

-----*The Would-Be Gentleman* (Spring 2011)

By Moliere [43 pages in this text]

Kaarin Johnston's synopsis of the Morris Bishop version in Great Books of the Western World volume 31

The Characters (in the original version): 8 main characters (4 pairs)

Monsieur Jourdain, bourgeois (desires Dorimene)

Madame Jourdain, his wife (wants their daughter to marry Cleonte) enters in Act III

Lucile, his daughter (in love with Cleonte) enters half-way through Act III

Cleonte, (in love with Lucile) enters half-way through ACT III

Dorimene, a marquise (in love with Dorante) enters towards the end of ACT III

Dorante, a count (in love with Dorimene) enters in ACT III

Nicole, servant of Monsieur Jourdain (loves Covielle) enters in ACT III

Covielle, a manservant of Cleonte (loves Nicole) enters ½ way through ACT III

A Music Master—ACT I & II

The Music Master's Pupil—ACT I & II

A Dancing Master—ACT I & II

A Fencing Master—ACT I & II

A Philosophy Master—ACT I & II

A Merchant Tailor—ACT I & II

A Journeyman Tailor—ACT I & II

Lackeys, singers, instrumentalists, dancers, cooks, tailor's apprentices

The scene is in Paris, in Monsieur Jourdain's house

ACT I

The MUSIC MASTER'S PUPIL is working at a table. He may rise, strike some notes on a harpsichord, and return to his composition. He hums a tune, trying both the men's and the women's parts. Enter the MUSIC MASTER, three SINGERS, and two VIOLINISTS.

Within moments, the dancing master and dancing students enter. The two masters discuss what it is like to receive large sums of money from an uncouth idiot who cannot understand or appreciate the arts. They agree the money is pleasant to eat well and pay the rent; however it does not satisfy their souls.

Jourdain enters and asks them to admire his new clothing. The music master's pupil sings a song written for the occasion, but Jourdain finds it too sad and sings a popular tune which he is fond of; it is about a girl named Jeannette who he thought was a lamb but is actually a tiger. (it is probably a tavern song.) When the Music Master tells Jourdain that people of quality take music lessons Jourdain is anxious to do so. The Dancing Master tries the same approach with the same results. The singers perform and then the dancers.

ACT II—(Continuous action)

Jourdain needs to practice the minuet so the Dancing Master sings the music and direction as Jourdain tries to dance correctly. He then asks to learn the correct bow for a marquise (the lady he is planning to impress). A few moments later the Fencing Master arrives and practices with Jourdain, who remembers nothing from his last lesson. When the Fencing Master ridicules music and dancing a three-way argument ensues. When Jourdain tries to intervene it grows worse until the Philosophy Master enters and explains how philosophy and the study of wisdom is the most important. Jourdain tries to stop the three

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from fighting but they unite and turn on him instead. Finally the first three exit leaving the Philosophy Master to try and teach Jourdain, an impossible task! (The “lesson” includes logic, ethics, physics but Jourdain prefers to focus on spelling; the teacher begins with vowels and how they are sounded. The subject for the next lesson will be “consonants”.) Jourdain desires assistance writing a love-poem to the marquise and manages to come up with the line, “Beautiful marquise, your lovely eyes make me die of love.” After the Philosophy Master exits, the tailor and apprentice arrive with Jourdain’s new suit (which is very tight and uncomfortable) and his fancy new shoes (which are too small). Jourdain complains because the flowers on his coat are all upside down but the tailor convinces him that all the people of quality wear them that way. The Master Tailor has servants dress Jourdain to beautiful music.

ACT III—(Continuous action)

The Tailor and servants exit. Nicole enters and begins laughing; she tries to control herself but every time Jourdain tries to speak she bursts into laughter at the way he looks. He instructs her to prepare for guests who will be arriving soon. His wife enters and tells him how ridiculous he looks; Nicole supports her as Jourdain scolds his wife. He, in turn, proves to her that she does not know she is speaking prose instead of poetry. Then he decides to show them what he learned about fencing only Nicole manages to defeat him.

His wife berates him for lending Monsieur le Comte so much money but he tells her it is an honor to lend money to a man so close to the King. At that point Dorante enters and lavishly praises Jourdain’s new clothes (which are hideous), tells Jourdain that he was speaking to the king about him just this morning, and urges Jourdain to put his hat on (as if they are equals). Dorante reminds Jourdain that he owes him money and asks to be reminded of the amount of the total debt. When he “learns” that he owes Jourdain 15,800 francs he says that after Jourdain loans him 200 more then it will be a nice round number. Despite the urgent whispered appeals from his wife not to loan the money, Jourdain exits to fetch it.

Meanwhile M. Jourdain and Dorante let each other know what they think of each other. After Jourdain returns and gives Dorante the money the two men move to the side and discuss the woman (the Marquise) Jourdain wants to meet. (Dorante has been acting as a go-between and supposedly gave her a large diamond ring from Jourdain.) Dorante tells J. that the woman has agreed to come to a lavish party J. will host. We learn that J. has already, according to Dorante) paid for serenades, flowers, and fireworks on the lake. J. explains that he has arranged for his wife to dine with her sister so his dinner party will be uninterrupted. Nicole tries to eavesdrop but it caught by J who quickly exits with Dorante.

Nicole and M. J. discuss their scheme for J.’s daughter to marry Cleonte and Nicole expresses her desire to marry Cleonte’s manservant. M. Jourdain exits and just at that moment Cleonte enters with Covielle (his manservant) and berate Nicole. She exits to find her young mistress. They both begin to complain about the two women they love and a very funny lazzo occurs. The two young women enter and another funny lazzo takes place, in which the women try to explain but the men reject them. When the women give up the same lazzo is repeated, only in reverse with the men chasing after the women.

M. Jourdain reenters and tells Cleonte her husband is coming and to ask for Lucile’s hand in marriage. Jourdain asks Cleonte if he is a gentleman [of the upper class] and when Cleonte replies that he is not, Jourdain refuses to allow the marriage. M. Jourdain berates her husband for trying to hide his own merchant class lineage but her husband resolutely denies it. [M. Jourdain has a wonderful speech about why Nicole should marry someone from the bourgeois class.] Jourdain exits, his wife tells Cleonte not to give up hope and she exits with her daughter and Nicole.

The two male lovers discuss their predicament and Covielle comes up with an elaborate plan to fool Jourdain so the lovers can marry. Covielle says he will get the actors who are needed and make all the arrangements. He says Jourdain will play his own part in the farce, perfectly. The two men exit.

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Jourdain enters expressing his desire to have been born a noble as a servant enters with news that Dorante and a “lady” have arrived. Jourdain exits to make arrangements. Dorante and the lady (the widow Dorimene) enter and we learn Dorante has been pursuing her and wants to marry her. He has used all of Jourdain’s gifts as if they came from him. She tells him he is wearing down her defenses and that she is quite concerned about the amount of money he has been spending on lavish gifts. She informs him she does not want him to go into debt.

At this point Jourdain enters and attempts his fancy bow but since there is no enough room he asks Dorimene to back up and give him more room. He delivers a totally ridiculous speech. For a few minutes Jourdain side-coaches Jourdain what to say as well as whispering to Dorimene what she should reply. The servants dance in with their dishes and covered platters.

ACT IV

The food is set out and the three begin to drink wine and possibly eat something. The singers entertain them with a drinking song. Jourdain begins to flatter Dorimene and his wife walks in. In order to “save” Jourdain, Dorante says it is his party and Jourdain has just allowed him to use their house. As M. Jourdain hollers at her husband and Dorimene, Dorimene flees from what she considers to be a crazy woman. Dorante follows her and Jourdain berates his wife for driving off people of quality.

Covielle, disguised in an Oriental costume and wearing a beard, arrives and informs Jourdain he was a great friend of Jourdain’s father—and that Jourdain’s father was a “gentleman”. He has come to announce that the Grand Turk [to be changed] has arrived in town and has fallen in love with Nicole and wants to marry her. Not only that but the Son of the Grand Turk will promote Jourdain to the status of a mamamouchi, or as the title is also known, a paladin. He tells Jourdain that the Son of the Grand Turk bears a striking resemblance to Cleonte and that will help Jourdain’s daughter fall in love even faster.

Cleonte enters in his costume and carries on a “conversation” translated by Covielle. [This section is pretty darn funny.] The Cleonte exits with Jourdain to prepare for the ceremony which will make him a paladin before the wedding takes place. Dorante enters and Covielle fills him in on the trick he and his master are playing. While the talk at the side the stage is set for the “ceremony”. [*The ceremony is described as an Arab event including whirling dervishes—we will need to create our own to fit the mythical country chosen.*] The ceremony to make Jourdain takes place in gibberish with silly antics terrifying Jourdain. All exit except Jourdain.

M. Jourdain enters and asks her husband why he is dressed so stupidly. He informs her he has just been made a mamamouchi. She tries to get him to explain but she becomes convinced he has lost his mind; he runs off because she is so stupid and won’t acknowledge his new status. She runs off to get help because she believes he is now insane.

Dorante and Dorimene enter and he explains the lovers’ plot and asks her to help. She agrees and also informs him she will marry him in order to put a stop to all his foolish spending. Jourdain enters (still in his new finery) and the others tell him they have come to congratulate him on his daughter’s engagement. Cleonte enters in his costume and Dorante speaks to him. Jourdain calls for the translator and another silly exchange takes place.

Lucile enters and her father tells her she must marry the Son of-- ; she refuses and they argue until she suddenly recognizes Cleonte and agree to marry him. M. Jourdain (who is not in on the trick) enters and refuses to allow her daughter to marry the unknown Son of-- After a bit of banter, Cleonte and Covielle manage to tell her about their plan and she agrees to the wedding. When they send for the notary Dorante

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says that he and Dorimene will also make use of the notary since they too will marry. Jourdain think it is part of the plan to fool his wife. They all sit and watch a ballet while waiting for the notary.
[Our production will have a silly wedding instead.)