CONCLUSION

MOLIERE AND IDEOLOGY

No study of the social structures in Molière's theater could be truly thorough without a discussion of their possible ideological ramifications. There is, after all, an appropriate progression from the analysis of status indicators, characters' identities, behavioral patterns, and configurations of values in the texts to an inquiry into the design, conscious or otherwise, that gave them form. Ideology is a controversial and sometimes deceptive term, long invested with a pejorative connotation, thanks to Marx's interpretation of it as "false consciousness." Fortunately, Jorge Larrain's recent book on the problematics of ideology and Louis Althusser's reinvestigation of the topic have allowed for a more open and practical definition; in Althusser's terminology, it is "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." In the case of Molière's comedies, this process of representation has more to do with a sensitivity to structural relationships than with actual social consciousness, a condition that, according to Althusser, is true of most ideological expression. Since there do not exist any writings or personal papers in which Molière speaks abstractly or theoretically about society, the only way to gain an understanding of his ideology is through the inductive method of examining his dramatic works against the operative context of his environment. Thus, it is suitable to adopt an attitude that ideology is, in Larrain's words, positive ("the expression of a worldview"), objective ("impregnating the basic structure of society"),
and coextensive ("with the whole cultural sphere usually called the ideological superstructure").

Critics of early modern literature occasionally adopt a line of reasoning that may be summarized as follows: an author's work cannot have ideological content unless he is a philosopher; he cannot be a philosopher without a discrete and comprehensive philosophy; therefore, the lack of an acceptable system not only of ethics but also of ontology, epistemology, and so on, must signify a lack of ideological content. Surely this doubtful syllogism should not be applied to Molière. No one in the audience of the Palais-Royal would expect successful comic discourse to resemble that of Descartes or Gassendi. On the other hand, the public has always perceived to some extent the innate social and critical thrust of the comic. In the language of Keith Thomas, "Jokes are a pointer to joking situations, areas of structural ambiguity in society itself, and their subject matter can be a revealing guide to past tensions and anxieties." Comic discourse can be far more penetrating in its ethical analysis than even the most rigorous formal philosophy, and one should never mistakenly assume, as did some of the positivist critics, that comedies need to be grafted onto other features of the ideological superstructure in order to be considered valid.

The representation that takes place in Molière's work surpasses simple reflection or refraction of "real life scenes" of Louis XIV's France. Its function is less photographic and more similar to semiotic signification. Here lies the great difference between the Classical writer and the one who purports to express documentary truths, whether he be a pamphleteer in the service of Versailles or a more recent devotee of committed literature: the former always shuns the level of the referent, creating dramatic or dynamic relationships without pretending that his works actually participate in the organic experience of social living. Although a status indicator such as a sum of money or posses-
sion of property may help us classify characters like Harpagon or Arnolphe and evaluate their signified behavior, it is pointless to leap across the gap that separates the sign and the referent and to assume that Tartuffe is Charpy de Sainte-Croix, that Philaminte is a lady of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, or that Amphitryon is Monsieur de Montespan.

The mode of indirection and signification in Molière's work coincides with the aesthetics of the Classical age, which condemned overt, partisan campaigning as a violation of the implicit artistic pact between writer and reader. The resultant absorption of ideology into technique is described by Jean Decottignies:

Par vocation, c'est-à-dire en raison de son insertion historique, le texte classique tente de dérober son fonctionnement, d'occulter le procès qui le fait être. En lui, le dire — ou si l'on veut, la pratique — ne s'apprécie pas; sa perfection réside dans sa transparence, dans les ruses qu'il déploie pour évacuer de son espace l'activité investigatrice du lecteur, pour l'orienter vers les en-deça ou les au-delà. Le texte classique refuse en principe la lecture telle que nous l'entendons . . . C'est là que nous voyons l'idéologie à l'oeuvre, et c'est pour cette raison qu'elle nous préoccupe.

Such a fusion is apparent in the work of the man some contemporaries called "The Painter." Like a visual artist using the techniques of trompe l’œil composition (and his friendship with Mignard makes it highly likely that he was knowledgeable in this field), Molière invites us to consider the overview of the finished fresco while drawing attention away from the solid materials that support the system of signs.

Another effect of the oneness of technique and ideology is to blend inseparably Molière the artist-thinker and Molière the entertainer-craftsman. The advantages of such a position are readily revealed in La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes and in
L’Impromptu de Versailles, where the dramatist defuses the serious accusations of moral meddling leveled against him by resorting to a brand of meta-theatrical satire more subtle and more powerful than the crude, vitriolic discourse employed by his enemies in Zélinde or Elomire hypocondre. What more effective way for him to destroy his image as a social danger than to take up the mask of the clownish mimic and to flout the pompous declamation and gestures of his everyday rivals in the Hôtel de Bourgogne?

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Molière’s ideology is the fact that he exhibits a disdain for the dogmatic philosophical systems that prevailed in his day. The attitude did not stem from ignorance, for he numbered among his friends the skeptical savant La Mothe Le Vayer, is thought to have translated Lucretius’s De Rerum Natura, and left numerous hints of his familiarity with philosophical literature; his antidogmatic stance results from his tendency to avoid reductive, a priori reasoning. In Le Mariage forcé the foolish old Sganarelle, like Rabelais’s Panurge in the Tiers Livre, consults about his marriage prospects with diametrically opposed philosophers. Pancræce the Aristotelian is a prisoner of his own endlessly hair-splitting definitions:

Je soutiens qu’il faut dire la figure d’un chapeau, et non pas la forme; d’autant qu’il y a cette différence entre la forme et la figure, que la forme est la disposition extérieure des corps que sont animés, et la figure, la disposition extérieure des corps qui sont inanimés; et puisque le chapeau est un corps inanimé, il faut dire la figure d’un chapeau et non pas la forme. . . . Ce sont les termes exprès d’Aristote dans le chapitre de la Qualité. [Scene 4]

Marphurius the Pyrrhonian, on the other hand, is immobilized by his system’s denial of any certitude:
Notre philosophie ordonne de ne point énoncer de proposition décisive, de parler de tout avec incertitude, de suspendre toujours son jugement, et, par cette raison, vous ne devez pas dire: "Je suis venu"; mais: "Il me semble que je suis venu". [Scene 5]

To the pragmatic Molière, such systems destroy their own erstwhile cohesiveness by relying too heavily on theories that conflict with observable fact. He is unwilling to allow himself to lose sight of human problems simply because of doctrinal disputes.

The reservations about erudition that are made in *Le Mariage forcé* remind one of Francis Bacon’s *The Advancement of Learning*. Bacon attacks three “diseases of learning” that impede clear thinking, namely, excessively flowery language, contentiousness, and deceit. The second category, which Bacon explicitly links with Aristotelianism, applies equally well to Pancrace and to Marphurius:

And such is their method, that rests not so much upon evidence of truth proved by arguments . . . as upon particular confutations and solutions of every scruple, cavillation, and objection; breeding for the most part one question as soon as it solveth another . . . so the generalities of the schoolmen are for a while good and proportionable; but when you descend into their distinctions and decisions, instead of a fruitful womb for the use and benefit of man’s life, they end in monstrous altercations and barking questions.\(^9\)

Since Molière presents a dramatic illustration of this disorder, he joins Bacon in anticipating the development of a modern scientific method based on induction, careful observation, and experimentation. However, he stops short of extolling progress, for the enthusiasm it sometimes engenders can dull and trick the senses, as it does when Bélise imagines she sees men in the moon through her telescope.
The ideology expressed in Molière’s plays is best understood in a synchronic sense, rooted in the conditions of social awareness in mid-seventeenth-century France. Jorge Larrain states authoritatively, “Cultural phenomena are no longer understood as genetic products of a subject, but rather as subjectless, synchronic, underlying structures.” It is for this reason that Molière’s characters are analyzed in relation to états rather than to Industrial Revolution classes or—what is worse—the feudal terminology so dear to some Marxist interpretations.

Molière’s insertion of his works into their historical context was quite deliberate. Instead of such timely characters as the salon hack, the director of conscience, and the aberrant officer, he could have used the jaded stereotypes that reappear with monotony in the works of other comic dramatists: the boastful captain, the pedant, the drunken servant, such as Jean Chevalier’s Guillot, or the clever, seductive valet exemplified by Raymond Poisson’s Crispin. Theater directors have learned through centuries of experience that one may remove Molière’s figures from the seventeenth-century decor by placing them, for instance, in a twentieth-century living room instead of an antechamber, but that it is impossible to take the context out of the character: Alceste will always be a frustrated courtier who yearns for monarchial dominion, no matter what furniture he sits on or what clothes he wears. The dramatist was conscious of the need for synchronic homology, for he explained in *L’Impromptu de Versailles* that comic types were not static. Defending his recurrent use of the ridiculous marquis figure, he pointed out that this type of up-to-date fool had replaced the others and that the successful playwright must be watchful for such changes (scene 1). Furthermore, in concrete demonstration of this principle, he included in his comedy not only an “imaginary” marquis, portrayed by La Grange in the play-within-a-play, but also a “real” marquis, acted by La Thorillière, who annoys the troupe during
their rehearsal (scene 2). As a reader, Molière probably appreciated the Roman-ness of the characters in Plautus’s *Aulularia*; but he inserted his own miser, Harpagon, into the midst of his own age and its issues, with all the appropriate emphasis on *dot* and *dignité*, on controlled lending and contractual procedure. Thus, the ideological-technical synthesis in his theater is not merely the effect of a certain intellectual background but a deliberate step toward a more synchronic social representation in the work of art.

In Molière’s comedies, structures operate over a rather well-defined field of social conditions, that of the urban ranks of the officer-level middle bourgeoisie and the nobility of the court. This field of influence is to a large degree identical with the segments of the population that frequented the playhouses and read published plays. Not surprisingly, Molière constructed the comic situation in an environment with which he and his audience were intimately acquainted—the same layer of society that was in so many countries the *sine qua non* of theater itself. Other groups are not given a central position in his plays. Apart from the second act of *Dom Juan*, peasants appear infrequently, though village life had drawn the attention of such fellow dramatists as Brécourt, who wrote a comedy called *La Noce de village* complete with sustained rural dialect. Nor did Molière depict the world of the workers, artisans, and *petits bourgeois* other than by a few sedan-chair porters and by the Sganarelles of *Le Cocu imaginaire* and *Le Médecin malgré lui*, neither of which devotes much space to behavior within the lower *roturier* household. Servants appear in the context of their domestic duties to masters and mistresses and are assimilated into the concerns and plans of their hierarchical superiors. The most radical example of this is the snuff-taking Sganarelle of *Dom Juan*, who becomes so wrapped up in his master’s situation that he misses his meals and forgets to hide away a few pistoles in case of hard
times. In general, the less-fortunate commoners are shown to be preoccupied with their immediate survival.

It may be argued that this concentration on the middle bourgeoisie and aristocracy constitutes neglect of the largest part of the French population, perhaps eighty to ninety percent of it. In fact, Ilutowicz, Roe, and Emelina have maintained in their studies on the lower portions of the populace in Molière’s works that the author portrayed these groups negatively or sidestepped their social significance. Neither accusation is really valid, however, since Molière was guided in his signifying of these social segments by technical as well as ideological requirements. There was an inherent contradiction in selecting Classical comic protagonists from groups subject to the misery of sporadic famine and ailing commerce. La Bruyère’s well-known sketch of peasants as animals rooting in the earth grimly reflects the devastating mortalités that swept through the countryside. The urban poor—even the marginal groups of the petite bourgeoisie—were scarcely better off. In choosing the comic genre, Molière acquired the option of presenting non-noble figures; but he also accepted the paramount importance of pleasing the public, that is, of instilling in them delight and laughter. The predicament of lower roturier groups precluded this, and Molière was too truthful an artist to create a village full of “happy natives,” as Brécourt had done, or to fabricate a Gallic version of The Shoemaker’s Holiday.

If it is unfair to brand Molière as an enemy of the masses simply because he does not incite the commoners to revolt, it is equally inaccurate to claim, as Stackelberg has done, that his sentiments reside with the oppressed rather than with their bourgeois or aristocratic overlords. At times Dorine and other servants are certainly made to speak much more sensibly than their superiors, but it is on behalf of the interests of the masters themselves. Where the vulnerability of the servant condition is
involved, as in Martine’s dismissal in *Les Femmes savantes*, the customary paternalistic code is the only secure solution to the worker's helplessness to be offered by the text. Even Scapin, who commits a most outrageous action by beating his master, Géronte, in a sack, never attains the aggressive class consciousness of a Figaro. His boldness is attenuated by the exotic element in the play, as well as by the fact that he explains his *fourberies* to his timorous associate Silvestre in terms of whimsical adventurousness: “Je me plais à tenter des entreprises hasardeuses” (3.1). His ultimate goal is merely to retain his status as a well-fed dependent, “au bout de la table, en attendant que je meure” (3.13).

Central to the critical depiction of urban groups in Molière’s theater is the bipolar nature of the social structures themselves. This phenomenon of contrast and antithesis has given rise to considerable discussion by Raymond Lebègue and more recently by Roger Ikor in *Molière double*. Ikor sees the source of the polarity as a kind of benign moral schizophrenia in the author, but it is perhaps worthwhile to consider the question in a larger structural perspective. This study has concentrated on four areas of pronounced tension between widely recognized behavioral values and aberrant developments that threaten to subvert them. It is remarkable that Molière does not seem to envision the possibility of a mediation between the extremes, other than a purely illusory one on the model of Monsieur Jourdain’s mamamouchization or Argan’s “medical” transformation. Like Pascal, Molière reiterates the formula of *le tiers exclu*. The offender and his rationale, no matter how formidable, are ultimately overcome by means that range from benevolent deception through alienation and exclusion to outright execution, and the social fabric knits together again with no sign of lasting weakness. One might object that *Dom Juan* poses an exception to this pattern, and it is true that Molière’s decision to adapt this
elaborate tradition, with its numerous set scenes already added by Spanish, Italian, and French predecessors, imposed special constraints with which the dramatist did not usually have to deal. But one must ask oneself whether Dom Louis, Elvire, and Sganarelle can possibly be in worse straits at the end of the play than when the young rake was alive to degrade them. Is not the life of Dom Carlos, who faced imminent death in one of Dom Juan’s duels, a triumph for social values and a hope that noblesse will survive? Dom Juan himself rejects a series of conciliatory efforts by other characters and eventually undermines by his false piety in the fifth act any remaining possibility of mediation between his former misbehavior and the demands of society. Thus, even in the play that many critics have judged to be the author’s most ambiguous, the refusal of dialectical compromise is cleverly incorporated into the protagonist’s own network of decisions. The Commander’s statue, associated with the punitive aspect of collective values, intervenes to enforce the souverain bien when individual efforts by father, wife, creditor, and fellow cavalier have failed to reclaim Dom Juan.

Although the polarities in Molière’s works remain unmodified, an ideological mediation is achieved through the triumph of the pluralistic société d’états over the forces of disintegration. In order to appreciate this, it is important to understand that the dramatist served as spokesman neither for an antiaristocratic nor for an antibourgeois point of view. Let us first consider the opinion that Molière was a bourgeois militant, as set forth in typical, but by no means decisive, form by John Cairncross. He claims that Molière incarnates “les premières années de Louis XIV, période où l’alliance entre le roi et les éléments les plus avancés de la bourgeoisie a favorisé l’éclosion du libertinage et une campagne à fond contre les classes et les valeurs féodales.” Cairncross goes on to offer as proof the statement that Molière loved simplicity, naturalness, and frankness, virtues that were
supposedly reserved for the bourgeoisie alone! This intuitive approach is as rich in sociohistorical myth as it is lacking in scholarly rigor. If Molière were really expressing an antinoble ethos, why would he take such care to examine the codes of exemplarity that enshrine noblesse as the highest aspiration and reward of civil existence? Young men like Valère, Cléonte, and Clitandre derive their ability to defeat their aged or defective rivals from a solid adherence to the standards and values of the court. Furthermore, the character who is the great champion of the simple, the natural, and the frank, Alceste, is the least bourgeois figure in the entire Molière canon. Though Molière mocked the deviant behavior of foppish marquis, lawless seigneurs, bumbling usurpers, and power-hungry misanthropes, he never ridiculed the basic concepts of the noble code. Virtuous noblemen such as Dom Carlos and Philinte admit its contradictions and surmount them, winning grudging respect from their disbelieving counterparts.

The contrary viewpoint, that Molière is an antibourgeois ideologist, is also fraught with insufficiencies, even when it is advocated by a critic as eloquent and as profound as Paul Bénichou:

Il suffit de parcourir le théâtre de Molière pour se rendre compte que le bourgeois y est presque toujours médiocre ou ridicule. Il n’est pas un seul des bourgeois de Molière qui présente, en tant que bourgeois, quelque élévation ou valeur morale; l’idée même de la vertu proprement bourgeoise se chercherait en vain à travers ses comédies. . . . Ce qui importe, c’est que l’infériorité sociale des bourgeois soit représentée avec tant de force.17

If this great comic body of literature lacks shopkeeper heroes, it is for the good reason that, apart from Monsieur Dimanche and Messieurs Josse and Guillaume of L’Amour médecin, it contains few shopkeepers of any kind, either positive or negative. However, there are a great number of officer clans and bourgeois
families living nobly. It is not clear exactly what Bénichou would consider elevation or moral value, but it is evident that time and time again, these units emerge as very powerful forces in the comedies. The Arnolphe, Harpagon, and Orgon who attempt to subvert the behavioral codes generally fight a lonely struggle, and only in *Les Femmes savantes* is there something that briefly resembles an equality of numbers for and against bourgeois practices. To represent the positive forces of partial closure, reciprocity, and socioeconomic integrity, Molière creates not only a long line of “advisers” (Chrysalde, Géronimo, Cléante of *Tartuffe*, Ariste, Béralde) and concerned servants (Dorine, La Flèche, Nicole, Martine, Toinette) but also some of his most memorable family members, including Elmire, Cléante of *L’Avare*, Madame Jourdain, Henriette, and Angélique of *Le Malade imaginaire*. In the case of George Dandin, it is the transgressor himself who recalls the codes he is violating. Nor can one forget such officers as Cléonte, who demonstrates in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* that his good fortune has not obliterated his origins or given him a pretension to the rank of hereditary noble, but only imbued him with a sense of added dignity and civil behavior that is an extension, rather than a denial, of his status.

Proponents of Bénichou’s thesis are likely to point particularly to the Greek plays (as they are designated in chapter two above) as proof of Molière’s putative courtly ethic, and indeed those plays do deserve consideration. In them Molière created a fundamental structure of complete noble closure, but he chose to distance this closure from his audience through theatrical features (setting, costumes, decorations) and social elements (antique and mythological *conditions*) that were remote from everyday experience. Though perfectly conventional and acceptable in art, the characters in the Greek play certainly lacked the shock value of Tartuffe, dressed in contemporary *dévot* fash-
ions, or Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, freshly arrived from Limoges in his gaudy clothes. Had the playwright chosen to make the princesse d’Elide a contemporary duchess or Amphitryon a general in Louis XIV’s armies, or to make Tartuffe a Celtic priest or Pourceaugnac a citizen of Ephesus, our view of the Molière canon would be radically different, but in fact he did not. For example, *Amphitryon*, which is in almost every sense the most impressive of the Greek plays, has been cited innumerable times as unshakable evidence that Molière was an official symbolic spokesman for the throne, on the grounds that the comedy supposedly justified Louis’s real-life affair with Madame de Montespan. However, it is, despite its beauties, among Molière’s least original plays, being patterned very, very closely on a French source (Rotrou’s *Les Sosies* [1636]) that was still fresh in the minds of many of his spectators. Unless one credits Rotrou with psychic powers, there can be no connection between his comedy and the king’s love-life, for Louis was not born until 1638. Furthermore, Sosie and Mercure, the most important characters in both the Rotrou and Molière versions, have no identifiable historical counterparts. Obviously, any similarity between Alcémène and the lovely Mme de Montespan is an accidental case of life imitating art—Rotrou’s art. Plays like *Amphitryon* and *Les Amants magnifiques* had an audience appeal in their day that qualifies as a form of escape literature, conjuring up a hazy Golden Age, a still-popular ideal of aristocracy that represents the theoretical end point of social mobility, when many spectators dreamed of emerging from their bourgeois cocoons into a more beautiful world. The closed noble society of the Greek plays thus has a distinct place in Molière’s overall ideology, but it is not a preponderant or exclusive one and did not occupy the author’s talents in the same magnificent way as noble unworthiness does in *Dom Juan* or bourgeois reciprocity in *Les Femmes savantes*. 
It is hardly surprising that Molière chose not to heap ridicule on either the upwardly mobile bourgeoisie or the noblesse, since his creation of the comedy of manners was based on a new consensus. A study of the comedies offered by the Troupe du Roi during their visits to aristocratic and royal palaces reveals that they were accepted there with levels of enthusiasm roughly similar to those of the general public in the Parisian playhouse. The works that were first applauded at court, such as *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, were greeted warmly by the crowds at the Palais-Royal, just as those that made their debut in Paris, including such farcical entertainments as *Sganarelle* and *L’Ecole des maris*, were heartily approved by elite audiences. The fact that burghers and courtiers joined in giving their approbation to Molière was due in large part to his ability to achieve a sense of Classical comic plenitude unequaled by his rivals. His plays represent an imaginary network of social relationships that is remarkably homologous to the world view of the French literate public in the reign of Louis XIV. This ideology that seeks to defend the harmony of unlike elements against the challenges of revisionistic individuals can be described as polymorphous and polyvalent, for it encompasses a wide range of social conditions and assigns to each a distinct code of behavior.

The profundity of Molière’s ideological differentiation finds few parallels in the theater, but it coincides with some of the leading intellectual trends of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Perhaps the most interesting similarity involves Leibniz’s theory of monads, which postulates a continuous chain of indivisible, inalterable units possessing distinct inherent qualities—much like the états of Molière’s social continuum. Despite Leibniz’s German nationality, his development of monadology was closely associated with the mental climate of France, for its components were first discussed in his correspon-
Leibniz was, moreover, quite aware of the social implications of his monads, for his *Théodicee* strongly affirms the principle of hierarchic gradation as the cornerstone of universal harmony; across the English Channel, Pope and Soame Jenyns expressed kindred outlooks. Polymorphism spilled over from ethics and metaphysics into the area of the natural sciences, where *fixistes* such as Carl Linne, Buffon, and Bonnet professed a belief in the immutability of the species well into the era of the Enlightenment.

In his theater of social differentiation, Molière accomplished a mediation for the highly diverse groups that made up the *société d'états*. His contemporaries could find in it an illustration, in praxis rather than in mere theory, of the great chain of social being. The comedies maintain the validity, but not the equality, of each *condition* and show that each must have a specific constellation of values adapted to its social environment. Molière, the consummate comic dramatist, exploited the virtually unlimited possibilities for combining the dissonances of humor—the joke, the trick, the humiliating situation—with the social dissonances of his time—unworthiness, usurpation, egotistical imbalance, and parasitism. And whenever he makes us perceive that the clown who fails to keep his equilibrium on the stage and the fool who fails to keep his equilibrium in the world are both victims of the same vertigo, we still laugh today.


2. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 153. Jorge Larrain, in *The Concept of Ideology*, pp. 154–64, relates Althusser’s opinions to those of John Mepham and Nicos Poulantzas, and cogently discusses the criticisms made by Jacques Rancière and Paul Q. Hirst. However, as the latter concern primarily the question of science supplanting ideology in the modern period, they do nothing to diminish the applicability of Althusser’s apt definition to the early modern context.


6. Important contributions to reflection theory include: J. Duvignaud, *Sociologie du théâtre*; P. Machery, *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*; and C. Duchet, "Une écriture de la socialité."

7. One modern example of the tendency to see Molière as an author of Schlüsselkomödie is Paul Römer's *Molières Amphitryon und sein gesellschaftlicher Hintergrund.*


9. Francis Bacon, *The Adventure of Learning and New Atlantis*, pp. 32-33. Bacon goes on to describe other "peccant humors" that afflict philosophy; these ideas are reorganized later in his *Novum Organum* into the "idols of the theatre." See Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology*, pp. 19-21.


11. See the critique of Boris Porchnev's work in Roland Mousnier, "Quelques aspects de la fonction publique dans la société française du XVIIe siècle," as well as Hubert Méthivier, *L'Ancien Régime*, pp. 75-78.


13. Laughter is, of course, directed at roturier cowardice, particularly in Sganarellle (e.g., *Le Cocu imaginaire*, *Dom Juan*). However, the ridicule is prompted not by the survival function of cowardice but rather by characters who presume to be more than they are and then back down in times of crisis. Such behavior is ignoble, but then again so are the characters' pretensions (i.e., Sosie's attempt to claim a glorious part in the récit of Amphitrion's victory). More modest commoners are not always cowardly, as shown by the porters in *Les Précieuses ridicules* or Alain in *L'Ecole des femmes*. Unlike such rivals as Chevalier, Molière did not gratuitously mock the timorousness of the third estate.


20. W. H. Barber, *Leibniz in France from Arnauld to Voltaire*, pp. 10–15. For the text of Leibniz’s letters see *Lettres de Leibniz à Arnauld*. Marie Cariou, in *L’Atomisme: Gassendi, Leibniz, Bergson, et Lucrece*, pp. 92–102, discusses Leibniz’s refutations of Epicurean-Gassendian arithmetic mechanism (on the basis that their atomic theory cannot account for qualitative differences) and of Cartesian geometric mechanism (because mathematic points in space are purely representational and not real in a concrete sense). In *Le Système de Leibniz et ses modèles mathématiques*, Michel Serres discusses Leibniz’s notion of biological multiplicity; see 1:326–31, and 2:573.

21. Besides these writers, Fontenelle also held that nature creates a continual differentiation of life forms. See Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, pp. 131, 200–207
