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Masks, Costumes, Ceremony Life In Seventeenth Century France

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Rich in culture, literature, and the arts, France's Seventeenth Century remains vibrantly alive today in its records. During this time, Corneille, Racine, Molière, La Fontaine, Pascal and Descartes were writing; Poussin, Le Vau and Le Brun were painting; and Mansard was building Versailles.

One literary work in particular lends itself to a study of this century. *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (*The WouldBe Gentleman*) by Molière forms the basis of this unit focusing on the "rise" of the bourgeoisie and the "fall" of the nobility, which started in the early 1600's and ended in the late 1700's with the French Revolution. As social class distinctions began to change, these changes were reflected in literature and art. The rise of the bourgeoisie, buttressed by the manipulations of Louis XIV, had a political and social impact on the times. "As the bourgeoisie developed, and especially as it tried to buttress its improving economic status with political gains, class distinctions became the explicit subject of ideological, literary, legal, and social debates. Economic factors, and more or less deliberate government policies, contributed significantly to changes in both facts and perceptions about the social classes." ("The Issues of Nobility and Identity in *Dom Juan* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* ", Larry W. Riggs *The French Review* Vol. LIX No. 3, Feb., 1986, p. 399) A basic grasp of this movement is essential to understanding the themes of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* .

The bourgeoisie came about because of economic changes. Prices increased steadily during the Sixteenth Century, which lowered the value of land (the basis of the noble's wealth) and encouraged commerce (the basis of bourgeois wealth). There was great movement between classes, particularly the bourgeoisie (those of the "bourg" or town) toward the nobility. This nobility depended on commercial wealth; a connection which made the nobles uneasy. The feudal nobility no longer had sole power over their lives and those of the other classes. Louis XIV, like many kings before him, wanted to exercise total control over the nobles.

The upward movement of the bourgeoisie helped Louis in his efforts, for he could use them to weaken the power, especially economic, of the nobles. In playing off both, he controlled both. Of the time, Riggs says:

Throughout the century, the monarchy and the bourgeoisie continued to assert themselves at the nobility's expense, and the ennoblement of commoners continued to blur the border between the classes. Also, the gradual 'domestication' of the nobles—reflected by the substitution of *honnêteté* (honesty, nobility) for *prouesse* (power, ability)—required adjustments in noble ethics. Of particular importance was the increasing weight of actual behavior in *present* , *social* circumstances in determining and legitimating status, for this eliminated both the

past and the field of battle as exclusive guarantors of rights and privileges, and thus tended to equalize nobles and commoners in the competition for the King's favor. Louis XIV's refusal to allow power and social prestige to coincide in the same individual made the nobles particularly jealous of their remaining prestige. (Ibid. Riggs, pp.399400)

The bourgeoisie's increasing power and prestige at the Court of Louis XIV continued to frustrate the nobles' attempts to maintain the status quo. Louis XIV used the confusion to his advantage in solidifying his absolute power as a Divine Monarch.

It was very easy to buy nobility in the Seventeenth Century. One could imitate noble behavior, dress, and customs, and be accepted in society. As the bourgeoisie bought its way to power, it grew in strength. Yet, the King's favor was a most important factor in any upward movement. His manipulations between the two classes served primarily to destroy the nobility. Thus he preserved his own power.

The ambiguities, conflicts, and manipulations of this time found their way into art. An astute observer of men, MoliEre developed the ambivalences into an art form through his plots. Life was a ceremony composed of rites, status symbols, and style in combat always with money and royal favor. The theatricality of life at Court gave MoliEre much to ponder. Riggs says: "The very theatricality—the vagueness and changeability of social class in the 1660's made comic theater the ideal medium for exploring the questions of class, identity, and ethics." (Ibid. Riggs, p. 400) MoliEre's comedies exploited and explored the values of French society. His unique view brought French theatre into its own.

In order to explore more fully the idea of life as theatre in Seventeenth Century France, this ten week unit will study the many levels of MoliEre's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. The unit can be used in an advanced French class (Levels III, IV or V). The play can be studied in conjunction with a world literature class, a world history class, an art or music and a theatre class. Seventeenth Century France will be studied as an integral part of the civilization of man.

The objectives which form the basis of this unit are:

1. To understand the class conflicts of the period.
2. To understand the daily life of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, especially as they differed.
3. To learn about life at the Court of Louis XIV, with its emphasis on appearance, etc.
4. To study *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* as a literary form.
5. To study *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* as MoliEre's view of Seventeenth Century French Society.

These objectives are tied to a thorough study of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. The students will be introduced to the Seventeenth Century through a short passage in French about the reign of Louis XIV from *Un Coup d'Oeil sur la France* by Claudine Coulanges and Flake Daniel (see Student Reading List). They will read the selection orally and discuss it. Then they will write answers to the questions following the selection. The students will be encouraged to question different facets of the century and then to research these points on their own for further class discussion.

The students will also be introduced to MoliEre through another short passage in the textbook *Promenades et Perspectives* published by Scott Foresman and Company (see Student Reading List). They will read the

passage aloud and answer questions based on their reading.

Once the students have an understanding of the history of the times and the playwright's background, they will see a videotape of the play performed by actors at the Comédie Française in Paris, France. It is in French with English subtitles. (see Teachers Reading List) At the end of the presentation, the students will discuss the plot and its significance to the historical, social forces of the period.

APPEARANCE AND REALITY

One of the major themes of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* is the appearance of the characters and situations and the way things really are. The theme of appearance versus reality is connected to some of the other themes such as masks, ceremony, rituals, costumes, theatricality, and nobility.

In order to demonstrate the evidence of the theme of appearance versus reality, the play will be discussed act by act just as it would be taught. This discussion will familiarize other teachers with one important theme of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.

Act I

Act One introduces Molière's major themes of masks, ceremony, rituals, costumes, theatricality, and nobility. It opens with the Dancing Master and the Music Master discussing their jobs working for Monsieur Jourdain, *le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. M. Jourdain wants to better himself and become a person of "qualité" or nobility, using his newfound wealth as his entry. His status as a *parvenu* (a person who has earned "new money", as opposed to "old money" which was inherited) allows him the luxury of hiring tutors, tailors, and servants. He is willing to pay very well for the trappings of nobility which include having musical and dance performances as entertainment for guests.

The arts, particularly music, dance, and the theatre, constituted much of the Court's entertainment. Thus, a person wishing to become part of Louis XIV's Court needed to be familiar with the amusements of the day.

The debate between the Music Master and the Dancing Master gives a serious tone to the beginning of the play. Their discussion centers around whether it is more important for the audience to understand and appreciate one's art or to be paid for one's work.

"Dancing Master: . . . I must confess that what I long for most is applause; it is appreciation I live for. To my way of thinking there is no fate more distressing for an artist than to have to show himself off before fools, to see his work exposed to the criticism of the vulgar and ignorant. . . . There is no joy like that of working for people who have a feeling for the fine points of one's art, who can appreciate the beauties of a work and repay all one's trouble by praise which is which is really discerning. . . .

Music Master: I agree. . . . There is nothing more pleasing than the recognition you speak of, but you can't live on applause. Praise alone doesn't keep a man going. One needs something more substantial than that, and, to my mind, there's no praise to beat the sort you can put in your pocket."

(*The WouldBe Gentleman* , translated by John Wood, Penguin Books, 1953, pp.3D4)

The debate concludes with a reconciliation of the two arguments as they pertain to Monsieur Jourdain: "Dancing Master: I still wish that with all his great wealth he had a little more taste. Music Master: So do I, and isn't that just where we are both trying to help him—so far as we can? In any case, he is giving us a chance to make a name in the world and he will make up for the others by paying while they do the praising." (*Ibid* . Wood, p. 4) The appearance of altruism is tempered by the reality of hunger—artistic and real. These Masters are helping themselves while seeming to help M. Jourdain.

The importance of the debate in the play is that it sets the tone of M. Jourdain's efforts to become noble. Although, in reality, he will never have the grace and innate sensitivity to be truly noble. Nevertheless, M. Jourdain, in good faith, hires teachers to instruct him in the various skills necessary to being noble. He knows how to read and write and compute, but that is not enough for the Society he wishes to enter. It would only be a false nobility at best. He wants to wear the "mask" of nobility by purchasing their customs, entertainment and costumes.

Ceremony and costume as themes of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* are introduced in Act One in a comical way. M. Jourdain appears in a ridiculous costume which he had been told was what nobles wore in the morning. Obviously, if he wears such clothes, he too will be transformed into "nobility."

M. Jourdain has two lackeys dressed in livery who answer the door, run errands and who will follow him through the streets if he wishes. He thinks that they are necessary for his station in life.

The music and dances are of the period, very courtly, and superficial. The characters in the song at the end of Act One are shepherds and shepherdesses, which is typical of the period. It was felt that nobles did not make good subjects as it was undignified for them to feel and express strong emotions. The lower classes, on the other hand, could. Their lives were so far removed from the nobles' that there was no threat to the nobles' sensibilities. "Mr. Jourdain: But why shepherds again? It always seems to be shepherds. Music Master: Because, if you are to have people discoursing in song, you must for verisimilitude conform to the pastoral convention. Singing has always been associated with shepherds. It would not seem natural for princes or ordinary folk for that matter, to be indulging their passions in song." (*Ibid* . Wood, p. 8) Thus it seems that nobles were removed from the ordinary struggles of life, while, in reality, they were engaged in a fierce battle for existence.

Act II

Act Two's purpose is to further clarify Monsieur Jourdain's character. He doesn't understand music and he has a tin ear. His favorite instrument is a marine trumpet (a onestringed instrument) which, of course, is limited in its range! He doesn't appreciate the beauty of the music nor the skill of the dancers and singers whose talent he has purchased. He is mainly concerned with its seeming appropriateness for entertaining his noble guests.

M. Jourdain hired four teachers—music, dance, philosophy, and fencing. Regarding his teachers, he is deferential to them but not fawning. He has paid for their services. He knows he needs their knowledge, and he is appreciative of their efforts.

The four masters wear "masks" because they are working for the money and fame, not for the love of their craft. They flatter M. Jourdain unnecessarily. When they are teaching him they present the lesson in such a way that he has difficulty grasping the point either with prowess (fencing) or with acuity (philosophy). The lessons are reduced to the most elementary level (the sounds of vowels, or the difference between prose and verse) where M. Jourdain is stunned by what he doesn't know. The reality is that even with the aid of the

masters, M. Jourdain will never learn enough to attain a noble's education. In time, he might grasp the essentials of such knowledge so that he will appear to have attained "nobility."

The arguments among the masters as to which "art" is more important, underline comically the great debates of the century, in particular whether arms or letters is the most important art. Molière doesn't attempt to resolve the question except to show that all the arguments are meaningless. The result is a physical fight, which doesn't resolve anything.

While M. Jourdain defers to his teachers, his attitude toward his tailor is different. He has been waiting for the tailor to bring his new outfit, while he has had his lessons from his teachers. He is indignant that he has been kept waiting by an inferior. When the tailor finally arrives, he is wearing an outfit made out of the material of Monsieur Jourdain's last costume. M. Jourdain recognizes it and reprimands the tailor. It is highly possible that the outfit was part of the material paid for by M. Jourdain. He doesn't see this possibility, however. He has been easily duped.

M. Jourdain is naive and gullible in that instance, and at the end of the Act, when the tailor's boys flatter a tip out of him. Every time they address him using a term such as "My Lord," M. Jourdain gives them more money. It thrills him to be addressed by noble titles. Another mask!

The ridiculous outfit M. Jourdain has received from his tailor is an exaggerated copy of Court dress. Assured that this costume is the newest style, he intends to promenade through the streets, wearing the outfit, and followed by his two lackeys in a parody of noble processions. M. Jourdain will be laughed at and will be made fun of, but he will not be cognizant of the ridicule. He will be delighted that people are noticing him in his noble clothes.

Acts One and Two form a unit. They introduce the main character and the major themes of the play. They could almost stand alone as commentary on the hopes and desires of the bourgeoisie, without the other three. Molière's mastery of his craft is such that what remains of the play is the fun in unmasking M. Jourdain's vanity and folly.

Act III

Act Three is the literary climax of the play. The tone turns more serious. It is the longest act as well. Several important, new characters are introduced: Nicole, the maid; Madame Jourdain; Dorante, the nobleman who borrows money from M. Jourdain; Dorimène, the noblewoman whom M. Jourdain is wooing; Cléonte, suitor to M. and Mme. Jourdain's daughter Lucile; Covielle, Cléonte's servant; and Lucile Jourdain.

Mme. Jourdain, a typical bourgeoisie, tries to talk some sense into her husband. She is down to earth and has no illusions about life and her place in society. She tells him that he is what he is and should not hope for better. She wants him to realize that his pretensions have made him an object of ridicule. "Mrs. Jourdain: What new nonsense is it this time? What are you doing in that getup, man? Whatever are you thinking about to get yourself rigged out like that! Do you want to have everybody laughing at you? Mr. Jourdain: My good woman, only the fools will laugh at me, Mrs. Jourdain: Well, it isn't as if folk have not done it before! Your goings on have long been a laughingstock for most people." (*Ibid* . Wood, pp. 2324)

Monsieur Jourdain refuses to listen to his wife's admonitions about his lessons, his lending of money to Dorante, and his daughter's future, among other things. M. Jourdain sees things as he wishes them to be, not as they really are.

Lucile, Monsieur and Madame Jourdain's daughter, is in love with Cléonte, but because he is not a nobleman, her father refuses to consider him as a potential husband for her. Mme. Jourdain, on the other hand, is for the match as they are well-suited to each other, particularly in terms of social class. "Marrying above one's station always brings trouble. I don't want a son-in-law who'll look down on my daughter because of her parentage, and I don't want her children to be ashamed to call me their grandmother neither, . . ." (*Ibid* . Wood, p. 41)

In desperation, Cléonte and Covielle hatch a plot to trick M. Jourdain into giving his approval to Cléonte's and Lucile's marriage. They plan that Cléonte will impersonate the son of the Grand Turk and, Covielle, in disguise, will approach M. Jourdain for Lucile's hand.

Nicole and Covielle are servants with an important role to play. They have a great deal of common sense, and see things as they really are. They act as confidantes of Mme. Jourdain and Cléonte, respectively. They are also smarter than their bosses (M. Jourdain and Cléonte, respectively), and understand them very well. They are clever and use their intelligence to manipulate events. Nicole and Madame Jourdain share the same views on life, Covielle and Cléonte act more like friends than servant and master.

Dorante, the nobleman, also appears in this act for the first time. He greets M. Jourdain as if they are equals. M. Jourdain takes off his hat in deference to Dorante's rank. Dorante expects M. Jourdain to act as his equal. That is to say, He allows M. Jourdain certain liberties which M. Jourdain could not normally presume to take in other circumstances:

Dorante: Come put on your hat!

Jourdain: Sir, I know the respect I owe to you.

Dorante: Please put on your hat. No ceremony between us, I beg you.

Jourdain: Sir-

Dorante: Do put on your hat, Mr. Jourdain. You are my friend.

Jourdain: Sir, I'm your very humble servant.

Dorante: But I cannot put on my own hat unless you put on yours.

Jourdain: (putting on his hat) I'll forego my manners rather than be a nuisance. . . . (*Ibid* . Wood, p. 28)

Monsieur Jourdain feels inferior despite Dorante's efforts to make him feel equal; both are fooling themselves. Dorante is being sycophantic, M. Jourdain coy.

There is a purpose for Dorante's visit: he wants to borrow more money from M. Jourdain. Dorante owes him a considerable sum of money but, most likely, will never repay any of it. M. Jourdain sees none of this; he only sees Dorante's "nobility."

Some of Dorante's time is spent in dressing and going to his plumemaker, his tailor, his saddler, and other tradesmen. The rest of his time is spent at Court, in the "Royal Presence," at ballets, or "Royal Entertainments," and dining. Thus he represents the empty pomposity of the nobility. He has no real power because he has no money; all is faCade.

Dorante has agreed, in principle, to help M. Jourdain attain DorimEne's favor. He has acted as a liaison, bringing her flowers and a very large diamond, staging fireworks displays, and asking her to dine at M. Jourdain's house. Dorante told M. Jourdain that he is pleading his case with DorimEne, when, in reality, he has let DorimEne think that he, Dorante, is wooing her for himself. His power with DorimEne is falsity, based only on appearances.

DorimEne is a wealthy widow whom Dorante wants to marry, probably because she is rich, and whom M. Jourdain wants as his entrée into Society. She seems intelligent, and has been resisting Dorante's advances to a degree. She scolds him gently about giving her extravagant gifts: ". . . firstly, they commit me further than I would wish, and secondly, I feel sure, if I may say so, that you are spending more than you can afford—and that I don't in the least want." (*Ibid* . Wood, p. 43) She, at least, attempts to see through the false facade.

DorimEne knows that M. Jourdain is foolish, but she condescends to dine with him and Dorante. She uses the royal "we" which supposedly puts her above her dining companions: "We are most admirably entertained." (*Ibid* . Wood, p. 46) She too, is wearing a mask of gentility, perhaps to gain a new husband who will give her presents and amusements like those she has accepted from Dorante. In reality, she is out for what she can get. Her nobility is false.

Act Three concludes with Monsieur Jourdain, Dorante, and DorimEne preparing to dine on a sumptuous meal prepared especially for the occasion. While they are dining musicians entertain them. M. Jourdain has let no detail of noble dinner parties escape his attention. However, it is still a bourgeois home pretending to be noble. It is a successful attempt to entertain nobles in the manner to which they are accustomed.

Act IV

In Act Four Madame Jourdain returns earlier than expected, and is quite indignant to find M. Jourdain entertaining guests. She thinks that her husband is being unfaithful to her, which he is, in a sense. He would like to get rid of his wife and all things which keep him in his place. Dorante comes to M. Jourdain's rescue by telling Mme. Jourdain that it is his party, and M. Jourdain is graciously allowing him to use his home for it. Mme. Jourdain isn't fooled by the explanation: "And it's downright wicked of a fine gentleman like you to encourage my husband's tomfoolery. As for you, madam, it ill becomes a fine lady to be causing trouble in a decent family and letting my husband think he's in love with you." (*Ibid* . Wood, p. 48)

Covielle's plan is put into motion. He appears, disguised, and meets M. Jourdain. He pretends to have known M. Jourdain when he was a little boy. "You were the prettiest child I ever saw. All the ladies were for ever picking you up and cuddling you. . . . You see I was a great friend of the late gentleman, your father." (*Ibid* . Wood, p. 49) M. Jourdain is delighted to find out that his father was a "gentleman." He wants to know if his father was "in trade." Covielle says: "In trade! Sheer slander! Never in his life! It was just that he was obliging, anxious to be helpful, and as he knew all about cloth he would go round and select samples, have them brought to his house and give them to his friends—for a consideration." (*Ibid* . Wood, p.30) M. Jourdain takes this statement to mean that his father was noble. Covielle, making a pun about the word "gentleman," lets him believe it. His description of M. Jourdain's father's "pastime" is an exact description of his very real work of selling cloth!

Covielle convinces M. Jourdain that the son of the Grand Turk (Cléonte in disguise) wants to marry Lucile. M. Jourdain agrees to the marriage, and to becoming a *mamamouchi* (which means "good for nothing" borrowed from the Arabic *m ^ menou schi*) a so-called noble title from Turkey, because he would be "on an equality with the greatest of noblemen." (*Ibid* . Wood, p. 51) He is impressed with the son of the Grand Turk

and the “Turkish language.” M. Jourdain is a willing dupe, and everything proceeds according to plan.

The elaborate ceremony is composed of madeup language and rituals designed to impress Monsieur Jourdain and entertain the audience. It is a colorful ceremony composed of dancing, music and chanting. M. Jourdain is dressed in a Turkish costume which is completed at certain points during the ceremony. A turban and a saber become part of his costume. At the end of the ceremony, the Mufti and other Turks hit M. Jourdain with their scimitars. For M. Jourdain, this ceremony marks the culmination of his dreams. He is carried off in triumph at the end of the act. Nothing in the behavior of the participants nor in the words of the invocations or chants is real. The nonsensical activity serves to unmask M. Jourdain, finally.

Act V

Act Five ties up loose ends. Little by little all the characters except M. Jourdain are let in on the secret that the son of the Grand Turk is really Cléonte. DorimEne and Dorante have come, ostensibly to celebrate Lucile’s marriage to Cléonte, but really to see M. Jourdain in his fantastic costume. DorimEne has decided to marry Dorante to stop his “extravagances.” M. Jourdain says that Nicole may marry the interpreter (Covielle); and that he will give his wife to anyone who wants her! He is not aware of the elaborate joke that has been played on him, nor will he ever realize the extent of it.

It is this kind of analysis, act by act, that the students will engage in to gain a basic grasp of the issues and the movement of the play. Such a plot analysis will help them understand what the play is really about, why the characters are who they are, and why MoliEre chose the plot actions he did.

CHARACTERS AND MASKS

In this opposition of reality and appearance, MoliEre uses elements of farce, the *commedia dell’arte*, and classical Greek and Roman comedy to heighten their contrast. All of these types of theatre use the mask to set the character. The *commedia dell’arte* in particular, used the mask as a caricature rather than the reality of a type.

MoliEre used this idea of the mask to portray his characters as always masked to some degree as to their true nature. For MoliEre, it was a human characteristic to try to appear to be more or better than one is.

The purpose of the drama for MoliEre is to explore through plot events the unmasking of his characters. No matter what happens to the character throughout the play, he is essentially the same at the end as at the beginning. Only the mask has slipped, and by the end, the true character is revealed. Moore notes that:

For MoliEre, impressed as he was with the affixed character, it is only affixed, and to a living organism. The point of interest for him, and for us, is the point when the mask slips or falls, when the underlying man appears. This distinction is never absent from MoliEre’s plays. All his situations gravitate to that moment when the mask is removed; he steers them towards this abandonment of the mask and consequent emergence of the natural.

(W.G. Moore, *MoliEre A New Criticism*, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1949, pp. 3839)

The idea of people wearing masks for differing purposes reflects the society in which MoliEre lived and worked.

. . . It is a thread that runs through the society that was all around him and that supported his plays. Could he put any better mirror up to that society than that of the mask? Were they not all compelled by etiquette to assume the mask, to act a part, to keep up their social role? Does not all society imply the mask in its constraint upon natural impulses? Can one ever, to other people, speak one's full mind? What is politeness but a cloak, a mask, thrown over selfinterest? (*Ibid* . Moore, pp. 3839)

Not only did the mask reflect Seventeenth Century French society but it served to make MoliEre's comedy universal in its truth about human nature for all people and all time.

MoliEre's comedy sets up situations in which the character's mask must fall and the real person emerges. The comedic format is a means to an end, not an end in itself. "MoliEre exhibits the limits of human nature no less than its powers. It apparently implies a sober sense of man's place in nature, of his function, of that order and sobriety to overstep which is to be unnatural." (*Ibid* . Moore, pp. 120121) The comedy occurs here where the human being uses the mask and changes it at will. "In this contest of mask and face, of wit and nature, of mind against life, let us not ask who wins. The comedy does not determine the relative strength of the forces pitted against each other; it illustrates in bewildering variety, their juxtaposition and coexistence." (*Ibid* . Moore, pp. 120121) Thus the mask is not the character but a facet of his nature.

It is important that students grasp this essential theme of MoliEre's play—the mask that we all wear, and how ridiculous it can become. The following activities are designed to help students analyze the mask theme in the play and fully realize it.

The students will read the play, in French, for answers to the questions they have generated. Through discussion and brainstorming, guided by the teacher, the students will attain each of the objectives mentioned above. (See Appendix A)

The videotape will be used to clarify points not understood by reading. Questions that cannot be answered by the play, will be researched by individuals and then shared with the class.

As the students are watching the videotape a second or third time, or while they are reading the play, they will, in small groups, make notes of things such as: behavior, costume, masks, ceremonies, theatricality, or individual characters as they occur in the play. These notes could then be used for discussions and essays.

Students could take a character, list his/her qualities, and present themselves as the character, asking who am I? They could dress in costume and use props. Or they could write a paragraph describing themselves and have other students guess who they are.

If there are students who enjoy acting, they could choose their favorite scene in the play, rehearse it, and present it to other students or parents, or the public. These scenes could be done bilingually, in French and English, or with a narrator giving a synopsis in English.

Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme is a "comédieballet" in which music and dance play an important part. Each act ends with a ballet. The play ends with a Ballet of Nations in which different nations are represented in song, costume, and dance. This format was used to please the King and his Court. Students could be asked to discuss the value of their presence in the play. They could analyze the songs for their meaning intrinsically, and for the play. They could also find out what kind of music was being played or sung during the Seventeenth Century, and decide if MoliEre was using it seriously or as a statement.

Once the play has been read, seen, and studied, the students could do written or oral reports on the following topics: "A Day in the Life of a Courtier," "A Day at Versailles," "If you were noble (bourgeois), what would you find funny in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* ? Another report or presentation might be to tell the story from the viewpoint of one of the characters. Students could also write character sketches.

A debate might also be fun. The students, in small groups, could prepare opposite sides of a question or topic and then present their views on the assigned day. The debate could be a real one from the Seventeenth Century, such as "Arms versus Letters," or it could be based on ideas brought out in class discussion.

Other activities or projects, depending on the interest and ability of the students, might take an artistic turn. Students could make a collage or montage of a famous place, a famous event, Louis XIV, a favorite scene from *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* , among other things. They could make a diorama of an event, a scene, or of a place. They could make a costume or a menu of the time. The project could take the form of a booklet with drawings made by the students, of costumes, furniture, decorated rooms. To illustrate the history of the times, students might make a newspaper. They could also design a card game about the history of Seventeenth Century France, Louis XIV, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* , or MoliEre.

The century of Louis XIV is a vast banquet from which we have just sampled. Our appetites have been whetted for more! Other areas to be explored are: life at Versailles, the role of the arts in Seventeenth Century France, MoliEre's theatre, history of the French Theatre, *Les Précieuses ridicules* , and the works of La Fontaine, La Rochefoucauld, La BruyEre, Boileau, and Voltaire's essay on Louis XIV.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, after working through this unit, students will have learned what makes a literary work universal that it illustrates universal truths about human nature. They will understand plot development and literary form. They will have a perspective of the historical background of France in the Seventeenth Century. And they will have begun to understand the development of man with an emphasis on man as maskwearing.

APPENDIX A

Students will be encouraged to come up with questions to guide their reading. These questions can be discussed using brainstorming techniques as a whole class, and the answers can be found in small groups. In addition, the students can be encouraged to look for what is not obvious in the play so as to make statements about MoliEre's art.

Acts One and Two

Some of the categories of questions might be: humor (What is funny? Why?), masks (Who is wearing a mask? For what purpose?), ceremony (How does one live as a noble? a bourgeois?), Louis XIV and his Court (How does life there affect life outside? Of what does Court life consist?), literary form (How is the main character introduced? Why are other important characters not introduced until Act Three? Why is so much time given to debate art versus livelihood? What is the purpose of the fight between the masters? What do we know about M. Jourdain by the end of Act Two?), MoliEre's view (How is this life superficial? What is the purpose of

ceremony, rites, masks?), and, social history (Why is there a struggle between the bourgeoisie and the nobility?).

Act Three

While reading this act, students can look for answers to questions such as: What are courtiers like? How are they different from M. Jourdain? What are Mme. Jourdain's values? Describe the differences between Mm. Jourdain and DorimEne; and what is MoliEre saying to the audience?

Acts Four and Five

Some of the questions to which students might formulate answers for these acts are: What is the purpose of this farcical ceremony? Why is it included in its entirety? Why does Act Five exist? Is it necessary to the action? Who is MoliEre making fun of, and why? How does he get away with it?

READING LIST FOR STUDENTS

La Fontaine, Jean de. *Fables choisies mises en vers* Tome II, (Paris: Société les Belles Lettres), 1934.

Several fables lend themselves to a discussion of the Seventeenth Century and its society. I suggest using: "Les Amimaux malades de la peste" pp. 1315; "La Cour du lion" pp. 2526; "Les Vautours et les pigeons" pp. 2728; and "Le Lion, le loup et le renard" pp. 5657.

La Rochefoucauld, duc de. *Maximes* Classique Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse), 1934.

Certain *Maximes* can be used to illustrate MoliEre's theme of masks, vanity, among others. I recommend: numbers 2, 4, 13, 88, 85, 144, 127, 35, 36, 146, 148, 158, 294, 218, 159; also, "De l'air et des maniEres" number 4, pp. 5860.

Lewis, W.H. *The Splendid Century* (New York, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.), 1953.

A book one cannot do without for use in understanding life in the Seventeenth Century! It is full of interesting information which fascinates the reader.

MoliEre. *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* Classiques Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse), 1970.

The basic text of MoliEre's play. It contains good notes for a thorough study of the play. It should be used in the French classes studying the play.

MoliEre. *Les Précieuses ridicules* Nouveaux Classiques Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse), 1970.

Students could read the play in addition to *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* for another aspect of the times. The notes are extremely useful for a study of MoliEre's theatre and Seventeenth Century society.

Wood, John. (translator) *The Would-Be Gentleman* (Penguin Books), 1953.

A useful translation of the play which could be used by classes other than the French classes for study.

Coulanges, Claudine and Flake Daniel. *Un Coup d'Oeil sur la France* (Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook

Company), 1985.

A useful book about the history of France.

Valdman, Albert, Nancy C. Millerski, Susan L. Heine. *Promenades et Perspectives* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company), 1984.

A wellthoughtout textbook for use with upper level classes.

READING LIST FOR TEACHERS

There is a videotape of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* available for borrowing from the Yale Teachers Institute on Wall Street in New Haven, Connecticut.

Alter, Jean V. *L'Esprit antibourgeois sous l'Ancien Régime Littérature et tensions sociales aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siEcles* (GenEve: Librairie Droz), 1970.

Good background information of the century, particularly chapters 1,2,3 in the first section, and chapters 1,2,3 in the second section.

Alter, Jean V. *Les Origines de la satire antibourgeoise en France Moyen Age—XVIe siEcle* (Geneve: Librairie Droz), 1966.

Good historical background, particularly chapters 2,3,4 in the first section and chapter 2 in the second section.

Descotes, Maurice. *Les grands r™les du thé%otre de MoliEre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), 1960.

An interesting look at who played the roles of major characters in MoliEre's plays through the years, and how the actor and the character must become one in order to make the character believable. Note the Préambule in which MoliEre's techniques and style are discussed. Chapter VI discusses *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* .

Gossman, Lionel. *Men and Masks A Study of MoliEre* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press , 1963.

For our purposes chapter 6 "MoliEre in His Own Time", and chapter 7 "After MoliEre" discuss MoliEre's influence and mastery of his craft.

Guicharnaud, Jacques, editor. *MoliEre A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.), 1964.

Much of this book is useful for a study of MoliEre, such as: the Introduction which gives a background of MoliEre and his works; "MoliEre and Farce" by Gustave Lanson; "The Elementary Rites of MoliEre's Comedy" by Alfred Simon; "Speech" by Will. G. Moore; "The Comedy of Will" by Ramon Fernandez; "World of Imagination" by René Bray; "The AntiBourgeois" by Paul Benichon; and "The Comic Hero and His Ideals" by Lionel Gossman.

Howarth, W.D. and Merlin Thomas. *MoliEre: Stage and Study Essays in Honour of W.G. Moore* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press), 1973.

Two essays are useful for our study of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* : J. Cameron Wilson's "Expansion and Brevity in Moliere's Style," which discusses Moliere's writing techniques, and Mollie Gerard Davis' "Masters and Servants in the Plays of Moliere," which discusses the role servants play and their usefulness to Moliere's strategy.

Hubert, J.D. *Moliere and the Comedy of Intellect* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1962.

A fascinating study of Moliere's plays. Note chapter 18 "A Lesson for a Maecenas" which deals with *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* , and chapter 3 "On the High Cost of Reading" about *Les Precieuses ridicules* . The Preface deals with Moliere's style and his themes.

Knutson, Harold C. *Moliere An Archetypal Approach* (Toronto: Univercity of Toronto Press), 1976.

A discussion of themes and techniques of comedy. Use the Index for information. See pp. 110116 especially.

La Fontaine, Jean de. *Fables choisies mises en vers* Tome II (Paris: Societe les Belles Lettres), 1934.

See Reading List for Students.

La Rochefoucauld, duc de. *Maximes* Classiques Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse), 1934.

See Reading List for Students.

Lewis, W.H. *The Splendid Century* (New York, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.), 1953.

See Reading List for Students.

Mander, Gertrud. *Moliere* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company), 1973.

This book discusses Moliere as a playwright. It is essential for understanding Moliere's comic hero.

Moliere. *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* Classiques Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse), 1970.

See Reading List for Students.

Moliere. *Les Precieuses ridicules* Nouveaux Classiques Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse), 1970.

See Reading List for Students.

Moore W.G. *Moliere A New Criticism* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press , 1949.

A useful critique of Moliere's plays and techniques.

Mourgues, Odette de. "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme as a Criticism of Civilization", *Moliere: Stage and Study Essays in Honour of W.G. Moore* edited by W.D. Howarth and Merlin Thomas (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press), 1973.

An important article for our study. It is a clear explanation of Moliere's comedic technique in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* .

Riggs, Larry W. "The Issues of Nobility and Identity in *Dom Juan* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* " *The French*

Review , Vol. LIX No. 3, February, 1986.

Another essential article for a study of MoliEre.

Walker, Hallam. *MoliEre* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc.), 1971.

See chapters 1,2,3 for background information; and pp. 153-157 on *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* .

Wood, John, translator. *The Would Be Gentleman* (Penguin Books), 1953.

See Reading List for Students.

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