A word or two about the form and content of the following pages might not be out of place.

A certain amount of repetition could perhaps have been avoided if the chapters dealing with individual plays had been presented instead in the form of a study of topics and themes. It seemed to me, however, that such a schematic presentation might have several disadvantages that would offset the possible advantages of neatness and economy. It is only in their concrete embodiment in the plays themselves that the themes live and have meaning. The significance of any work of art is probably inseparable from the work itself and is never found in concepts distilled from the work. Processes of abstraction and comparison do, I imagine, have an important part to play in the reading and understanding of a piece of literature. It seems to me only that analysis and abstraction must be completed by a return to the work and to the actual flesh of the word, the gesture and the act. The reader's first meeting with a work is often a direct and intimate experience of it, and it is through processes of alienation, abstraction, judgment, and comparison that, as he reads, he succeeds in deepening this experience, but only if the universal and the particular, the abstract and the concrete, the position of alienation and the position of immersion are maintained in dialectical union with each other, illuminating each other and illuminated by each other. It is possible to consider the totality of an author's work in this way. It may even be the best way to study an author, for it sets the parts of his work in relation to the whole and enriches thereby our understanding of these parts. No individual work, perhaps, can be properly understood in isolation from the whole, any more than one movement of a sonata can stand apart from the whole sonata. Nevertheless, a total view that maintains a constant relation to the concrete parts requires
far greater experience and skill than I think, at this point anyway, I possess. Rather than fall into abstraction, therefore, and drag the reader with me into arid discussions of disembodied ideas and "problems," I preferred not to stray too far from the individual plays and to allow myself and the reader to be guided and supported by them. My exposition thus follows in some measure the process of my own reading and reflection.

This explains why the selection of plays is somewhat arbitrary. It is so not because these plays best illustrate certain arguments and theories—which would hardly be arbitrary at all—but because it was from these plays that I actually set out. I could have added others, but this would have made the book rather longer than I wanted it to be. I preferred to stick to my original group of plays and to discuss or allude to others in the conclusion. Nonetheless, I am aware that the selection of plays pinpoints a shortcoming in this study. As I shall insist shortly, I tried to view Molière in the context of the experience and thought of his age. But while I think I have taken account of Molière's work in its historical situation, I do not think I have taken sufficient account of the historical development of his work itself. I have concentrated so much on the first, which it seemed to me important to do, that I have to some degree deprived Molière of his own historical evolution, by considering his work as a static bloc rather than in its dynamic growth and in its relation to possible developments of his position in the world and of his attitudes. Thus my division of the plays into two types—the *Misanthrope* type and the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* type—may well be rather formalistic, and a fuller study of Molière would, I suspect, require that it be considerably refined. Above all it would have to be made dynamic by being set in concrete relation to the changing situation of the author, to movements in his own life and in that of his society, and to his own intellectual growth and deepening understanding of the world.

While I think it is only honest to admit this shortcoming in the present study, I do not think that I have been entirely un-historical in my approach. It might be said that I have anachronistically applied twentieth-century ideas to a seventeenth-century writer, and I could hardly deny that reading certain nineteenth-and twentieth-century philosophers or moralists (in the French sense of *moralistes*) opened my eyes to many things I had not noticed before, or at least helped me to formulate notions that had hitherto been ill-defined. Nevertheless, almost all the categories on which my reading of Molière's texts rests
are brilliantly defined by Pascal, and in case anyone should think that
the analysis of vanity and pride was a prerogative of Pascal or of La
Rochefoucauld in the seventeenth century, I would suggest that the
late Professor Lovejoy's Reflections on Human Nature (Baltimore,
1961) could be looked into with profit. From Lecture IV onward,
Lovejoy produces countless texts of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and
eighteenth centuries in which the problems of human behavior are
analyzed according to the categories that I have tried to apply to the
comedies of Molière. If these strike us as "modern" in some respects,
it is simply because, during the heydey of positivism, which is not yet
over, we forgot a great number of useful and important ideas. To
people of a more positivist cast of mind, indeed, many of my categories
may appear "old-fashioned."

My occasional confrontations of Molière with more recent and even
with very recent writers may cause misgivings in some readers. My in­
tention was to emphasize the present meaningfulness and relevance of
Molière, not merely as an entertainer, but as an artist and in a sense
as a seer, which almost every great artist has been in some degree.
Molière belongs to the seventeenth century, but he also belongs to us,
as every great writer of the past does. In pointing out the historical
roots of a writer's work, we should aim not to imprison it in the past
but to make it even more meaningful to the present.

There are many approaches to literature and many ways of opening
up the immense treasures that are contained in the great texts. For my
own part I am sorry that I did not look more closely into formal mat­
ters than I did. But each critic contributes as he can. If I communicate
even a part of the pleasure and instruction I myself have derived from
reading, seeing, and reflecting on the comedies of Molière, and if I add
anything at all to the reader's understanding of them I shall be well
content. For the critic's task, I believe, is not to exhaust the work,
not to substitute his work for it, but to serve it. "Cependant, ce lecteur
mimétique (i.e., the critic), si proche de l'auteur qu'il est plus intime à
l'auteur que l'auteur lui-même, il n'est pas l'auteur," writes Jean
Rousset in a recent book (Forme et signification [Paris, 1962]). "Il
ne compose pas l'oeuvre, il la revit pour en dégager la composition, il
l'explore pour la montrer. ( . . . ) Sans l'opération du critique, l'oeuvre
court le risque de demeurer invisible. Comment serait-elle sentie si elle
n'a pas été comprise et révélée? Mais il faut en convenir, cet acte
indispensable à son existence ne la remplace pas. C'est le para­
doxe de la critique, et peut-être son drame: l'oeuvre a besoin de la critique,
c'est-à-dire d'un regard qui la pénètre, mais la critique tend à se con-
stituer en œuvre de l'œuvre, en un au-delà de l'œuvre, où l'œuvre
est tout entière, sauf sa présence. Cette présence concrète, la critique
ne pourra jamais en fournir l'équivalent; elle nous donne toute l'œuvre,
mais quelque chose nous échappe, ce contact charnel qu'est l'œuvre
même.”

Baltimore, Maryland                         Lionel Gossman
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