

# Good history essay example

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## **The Would-Be Gentleman by Moliere**

Molière's *The Would-Be-Gentleman* is a comical satire that reveals the various facets of human emotions and behaviour of seventeenth century Europe. Most of his comedies critique the pompous artificiality of French high society during the middle- and late seventeenth century. The characters portray farce to serious comedies of manners. France, during his time, had two distinct sections of society; the nobility or the rich, and the bourgeoisie; the middle class. Molière produced a number of satires that criticised the lifestyle of the rich and famous in France. In particular, Molière looked to tease the extravagant manner, style, and language of the French women who wanted to be distinguished from the rest, through their excessively refined taste and behavior.

The criticism of nobility seems to be the essence of *The Would-Be-Gentleman*. In Act I, Scene I for example, the music master, the dance master and the pupil are gathered at the house of Monsieur Jourdain, a noble. They had been ordered by Monsieur Jourdain to prepare a serenade, and as they waited for the nobleman, the music teacher tells the dancing master:

It's true that he understands them poorly, but he pays well, and that's what our art needs now more than anything else.

I could wish that he understood better the things that we give him

I don't place all my happiness in it, and I could wish that together with his fortune he had some good taste in things.

The above two statements by the dance master and the music master clearly shows that entertainment was a way of expressing a person's nobility

in society, and despite an assurance from the music teacher that they would be paid well for their performance, the dance teacher was worried that it was not only money that mattered, but appreciation of art, which he believed, Monsieur Jourdain lacked. By including these statements in their dialogue, Molière was actually depicting the fallacy of the French society during the ancient régime. Despite being rich, Monsieur Jourdain had no knowledge on art, and because nobility mandated that people like him had to elicit such pompous attitude in society, he did so too. This point is further substantiated by Monsieur Jourdain in Scene II when he tells the entertainers:

I kept you waiting a little, but it's because I'm having myself dressed today like the people of quality, and my tailor sent me some silk stockings that I thought I would never get on.

I want you both to stay until they have brought me my suit, so that you may see me.

Time was never considered important in France in the seventeenth century, and the only thing that mattered for the elite class was their appearance in public. Despite making the music and dance masters wait for him, he didn't express his apology of keeping them waiting. His excuse of having to wait for the tailor to send me his silk stockings was what kept him from meeting them earlier. Appearances were what the elite class believed in.

In Act II, Scene I, while Monsieur Jourdain talks to the music and dance teachers, the music teacher tells Monsieur Jourdain:

However, sir, this is not enough. A person like you, who lives magnificently, and who are inclined towards fine things, should have a concert of music here every Wednesday or every Thursday.

## **Is that what people of quality do?**

This again shows how Molière portrays the nobility and the bourgeoisie.

Monsieur Jourdain seems ignorant of his surroundings. All that he knows is that as a noble, he had to have entertainment, and whether it was fencing, music, dancing, or philosophy, it was a matter of knowing what nobility had to do. For the bourgeoisie, it was about keeping the nobles happy and content. For the bourgeoisie, their survival; depended on how well they kept the nobles. As the music teacher said:

## **That's what both of us are working for as much as we can [Act I, Scene II].**

In Act II, Scene I, the distinction of class between the nobility and the bourgeoisie is portrayed by Molière explicitly, when, asked to show how to bow to salute a marchioness, he refuses his hand to the dancing master, who requests it.

## **Dance master: How you must bow to salute a marchioness?**

Monsieur Jourdain: Yes, a marchioness named Dorimène.

## **Dance master: Give me your hand.**

Monsieur Jourdain: No. You only have to do it, I'll remember it well. [Act II, Scene I]

It would have been inappropriate for a noble person to even contemplate touching a bourgeoisie, leave alone his hand. In Act III, Scene IV, Monsieur Jourdain's true identity is disclosed, when Madame Jourdain speaks about her husband's affiliation toward Count Dorante; who uses his position to extract money from Jourdain.

In Act IV, Scene II, Molière ridicules nobility when she tells Monsieur Jourdain that:

I laugh at their quality

In showing the follies of the upper class of society, and how they take advantage of the bourgeoisie for their own good, Molière exposes the insensitivity of the upper class.

### **Works Cited**

Caywood, Paul. *The Would-Be Gentleman*. 1st ed. Eldridge Publishing Company, 1997. Print.