gros Monsieur qu’il est, il seroit par ma fique nayé si je n’aviomme este là... Ô Parquenne, sans nous, il en avoit pour sa maine de féves” (2. 1). Soaked to the skin, Dom Juan has been obliged to strip naked, which allows Pierrot to give a description of the nobleman’s clothing; the picture that unfolds is not that of the average discreet noble but that of the foppish marquis who stood out even at the court of Louis XIV:

Quien, Charlotte, ils avont des cheveux qui ne tenont point à leu teste, et ils boutont ça après tout comme un gros bonnet de filace. Ils ant des chemises qui ant des manches où j’entrerions tout brandis toy et moy. En glieu d’haut de chaussé, ils portont un garde-robe aussi large que d’icy à Pasque, en glieu de pourpoint, de petites brassières, qui ne leu venont pas usqu’au brichet, et en glieu de rabas un grand mouchoir de cou à reziau aveuc quatre grosses houpes de linge qui leu pendant sur l’estomaque. Ils avont itou d’autres petits rabats au bout des bras, et de grands entonnois de passement aux jambes, et parmy tout ça tant de rubans, tant de rubans, que c’est une vraye piquié. [2. 1]

The wig, the *rhingrave* and *jabot*, the *canons*, the *affütiaux* are all marks of the ridiculous marquis, and one need only compare Pierrot’s description with those given by Cathos in *Les Précieuses ridicules* or by Sganarelle in *L’Ecole des maris*. It follows that Dom Juan is decidedly out of his element in the village, for he hardly resembles the local *seigneur* with whom the peasants might be familiar: he might just as well have landed from another planet as from the world of the *courtisans*.
In contrast to the aristocrat, the farmers are presented in the social context of their own micro-economy and village customs. Pierrot relates the wager he made with Lucas as to the nature of the creatures writhing in the sea: “quatre pièces tapées, et cinq sols en doubles” (2. 1). These obsolete and devalued coins were seldom used in urban commerce, for their worth was too infinitesimal to guarantee. Their survival in this village shows to what extent the economy of rural areas could be retarded. In this system, barter often replaced the concept of abstract worth. It is in terms of barter that Pierrot explains his love for Charlotte: “Je tachète, sans reproche, des rubans à tous les Marciers qui passent, je me romps le cou à taille denercher des marles, je fais jouer pour toy les Vielleux quand ça vient ta feste” (2. 1). Moreover, Pierrot insists that Charlotte give him something tangible in return, namely, an occasional push, shove, or smack! In a similar incidence of barter, Charlotte tries to assuage Pierrot’s hurt feelings with the economic benefits of the dairy trade at her future château: “Va, va, Piarrot, ne te mets point en peine: si je sis Madame, je te faï gagner queuque chose, et tu apporteras du beurre et du fromage cheux nous” (2. 3). Over this order preside the elderly women of the countryside, who were frequently recognized as chefs du feu by the village assemblies, matriarchs like Pierrot’s mother, Simonette, and Charlotte’s aunt, to whom the jilted boy goes to complain over his broken engagement.\(^{18}\)

Dom Juan, arriving in the village in a state of obligation, wastes no time in disrupting the local equilibrium, without ever settling his own debt. No sooner does he lay eyes on Charlotte than he begins to shower her with the most out-of-place compliments and to propose marriage—his usual shortcut to seduction:

DOM JUAN: Sganarelle, regarde un peu ses mains.
CHARLOTTE: Fi! Monsieur, elles sont noires comme je ne sais quoi.
DOM JUAN: Ha! que dites-vous là? Elles sont les plus belles du monde. [2. 2]

This courtship bears a striking resemblance to that of Don Quixote and the drab Aldonza, with which Molière was probably familiar, since he performed from 1659 to 1661 Guérin de Bouscal’s Sancho Pansa.19 Certainly the two cases are equally grotesque. This is no impecunious count marrying a banker’s daughter to replenish the family’s treasures; it is a rank manipulation of the girl’s wildest hypergamous fantasies.20 The fact that Dom Juan mass-produces such deception is revealed when Mathurine announces she has accepted the same proposal. The rake’s attempts to use double-talk to confuse the two prospective brides succeed more because of the girls’ curiosity and village rivalry than because of his unctuous charm.

Instead of giving Pierrot a reward, as rural barter and noble largesse would have it, the ungrateful aristocrat becomes a rival for the fiancée of the man who saved his life. The bewildered peasant takes flight after being pushed and struck several times, but not before he points out the brutality of Dom Juan’s character: “Testiguenne! parce qu’ous estes Monsieu, ous viendrez caresser nos femmes à notre barbe? Allez-v’s-en caresser les vôtres” (23). Dom Juan’s interlude in the village, which is cut short by the approach of Elvire’s brothers, disturbs interpersonal relations at all levels: between the betrothed young people, between rivallasses, between whole family units, and between the peasants and the seigneur.

A second confrontation with the lower classes takes place in the famous “scène du Pauvre.” Once again, Dom Juan begins by making an obligation that he never fulfills. A penurious hermit tells him the way to town, but Dom Juan will give him no gratuity; in fact, he begins to insult him. The pauper explains his situation in terms of a simple economic exchange, money for
prayers, which recalls the tangible micro-economy of barter in the peasant village.

**DOM JUAN:** Quelle est ton occupation parmi les arbres?
**LE PAUVRE:** De prier le Ciel tout le jour pour la prospérité des gens de bien qui me donnent quelque chose. [3.2]

Dom Juan tries to subvert this structure by offering to pay the pauper a louis d’or on condition that he blaspheme, to which the latter protests that he would rather starve. The exchange is no longer equal, for in gaining his deserved recompense, the hermit would be losing both his pride and his perceived spiritual good standing. Eventually Dom Juan bids him take the coin “pour l’amour de l’humanité,” but it is well to remember here that this ostentatious generosity is actually no more than the pauper had earned. For many decades there was confusion over this point, since the edulcorated 1682 edition of the play by La Grange and Vivot had canceled the lines in which Dom Juan tempted the hermit, thus making it seem the nobleman was being magnanimous. Since we now have the complete text of the play, there is no need to persist in this misunderstanding. The treatment given this scene in the 1979 Comédie-Française production, directed by Jean-Luc Boutté, is worth mentioning here, for the seigneur’s grand gesture was greeted by a long moment of icy silence from the hooded figure, who then turned and left without accepting the coin, a bold interpretation that accentuates a turning point in the play, the first time that one of Dom Juan’s cynical gambits fails utterly.

The relationship between the wayward aristocrat and the befuddled local merchant, Monsieur Dimanche, has many elements similar to the peasant courtships. Dom Juan’s outlandish compliments extend to the merchant’s complexion, to his wife, children, and even “votre petit chien Brusquet” (4.3). He breaks the laws of préséance not only by seating his socially
inferior creditor, but by seating him in the highest style, in an armchair. He lowers himself to shake hands with the man and even offers to escort him home personally, as a vassal would for his liege lord. Instead of paying his debt or at least bearing his financial burdens with some dignity, Dom Juan undermines the business relationship between the noble debtor and the bourgeois creditor, as outlined in Jacques Savary's commercial manual, *Le Parfait Négociant*, and in Domat's fourth general rule of law; "Ne faire tort à personne, et rendre à chacun ce qui lui appartient."  

In dealing with his fellow noblemen, Dom Juan shows himself to be every bit as unworthy and pernicious as he is toward the peasantry and the bourgeoisie. He succeeds in evading his aristocratic responsibilities toward Dom Louis and Elvire through a combination of insult, neglect, and deceit. It is only necessary to contrast him with Elvire's brother Dom Carlos, a figure of similar age, birth, and potential, in order to measure the distance between exemplary and derogatory conduct. The first meeting between the two men, in which Dom Juan rescues Dom Carlos from a group of bandits, poses some fundamental questions about the place of strength and courage among the gamut of noble attributes. Dom Juan explains his intercession by saying, "La partie est trop inégale, et je ne dois souffrir cette lâcheté" (3. 2). Can this phrase, which follows immediately the *scène du pauvre*, indicate that Dom Juan, shamed by the pauper's righteous resolution, is moved by an attack of conscience to try to substitute a display of valor for the generosity he had failed to show, to replace one sort of magnanimity with another? Certainly his plot of piracy in act one proved that he is no stranger to violent and reckless ventures. Above all, it is the bold but capricious response of a man of action, who is interested mainly in the mathematical aspect of the contest and who would just as gladly have come to the aid of one robber pursued by three gentlemen.
As if to remind Dom Juan of his own misdeeds, Dom Carlos explains to him that he and his brother have been obliged to search the woods "pour une de ces fâcheuses affaires qui réduisent les gentilshommes à se sacrifier, eux et leur famille, à la sévérité de leur honneur" (3. 3). Elvire's brother is surely no ruffian, for he proceeds to say that he regrets the necessity for the code of the point d'honneur and wishes there were a more civil way of resolving such questions, a speech that must have pleased the partisans of the king's policy against dueling. Unlike Dom Juan, Dom Carlos recognizes his debt to a man who saved his life and does not wish to fight with him over the crimes Elvire has suffered: "Ce me serait une trop sensible douleur que vous fussiez de la partie" (3. 3). Even after Dom Alonse reveals the identity of the disguised kinsman, Carlos refuses to exact revenge without first repaying the life-debt:

... La reconnaissance de l'obligation n'efface point en moi le ressentiment de l'injure; mais souffrez que je lui rende ici ce qu'il m'a prêté, que je m'acquitte sur-le-champ de la vie que je lui dois, par un délai de notre vengeance, et lui laisse la liberté de jouir, durant quelques jours, du fruit de son bienfait. [3. 4]

He goes so far as to throw himself between Alonse's sword and its target and to suggest that they resolve the matter by negotiation rather than by force, a rational alternative that Dom Juan rejects out of hand.

When Dom Juan and Dom Carlos meet again in the third scene of the last act, the former has assumed another disguise, this time that of a dévot, or religious zealot. The courteous brother-in-law once again invites him to take part in a reasonable settlement, but Dom Juan gives the incredible response that heaven has instructed him to remain chaste and to repudiate his wife. He evidently hopes to escape from his responsibilities as a nobleman and a husband by attaching his fate to the
codes of the first estate rather than the second, a perversion of the system of group differentiation that makes him more of a social danger than his simple fugue ever did. Carlos, who knows well that piety does not excuse divorce and desertion, is not fooled by this feint and finally resolves to meet Dom Juan in combat, later and in a more appropriate place. In doing so, he accepts his *condition* and its duties, even though it means very possible death at the hands of a skilled swordsman like Dom Juan. The protagonist, however, continues to the very end to deny his proper station by monstrously combining the habit of a saint with the weapon of a murderer.

Why then does not Dom Carlos, as exemplary noble, have the task of meting out justice to the social transgressor? It is only because there is another character who represents values that take precedence even over the *point d'honneur* and the noble codes of family loyalty—the commandeur's statue. Significantly, this figure embodies ultimate civil and religious authority and thus blends clerical piety with knightly valor, fusing physical and metaphysical might. The title of "commandeur" generally designated an officer in one of the military-monastic organizations, such as the Knights of Malta. In the first Dom Juan play, Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla*, he belongs to the Order of Calatrava. Molière's stately champion of "le ciel" and avenger of villainous abuses bears particular comparison with the king of France, who was both the first noble of the land and the head of the Gallican church. Louis XIV was especially proud of his duties as defender of the faith, "Rex Christianissimus" and scourge of heretics. Furthermore, the mobile statue's magic is of the same type as the magic that the French monarch claimed to possess, as a heavenly healer who could cure scrofula. The commandeur's sartorial and architectural trappings serve to reinforce his affiliation with royalty. Dom Juan himself notes "son habit d'empereur romain" (3. 5). The splendid mau-
soleum that opens to reveal its interior reminds one of the king's ostentatious building projects and of the magnificent *pompes funèbres* of the court. Gazing at the tomb, Sganarelle exclaims, "Ah! que cela est beau! Les belles statues! Le beau marbre! les beaux piliers! Ah! que cela est beau!" (3.5). Like the king, an officer of the military orders could claim direct service not only to the state but to God himself.

If, in killing the commandeur, Dom Juan has murdered an analogue to the king, he has committed the most heinous crime of the seventeenth century, the most awful form of *lèse-majesté*. Molière's countrymen had not forgotten the assassin of Henri IV and his horrible demise, nor had Louis XIV dismissed his brushes with danger during the Fronde. In the figurative world of the theater, serious sociopolitical crimes were often tantamount to sacrilege, and the systems of punishment easily overlapped. In *Tartuffe* the king's police apprehend a counterfeit devot, and in *Dom Juan* supernatural forces seize the master criminal. Can the latter heavenly intervention be attributed to the doctrine of *noblesse oblige*? In any case, enemies of secular order and disturbers of the spiritual peace require a suitably spectacular end.

An understanding of the social significance of the commandeur helps to set the entire structure of the comedy in perspective. Dom Juan's first encounter with the statue, at the end of the pivotal third act, concludes a sequence of disquieting events for the protagonist. First shamed by the pauper, then forced to oppose the admirable Dom Carlos, of whom he says, "Il est assez honnête homme . . . j'ai regret d'avoir démêlé avec lui" (3.5), Dom Juan makes fun of the statue, ordering Sganarelle to invite it to dinner, and subsequently doing so himself. He has systematically disbelieved in the existence of supreme civil and supernatural power (which were, to the seventeenth-century mode of thinking, two aspects of a single immanent
phenomenon) and is shocked by the proof of the animated statue. By the beginning of the next act, he has relegated the incident to the status of an optical illusion, "une bagatelle." Yet, the second meeting with the commandeur's statue, coming at the end of a series of "reminders" from M. Dimanche, Elvire, and Dom Louis, presents an undeniable challenge to the rake's bravado, for the statue says to him, "Je vous invite à venir demain souper avec moi. En aurrez-vous le courage?" (9. 8). Like an aristocratic criminal on parole, Dom Juan promises to appear for the reckoning. When the statue finally arrests him, it is almost anticlimactic, for the unrepentant murderer has no alternative to an execution by "special effects," as leaping flames envelop him. The three meetings with the commandeur parallel the stages of civil justice: the trial (with presentation of evidence), the sentencing, and the punishment itself. Like the exempt in the denouement of Tartuffe, the commandeur is a proxy for the divine and earthly aspects of royal power, a knight from Heaven who reestablishes law and the noble order.

Le Misanthrope, produced about eighteen months after Dom Juan in 1666, differs radically in some respects from the earlier aristocratic play. Dom Juan, written in prose and embellished with the complicated spectacle of "machines," strains at the confines of the unities and features the actor Molière in an unusual role ancillary to the protagonist; an instant success, it was abruptly stricken from the repertory. On the other hand, Le Misanthrope contains some of Molière's most polished verse, adheres to classical conventions, and restores Molière the actor to the center of attention. Although its debut met mediocre success, it soon came to be recognized as a masterpiece. On a behavioral level, the misanthrope, Alceste, contrasts with his fellow nobleman, young Dom Juan. The latter boasts of his merit but behaves in a consistently demeaning manner, whereas
the former is superficially modest about his contributions to society but actually quite haughty toward his equals. Thus, *Dom Juan* and *Le Misanthrope* represent opposite ends of a spectrum of misbehavior that, by indicating the extremes of abuse, makes straight and clear the path of exemplary nobility.  

Alceste’s social affinities are evident from the beginning of the play. The courtier Oronte recognizes his standing by declaring, “Mon coeur au mérite aime à rendre justice, / Et je brûle qu’un noeud d’amitié nous unisse” (1. 2. 257–58). Arsinoé acknowledges him as “un homme . . . de mérite et d’honneur” (5. 4. 1714). Moreover, Alceste chooses to associate himself closely with a particular notion of *honneur* that goes to the very heart of his problems of alienation and malfunction: “Je veux qu’on soit sincère, et qu’en homme d’honneur / On ne lâche aucun mot qui ne parte du coeur” (1. 1. 35–36). Unlike Dom Juan, who sought to collapse society to a single social level, Alceste places great emphasis on the necessity for hierarchies in all relationships, and he chides his extroverted friend Philinte:

Sur quelque préférence une estime se fonde,  
Et c’est n’estimer rien qu’estimer tout le monde.  
Puisque vous y donnez, dans des vices du temps,  
Morbleu! vous n’êtes pas pour être de mes gens.  
[1. 1. 57–60]

Behind the insistence on hierarchical distinctions is a desire for social eminence, a wish that others should place him above the average members of the courtly society he frequents. For the misanthrope, any equality or solidarity, even with those of his native stratum, is incompatible with his need for individual dignity: “Je veux qu’on me distingue; et pour le trancher net, / L’ami du genre humain n’est point du tout mon fait” (1. 1. 63–64). Such self-importance recalls the values of older genera-
tions of nobility, when the notion of personal *gloire* demanded total attention.\textsuperscript{27}

That Alceste’s concept of nobility based on inflated *honneur* is out of touch with the ideas of his contemporaries is evident in his conversations with Philinte, who represents a prevalent standard of *honnêteté*. This faithful friend believes that even the petty social ceremonies should be observed, just as petty debts must still be paid: “Lorsqu’un homme vous vient embrasser avec joie, / Il faut bien le payer de la même monnoie” (1. 1. 37–38). Alceste condemns this line of thought in the spirit of the superannuated nobility, calling it a “lâche méthode.”\textsuperscript{28} Yet Philinte’s principles are in complete accord with the codes of behavior of Louis XIV’s court, as expressed by the theoretician of the *honnête homme*, the chevalier de Méré, who referred to the models of the New Nobility as “esprits doux . . . coeurs tendres” and observed, “Ils n’ont guère pour but que d’apporter la joie partout, et leur plus grand soin ne tend qu’à mériter de l’estime, et qu’à se faire aimer.”\textsuperscript{29} Méré goes on to note that the ideal *honnête homme* should, unlike Alceste, deliberately avoid matters of morality. In terms so perfect that Méré could find none better, Philinte explicitly describes the new standards to Alceste and reproaches his friend’s attachment to obsolete values:

\begin{verbatim}
La parfaite raison fuit toute extrémité,
Et veut que l’on soit sage avec sobriété.
Cette grande roideur des vertus des vieux âges
Heurte trop notre siècle et les communs usages.
\end{verbatim}

[1. 1. 151–54]

If Alceste’s misbehavior places strain on friendship, it makes love all but impossible. From this paradox of the *atrabilaire amoureux*, the misanthrope in love, the play derives most of its
comic force. Although *Le Misanthrope* sprang from the ill-fated *Dom Garcie de Navarre*, the central figure of Alceste is far superior to the jealous prince of the earlier play, for his difficulties are caused by internal contradictions rather than by outpourings of passion and the memorable confrontation scenes with his beloved are organized around misunderstandings of character rather than of appearances. Alceste's love, Célimène, is an independent and coquettish widow whose wily maneuvers add much depth to the problems of this strange noble courtship. As Alceste tries unsuccessfully to present his proposal—or, more appropriately, ultimatum—to Célimène, he has opportunities to criticize her entertainment of other men (“...Votre humeur, Madame,/Ouvre au premier venu trop d'accès dans votre âme” [2. 1. 457-58]), her gossiping (“Vous avez des plaisirs que je ne puis souffrir” [2. 4. 692]), her duplicity (“Ah! que ce coeur est double et sait bien l'art de feindre!” [4. 3. 1322]). It is no wonder that she complains of Alceste's gallantry-in-reverse:

...La méthode en est toute nouvelle,
Car vous aimez les gens pour leur faire querelle;
Ce n'est qu'en mots fâcheux qu'éclate votre ardeur,
Et l'on n'a vu jamais un amour si grondeur.

[2. 1. 525-28]

More than mere ineptitude, his treatment of Célimène is based on a profound distortion of noble values, for as he eventually explains, he wishes to establish a marriage in which she would be utterly subjugated: “Je voudrais.../Que vous n'eussiez ni rang, ni naissance, ni bien” (4. 3. 1425-28). This urge to destroy Célimène's *condition*, like so many elements of Alceste's conduct, is diametrically opposed to the code of *honnêteté* promulgated by the New Nobility, which insists on the social eminence of the aristocratic lady.
Alceste has been dubbed by Ralph Albanese an “héros de la rupture,” a mock tragic figure who wishes to rail against his fellow humans’ vices and feels entitled to do so because of his deliberate and systematic defiance of social norms; but as Judd Hubert observes, “Hélas, Alceste partage la futilité et même les défauts de la société qu’il condamne.” Even before the misanthrope has a chance to speak with his ill-chosen lady (shared scorn for others does not a marriage make), Molière provides a clear example of the character’s weakness in the second scene of the comedy, where the pompous poetaster Oronte asks for an opinion on one of his sonnets. To his credit, Alceste attempts to avoid this chore; but after he reluctantly agrees to hear the poem—a trivial but typical product of mid-century gallantry, bubbling with facile sentimentality—he ruthlessly dissects and dismembers it, stubbornly refusing to play the game of literary criticism by any but his private rules. When he offers to give an example of good verse, one expects him to produce some artistic gem that would put Malherbe, Maynard, and Saint-Amand to shame; but alas, all he quotes is a cheerful, fashionable ditty from the previous generation. “Si le Roi m’avait donné Paris” is elevated in Alceste’s system of value only because it belongs to yesterday’s fashion rather than today’s. A potent critic of external shortcomings, Alceste proves La Rochefoucauld’s maxim that others’ faults are much easier to find than one’s own. When it comes time to enter Célimène’s salon in act two, Alceste finds that his masterful debunking of Philinte’s maudlin embraces does nothing to help him avoid ridicule himself, for his gruff comments soon have the laughers united against him. As in *L’Ecole des femmes*, where Arnolphe browbeats his friend Chrysalde at the opening curtain but cannot get his moronic servants to open the door for him in the next scene, the dramatic structure of *Le Misanthrope* serves to undermine the putative hero’s pretensions; for Alceste falls from the confident intellectual debate of the first moments into the complicated emotional
world of later scenes, where his ideas fail to fit the shapes of reality. In contrast to Molière’s exemplary noble figures, such as Dom Carlos, Elvire, Dom Louis, and Philinte, who accept to a great degree the absurd reversals that result from mankind’s imperfect passionate nature, perfectionists like Alceste and Dom Juan are especially vulnerable when ironic fate stands against them.

*Le Misanthrope* recalls *Les Fâcheux* by virtue of its dramatic structure of deferral, for the desired interview between a gentleman and his lady is put off by a series of interruptions: first Oronte’s, then in the second act the arrival of Acaste and Clitandre, followed by the intrusion of Arsinoé—not to mention a succession of importunate messengers from the courts. Acaste and Clitandre stand out as a pair of preening courtiers who have nothing better to do than drop names, sneer at their acquaintances, and wager on which is more dear to Célimène. Along with their hostess, they constitute the heart of the acidulous clique that delights in the protracted discussion of Parisian fools, including the extravagant Cléonte, the boring Damon, the secretive Timante, the affected Géralde, shallow Bélise, conceited Adraste, and others whose only fault is to be hospitable or refined. Yet, the unity of the salon is illusory, for as the third act begins, Acaste and Clitandre give a perfect animated illustration of the narcissism that La Rochefoucauld’s *Maximes* explored in the abstract (“On peut, par tout pays, être content de soi” [3. 1. 804]), jostling for the prestige of amorous recognition while scrupulously avoiding any true emotional commitment or any hint of failure. The impression of disunity is strengthened by the ensuing contest between rival females, as the coquette turned false prude, Arsinoé, misguidedly attempts to match wits and tongues with Célimène. The tone turns bitter when Célimène succeeds in discrediting her antagonist’s vanishing sex appeal, leading Arsinoé to suggest ever so politely that Célimène is a whore by maintaining:
Qu'on n'acquiert point leurs coeurs sans de grandes avances
Qu'aucun pour nos beaux yeux n'est notre soupirant,
Et qu'il faut acheter tous les soins qu'on nous rend.

[3. 4. 1014-16]

The dévote woos Alceste with promises of power and consolation, but she only receives a measure of attention from him by appealing to his obsession with Célimène's infidelity.

Molière shows, however, that third parties are not the real fâcheux in this drama, for the misanthrope and his coquette furnish more than ample obstacles to conjugal cooperation. He tries to corner her throughout act two, but she dodges him and laughs in his face: "Vous vous moquez, je pense," to which he can only splutter, "Non; mais vous choisirez; c'est trop de patience" (2. 4. 564-65). When he finally catches up with her again, she cleverly slips away, leaving him in the clutches of lecherous Arsinoé. Alceste then hampers his cause by flying into a jealous rage at the incomplete evidence of a fragmentary love letter of Célimène's that Arsinoé has intercepted and shown to him. Like Dom Garcie de Navarre, he looks all the more pathetic when his fury turns to groveling, as Célimène applies her crafty policy of denial and derision: "Allez, vous êtes fou, dans vos transports jaloux, /Et ne méritez pas l'amour qu'on a pour vous" (4. 3. 1391-92). In fact, Molière uses double-edged irony, for Célimène is guilty and Alceste does deserve the love he gets from her—that is to say, very little. Though intellectually justified in denouncing fawning embraces and idle gossip, Alceste reveals at the crucial instant that he is even more prone to be tricked by superficial considerations (and to trick himself) than any other character.

Besides the misanthrope's personal embroilments with Philinte, Célimène, and other nobles, he runs afoul of some of the prominent mechanisms of the ancien régime, especially the courts of law. Molière hints that Alceste's haughtiness derives at
least in part from the unfortunate progress of a lawsuit, for the protagonist cites as an example of the “universal” success of unworthy villains the impending victory of his opponent, a mere pied plat (one who does not wear high-heeled noble footwear, hence, a commoner). Alceste is so enraged by this fraudulent suit that he refuses to visit the judges in order to dispense the customary bribes necessary to win the case. The ineptitude of the Old Nobility in confronting the legal world had already been depicted by many seventeenth-century writers: one thinks, for instance, of Charles Sorel’s Francion, in which the protagonist’s father, Monsieur de la Porte, nearly reduces his family to misery through his clumsy handling of a suit. Alceste’s incident goes much farther, for he is aware of the established channels of bribery and refuses to use them, thus deliberately botching the affair through self-deception.

The misanthrope manifests his rejection of the normal enforcers of the social order in a more serious way when he attracts the attention of the tribunal of the Maréchaussée and then balks at following their decisions. The Court of the Marshals of France was a direct delegate of the power of the throne, charged since 1651 with arbitrating all questions involving the point d’honneur, among other duties. Unlike the civilian law courts, the Maréchaussée was presided over by noblemen close to the royal family, the most distinguished representatives of the second estate. After arguing with Oronte about the sonnet’s merit, Alceste receives the warning from Philinte that he has gained a dangerous antagonist: “Vous voilà sur les bras une fâcheuse affaire” (1.3.440). The appearance of the marshals’ guard elicits little respect from Alceste, who boasts, on the contrary, that only the king himself can sway him:

Hors qu’un commandement exprès du roi me vienne
De trouver bons les vers dont on se met en peine,
Je soutiendrai toujours, morbleu! qu’ils sont mauvais,
Et qu’un homme est pendable après les avoir faits.

[2. 6. 769-72]

The adjective *pendable*, applicable only to commoners, conveys Alceste’s judgment that there is something ignoble about the frothy little poem and that its author is too unworthy for truly aristocratic thought. As in the opening scene, the protagonist rejects equality with his hierarchical peers. At the beginning of the next act, we learn from Philinte’s report to Eliante on the proceedings of the tribunal that the misanthrope steadfastly refused to change his position, enabling the marshals to arrange only a partial reconciliation. This important incident serves to underscore Alceste’s anachronism and his defiance of the authority on which the *société d'états* was founded. Domat, for instance, lists submission to authority as the second general rule of law; Loyseau states that, regardless of the equality of all gentlemen, comparison of a subject to his king is “odieuse, insolente, et comme blasphamatoire”; and La Mothe Le Vayer concurs that “un homme ne saurait être plus ridicule que de vouloir prendre de l’avantage du côté de sa généalogie . . . chacun se doit accommoder doucement à sa condition.”33 The Maréchaussée incarnated the manners and mores of Louis XIV’s court, the prevalence of reasonable self-effacement over inflexible violence and the claims of gloire. The persistence of selfishness in spite of the authoritarian mechanisms recalls the spirit of the Old Nobility that had challenged royal power during the Fronde, and Alceste’s righteous appeal to “Mon bon droit” (1. 1. 187) echoes the cry of many a rebellious subject.

Although Alceste’s refractory behavior before civil and noble courts suggests that he wants to play the role of a prince, all evidence points to the conclusion that he is not illustrious and that his *mérite* is not based on material power. He stands to lose
20,000 livres in his suit with the pied plat, but this sum is not really impressive for a noble fortune. His lone servant, the valet Du Bois, is an illiterate, uncouth lout with whom he interacts in a laughable manner unbefitting a grand seigneur. Unlike Arsinoé, he does not seem to possess a carriage. Illustrations of the misanthrope’s clothing show a modest gentleman’s outfit consisting of justaucorps, baggy haut-de-chausses, lace cuffs, tasteful shoulder ribbons, wig, and hat, but he differs from Philinte in that his hat has no plumes and he carries no sword. His language, throughout the comedy unmistakably aristocratic in its clarity and precision, stands out in relief to that of Du Bois, whose expressions such as “déloger sans trompette . . . plier bagage . . . pis que démon . . . le diable d’enfer n’y verrait goutte” (4. 4) represent the idiom of the common folk. Yet, interjections like “morbleu” and “sangbleu” crop up again and again, recalling the antiquated oaths of past generations. Far from being a remarkable personality, Alceste seems to be in most details a mediocre noble who is not in a position to look down on his fellow chevaliers.

In fact, the other nobles of the play, apart from Philinte and his feminine counterpart Eliante, are hardly models of exemplary conduct. Count Oronte, vain and quarrelsome, is a powerful figure at court who boasts to Alceste, “Je crois qu’un ami chaud, et de ma qualité, / N’est pas assurément pour être rejeté” (1. 2. 259–60). The prudish Arsinoé is rich and equally influential, for she promises the protagonist, “On peut pour vous servir remuer des machines, / Qui vous feront à tout un chemin assez doux” (3. 5. 1078–80). Nevertheless, Oronte’s presumptuousness and Arsinoé’s backbiting and mistreatment of servants are qualities not to be found in the truly bonnête person, and their standing among the nobility is based purely on power. As for Acaste and Clitandre, the so-called marquis, their status is ambiguous. When they appear at Célimène’s, they are given the
same chairs as the other nobles gathered there, a sign of equality according to the codes of *préséance*. Clitandre wastes no time boasting of his presence at the king’s *lever*. Alceste concedes the acceptance of Acaste and Clitandre in the palace circles when he calls them “mes bons amis de cour” (2. 4. 651). Yet, the misanthrope debunks Clitandre’s ridiculous foppery: his blond wig, large *canons*, flowing *rhingrave* and superabundance of ribbons, the long fingernails he displays as a sign of leisure. Célimène also stresses the laughable nature of the pair when she refers to them as “ces grands brailleurs” (2. 2. 548) and calls Clitandre in a letter “le petit marquis . . . de ces mérites qui n’ont que la cape et l’épée” (5. 4). Acaste mentions that he has arrived in a *chaise à porteurs* rather than a carriage and speaks of love in terms that smack of the bourgeoisie: “Aimer à crédit et faire tous les frais” and “Il faut qu’à frais communs se fassent les avances” (3. 1. 816, 822). Another suggestion of less than noble standing is the fact that Célimène is using Clitandre to further her lawsuit—an enterprise where a *gentilhomme* would presumably be of little help but where the scion of a robe family would be useful. Finally, the lack of *honnêteté* among Oronte, Arsinoé, Acaste, and Clitandre is revealed conclusively when all four turn maliciously on Célimène in the last act of the play and seek to exploit her weakened position.

The uniqueness of Philinte and Eliante as exemplary figures lies not only in their ability to avoid attacking others through vicious gossip or inconsiderate moralizing, but also in their collaboration as lovers and friends. Like Méré’s ideal *honnête personne*, both are good listeners; but when they speak, their language is invariably clear and elegant, as when they resolve to wed at the end of the comedy.36 Eliante rejects Alceste’s second-hand wooing by engaging herself to his friend: “Ma main de se donner n’est pas embarrassée; /Et voilà votre ami, sans trop m’inquiéter, /Quoi, si je l’en priaïs, la pourrait accepter” (5. 4.
to which Philinte responds, “Ah! cet honneur Madame, est toute mon envie. / Et j’y sacrifierais et mon sang et ma vie” (5.4.1799–1800). This exchange expresses the kind of sincerity to which Alceste aspires but which is absent in his sparring with Célimène. That yearning for merit that the lovers admired in the misanthrope, which Eliante was willing to reward at one time by her hand in marriage (and to which Philinte would gladly have sacrificed his own happiness), is eventually realized in the exemplary couple. Even after the debacle of the fifth act, where Célimène is disgraced and Alceste ruined, Philinte and Eliante adhere to their friends, for their attachment is founded on the concern for the common good rather than on self-interest, a devotion to the souverain bien that contemporary thought placed above amour propre and self-gratification. 37

The conclusion of Le Misanthrope entails the accomplishment of several inevitable events that had been delayed by the accidental comings and goings of the four previous acts, the most dramatic of which is the public exposure of Célimène’s mendacious coquetry. Indications of the difficulty of keeping secret the widow’s motives occur as early as the beginning of the second act, where she confronts Alceste’s growing curiosity. Opportunities for disclosure multiply with the confidences of the marquis in act three and with Alceste’s reading in act four of a telltale letter intercepted by Arsinoé. Célimène’s misdeeds consist not so much in ill will toward any of her suitors as in a lack of aristocratic honesty in her own activities. She is a character of pure amour propre, claiming to do nothing to excite her admirers (“Des amants que je fais me rendez-vous coupable? / Puis-je empêcher les gens de me trouver aimable?” [2.1.461–62]) and promising to Alceste “Le bonheur de savoir que vous êtes aimé” (2.1, 503), as she has done to all the other gentlemen. Her strategy is an aggressive program of mockery and accusation that
preys on the lack of self-assurance in others, thus diverting attention from her own shortcomings. Even as Alceste offers her a last alternative to disgrace in the form of sharing his lonely provincial retreat, she tries to take advantage of him through a mock compromise that would commit her to be his wife in name only: “Si le don de ma main peut contenter vos voeux, / Je pourrai me résoudre à serrer de tels noeuds” (5. 4. 1777–78). To the very end, she twists and evades with every word, in violation of the convention that a noble’s promise must be an inviolable bond.

As for Alceste, he has resolved from the outset to allow the pied plat to win the contested lawsuit and to leave Célimène’s salon, with or without a bride, as soon as he presents his ultimatum. It seems momentarily that the events of the dénouement will afford him the occasion to marry, not with Célimène the social butterfly, but with a woman reduced to a state of misery, dependent on him in every way. He may finally fulfill his wish: “que j’eusse la joie et la gloire, en ce jour, / De vous voir tenir tout des mains de mon amour” (4. 3. 1431–32; emphasis added). The chance to become more than a noble husband, to become a monarch with his mate as an adoring subject and his désert as his realm, appeals greatly to this man who dreams of a world devoted to his glorification. When Célimène refuses to accompany him, Alceste vows to reject all human society, which he judges to be in a state of déchéance from his personal standards: “Je vais sortir d’un gouffre où triomphent les vices, / Et chercher sur la terre un endroit écarté / Où d’être homme d’honneur on ait la liberté” (5. 4. 1804–6). The désert thus signifies not only a natural landscape but also a sociopathic space empty of people. Blinded by the impulsion to flee and by his own mock-tragic rhetoric, Alceste fails to notice that society is by no means permeated by vice—in reality, justice and truth are at hand in the chastisement of Célimène and the enlightenment of
her suitors, and the brightest virtues are to be celebrated by the marriage of the *honnête* couple, Philinte and Eliante. In the midst of their joy, the betrothed aristocrats do not forget their dedication to a *souverain bien* or to their deluded misanthrope, who must still be rescued from the wilderness of his imaginary honor.\(^{38}\)

It is customary to emphasize that the dénouement of *Le Misanthrope* is problematical, and, indeed, too many productions of the play become mired in sadness when they reach the fifth act. There is a tendency to treat the empty stage at the conclusion as a tomb for the lonely crowd that had filled Célimène’s salon with its giggles. Nevertheless, one must ask oneself whether such gloom is absolutely necessary or justifiable. Although the typical seventeenth-century comedy concludes with a joyous assembly prepared to witness a marriage contract, a more ironic ending was not unusual, particularly when one or both of the partners in the potential couple proved unsuitable for wedlock, as in Desmarests de Saint-Sorlin’s *Les Visionnaires* and in Molière’s own farce *Les Précieuses ridicules*. Alceste’s brusque departure follows the archetypal pattern of *pharmakos* exclusion represented in earlier Molière comedies such as *L’Ecole des femmes*. Furthermore, Célimène’s banishment is equally logical, since by degrading sentimental love, as Dom Juan had done with marital commitment, she reveals herself to be a manipulating parasite akin in many ways to Tartuffe and Trissotin. Ludicrous but hardly sad, Acaste, Clitandre, Oronte, and Arsinoé flutter away from Célimène’s salon toward other centers of self-aggrandizement, well paid for their time and troubles by the delicious tales of scandal that will gain them entry to the choicest circles of gossip. They will continue to show off their ribbons, to write occasional sonnets, and to parade their sanctimoniousness, thus satisfying the audience’s appetite for cyclical verisimilitude: *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*. 
Moreover, it bears repeating that the setting of the play is a salon rather than a *ménage*, a space by nature ephemeral because of its association with unmarried or unreproductive women and with the rise and fall of courtiers, the favorite motif of the age. As incontrovertible evidence in the form of letters and *procès verbaux* attests to the group's fundamental lack of cohesion, the space empties; but not without a last theatrical flourish from Alceste, who makes the most of his exit by hamming up his righteous anger before his indulgent friends. The famous parting smile that Madeleine Renaud gave to her Célimène, and that has since become an institution, offers hope that she will reappear in a forthcoming sequel. Alceste's melancholy rural utopia and Célimène's circus of scorn may be as impossible as they are undesirable, but there exists a more practical alternative in the form of the new *honnête* relationships that will spring up *chez* Philinte.

Having completed in *Dom Juan* a telescopic panorama of criminal unworthiness, and in *Le Misanthrope* a microscopic dissection of civil misbehavior, Molière did not devote another full-length comedy to the structure of exemplary aristocracy. The single subsequent play to put on stage any appreciable number of nobles is *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, a brief sketch of the salon of a provincial lady whose utterly burlesque antics convey a strong suggestion of usurpation. Molière himself did not act in the production, nor did he provide a truly positive example of group codes, since the "normal" couple, Julie and her suitor the vicomte, are little more than sarcastic spectators. The reason why the author abandoned a social structure that had furnished the basis for two consecutive masterpieces is unclear. One may speculate that the reception of the plays, suppression on the one hand and disappointing receipts on the other, dissuaded him from further explorations into the founda-
tions of the second estate, but such timidity would be incompatible with the struggling personality that battled for years against incredible odds and constant danger of persecution in order freely to present *Tartuffe*. It is much more probable that Molière was satisfied to have analyzed the significant dimensions of the structure in two contexts that complement each other in every way. He had seized upon this social tension at the precise moment when it was at the forefront of public attention because of political developments. In the same years, if the critic Charles Boudhors is correct, the chevalier de Méré was hard at work on an explicit theoretical formulation of the concept of *bonnêteté*. 39

Whatever the attitudes of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin in private life, the playwright Molière seems generally to have accepted *in toto* the validity of the social codes applied to the *noblesse*. He raises no questions about the modification of the standards of behavior, nor about the category of nobility itself. His only reservation about the legitimacy of aristocratic status concerns the claims of individuals to the order, and this was a commonplace of seventeenth-century social writings. Abuses committed by the unworthy characters are clearly portrayed as transgressions of the behavioral codes, and hence there is no mention of the complaint aired a century later by Beaumarchais, that aristocrats are permitted by the system to perpetrate certain types of wrongs. As for the exemplary characters, Philinte, Eliante, Dom Carlos, Elvire, and Dom Louis, they are neither centers of attention nor sources of laughter. Their function is to provide depth of vision and the prospect of comic delight, whereas willing and unwilling clowns, particularly Sganarelle and Alceste, provoke bursts of ironic glee. The brilliance of exemplary nobility on the comic stage, unlike the radiance of *gloire* in such tragic heroes as Horace and Polyeucte, deliberately avoids overwhelming the other elements of the play and takes its place in the *chiaroscuro*
of a human tableau, in juxtaposition to the darkness of depravity and confusion.

Class struggle is absent in *Dom Juan* and *Le Misanthrope*. Indeed, recent historical research seems to have laid to rest the contention of some Marxist historians that seventeenth-century France was seething with revolutionary turmoil; careful work has revealed that the sporadic uprisings and *jacqueries* of the age were initiated by diverse causes and attracted support from a broad spectrum of social groups.\(^4^0\) The closest thing in the plays to a dispute between *conditions* is Pierrot's indignant admonition to Dom Juan that he should woo women of the court and leave peasant girls alone. Yet even this feeble cry is hardly unique to the peasantry, since it would have been seconded by the distinguished Dom Louis, nor is it shared by "the masses," since Charlotte and Mathurine are both very willing to marry a courtier. The origin of any activity that can be called "antiaristocratic" is to be found in an aberration within the estate itself, in a dissonance between an individual and his *milieu.* Far from demonstrating revolutionary, class-conscious traits, this type of misbehavior invariably is associated with a lack of solidarity and with a desire to enlarge limitlessly upon what the misguided "grand seigneur méchant homme" and "atrabilaire amoureux" consider to be their personal privileges.

It is significant that Molière does not choose to highlight any subdivisions of nobility in the context of this structure of exemplar nobility and unworthiness: the ruptures between robe and sword, *gentilhomme* and *anobli,* courtiers and poor gentry, are never specifically mentioned. The only hint that any character in these plays is less than a full-fledged *chevalier* involves a few inconclusive details of possible bourgeois associations for Acaste and Clitandre. The consciousness of an internal hierarchy of distinctions does not intrude into the homogeneous atmosphere of Dom Juan's *parentèle* and Célimène's clique. One must
observe that, of all possible causes of unworthiness, Molière depicts only those that violate the most intrinsic rules and avoids commercial dérogeance completely. The reason for this is two-fold: on the level of verisimilitude, it would be ridiculous for Dom Juan Tenorio or Alceste to take up shopkeeping; on the historical and structural level, commercial dérogeance was probably rather rare. There was no collective movement of noblemen anxious to involve themselves in business activities under the ancien régime; quite to the contrary, the tendency of merchants to retire and to immobilize their capital in rentes foncières in order to “live nobly” was a massive cause of economic stagnation. By concentrating on unworthiness linked to crime and civil misconduct, Molière was proving his timeliness and realism.

Both in Le Festin de Pierre and in Le Misanthrope, unworthiness is eventually punished by the expulsion of the pharmakos through a process of rational analysis. Each time the unworthy one is given ample explanations of the codes and frequent warnings, even from such reluctant antagonists as Dom Carlos and Célimène. Neither Dom Juan nor Alceste is manipulated in any way by deterministic forces. The chance to reintegrate themselves into society is reiterated and rejected to the bitter end. Comic judgment in Molière’s plays is a rigorous but fair procedure that arrives at the exclusion of the misbehaver only as a last resort. Molière’s Dom Juan is unique in that it does not rely on the well-known dramatic tradition of the “athée foudroyé,” which doomed the man from the outset, but instead articulates a logical hierarchy of crime and punishment with which the rake insistentely contends. If Alceste faces a mitigated exclusion by self-imposed exile, it is because he has freely chosen a punishment more severe than that which society would have given him. Such a fate is appropriate and, with Philinte’s intercession, may be only temporary; for Alceste is harmless except to himself, and his distortion of actual aristocratic values stems more from inflation than from denial.
Thus, Molière’s exemplary aristocrats are well-rounded, idealized versions of the New Nobility promulgated by the court of Louis XIV: respectful of authority, scrupulously moderate, conscious of the *souverain bien*. Although they do not flaunt their superiority, they continually take part in the relentless comparison of the individual to the standards of what he should be; they never for a moment concede or justify the unreformed misbehavior of their fellow noblemen. The unworthy, who place their confidence in an immutable order of privilege and who do nothing to merit their dignity, are winnowed out by the moment-to-moment testing process of civil life. Action is for Molière’s nobles the ultimate proof of status.


7. Robert Mandrou uses the term “feudal reaction” to describe a tightening of social closure in the seventeenth century that encompassed the verification of noble titles; see *Classes et luttes de classes*, p. 82. Pierre-Adolphe Cheruel, in *Dictionnaire historique des institutions, des moeurs et des costumes de la France*, 1:267–68 and 2:861, notes the success of the réformations, as does Louis de la Roque, in *Armorial de la noblesse de Languedoc*, 1:xxxii–xliv, who observes that many people attempting to live nobly were fined and obliged to declare themselves non-noble.


an interesting analysis of Dom Juan's expressions in the light of the philosophy of nature.

10. Roland Barthes, "Le Silence de Dom Juan." Besides Barthes and Cairncross, some of those to present arguments in favor of a “positive” Dom Juan are: James Doolittle, "The Humanity of Molière's Dom Juan"; André Villiers, "Dom Juan Revisited," in Molière, A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 79–89; Jean-Marie Teyssier, Réflexions sur le Dom Juan de Molière, pp. 15–20; and Micheline Sauvage, Le Cas Dom Juan, pp. 153–57. Janine Krauss, in Le Dom Juan de Molière: une libération, concurs with the idea that the play is a libertine document, but stops short of admiration for the protagonist (pp. 111–31). Among the most eloquent analyses of a criminal, ridiculous Dom Juan are: W. G. Moore, "Dom Juan Reconsidered"; H. Gaston Hall, "A Comic Dom Juan," in Molière, A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 103–10; Edouard Guitton, "Molière juriste dans Dom Juan"; Jean Dubu, "Dom Juan et la notion de l'honnêteté chez Molière"; Jacques Morel, "Le comique de Molière a-t-il un sens?"; and Francis Lawrence, "Dom Juan and the Manifest God: Molière's Antitragic Hero." Jules Brody's engaging essay "Don Juan et Le Misanthrope, or the Esthetics of Individualism in Molière" offers a tempting compromise to the problem by asserting that the protagonist is morally wrong but esthetically right (just the reverse of Alceste); however, this argument depends to a great extent on the dissociation of vice and error and on the premise that a character is wrong if he is wronged—points that remain to be proved. Jacques Guicharnaud puts his finger on the source of Dom Juan's much vaunted liberty: "Dom Juan étant totalement aveuglé par la satisfaction sensuelle et amorale de son être... piétine les codes du monde qu'il traverse, et ne s'apercevrait pas des dégâts qu'il commet si on ne les lui signalait pas. C'est là sa liberté: celle de l'homme à idée fixe qui pénètre dans des propriétés interdites parce qu'il ne voit pas les pancartes; si on les lui montre, l'idée fixe est trop possessive pour qu'il les prenne au sérieux" (Molière, une aventure théâtrale, p. 199).

11. On the anecdote, see OC Couton, 2:1310. The criticism comes from the Lettre sur les observations d'une comédie du sieur Molière intitulée Le Festin de Pierre, OC Couton, 2:1222.

12. Baillard, Discours du tabac, summarizes several contemporary opinions on tobacco and agrees, on p. 64, that tobacco makes the head "plus flexible à toutes les actions de l'esprit, soit qu'il juge, soit qu'il imagine."

13. On marriage conventions, see Donald Hunt, Parents and Children in History, pp. 57–67; Henri de Campion, Mémoires, p. 231; and, regarding the sadistic implications of Dom Juan’s own marriages, Guicharnaud, Molière, une aventure théâtrale, pp. 209–22.

14. Loysel, Institutes coutumières, 1:162. See also on elopement as rape J. Gaudemet, "L'égislation canonique et attitudes séculières à l'égard du lien matrimonial au XVIIe siècle." François Lebrun, Les Hommes et la mort en Anjou aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles, pp. 419–22, observes that noble crimes and armed attacks were not rare in the French countryside during this period. See also Guitton, "Molière juriste."
15. All details on the Grands Jours come from Arlette Lebigre, *Les Grands Jours d'Auvergne: désordres et répression au XVIIe siècle*, pp. 97–120. Other instances of crimes by nobles, based on Chancellor Séguyer's correspondence, are to be found in Ralph Albanese's "Historical and Literary Perceptions on 17th Century French Criminality."

16. Loysel, *Institutes coutumières*, 1:50 ("Nul ne nait chevalier"), and 2:203 ("Le fait juge l'homme"); Domat, *Les Lois civiles*, p. v; Chappuzeau, *Le Devoir général*, pp. 82–88; Godefroy, *Abbrégé des trois états*, 2:1 ("La vertu est donc la principale cause de la noblesse, et la noblesse un effet de la vertu"); *La Noblesse civile et chrétienne*, trans. H. Estienne, p. 98; and François La Mothe Le Vayer, *De la noblesse*, in *Oeuvres*, 2:191–200, which goes on to state, "Si un noble est sans vertu, ses défauts paraissent au double et son infamie croît autant à proportion de son rang que de son vice." Annie Ubersfeld's article "Dom Juan et le noble vieillard" tends to present Dom Louis as an avatar of reactionary repression, but she significantly omits to discuss the father's indulgent, sentimental side, which appears especially in act five. For a detailed discussion of similarities between this scene and the admonition sequence in Corneille's *Le Menteur*, as well as other intertextual elements, see my article, "Le Menteur and Dom Juan: A Case of Theatrical and Literary Adaptation."

17. Also see illustration, *OC La Grange*, 7:128.

18. Jean Jacquart, *La Crise rurale en l'Ile-de-France 1550–1670*, p. 558. Pierre de Saint-Jacob notes that as the peasant/seigneur division deepened, the village assemblies would meet clandestinely in the graveyards after mass (*Documents relatifs à la communauté villageoise en Bourgogne*, p. xiv).


20. Leo Weinstein underscores the fact that Molière's Dom Juan is not really a very successful seducer or a model of gallantry (*The Metamorphoses of Dom Juan*, p. 29).

21. See Jacques Morel, "A propos de la scène du pauvre dans Dom Juan," which analyzes this scene from the point of view of charity and stresses the traditional exchange of money for spiritual well-being.


23. Carlos's situation is not so much an impossible dilemma as the conflict between emotion and moral values which ancien régime ethics continually pose; see Guicharnaud, *Molière, une aventure théâtrale*, p. 264. For evidence that persistent duelling still gave rise to such debates in Molière's time, see François Billacois, "Le Parlement de Paris et les duels au XVIIe siècle," in *Crimes et criminalité en France sous l'Ancien Régime*.

24. Michel Pruner, "La Notion de dette dans le Dom Juan de Molière," undertakes a thorough study of the contractual relationships in the play and notes that Dom Carlos is
just one of several characters who contrast with the infractions of Dom Juan. Joseph Pineau, "Dom Juan 'mauvais élève'," refers to the character as an "anti-noble qui contesterait ouvertement toutes les valeurs de sa propre classe" (p. 567).


26. Among those studies that echo Rousseau in praise of Alceste are M. Magendie, "Le véritable sens du Misanthrope," in Mélanges de philologie et d’histoire littéraire offerts à Edmond Hugnet; and René Jasinski, Molière et Le Misanthrope. Gustave Michaut, Les Luttes de Molière p. 227ff.; P. J. Yarrow, "A Reconsideration of Molière," and Gérard Defaux, "Alceste et les rieurs," agree that Alceste is fundamentally ridiculous, but the latter two stress a perceived shift to seriousness at the end of the play. An excellent and lucid summary of critical opinions on Alceste is Francis Lawrence, "Our Alceste or Molière’s?"

27 Jasinski makes a notable attempt to identify the sentiments toward mankind expressed by Alceste with those found in La Mothe Le Vayer's Prose chagrine; see Molière et le Misanthrope, pp. 258-75.

28. The nature of the relationship between Alceste and Philinte has been viewed in many ways; two of the alternatives are W. D. Howarth, "Alceste, ou l’honnête homme imaginaire," whose ideas on Philinte as an example of honnête behavior to the unworthy Alceste we have followed rather closely; and L. Hippeau, Essai sur la morale de La Rochefoucauld, pp. 174-94, which interprets Alceste as a stoic battling unsuccessfully against the epicurean Philinte. Another essential point in the discussion of the social dynamics of the play is made by Robert Horville, "La Cohérence des dénouements de Tartuffe, de Dom Juan, et du Misanthrope," who states that Alceste constantly stressed person-to-person relationships to the detriment of the entire social fabric.


30. Ralph Albanese, "Théâtre et anomie: le cas du Misanthrope"; Judd Hubert, "Molière et les deux styles burlesques." A good treatment of Alceste's place in Molière's satire of the idea/ideal is found in Carlo François, La Notion de l'absurde dans la littérature française du XVIIe siècle, pp. 101-11.

31. Sorel, Francion, pp. 156-60.

32. Regarding the important functions of the Marechaussee, see Voltaire, Le Siècle de Louis XIV, in Oeuvres complétées, 14: 507-11; Cheruel, Dictionnaire historique, 2:733-34; and Meyer, La Noblesse bretonne, pp. 1137-39. The peacekeeping power of this body was associated with the legal principle expressed by Loysel in Institutes coutumières, 2:167: "Il ne se donne ni trève ni paix entre les sujets du roi, mais on les met en assurance et sauve-garde."

33. Domat, Les Lois civiles, p. vii, Loysseau, Traité des ordres, p. 66; La Mothe Le Vayer, De la noblesse, pp. 197-98. On Alceste's marginality in this respect, see Albanese, "Théâtre et anomie."
34. On the conventions of treating servants, see Chappuzeau, *Le Devoir général*, pp. 103-4.

35. *OC* La Grange, 3:117. An earlier illustration of the play shows basically similar attire, except for the *justaucorps*; see Roger W. Herzel, "The Decor of Molière's Stage: The Testimony of Brissart and Chauveau."

36. Méré, "De la vraie honnêteté," pp. 76-77. A fine discussion of Philinte and Eliante is provided by Marie-Odile Sweetser, "Structure et signification du *Misanthrope*."


38. Quentin Hope, in "Society in *Le Misanthrope*" correctly insists on the importance of this ending, as opposed to the abbreviated one used by Arnavon in order to augment the "noble pathos" of the play.


41. For a broader perspective on the expulsion of the antisocial *pharmakos*, see Ralph Albanese, "Quelques héros criminels chez Molière."