

Domestic Economy in Molière's Comedy.

Votre prudence est endormie,
De traiter magnifiquement,
Et de loger superbement
Votre plus cruelle ennemie.
Faites-la sortir, quoi qu'on die,
De votre riche appartement,
Où cette ingrante insolemment
Attaque votre belle vie.
(*Femmes savantes*, III, ii)

Read as ironic (in the sense that Trissotin is in fact reading Cotin's lines), this sonnet has been seen as an indictment of both the fictional character's and the real poet-abbot's talents. What I shall argue, however, is that, given the thematic density of Molière's plays,¹ the infamous Trissotin/Cotin sonnet from *Les Femmes savantes* takes on its full significance only when read in connection with the plot-line of this and other plays. It functions as a kind of *mise-en-abyme*, and it highlights some of the main characteristics of domestic economy in Molière's theater. Through a kind of allegory, it emphasizes that domestic organization revolves around questions of power and knowledge or, more accurately, that the (bourgeois) domestic interior is the stage of an intense power struggle. What is required to be "maître/sse chez soi"?² Who determines who is part of the household and according to what criteria? What role do traditional bourgeois wisdom, science (or pseudo-science), and the practical common sense and unspecialized knowledge of worldly elites play in the structuring of the family space?

Let us return for a moment to the metaphor—the conceit—developed in the sonnet. The poet-speaker warns the princess that her guest misuses her splendid hospitality; that her guest is, indeed, her enemy; that she had better, therefore, turn her out of doors, for far from returning favor for favor, the ungrateful fever (a disease) is actually plotting against her welfare. Uranie should, therefore, drown her rather than welcome her into her splendid lodgings. I contend that such a summary of Uranie's predicament mirrors Philaminte's own situation. I propose, moreover, that *Les Femmes savantes* is paradigmatic: on the one hand, the "Sonnet à la princesse Uranie sur sa fièvre" thematizes the tensions at the core of the play, but the structure thus repeated *en abyme* is, on the other hand, the underlying structure for quite a few of Molière's bourgeois plays.

The warning that Philaminte's gifts are unwisely bestowed, that her protégé is in fact her enemy, and that her welfare is threatened by the very guest she treats so generously comes from a very reliable source—the honored guest, Trissotin, himself. The allegorical discourse is repeated in plain language by Clitandre, by Ariste, by all characters, that is, whom the spectator identifies as "sane" and whose judgment s/he can

¹ On this quality of Molière's comedy, see Nathan Gross, *From Gesture to Idea: Esthetics and Ethics in Molière's Comedy* (New York: Columbia U P, 1982), in particular "Values in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (136 ff).

² When Béralde asks his brother Argan to account for his decisions, the latter answers with the question that concerns me here: "D'où vient, mon frère, que je suis maître dans ma famille pour faire ce que bon me semble?" (III, iii).

depend on. It is echoed by Vadius and Chrysale, even though these two characters are flawed and their power to discriminate between true intellectual and moral elegance, on the one hand, and pretence, on the other, would be questionable, were it not supported by other evidence. Uranie is a princess, and she should not be expected to worry about domestic economy; but Uranie is also the name of muse of astronomy, and a conventional name for a worldly lady, and a fitting one, as well, for a *précieuse*. It does, in that sense, doubly apply to Philaminte. As a *femme savante*, Philaminte is entitled to a literary name. And, as Chrysale reminds us, she is well versed in lofty sciences; more specifically, she observes the heavens. Finally, even though she is warned, she is as unable as Uranie to heed the warning. We are made to understand from Béralde's statement in *Le Malade imaginaire* that medical science is powerless to cure the body; that the body, if it is strong enough, will eventually return to health naturally. It is to be hoped, therefore, that Princesse Uranie will eventually get better. Similarly, Philaminte's own "magnifique appartement" (and it is clear from the play that we are in the context of a wealthy family, especially since the house is—or rather was—full of servants³) is infected with a disease. If we pursue the parallel, we can only conclude that no doctor (or no *raisonneur*) has the power to cure the familial constitution, and its own strength must eventually start it on its way back to good health or, failing that, it must collapse.

Les Femmes savantes is remarkable in that knowledge is at the core of all arguments and verbal sparring, even though what is really at stake is the family power-structure. The play is also paradoxical because it is a desire for knowledge that fuels the superiority complex in the authority figure, whereas the functional support of the young couple (the father) adheres, not to the common sense—inseparable from good taste⁴ in fashion, but to the old code recurrently rejected in Molière's comedies. Philaminte explicitly links her right to take on the role of head of the family to the superiority of mind over matter. Setting up the kind of proportion Pierre Force analyzes in *Molière ou le prix des choses*, for instance when he examines Alceste's comparative evaluation of Oronte's merit and his own⁵ or, even, his reaction to Arsinoé's tenders of admiration and friendship,⁶ Philaminte states:

Je lui montrerai bien aux lois de qui des deux
Les droits de la raison soumettent tous ses vœux,
Et qui doit gouverner, ou sa mère ou son père,
Ou l'esprit ou le corps, la forme ou la matière.

(IV, i)

The battle lines are here clearly drawn. For Philaminte, Bélise, and Armande, with various degrees of sincerity or sanity, the body is a rag ("cette guenille"); for Chrysale, "Mon corps est moi-même, et j'en veux prendre soin:/ Guenille si l'on veut, ma guenille m'est chère", II, vii, vv.542-3). Clitandre offers a very convenient median position:

Pour moi, par un malheur, je m'aperçois, Madame,
Que j'ai, ne vous déplaie, un corps tout comme une âme.

To these three versions of the mind/body relationship correspond three kinds of competence or (view of) knowledge: the three *femmes savantes*' scientific curiosity and erudition (always viewed as a basis for wielding power, as is clear from the desire to establish an academy); Chrysale's nostalgic eulogy of an exclusively domestic competence on women's part and a purely instrumental use of books (the mythic bourgeois vision); and Clitandre's sound judgment based on courtly common sense and

³ On the servants as social indicators, see James Gaines, *Social Structures in Molière's Theater*.

⁴ In his defense of the Court, Clitandre states: « Permettez-moi, Monsieur Trissotin, de vous dire/ . . . Qu'elle a du sens commun pour se connaître à tout ;/ Quechez elle on se peut former quelque bon goût" (*Femmes savantes*, IV, iii, 1337, 1343-4)

⁵ See Pierre Force, *Molière ou le prix des choses* (Paris : Nathan, 1994), p. 131 ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101 ff.

good taste. Philaminte's misguided cult of knowledge (with her aberrant choice of heroes) puts the household in jeopardy—though it is worth noting that it allows her, first, to take an authentically philosophical view of the alleged ruin of the family, and, second, to acknowledge Clitandre's generosity and to adhere to the dénouement. The happy resolution is not brought about by Chrysale's outdated views and he is as powerless as his wife to restore good order in their household.

That the claim to absolute authority revolves around the assertion of a kind of knowledge is supported by the tendency, evinced by most tyrant-figures, to educate or sermonize, as Force noted.⁷ More specifically, two instances of snappy retort, one by Orgon, the other, by Argan, show that the question of who occupies the position of authority within the domestic economy is couched by the characters involved in terms of who knows best (“Oui, vous êtes sans doute un docteur qu'on révère/ Tout le savoir du monde est chez vous retiré” (I, v, vv. 346-7); “C'est à dire que toute la science du monde est renfermée dans votre tête, et vous voulez en savoir plus que tous les grands médecins de notre siècle” III,iii). In both cases, the character thus taunted goes on to expound upon his real knowledge or creed. Cléante counter-attacks:

Je ne suis point, mon frère, un docteur révéré,
Et le savoir chez moi n'est pas tout retiré.
Mais en un mot, je sais, pour toute ma science,
Du faux avec le vrai faire la différence.

(Vv. 351-4)

and Béralde asserts his knowledge of medicine's powerlessness. He even sets himself up explicitly as Molière's spokesman:

Il a ses raisons pour n'en point vouloir [des remèdes], et il soutient que cela n'est permis qu'aux gens vigoureux et robustes et qui ont des forces de reste pour porter les remèdes avec la maladie ; mais que, pour lui, il n'a justement de la force que pour porter son mal.

Nothing symbolizes the tensions underlying domestic economy more strikingly than the opposition between the *here* of the stage (the house) and the rest of the world. The word *céans* recurs as a marker of this divide. The emphasis on what takes place (or should, or should not, take place) *céans* may express either desire or censure, as is the case with the obsessive repetition in Chrysale's tirades (for instance, “Et céans beaucoup plus qu'en aucun lieu du monde”). Ultimately, authority is defined by the right and power to introduce a character into, or exile a character from, the bourgeois household. From Molière's earliest surviving farce, *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, to his last play, *Le Malade imaginaire*, verbal and sometimes physical confrontation makes an essential contribution to the creation of comedy. It would be reductive, even misleading simply to construe this fact as just more evidence of the debt of Molière's comedy to farce. What is at stake is control over access to the household. One of the main episodes of verbal sparring in *Les Femmes savantes* occurs precisely on the occasion of Martine's dismissal by Philaminte on grounds of grammatical impropriety. By resisting his wife's desire to expel Martine, Chrysale is, in effect, questioning her authority:

—Philaminte : Vite, sortez friponne, allons, quittez ces lieux,
Et ne vous présentez jamais devant mes yeux.

Chrysale : —Tout doux.

Phil. :—Non, c'en est fait.

Chr. :—Eh ?

Phil. :—Je veux qu'elle sorte.

[...]

Non, elle sortira, vous dis-je, de céans.

⁷ In *Molière ou le prix des choses*, *op. cit.*, p. 192 ff.

(*Femmes savantes*, II, v. 429-438)⁸

That authority over the household is demonstrated by the right and might to admit or ban characters is made quite clear in *Tartuffe* when a disillusioned Orgon turns Tartuffe out of doors:

Orgon :—Allons, point de bruit, je vous prie.

Dénichons de céans, et sans cérémonie

Tartuffe :—Mon dessein...

Orgon :—Ces discours ne sont plus de saison :

Il faut, tout sur-le-champ, sortir de la maison.

Tar. :—C'est à vous d'en sortir, vous qui parlez en maître.

(*Tartuffe*, I(V, vii, v.1553-1557)

Symmetrically, disgruntled or disempowered characters express a frustrated wish that they could prevent others from invading the family space (the stage). Both Nicole and Madame Jourdain complain of the "*compagnies*" that assemble in the house:

Nicole:—Toutes ces compagnies font tant de désordre céans que ce mot est assez pour me mettre de mauvaise humeur.

Monsieur Jourdain:—Ne dois-je point pour toi fermer ma porte à tout le monde?

Nicole: —Vous devriez au moins la fermer à certaines gens.

(III, ii)

Tartuffe has, indeed, made himself master in Orgon's house, as Dorine implies when she first informs the spectator of the domestic situation and expresses her anger: "Qu'un inconnu céans s'impatronise" (62) and then observes that Tartuffe tries to eliminate visitors ("ne saurait-il souffrir qu'aucun hante céans", 80). And Madame Pernelle, similarly, tells Cléante to his face (while identifying his relationship to Orgon for the spectator's benefit) that, were she her son, she would ask him not to come to her house, with the same ironic verb, *révéler*:

Pour vous, Monsieur son frère (Elmire's)

Je vous estime fort, vous aime, et vous révère ;

Mais enfin, si j'étais de mon fils, son époux,

Je vous prierais bien fort de n'entrer point chez nous.

Orgon in *Tartuffe* aspires to creating a domestic milieu under the spiritual supervision of the ostensibly devout Tartuffe; Philaminte means to turn the private space of her family life into an exceptional academy; on the other hand, both interiors are, from the perspective of the "sane" characters, what we might today call dysfunctional households. It is, actually, the introduction of an external factor that disturbs the domestic balance in *Tartuffe* and *Les Femmes savantes*. While all "socially adept" characters try to persuade the authority figure to dismiss the intruder s/he brought into the household, the authority figure strives to render the connection permanent through marriage; the intruder, on the other hand, works to displace the legitimate heir or suitor, or both. Damis is banished on account of Tartuffe, who displaces Valère as Mariane's fiancé. Trissotin supplants Clitandre as Henriette's husband-to-be. Marriage is thus a way to reward an outsider, to educate a daughter, and to keep her within the family circle (by incorporating the husband). Béline plots to spoil Angélique and Louison of everything they should inherit (and to have them placed in a convent, thus preventing them from marrying altogether). Richard Sörman sees credulity and a belief that the intruder possesses absolute knowledge as the basis for the latter's success and the major role s/he plays in the authority figure's desire—in the

⁸ In one of the first scenes of *L'Avare*, Harpagon dismisses La Flèche, his son's valet: "Hors d'ici tout à l'heure, et qu'on ne réplique pas. Allons, que l'on détale de chez moi, maître juré filou, vrai gibier de potence" (I, iii).

libidinal economy. However, from Orgon's stated pleasure in "faire enrager tout le monde", and his eagerness to bring about a marriage between Tartuffe and Mariane (echoed by Philaminte's determination in hastening the wedding proceedings between her daughter and Trissotin), it is clear that the authority figure uses the intruder as a means toward establishing an unchallenged power. As is logical in the case of a dramaturgy where characters are beings of language, the current discussion confirms that power is evidenced first and foremost by the effectiveness of the Master's say-so: all the utterances about who should leave, or be introduced, *céans*, also points to an aspiration to a performative quality of language.⁹ In this sense, Molière is clearly of his time, since the discourse in praise of the French language, paradigmatically represented by, but not limited to, the French Academy's oratorical output converges on the celebration of the King's word, a human but God-given variant of the divine Word.¹⁰

The bourgeois interiors of Molière's theater¹¹ thus set up a very paradoxical model for domestic economy. Figures of authority (fathers, surrogate heads of the household) aim for an idiosyncratic *distinction*, in keeping with the (often fantasized and somewhat mythical) bourgeois tradition, that sets them apart from, and pitches them against, the social *distinction*—close to the Bourdieusian concept of distinction¹²—so important to the then valorized world of the *salons*, of "the Town" and the court. Since comedy is based, structurally, on the marriage plot-line, with its attendant conflicts of generation, power play, and financial arrangements, domestic economy—as the structure of the household according to values and a kind of practical knowledge—is inextricably linked with economy and knowledge in the wider sense of those terms.

The mechanisms I have just outlined can help account for some aspects of plays where the relationships among characters seem to differ widely from those available in *Tartuffe*, *Les Femmes savantes*, or *Le Malade imaginaire*.¹³ *Le Misanthrope* epitomizes the complexity, density and coherence of Molière's comedy, in particular because of Alceste's functional polyvalence in the plot. Though he is listed as "amant de Célimène" and is, indeed, her suitor, he can also be seen as both the intruder and a would be authority-figure. His assessment of himself,

Moi, Madame! Et sur quoi pourrais-je en rien murmurer ?
 Quel service à l'État est-ce qu'on m'a vu rendre ?
 (III, v, 1053-4)

is an anticipated echo of Clitandre's judgment on Trissotin's worth:

Que font-ils pour l'État, vos habiles héros ?
 Qu'est-ce que leurs écrits lui rendent de services [. . .] ?
 (IV, iii, 1356-7)

⁹ Discussed at length by Soshana Felman in *Le Scandale du corps parlant. Dom Juan avec Austin ou la séduction en deux langues*. Paris : Le Seuil, 1980

¹⁰ On this aspect of the celebration of both the French language and Louis XIV, see, among others, P. Zoberman, *Les Panégyriques du Roi* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1992), p. 130 et *Les Cérémonies de la parole* (Paris: Champion, 1998), p. 126-131.

¹¹ Especially those rare examples where both the mother and father are present (*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, or *Les Femmes savantes*), or where a complete family has been re-formed, as in *Tartuffe* (the *Malade imaginaire* represents yet another structure, given the obstacle-function of Béline, Argan's second wife)

¹² See P. Bourdieu, *La Distinction* (Paris: Minuit, 1979). The subtitle, *Critique sociale du jugement* and the field of inquiry, *taste (le goût)* both correspond to concerns Molière ascribes to such Characters as Clitandre, or even, though negatively, as it were, to his *Misanthrope*.

¹³ I am indebted here to Jan Clarke for directing my attention to the relevance of the *Misanthrope* for my argument when I presented a shorter version of this article at the twenty-fifth annual conference of the Society for Seventeenth-Century French Studies in Glasgow. The paragraphs that follow are a response to her suggestion.

Alceste takes on both the role of Clitandre, who assesses Trissotin's merit, and of Trissotin himself, whose merit is thus denied. But the situation is more complex. If the *salon* is typically antithetical to the closed space of the bourgeois interior, as it is specifically designed to receive visits, then Alceste, in his repeated requests that Célimène not see visitors as freely as she does, is another avatar of Arnolphe, who keeps Agnès locked away in his house. Early on in the play, Alceste, as peevishly as Nicole or Madame Jourdain, complains:

Quoi? L'on ne peut jamais vous parler tête à tête ?
À recevoir le monde on vous voit toujours prête ?
Et vous ne pouvez pas, un seul moment de tous,
Vous résoudre souffrir de n'être pas chez vous ?
(II, ii, 533-6),

where « n'être pas chez vous » actually means, not admitting anyone, staying confined in the house, which points to the male character's typical desire of keeping the female object of possession under wraps—and the men who visit Célimène, and above all, Alceste, eventually demand that she chose, that she not admit the others. All along, Alceste claims a kind of *distinction* that sets him apart from the fashionable elite, again a trait that makes him an admittedly more polished avatar of such characters as Orgon, Sganarelle (in *L'École des maris*), or Arnolphe—a resurgence in the universe of the salon of the mechanically jealous Dom Garcie de Navarre. By marrying Célimène, Alceste aspires to curbing her autonomy, in seventeenth-century culture the privilege of widows, and to becoming the kind of domestic tyrant Orgon, Sganarelle, Argan, or even Philaminte embody. When it becomes clear that the salon cannot be transformed back into the confined space of the mythical bourgeois interior, Alceste seizes upon the exposure of Célimène's double-dealing as his chance to put plan B into action: spiring Célimène away from the mondain circles and cutting her off from all other company than his, the typical fantasy attributed by Molière to his (mythical) retrograde bourgeois authority-figures—such as Arnolphe, in *L'École des femmes* and his forerunner Sganarelle, in *L'École des maris*, whose views on fashion and behavior are echoed by Madame Pernelle's. It is clear, therefore, that age is not the only, nor the most important determining factor,.

This characterization of bourgeois domestic economy as represented in Molière's comedies opens up a few avenues for the interpretation of his theater. I will sketch what I see as possible developments in two directions—an analytic perspective and an ideological reading.

In the first place, the mechanism by which the authority figure tries, and fails, to fulfill his/her desire can be schematized in Lacanian terms. I have expressed elsewhere my concern with regard to the interpretation of socio-historical phenomena, such as Nazism, using the psychoanalytic models developed by Lacan,¹⁴ But we are dealing here with representation, a fictional transcription of social phenomena. And at least as a descriptive model, what I would call the Lacanian paradox of desire can illuminate the representation of domestic life onstage. When the play opens, the intruder is already in the place; he is part of the initial, unstable situation. Orgon uses Tartuffe as a means toward asserting full authority and complete control. Yet, located as he is at the core of all decisions, Tartuffe undermines that very power Orgon craves for. Tartuffe's lust and greed topple Orgon's dual fantasy of power and sanctity. Similarly, the revelation of Trissotin's mercantile motives deflates Philaminte's claim to sound judgment. She remains faithful (a not insignificant accomplishment) to her ideal of stoic wisdom, but her error in judgment undermines her claim to knowledge, hence her oft-banded right

¹⁴ See Zoberman "Queer(ing) Pleasure: Having a Gay Old Time in the Culture of Early-Modern France," in Paul Allen Miller ed., *The Desire of the Analyst* (SUNY, in press)

to rule the household. In both cases, the disturbance of the family milieu results in the mismanagement at all levels of the family—as other characters, such as Dorine, point out. Therefore, the foreign element introduced into the family circle in order to bring about the satisfaction of the authority figure’s overriding desire that lies at the core of the *moliéresque* domestic economy is, at the same time, the hitch that prevents it effectively from working. Once again Tartuffe, Trissotin, the array of doctors in *Le Malade* are necessary to the wielding of power inside the protagonists’ universe; but they also represent the outside world in opposition to which the domestic world is being organized. Thus, the alleged folly of the outside world is both banned from and introduced into the very universe that is supposed to remedy it. This structure is very similar to the way in which Lacan delineates the concept of *objet a*. *Objet a* is the fragment of the Real, *already stuck in the psyche*, that prevents the circle of desire from closing. Orgon aims for heavenly rectitude away from human passions and greed; Tartuffe is brought into the household to further this end, but he embodies those very worldly foibles and vices Orgon is trying to keep at bay. This mechanism could also be read as the staging of hopeless attempts to fill a fundamental void, or lack. Nathan Gross points out that there is, ultimately, no absolute ethical value.¹⁵ Richard Sörman, on the other hand, interprets Molière’s dialogues in the light of the Lacanian theory of meaning—the fundamental lack of a primary signifier, an essential lack, that corresponds, as well, to the Thing, that obscure object of desire...¹⁶ One might suggest, then, that the verbal sparring around the word “céans” embodies, or rather, dramatizes and textualizes the constant striving toward fulfillment and meaning, toward authentic value—an antidote to the incompleteness Sörman diagnoses as the origin of most characters’ aberrant behavior. To go back to the sonnet metaphor, as regards both the psyche of the desiring subject and Molière’s desiring heads of the household, the problem is not the outside world, it is the enemy within.

In this sense, Molière’s last play may turn out to be more complex than it seems, as it takes the situation further than any other. For in that play, the intruder has apparently succeeded before the play begins, since she has already become, through marriage, a member of the family. Though one may be tempted to draw a parallel, as I have done earlier, between Tartuffe, Trissotin, and the various doctors, in particular because of the projected marriage with Thomas Diafoirus, the intruder, in Molière’s last play, is in fact Béline. She is the one character whose apparent disinterestedness (love for her husband and concern for his welfare) covers mercantile motives. She is the one character about whom Argan must be enlightened, and she is the one, therefore, that will be the target of the final trick [after finally being identified as the intruder by Béralde :

Hé bien, oui, mon frère, puisqu’il faut vous parler à cœur ouvert,
c’est votre femme que je veux dire ; et non plus que l’entêtement pour la
médecine, je ne puis vous souffrir l’entêtement où vous êtes pour elle, et
voir que vous donniez tête baissée dans tous les pièges qu’elle vous tend.
(III, xi)]

The staging of Argan’s death results in Béline’s expulsion from the household and in her failing to get her hands on the possessions of which Argan had desired to frustrate his children. Since the same *mise-en-scène* that serves to draw Béline out also helps reveal Angélique’s loving nature, the distribution of roles is both similar to, and different from, what we see in *Tartuffe* and *Les Femmes savantes*. It becomes clear,

¹⁵ “Values in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*,” *From Gesture to Idea*, *op. cit.*, p. 139 ff.

¹⁶ See Richard Sörman, *Savoir et économie dans l’œuvre de Molière* (Uppsala : Uppsala University, 2001).

however, that the various doctors are only functional partners of the intruder. Béline's expulsion restores order.

We can draw further analogies between analytic and dramatic structures. As fiction, precisely, literary works of art can be viewed as analogous to the Freudian dream-work. Dramatic plots stage, in distinctive ways, the fulfillment of desire. The tensions of domestic economy in Molière allow for a two-tiered mechanism. *Comédie-ballet* offers a dénouement whereby the protagonist's obsession is managed through a flight into fantasy. Such spectacles might also be read as mirroring, or perhaps instantiating, the Freudian primary process. Desire is fulfilled through the fantasized staging of a situation where desire is fulfilled. Not surprisingly, the *raisonneurs* and the functional partners of the young lovers bring about the resolution, not through a fantasmatic denial of reality (though they are instrumental in the staging of the fantasy that qualifies as a denial of *the fictive* reality), but by creating a twist that eventually modifies the fictive reality, this time an actualization of a Freudian secondary process. Such a scenario points to several characteristics of desire as well as of Molière's dramaturgy. The flight into fantasy reminds us of the self-reflexive nature of desire. But the playwright seems to be inducing pleasure in two diverging (or converging ?) ways—by resolving the dramatic conflict in the expected dénouement that brings about the intruder's downfall, and by allowing a central figure to indulge in a kind of childish fantasy. There is, in the end no *real* salvation for Molière's *visionnaires*.

This, in turn, calls for an examination of the ideological implications of such representations of the bourgeois interior. I shall leave aside the light the representation of *luxe* sheds on Molière's comedy as a channel for monarchic ideology, since I touched on that topic elsewhere.¹⁷ But, even Philaminte's careless view of money is unreasonable, as is made clear from her focusing on the language of the legal document conveying the outcome of her trial. After all, Dorimène, a positively valued character in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, states that by marrying Dorante she will prevent him from spending all his money. Here we see how dramatic fiction turns the tables on the bourgeois, whose money is first appropriated, then well invested by an unscrupulous nobleman who can marry the rich marchioness he desires, all the while playing on Monsieur Jourdain's desire and using the latter's money freely.

What we see, therefore, before the fantasy that closes the *Malade imaginaire*, is the hopelessness of traditional bourgeois mentality as well as of the degraded modern, even fashionable, salon tenets when they are contaminated by the bourgeois family. Thus, it is necessary to look for good sense and good taste elsewhere—in Clitandre, whose tirades highlight the new social values, *bon goût*, a universal but proper capacity to have a general knowledge of everything, a taste for, and cleverness at, irony and *raillerie*, etc. And Clitandre had forbears in Cléante, who can see the difference between true and false devotion, or in Elmire, whose virtue did not need scandals. Nathan Gross stresses the dreary reality of the bourgeois interior in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme*. He points out the quarreling that precedes Dorimène's entrance. The same can be said, clearly, of *Tartuffe*, where Madame Pernelle is characterized by a constant need to quarrel and upbraid. If the interior were ruled as she wishes, it would also be marked by a dreary quarrelsomeness. Agnès is made to express how unattractive married life appears in Arnolphe's instructions, etc.

Yet, without any rational justification, some characters are naturally gifted with a kind of practical wisdom and good taste that qualifies them for social intercourse—Agnès, but also all the young people whose happiness is ostensibly at stake in the

¹⁷ See P. Zoberman, "Le Sens du luxe : mondanité, appareil, magnificence, volupté," in Martial Poirson ed., *Art et argent en France au temps des Premiers Modernes (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Oxford : The Voltaire Foundation, 2004).

comedies' plot-lines. Here, we are reminded more of La Bruyère's concept of unaccountable virtue than of La Rochefoucauld's amour-propre. The *Bourgeois gentilhomme* can be used to show that there is an essentialist view of the social world in Molière: try as he may, a *bon bourgeois* will remain a *bon bourgeois*. And the *esprit de finesse* that allows members of the elite to exercise their discriminatory power of taste confirms that aspect. The very *je ne sais quoi* (taken up by Bouhours in his *Entretiens*) that characterizes taste and courtly manners cannot be rationally accounted for. Hence the paradox of the bourgeois interior with its resistance to worldly values: no matter how unredeemable a bourgeois family may seem, some (usually, but not necessarily, younger) members will be "saved". If a new elite is forming that downplays social origins and stresses behavior, then Molière presents a breed of characters that fit the mold, though it is unclear however they could have sprung up in and from the midst of the family. *Tartuffe* is easier to accommodate within this conceptual framework, in the sense that the family has incorporated a new element, and that the second wife can be seen as the channel through which the new sociability has pervaded the household. One might argue that matrimonial projects are one of the main factors in social education, as they are one of the main avenues toward upward mobility. Old timers such as Madame Pernelle or Harpagon did not have the behavioral models on which the younger generation can mold its own attitudes and values. It is, however, not a completely satisfactory statement, since in *L'Ecole des maris*, we see the younger brother Sganarelle, with his name ominously reminiscent of the farcical tradition, adhering to the backward-looking creed of Pernelle and Arnolphe, whereas the much older Ariste has adopted the socially valorized ethic of Philinte in *Le Misanthrope*. To turn again to the *Femmes savantes* as Molière's penultimate, if not last, word on sociability, the witty, socially adept, well mannered and generous Clitandre is both the suitor and the spokesman for, and paradigm, of courtly values. He is also capable of distinguishing between true merit in the field of letters¹⁸ and pedantic vapidness. He can frame the dysfunction of Philaminte's domestic milieu with the characteristic opposition between "here" and the rest of the (social) world: "Hors céans, on le prise [Trissotin] en tous lieux ce qu'il vaut" (IV, 2, v.1259). If Molière's comedy suggests a negative view of hoarding (perhaps as a perversion of accumulation of capital, or of the logic of investment which implies calculated risk); if excessive austerity is denigrated in view of the social validation of expense and *luxe*,¹⁹ the resistance of authority figures to the giving away of daughters in marriage to fashionable young men also functions as a reminder that the circulation of marriageable girls allows for the unfolding of a civilizing process.

Paradoxically, while representation concentrates on *céans*, the ethical message seems to encourage the audience rather blithely to open themselves to the outside world—and to enjoy the *present time*. Domestic economy in Molière's theater warns against compulsive enclosure, and unproductive economy. The new sociability, based on polite intercourse, the new economy, based on the manufacturing and trading of luxury items, are an invitation to being neither too domestic, nor too economical. The representation on stage of bourgeois interiors and their tensions only heightens the attractiveness of a newer, freer way of life, a natural endorsement of the easy commerce of the world.

¹⁸ On the kinship between Alceste's self-deprecatory remarks and Clitandre's searing and sneering assessment of Trissotin's colleagues, see above.

¹⁹ And the endorsement of *luxe* as a socially sanctioned behavior calls into question the reality of the King's efforts to curb ostentatious luxury in edicts promulgated throughout his reign—as was the constant practice of the kings of France before him. On this contradiction, see "Le Sens du luxe," *loc. cit.*