CHAPTER FOUR
SOCIAL CLOSURE AND USURPATION

The attraction exerted by noble status and privilege caused the French aristocracy to be concerned not only with maintaining the internal cohesion of their group through emphasis on nonderogation, but also with forestalling a possible displacement or dilution of their power by the rapid influx of bourgeois into their estate. Many hereditary nobles of both the épée and robe categories felt threatened by totally "unqualified" usurpers and by recent beneficiaries of the noblesse de fonctions, whose vertical mobility was guaranteed by law. Mousnier, Deyon, and others have pointed out that during the seventeenth century more and more restrictions were placed on mobility, as a reaction against change of status reduced access by the third estate to aristocratic positions.\(^1\) The percentage of anoblis in the noble population dropped from about 51 percent in 1500 to about 10 percent at the close of the grand siècle.\(^2\) Although the entries to the upper strata were never entirely shut off to those who could place at the disposal of the crown large sums of money, the mechanism of closure became increasingly efficient.

Under the reign of Louis XIV, social closure became centralized and institutionalized. A main factor in this evolution was the role of the recherches de noblesse, which insisted upon explicit documentary proof of noble status. This in turn implied almost complete reliance on recognition of status by the formal organisms of the state. Families that otherwise might have felt content to claim nobility on the basis of a vague history of participation in military campaigns, service to a princely house,
or gradual assumption of a noble life-style now were forced to consolidate their claim with letters of nobility, offices, exemptions, or fief ownership that could be provided only by the king’s delegates.

The same process of restricting mobility operated on the lower levels of society and fulfilled an important preemptive function by limiting vertical movement into the bourgeoisie proper. Louis XIV’s policy of establishing corporations and maîtrises for nearly all skilled professional and artisanal activities made it difficult for any but members of the masters’ families to rise through commerce or industry. Expensive corporate rites of passage minimized the possibility of competition from newcomers. The gap between the masters of the trades and the nascent proletariat of journeymen, apprentices, day laborers, and servants insulated the privileged groups from any massive upsurge of nouveaux riches.

The imperative of social ascension nevertheless continued to exert pressure on the groups occupying lower places in the hierarchy of power. Lapeyre’s study of the Ruiz merchant dynasty in Nantes shows that after only two generations of commercial activity in France, this family was fully involved in the search for nobility. There is abundant evidence that the appeal of tax-exempt status in the nobility drove commoners from almost every corner of the nation to try to usurp aristocratic privileges, thus avoiding the time-consuming path of office-holding and the exorbitant expenses of title purchase. Despite the risks of usurpation and the dogged investigations of the recherches de noblesse, Ernest Lavisse concludes that false nobles were a common phenomenon in the société d’états. After all, the average bourgeois could hardly wield the financial and political power that permitted Colbert’s family to achieve a spectacular ascent in rank through service to the crown. Denied the means of speedy and legitimate betterment, the ambitious roturier often had no
recourse except to use what wealth he possessed to acquire some of the superficial attributes of superiority, in the hope that society would accept him on the basis of his clothes, his lands, his life style, or some other aspect of outward recognition. The usurper thus can be seen as one who manipulates the normative *paraître* that rules his environment in order to assign himself a new identity, or *être*—a process that seeks to subvert the social order without changing it in any but a single individual detail.

In the work of Molière, usurpation first appears in *Les Précieuses ridicules*, where both the "false" *précieuses*, Cathos and Magdelon, and the masquerading valets, Mascarille and Jodelet, play at being members of the aristocracy. The critique of usurpation is attenuated in the play because the girls owe a good part of their failure to their provincialism, which is a geographic rather than a social issue. Their understanding of noble behavior is based on the impressions given by idealized novels, rather than on acute observations of Parisian hierarchical customs. As for the valets, they undertake to pass for nobles only because they have been encouraged and cajoled by their masters, Du Croisy and La Grange. Other than dressing in foppish costumes and engaging in what they believe to be aristocratic conversation, they make no serious attempts to claim the privileges of the upper groups. It is clear from the outset that Mascarille and Jodelet are performing strictly within the limitations set for them by the masters. Since neither the girls nor their ridiculous suitors can entertain any hopes of making the larger world accept their travesty, they are all "false" usurpers, harmless because their potential for disrupting the social order through illicit mobility is totally devalued.

In 1662 Molière's first fully developed five-act comedy, *L'Ecole des femmes*, provided a far more detailed picture of usurpation than had appeared in his previous farces. The action of the drama catches the protagonist, Arnolphe, in the midst of
a subtle plot to alter radically his identity as a prosperous bourgeois in an unnamed French city. On the one hand, he has already dared to appropriate a noble name, Monsieur de la Souche, and on the other, he is on the point of marrying his own ward, Agnès, a peasant girl whom he deliberately has raised to be a model of ignorance. At first glance, it might seem that Arnolphe's passage from bourgeois to noble, described largely in the liminary discussion with his fellow townsman, Chrysalde, is almost a \textit{fait accompli} and is detached from his "courtship" of Agnès. Yet, in fact, there is a double bond between the phenomena. Arnolphe's plans for Agnès emanate from his desire to avoid being accused of usurping a high position, to have a wife who cannot reproach him his humble beginnings or embarrass him by claiming an equal footing in the family. It seems necessary that Arnolphe marry the woman of his choice (one might almost say, of his creation) in order that his ambitious projects may reach fruition: the possibility of assuming supremacy in the social hierarchy hinges on his ability to establish first of all an unchallenged domination within the family unit. The fundamental paradox of his position is that the very strengths of his double identity become weaknesses once an alternative destiny for Agnès is proposed. Horace, his rival, is not only young and relatively powerless, but he is subject to the commands of a father who is among Arnolphe's best friends and who has other plans for the boy's future that preclude his marrying the poverty-stricken ward. It would seem that nothing would be easier than to remove Horace from the scene once and for all. Yet, in doing so, Arnolphe would have to admit publicly his double identity and to bring unwanted critical attention to his highly irregular plans for advancement.

Arnolphe's wealth is acknowledged by all his fellow citizens, even though they may hold him in less respect than he believes. Horace has heard that he is: "Riche, à ce qu'on m'a dit, mais des plus sensés, non; /Et l'on m'en a parlé comme d'un ridicule"
The fact that he carries in his purse 100 pistoles, more than 1,000 livres, indicates that he is a man accustomed to handling very large sums of money. In addition, he owns land in the country, for he has just returned from an eleven day visit to his métairie (1. 4. 253–56). It was not unusual for the bourgeoisie of provincial towns to monopolize the prime agricultural lands in their vicinity and to make extended trips to the farms during the planting and harvesting seasons in order to supervise the workers and to make sure that not a penny of profit escaped them; Couturier mentions that this was the practice around Châteaudun, and Drouot notes the same for Mayenne and Burgundy. Venard adds that in the area of Avrainville the burghers had made such an institution of these visits that their farms contained comfortable houses with carriage facilities.

It is from his sense of property ownership that Arnolphe has progressed to the stage of usurpation. Chrysalde mocks the vanity of this erstwhile transformation, as well as the lack of imagination reflected in the unfieflike name of la Souche:

Qui diable vous a fait aussi vous aviser,
A quarante et deux ans, de vous débaptiser,
Et d'un vieux tronc pourri de votre métairie
Vous faire dans le monde un nom de seigneurie?

[1. 1. 169–73]

These comments imply that Arnolphe's activities are both unusual and illegal, for he has skipped several steps in the legitimate process of upward mobility by failing to acquire a noble fief (even a seigneurie was no grounds for a claim of nobility) and by avoiding the payment of the franc-fief, which would authorize a commoner like himself to possess such land. Avarice is probably at the root of this plan, for to purchase a fief and pay the fee to the king would be a costly undertaking.

Molière supplies other indicators that would confirm the
audience's impression that Arnolphe is a wealthy but tightfisted bourgeois and an eminent person in his community. He owns two houses in the town, one for his sequestered ward and the other for himself. The latter is frequented at all hours of the day by all sorts of people: "Ma demeure / A cent sortes de monde est ouverte à toute heure" (1. 1. 143–44). Such a busy house might be the home of a prosperous merchant or, even more likely in view of the social cross-section represented by the visitors, that of an officier, a magistrate, or a tax collector. The greed of the latter two professions was already legendary in Molière's day. This type of man could be expected to wear the traditional bourgeois suit, shoes, and hat pictured in the well-known engraving by Chauveau that served as frontispiece to the play. The same illustration shows lace ornaments adorning the suit, a testimony to Arnolphe's desire to enhance his standing in the town. Yet, just as the protagonist has not completely freed himself from the costume of the bourgeoisie, he employs clumsy servants who have only recently left their farms and hence lack the bearing and the cunning of domestics in a distinguished house.

Somehow Arnolphe has already managed to gain the connivance of the townspeople in his project of usurpation. Chrysalde shows him considerable respect and vows to use his assumed name: "Je prendrai le soin d'accoutumer ma bouche / A ne plus vous nommer que Monsieur de la Souche" (1. 1. 191–92). Dominating the town, Arnolphe seeks to consolidate his authority both by entering the superior class and at the same time by setting himself up, as Alceste longs to do, as an unquestionable patriarch within his own household. His words recall the Misanthrope's longing for an abject wife:

Je me vois riche assez pour pouvoir, que je crois,
Choisir une moitié qui tienne tout de moi
Et de qui la soumise et pleine dépendance
N'aït à me reprocher aucun bien ni naissance.

[1. 1. 125–28]

The will to dominate, objectify, and exploit other creatures, which such critics as Bernard Magné and Ralph Albanese have discerned in Arnolphe, is paradoxically an important ingredient in the ridiculous dissonance of his character. At first it may seem that these plans for a hypogamous marriage to a peasant girl are incongruous with the upward pretensions of a social climber. On close examination, however, we find in Arnolphe’s double scheme a careful, if twisted, method that makes him qualify as one of Molière’s most interesting pseudo-intellectual dupes. His frenzied efforts to establish aristocratic status in the town are not as uncommon as they may seem, for Gustave Roupnel and Pierre Goubert have discovered similar efforts in real life by the Taisand family of Dijon and the Foy family of Beauvais. What Arnolphe has fixed as his goal is to avoid the interference of a wife in his usurpation schemes—a difficulty that will later befall both George Dandin and Monsieur Jourdain. A would-be noble could be betrayed by the inappropriate views and manners of a thoroughly bourgeois wife or by the contumely of an over-proud aristocratic one. By taking a wife from the bottom of the social order, Arnolphe hopes to enhance his loftiness and to re-create in the home the same upstart hegemony that he seeks to establish over his fellow-citizens.

This project also explains his abiding fear of cuckoldry, which is far more here than a mere farcical theme. Having eliminated the possibility of being dwarfed by his wife’s social stature and also having blackmailed the local husbands into compliance, Arnolphe is conscious of only one remaining danger: his spouse may put the horns on him, thus shattering his precarious respect and proving his lack of honor or worthiness. It is revealing that
Arnolphe refers to his personal attempts to avoid cuckoldry as a “noble dessein” (4. 7. 1196). The danger is paramount, since Arnolphe always congratulates himself as being better than other unfortunate city-dwellers:

. . . Est-il au monde une autre ville aussi
Où l'on ait des maris si patients qu'ici?
Est-ce qu'on n'en voit pas, de toutes les espèces,
Qui sont accommodés chez eux de toutes pièces?
L'un amasse du bien, dont sa femme fait part
A ceux qui prennent soit de le faire cornard;
L'autre, un peu plus heureux, mais non pas moins
infâme,
Voit faire tous les jours des présents à sa femme
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Enfin ce sont partout des sujets de satire;
Et comme spectateur ne puis-je pas en rire?

Arnolphe hints that Chrysalde may be a cuckold, too, and boasts to young Horace, “C'est un plaisir de prince; et des tours que je vois/Je me donne souvent la comédie à moi” (1. 4. 297-98). No sooner does Arnolphe hear that Horace has embarked upon an amorous intrigue than he sets out to record it in his annals of municipal dishonor: “Bon! voici de nouveau quelque conte gaillard;/Et ce sera de quoi mettre sur mes tablettes” (1. 4. 306-7). Of course, Chrysalde, who accepts infidelity as a social fact and sometimes even a pleasant arrangement, does not share his friend’s extremist views. But since Arnolphe defines his own honor not in positive terms but according to the dishonor, lowliness, and misfortune of those who surround him, one incidence of cuckoldry will be enough to destroy his chimerical ambitions of power and prestige as a noble.
Part of the comic delight of *L'Ecole des femmes* is the gap between the demands of social living and Arnolphe's image of them, for despite his far-reaching plans, it is clear to the audience that Arnolphe is not capable of living an exemplary life or behaving like an aristocrat. In the second scene of the play, when he tries to reassert his mastery over the doltish servants, Alain and Georgette, he is locked out, delayed, insulted (when Alain obstinately refuses to doff his hat), and even slapped (1. 2. 218). After he has found out that the domestics accepted money from Horace to conceal his visits, he literally goes wild, and Alain comments: "Quelque chien enragé l'a mordu, je m'assure" (2. 2. 392). Even Arnolphe admits he has lost the self-control so essential to a noble. Anger transforms him into an atavistic savage: "Ouf! Je ne puis parler, tant je suis prévenu: / Je suffoque, et voudrais me pouvoir mettre nu" (2. 2. 393-94). Moreover, this odd example of regressive behavior is by no means atypical, for later on (4. 6), we learn that he has thrown a tantrum in Agnès's bedroom, smashed china, and even kicked the dog!

Instead of accenting his superiority, Arnolphe is forced as the action develops to draw closer and closer to the rustic servants. Before sending them out to ambush Horace, he calls them "mes fidèles, mes bons, mes vrais amis" (4. 4. 1093). The ambush is hardly an honorable aristocratic combat, and Arnolphe augments his unworthiness by letting Alain and Georgette push him about for practice. In the light of this awkward and ineffective relationship with the servants, one has trouble imagining how some dramatic interpreters, such as Roussillon, were able to maintain that Arnolphe is a Hitlerian manipulator worthy of melodrama.¹¹

Arnolphe’s difficulty with the domestics is nothing compared with the problems of dealing with the ingenuously rebellious Agnès. Her anodyne prattle in the beginning of the play about
kittens, insects, and nightgowns is merely the superficial appearance of simplemindedness. Her récit in the second act reveals that she has already begun to form with Horace a relationship that springs from politeness and is maintained by generosity:

Toujours comme cela je me serais tenue,
Ne voulant point céder, et recevoir l'ennui
Qu'il me pût estimer moins civile que lui
Et pouvais-je, après tout, avoir la conscience
De le laisser mourir faute d'une assistance?

[2. 5. 500–502, 539–40]

When the time comes for communication, Agnès masters the sophisticated language of love with surprising ease and natural inclination.¹²

With the famous concluding line of the second act, "Je suis maître, je parle: allez, obéissez," taken from Corneille's Sertorius, Arnolphe tries to regain control by ordering Agnès to forget her instincts and obey the command to marry him.¹³ The usurper is trying to assert himself like the chivalric hero of some tragedy, little knowing that he will have tragedy enough when the play ends. He also calls himself "un sage directeur" and notes that he has elevated his ward from the "vil état de pauvre villageoise" to be his mate. This pattern of overevaluation of the self, as Ralph Albanese calls it, runs contrary to the prevailing ideas of homogamous, contractual marriage, free of constraint.¹⁴ Marriages that featured a wide discrepancy in age were condemned explicitly by the decisions of the church and the folk custom of the charivari, implicitly by such legal codes as Domat's tenth general rule: "Tous les engagements qui blessent les loix et les bonnes moeurs sont illicites."¹⁵
Strangely enough, Arnolphe admits that he has refused other, more normal offers of marriage, and describes himself as “un homme qui fuyait tous ces engagements, / Et dont à vingt partis, fort capables de plaire, / Le coeur a refusé l'honneur qu’il vous veut faire” (3.2. 686–88). He declines these opportunities in order to wed someone according to his private rules (“ma mode”) and to construct his own version of society in which he will be the lord and Agnès his thrall:

Du côté de la barbe est la toute-puissance.
Bien qu’on soit deux moitiés de la société,
Ces deux moitiés pourtant n’ont point d’égalité:
L’une est moitié suprême, et l’autre subalterne.

[3. 2. 700–703]

This man, who has tried to procure for himself princely pleasures at the expense of others, likens himself to generals and pontiffs, to everything short of king. The Maximes that he makes his ward recite are inimical to the form of equal marriage that was customary among the nobility he hopes to join; they leave the woman no alternatives to ugliness, illiteracy, solitude, and subordination. Once again, Arnolphe’s twisted ambitions do not match the conduct of the class to which he aspires. Yet he believes he has convinced Agnès of his dominance and boasts: “Comme un morceau de cire entre mes mains elle est” (3. 3. 810).

Arnolphe’s illicit ambitions have not reckoned with the force of love, which, according to Horace, really does have the power to make people behave in ways far above their apparent abilities or conditions:

Il le faut avouer, l’amour est un grand maître:
Ce qu’on ne fut jamais il nous enseigne à l’être;
Et souvent de nos moeurs l’absolu changement
Devient, par ses leçons, l'ouvrage d'un moment;
De la nature, en nous, il force les obstacles,
Et ses effets soudains ont de l'air des miracles.

In fact, the miracle has occurred in Agnès, for, throwing off the abject role Arnolphe has given her, she manifests an almost aristocratic generosity by giving herself symbolically in her letter to Horace, an act that represents the final conquest of free speech.\textsuperscript{16}

From this point on, resistance is hopeless; Arnolphe is fighting in vain against all the social rules of the world in which he lives. The best he can hope for is a stalemate. This point is driven home by the appearance of the notary in the fourth act. The scene is not simply professional satire, for the notary represents the laws and customs of the society. He carefully elaborates the different forms of successful marriages and all the acts of generosity the prospective husband may perform by dispensing with the dowry and sharing wealth with his wife. Throughout the notary's presentation, Arnolphe is closed within his own sphere, worrying about the endangered reputation of the "superior man," Monsieur de la Souche: "J'ai peur, si je vais faire éclater quelque chose,/Que de cet incident par la ville on ne cause" (4. 2. 1048–49). He finally dismisses the notary with an insult, but the representative of society's laws has the last word, for his observation that Arnolphe already resembles a cuckold ("Je pense qu'il en tient") shows that the tyrant's downfall is imminent.

The arrival of Enrique, the lost parent, provides for a coherent conclusion to the play.\textsuperscript{17} The young lovers have already prepared for marriage as much as possible, having only to find a way of signing a contract in order to fulfill their inclinations. Agnès's generosity and her emerging intelligence have raised
her above the level of a simpleminded peasant girl, the role Arnolphe has assigned her. Horace has for his part made several sacrifices: spending, borrowing, and even risking death in order to court his beloved, he has proved Arnolphe’s prediction that he is as talented at love as at business: “Les gens faits comme vous font plus que les écus, / Et vous êtes de taille à faire des cocus” (1. 4. 301–2). Enrique provides the missing element of paternal protection and approbation, which by its very absence has brooded over the first four acts of the play. This industrious figure, who has enriched himself in the Americas through one of the mercantile ventures so dear to the hearts of Colbert and Louis XIV, serves to legitimize the marriage of the lovers and to remove Agnès from the odious guardianship of Arnolphe, thus breaking the stalemate in favor of the bourgeois marriage codes.

In contrast to the radiant example of Enrique, Arnolphe is unveiled as a thrice illegitimate individual, who has falsely claimed the dignity of father, husband, and noble. It is this triple embarrassment that explains his reaction to the scène de reconnaissances, for although he will be reimbursed by the parents of the lovers for the expense incurred in raising Agnès, he is so outraged that he can barely utter “Ouf!” before he leaves the stage. His carefully planned usurpation, meant to substitute for his bourgeois destiny a pseudo-aristocratic authority in the household and in the town, collapses in ruins as soon as it is known that Monsieur de la Souche and Arnolphe are one and the same, and that he is unable to impose his will on Agnès or his vengeance on Horace. Even the relatively uncomplicated transformation of his métairie into a seigneurie can no longer be realized, for the city will know that he is a fraud, a fool, and a dupe.

The ultimate irony of Arnolphe’s failure is that, despite his efforts to erect mechanisms of closure between himself and the townspeople, whom he despises as bourgeois cuckolds, and
between himself and Agnès, whom he seeks to identify with the even less powerful level of peasants and oppressed women, he is finally the victim of legitimate social closure. The key to his ambition was not to take advantage of existing opportunities and to gain the acceptance of his peers but to forge his own rules and to create a caste for himself. It becomes clearer and clearer as Arnolphe’s control of domestic affairs breaks down, and as contrary evidence accumulates, that his superiority is an illusion. When self-assured characters arrive to claim their rights, the last lingering remnants are dissipated.

Six years later, in 1668, after having sketched briefly in *Le Mariage forcé* the predicament of an ambitious commoner who chose to marry a woman superior to him in pretension if not in rank, Molière again devoted a major play to the conflict between *arrivistes* and the mechanisms of closure. *George Dandin* features a protagonist who is in many ways the polar opposite of his predecessor Arnolphe. Whereas the latter picks a spouse from what he believes to be the bottommost level of his environment, Dandin boldly weds one of the dominant women of his rural world, for Angélique is a member of the gentry. Agnès and her relatives opposed the ambitions of Arnolphe, but Monsieur and Madame de Sotenville are only too willing to ally themselves to Dandin’s money. Arnolphe overanticipates and takes nothing for granted, but Dandin foolishly assumes that his marriage has put him on a par with the Sotenville clan and that they will share his views regarding “honorable” family life. As shown in these and many other possible parallels, Molière seems to have practiced the same tactic of bracketing that he used in portraying nobility and unworthiness; he exposes a phenomenon in depth by focusing on a multitude of its differing aspects.

George Dandin’s incompatibility with the *noblesse* is beyond doubt. Although he is described in the list of *acteurs* as a “riche
paysan,” it is important to specify that his status has more in common with the bourgeoisie than with the “bonne et franche paysannerie” of which he boasts. No ordinary farmer, whether field hand, censitaire, or métayer, could expect to amass enough wealth to wear the gaudy, silver-trimmed clothes sported by Dandin.\textsuperscript{19} Research on seventeenth-century rural society, such as Emile Mireaux’s study of the Brie countryside and Jean Jacquart’s work on the Hurepoix, has revealed only one group capable of such luxury—the laboureurs.\textsuperscript{20} Their dominance over all the essential tasks of the agricultural world made them monopolizers of equipment, creditors of the small farmers, managers of absentee interests, suppliers of commodities, and brokers of money, power, and labor in the community. When average farmers collapsed or starved during weather or market crises, the diversity of the laboureurs’ activities allowed them to continue to flourish and to develop fortunes in the range of 10,000 to 16,000 livres. Jacquart found that a laboureur in the Hurepoix named Gaspard Hersant had been able to acquire nobility, but Mireaux mentions that some aspiring members of this stratum, like the office-seeking Bernard family of the Brie, were thrust back into the ranks of the roturiers by Louis XIV’s commissions of inquest.\textsuperscript{21}

Like so many other coqs de village who are not content merely to be wealthy and comfortable, Dandin has taken steps to speed his climb up the pyramid of social dignity. Choosing to skip the prescribed steps, which included holding honorable offices, acquiring seigneuries, and purchasing letters of nobility, he tries to circumvent the codes of behavior by marrying directly into an aristocratic family. With their help, he has converted one of his parcels of land into a so-called estate and assumed the title of “Monsieur de la Dandinière” (1. 4).\textsuperscript{22} Although the name in itself tends to cast aspersions on the origins of its bearer through its rather explicit evocation of the basse cour, Molière does not allow us to forget that the equivocal use of titles was one of the
most common means of usurpation, particularly if the social climber could gain the connivance of the local notables, as Dandin has done.

It is essential to keep in mind that George Dandin’s in-laws, the Sotenvilles, are not great nobles but penniless hobereaux. As such, their claims to legitimate dominance over their daughter’s lowborn husband are questionable. Some provinces, such as Normandy, attacked the very existence of the poorer gentry by proclaiming that any noble unable to maintain his station in life was automatically guilty of dérogeance! Dandin himself tells us that the house of Sotenville was on the brink of financial ruin before the strategic marriage: “Sans moi vos affaires, avec votre permission, étaient fort délabrées, et mon argent a servi à reboucher d’assez bons trous” (1.4).

Although the hobereaux enjoyed considerable sympathetic response in seventeenth-century literature (one thinks, for example, of Charles Sorel’s Francion and of many of La Bruyère’s personnages), Molière does not endow the Sotenvilles with a single positive feature. The ridiculous, anachronistic attitude of the baron is embodied in the obsolescence of his title and in the ancient helmet in which he appears onstage. Moreover, his speech is punctuated by the rustic oath “Corbleu!” With great sarcastic effect, Molière shows the baron and baroness boasting of ancestors with peasant names like Jacqueline and Mathurine and protesting, a bit too strenuously, that these women refused to become the mistresses of great seigneurs. Another ironic joke involves Mme de Sotenville’s proud claim that her family of La Prudoterie ennobles by “le ventre,” an admission that implies others of her lineage had stooped to marry roturiers. Even more ludicrous are the baron’s allusions to military prowess. “J’eus l’honneur dans ma jeunesse de me signaler des premiers à l’arrière-ban de Nancy . . . mon père Jean-Gilles de Sotenville eut la gloire d’assister en personne au grand siège de Montauban” (1.5). He might as well have bragged about being on
the Maginot Line or at the Battle of Algiers, for the two events he mentions were notable French embarrassments. Ignorant of these shortcomings, M. de Sotenville compounds his errors by offering Viscount Clitandre the pleasure of hunting—not the aristocratic stag but the lowly hare (1. 6)! The baroness fares no better, for she betrays brutality in threatening to strangle her daughter with her bare hands if she has been unfaithful (1. 4). Thus, despite their initial concern for superficial decorum in speech and forms of address, the Sotenvilles reveal themselves to be unworthy of true aristocratic status.

Even had Dandin respected the conventions of social ascension, his marriage to Angélique could hardly be considered a reflection of the usual manners of the laboureurs. The general consensus of historians of early modern rural life, including Constant, Goubert, Venard, Couturier, and others, is that laboureur society was essentially endogamous, that family solidarity and lineage were as important within this group as within far more privileged segments of the société d'états.26 The same was not true of the hobereaux, however, for various forms of misalliance were quite common among the minor provincial nobility.27 Dandin's choice to marry outside his stratum is more a concession to the practices of those who victimize him than a reflection of any widespread initiative toward mobility by the commoners of seventeenth-century France.

Obviously, Dandin has made a mistake in betting his own advancement on the honor of this discredited family. However, his pretensions go beyond the possession of title, for he also considers it part of his position to avoid the state of cuckoldry. This risky enterprise is rendered absolutely impossible by the personality of his wife, Angélique, who lacks any respect or inclination for her husband or for the exemplary life:

... Je prétends n'être point obligée à me soumettre en esclave à vos volontés; et je veux jouir, s'il vous plaît, de quelque nombre de
beaux jours que m'offre la jeunesse, prendre les douces libertés que l'âge me permet, voir un peu le beau monde, et goûter le plaisir de m'ouïr dire des douceurs. Préparez-vous-y, pour votre punition, et rendez grâces au Ciel de ce que je ne suis pas capable de quelque chose de pis. [2. 2]

Angélique’s frankness in asserting what she regards as her rights arouses a violent anger in Dandin who rants, “Il me prend des tentations d’accommoder tout son visage à la compote, et le mettre en état de ne plaire de sa vie aux diseurs de fleurettes” (2. 2). Although aristocratic custom condoned the freedom of the wife, the roturier’s attitude could reduce the wife’s status to that of slave or object. It is apparently the latter ideology that motivates Dandin’s ire, and this miserliness in goods and women opposes itself to the generosity that the noble ideology prescribes. The fact that Dandin complains publicly about young Angélique’s intrigues is in itself evidence of his lack of suitability for the title he flaunts, for honorable conduct required acting with discretion at all times.

Whereas Angélique is “naturally” attracted to the aristocratic (though far from perfect) qualities of Clitandre, Dandin is in a sense contaminated by his meetings with the farmhand Lubin. This swain is staggered by the gold pieces he has earned in the service of the viscount, for he has grown used to sweating all day for ten sous (the three louis he receives thus represent about two months’ wages). He shows little deference in speech to Dandin: the two address each other with the formal “vous,” and a parity is thus established between these characters who come from opposite ends of the third estate. Lubin’s courtship of the beautiful but worldly Claudine is not simply a disparate element; this relationship underscores the contradictions of the marriage between Dandin and the heiress of the Sotenvilles. Like Angélique, Claudine is attracted to Clitandre, for she admits, “Je vous rends service parce que vous le méritez, et que je me sens au
coeur de l’inclination pour vous” (2. 4). Clitandre rewards her with a gratuity and a kiss, and the two find themselves in each other’s arms again in the second scene of act three. Like Angélique, Claudine seems to know the rules of successful intrigue; she refuses to give Lubin a kiss because “j’y ai déjà été attrapée.” Lubin resembles Dandin in his lack of politeness when he retorts, “Adieu, beauté rude ânière” (2. 1). More than providing subplot material or extra comic relief, the parallel between these two vastly different peasants emphasizes the distance and tension between Dandin and Angélique.

A great deal of this play is devoted to George’s laments and humiliations, which are found not only in his five monologues, but in virtually every scene where he appears. His first attempt to assert himself is thwarted by Clitandre’s appeal to the code of dueling: “Monsieur, vous voyez comme j’ai été faussement accusé: vous êtes homme qui savez les maximes du point d’honneur, et je vous demande raison de l’affront qui m’a été fait” (1. 6). Dandin decides in the second act to try to collect more proof before making another accusation, and thanks to a further confidence made by Lubin, he believes he nabs Angélique and the shrewd Clitandre en flagrant délit. Nevertheless, the wife cleverly feigns outrage at the proper moment, and Dandin winds up receiving the bastonnade that was meant for the interloper. These farcical elements become more frequent in the third act, where Lubin mistakes Angélique and then Dandin for his beloved Claudine, a burlesque confusion of identity that rekindles interest in the play’s central problem. In a vain attempt to collect an irrefutable bit of evidence against his “transgressing” wife, Dandin uses the same locked-door ploy that Molière had already included in La Jalousie du Barbouillé. Unfortunately for George, his roturier cowardice once again undoes him, for he fears that he might be prosecuted for Angélique’s “death” (3. 6). Once again, he must make a painful excuse dictated by Monsieur de Sotenville. His shame is all the
greater, since he must kneel, thus assuming the final position of submission.

At first glance, it might seem that Dandin’s enterprise ends in a tragic fashion, for he reflects, “Lorsqu’on a, comme moi, épousé une méchante femme, le meilleur parti qu’on puisse prendre, c’est de s’aller jeter dans l’eau la tête la première” (3. 8). Yet, it is sometimes forgotten that this play was written as part of the larger scheme of the Grand Divertissement royal de Versailles. Songs and dances framed the play and its separate acts. In fact, Dandin’s “suicidal” monologue does not end the entertainment, for the libretto goes on to note: “Enfin un de ses amis lui conseille de noyer dans le vin toutes ses inquiétudes, et part avec lui pour joindre sa troupe, voyant venir toute la foule des bergers amoureux.”

It is with Bacchic ceremony that George Dandin concludes; the ambitious laboureur is reunited with his peasant origins and provided with a convenient consolation for his great chagrin. The fumes of wine will make the entire world as dizzy and as formless as his own existence has become.

If George Dandin lacks a spokesman for the exemplary life, it is because the issue of déchéance is thrust aside by the spectacle of closure gradually isolating a man who thinks he has already broken through the hierarchical barriers. Dandin is locked in a cycle of failure, much like Lélie in L’Etourdi; but unlike the latter, he is made to perceive that his dilemma develops ineluctably from the fatal mistake he made in marrying the hobereau’s daughter. The flaws of the Sotenvilles are not really out of place in the penurious gentry, and one could hardly expect better behavior from a clan that allied themselves to Dandin’s “vile” wealth. In a sense, the play is a global indictment of rural society—that disorderly realm distant from the new and superior polity of Paris and the court. Overambitious laboueurs would find few defenders among Molière’s spectators, who had
not forgotten that it was an upstart member of that group, Antoine Du Roure, who had recently incited a nasty rebellion in the Vivarais. Violent rebels were subject to hanging, but usurpers—unable to compete in the stage world with real nobles or to assert their authoritarian desires—might be humiliated by the natural inclinations of those around them, and forced to withdraw into the limited privileges of their own element.

Despite the fact that George Dandin explored a new dimension in the ethics of social mobility, Molière could not have been overly satisfied with the play. It had been patched together in haste for a royal entertainment and later disseminated to a larger audience through publication and production on the Parisian stage. Yet its dialogues between equally flawed and rigid individuals lacked the stature of L’Ecole des femmes and the supple wit of most of Molière’s theater. Thus, when in 1670 Louis XIV asked the playwright to write another comédie-ballet for his hunting excursion at Chambord, the impulse to return to the situation of the parvenu began to amalgamate itself to the monarch’s stipulation that the play should contain a Turkish ceremony. Was it not possible that the “Turks” could be false and that their ceremony could provide a convenient way to gull some contemporary dupe? A rival comedian, Raymond Poisson, had produced in 1668 at the Hôtel de Bourgogne a brief farce called Les Faux Moscovites that featured such a combination. To cover up an abduction plot, Poisson’s scoundrels disguise a “crieur de noir à noircir” as a great Russian lord and succeed in bamboozling an innkeeper. The precedent for foreign masquerades existed; it only remained for Molière to blend it with a renewal of his usurpation comedy, raised to a new register of effectiveness.

In Monsieur Jourdain, Molière created a versatile usurper who, unlike Dandin, could interact with a wide spectrum of
social types. We see him as a clumsy patron to teachers and tradesmen who flatter his craving for *qualité*, as the unfortunate creditor to a rapacious nobleman, as an aspiring but befuddled candidate for aristocracy, and finally as a voluntarily redefined individual—a prisoner of the illusion that Cléonte had spun around him in order to further the progress of society. In the course of this evolution, the would-be gentleman is juxtaposed to characters from each major level, from Nicole, a peasant who has kept her country ways, to mock royalty in the person of the Grand Turk’s son. This social panorama, reminiscent of *Dom Juan*, permits a multifaceted evaluation of the phenomenon of illicit ambition that fulfills the task originally undertaken in *L’Ecole des femmes*.

The milieu that serves to introduce Monsieur Jourdain is composed of bourgeois professionals, experts who have mastered academic disciplines, fine arts, and warfare. These teachers are not fooled for a second about the extent of Jourdain’s attributes and abilities. They disparage him with epithets such as “notre homme” and “ce bourgeois ignorant.” However, as the music master explains:

*C'est un homme, à la vérité, dont les lumières sont petites, qui parle à tort et à travers de toutes choses, et n'applaudit qu'à contresens; mais son argent redresse les jugements de son esprit; il a du discernement dans sa bourse.* [1. 1]

The teachers are simply pursuing their livelihoods, searching for an introduction to lucrative social circles, and trying to recoup the losses incurred in serving the penniless Dorante.

Monsieur Jourdain makes his entrance into this businesslike group dressed in a ridiculous gown and wearing his first pair of silk stockings. Along with his own garments, he shows off the livery of his two lackeys. From the outset, Molière makes it clear that the same Jourdain who itches to be a gentleman has only
very fuzzy concepts of social differentiation. Charles Chappuzeau must have had someone like him in mind when he wrote, “Beaucoup [de gens] veulent comme des potirons devenir et paraître riches en une nuit.” The verisimilitude of the character has given rise to much speculation about the identity of his “model,” ranging from the powerful Colbert to homonymous cloth merchants of Paris and Amiens. Yet Jourdain is so full of unmitigated extravagance that he surpasses localization.

Only the superficial aspects of nobility are of concern to Monsieur Jourdain, for he cannot grasp that being and seeming are not the same thing. Naively he assumes that others are also unable to distinguish between counterfeit façades and essential traits. He takes dancing lessons because he thinks aristocrats do, and before trying to sing inquires, “Est-ce que les gens de qualité apprennent aussi la musique?” (1. 2). He explains that fencing only interests him because “de cette façon donc, un homme, sans avoir du coeur, est sûr de tuer son homme, et de n’être point tué” (2. 2). The effect of such cowardice is evident in his role in the brawl between the teachers: “Oh! battez-vous tant qu’il vous plaira: je n’y saurais que faire, et je n’irai pas gâter ma robe pour vous séparer” (2. 3). No wonder the protagonist is bested at fencing by his feeble maid, who is armed only with a broomstick! Likewise, the humanities only attract his attention because he wishes to spell correctly the words of a letter of seduction. The height of Jourdain’s exploitation by his fellow bourgeois is reached when the philosophy teacher goes further than any of his colleagues and sells the dupe something he already possesses—the ability to pronounce “o” and “u.”

The pathetic image of Jourdain persists into the third act, where Nicole’s fit of laughter at the sight of her master’s comical costume embarrasses him in public. The bourgeois is shown to be inferior in judgment to his own maid, who does not hesitate to use her rustic language to call one of the only nobles she
knows “le plus grand malitorne et le plus sot dadais que j’aie jamais vu” (3. 12). Jourdain shows his displeasure at the frank but devoted remarks of his servant by calling her “une pendarde.” Yet, this ill humor is not surprising, for he has already underlined his bilious nature by berating his tailor:

Que la fièvre quartaine puisse serrer bien fort le bourreau de tailleur! Au diable le tailleur! La peste étouffe le tailleur! Si je le tenais maintenant, ce tailleur détestable, ce chien de tailleur-là, ce traitre de tailleur. . . . [2. 4]

Of course, Nicole’s irreverence for nobility strikes at the root of Jourdain’s obsessions, for he had tipped the tailor’s apprentices to call him “Mon gentilhomme,” “Monseigneur,” and even “Votre Grandeur.”

The arrival of Mme Jourdain, who makes common cause with Nicole, marks the beginning of explicit condemnation of ambition from within the bourgeois family. She reminds her husband that, instead of squandering his riches to create a carnival atmosphere, he should give serious thought to arranging a suitable spouse for their daughter, “qui est en âge d’être pourvue” (3. 3). She thus responds to what is perhaps the major concern and responsibility of bourgeois parents, family advancement through marriage. The moralist Chappuzeau voices a widespread opinion when he speaks against parents who, like Jourdain, “consument le bien de leurs enfants.”

Mme Jourdain has little use for nobility and exclaims to her mate, “Çamon vraiment! il y a fort à gagner à frequenter vos nobles, et vous avez bien opéré avec ce beau Monsieur le comte dont vous vous êtes embéguiné” (3. 3). When Dorante offers to co-opt her with the gift of a place at the royal entertainments, she retorts sarcastically, “Oui, vraiment, nous avons fort envie de rire, fort envie de rire nous avons” (3. 5). Jourdain’s wife seems to represent a conservative, endogamous train of thought,
a feeling of identity with their merchant dynasties. French society in the seventeenth century was dominated by small groups of families, such as the twenty that were found by Deyon to control Amiens.\textsuperscript{38} To abandon this secure circle of distinguished clans is unthinkable to Mme Jourdain.

If one follows the money in the play, Jourdain’s scenario for success becomes clear. Although his wife has accused him of financial carelessness, the bourgeois reveals that he has in fact kept close track of his loans to the count, which he evaluates, “Somme totale, quinze mille huit cents livres” (3. 4). He readily accedes to his debtor’s request for another 2,200 francs, and when he hands over the bags of coins, he explicitly states that the motive for these transactions is the seduction of the beautiful marquise Dorimène. This admission lends new ironic meaning to the response he gave his wife when asked what good Dorante can do for them; “Il a pour moi des bontés qu’on ne devinerait jamais . . . des choses dont on serait étonné, si on les savait” (3. 3). This new perspective on illicit ambition goes far beyond the sending of a few poulets to a lovely lady, for the expenses involved in acquiring a noble mistress are massive: 18,000 livres to Dorante to serve as go-between, thousands spent on clothes and lessons, a costly diamond, feasts, serenades, and entertainment. Jourdain’s road to noble privilege runs through the means of personal relations purchased with his family’s patrimony, rather than through the time-sanctioned acquisition of ennobling lands and offices. The illicit nature of this procedure becomes clear when one considers the following fundamental code voiced by Argou: “Lorsqu’une famille n’a pas toujours été noble, elle ne peut le devenir par quelque temps que ce puisse être, si ce n’est par la concession du prince.”\textsuperscript{39} Jourdain’s mistake lies not in his aspiration to join the New Nobility but in his attempt to avoid dealing with the gatekeeper of social mobility—the monarch.
Contrasting with the underhanded schemes of Monsieur Jourdain, the honest and reciprocal affection that Cléonte professes for Lucile is a model of legitimacy. Moreover, the young lovers enjoy a sense of parity that would please Lucile’s mother and that makes possible on the dramatic level the wry Molièresque technique of the *dépit amoureux* (3. 8, 9, 10). In order to wed, the couple must obtain Jourdain’s assent, and Cléonte makes a modest but respectable presentation of his case:

> Je suis né de parents, sans doute, qui ont tenu des charges honorables. Je me suis acquis dans les armes l’honneur de six ans de services, et je me trouve assez de bien pour tenir dans le monde un rang assez passable. Mais avec tout cela, je ne veux point me donner un nom où d’autres en ma place croiraient pouvoir prétendre, et je vous dirai franchement que je ne suis point gentilhomme. [3. 12]

The key word in Cléonte’s proposal is “charges,” since it is generally associated with the *noblesse de fonctions*. It is thus very possible that Cléonte is a titled nobleman, especially considering his previous military service. Although martial valor and a substantial fortune fulfill two of the criteria for nobility, Cléonte is technically correct in saying that he cannot aspire to the status of a *gentilhomme*, which is theoretically reserved for nobles with little or no bourgeois blood in the lineage. The use of “parents” in the speech refers to at least two male predecessors, perhaps a father and grandfather. Parliamentary offices adhered to the formula *patro et avo consulibus*, which made a third-generation officeholder a full-fledged hereditary noble. Although such a man could not compare in standing with great dukes such as Condé or La Rochefoucauld, or even with ancient *hobereau* families, he would be a very acceptable match for the daughter of Monsieur Jourdain. 40

Cléonte is of course stunned when he hears Monsieur Jourdain’s answer to his proposals: “Touchez là, Monsieur: ma fille
n'est pas pour vous... vous n'êtes point gentilhomme” (3. 12). He goes on to explain that he wishes to marry his daughter to a marquis in order to acquire nobility by association: “J'ai du bien assez pour ma fille, je n'ai besoin que d'honneur.” His emphasis on himself at this point underlines the fact that Lucile's marriage has meaning for him only as a means of procuring aristocratic honor. It is left to his wife to stand up for the bourgeois idea of marriage, which stressed a desire for similarity of partners (“un mari qui lui soit propre”) and for officeholding (“un honnête homme”). Acutely conscious of the many pitfalls of “les alliances avec plus grand que soi” and of her own identity as the daughter of a cloth merchant from the neighborhood of the Porte Saint-Innocent, she prefers to involve her daughter in a reciprocal alliance with a man “qui m'ait obligation de ma fille.” Monsieur Jourdain ignores all his wife's arguments in favor of homogamous kinship and spitefully threatens to arrange an even more disproportionate marriage, to a duke, if she persists. Thus, the stalemate between the ambitious usurper and the forces of social order is complete by the middle of the play.

Documentary evidence on patterns of marriage in seventeenth-century France supports Madame Jourdain point by point and condemns her husband's actions. Jean-Marie Gousse found that in Normandy not only was homogamy the prevailing rule in upper social groups, but also the marriage of inclination was prospering with the approval of authorities like Saint Jean Eudes. Even premarital lovemaking and extramarital cohabitation were not unknown. Although Monsieur Jourdain intends to compel his daughter to marry a gentilhomme, any union by compulsion was frowned upon by most religious and lay theorists, who tended to share the views of Charles Chappuzeau: “Les enfants ne doivent jamais être contraints ni forcés de se marier contre leur volonté.” Furthermore, the usurper had
implied that he intended to concentrate his wealth on his own whims rather than on a proper bourgeois dowry, thus squandering the funds that his prosperous but unacknowledged drapier ancestors had striven to accumulate. The image of Monsieur Jourdain as a crazy flirt gives way to that of a systematic renegade from the codes of his group.

Events reveal, nevertheless, that Jourdain is a failure and a dupe, rather than a successful playboy and social rebel. Dorante, whom the usurper believed to be serving as a pimp in his illicit affair with the marquise Dorimène, has in fact been using Jourdain’s money to woo the same woman, following the usual steps of respectable gallantry: declarations of love, serenades, cadeaux, presents, and a great deal of patience. Dorimène admits, “Je crois qu’à la fin vous me ferez venir au mariage, dont je me suis tant éloignée” (3. 15). To the wily Dorante, this assiduous courtship represents more than an amorous conquest; its object is much-needed transfusion of power and money. Unlike Jourdain, he is Dorimène’s near-equal in all but wealth, and their reciprocal esteem, like that of Cléonte and Lucile, seems to follow group lines.

The usurper’s feast in the fourth act furnishes the setting for the count to show off his qualities as a conversationalist and his thorough knowledge of table manners, much to the detriment of the host, for whom Dorimène expresses keen revulsion. The contrast in manners is brought to a head when Madame Jourdain’s entrance disrupts the feast. Thinking her husband’s schemes to be successful, she mistakenly upbraids the nobles for their complicity:

Cela est fort vilain à vous, pour un grand seigneur, de prêter la main comme vous faites aux sottises de mon mari. Et vous, Madame, pour une grand dame, cela n’est ni beau ni honnête à vous, de mettre la dissension dans un ménage, et de souffrir que mon mari soit amoureux de vous. [4. 2]
Her outrage as a wronged housewife has driven her to make such extreme statements, for she admits, "Je me moque de leur qualité. . . . Ce sont mes droits que je défends." The aristocrats respond to her attacks within the prescribed behavior for their level; Dorimène calls her an "extravagante," and Dorante tells her, "Prenez de meilleures lunettes." Monsieur Jourdain, however, reacts with a brutality unsuited even to his real status as a bourgeois, ranting, "Je ne sais qui me tient, maudite, que je ne vous fende la tête avec les pièces du repas que vous êtes venue troubler." With the hasty ending of the cadeau, all three couples, Cléonte and Lucile, Dorante and Dorimène, Monsieur and Madame Jourdain, are at least temporarily split up, and the prospect of finding a mutually acceptable solution does not seem very bright.

The disguised valet, Covielle, had been planning the Turkish masquerade since the thirteenth scene of act three, having realized at that point that no rational methods stood a chance of swaying the usurper. The ceremony offers a solution to the tension that has been growing between ambition and the forces of closure, for it will permit the others to satisfy Jourdain's outlandish desires while still preserving the equilibrium of society and the marriages of the lovers. It is interesting that the main tactic of the Turkish ceremony is a surenchère, an overbidding of Jourdain's original project for usurpation. The bourgeois had already asked Dorante to mention his name to the king, and this desire to associate with royalty seems to become a reality when the possibility arises of marrying Lucile to the son of an oriental monarch, the Grand Turk. Jourdain seizes this opportunity, all the more so because it offers him the personal benefit of becoming an immediate gentilhomme, a mamanouchi. The masquerade contains elements of superficial nobility, such as titles (Paladina, nobilé), a coronet (turbanta), and a sword (schiabbola); but it also involves distinct unworthi-
ness, since it calls for "Giourdina" to dechristianize himself and to be beaten with sticks, a true "ultima affronta" reserved for commoners.  

The conclusion of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* is rather foreshortened, for it is only a matter of making all the characters conscious of the masquerade and of the arrangements that have been made. Dorimène has already consented to marry Dorante in order to save him from further debts incurred through courtship. Monsieur Jourdain shows the depth of his confusion of social fact and social fiction when he accepts the aristocrats' marriage announcement as a further disguise for his schemes of seduction. On the other hand, neither Madame Jourdain nor Lucile accepts the proposed union with "un carême-prenant" until the mask of deception is lifted. Jourdain is thus totally alone in his illusions at the end of the comedy, and he completes his isolation by breaking any remaining social ties in his last lines: "Je la [Nicole] donne au truchement; et ma femme à qui la voudra" (5. 6).

Monsieur Jourdain's "ultima affronta" reserves for him a fate more benign than that of his predecessors, Arnolphe and George Dandin, who are relegated to celibacy and cuckoldry as a punishment for their illicit ambitions. In all three plays, usurpation is linked to the possession of a woman, as well as to such visible aspects as clothes, titles, and manners. The three usurpers show contempt for social codes by rejecting proper marriages, insulting officeholders, short-circuiting the channels of mobility, and belittling their fellow bourgeois. Each time the value-conscious family reorganizes itself and eventually thwarts the usurper by exposing his foolish unworthiness, whether accidentally or deliberately, and by casting the misguided transgressor into an isolation that he willingly accepts, rather than abandon his personal notions about the social hierarchy.  

Arnolphe, Dandin, and Jourdain are victimized by their own
failure to understand identities and social codes in general. Neither their bourgeois status nor their ambition is to be blamed for their plight, since in each case their particular perversions bring about their most serious problems, while such “normal” bourgeois or officiers as exist in the works enjoy the benefits of a reintegrated society. The ultimate test of values is that of the family, for each of the gentilshommes imaginaires contradicts his origins and threatens to disrupt collective harmony. The usurpers must ultimately be repelled, be it through illusory “mamamouchization,” through the humiliating ritual of seeking pardon from one’s superiors, or through the silent, suffocating shame of the man who measured his so-called nobility against the misfortunes of others.

2. Jean-Marie Constant, “La Mobilité sociale dans une province de gentilshommes et de paysans: la Beauce.”
5. Lavisse, Histoire de la France, 7:373. La Mothe Le Vayer’s letter, “De ceux qui ont pris de faux noms,” Oeuvres, 2:499-503, testifies to the anxiety over usurpation at the time of the réformations. James B. Wood found that in Bayeux about ten percent of the nobility were condemned for usurpation, but that a significant number of them were reinstated upon appeal (The Nobility of the Election of Bayeux, 1463-1666, p. 35).
6. Couturier, Recherches sur Châteaudun, p. 155; Drouot, Mayenne et la Bourgogne, pp. 46-47
8. Molière, L’Ecole des femmes. Chauveau’s frontispiece shows Arnolphe pointing to his forehead (3. 2. 677: Là, regardez-moi là durant cet entretien.) This famous scene is also featured in the 1682 OC La Grange, 2:140, and in Sylvie Chevalley, Molière en son temps 1622-1673, p. 140; Arnolphe’s outfit is also visible in the well-known painting of the great farceurs in the Comédie-Française, attributed to Verio.
9. Bernard Magné, “L’Ecole des femmes ou la conquête de la parole”; Ralph Albanese, Le Dynamisme de la peur, pp. 141-55. Ramon Fernandes points out that this
will to power is at the basis of Arnolphe's ridiculousness in "The Comedy of Will" (Molière: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 50-53).


12. Roger Duchène, "Molière et la lettre."


14. Ralph Albanese, "Quelques héroïs criminels chez Molière"; Gaudemet, "Législation canonique," notes that secular jurists stressed the contractual nature of marriage. François Lebrun, *La Vie conjugale sous l'Ancien Régime*, pp. 11-20, explains that, though parental approval was obligatory, constraint was forbidden.


17. Enrique, Orgon, and Chrysalde, the fathers of the couple and their uncle, will constitute the leadership of the new clan, in which Arnolphe will have no foothold of power. Zwillenberg, in "Arnolphe, Fate's Fool," considers the ending to be a retrospective reality that changes the perspective on the protagonist's pseudo-aristocratic struggle against destiny.

18. Couton, like most other editors, sticks to the textual "Oh!" but it is known that "Ouf!" (which connotes the suffocation and expulsion of Arnolphe) was often used on stage. See *OC* Couton, 1:1282. A good discussion of the case for a comic Arnolphe is found in R. Picard, "Molière comique ou tragique? Le cas d'Arnolphe."

19. The inventory of Molière's possessions describes the Dandin costume as "concis-tant en haut de chaussée et manteau de taffetas musque, le collet de même, le tout garny de dantelle et de boutons d'argent, la ceinture pareille, le petit purpoinct de satin cramoyse, autre pourpoinct de dessus de différentes couleurs et dantelles d'argent" (Maxfield-Miller and Jurgens, *Cent ans*, p. 567).


22. This is a case of the same onomastic devaluation that produced Messieurs de la Souche and de Pourceaugnac, as well as such contemporaries as Poisson's Baron de la Crasse. Dandin's tendency to reject facts in favor of his own imaginative aspirations is explored in Ralph Albanese's "Solipsisme et parole dans *George Dandin*."


notes, "La qualité de baron estoit devenue si commune, qu'il n'y avoit pas un Gentilhomme qui s'en fit honneur. Aujourd'hui elle est entièrement bannie de la Cour; et l'on y regarde un Baron comme un homme nouvellement débarqué des terres Australles et inconnus."

25. Loyseau, Traité des ordres, p. 56, notes that the custom of matrilineal nobility had fallen into disgrace even in Champagne, its last refuge.


28. Angélique has been viewed as a real monster, especially by those who associate her with the contemporary assassins of Nantes and the Affaire des Poisons. See P. d'Estre, "La Genèse de George Dandin."

29. One finds it hard to agree with Joan Crow, "Reflexions on George Dandin," in Molière: Stage and Study, pp. 3–12, that this ending can be disregarded simply because it was not staged in the Paris production. Marcel Gutwirth points out ("Dandin, ou les égarements de la pastorale") that the ballet sections constitute an essential noble counterpoint to the rest of the plot. See also Helen Purkis, "Les intermèdes musicaux de George Dandin," and W. A. Peacock, "The Comic Ending of George Dandin," which criticizes the anachronistic elements in recent productions by Rousillon, Planchon, and Han.


33. Jean Marion, "Molière a-t-il songé à Colbert en composant le personnage de Jourdain?"; Maxfield-Miller, "The Real Monsieur Jourdain of the Bourgeois gentilhomme," reveals that a real Jourdain, cloth merchant, lived only a few houses away from the Poquelin family; Deyon found a Jourdain family in Amiens that was arriviste and combined title with commerce, in Amiens, pp. 301–2.

34. The deep comic potential of this apparently minor scene is explored in René Girard, "Perilous Balance: A Comic Hypothesis." Obviously, one learns early in the play that Jourdain has foibles. In that light, it is hard to understand how a critic can say of the usurper that "intelligence and an ethical sense coexist with his impulse to deny what, after all, is only an accident of birth and fortune" or to claim that "Jourdain is Molière's most sympathetic and accessible character" simply because he wants to be one of the Beautiful People! See Nathan Gross, "Values in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme."

35. Jourdain's lapses into such crude speech negate his pretension to elegant language. For a complete study of styles in this play, see R. Garapon, "La Langue et les styles des différents personnages du Bourgeois gentilhomme."
36. Bluche, “L’Origine sociale,” p. 21, notes that the secrétaires d’état did in fact receive the privilege of being addressed as “Monseigneur,” thus enjoying titular parity with dukes and doubtlessly causing quite a social stir.


40. The case of an officier’s son serving in the army is not a rare exception: Deyon, in *Amiens*, noted that, just as many bourgeois sons left commerce, many magistrates’ sons found in the military an attractive guarantee of their nobility (pp. 276, 294); this is corroborated by Ford, *Robe and Sword*, pp. 138–39, and by Jean Chagniot, who notes in “Mobilité sociale et armée (vers 1660–vers 1760)” that many sons of Parisian bourgeois or anoblis served in the musketeers or gendarmerie before joining a regiment; André Corvisier, in “Les Généraux de Louis XIV et leur origine sociale,” even notes that the beginning of Louis’s reign saw the creation of some “généraux de robe!”


43. Despite the generosity implied in this speech and Dorimène’s impeccable manners, there was once a trend to malign her. René Talamon’s sensible reevaluation, “La Marquise du Bourgeois gentilhomme,” put an end to this error.

44. J. L. Barrault’s circus-like production expertly captured the memorable quality of “mamamouchization,” an illusion that dazzles Jourdain and removes him as a social danger. See Ph. Sénart’s theater review in *Nouvelle Revue des Deux Mondes* and Barrault’s own article, “Le Bourgeois ou la poésie du rire.” Richard E. Wood has studied the language of the Turkish ceremony in “The Lingua Franca in Molière’s *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.”

45. On Jourdain’s stubborn refusal to abandon his efforts to be éblouissant, in the mock-tragic sense, see Robert Nicolich, “Classicism and Baroque in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.” Can Jourdain then also function as a reliable representative of social values, as suggested in Odette de Mourges, “*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* as a Criticism of Civilization,” in Howarth and Thomas, eds., *Molière: Stage and Study*, pp. 170–84?