

Aping the Nobility

The Monkey Paintings of David Teniers the Younger in their Social Context

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Introduction

Most paintings by David Teniers the Younger are not difficult to understand. Peasants dance at gatherings outside of their homes or local taverns and drinkers sit inside taverns relaxing after a hard day's work. Teniers' paintings tend not to have critical undertones. Instead they are just pleasant depictions of people living and enjoying their lives. The paintings are of course idealized, there is no evidence of hardship or discontent. One can imagine that these scenes were pleasing to Teniers' overwhelmingly aristocratic viewers. While they represented the upper – crust of society, those beneath them were also happy and healthy, and simply content to play their role. An overwhelming majority of Teniers' paintings fit this description and Teniers' contemporary biographer Cornelis de Bie wrote that Teniers' paintings were indeed very popular with aristocratic viewers.¹ Teniers was a court painter who was clearly aiming to please his patron, the Arch Duke of the Southern Netherlands², so it is not surprising that he painted so many canvases of cheerful peasants.

Teniers worked in many genres aside from the peasant scenes for which he was so well known. He also painted histories, portraits, religious paintings, and monkeys. While history paintings, religious works, and portraiture were obviously acceptable genres for such a prestigious painter to work in, Teniers' monkey paintings are a bit more puzzling. De Bie, when discussing Teniers' various motifs, includes the monkey paintings as one of the fine painting types that Teniers was known for³, yet they stand out as a quirky exception to Teniers' mostly traditional paintings. Monkeys wearing extravagant and luxurious clothing sit in taverns, drinking, smoking, and playing games. It is impossible to deny that these paintings are quite funny, but this is also a confusing point. At first glance the monkey paintings seem to be satires of the nobility, but considering that Teniers had many aristocratic patrons it is necessary to question this interpretation. Insulting your patrons is not a smart move for an artist, especially one

¹ Cornelis de Bie, *Het Gulden Cabinet van de Edel Vry Schilderconst (1661)*, (Soest: Davaco Publishers, 1971), 337.

² Margret Klinge, "David Teniers and the Theater of Painting" in *David Teniers and the Theater of Painting*, edited by Ernst Vegelin van Claerbergen, (London: Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery in Association with Paul Holberton Publishing, 2006), 13.

³ De Bie, 336.

like Teniers who was particularly dependent on his aristocratic patrons. The following chapters will address this problem. Teniers works were painted to please the nobility who were essential to his financial and artistic success, so why would he produce paintings in which the nobility, and essentially his patrons, are compared to apes in fancy clothing?

Attempting to identify what Teniers was really intending to convey in his monkey paintings is important for several reasons. First, it has been noted that the majority of Teniers' oeuvre is comprised of simple, pleasing, and easily to understood paintings. Scholarship concerning Teniers' work usually focuses on these paintings and the influence that they had on later artists through reproduction. Of the 319 prints made after Teniers in France, the vast majority of them are of peasants or taverns; only 3 are of monkeys.⁴ Although the monkey paintings are not represented in prints, which demonstrates a lack of interest in them among 18th century print collectors, some artists took over a limited scope of the motif. For example Jean- Baptiste Simeon Chardin utilized Teniers' depiction of a monkey painter and connoisseur, but did not paint monkeys as noblemen. Researching Teniers paintings of apes dressed as the nobility therefore encourages investigation of Teniers work from a different angle. Rather than looking at the later effect of the paintings, attention will be given to what may have inspired them. The following discussion of Teniers' ape paintings will focus on sociological factors, such as social mobility and attitudes towards class structure in the 17th century as a means to try and better understand why Teniers may have chosen to paint apes dressed as the nobility.

Placing the monkey paintings in their contemporary social context also provides an opportunity to look at Teniers' paintings and ambitions out-side of emblematic tradition. It has become very common for scholars to rely on emblems or Medieval and Renaissance traditions to explain Early Modern works of art. In the case of Teniers' ape paintings this approach simply does not work. Because these "go to" methods are insufficient and focus only on negative moral lessons, it is important to look at the social factors that may have been influential in Teniers' decision to make his ape paintings. Social practices and ideas are rarely discussed beyond the fact that Teniers had

⁴ Vivian Lee Atwater, *A Catalogue and Analysis of Eighteenth Century French Prints After Netherlandish Baroque Paintings*. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1988), 279.

aristocratic patrons. However, the social climate had become rather dynamic by the mid 17th century, with a dramatic increase in upward social mobility. As a result there were many groups of people jockeying for positions as rich commoners wished to enter into the nobility. It is these social forces that will be used to try to better understand Teniers' ape paintings.

In order to understand why a sociological approach is necessary in the consideration of Teniers' ape paintings, the paintings will first be discussed in the framework of traditions of ape lore and apes in art. Theories that have been proposed to explain the ape paintings using conservative ideas of sin and folly will be discussed as well. Specific paintings and interpretations of them will be compared to what is known about Teniers and his patrons. Such a comparison will serve to establish why Teniers' paintings cannot be considered allegories for sin, or depictions of foolish excess.

Once it has been established that Teniers would not have been using apes as a means to criticize his patrons through alluding to them as sinners or fools, pertinent social issues will be discussed to establish a plausible explanation for the ape paintings that would also appeal to Teniers' patrons. First, the nobility as a class and how it had changed between the Middle Ages and the 17th century will be discussed. Concern over the function of the nobility, and what exactly it meant to be noble were of great concern throughout the 16th century and into the 18th.

During the 17th century the nobility faced an identity crisis, comprised of two parts. First, the nobility had to defend its existence as a unique class. In order to do so, the nobility increasingly emphasized heredity and cultural sophistication. Displays of wealth, education and etiquette were emphasized as a means of distinguishing the nobility from commoners. Second, the ambiguity of what exactly made a person noble allowed for an increase in the possibility of upward social mobility among some non-nobles. Commoners who had gained a large amount of wealth were increasingly interested in becoming members of the nobility. The emulation of the nobility by wealthy commoners and their attempts to gain titles was resisted by the established nobility, who tried to further distinguish themselves. This tension between hereditary nobility, newly established nobility, and the commoners who attempted to gain access to the nobility was a very prominent social issue among the upper-classes during the 17th

century. Establishing the fact that there were wealthy people who were not nobility, but did emulate it, and that the older nobility deeply resented this practice is very important in the discussion of Teniers' ape paintings. There were people other than the nobility that could have been the target of the parody.

No documentary evidence exists that Teniers was targeting social imposters who hoped to gain access to the nobility with his ape paintings. Therefore in order to support this theory, parallels in the other arts will be discussed. Absolutely essential to reinterpreting Teniers' ape paintings is the fact that in the 17th century emblems were used flexibly. Apes no longer only represented sin and folly. Writers used fables and emblems of apes in a variety of ways, liberating them from strictly Christian iconography. Emblems and fables that emphasize the imitative character of monkeys will be used to establish that viewers, especially viewers as educated as the nobility, would not have immediately assumed that an image of an ape was indicative of an allegory of sin.

It is also important to establish that aggressive social climbers would have been seen as a source of comedy in the 17th century. Abundant evidence of this can be found in literature. The French writer Molière will be discussed at length. Many of his plays deal with class and the comedic results of a commoner attempting to gain access to the nobility. Molière depicts social climbers as silly, foolish, buffoons, hopelessly attempting to emulate the superior nobility. As Louis XIV, the king of France, was Molière's most important patron, it is clear that these plays indeed were written for the amusement of the nobility.⁵ Molière's works are also relevant in the Low Countries; his work was very popular there and even inspired followers.⁶

Opera is another art form in which concerns of class and status are clearly expressed. In France classicism was used to reinforce the ideas that the monarchy and nobility were legitimate and important.⁷ While this is not a comic expression of class concerns as in Teniers' ape paintings and Molière's plays, there is nevertheless an

⁵ James F. Gains, *Social Structures in Molière's Theater*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986)155.

⁶ Reinder P. Meijer, *Literature of the Low Countries: A short history of Dutch literature in the Netherlands and Belgium*, (The Hague and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 158.

⁷ Don Fader "The 'cabale du Dauphin,' Campra and Italian Comedy: The courtly politics of French Musical Patronage around 1700" in *Music and Letters*, Vol. 86 Issue 3. (2005): 381.

underlying message of the importance of social stability and class boundaries. Eventually the connection becomes clearer between the social themes of the opera and the theater through the popularity of *Opera Buffa*, which is more explicitly concerned with comic social situations resulting from class differences.

Teniers' own biography is also relevant in discussing social climbing and attitudes of the nobility towards social climbers. It is frequently noted that Teniers himself was a social climber who was born a commoner and eventually petitioned the Spanish crown for a title. Unlike many social climbers, Teniers had reason to believe that he was a true member of the nobility because of his ancestry. Essentially Teniers represented a small third social group, commoners who believed themselves to be unrecognized hereditary nobility. One can imagine that the aggressive social climbing by wealthy commoners inhibited people like Teniers in their own pursuit of nobility. It seems entirely plausible that Teniers would have wished to separate himself from these social imposters and associate himself more closely with his noble patrons. Humor is one way to do so.

Through the use of historical and social context, parallels in literature and opera, and Teniers' biography, it will be made clear that Teniers' ape paintings are not criticism of the nobility or its sins. Instead paintings of apes dressed as the nobility are expressions of pertinent social attitudes concerning class and upward social mobility. I hope to demonstrate that Teniers' ape paintings are inside jokes for the nobility that actually helped to reinforce their social identity.

1. The Ape Paintings of David Teniers the Younger

David Teniers the Younger (1610 - 1690) was a prolific and influential artist in the Southern Netherlands. While best known for his numerous idealized peasant scenes, Teniers worked in many of the popular genres of the 17th century making his oeuvre quite diverse. Borrowing compositions and motifs from other artists, Teniers was able to produce commercially successful art by following in the footsteps of his predecessors and successful contemporaries, while infusing his paintings with his own unique artistic point of view.

Teniers' early works are very similar to those of Adriaen Brouwer. Brouwer introduced bawdy drunken peasant genre scenes to the Southern Netherlands which were imitated by many followers including Teniers.¹ Even the great Peter Paul Rubens was an admirer of Brouwer and owned at least one of his paintings.² Teniers early works can almost be mistaken for Brouwer's depictions of peasants in taverns. He often directly borrowed figures or compositions from Brouwer and then transformed them in his own variations. Teniers was so well known for his ability to imitate Brouwer that art dealer Andrew Musson even contracted Teniers to supply copies of Brouwer's works for his art trade.³ While it seems that Teniers occasionally copied Brouwer's works directly for the sake of business, his own works only borrow from Brouwer and remain distinctive. Even when Teniers directly copied figures from Brouwer the effect was quite different. There was something far less grotesque and vulgar in Teniers' work. His works have even been called naive and idealistic in comparison.⁴

Pieter Bruegel the Elder and his son Jan Bruegel the Elder are also frequently cited as major influences on Teniers' style. Teniers was directly connected to the Bruegel family and their artistic tradition through marriage; Jan Bruegel the Elder was

¹ Margret Klinge, *Adriaen Brouwer/ David Teniers the Younger: A loan exhibition of paintings* (New York 7-30 October and Maastricht 19 November -11 December: Noortman and Brod, 1982), 9.

² Klinge, *Adriaen Brouwer/ David Teniers the Younger*, 9.

³ Hans Vlieghe, *David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690): A Biography* (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2011), 12.

⁴ Pierre Poirier, *Un Siècle de Gravure Anversoise de Jérôme Sock à Jacques Jordaens de Dessin à L' Estampe Académie Royale de Belgique* (Bruxelles, 1967), 216.

Teniers' father in law.⁵ This connection between Teniers and the Bruegels is also visible in the similarities between Teniers' famous peasant dances and fests, and those of the Bruegels. Again, while it is true that Teniers borrows the themes of peasants drinking and feasting at outdoor parties from the Bruegels, the compositions are uniquely his. Like in his tavern scenes, Teniers' peasants are clean and idealized in their quaintness. He also uses a dramatically different palette of light silvery tones highlighted through bits of bright color.

Like most of Teniers' subject matter, his ape paintings are also part of a longer tradition. Monkeys were common as a literary device and appeared in manuscript illustration and prints, but their presence in painting was limited. Teniers did not invent the motif of apes in human clothing, but following the examples of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Jan Bruegel the Younger, he did innovate it and give it prominence in painting. Teniers' monkey paintings are unique and conceptually complicated in comparison to his other works. So while it is important to understand the artistic legacy from which his monkey paintings evolved, it is also important not to limit interpretations the paintings by attempting to fit them into traditional themes associated with apes. Although the literary tradition is strong, the artistic tradition is notably meager, leaving much room for artistic liberties to be taken.

Ape Paintings of David Teniers the Younger and Tradition

Monkeys and apes have a long tradition in the art of many cultures. Some of the oldest examples are from ancient Egypt where the baboon was considered sacred and monkeys and apes were used frequently as decorative motifs.⁶ Ancient examples are also found in Japanese, Indian, Greek, and Roman art and literature.⁷ Though the ape lore varies greatly from culture to culture, there is a fixation on the ape's ability and tendency to copy human behavior that is common to almost every tradition. Whether the ape's

⁵ Vlieghe, 15.

⁶ William Coffman Mc Dermott, *The Ape in Antiquity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), 12.

⁷ For Japanese examples see Ohnuki-Tierney (1995), for Indian Examples see Mc Dermott (1938) 76 and Rawson (1977) 56, for Greek examples see Mc Dermott (1935), and for Roman examples see Mc Dermott (1936).

behavior is seen as comic, foolish, or evil, is not only dependent on the culture, but also its the time period and appearance. In India apes were associated with the warrior Hanumān, who in the epic the Rāmāyana is a brave and clever hero of Vishnu.⁸ Later in India the “clever” ability of apes to copy humans was taken advantage of in a far less flattering way. In his account of the life of Apollonius, Greek philosopher Flavius Philostratus provides an account that demonstrates the exploitation of the monkeys’ human like behavior in order to harvest peppers. He writes that the Indians pick a few peppers during the day and toss them into shallow pits, acting like the peppers are of no value. Over night the monkeys copy this behavior and harvest the peppers from the tops of the trees which were otherwise difficult for the people to reach.⁹

The literary meaning of apes and their representation in art varies dramatically through the ages in almost every culture. Early Japanese culture revered the ape as a sacred animal that was so pure that their eyes and anus were described as glowing with light.¹⁰ However, over time their status deteriorated and they became viewed as wild and evil. Comparisons of negative ape behavior and negative behaviors of man became so common that many Japanese insults derive from them.¹¹ The western Christian tradition is no different; interpretations of apes and their mimicry, as well as their representation in art, evolve over time.

Early Christian writers and theologians considered monkeys and apes to be evil, going so far as to refer to enemies of the church and Christ as apes.¹² This idea was so prominent that it even permeated medieval science. The most important example of a

⁸ Jessica Rawson, *Animals in Art* (London: British Museum Publications Ltd., 1977), 56.

⁹ Flavius Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: The epistles of Apollonius and the treatise of Eusebius*. Original Greek with an English translation by F.C. Conybear. (London and New York: William Heinemann and G.P. Putnam’s sons, 1927), Vol.1 Book III Chapter IV, 239.

¹⁰ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, “Representations of the Monkey (Saru) in Japanese Culture” in *Ape, Man, Apeman: Changing views since 1600*, ed. Teymond Corbey and Bert Theunissen (Leiden: Leiden University, 1995), 301.

¹¹ Ohnuki-Tierney 301-303. Examples of these words include *sarumane* “monkey imitation” which is the superficial copying of others, and *saru ni ebōshi* “a fancy hat for a monkey”, meaning that a person does something inappropriate for their status.

¹² H.W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1952), 16.

medieval scientific work on animals is the 10th century *Bestiary*.¹³ The *Bestiary* is a collection of texts that describes the natural qualities of animals and their habitats. These natural qualities are then used as tools to teach religious and moral lessons.¹⁴ In the *Bestiary* monkeys and apes are explicitly associated with the devil due to their ugly and misshapen form.¹⁵ While apes were commonly compared to the devil in rhetoric, there are very few images that illustrate this idea. The concept of the ape as a personification of the devil was not long lived which may in part explain its lack of depiction in art. Zoological texts written in the 12th century mark a departure from this point of view. Christian writers then began to regard apes as sinners who had fallen victim to the Devil.¹⁶ One can imagine that this is an important ideological turning point. Apes were viewed as foolish and sinful rather than evil which was a far less intimidating status. It was not until this shift in the conception of what an ape represented that it became popular in western art. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries apes increasingly appear in manuscript marginalia parodying various human activities or playing musical instruments as a drollery.¹⁷

During the Renaissance, the ape's place in the art of the Low Countries and Germany evolves from a marginal decorative motif to an important emblematic element, or occasionally even an independent subject matter. However, it was not until the 16th century, when the ape's importance as a signifier of evil in Christian rhetoric dramatically decreased, that they became sources of purely comic mockeries as grotesque depictions of people.¹⁸ This change is once again reflected in art. During the sixteenth century apes were particularly popular in paintings as a representation of the foolish qualities of man.¹⁹ A painting that is frequently discussed as an early example of apes as victims of sin rather

¹³ A. Th. Bouwman, "Het dier in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde" in *Mijn Naam is Haas: Dierenverhalen in Verschillende Culturen*, edited by W.L. Idema, Mineke Schipper, and P.H. Schrijvers, (Baarn: Uitgeverij AMBO, 1993), 58.

¹⁴ J. Barclay Lloyd, *African Animals in Renaissance Art and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 7.

¹⁵ Lloyd, 11.

¹⁶ Janson, 31.

¹⁷ Janson, 55.

¹⁸ Pamela J. Asquith, "Of Monkeys and Men: Cultural Views in Japan and the West" in *Ape, Man, Ape man: Changing views since 1600*, edited by Raymond Corbey and Bert Theunissen, (Leiden: Leiden University, 1995), 310.

¹⁹ *Colnaghi: Old Master Paintings 2008* (London: 2008), 26.

than embodiments of evil is Peter Bruegel the Elder's *Two Monkeys* of 1562 [Figure 1]. The two monkeys are seen chained to a ledge in front of a city with a scattered broken nutshell in front of them. Margret A. Sullivan points out that according to Christian teaching the fettered ape represents man enslaved by sin, and in the humanist tradition nuts represent greed.²⁰ Sullivan cannot however provide evidence that Bruegel meant for these monkeys to be interpreted in this manner. It is just as likely that Bruegel painted the apes because they were a new object of curiosity in the Low Countries. Monkeys were popular gifts and pets among people rich enough to afford them; so popular, that sailors who traveled to exotic places brought them back to Europe to sell as supplemental income.²¹ In either case, the monkey was no longer considered a sinister creature and was appealing enough to viewers to be the main subject of a painting.

Teniers' paintings of apes engaging in human vices are connected to the tradition of viewing apes as an allegory of folly or sin. *Monkeys Drinking and Smoking* which is dated to the 1660's [Figure 2], is an example of this group of paintings that use apes to emphasize the activities of sinners. Four apes sit in front of a dark background. There is little setting except for a shoddy wooden bench with a stoneware jug placed on it and a red earthenware dish for stoking coals. Only two of the apes are actually smoking. Both of the smoking apes are dressed slightly more ornately than the two which are not. The smoking apes have buttons on their shirts and hats with feathers in them. One of the smoking apes is seated opposite of the other three. It is dressed in bright red and wears a small sword. This is of special interest because in the Southern Netherlands as well as in France during the 17th century, the carrying of a sword was one of the few definitive indications that a man was a member of the nobility.²² Other symbols of class and status, such as elegant clothing, were also available to rich commoners: a fact that made distinguishing marks such as a sword far more significant. Therefore the inclusion of this sword makes it clear that we are looking at a variety of classes, ranging from at the very

²⁰ Margret A. Sullivan, "Peter Bruegel the Elder's *Two Monkeys*: A new interpretation" in *The art Bulletin* Vol.63 No.1 (March 1981), 123.

²¹ Almudena Pérez de Tudela and Annemarie Jordan Geschwend, "Renaissance Menageries: Exotic animals and pets at the Habsburg courts in Iberia and Central Europe" in *Early Modern Zoology: The construction of animals in science, literature and the visual arts*. Edited by Karl A.E. Enenkel and Paul J. Smith (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 422.

²² Ellery Schalk, *From valor to Pedigree: Ideas of Nobility in France in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 149.

least poor commoners, to what is likely a wealthy commoner, and a nobleman (or rather noble-ape). One ape holds up a glass of what appears to be wine, while the ape in red holds a stoneware drinking tankard. The last ape, one clearly of the common class, bends down to cut more tobacco on a simple wooden plank.

Much like Teniers' paintings of human drinkers and smokers, *Monkeys Drinking and Smoking* is tame compared to the crude drinkers of Adriaen Brouwer. Rather than a more explicit depiction of unsavory behavior, which can be seen in the works of Brouwer, for example in his *Tavern Scene* painted in the 1630's [Figure 3], the critique of the behavior in *Monkeys Drinking and Smoking* is conveyed only through the popular idea of the time that apes were foolish animals,²³ so for a contemporary viewer the monkeys clearly represented negative human behaviors and qualities. The moral is implied through an expected familiarity with the general idea that apes are foolish animals. This point is made even more clearly in 18th century prints made after *Monkeys Drinking and Smoking*. In 1770 Caldwell published a print of Teniers' painting that included the caption "Simia quam similis turpissima bestia nobis" or "Do Chattering Monkeys mimick men, or we turn'd Apes outmonkie them?"²⁴ The moral is concerning the general foolishness of man and is not specific to sin.

Another example, *Apes in a Tavern* [Figure 4], is very similar to Teniers' typical tavern interiors of men drinking and smoking. A group of apes is gathered in the foreground. Some of the apes play cards and others sit drinking and smoking while watching the card game. There is also a second group of apes in the background situated around a table. It is not possible to see exactly what they are doing except that they are clearly drinking and smoking. In this painting, the apes are undoubtedly in a tavern interior rather than simply presented in front of an unspecific dark background, as is the case in *Monkeys Drinking and Smoking*. Day light comes through one of the windows high up on the left hand wall. All of the apes wear clothing, which varies in its degree of ornamentation. One ape carries a sword, again suggesting a mixing of the classes. The objects in the room also indicate that the location is not at all a place of luxury. All of the objects, such as the jugs and glasses are very average. The composition of *Apes in a*

²³ Colnaghi: *Old Master Paintings 2007* (London, 2007), 25.

²⁴ Colnaghi: *Old Master Paintings 2007*, 25.

Tavern, the quality of the clothing of the apes, and the quality of the objects in the room are very reminiscent of Teniers' 1645 painting *Card Players* [Figure 5], which is now in the Louvre.

Card playing in itself had rather negative connotations in the 17th century. Teniers' card players are often assumed to indicate a worthless waste of time.²⁵ However, while some of his early tavern interiors were as overtly satirical as Brouwer's, later in Teniers' career there is nothing explicitly satirical about the scenes. In many cases, including *Card Players* in the Louvre, Teniers depicts a quiet game of cards, in which no one appears to be overly intoxicated or lowly. Margret Klinge has recently suggested that Teniers was attempting in fact to present a more positive view of playing cards as a relaxing activity.²⁶ *Apes in a Tavern* was painted in the later period of his career, when Teniers painted many tavern scenes void of critique of the peasantry.

Like their human counterparts, there is very little to indicate that these apes are committing any moral folly with the obvious exception of the activities of drinking and smoking. They are every bit as calm and content as the humans playing cards. In *Apes in a Tavern* Teniers does provide one extra clue that the apes are fools however; the ape dispensing the drinks is dressed in a fool's costume. Teniers used this fools cloak in many of his ape paintings. The presence of the fool and the sinful connotations of drinking and smoking bring to mind some sort of critique, or at least comic mocking. However, it has already been noted that Teniers had moved away from criticizing drinkers and smokers. Because of this change in the character of Teniers' tavern scenes, it is valid to reevaluate what he may have been poking fun at with his monkeys. It is possible that he was not at all concerned with sin or drinking, and was in fact inventing new themes of monkeys in art.

Teniers did not focus on apes as sinners, but rather focused on their foolish qualities. His monkey paintings are most closely related to the engravings of Pieter Van der Borcht (1545-1608), who produced a series of prints in which apes are dressed as

²⁵ Natalya Babiba and Natalia Gritsay, *State Hermitage Museum Catalogue: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Flemish Painting* (New Haven & London: Hermitage Publishing House in association with Yale University Press, 2007), 336.

²⁶ Margret Klinge, *Adriaen Brouwer/ David Teniers the Younger*, 86.

humans while engaged in daily activities.²⁷ Apes do everything from having banquets, going to school, or engaging in sea battles. They are not at all engaged in sin and also do not seem to be fools. This innovative new use of apes in a genre context had a great impact on seventeenth century painters such as Frans Francken II and David Teniers the Younger in their use of apes. One particularly interesting example is *The Nursery* [Figure 6], an interior in which apes dressed as women take part in a variety of domestic chores. Some clean or spin wool, while others tend to the young monkeys by nursing infants, rocking a cradle, and switching a younger ape. The disciplining of the youngster in itself demonstrates that apes were not meant to be viewed as evil or void of morality in this print. Instead they punish bad behavior just as any respectable person would. There is nothing overtly critical or moralizing about it, which has led to some ambiguity as to whether these prints should be considered in the tradition of apes used in a didactic function such as parody, or if they are simply an extension of the drolleries medieval marginalia. In either case, the invention of apes in genre scenes by van der Borcht can be regarded as direct predecessors to Teniers' ape paintings.²⁸

Much like van der Borcht, Teniers painted his apes in a variety of daily settings. Also like his predecessor, Teniers avoided overt moralizing in his monkey paintings. Instead, as we have seen, Teniers prefers to rely on the assumption that his viewer would have understood that they were viewing images of parody. However, just like in the print series of van der Borcht this ambiguity does lead to some puzzling examples.

Monkeys in the Kitchen from the 1640's [Figure 7], now in the Hermitage museum, is one of these works. A group of apes is seen in a kitchen that is largely undecorated. Most of them do not wear any clothing at, but some have caps. Many of the apes sit quietly on the floor and eat fruit and bread, however a few sit around a large but plain kitchen table. A pot hangs over the fire to cook, and some dried meats hang from the ceiling. Though there are jugs and barrels of drinks, the apes do not seem to be intoxicated. One ape is distinguished from the group by his bright red cap and the high stool that he sits on, but otherwise they are all very similar in appearance.

²⁷ *The New Hollstein Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts: 1450-1700*, edited by Ger Luitan (Rotterdam: Sound and Vision Publishers, 2004), 210.

²⁸ Janson, 169.

The authors of the catalogue of the Hermitage Museum deduced that Teniers intended there to be a hidden moral in *Monkeys in the Kitchen* by comparing it to a similar painting by Frans Francken II in the Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum. It is noted that the Francken painting of monkeys in a kitchen includes in it a painting of gluttonous people above the fireplace of the kitchen, which emphasizes the apes' sinful behavior.²⁹ The apes are then identifiable as foolish gluttons, a point that Francken emphasizes through their wild appearance. It is interesting however, that a painting of people within the painting of apes is necessary to clarify that the apes are sinners. This indicates that there is indeed a disconnection between apes and the notion of sin in the 17th century. Since the apes in Tenier's painting are not engaged in gluttony and unlike in Francken's painting there is no explicit indication that they are meant to be viewed in this light, the projection of moralizing messages onto this group of apes based only on the similarities with the Francken piece, seems to be a bit of a stretch.

Margret Klinge has proposed that rather than being a commentary on gluttony, *Monkeys in a Kitchen* is instead a more general commentary on wealth and excess. She argues that Francken's "fat kitchen" typology cannot be extended to Teniers piece and suggests instead that the glassware in the painting is an indication that the moral is one of excessive wealth rather than gluttony. Klinge also relies on the symbolism of fruit as sin as the "key" to understanding that there is symbolism in the piece, but argues that the glass wear is the most important symbolic element.³⁰ She remarks that while the food is not "fat" per say, the wine glasses are a mark of conspicuous consumption.³¹ While luxury goods were surely used as a means of distinguishing class, both in reality and in painting, in the case of Teniers it is important to look at his general use of objects before jumping to any conclusions about their possible iconography. Late in Teniers' career he always used objects appropriate to the class of the people in his paintings, but this was not the case in his early works. In fact in *The Lute Player* [Figure 8], which was painted in two versions probably between 1635 and the 1640's, the exact same wineglasses and stoneware jug that are in *Monkeys in a Kitchen* are seen in a low class pub. While this

²⁹ Babina and Gritsay, 369.

³⁰ Margret Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge: Schilderijen, Tekeningen* (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 11 May – 1 September, 1991), 132.

³¹ Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge*, 132.

does not disprove Klinge's interpretation of the objects, it does invite further examination. One could still question if Teniers intended for the apes in *Monkeys in a Kitchen* to be foolish or sinful, or if he was simply interested in exploring a comic motif.

In this same Hermitage catalogue it is suggested that the kitchen does indeed have moralizing undertones, asserting that the fruit is indicative of original sin while the ape sitting on the stool with the red cap is a commentary on class.³² However, if this is indeed the case, the class critique is muddled by the fact that one of the apes sitting on the floor carries a sword, which indicates that he is a member of the nobility, while the ape on the stool does not carry one. Does this then mean that the ape on the stool is then of higher rank but lower in class? Walter Liedtke has introduced the idea that it is possible that this kitchen is actually meant to be a guardhouse, in which case the question would be about military rank rather than normal class as such.³³ But with the attributes of typical guardhouses lacking, such as weapons and armor, Liedtke's argument is also questionable. Furthermore, the role of class, and above all the nobility, was just as important in civilian society as it was in the military. Thus, a critique of rank and class within a military context is almost congruent to the civilian situation. It is irrelevant whether it is a guard house or not, Teniers could easily have meant there to be a commentary on status, rank, and class in *Monkeys in a Kitchen*.

Though many of Teniers' ape paintings are not dated, through stylistic comparison the examples that have been discussed thus far date from the middle to the end of Teniers' long career. The subdued browns with translucent accent colors over them suggest dates ranging from the 1640's to the 1660's. However in the 1630's, during the earliest years of his career, Teniers produced ape paintings that are dramatically different in character from the examples that have been presented so. Apes are dressed exclusively as the elite and as soldiers that drinking and playing games in their beautiful uniforms. They are always among their own class, and they are in settings that are associated with nobility or the military. This is striking in comparison to his later works in which apes are dressed as a variety of classes, sitting in pubs. Even if one accepts the

³² Babina and Gritsay, 369.

³³ Walter Liedtke, "Dutch and Flemish Paintings from the Hermitage: Some notes to an exhibiton catalogue, with special attention to Rembrandt, van Dyck and Jordaens" in *Old Holland* Vol. 103 (1989), 166.

premise that paintings like *Monkeys Drinking and Smoking* are meant to criticize foolish or sinful behavior, it is difficult to explain why Teniers, in paintings of apes dressed as the elite, would have exclusively attacked the faults of the upper class. After all, the nobility was the class most likely to buy Teniers' works. By considering these early paintings more carefully it may be possible to identify a reason for his critique of the apparently upper and military class apes of these paintings as well as an underlying mentality that is characteristic of all of his ape paintings.

Early Works: Apes Dressed as the Elite

To begin a discussion of David Teniers the Younger's very unconventional early ape paintings, it is good to begin with what is likely the first. *Monkey Party* [Figure 9] is possibly the only ape painting actually dated by the artist. Teniers painted the date 1633 on the coat of arms that hangs over the barrels of drink. This means that it was painted only one year after Teniers joined the Antwerp St. Luke's Guild in 1632.³⁴ Though the painting is titled *Monkey Party*, it is clearly a military encampment. Tents are set up in front of what seems to be somewhat of a guardhouse. There is a meat stall on the right side and attending to it is an ape dressed in elaborate women's clothing. A group of apes that are dressed as soldiers wearing brightly colored uniforms sit in front of the tents. They are smoking and drinking while another ape in an elaborate bright red uniform carries fruit to them. There are also apes present that can be assumed to be of a lower class, but they are limited to the periphery. One is being escorted into the guardhouse in the background, while two others, which are apparently foot soldiers, sit and load their weapons.

Attached to the foremost tent is an emblem that hangs above the main group of apes. It is an owl with a candle and glasses. Understandably, this emblem is often thought to be the key to this piece. Margret Klinge has also written about this piece and identified the proverb "wat baeten kaers of bril, als den uijl niet sien wil?" as the source of the emblem.³⁵ This means "what good are a candle and glasses if the owl doesn't want

³⁴ Jane P. Davidson, *David Teniers the Younger* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 4.

³⁵ Margret Klinge and Lüdke Dietmar eds., *David Teniers der Jüngere 1610-1690: Alltag und Vergnügen in Flandern* (Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe: Karlsruhe, 2005), 90.

to see?”³⁶ Klinge describes the emblem as a warning that one needs to be aware of their sinful and foolish behavior.³⁷

According to Klinge there are also elements of *Vanitas* and carnal sin in the painting, again warning the viewer of the possible consequences of the apes' actions. Sins of the flesh could be symbolized by a variety of sumptuous objects, however meat stalls, especially those run by women, have long been regarded as a symbol of carnal sin.³⁸ Sexual and gluttonous temptations can be implied at once. It is not a stretch that Teniers has used the meat stall in this way.³⁹ There would be very little other reason for it to be included.

Vanitas symbolism is often believed to be a central element of Teniers' exquisitely painted objects. Various aspects of his meticulously painted still life passages, or of the even seemingly incidental objects in his paintings of peasant dances and pub interiors, have often had such meanings projected on to them. In *Monkey Party* Klinge, believes that the *vanitas* element is the foot soldier monkey who sits with his back to the viewer while loading musket balls into his gun.⁴⁰ The implication of a killing instrument in the midst of merry- making could very well be an indication of the transience of worldly pleasure. Symbols of transience are well associated with Teniers. For example broken clay pipes are often considered *vanitas* symbolism in Teniers' paintings.⁴¹ These pipes are often said to imply the brevity of life and earthly pleasures. However, it is also important keep in mind that one of the most important qualities that made Teniers' works unique and desirable was his uncanny ability to paint objects and textures as they really existed. A saying about his work expressed this well: “show me a pipe and I will tell you if the painting is a Teniers.”⁴² Why it is accepted that these clay pipes are indeed symbols of *vanitas*, the loading of a weapon is not so common in this context. It is

³⁶ My own translation.

³⁷ Margret Klinge and Lüdke Dietmar, 90.

³⁸ J.A. Emmens, “‘Eins Aber ist Nötig’ Zu Inhalt und Bedeutung von Markt- und Küchenstücken des 16. Jahrhunderts” in *J.A. Emmens Verzameld Werk - Deel 4*, (Amsterdam: G.A. Van Oorschot, 1981), 198.

³⁹ Klinge and Dietmar, 90.

⁴⁰ Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge*, 34.

⁴¹ Babina and Gritsay, 441.

⁴² My own Translation. For original text see Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge*, 18. “Toon mij een pijp en ik zal u zeggen of het een schilderij van Teniers is.”

therefore possible that elements such as the ape loading a weapon were added to give a sense of realism and naturalism rather than imbed any specific meaning.

Although Klinge's argument that the monkey loading a weapon is included as a symbol of transience or *vanitas* is plausible, it is far from obvious or conclusive. The ape loading his musket is impossible to miss, seated just right of the main ape, which may suggest that it is indeed of a greater importance, though not as a symbol of *vanitas*. Considering Teniers' tendency to include objects that enriched his compositions and scenes, it is possible that Teniers was emphasizing the military occupation of these apes through this detail. The foot soldier loading his weapon makes it clear that these apes represent military professionals rather than members of a more general elite class enjoying a day out. Musket loading then becomes important as a clarifying element in the guise of an incidental detail. Klinge herself is a proponent of the idea that the military aspect of the painting is indeed of some importance. Even though Klinge acknowledges that the military aspect of *Monkey Party* is important, she still maintains that *vanitas* is the main theme of the painting. This ridged focus on sin and other traditional moralizing ideas is extremely limiting. Military officers, the soldiers under them and their respective behaviors were complex and rich with social issues that were significant at the time. Because of the specificity of the military context, it is important to fully understand these themes in order to accurately analyze *Monkey Party*.

Underneath the owl emblem are the words BON VIN DAY, which, although it is not in any one language, is a mix of French and English that probably means "good wine day."⁴³ Clearly the slogan, regardless of the odd use of language, is in reference to the cheerful character of the drinking apes. The slogan BON VIN DAY leads Klinge to interpret this painting as a critique of specific behaviors.⁴⁴ Over indulging in drinking is the most obvious of the questionable activities in which the monkeys are engaged. While it is safe to assume that BON VIN DAY does allude to drinking, it is important not to ignore the linguistic element of the slogan. What is Teniers' trying to communicate to his viewer through the misuse of two foreign languages? During the 17th century education

⁴³ My own translation

⁴⁴ Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge*, 34.

became an increasingly important distinction of the nobility.⁴⁵ By including the slogan BON VIN DAY, which is essentially gibberish, Teniers may have been revealing to his viewers that these apes were not proper nobility, and are instead rather silly imposters.

Klinge makes a very interesting remark, implying that there is an added significance to the bad behavior in this painting because of the military costumes. She argues that because of the military uniforms, the apes here are not just a commentary on the general bad behavior of people, but more specifically they emphasize the questionable behavior of the military.⁴⁶ Though she does not elaborate on this idea, Klinge's introduction of the notion that Teniers was specifically interested in criticizing the military is very interesting and becomes quite pertinent in the context of Teniers' following ape painting.

Monkey Guardhouse [Figure 10] is likely the ape painting that chronologically follows *Monkey Party*. Even though, like many of Teniers' paintings, *Monkey Guardhouse* is not dated, the date can be deduced rather easily. A dated 1635 self-portrait shows Teniers in his studio surrounded by paintings, *Monkey Guardhouse* being one of them.⁴⁷ Therefore this painting was produced after his entering the guild of St. Luke (1632/33), but before 1635. Like *Monkey Party*, *Monkey Guardhouse* also has an explicitly military theme. It is nighttime and we see the interior of a guardhouse. It is very dark with areas of local light provided by candles and fires. Most of the apes are sitting around various tables and are engaged in activities such as drinking, playing cards and backgammon, and smoking. Two of the apes in the far back of the scene are already so inebriated that they have fallen asleep. The main scene is on the far right of the painting. An ape bearing a torch provides dramatic lighting for the scene which emphasizes the central narrative element. It is a dramatic scene in which two ape soldiers bring a cat into the guardhouse and present it to the captain ape.

Once again there are obvious negative implications of apes drinking, smoking, and gambling; they are fools giving into worldly temptations and committing sins. Even

⁴⁵ Ellery Schalk, 177.

⁴⁶ Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge*, 34. "Het blijft niet bij een loutere imitatie van het menselijke gedrag: voorzin van militaire attributen en gekleed als soldaten, voeren de apen meer bepaald de bedenkelijke militaire praktijken te tonele. Bij nadra beschouwing blijkt immers dat de als soldaten en officieren verklede apen het er in her mooie weer voor hun tenten goed van nemen."

⁴⁷ Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge*, 38.

the cat is sometimes interpreted an indication of worldly sin, or more specifically carnal sin. Margret Klinge again has been the only scholar to attempt an interpretation of this painting. According to Klinge, the reason that the buttons on the cat's jacket are undone, and that it has a shocked or embarrassed expression on its face, is that Teniers wished to insinuate that the cat had been caught in an indecent amorous incident.⁴⁸ Implied indecent sexual behavior would fit nicely with Klinge's notion that this painting is primarily about carnal sin, but this interpretation is questionable. This interpretation is indeed quite a stretch considering there is no precedence in literature or other artworks to suggest that the cat was caught in a sexual act. Unlike the meat stall in *Monkey Party*, there is no iconographic tradition that would lead the viewer to immediately assume that the cat is a symbol of carnal sin. Emblems that include cats vary so greatly that it is unlikely that anyone would immediately jump to the conclusion that this cat was guilty of lust. Once again, just as in *Monkey Party*, a discussion of the military elements is more pertinent than unsupported arguments concerning sin.

In 2008 Colnaghi acquired *Monkey Guardhouse*, at which time they published a short catalogue entry on it. In this entry a newer idea proposed by Klinge, who had examined the painting for the gallery, is provided. It states that Klinge now believes that the painting may be less of an indication of sin, and more a critique of inflated military ranks.⁴⁹ One of the apes has a pot on his head, while another wears some sort of funnel as a helmet. Klinge believes these attributes are meant to indicate the foolishness of the men in their military positions.⁵⁰ No other supporting evidence is provided for the argument that *Monkey Guardhouse* is an intentional critique of military ranks.

I would howeverd like to propose that Klinge is indeed correct in her second interpretation of the painting. Corrupted officials and occupations that were considered to be sinful were often parodied in art through the use of apes. Even in the manuscript marginalia of the Middle Ages there are examples of apes dressed as knights and monks.⁵¹ A viewer would have likely been able to understand that the apes were a parody of the military profession and the ranks that they held. There is ample historical

⁴⁸ Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge*, 38.

⁴⁹ *Colnaghi: Old Master Paintings 2008*, 28.

⁵⁰ *Colnaghi: Old Master Paintings 2008*, 28.

⁵¹ Janson, 168.

evidence to suggest that a critique of military men would have been a pertinent topic during the 1630's in the Southern Netherlands. Military rank was a complicated issue that directly related to noble status and tradition, a practice that was becoming increasingly criticized in the 17th century, a point that I will return to in detail the following chapter.

A Common Link: Ape Paintings in the Context of Class Issues

One last painting, *Monkey Banquet* [Figure 11] is very important to consider here, because it unites elements of both Teniers' early ape paintings and their unusual character with the more traditional use of apes that is associated with his mature years. *Monkey Banquet* is another painting of a monkey kitchen, or possibly a banquet. It is signed in the lower right corner *D. Teniers* but is not dated. It is important to point out that many artists followed Teniers and attempted to imitate (or perhaps forge) his works for profit, so occasionally signatures are not an adequate indication of authenticity. Further complicating the issue of authenticity, is that we know very little about his workshop and students and whether they were responsible for some of the lower quality "Teniers" paintings.⁵² This problem of attribution was known even in his own time. In the 18th century, when his paintings became wildly popular in auctions in France, provenance and documentation of authenticity were extremely important factors in determining their worth.⁵³ Many paintings of monkey kitchens and banquets were produced following Teniers' example, so it is important not to rush in attributing a monkey kitchen to Teniers. However, *Monkey Banquet* with a provenance dating to the 18th century, is technically and stylistically sophisticated enough to attribute to Teniers rather than to his circle even though there has not been a great deal of research done on it.⁵⁴ Teniers' handling of the various textures and exquisitely rendered details are far more sophisticated than any of his followers. Based on the rich browns and subtle colors used as accents, this painting seems to be from the late or middle period of Teniers' career.

⁵² Davidson, 56.

⁵³ Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge*, 17.

⁵⁴ Alessandro Bettango et al., *I Dipinti Del Prado* (Udine: Magnus Edizioni, 1998), 487.

Monkey Banquet is reminiscent of *Monkeys in the Kitchen* but more emphatically moral, and in the case of *Monkey Banquet* it is clearly a depiction of a fat kitchen. A group of richly dressed apes sit at a table feasting on a variety of foods, from cakes, to meat, to fruit. The kitchen is well stocked and there are cooks in the background who prepare everything for the dining apes. There are also apes dressed in simple cloaks or wearing absolutely nothing, which sit on the floor eating fruit and oysters. Two especially wild looking apes sit on the floor in the center, smoking tobacco out of pipes. In addition to the food, there are also very rich objects such as a large and ornate cooler, and pewter plates, rather than cheaper and more common wooden ones. If the viewer, despite all of these details, misses the fact that this painting was indeed a fat kitchen, Teniers yet again included the owl emblem, which hangs on the wall behind the dining apes.

Monkey Banquet is obviously related to traditional ape motifs, and it is impossible to ignore that these apes are gluttons. Monkeys feasting were not new in paintings; even an earlier painting by Tenier's brother in law Jan Bruegel the Younger, *Vanitas Allegory* (1621) [figure 12], used this motif. The composition of *Vanitas Allegory* is similar to *Monkey Banquet*, however Teniers has reversed the composition and altered the décor. In both paintings apes sit on a table as well as on the floor and eat with their hands. Unlike in Teniers' painting, only one of the dozens of monkeys in the *Vanitas Allegory* is wearing clothing. All of the monkeys are wild in appearance and are extremely out of place in the ornate room that they occupy. Klaus Ertz suggests that *Vanitas Allegory* was both meant to evoke a sense of *vanitas* and a feeling of drollery.⁵⁵ It is important to note that Teniers may have been inspired by the notion of a critical drollery, even if he did not focus on *vanitas*.

The monkeys in *Monkey Banquet* delight in the overindulgence of food, drink and smoking. Just like in Bruegel's *Vanitas Allegory* anyone could look at this painting and understand that it is a comic parody of foolish behavior. The owl emblem serves to emphasize that these apes do not see the sin that they are committing, just in case it was not already obvious. Or does it? There is no other example of a monkey painting,

⁵⁵ Klaus Ertz and Christa Nitze-Ertz, *Jan Bruegel der Ältere (1568-1625): Kritischer Katalog der Gemälde*, (Lingen: Luca Verlag, 2008), 1178.

peasant scene, or tavern scene in Teniers' oeuvre that is so heavy handed in its iconography. Normally Teniers uses less overt symbols, which sometimes leads him to include explicit elements such as an emblem or the meat stall in *Monkey Party*. In fact, it seems odd that he would be so emphatically indicating sin through the use of an emblem in *Monkey Banquet*, because it is already abundantly clear. Of course there is the chance that this was done by a follower of Teniers, but this painting's attribution of this painting to Teniers has long been accepted. Perhaps then, Teniers was attempting to draw attention to something else in this painting through the use of the emblem: something less obvious.

It is important to note that *Monkey Banquet* contains four distinct groups of apes: the well dressed group sitting on the table, the cooks standing in the background working, the clothed apes on the floor eating, and the completely wild apes eating fruit off of the floor. However, only the two apes at work in the background of the piece stand upright, as if they are humanized. All of the rest of the apes sit on their haunches with their shoulders bent over. They all eat with their hands. The most distinguished looking of the various apes, wearing a sash and a golden chain like those often given to nobility to indicate service to the court,⁵⁶ is actually the most vulgar in its behavior, sitting on the table rather than in the chair. Right behind this obviously noble ape, on the backrest of the chair that has been provided for him, sits a small, unclothed ape, who hunches over in the same animalistic position. Above them both is the owl emblem.

Teniers was an intelligent painter whose compositions are always very deliberate in appearance, so it is not adequate to dismiss the emblem's location as coincidence. It has been discussed that it seems that with the explicit iconography of the fat kitchen, it seems unlikely that Teniers would feel the need to include the owl emblem to indicate sin. Nevertheless, the emblem is included, and in a prominent position at that. What is the owl then unwilling to see? I would argue that the ape over which the emblem is situated is the owl and that it is ignoring the fact that although it has reached noble status, enjoys delicacies of the upper class, and dresses in ornate clothing, it is no different than the naked ape sitting behind him. He is still just an ape, which is revealed through his

⁵⁶ Faith Paulette Dreher, "Chateaux and their Proprietors in the Work of David Teniers II" in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 60 No.4 (Dec. 1978): 686.

behavior. This may also be true of the military apes, or the apes dressed as nobility who drink with commoners. But again, this leads to an obvious question. *Why would Teniers produce paintings that explicitly depict the nobility as fools?*

In the following chapters the ape paintings of David Teniers the Younger will be looked at in the context of the growing tension between the classes during the 17th century in the Southern Netherlands. Priority will be given to the paintings that have been so far addressed, however these represent only a part of Teniers' ape paintings. Though it is not an entirely comprehensive survey, they are illustrative of the motifs that appear most commonly. I hope to demonstrate the importance of the military in understanding class tensions in the Southern Netherlands, and especially the role that it played in social advancement. *Monkey Party* and *Monkey Guardhouse* will be reexamined through this lens.

Attention will then focus on the potential for social advancement, or “social climbing,” and the class tensions that it caused. The role of social “aping” (to copy closely but often clumsily and ineptly)⁵⁷ is an especially important topic. How members of the elite felt about new nobility and social advancement will also be investigated. *Apes in a Tavern* and *Monkeys Drinking and Smoking* will be further discussed in the context of social advancement and attitudes concerning it. Finally David Teniers the Younger's own social standing and ambitions will be discussed to better understand what personal concerns regarding class may create an underlying tone or even message in his ape paintings, and whether they are military or more traditional in nature.

⁵⁷ Mariam Webster

Chapter One Images



Figure 1. *Two Monkeys*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1562



Figure 2. *Monkeys Drinking and Smoking*, David Teniers the Younger, 1660's



Figure 3. *Tavern Scene*, Adriaen Brouwer, 1630's



Figure 4. *Monkeys in a Tavern*, David Teniers the Younger, After 1640



Figure 5. *The Card Players*, David Teniers the Younger, 1645.



Figure 6. *Monkeys in an Interior*, Pieter van der Borcht, late 16th ct.



Figure 7. *Monkeys in a Kitchen*, David Teniers the Younger, 1640's



Figure 8. *The Lute Player*, David Teniers the Younger, 1635-1645



Figure 9. *Monkey Party*, David Teniers the Younger, 1633



Figure 10. *Monkey Guardhouse*, David Teniers the Younger, before 1635



Figure 11. *Monkey Banquet*, David Teniers the Younger, 1660's



Figure 12. *Vanitas Allegory*, Jan Bruegel the Younger, 1621.

2. The Nobility and Upwards Social Mobility in Historical Perspective

By the mid 16th century the nobility across Europe were facing growing problems. Economic decline, changes in warfare, and general social discontent were threatening to make the nobility obsolete. Commoners began to question the legitimacy of the nobility and their privileged status and as the 17th century began the distinction between the two groups had become increasingly difficult to identify. Nobility in France and Spain were especially vulnerable to these class issues. Beginning in the 16th century and continuing throughout the 17th, upward social mobility put pressure on the nobility to reinforce the distinctions between classes in order to maintain power and social superiority. Desire to remain relevant and influential caused the nobility to continually reevaluate exactly what their class was and to reconstruct their self-defined identity accordingly. New distinctions of the nobility allowed them to maintain their unique status, but led to a great deal of social tension between them and the increasingly affluent commoners who strived for social advancement. David Teniers the Younger was himself an aggressive social climber and many of his clients were members of the nobility or the affluent upper-class of the Southern Netherlands. Therefore these developments in the way in which the nobility attempted to display and assert their status, and the threat posed by the possibility of upward mobility of the lower-classes, are important to consider when examining the paintings of Teniers.

The Origin of the Nobility in France and Spain

Nobility, and especially the nobility of France, Spain, and Germany, initially developed as an occupational class. In the early Middle Ages the nobility was the military class which served to protect and serve the lands.¹ Noble titles for families were established through men with military professions and their acts of chivalry and valor. However once a title was granted to a family, it was passed down through heredity

¹ Scott and Storrs, 9.

regardless of the descendants' abilities.² As titles were passed down family lines the idea quickly became widely held that if a person was of the nobility it meant that they came from a bloodline beginning with a virtuous and heroic ancestor. Noble heredity also carried with it a notion that the members of noble families were somehow inherently better than the peasantry and commoners. Because of the widely accepted notion that nobility inherited their status through its genealogy, the nobility had no need to defend its existence throughout the Middle Ages. The nobility simply existed because it was unique. Ellery Schalk points out that it is not until the 16th century that there is any question as to what nobility is, or any debate regarding its requirements.³ Regardless of the nobility's own notion that they were superior and descendants of virtuous ancestors, the reality of the nobility and noble heritage was something quite different.

Contrary to popular romanticized ideas about noble families and their lineages that allegedly date back for centuries, most family lines survived for only a few generations. Jonathan Dewald has found that only about 1/5 of noble families in medieval France carried on into the following generation.⁴ Similarly, in Spain only 6 of the 55 noble families listed in 1550 had been in existence since the 1300's.⁵ The nobility at large did not cease to exist after only a few generations of course; instead the lines that died out were replaced by new families.

Upward Social Mobility Before 1600

As it turns out, social mobility during the Middle Ages was far greater than traditionally believed, and existed in many forms. It was, in fact, necessary in order to replace noble families that had died out. Marriage was one possible means of upward social mobility. In France, as early as 1100 commoners intermarrying with affluent

² Jonathan Dewald, *The European Nobility 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15.

³ Ellery Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree: Ideas of Nobility in France in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 10.

⁴ Dewald, 17.

⁵ Dewald, 17.

members of lower nobility were not unheard of.⁶ Marriages between social classes became increasingly common in France and Italy due to the lessening of restrictions on the practice.⁷ Intermarriage expanded the nobility and does not seem to have caused any tension between social groups. It seems instead, that though there were initial prejudices against the person who married into the nobility, these prejudices were usually forgotten by the next generation.⁸ It is only logical that the second generation that came from such a marriage would not face prejudice, as it did now indeed have noble blood from at least one parent.

It has been mentioned that the nobility was a class associated with the military profession, and until the 15th century this was accurate. However, by the late 15th century and into the 16th, the nobility's function as an actual fighting class began to wane. Many non-nobles were part of the military and held many of the fighting positions, while leadership positions remained mostly occupied by the nobility. If a commoner was to obtain one of these positions of leadership, he would then almost always be promised ennoblement to suit his post because of the strong notion that only a nobleman could hold such a rank.⁹ As the origin of the nobility was initially a result of the valor and virtue of military service, it is understandable that men who had proven themselves in contemporary battle would receive the same status and honor through their merit as their predecessors.

Military achievements and marriage were not the only ways for a low-born person to advance into the ranks of the nobility in France. Beginning with the price revolution of the 16th century, the French provincial nobility suffered a drastic loss of economic power. By the 1520's approximately eight out of ten noble families either lost property or had gone into debt.¹⁰ Wealth acquired through trade could easily create a better standard of living for a common merchant than the standard of living of the impoverished and abusive nobility, yet often these hard working but wealthy commoners still had little

⁶ Otto Forst de Battaglia, "The Nobility in the European Middle Ages," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 5 No. 1 (1962): 66.

⁷ De Battaglia, 66.

⁸ De Battaglia, 66.

⁹ Schalk, 13.

¹⁰ Davis Bitton, *The French Nobility in Crisis: 1560-1640* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 2.

social currency in France.¹¹ However, in some cases these adverse economic conditions did indeed work in the favor of the peasantry and other commoners. During the 15th and 16th centuries occasionally peasants who had managed to earn enough money would buy fiefs and after becoming small landowners themselves, would enter the service of a larger noble landowner.¹² Landownership and service to higher nobility then allowed the peasant to enter the ranks of lower nobility.

An even more drastic effect of the economic downturn was the shrinking income of the court. Again, this financial stressor to existing nobles simultaneously benefited the ambitious commoner. Crowns across France and Spain began selling noble titles for profit to anyone willing to pay a large sum of money to buy ennoblement for themselves and their family.¹³ While this may at first glance seem to be purely motivated out of greed on both sides, it appears that the practice was actually quite beneficial and practical. These new nobles who had just bought their titles were eager to serve the court and prove their virtue. In order to prove themselves, very often these new nobles did excellent work in their offices.¹⁴ Economic change, therefore, became an important catalyst for a more general change in the perception and function of the nobility in French society.

Another class that profited greatly, not only from the economic changes but also the not yet well-defined requirements of the nobility, was the mercenaries or *roturiers*. Though noblemen were in theory the fighting class, apt at defending the realm through their heritage, the French nobility no longer considered this as their primary function.¹⁵ While the nobility considered *roturiers* to be nothing more than “boorish peasants totally lacking in the qualities of fighting men,”¹⁶ they were quickly becoming more and more capable of permeating into the nobility. During the 16th century *roturiers* also began to buy land, but unlike the fiefs owned by the peasantry (which as we have seen, had

¹¹ De Battaglia, 61.

¹² Dewald, 20.

¹³ Roger Mettan, “The French Nobility 1610-1715” in *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* Vol.1, edited by H.M. Scott (London & New York: Longman, 1995), 115.

¹⁴ Mettan, 115.

¹⁵ Mark Motley, *Becoming a French Aristocrat: The Education of the Court Nobility: 1580-1715* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 4.

¹⁶ Bitton, 36.

become the low-nobility in part due to their purchases) *roturiers* bought old estates that had formerly been owned by nobility.¹⁷ By doing so, they were able to emulate the aristocratic manner of living, which effectively demolished one of the most apparent differences between nobility and commoners. Davis Bitton has pointed out that several writers in the period remarked on this practice, saying that it allowed there to be a large number of Frenchmen “who call themselves nobles yet are not.”¹⁸ This practice of emulation of nobility by commoners without title, again lead many to question the legitimacy of the nobility.

Erasmus’ *The False Knight* offers a comical, yet critical, insight into the ambiguity that existed between commoners and the nobility in the 16th century.¹⁹ The colloquium is a conversation between Harpalus who wishes to become noble, and Nestorius who advises him. It begins:²⁰

Ha. If you could help me out now, I am not a man to forget a Courtesie. *Ne.* It shall be your own fault if I do not make ye what you would be. *Ha.* But it is not in our power to be *born Noble*. *Ne.* What you want in *Blood*, you must supply with *Virtue*, and lay that Foundation of your own *Nobility*. *Ha.* That’s such a *Devilish* way about. *Ne.* Away, away, you may have it at *Court* for a *Trifle*. *Ha.* But the people are so apt to laugh at a man that buyes His Honor.

After Harpalus shoots down all of Nestorius’ advice as to how it is possible to obtain actual nobility (birth, virtuous actions, and purchase) the conversation takes an unexpected turn. Harpalus proposes that, rather than go through any of the conventionally processes of gaining nobility, he would rather find a way to “make myself honorable in the opinion of the world,”²¹ or in other words, just fake it. The remainder of the dialogue outlines the types of clothing that Harpalus must wear such as silks, the types of remarks he must make, for example referring to the political situation between

¹⁷ Bitton, 94.

¹⁸ Bitton, 94.

¹⁹ I was made aware of this text by Dewald’s use of it. Dewald, 33.

²⁰ Erasmus Roterodamus, “The False Knight” in *Select Colloquies out of Erasmus Roterodamus; Pleasantly Representing Several Superstitious Levities That were crept into the Church of Rome in His Day*, edited by Roger L’Estrange, (London: 1689), 237.

²¹ Erasmus Roterodamus, 238.

Vienna and France, and most interestingly, how to forge noble acquaintances. Harpalus is confident in his ability to pull off the ruse saying:

I can do that as Easily as Drink; for I'll Imitate any
mans hand alive so exactly, that he shall not know it
from his Own.²²

The critique becomes increasingly scathing until at last, at the very end, it is revealed that Nestorius and Harpalus do not believe that the nobles are any better than common folk despite Harpalus' desire to be one. They agree that "after death there remains nothing of a Man, but his Carcas."²³

Even though Erasmus' dialogue is fiction, it points to a growing criticism of the nobility, and clearly indicates the practices a man could use to advance himself socially through aping the behavior of the nobility. As the nobility lost economic dominance, it became progressively easier for imitators to enjoy privileges of the nobility. But even more troubling for the nobility than general criticism and attempted imposters, was the increased granting of noble titles to low-born soldiers for their service. Rather than being mere imposters as Harpalus planned to be, they were in fact new nobility. The continual acceptance of these newly ennobled men into the nobility furthered a growing debate as to whether or not valor and merit should be legitimate sources for noble status, or if noble genealogy was necessary.²⁴ By the late 16th century the social border had become increasingly porous, making it necessary for the nobility to redefine itself.

In his article "Nobility in the European Middle Ages" Otto Forst de Battaglia points out that it is not until the nobleman becomes associated with a gentleman that it became imperative for the nobility to defend their hereditary origin.²⁵ As fewer of the nobility were engaged in military activities and progressively more commoners were becoming wealthy and landowning, the distinction between a nobleman and a common gentleman had indeed become difficult to identify. In order to preserve their class the old nobility redefined their identity by taking the stance that heredity was the only legitimate basis for being noble. Valor and virtue were not disregarded, but rather reconceptualized in a way that would support the notion of heredity. Schalk has pointed out that this was

²² Erasmus Roterodamus, 240.

²³ Erasmus Roterodamus, 246.

²⁴ Schalk, 117.

²⁵ De Battaglia, 61.

actually not a drastic break from the social reality. She notes that even though the military function of the nobility and their valor had initially earned them the rank of nobility, the status was then handed down through heredity during a time of political stability when fighting ability was not of extreme importance.²⁶ In essence, nobility had in fact become a hereditary class, which had evolved out of a functional class. Commoners' criticisms in the 16th and 17th centuries that the nobility was failing to serve its function, did not take into account that the nobility had already for a long time been hereditary and not functional.

At the beginning of the 17th century, when the debate as to what the nobility was fully emerged, the nobility had clearly divided into two groups: old established nobility that believed in their superiority due to genealogy, and the new nobility that felt their service and virtue earned them a status equal to that of their longer established counterparts. In a reaction against the idea that virtue and service were required of nobility, it became an accepted notion among the nobility that virtue is not an inherent quality to the nobility. Instead the older noble families believed that being noble frequently lead to a person having virtue.²⁷ Of course this was a convenient excuse for the bad behavior of any existing nobility, and could explain why some non-nobles also had virtuous qualities.

The Nobility in Spain and the Army of Flanders

Before delving further into the reconceptualization of the nobility in 17th century France, it is also worth examining the evolution of the nobility of Spain and its role in the Army of Flanders. Spanish nobility and its traditions also had a great influence on the court in Brussels and the culture of nobility in the Southern Low Countries. While many ideas concerning the nobility in Spain were similar to those in France, the differences are important to note.

Like in France, the origin of the Spanish nobility did have a connection to the military. Spanish nobility traced its origins back to the Visigoths who fought the Moors

²⁶ Schalk, 24-25.

²⁷ Schalk, 117.

for control of Spain.²⁸ Unlike France, however, this medieval heritage remained very real and quite important. What resulted from this belief that honor was hereditary in Spain, was somewhat of an obsession with genealogy that began in the Middle Ages and continued into the early modern period. All descendants of those fighting men, as long as they kept their bloodline pure, were considered to be a type of nobility known as *hidalgos*.²⁹ Emphasizing heredity so strongly had extreme consequences for the status and class of the *hidalgos*. Being noble was considered a great point of honor in Spain, and as a result the *hidalgos* did not wish to jeopardize this status by engaging in non-noble activities, such as commerce and manual labor. Manual labor was generally considered a lowly occupation in Spain and it was absolutely unacceptable for a nobleman to do such work.³⁰ The result of this mentality was an impoverished lower nobility which was virtually indistinguishable from the peasants, except for the fact that peasants could earn their living as farmers.³¹ Therefore, unlike in France, a nobleman in Spain did not necessarily have any type of wealth or social power. The *hidalgos* were only “superior” in any way due to heredity and the notion that nobility carried honor inherently with it.

Of course not all nobility in Spain was impoverished and irrelevant. Although throughout Spain the hierarchy of the nobility was divided in a variety of ways, the poor *hidalgos* were always at the bottom, while wealth, military posts, and courtly service defined the various elite ranks of the nobility. Interestingly, it was these elite ranks that presented the possibilities for commoners to enter the nobility, rather than the rigid blood requirements of the *hidalgo* class. Wealthy merchants and artisans took advantage of the 15th century practice of selling noble titles, which allowed them to purchase their nobility from crowns in need of money.³² While *hidalgos* rejected new nobility on the basis that

²⁸ Marcelin Defourneaux, *Daily Life in Spain in the Golden Age*, translated by Newton Branch, (Stanford: Dtanford University Press, 1966), 40.

²⁹ Teofilo F. Ruiz, *Spanish Society: 1400-1600* (Harlow, England-London-New York-Reading, Massachusetts-San Francisco-Toronto-Don Mills, Ontario-Sydney-Tokyo-Singapore-Hong Kong-Seoul-Taipei-Cape Town-Madrid-Mexico City-Amsterdam-Munich-Paris-Milan: Longman, 2001), 69.

³⁰ John H. Elliot, “The Decline of Spain” in *Past and Present* No. 20 (1961): 55.

³¹ Ruiz, 68.

³² Fernando González de León, *The Road to Rocroi: Class, Culture and Command in the Spanish Army of Flanders, 15667-1659* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009),15.

the newcomers were not related to the heroic Visigoths, the newcomers were significantly higher in society. They frequently signaled their newly acquired noble status by calling themselves by the title of “Don,” a title that mere *hidalgos* were not allowed to use.³³ Upward social mobility in Spain created in essence a middle nobility between the elite who had both power and honor through heredity, and the *hidalgos* who existed strictly through their genealogy.

The armies under the control of Spanish officers were also greatly affected by social class. Commoners and nobility both played important roles in the functioning of the army, though exactly what role each group played was greatly dependent on the *Captain General's* personal philosophy. Two of the most influential *Captain Generals*, whose ideas about the nobility and the military are extremely clear and had a large impact on the effectiveness of the Army of Flanders, were the Duke of Alba who served from 1567 to 1582, and one of his later successors, the Count-Duke of Olivares, who served from 1621 to 1643.

Under the Duke of Alba, the Army of Flanders was a virtually undefeatable force. The success of this army was in large part due to the ideas and practices of the Duke. One of his strongest beliefs was that no matter the rank, class, or education of a man wishing to join the ranks of the Army of Flanders, the recruit must follow the same intensive training regiment.³⁴ Because of this, every soldier under the Duke's command was well trained in the army's tactics. While personal heroism, chivalry, and acts of valor were once favored as qualities for soldiers, under the Duke of Alba tactical understanding and strategy were stressed.³⁵ However, this stress on calculated military tactics did not mean that he felt that as a whole, commoners were equal to the nobility. On the contrary, Alba valued the traditional ideas that the nobility was particularly well suited for military service. The Duke was a strong believer that the nobility were people of superior “substance” and he preferred his soldiers be of noble origin.³⁶ However, the

³³ Defourneaux, 43.

³⁴ González de León, 55-56.

³⁵ González de León, 9.

³⁶ Unpublished letter from the Duke of Alba to King Phillip II of Spain, 27 April, 1567. Translated and Quoted in Geoffry Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road 1567-1659: The logistics of Spains victory and defeat in the Low Countries 'wars*. (London – New York – New Rochelle – Melbourne – Sydney: Cambridge University Press: 1972), 41.

Duke also believed that valor in military service could prove a man noble, an idea that was deeply ingrained into Spanish society.³⁷ Many Spanish soldiers earned nobility by advancement through the army's ranks, proudly claiming in a marching song "my lineage starts with me!"³⁸ All soldiers started low in Alba's army and worked their way through the ranks. Positions were earned through merit, rather than through noble lineage.

All golden ages must come to an end, and for the Army of Flanders the seeds of decline were sewn immediately following the death of the Duke of Alba. Undermining the Duke's policy of merit-based appointments, during the 1590's King Philip II began to appoint established aristocrats to important military posts.³⁹ This may have been due to his general campaign to begin limiting the number of men being granted new titles of nobility. The beginning of the 17th century was marked by a sharp backlash against new nobility, which led to Philip's decision to dramatically limit the granting of new titles and tighten restrictions on the requirements for entering the nobility.⁴⁰ In any case, it did not take long before the quality of the military leadership began to deteriorate due to high ranking aristocratic, yet inexperienced, men.

Leadership problems quickly worsened under Count-Duke Olivares as he allowed the nobility that held commanding military positions to expect progressively extravagant luxuries that they felt were suited to their rank. Pageantry was no longer something that the nobility of the military only engaged in off duty, as was the case under the Duke of Alba. Instead, officers began to interrupt campaigns in order to participate in festivals being held in Brussels.⁴¹ Furthermore, the aristocratic officers began to alienate themselves from the common soldiers. Rather than taking part in marches or engaging in battles these officers who gained their posts from nobility rather than merit opted to stay in the security of their luxury carriages and for wintering in their Brussels homes.⁴² It is not hard to imagine that the average soldier would become frustrated with his own inability to advance because of nepotism and preference for established nobility.

³⁷ Ruiz, 70.

³⁸ Mateo Frago, *Lorenzo Mellamo*. " Mi liaje empieza en mi porque son mejores hombres los que sus linaje hacen que aquellos que lo deschechan adquiriendo viles nombres." Quoted and translated in Defourneaux, 204.

³⁹ González de León, 72.

⁴⁰ Thompson, 186.

⁴¹ González de León, 185.

⁴² González de León, 188-190.

Monkey Party and the Military

It is important to consider Teniers' *Monkey Party* [Figure 1] in the context of the controversial behavior of the nobility that held high ranking posts in the Army of Flanders and the army's presence in the Southern Low Countries. It has already been noted that the older elite nobility was attempting to differentiate itself from new nobility and the *hidalgos*. For much of the military elite, this included elaborate costumes and camping away from the common soldiers. I would like to propose that *Monkey Party* is not just any military camp, as suggested by Klinge, but rather that it is a depiction of, and comment on, nobility in the military.

This encampment is clearly not a typical military camp. Fernando González de León points out that in order to be inconspicuous the aristocracy that served in the time of the Duke of Alba wore austere costumes, which was not common practice under following *Captain Generals*.⁴³ Clearly these apes are indeed attempting to distinguish themselves through ornate costumes and are thus contemporary members of the military leadership. Their camp also does not seem to be anywhere near the encampment of the common soldiers, another indication that they are consciously differentiating themselves. The only indications that this even is a military camp are the foot soldiers sitting just right of the ape dressed in red. Due to his bright red coat and sash this ape can be assumed to be the captain of the soldiers.⁴⁴ If not for the military costuming and the ape loading his musket, this scene would be entirely ambiguous. It looks as if it could be simply an outdoor festival. There is not even precedence for such a scene in the prints of van der Borch, so it seems that Teniers very consciously invented his own motif of apes in a military encampment of the nobility.⁴⁵

It is possible to completely reinterpret the alleged iconography of *Monkey Party* once it is accepted that the point is not merely pleasures of the flesh or *vanitas*, but rather a more complicated commentary on rank and class. These apes are engaging in common

⁴³ González de León, 69.

⁴⁴ *Colnaghi: Old Master Paintings 2008*, (London, 2008), 28.

⁴⁵ Margret Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge: Schilderijen, Tekeningen*, (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 11 May- 1 September, 1991), 34.

vices such as gluttony and drink, but more importantly they are engaging in the conspicuous display of wealth and rank. Even while on a military campaign they are affluent and cultured enough to indulge in the luxuries of their class. Spending large amounts of money to take luxuries on campaign was a rapidly growing practice in the 17th century; aristocrats of the high command would take elaborate carriages and servants with them.⁴⁶

The meat stall is also easily reconcilable with symbolism associated with the nobility. Dining etiquette and quality of food was associated with the nobility across Europe. Meat was of particular significance. Mark Motley has described the importance of meat for the nobility as such “In a society in which an overwhelming majority of the peasant population subsisted on grain and vegetables, eating meat was a sign of social distinction, and aristocratic tables were piled high with an unimaginable variety and quantity of it.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, the dead birds in the painting are reminiscent of bird still-lives, which carry the connotation of depicting the product of a hunt. Again this is significant for its possible reference to nobility. Hunting was one of the few remaining rights of the nobility that was strictly prohibited for commoners.⁴⁸ Another peculiar element of the meat stall is that the ape working there is dressed as a noble woman. Engaging in direct commerce or any manual labor was forbidden for both the Spanish and the French elite, making it simply impossible for this “woman” to manage her own stall. Instead she is included as just another reference to the elite. It is then plausible that though the traditional meat stall is indeed a symbol of voluptuous and carnal sin could have been recognized as such, it also serves a secondary function to emphasize that the ape officers are members of the nobility.

It first may seem that the emblem of the owl with the candle and glasses eliminates any reading of this painting except for a critique of sinful behavior. It has been assumed that the emblem directs the viewer’s attention to the sins that the apes are committing yet are blind to.⁴⁹ But if one thinks only of the proverb and not the assumed

⁴⁶González de León,192.

⁴⁷ Motley, 38.

⁴⁸ Schalk, 147.

⁴⁹ Margret Klinge and Lüdke Dietmar eds. *David Teniers der Jüngere 1610-1690: Alltag und Vergnügen in Flandern* (Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe: Karlsruhe, 2005), 90.

connotation of sin, this is not necessarily the case. “Wat baeten kaers of bril, als den uijl niet sien wil?” does not implicitly allude to sin. It simply means that it is futile to point something out if the other person is unable to see it. Sin is one possible explanation for what these apes are incapable of seeing, but if the apes in the painting are looked at more carefully and not simply as symbols, sin doesn’t quite fit. These apes are not at all intoxicated; instead they are alert and orderly. Only one ape even has a glass of wine, which he raises in a toast.

What these apes are unable to see is possibly that even with all of their attributes of rank and wealth, they are still just apes, no different than the foot soldiers that serve them. Teniers painted *Monkey Party* in 1633, a time when the Army of Flanders still had a strong presence in the Southern Low Countries, but its leadership had deteriorated into aristocratic posts rather than true military elite. The nobility in the 17th century was increasingly concerned with image and identity, and these apes are perfect examples of this social phenomenon. The apes are acting in a sophisticated and extravagant manner that associates them with the nobility, yet at the same time proving that they are just aristocratic in their titles, posts, and fashion, but not in their military conduct. Honor, merit, and valor, the very qualities that were thought to be the essence of nobility, have nothing to do with why these apes hold the military position that they do. By the 1630’s under Olivares, even sieges came to be seen as opportunities to visit with foreign aristocrats, and any success was cause for a large banquet or ball.⁵⁰ Pageantry did not compensate for the fact that these nobles are not qualified to hold the office that they did, just as the apes’ costumes do not transform them into officers. As for the slogan BON VIN DAY, it has already been addressed that this mash up of languages is evidence that these apes are not actually of quality or the educated nobility. Furthermore in the context of a military camp, it is also a comic bit of irony that points out the absurdity of this sumptuous behavior for the military elite. Is there any such thing as a *Good Wine Day* during a military campaign? In the age of excessive displays of nobility on military campaigns, any number of petty reasons could be used as an excuse for a banquet.

It is important to note that Teniers’ mocking of the nobility serving in the military does not mean that he is mocking the nobility in general. The point is not that the

⁵⁰ González de León, 183.

nobility is a group of foolish apes; it is far more complicated. Traditionally, holding a military position was one thing that could ennoble Spanish men in a way that was considered to be undoubtedly honorable. Military rank could only properly ennoble a man if, like under the Duke of Alba, rank and honor was earned. Because of the practice of placing urban nobility, many of which had bought their titles, in positions of leadership in the military, it was no longer the case that the prestige of a position necessarily reflected personal valor or honor. Commoners of great merit could not ennoble themselves regardless of the quality of their service, while men holding empty noble titles occupied ranks beyond their skill.⁵¹ *Monkey Party* is then not really a critique of the military or honorable officers, but it instead pokes fun at imposters such as people holding undeserved positions.

Critique of, or rather poking fun at the undeserving nobility would not have been offensive to most of Teniers noble patrons, which is also an important point. Most old nobility were highly critical of the newer nobility and may have found a painting like *Monkey Party* especially appealing. Even though these men had bought titles, had the same privileges as the nobility, and tried to emulate the same style of life, they were still just apes and could never truly become nobility. Likewise, commoners with wealth and social currency were likely resentful of their former peers who had managed to reach the ranks of the nobility. In a matter of a few years the potential for upward social mobility had been drastically limited by Philip II, and few new titles were being granted.

Monkey Guardhouse [Figure 2] can be examined in the same light. Klinge has already noted that *Monkey Guardhouse* is possibly a commentary of the foolishness of men in military positions but she does not address the topic at length.⁵² Again, just as in *Monkey Party* I would like to propose that this critique centers on class and performance of rank. In the case of *Monkey Guardhouse* the apes are dressed in a wider variety of costumes. All of the apes are members of the military, which is demonstrated by their swords and lances, but they also show great diversity in their class and rank. Some are dressed very plainly and wear simple hats, while others wear brighter colors and have more elaborate hats with feathers, and a few even wear bright blue sashes. Like in

⁵¹González de León, 73.

⁵² *Colnaghi: Old Master Paintings 2008*, 28.

Monkey Party, the commander in *Monkey Guardhouse* is distinguished from the others with his bright red jacket, bright blue sash, and his elaborate hat.

The main narrative action of *Monkey Guardhouse* unfolds on the right third of the canvas, away from the majority of the ape soldiers. Most of the apes are playing cards or backgammon, drinking, and smoking and are seemingly oblivious to the main action. Two apes bring a cat into the guardroom and present it to the captain. Dressed in a nice red jacket, the cat does not appear to be a peasant, drunkard, or delinquent. In fact he seems to be quite surprised to find himself arrested and stands with his tail literally between his legs. Accompanied by two other soldiers, the captain walks towards the cat. Teniers provides no other information to help his viewer understand what exactly is happening. The action of *Monkey Guardhouse* is actually quite puzzling.

To better understand what the implications of *Monkey Guardhouse* may be, it is useful to look at some of Teniers' other paintings of guardhouses. Teniers painted many guardhouses, all of which include drinking, smoking, and gambling. It has already been noted that in Teniers' tavern scenes these activities are associated with relaxation and leisure for the lower-class, but not necessarily sin. It may not be the same situation for the guardhouses. Several of Teniers' paintings of the guards include a small subordinate narrative of St. Peter being liberated by an angel.

The Deliverance of St. Peter ca. 1645 [Figure 3] is at first glance a typical guardhouse. Like many of Teniers' paintings of guards, the soldiers sit around at table with jugs of drink, concentrating on their game of backgammon. Many of the men have removed their armor and jackets, apparently including the captain, as his red jacket is heaped on the pile of discarded military ware. However, these guards are not just unwinding after a day of hard work, they are in derelict of their duties, completely oblivious to the escape going on behind them. This scene carries two important ideas with it: the guards are the persecutors and enemies of the righteous Peter, and they are not even performing the duty of the position that they supposedly hold. Klinge suggests that because all of these paintings date to before 1645, these soldiers are specifically members of the Army of Flanders, and Peter represents the Southern Netherlands.⁵³

⁵³ Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge: Schilderijen, Tekeningen*, 78.

Monkey Guardhouse, painted in 1635, may very well carry some of the same messages in it. The apes are not qualified for their duty and abuse their posts at the expense of the cat. Like St. Peter, the cat may represent the average civilian in the Southern Low Countries. Throughout history the ape has been used to represent the “other.”⁵⁴ In this context the apes, or “the others,” are in control of the local population, here depicted as a cat. Again, Klinge’s interpretations of these paintings are exciting, but not supported by much evidence. There was no common iconography or rhetoric during the 17th century that compares the population of the Southern Netherlands to cats or St. Peter.

Regardless of who the cat is meant to represent, Klinge is nevertheless correct that *Monkey Guardhouse* is undoubtedly meant to be a parody of military officers. Recognizing this makes it possible to revisit symbolism of imposters. Klinge has suggested that the funnels and pots as helmets are simply a way to emphasize how foolish the apes are.⁵⁵ However as the ape itself is an allusion to fools, the funnels may carry a different connotation. Teniers’ strange use of household objects in *Monkey Guard House* is not unique. Most notably Pieter Breugel the Elder frequently used pots as hats, or boat oars as jousting rods, but in a much more specific context than general allusions to stupidity. Carnival scenes often include peasants who attempt to mock the elite by dressing as figures of authority and engaging in some form of parody masquerade, for example Pieter Breughel the Elder’s *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent* [Figure 4], now in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum. Lent wears a beehive on his head with a boat paddle as his lance, while Carnival holds a spit as his weapon. Other members of the audience wear items such as pots and plates as their hats, but they are all involved in the parody and mocking. Because Teniers frequently borrowed ideas and iconology from the Breugel tradition⁵⁶, it is possible that these apes are meant to bring a much more specific idea to the mind of the viewer. The apes (or the guards that they stand in for) are taking on the role of something that they are not. Like in *Monkey Party* the core concern of *Monkey Guardhouse* is the performance of rank and class. Just because these apes act

⁵⁴ H.W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1952), 16.

⁵⁵ Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge: Schilderijen, Tekeningen*, 38.

⁵⁶ Jane P. Davidson, *David Teniers the Younger* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 15-18.

as if they are superior and the ruling class, they are all still just apes. Again this is not a general critique of the nobility, instead a jibe at those who try to imitate or obtain a status that they are not worthy of.

Nobility and the Performance of Status in the 17th Century

Performance of status and class was problematic in the military, and although the practice was wide spread among the nobility of Spain and their military elite, it was also very prominent among the French nobility. During the 17th century the conspicuous practicing of noble behaviors had become immensely important. The nobility strived to differentiate themselves from the increasingly affluent commoners, while these commoners strived to advance in social rank. This contention between those who wished to limit social mobility and those who wished to advance, led to a complex debate as to who exactly could become nobility and a focus on the honor and ceremonial rights of the nobility.

One major change in the 17th century for the nobility in both Spain and France was an emphasis on the hierarchy within its own ranks. Particularly in France there was a push to distinguish the heredity and older grand nobility from the members of the nobility that had bought their titles. The nobility that held bought titles began to be called *anobli*.⁵⁷ While the *anobli* technically were still legally considered to be nobility, their status had been slightly down graded by the revoking some of their noble privileges. *Anobli* were once again required to pay taxes, and had to stand in the presence of grand nobility.⁵⁸

Another major effort was made to differentiate between wealth, class, and nobility. Seventeenth century writers in France became increasingly concerned with the idea that wealth was in no way an indication of class. In the minds of the French elite it was entirely possible to be wealthy yet remain low in class.⁵⁹ The importance of this point should not be underestimated. In a society with an increasingly affluent urban commoner class, it was important to stress that dressing like a nobleman and being able to afford similar luxuries did not in anyway allow for official social advancement. Dress

⁵⁷ Bitton, 95.

⁵⁸ Bitton, 95.

⁵⁹ Schalk, 139.

especially lost its importance as a distinction of class because luxury clothing and materials such as silk became progressively more accessible to the wealthy commoners. This same distinction between wealth and class had long existed in Spain due to the belief that only valor and heredity could prove a man noble.

The issue of class and wealth was more complicated in France. Until early in the 17th century it had been possible to obtain noble status through wealth. As a result many people felt, like the character of Harpalus in *The False Knight*, that nobility was indeed a performance dependent on wealth and education. The reaction of the nobility to this idea is truly fascinating, because to a degree they absolutely agreed. In the minds of the nobility heredity was all-important, but not because it meant that the nobility was inherently more virtuous than commoners. The nobility believed that they were more capable of becoming virtuous through proper upbringing and education than the common man.⁶⁰ In short, nobility needed education to become virtuous, but if a commoner received the same education he would not reach the goal of obtaining virtue. Interestingly, it also seems that an inability of a noble to learn virtue did not demote them to non-noble status,⁶¹ they were simply exceptions to the rule. Nevertheless, the idea essentially confirmed that even the nobility had to learn to be noble.

Education for nobles began in the home from a very young age. The idea was held that the noble “nature” of the child had to be properly nurtured in order for it to develop into adult chivalry and etiquette.⁶² Children received strict training on proper etiquette and manners. Young nobles were also introduced to important cultural movements such as humanism, and trained in traditional practices associated with the nobility, like horsemanship. Academies were even set up to ensure the proper learning of court manners and to provide training for occupations appropriate to the nobility, such as administrative positions within the court.⁶³ Of course, despite the best efforts of the nobility, a particularly clever commoner could always find ways to imitate these skills.

⁶⁰ Schalk, 117.

⁶¹ Schalk, 132-133.

⁶² Motley, 18.

⁶³ Schalk, 181.

The nobility was keenly aware of this and frequently ridiculed would-be imposters in their literature.⁶⁴ This point will be looked at in more depth in the following chapter.

Fashion and etiquette, while helpful in distinguishing the grand nobility from *anobli* and all nobility from commoners, were still not sufficient in creating class distinctions. Social activities also became increasingly important. Roger Mettan has pointed out that social activities were particularly important in distinguishing the grand nobility from the *anobli* saying “They [the grand nobility] patronized the finest artist, architects and sculptors, and their salons became places where high society listened to music, saw the latest plays and discussed intellectual topics. Many of the literary works presented and debated there were concerned with the ideas of *noblesse* and honor.”⁶⁵ Members of the grand nobility were not just patrons of the arts and intellect, but patrons of ideas that helped to further their self-identity. The *anobli* tried to emulate patronage of the arts, and to a degree, seemed to succeed. One of the greatest distinctions between the private salons of the grand nobility and those of the *anobli* was that the grand nobility refused to visit private dwellings of lower classes.⁶⁶ It did, however, help in distinguishing both groups of nobility from the commoners.

To reiterate, the nobility relied on several methods of distinguishing themselves from commoners, each having varying degrees of success. Dress, social behavior, and etiquette were the easiest means for a wealthy and intelligent commoner to emulate. Education in humanism and training for occupations associated with the nobility were also important, but much harder to emulate. Noble privileges such as not needing to pay taxes and preference in processions were effective, but not overly public. Engaging in the arts and limiting one’s circle to other cultured elite were the easiest ways to publicly assert ones noble status. It is clear that the nobility of the 17th century spent a great deal of time attempting to define itself, which directly indicates how difficult it was to keep imposters and social climbers at bay.

⁶⁴ Schalk, 198.

⁶⁵ Mettan, 117.

⁶⁶ Mettan, 118.

Aping the Elite in Teniers' Monkey Paintings

Beginning in the 1640's Teniers ape paintings began to lose their military settings. It has been noted that Walter Liedtke believes that *Monkeys in a Kitchen* (1645) is a guard house that is meant to address issues of rank. While there is little evidence to support that it is a guardhouse, it is very likely issues of rank and social status are meant to be conveyed, but in a civilian context. This is more clearly demonstrated in paintings like *Monkey Banquet* [figure 5]. This painting is full of busy apes, diverse not only in their biological types but also in dress, behavior and activity. Four apes sitting around a table full of prepared foods immediately draw the attention of the viewer. Two of them wear ornate caps with brightly colored feathers in them, visually establishing their class superiority through dress. One even wears a sash and chain, which are obvious allusions to nobility. The deep blue tablecloth makes the gold colors of the baked and roasted foods stand out as a dramatic point of visual contrast. Otherwise the painting is overwhelmingly brown in its tones.

It is not a coincidence that the food is highlighted. Food and proper dining etiquette was one of the most fundamental means of distinguishing the nobility from commoners. Etiquette was an especially complicated practice that could easily distinguish adult nobility from other social classes, particularly during mealtimes.⁶⁷ The "noble" ape in *Monkey Banquet* is obviously oblivious to manners. He sits on top of the table, while his peers sit around it on chairs. He has ripped a chunk out of the meat pie and seems to have eaten it with his hands; the knife at the table is clean and unused. Hunched over and sipping wine with one hand, the "noble" ape reaches for more pie. The two apes sitting across from him in chairs are also eating with their hands.

When one compares this group of well-dressed apes sitting at the table with the group on the floor behind them it is clear that they are not educated in properly. The apes on the floor are dressed in much simpler hats and robes. It has been suggested that one is even wearing a priests' habit.⁶⁸ Similarly to their counterparts seated around the table, these apes are busy eating. They also eat with their hands, but they are eating shellfish, a much more appropriate cuisine for that kind of behavior. One of them is also holding a

⁶⁷ Motley, 37.

⁶⁸ Alessandro Bettango et al. *I Dipinti del Prado* (Udine: Magnus Edizioni, 1998), 486.

knife, and seems to be cutting the actual food loose from the shells, again more appropriate than tearing into a meat pie with one's hands. In reality there is little difference between the two groups aside from (social) location, and their dress.

Clearly, the all-important notion that the nobility has superior etiquette by nature than other people has revealed the deficiencies of these apes. Another important aspect of social distinction (or rather lack thereof) is also clearly depicted in *Monkey Banquet*. Nobility did not visit places that commoners frequented, and commoners were not allowed in places of the elite.⁶⁹ In the 17th century there was a very real distinction of physical space between the two groups. Though the apes sitting at the table are dressed in the costuming of the upper-class and nobility, it is impossible that they themselves are members of the nobility. Instead they are imposters who dress the part, but fail to adopt the proper behavior and lifestyle that is the indication of true nobility.

Four exceptionally wild looking apes in the foreground of *Monkey Banquet* accentuate the animal qualities of these attempted social climbers. They are not dressed at all and squat on the floor. Two of them are smoking, and it is these two that are particularly disturbing in appearance. One is black and looks almost demon-like, and the other is reddish orange with a wild mane. They are the only two that smoke instead of eat, which may indicate that the activity of smoking here is indeed a symbolic element. Smoke has long been identified as a symbol of transience. Despite the apes on the table being the same species as the cooks, they more closely resemble these wild apes on the floor in their stature and gesture. The noble status is via the worldly goods that these apes own and their indulging in luxuries. Unlike hereditary nobility, which will always hold its status regardless of its wealth, the apes will only be "noble" as long as their wealth lasts. By depicting the apes as the wild animals that they truly are side by side with the apes dressed as members of the nobility, Teniers reveals and pokes fun at the true nature of social climbers.

Monkeys in a Tavern [Figure 6] and *Monkeys Smoking and Drinking* [Figure 7], two paintings from the late period of Teniers' career (after 1660), show a further deterioration of the distinction between apes of the nobility and apes that are commoners. *Monkeys in a Tavern* has been associated with messages of sin and foolery. This relies

⁶⁹ Metton, 117.

on the ideas that: (1) apes are associated with sin, (2) card games in paintings represent sin, and (3) the ape in the fools costume is meant to direct the viewer's attention towards the sinful behavior. However, it has already been discussed that in Teniers' late paintings of peasants, drinking and card playing are not directly related to sin. Drinking and card playing are instead presented as relaxing activities for the working classes.⁷⁰

If the notions that card playing and drinking are meant to be sinful activities and that apes are associated with sin are rejected, or at least set aside, *Monkeys in a Tavern* also lends itself extremely well to the discussion of Teniers' ape paintings as a commentary on class and social mobility. Apes can easily be associated with upward mobility in two ways. First, "aping" the elite in dress and lifestyle were the means that commoners most frequently employed in their attempts to move up the social ladder. Apes were well known for their copying behavior, and various 17th century texts use apes to comment negatively on people who imitate; a point which will be discussed at length in the following chapter. Second, as has been demonstrated, during the 17th century apes were not associated with sin because they were thought to be evil, they were associated with sin because they were considered foolish enough to commit sin. Similarly, social climbers were being foolish to engage in such a deplorable behavior as aping the elite, an act made worse by its futility. According to 17th century notions of nobility, no social climber would -by its nature- ever be able to learn the proper behaviors of the nobility.

The majority of the monkeys in *Monkeys in a Tavern* are dressed in decorative caps with long feathers in them or are wearing colorful sashes. One even wears a sword, identifying it as a member of the nobility. Two of the apes are not visible enough to tell if they are wearing anything. They certainly are hatless, and may be not dressed at all. Based on the other paintings, which usually include at least one ape not dressed, it can be assumed that they wear nothing, and are meant to be commoners. The ape dressed as the fool stands away from the group and looks over his shoulder at them as he fetches more drink.

Yet again in *Monkeys in a Tavern*, Teniers seems to have presented his viewer with an impossible scene, and it is not just because monkeys don't actually put on clothes

⁷⁰ Margret Klinge, *Adriaen Brouwer/David Teniers the Younger: A Loan Exhibition of Paintings* (New York 7-30 October, Maastricht 19 November-11 December: Noortman and Brod, 1982), 86.

and get drunk. It is impossible because an ape that stands in for a noble person is caught mingling in a dingy tavern with apes of all other classes. The nobility simply did not do this in the 17th century.⁷¹ Furthermore, the ape from the nobility is playing a game that in Teniers' works is associated with the relaxation of commoners. Noblemen were not allowed to engage in physical labor.⁷² But is it really a nobleman in the company of commoners? Because most Teniers frequently worked for noble patrons, it is doubtful that this is really meant to be a foolish noble. Instead it is once again a painting of an *anobli* or worse yet, a commoner with aspirations to climb the social ladder. Only they would be such fools to believe that clothing and a sword could make a person noble. One could easily imagine a member of the grand nobility chuckling at the sight of his inferiors being depicted in such a manner.

Monkeys Drinking and Smoking is a further simplified version of the same theme. An ape that is supposedly a member of the nobility, his status signified by his jacket and sword, is keeping the company of apes in lower social position. They drink and smoke, activities associated with lower-class leisure, rather than the leisure activities of the nobility. Once this theme is recognized, critiques of social climbing and false nobility can be identified in virtually every one of Teniers' ape paintings.

Conclusion

Although upward-social mobility and advancement into the nobility had been possible since the Middle Ages, it dramatically increased during the 16th century. The old nobility who believed that they had a genealogical right to their title and social status resented the new nobility and those who tried to gain nobility. This resentment led to a backlash against ennoblements that restricted access to the nobility. As a result many commoners continued to emulate the nobility hoping to gain some sort of status by association with them. Teniers' paintings do not serve to convey a notion that the nobility sin just like everyone else, or that they are foolish apes. Instead they are comic condemnations of the behavior of social climbers and the *anobli*. Such critiques are also

⁷¹ Mettan, 118.

⁷² Mettan, 118.

seen in emblems, literature, and music of the period. A closer look at how social mobility appears in the other arts will help to make it clearer that Teniers was engaging in a pertinent social dialogue, rather than just simply mocking the nobility.

Chapter Two Images



Figure 1. *Monkey party*, David Teniers the Younger, 1633



Figure 2. *Monkey guardhouse*, David Teniers the Younger, before 1635



Figure 3. *The Deliverance of St. Peter*, David Teniers the Younger ca. 1645



Figure 4. *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1562



Figure 5. *Monkey Banquet*, David Teniers the Younger, 1660's



Figure 6. *Monkeys in a Tavern*, David Teniers the Younger, After 1640



Figure 7. *Monkeys Drinking and Smoking*, David Teniers the Younger, 1660's

3. Monkey Business and Ambition in Literature and Music

Apes in Literature of the Low Countries

Apes in literature and art are often viewed with the general assumption that they represent sin or folly. This point of view is a result of the medieval religious texts in which monkeys have been used as a didactic tool. However, if one looks to Greek and Roman fables and their impact on humanism as well as on early modern emblems, the notion that apes would have been explicitly understood as sinners or fools proves to be quite implausible. Instead there is a notable theme of imitation and self-flattery associated with apes. When considered in the context of other 17th and 18th century arts such as opera and theater, the ape as an imitator and vain animal seems to be much more in line with the social interests of the period. Theater and opera were full of social imposters that can easily be associated with the non-Christian ideas of apes as mimics.

Aesop

Aesop's fables are some of the best known and earliest examples of animal lore to be incorporated into western literature. The fables of Aesop were the first fables to reach the Netherlands, arriving through retellings by the Roman poet Phaedrus.¹ An anonymous Flemish writer, who stressed the didactic nature of the fables in his preface, was the first author to translate the fables into Dutch in the 13th century.² The popularity of fables in Europe during the middle ages is clearly demonstrated by the frequency with which Aesop's Fables were translated and the availability of other fable collections. Along with the fables of Aesop "The Parables by Cyrillus" and "The Dialogues by

¹ A. Th. Bouwman, "Het dier in Middelnederlandse letterkunde," in *Mijn Naam is Haas: Dierenverhalen in Verschillende Culturen*, edited by W.L. Idema, Mineke Schippen, and P.H. Schrijvers (Baarn: Uitgeverij AMBO, 1993), 60.

² Bouwman, 60.

Creatures” are two other popular Latin fable collections that were translated into French, Dutch, and English.³

Aesop’s fables are well known for their moralizing elements and their accessibility to readers. They are not overly complicated and are powerful didactic tools. Many of the fables existed in multiple forms dating back to the Medieval Period, all of which have the same core morals, yet vary in style and details. The flexibility that authors had with Aesop’s fables made them popular among humanists, creating a period of increased interest during the Renaissance.⁴ Translations allowed authors to infuse the fables with their own stylistic elements, creating new versions of which Karl Enenkel has remarked that “the boundaries between translation, adaptation, and new forms are difficult to identify.”⁵ By the early modern period multiple translations and editions of Aesop’s fables were available and well known across Europe.

Apes feature prominently in several of Aesop’s fables. One of the most important fables for the development of ape lore into 17th century, is the fable of *The Two Travelers and the King of the Monkeys* [Figure 1]. The fable exists in several forms and documented records of it date to as early as the 11th century.⁶ Although there are variations in the surviving texts, all of the versions include the same core elements. In *The Two Travelers and the Kings of the Monkeys*, two travelers are in the woods when they come across a monkey king and his court. The monkey king asks the travelers what they think of his court. One of the travelers lies and declares that the monkey king has a wonderful court with worthy subjects and is rewarded by the monkey king for his lie. When it is time for the second traveler to answer, he decides to tell the truth and points

³ Johan Koppenol, “Noah’s Ark Disembarked in Holland: Animals in Dutch Poetry 1530-1700” in *Early Modern Zoology: The construction of animals in science, literature and the visual arts*, edited by Karl A.E. Enenkel and Paul J. Smith (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 454.

⁴ Karl A.E. Enenkel, “Tussen lering en vermaak: De Latijnse fable in het humanisme,” in *Mijn naam is haas: Dierenverhalen in verschillende culturen*, edited by W.L Idema, Mineke Schipper, and P.H. Schrijvers (Baarn: Uitgeverij AMBO, 1993), 37.

⁵ Enenkel, 38. “De grenzen tussen bertaling, bewerking en nieuwe schepping zijn hier vaak moeilijk te trekken.”

⁶ A. Gerber, “The Fable of the Visit of the Truthful Man and the Liar with Monkeys, and the Adventure of Reynard and Isengrim with the Apes” in *Modern Language Notes* Vol. 4 No.8 (December, 1889), 480.

out that the king and his court are merely monkeys, a truth that he is punished for by the infuriated king.⁷

In each version of *The Two Travelers and the King of the Monkeys*, the vain monkey king is pleased when his visitors pretend that he is a true king and enraged when his identity as a mere ape is pointed out to him. Because the liar in this story is rewarded and in many versions the truthful man is killed, it is safe to say that the lesson of the fable is about the dangers of foolishness and vanity, rather than truth and deception. *The Two Travelers and the King of the Monkeys* remained extremely popular into the 17th and even the 18th century, continuing to be retold in many different versions.⁸

The Two Travelers and the King of the Monkeys is not directly concerned with class, but the theme seems to have resonated with people of the 17th century. It is likely that the continuing popularity of *The Two Travelers and the Monkey King* into the 18th century may have been because it could be interpreted as a comic lesson about class. One version of the fable explicitly describes the apes as foolish false nobility. It dates back to the 12th century, the earliest written record of it being in Marie de France's version of Aesop's Fables.⁹ In this version Marie de France explains that the monkey king had been a pet raised by the emperor before it escaped to the forest and began a court of its own.¹⁰ The monkey king in this version of the fable is clearly an imposter trying to "ape" the nobility. It could be understood as a fable that describes the defiance and desperation of the false nobility to defend their status.

Emblems

Emblem books are a well known and important part of 17th century literary culture. Many emblem books borrow from a variety of sources, including fable collections. One of the most important transition works between fables and emblems is *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (1567) compiled and written by Edwaerd De Dene

⁷ One example of this lore can be found in: *The History and Fables of Aesop*, translated and reprinted by William Caxton 1484, reprinted in facsimile (London: Scolar Press, 1976), 148-149.

⁸ Gerber, 480.

⁹ Gerber, 482.

¹⁰ Marie de France, *Fables*, edited and translated by Harriet Spiegle (Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

and illustrated by Marcus Gheeraerts. *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* is important because it borrows from Aesop, yet is adequately rewritten in a manner that does not seem overwhelmingly in debt to his work.¹¹ More importantly, *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* also borrows from other fable groups like the little known *Der Dieren Palleyes*.¹² The way in which De Dene reformatted the fables is also of interest. The fables in *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* are presented as a picture with a motto that is accompanied by a subscript, which provided further explanation.¹³ In essence this format links the animal fable tradition with the popular emblem books of the time by putting them in the same format. Fables were not losing their relevance in the 17th century, but rather evolving in their format.

One of the most popular emblem writers of the 17th century was Jacob Cats. While he did not focus on animals, Cats did frequently use emblems that included animals to comment on human behavior. Emblems that focus on apes are used in both his *Sinne- en Minnebeelden* (1627) and *Spiegel van den ouden en de Nieuwen Tijd* (1632). These emblem books are both important in helping to understand the purpose of apes in paintings in the Low Countries, but in drastically different ways. One emblem demonstrates the flexibility of fables and the image element of emblems and how various writers manipulate them; the other illustrates a distinct concern with the ambitions of fools represented via ape emblems.

In *Sinne- en Minnebeelden*, Cats uses a familiar motif in ape lore: a mother ape holding its offspring [figure 2].¹⁴ The emblem is accompanied by the motto “A loved one is never ugly and a sack of coal is never pretty.”¹⁵ The poem accompanying the emblem makes the point even clearer. Its last two lines declare:

Who is in love call brutal “free” and drunk “happy” :
Love knows how to turn a sin into virtue.¹⁶

¹¹ Dirk Geirnaert and Paul J. Smith, “The Sources of the Emblematic Fabel Book *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (1567)” in *The Emblem Tradition and the low countries*, edited by John Manning, Karel Porteman, and Mare van Vaeck, (Turnhout:Brepolis, 1999), 24.

¹² Paul J. Smith, *Het Schouwtoneel der dieren: Embleemfabels in de Nederlanden (1567- ca 1670)* (Hilversum: Uigeverij Verloeren, 2006), 15.

¹³ Edwaerd de Dene, *De warachtighe faulen der dieren*, (Bruges: Pieter de Clerck, 1567).

¹⁴ Jacob Cats, *Sinne- en Minnebeelden* (Kampen: J.H. Kok N.V., 1960), 22.

¹⁵ Cats, *Sinne- en Minnebeelden*, 22. “Noyt leelick lief, noch schoonen coolsack”

¹⁶ My own translation, for original text see: Cats, *Sinne- en Minnebeelden*, 22. “Den stouten noemtmen vry, die droncken is, verheurcht: De liefde weet de feyl te trecken tot de deught.”

Rather than focusing on sin or folly, Cats focuses on the ugliness of the ape as the means of conveying the message that people in love view even negative qualities in a positive light. Love is powerful enough to make even the ugly ape find its child beautiful.

It is important to note that the representation of an ape with its young can be traced back to Aesop [figure 3].¹⁷ However, Aesop's fable addresses the love of a mother ape in a very different manner. Aesop's mother ape holds her most beloved child in her arms, and forces the unfavored to ride on her back. When the mother ape is attacked, she drops the favored child in order to flee, saving only the despised one. While the moral of this fable could be interpreted in a number of ways, it is a far cry from Cats' emblematic use as a metaphor for blind (or rationalizing) love. In fact, the most common Christian use of the mother ape has to do with the trappings of sin. The mother ape is interpreted as having her hated child on her back (sin), and her beloved child in her arms (virtue). While it is easy for her to lose her beloved, the hated one (sin) will always remain with her.¹⁸ By comparing the original Aesopian use of the mother ape with the manner in which Cats used it, the freedom with which the 17th century writers used sources in their emblem books becomes abundantly clear. Using the three-part emblem, an author could reuse an old emblem or motto, and modify the meaning with the accompanying poem.

In *Spiegel van den ouden ende nieuwen Tijdt* (1632), Cats includes a monkey emblem that is more specifically concerned with the preoccupation of people in the 17th century with advancement. *La scimia quanto piu in alto sale Tanto piu scuopere le sue vergogne* depicts an ape climbing a pole, only to reveal his hind-quarters to the people standing below [figure 4].¹⁹ Accompanying the emblem is a poem that describes a man who, wishing for higher status, abandoned his business and acquired new goods. Despite his new property the man's mind was still simple and lacked any ingenuity,

¹⁷ Aesop, "The fable of the ape and its two children," in *The History and Fables of Aesop: Translated and Printed by William Caxton (1484)*, reprinted in facsimile (London: The Scholar Press, 1976), 245.

¹⁸ H.W. Janson, *Apes and Apes in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: University of London, 1952), 31.

¹⁹ Jacob Cats, *Spiegel van den ouden ende nieuwen Tijdt* Vol.3 (Graven Hage: Isaac Burchoorn, Boek-drucker, 1632), 5. Reprinted in facsimile in *Jacob Cats en zijn Spiegel van den Ouden ende Nieuwen Tijdt* (Amsterdam: Facsimile Uitgaven Nederland N.V. in affiliation with Uitgeverij het Parool te Amsterdam, N.Israel, antiquaar en uitgever te Amsterdam, and B. de Graaf, antiquaar en uitgever te Niwuekoop (Z.H.), 1968).

revealing his true character.²⁰ The last two lines of the poem direct the attention of the reader to both the emblem and the moral of the story:

It is certain, when an ape wants to climb a pole,
Then only will his bare bottom be revealed.²¹

The verse makes it clear that this poem is about social climbers who abandon their responsibilities in order to advance themselves. Like many of his emblems, Cats does not entirely invent this motif. This emblem relates to a common Middle-Dutch proverb that can be traced to the 13th century.²² While the original proverb may have had a broader meaning that could be applied to anyone who strives for something beyond his capability, Cats takes advantage of the mode of the 17th century emblem book to suit the emblem specifically to his purpose. Cats' version of the emblem survived into the 18th century in woodcut reproductions of popular Dutch proverbs [figure 5].²³

Satire in 17th Century French Literature

In France emblems did not play such a great role in 17th century literature, nor did the ape as a foolish and aggressive imitator. Instead, through their use of satire, French writers dealt with social imposters in a much more direct manner. Authors used characters that emulated the nobility as comic and foolish figures that could never succeed in increasing their social standing. French plays with foolish social climbers are an interesting counterpoint to Erasmus' *The False Knight*. Written just a century before, *The False Knight* mocks both those who wish to join the nobility due to the pointlessness of titles, but also points out the weakness of the nobility against imposters.²⁴ The nobility in *The False Knight* is a class that exists out of vanity and little else. It seems that

²⁰ Cats, *Spiegel* Vol.3, 5.

²¹ My own translation, for original text see: Cats, *Spiegel* Vol.3, 5. "Tis seker, als een aep wil klimmen in den spriet, Dan isset datmen eerst sijn naeckte billen siet."

²² Janson, 38.

²³ Gerard Rooijackers, "European Apelore in Popular Prints, 17th-19th centuries" in *Ape, Man, Ape*, edited by Raymond Corbey and Bert Theunissen (Leiden: Leiden University, 1995), 328.

²⁴ Erasmus Roterodamus

Erasmus' critique was not so much a farce as an astute observation of a fact; one that the nobility tried to hide and deny.

I have already noted that the French aristocracy was consumed by the desire to distinguish itself from other social groups. Members of the aristocracy became obsessed with the notion that one's personal image was a measure of one's social stock.²⁵ The potential for imitators to gain rank and social status through the appropriation of the life style of the elite must have been an irritating notion at least, if not all together disturbing. Anxiety of the nobility can be seen through the types of social climbers that were ridiculed in popular theater. No other French writer better demonstrates the social tensions of the 17th century than Molière, whose works will be used here to demonstrate the attitudes towards the social imposters in polite society. Molière is also a fitting author for this study because of his influence in the Low Countries. Authors such as Pieter Langendijk wrote comedies after Molière's own, which became one of the most successful genres in the Low Countries.²⁶

Molière (1622-1673) was born into a wealthy merchant family in Paris. His father had gained an office with the king in 1631, which he passed on to his son in 1637.²⁷ This office indicates that Molière's family had entered the ranks of the *anobli*, meaning that Molière, a writer who would later be known for his satires of social climbers, came from a family guilty of the same behavior. However it is important to note that Molière himself abdicated this office to his brother in order to peruse acting.²⁸ This choosing of a profession would have nullified Molière's position as a nobleman. Acting, even though it is not commerce or actual labor, was considered to be a profession unfit for the nobility. While a person of nobility was allowed to appear on stage as a

²⁵ Larry F. Norman, "Molière as Satirist" in *The Cambridge companion to Molière*, edited by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge-New York-Melbourne-Madrid-Cape Town-Singapore- São Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57.

²⁶ Meijer, Reinder P., *Literature of the Low Countries: A short history of Dutch literature in the Netherlands and Belgium* (The Hague and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 158.

²⁷ Marie-Claude Canova-Green, "The Career Strategy of an Actor Turned Playwright: 'de l'audace, encore de l'audace, toujours de l'audace'" in *The Cambridge companion to Molière*, edited by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge-New York-Melbourne-Madrid-Cape Town-Singapore- São Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

²⁸ Canova-Green, 3.

hobby, joining a professional group caused a forfeiture of title.²⁹ Molière made a conscious choice to abandon his newly acquired nobility to become an actor and playwright. Throughout his career as a prolific playwright and favorite entertainer to King Louis XIV, Molières personal experience with the class system in France informs his works, making them full of delightfully believable parodies of various “types” in French society.

One of the most innovative facets of Molière’s comedies is his use of preconceived stereotypes about French social classes in order to inform his audience as to the personality of his characters. Molière used clues to each characters true social status, such as wealth, clothing, and language, which provided the audience enough information to use their own perceptions of these social “types” to understand the place of each character in the play.³⁰ By taking advantage of these stereotypes, Molière did not have to invent tedious character monologues to describe his characters state of mind. Instead, Molière’s audience just understood the characters through their own experiences. This allowed Molière to move plots in a more comic and rapid manner. Literary critics have sometimes criticized the almost stereotypical nature of Molière’s characters as being true to only one facet of the complicated social players on which they are based.³¹ However this criticism does not seem to take into account that Molière’s characters were meant to be extreme examples of types, used for the sake of parody. They existed to prove the absurdity of various social behaviors while at the same time not forcing any of the viewers to recognize characters as real people. It has been suggested that this is indeed the key to Molière’s dominance in French comedy. He was able to avoid direct satire of any person, yet create types that were familiar and felt real to the audience, allowing them to laugh without being in danger of laughing at themselves.³²

Molière addresses the question of class and social mobility in several of his plays. He parodies various “types” of social climbers in order to point out the deficiencies of

²⁹ Joachim Christopher Nemeitz, *Séjour de Paris, c’est à dire, Instructions fidèles pour les voyageurs de condition* (Leiden: 1727) reprinted in *French Baroque Opera: A Reader*, edited by Graham Sadler and Caroline Wood, (Sldershot-Burlington-Singapore-Sydney: Ashgate, 2000),

³⁰ James F. Gains, *Social Structure in Molière’s Theater* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986, 19.

³¹ Eugene H. Falk, “Molière the Indignant Satirist: ‘Le Bourgeois gentilhomme’” in *The Tulane Drama Review* Vol 5. Nol. 1. (September. 1960), 75.

³² Norman, 58-61.

each and turns them all into figures of ridicule. I would like to address two of these plays and what aspects of social climbing they depict in more detail. First, in *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, social advancement is criticized through the delusions of rich common women who believe themselves to be worthy of marrying nobility. Then, in the *comedies-ballets* *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, the buffoonery of the imposter is highlighted.

Les Précieuses Ridicules

Les Précieuses ridicules is the story of two girls Magdalon and her cousin Cathos, who have been raised in a rich provincial bourgeois home and two rich Parisian bourgeois suitors, La Grange and Du Croisy. The main action of the play, as well as the social critique, is set into play when the girls reject their suitors. The two men walk away from the house of Magdalon's father angry and insulted by the behavior of the girls and are well aware that they were only declined because they were not dressed in flashy outfits. Magdalon and Cathos hope to attract noble suitors instead of merely rich bourgeois and criticize La Grange and Du Croisy, not because of inferior behavior or wealth, but rather for their clothing. Their argument against the worthiness of La Grange and Du Croisy as suitors, is made clear by Cathos:

To pay ones court with no pampons at the knee, a hat
with no feather in it, with a wig that is positively unkept
and a suit which boasts an almost total absence of ribbons!³³

From this quote it seems that the girls expect all of their potential suitors to dress with a feathered hat, elaborate hairstyle, and a jacket full of ribbons! James F. Gains has pointed out that the girls only have an idea of what nobility really is based on novels rather than any real experience.³⁴ This is demonstrated through the rather comic account given by Magdalon regarding how gentlemen fall in love:

First, he must spy the person he is to fall in love with in
a church, or while he is out strolling, or at some public

³³ Molière, "Such Foolish Affected Ladies" in *The Misanthrope and Other Plays*, Translated by John Wood, 1-28, (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 9. For original French text see Molière, *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, (Paris: Bordas, 1962), 48. "Venire en visite amoureuse avec un jambe tout unie, un chapeaus désarmé de plumes, une tête irrégulière en cheveux, et un habit souffre une idigence de rubans!"

³⁴ Gains, 64-65.

ceremony. Or else he must be directed by the hand of fate to her house by a relative or friend, and leave her presence pensive and sad. For a while he conceals his passion from the object of his love, but nevertheless calls to see her several times when some matter concerning the etiquette of love inevitably crops up to exercise the wits of the assembled company. The day comes when he must make his declaration. This should normally take place in an avenue in some garden while the rest of the party has walked ahead. This declaration is followed by instant fury which is made visible by our blushes and which for a while banishes the lover from our presence. He then finds a way of placating us, of accustoming us gradually To hear him speak of his passion, of drawing an admission which is so painful for us.³⁵

Of course this is absurd, but in the minds of the girls, nobility really does fall in love in temperamental fits of passion. Courting girls in the parlor of their guardian's house, which is what La Grange and Du Croisy had done, is simply too pedestrian for the nobility in the minds of Magdalin and Cathos. According to Gaines, Molière uses the girls' inexperience and exaggerated ideas of nobility to demonstrate their own inferiority and unworthiness. Even though Magdalin and Cathos are aware that nobility dress in a certain manner and behave in a specific manner (of which nearly everyone in French society was aware), it is impossible for them to recognize these mannerisms because they are mere commoners themselves.

The foolishness of Magdalon and Cathos is exaggerated to a comic level later in the play when they are tricked into thinking that the valets of La Grange and Du Croisy are members of the nobility. La Grange and Du Croisy are so insulted by the rejection of the young women that they decided to dress their valets as absurd caricatures of the

³⁵Molière, *Such Foolish Affected Ladies*, 8-9. For original French see Molière, *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, 46. "Premièrement, il doit voir au temple, ou à la promenade, ou dans quelque cérémonie publique, la personne don't il devient amoureux; ou bien être conduit fatalement chez elle par un parent ou un ami, et sortir de là tout rêveur et mélancolique. Il cache un temps sa passion à l'object aimé, et cependant ui rend plusieurs visites, où l'on ne manqué jamais de mettre sur le tapis une question galante qui exerce les esprits de l'assemblée. Le jour de la delclaration arrive, qui se doit faire ordinairement dans une allée de quelque jardin, tandis que la compagnie s'est un peu éloignée: cette declaration est suivie d'un prompt courroux, qui paraît à notre rougeur et qui, pur un temps, bannit l'amant de notre présence. Ensuite il trouve moyen de nous apaiser, de nous accoutumer insensiblement au discours de sa passion et de tirer de nous cet aveu qui fait tant de peine."

nobility and send them to court the girls, complete with over the top clothing. It is the clothing that would have immediately identified the valets as imposters to any true member of the noble class. Although the garments were sumptuous, they demonstrated no refinement taste on the part of their wearers.³⁶ This scene in *Les Précieuses ridicules* reflects the attitude described by Ellery Schalk, that nobility was most importantly a manifestation of inner qualities such as wit and grace. Without these inner qualities, outer indications of nobility appear to be nothing but a foolish costume.³⁷ La Grange's valet Mascarille, demonstrates this wonderfully in the play. In the middle of a conversation, he stops to ask the girls about his "trimmings" and what they thought of them. Mascarille is so proud of his outlandish out fit that he even asks the girls to stop and smell his wig!³⁸ Magdalon and Cathos are only fooled by such a ridiculous display of wealth because they are themselves not noble and just like Mascarille, lack all refinement expected of true nobility. In the last act of the play the valets' class is revealed as they are forced to remove their costumes, and in a very literal sense, their "nobility." Eugene Falk describes this physical unmasking of the valets as a metaphor of the simultaneous figurative unmasking of the girls as imposters.³⁹

The satire of *Les Précieuses ridicules* is entirely focused on non-nobles. Two major groups of commoners are contrasted: bourgeois who accept their social status, represented by the suitors, and aggressive and foolish social climbers, represented by the girls. It is particularly interesting that this play focuses on the tension within the bourgeois class between those who are social climbers and those who are not, because all of the failure and judgment occurs within the same class. There is no actual representative of the nobility, and no real threat to noble status. The valets are the characters that come closest to imitating nobility, but do so only as a deliberate farce.⁴⁰ The girls are hopeless in their ambitions for social advancement and pose no threat to the nobility.

³⁶ Gaines, 65.

³⁷ Ellery Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 200.

³⁸ Molière, *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, 62. Molière, *The Midsanthrope and Other Plays*, 19.

³⁹ Falk, 80.

⁴⁰ Gaines, 66.

David Teniers the Younger's *Monkey Banquet* [figure 7] provides an interesting parallel to *Les Précieuses ridicules*. Much like the girls in the play, the apes in *Monkey Banquet* are clearly no threat to the nobility. The apes foolishly dress in absurd outfits similar to the ones Magdalon and Cathos imagined that their ideal noble suitors would be wearing. The apes that appear to be dining at the table of nobility wear sumptuous hats with extravagantly large feathers in them. It is immediately clear to the viewer that though the apes may be dressed as nobility they are simply apes. Teniers makes this clear most obviously by making his figures apes in the first place, and second by contrasting them with the naked apes which behave in the exact same manner as the apes dressed as nobility. Social climbers such as Magdalon and Cathos, regardless of their self-image, are still just commoners and are thus easily fooled by pageantry and superficial marks of nobility. They are monkeys among monkeys. Both *Monkey Banquet* and *Les Précieuses ridicules* appealed to the nobility because they would have understood what social types the artists were portraying, whether it was on canvas or on stage.

Larry Riggs has commented that Molière's satires are so effective, because they stroke the ego of the audience. They are reassured that they are not the fools themselves by their ability to laugh at the satire and understand what makes the characters so absurd.⁴¹ Riggs argument can be extended to Teniers' ape paintings. The viewer is assured that he is not the object of the artist's scrutiny because he recognizes what conventional social type the artist is portraying. It is obvious to them that the apes are not nobility itself, rather the apes represent those who ape nobility. A self-confident nobleman would not recognize *Monkey Banquet* or *Les Précieuses ridicules* as criticism, but rather an inside joke.

Le Bourgeois gentilhomme

Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* depicts a second type of social imposter. This time, unlike in *Les Précieuses ridicules*, the aping of the nobility is done in earnest

⁴¹ Larry W. Riggs, "Issues of Nobility in Dom Juan and Le Bourgeois gentilhomme" in *The French Review* Vol. 59, No 3. (Feb 1986): 404.

as an attempt to rise in social class. The protagonist of this play is Monsieur Jourdain, a wealthy cloth merchant that wishes to become a member of the nobility. He believes that by emulating nobility he will be able to gain access to their ranks. It has been pointed out that it appears that Monsieur Jourdain attempts to *possess* nobility, like one possesses fancy clothing.⁴² While this notion would have been absurd in the eyes of the nobility in the audience, when placed into historical context the idea that nobility can be possessed is really not all that strange. Well into the 17th century people were able to buy nobility, or at least titles, through paying the court to place them in offices that served the king.⁴³ Essentially this practice made noble titles a commodity that could be bought and therefore possessed. Monsieur Jourdain was not attempting to buy a title, but only to buy the accoutrements of nobility, but in principle the two ideas are not that far removed from one another.

Again, costume and behavior play central roles in the farce. Monsieur Jourdain has his tailor make him an elaborate outfit that “men of quality” would wear. The tailor presents Jourdain with a suit that has inverted floral patterns, which he initially finds unacceptable. Jourdain is so obsessed with the idea of having the proper attributes of a gentleman, that the only encouragement he needs to accept the appearance of the suit and wear it, is the tailor telling him that all men of quality wear their floral patterns inverted. For Jourdain, his personal opinion and the actual appearance of the suit are trumped by what he is told the nobility wears.⁴⁴ He is also keenly aware of how important image is to social status. After receiving his new suit from the tailor, Jourdain wants to make a display of it. He tells his footmen:

Follow me. I’m going out to show off my new suit
in town. Mind you both keep close behind me, so that
people will know that you are mine.⁴⁵

⁴² Riggs, 401.

⁴³ Roger Mettan, “The French Nobility 1610-1715” in *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* Vol 1, ed. H.M. Scott (London and New York: Longman, 1995):115.

⁴⁴ Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, (Montreal-Paris-Brussels: Didier, 1968),60.

⁴⁵ Molière, “The Would-be Gentleman” in *Misanthrope and Other Plays*, Tansalted by John Wood and David Coward (London:Penguin Books, 2000), 205. For original Frech see Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, 63. “Suivez-moi, que j’aïlle un peu montrer mon habit par la ville; et surtout ayez soin tous deux de marcher immédiatement sur mes pas, afin qu’on voie bien que vous êtes àmoi.”

Not only is Jourdain aware of how important it is to be seen in proper clothing, he is also aware of the status that having servants conveys.

Monsieur Jourdain's character does not only want to look like nobility, he also tries to live in an aristocratic manner. He hires tutors in music, dance, fencing, and philosophy, all because he has been assured that the nobility also studies these things. Jourdain is convinced that this will help him to advance socially, and unaware that his teachers and family all find him to be quite foolish. In Act I Scene I of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* the dance and music instructors have a conversation that immediately makes the audience aware of the fact that Jourdain's charade is not fooling anyone:

Music Master: Now it's true that this man of ours has no great share of enlightenment. He usually gets hold of the wrong end of the stick and claps in all the wrong places. But his money makes up for the weakness of his judgment. His taste is located in his wallet. His applause has cash value. Ignorant and middle class he might be, but he's worth more to us, you know, than the cultured nobleman who put us in touch with him.⁴⁶

Jourdain's tutors are only interested in his money, and see no potential for him actually learning much from them. Again, we see an attitude that was very real among the 17th century nobility; if one was not born into the nobility, no matter how much education one received, one will never be able to properly behave as nobility.⁴⁷ Jourdain's wife, daughter, and servants all see this clearly and are opposed to Jourdain's plans to move into the nobility by having his daughter marry a gentleman. The vanity of Jourdain and his strong desire to advance socially blinds him to the absurdity of his behavior, which everyone else clearly sees.⁴⁸ It is precisely this blindness that makes his character so comic; Jourdain's absolute obliviousness makes him laughable rather than pitiable.

It is important to consider that *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* was actually commissioned by King Louis XIV, to be performed at court. Between 1664 and 1672

⁴⁶ Molière, *Misanthrope and Other Plays*, 187. For original French see *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, 24. "C'est un homme, à la vérité, don't les lumières sont petites, qui parle à tort et à travers de toutes choses, et n'applaudit qu'à contresens; mais son argent redresse les jugements de son esprit. Il a du discernements dans sa bourse. Ses Louanges sont monnayées; et ce bourgeois ignorant nous vaut mieux comme vous voyez, que le grand seigneur éclairé qui nous a introduits ici."

⁴⁷ Mettan, 117.

⁴⁸ Falk, 82.

Molière wrote 15 plays exclusively for the king and was one of his favorite entertainers.⁴⁹ Therefore it is safe to assume that Molière was apt at catering to the taste and opinions of the king with his plots and characters. While the king asked for a play that would ridicule the Turks, Molière marginalizes this element of the play, and instead maintains the familiar comic motif of the foolish bourgeois. The king was particularly fond of Molière's comédie-ballets like *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*,⁵⁰ all of which contain elements of social critique. Molière likely used the foolish social climber so very often because it was funny to the king, not because he wanted to teach people a lesson. He was performing a service of entertainment.

Social Critique in Opera

Social status continued to be a popular motif well into the 18th century, even though the form of popular entertainment was changing. By the turn of the 18th century opera had completely replaced theater as preferred entertainment of the court. The end of Molière's career provides clear evidence of the shift of the king's preference from theater to opera. In 1672 the musician Lully and his partner Quinault replaced Molière as the main entertainer to the king.⁵¹ Lully and Molière had worked together on many occasions to produce what were known as *comédie-ballets*, which was a form of theater that used music, dance and spoken dialogue to tell a comedic story.⁵² Even though Molière was pushed out of the king's service when Lully and Opera gained favor, the taste in comic motifs like those in Molière and Lully's *comédie-ballet* remained popular. Unlike theater, which had many companies throughout Paris and one that served the court, there was only one Opera and it was under the control of a single director who was appointed to serve the king.⁵³ Therefore the type of operas being performed, to a great

⁴⁹ Canova-Green, 10.

⁵⁰ Canova-Green, 7.

⁵¹ Canova-Green, 12.

⁵² James R. Anthony, *French Baroque Music From Beaujeyeux to Rameau*, (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1978),54-56.

⁵³ David Charlton. "Genre and Form in French Opera" in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth Century Opera*. Edited by Anthony R. Del Donna and Pierpaolo Polzonetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009),155.

extent can be viewed as an expression of the king's tastes rather than more general popular themes.

Italian operas were very influential all over Europe. Lully himself was originally from Florence, but changed the Italian spelling (Lulli) of his name in an attempt to better assimilate into French high culture.⁵⁴ Lully adapted well to the French theater and was a highly successful collaborator of Molière's. This collaboration focused on the plays of Molière, using Lully's music as an accentuation. In a bold move to establish dominance over the court entertainment, Lully began the Académie Royale de Musique in 1671 and placed strict restrictions on which performers could use what types of music and texts.⁵⁵ As a result, Lully gained a great deal of control over the royal entertainment and a complete monopoly over opera. It is important to note that even though Lully was from Florence, he worked primarily in France and is considered a composer of French style opera. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the Italian influence in his choice of operas and the way that he structured them.

French opera under the control of Lully is largely considered to be very reminiscent of Italian classical opera in plot, but typically French in music. Lully uses the main figures and the chorus in a predictable manner that moves the plots forward. At first glance it may seem that these operas have little to do with the social farces written by Molière, but in fact they too include elements of social commentary. Instead of critique, Lully utilizes more of a model of positive reinforcement for social norms. It has been noted by Rebecca Harris-Warrick that while basing his operas on Italian models, Lully developed his own unique use of the notion of the chorus.⁵⁶ Lully writes his operas as an interaction of a main figure with society at large, which is played by the chorus, rather than focusing on relationships between isolated individuals, as is common in Italian opera. The chorus functions as a model for social norms and the coherent group

⁵⁴ Sterling Mackinlay, *Origin and Development of Light Opera*, (London: Hutchinson and Co. Publishers Ltd, 1927), 98.

⁵⁵ Canova-Green, 13.

⁵⁶ Rebecca Harris-Warrick, "Lully's On-stage Societies" in *Opera and Society in Italy and France From Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, edited by Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman, (Cambridge- New York- Melbourne- Madrid- Cape Town- Singapore- São Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53.

that results from it.⁵⁷ While Molière focused on showing the negative effects of working outside of one's proper place in society, Lully built model societies.

Phaëton (1683) is an example of Lully's manner of constructing ideal societies around his heroic or tragic figures. It is a tragic opera about the son of the sun, who has ambitions to take over the Egyptian Throne. In order to usurp power Phaëton must prove his noble lineage, deciding to do so by driving his father's chariot across the sky.⁵⁸ While the other characters are wary of Phaëton's ambitions, most notably his lover, Phaëton himself is blind to his own ambitions. He even sings "Love speaks to me in vain... Proud ambition speaks louder."⁵⁹ Phaëton could even be interpreted as a tragic parallel for Monsieur Jourdain. Both are so ambitious that they do not see the foolishness of their behavior, yet everyone around them is able to see the trouble in which they are getting themselves into.

Molière and Lully were working for the same patron, King Louis XIV, in the same time period, so it is important to try and understand what made both of their styles so appealing. Essentially it is because both Molière's model of social critique and Lully's manner of constructing a model for society in his choruses can be seen as two means to the same end. King Louis was obsessed with his absolutism, which depends on social rules and relative normalcy, but at the same time, the late 17th century and early 18th century were a time of social flexibility and change. Molière's works reassured the monarch that there was no real threat to the nobility and social structure from the buffoonish bourgeois and discouraged people from acting in such a manner. On the other hand, Lully's structure and classicism reinforced to the king, as well as any viewer of the opera, positive ideas of society and how it is meant to function.⁶⁰ In both cases the entertainment reflected the values of the king and his court.

It is also worth noting how opera functioned in Parisian society beyond its obvious role as entertainment for the court. Opera was seen as an opportunity to learn socialization and important mannerisms. Actors playing the roles of nobles were

⁵⁷ Harris-Warrick, 63-64.

⁵⁸ Graham Sadler, "Fatal Ambition: Lully's Phaëton Rides Again" in *Early Music* Vol. 22 No. 4 (November 1994): 692.

⁵⁹ Sadler, "Fatal Ambition" 693. *Phaëton* Act 3 Scene 2.

⁶⁰ Don Fader "The 'cabale du Dauphin,' Campra and Italian Comedy: The courtly politics of French Musical Patronage around 1700" in *Music and Letters*, Vol. 86 Issue 3. (2005): 381.

essentially a guide to the dress and manners currently in use at the court.⁶¹ Furthermore, the opera was considered a place to see others and also to be seen oneself. People partly went to the opera to keep up with the latest fashions and to copy the aristocracy in attendance.⁶² Attending the opera also helped to fulfill the image of a bourgeois or an aristocrat as a cultured and well-learned individual. Having a strong opinion about an opera and being able to discuss it were important parts of the social pageantry, for which the French were well known. It was even noted by foreign visitors to the French opera, that every one indeed did have an opinion, which they loudly shared regardless of its validity.⁶³ The opera was then an ideal medium through which to reinforce nominative social behavior. People in attendance were attempting to portray the social ideal and open to observing behaviors that would help them to “pass” for cultured and sophisticated members of society.

Despite the dominance of the Parisian opera and the classicism that Lully preferred to present there, other forms of opera still managed to arise. Comic opera or *Opera Buffa* was an especially popular form of Italian opera. *Opera Buffa* first appeared in Venice in the 1630's. It is a very light, silly form of opera that immediately appealed to audiences. By the mid 17th century, *Buffa* was so popular that nearly every opera, including histories and tragedies, contained comic figures and funny intermezzi.⁶⁴ In France *Opera Buffa* was limited due to the control of Lully over the royal opera company; the genre still had supporters, but was not as widely performed. One of the major ways in which *Opera Buffa* developed in France was through its performance as a part of annual fairs.⁶⁵ However, the most important patron was still royal; the king's son, the Grand Dauphin Louis de Bourbon, commissioned several Italianate operas.⁶⁶ The Dauphin and his circle enjoyed Italian comedies so much that they even performed some themselves.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Charlton, “Genre and Form” 156.

⁶² Sadler, Graham and Caroline Wood, *French Baroque Opera: A Reader* (Aldershot-Burlington-Singapore-Sydney: Ashgate, 2000), 33.

⁶³ Sadler and Wood, 93.

⁶⁴ Mackinlay, 64.

⁶⁵ Mackinlay, 64.

⁶⁶ Fader, 395.

⁶⁷ Fader, 403.

While in France the popularity of *Opera Buffa* was somewhat limited because of the politics surrounding courtly entertainment and the French opera, in the Viennese court it thrived. Much like in France the opera in Vienna was considered a place of social performance. Boxes for the upper-class functioned as a type of private salon that was in full public view, allowing for the nobility to display their cultural prowess.⁶⁸ *Opera Buffa* is well known for its rumpus plots and their manipulation of social norms. Plots focused on the complicated social structures of the period and just like in Molière's plays, critiqued various members of society in a gentle non-threatening manner. Comparisons of *Opera Buffa* in Vienna with popular literary themes, especially those from France and Italy, are not at all superficial. Many of the plots used by composers in Vienna are directly appropriated from French and Italian literature and theater.⁶⁹

Much like Molière's plays in France during the late 17th century, in 18th century Vienna *Opera Buffa* served to reinforce social structures through parody and demonstrations of absurdity. One of the most famous examples of a socially driven *Opera Buffa* is Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*. The main conflict of *Le Nozze di Figaro* occurs when two servants in Count Almaviva's household (Figaro and Susanna) wish to wed, but under an arcane set of laws the count is first allowed to bed the maid. Figaro, Susanna, and the countess are all opposed to this, but the count intends on executing his rights. A confusing series of events unfolds with each of the characters scheming for what is in their own best interest. What is striking about this example is that the buffoonery is not limited simply to one "social imposter" as in most of the plays by Molière, but is spread among a diverse cast. In *Le Nozze di Figaro* the count is quite a scoundrel in his intention to bed Susanna and be unfaithful to his wife. Figaro on the other hand foolishly assumes that he can match wits with the count and prevent him from having Susanna. Each of them is guilty of a social faux pas; the count is acting in an ignoble manner while Figaro thinks that he is on an equal intellectual level as a member of the nobility.

⁶⁸ Mary Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: The Poetics of Entertainment*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 27.

⁶⁹ Hunter, 31-32.

The original theatrical version of *Le Nozze di Figaro* had been banned in Vienna because of its anti-aristocratic sentiment.⁷⁰ Mozart's recrafting of the story and the tone in which he presented *Le Nozze di Figaro* is very important in the court's decision to allow the opera to be performed. Count Almaviva is a lustful figure in Mozart's version of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, but not heartless or evil. By the end of the opera he has seen the error of his ways and is repentant to his wife. Almaviva is not a critique on the nobility as a whole, but rather on some of the bad behavior of some of the lower nobility.⁷¹ Furthermore, the count is not deterred by his servant, Figaro. The plot that diverts Almaviva is thought of by his wife, the countess. Therefore there is no inversion of social hierarchy. At the end of the opera, like in many of Mozart's *Opera Buffas*, the social hierarchy is reinforced by the resolution.⁷² It is likely that this reinforcement of class stability at the end of the opera is what made it acceptable in the opinion of the court.

⁷⁰ Daniel Hertz, "Setting the Stage for Figaro" in *The Musical Times*, Vol. 127 No. 1718 (May 1986): 260.

⁷¹ Frits Noske, "Social Tension in 'Le Nozze di Figaro'" in *Music and Letters* Vol.50 No.1 (January 1969):61.

⁷² Hunter, 58.

Chapter Three Images

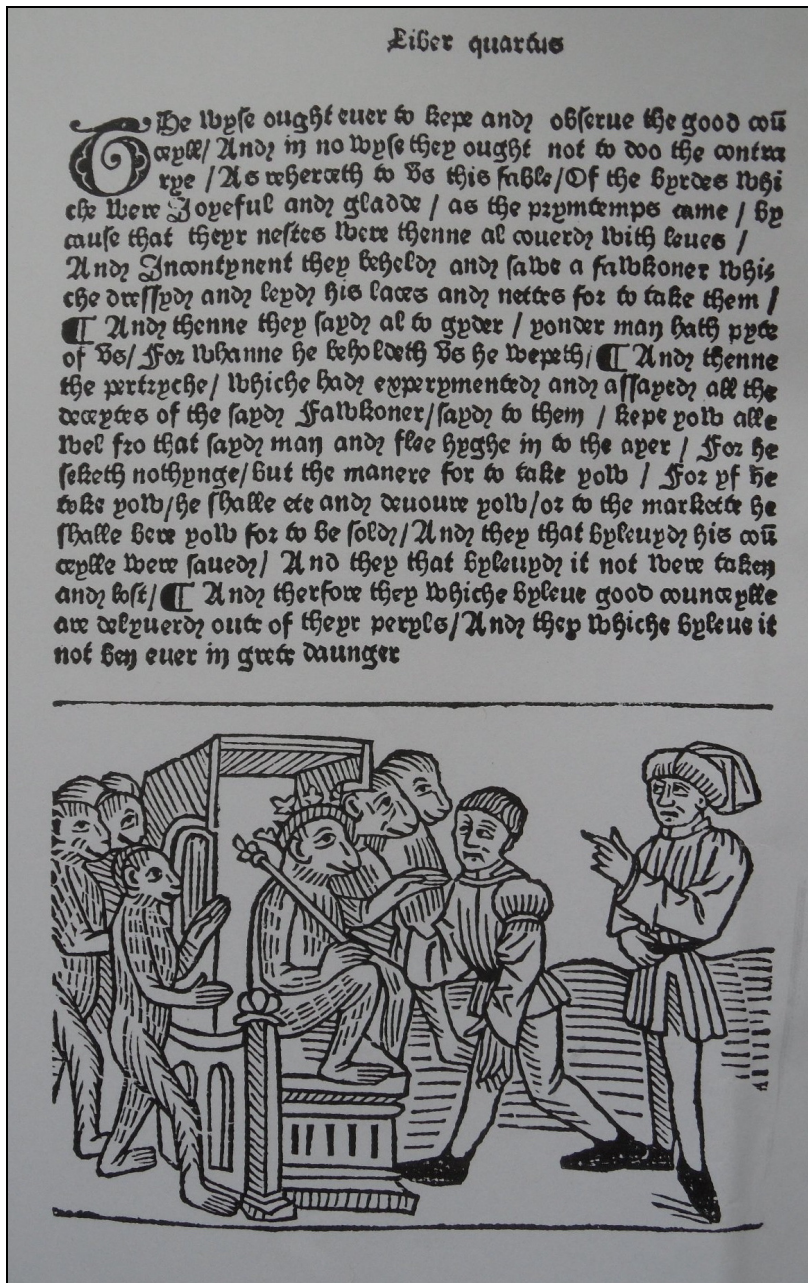


Figure 1. *The Two Travelers and the Monkey King*, woodcut print from *The History and Fables of Aesop: Translated and Printed by William Caxton* (1484)



Figure 2. *Mother Ape*, etching from Jacob Cats' *Sinne- en Minnebeelden* (1627)

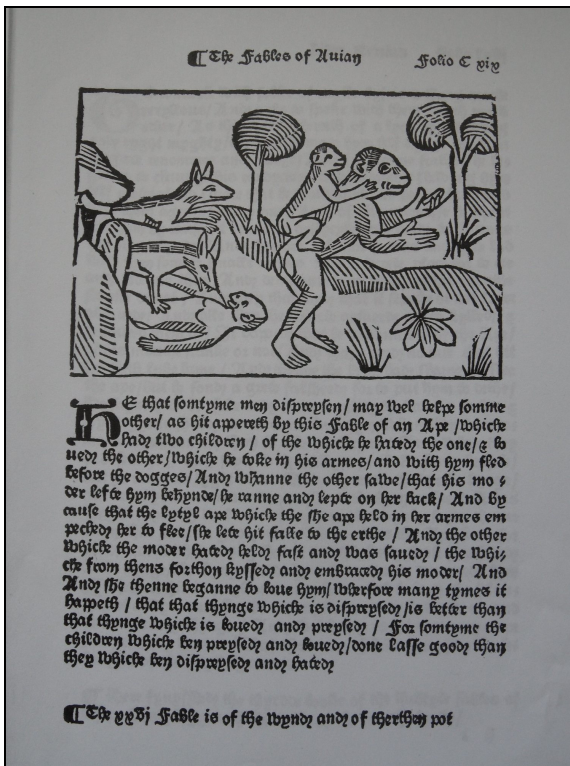


Figure 3. *Mother Ape*, woodcut print from *The History and Fables of Aesop: Translated and Printed by William Caxton* (1484)



Figure 4. *Ambitious Monkey*, etching from Jacob Cats' *Spiegel van den ouden ende nieuwen Tijd* (1632)



Figure 5. *Ambitious Monkey*, woodcut print from *Dutch Proverbs* published by S. and W. Koen (1781)

4. David Teniers the Younger : Nobleman or Social Climber?

Social Status and the Early Career of David Teniers the Younger

It is clear that the nobility easily recognized stereotypes of social climbers and imposters in art, literature, and opera, and found them to be funny. Theater and opera were largely influenced and controlled by the court in Paris and although the court in France was often responsible for the types of works produced in these media, the court in the Low Countries did not dominate painting. While David Teniers the Younger did eventually serve the court in Brussels, he began painting his ape allegories long before moving to Brussels and occupying the position as court painter. Therefore the initial motivation for Teniers to paint apes as mimickers of the nobility was not necessarily indicative of an interest of the court. Teniers' own aspiration to become a member of the nobility may shed some light on his motivation to create these comic yet critical paintings.

David Teniers the Younger was baptized in the Sint Jacobskerk in Antwerp on December 15, 1610.¹ His parents were the painter David Teniers the Elder and Dympha de Wilde, the orphaned daughter of Cornelis de Wilde, a sea captain for the Spanish fleet.² Teniers' family history eventually would play an important role in his own career, success, and status. The most obvious impact that David Teniers the Younger's family had on him, is that he was to become a painter just like his father. Records show that Teniers was working in his father's studio by 1626, even though it was not until 1633 that he began to produce and sign his own works.³ Painting was evidently not the only thing that David the Younger learned from his father. He also worked alongside his father as an art dealer on international markets.⁴ Teniers was establishing himself as an important artist and art dealer very early in his career, which resulted in many opportunities for the young artist. He even received a major commission by 1636 to paint a peasant scene for

¹ Hans Vlieghe, *David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690): A Biography*, (Turnhout:Brepolis, 2011),6.

² Vlieghe, 6.

³ Margret Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge: Schildrijen – Tekeningen*, (Anwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, May 11 – September 1, 1991),18.

⁴ Jane P. Davidson, *David Teniers the Younger*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980),4.

the hunting lodge of the king of Spain thanks to a recommendation from Pieter Paul Rubens.⁵

In bleak comparison to the success of his son, David Teniers the Elder had fallen into financial ruin by 1629. Hans Vlieghe remarks that this misfortune of his father may have been a major catalyst in David Teniers the Younger's drive to set his life in a different direction both financially and artistically.⁶ Unlike his father, renown and success as an artist came easily to David Teniers the Younger. His eclectic and refined style helped him to sell paintings on a variety of markets. Personal social status was something else all together from financial and artistic success. However, just as in painting, Teniers was successful in his endeavor to gain social currency at a young age.

On July 22, 1637 David Teniers the Younger married Anna Bruegel, the daughter of the deceased Jan Bruegel the Elder.⁷ His wedding to Anna Bruegel was beneficial for Teniers artistically, financially, and perhaps most importantly, socially. The Breugels were a well-known and important artistic family, but Teniers gained important connections other than to the Bruegels through his marriage to Anna. Pieter Paul Rubens, the respected artist and diplomat, was a friend of Anna's father and served as a witness for her marriage to Teniers.⁸ In addition to the prestigious acquaintances that Teniers gained through his marriage to Anna, it has also been noted that she seems to have brought a large sum of money into the marriage, further improving Teniers' financial standing.⁹ The marriage of David Teniers the Younger and Anna Bruegel is often rather cynically regarded as the first indication that Teniers was attempting to better his social standing. While the marriage undoubtedly improved Teniers social standing and provided access to higher social circles, there is no evidence to suggest that this was anything more than a positive result of the wedding. Throughout the remainder of Teniers' life, he would prove to be an aggressive social climber, but whether the marriage to Anna was a means to this ends, or an event that initiated his drive to advance is impossible to say.

⁵ Davidson, 4.

⁶ Vlieghe, 11.

⁷ M.G. Wildeman, *Antekening betreffende den Stamboom van David Teniers II en zijn adels-adspiraties* ('s Gravenhang: Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie en Heraldiek, 1914), 227.

⁸ Vlieghe, 15.

⁹ Vlieghe, 16.

Teniers' wealth and reputation continued to grow after his marriage to Anna Bruegel. From 1645 to 1646 he served as the Dean of the St. Lukes guild, and was also an active member of the Violieren Chamber of Rhetoric.¹⁰ Both of these positions demonstrate Teniers' increasing social standing, and his attempt to position himself more closely with practices associated with the nobility. We have already seen that engaging in cultured activities and in debates about the arts and humanist studies were a highly important way for the 17th century nobility to distinguish themselves from commoners.¹¹ It seems likely that Teniers was asserting his own status through his involvement in the Violiern Chamber of Rhetoric.

A Family Concert [figure 1], a portrait of the artist's own family painted during 1645, supports the notion that Teniers was attempting to construct an aristocratic self-identity during this period. Vlieghe has noted that *A Family Concert* may be an attempt by Teniers to assert his new social rank by associating the art of painting with the art of music, a practice which had very genteel connotations.¹² While I agree that the painting is an attempt to emphasize Teniers' social standing, I do not think it is through an attempted elevation of the art of painting to the same status as music. Many other elements of the painting also indicate that *A Family Concert* is about class.

Teniers paints his family sitting on a terrace in front of a baroque stone building. They all wear fine costumes, complete with lace and ribbons. While their clothing is clearly of high quality it is also not excessively ornate, which as it is made clear in the plays of Molière is also an indication of nobility. The family not only has the wealth to afford nice things, but the refined taste to choose the appropriate items. The family gathers around a table covered with a blue cloth, which is an element Teniers frequently used in his more sumptuous interiors. Each family member is engaged in music making, either with an instrument or reading out of a songbook. A servant boy, who is dressed as finely as the family, presents them with a glass on a pewter serving tray. Behind Teniers

¹⁰ Davidson,5.

¹¹ Roger Mettan, "The French Nobility,1610-1715" in *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Vol.1 edited by H.M. Scott, (London & New York: Longman, 1995),118-119.

¹² Vlieghe,25.

and his family, a monkey climbs the stone ledge. The scene is presented in front of a wide-open country space.

While *A Family Concert* is a charming family portrait, it is not simply a record of the family at leisure. Each of the details listed above carries specific connotations in the context of identity construction during the 17th century in the Southern Low Countries. Even the simple notion of a family concert is overtly aristocratic in character. Margret Klinge feels that Teniers paints the family portrait as a concert as an allusion to familial harmony.¹³ Her interpretation once again is reliant on symbolism and emblems, overlooking the social realities of the 17th century. The importance of musical knowledge as a mark of nobility is made abundantly clear by Molière's inclusion of it in his farce *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*. As we have seen, Monsieur Jordains, the main figure in the play, is a common merchant trying to advance himself socially by imitating the nobility. As a part of this process he takes music lessons to both learn to perform and speak about music. Jordains' main concern is to learn things that are popular among the nobility, a sentiment expressed when he asks his music instructor "do the quality learn music as well?"¹⁴ Furthermore, the inclusion of the children in to the musical performance implies that they are learning the proper etiquette of the nobility at home, which will allow them to behave as proper nobility later in life.

The servant boy is also a key indication that Teniers is trying to convey a certain degree of wealth and status in the *A Family Concert*. The size of a household and what servants could be afforded was also an important social sign about the affluence of the master of the household. Again, this is one of Molière's most commonly used techniques.¹⁵ It is important to note that while to have a servant was not indicative of nobility it was indicative of a minimal social status of upper bourgeois. For example in *Les Précieuses Ridicules* the wealthy bourgeois suitors La Grange and De Croisy arrive with their valets, informing the savvy viewer that they are indeed suitable callers for the

¹³ Klinge, *David Teniers de Junge*, 126.

¹⁴ Molière, "The Would-be Gentleman" in *The Misanthrope and Other Plays*, edited by John Wood and David Coward, (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 191. For original French text see Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, (Montréal – Paris – Brussels: Didier, 1968), 29. "Est-ce que les gens de qualité apprennent aussi la musique?"

¹⁵ James F. Gaines, *Social Structure in Molière's Theater*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986), 19.

young women. As we have seen in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* Monsieur Jourdain takes his servants into town to show off his wealth both through his new suit and his household help. Teniers would have undoubtedly known what notions about class the inclusion of servants could bring to mind. There seems to be no valid reason for Teniers' to include the servant in the family portrait other than trying to take advantage of him as an indication of wealth. With the servant in the painting, there can be little doubt that the family was at least a wealthy bourgeois family.

Certain possessions in *A Family Concert* also indicate the family was elevated in class. The pewter tray held by the servant, for example, is not an object that would ordinarily be found in a poor home or tavern. However, the pet monkey is the most interesting possession of the family. During the 16th century, monkeys and other exotic animals became popular pets in the Iberian courts.¹⁶ Catherine of Austria (1577-1587) was particularly fond of exotic creatures and frequently sent monkeys as gifts to relatives and other courts in both Spain and the Low Countries.¹⁷ The practice of giving apes and monkeys as prestigious gifts lasted into the 17th century. A well-documented example was the 1640 gift of a chimpanzee to the Prince of Orange, a gift met with so much appreciation that the prince allowed the famous Dr. Nicolas Tulp to dissect it.¹⁸ Regardless of their reception, monkeys were a courtly gift and owning a monkey would have been an indication of at least moderate wealth. One can only assume that Teniers would have included this monkey as a status symbol, as it seems unlikely that he would want to associate his own family with sin, folly, or foolishness.

It is also important not to overlook the setting of *A Family Concert* because it too provides the viewers with clues to the occupant's status. Country estates were frequently included in paintings of nobility to reiterate their class through the land that they

¹⁶Almudena Pérez de Tudela and Annemarie Jordan Geshwend, "Renaissance Menageries: Exotic Animals and Pets at the Habsburg Courts in Iberia and Central Europe" in *Early Modern Zoology: The construction of animals in science, literature and the visual arts*, ed. Karl A.E. Enenkel and Paul J. Smith, (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007), 421.

¹⁷ Pérez de Tudela and Geshwend, 423.

¹⁸ Pamela J. Asquith, "Of Monkeys and Men: Cultural views in Japan and the west" in *Ape, Man, Apemand: Changing views since 1600*, edited by Raymond Corbey and Bert Theunissen, (Leiden: Leiden University, 1995), 310.

possessed.¹⁹ Although Teniers did not acquire his own country estate until much later in his career, the message that the large building on the country-side would convey to any viewer was the same: the family in *A Family Concert* is wealthy and probably noble. Essentially the image conveys a carefully molded identity of the family, which is more important than whether the family really owned such a house. After all, they are unlikely to have owned a monkey either. Like in the plays of Molière, Teniers uses certain cultural ideas and stereotypes about the nobility to convey a message to the viewer. In this case, Teniers was asserting his social clout.

Horse Trading [figure 2], also painted in 1645, is yet another painting in which Teniers paints himself in a manner that brings to mind the nobility. In this painting Teniers paints himself and his son bartering with a man over a horse. Again they wear fine, but not extravagant clothing. Walter Liedtke suggests that Teniers is attempting to portray himself as a knowledgeable horseman and a tasteful consumer.²⁰ Both horsemanship and refined tastes were qualities that the nobility highly valued, because they were considered to be difficult for the bourgeois to master. It seems likely that *Horse Trading* and *A Family Concert*, both painted in 1645, a time when Teniers was on a particularly fast upward social trajectory serving as the Dean of the St. Luke's guild and making connections with influential patrons such as the Archbishop of Ghent, are attempts to emphasize his increasing social prominence.

Social Status and Artists

Since the Italian Renaissance, artists struggled to elevate painting and sculpture from a mere craft to a liberal art.²¹ The liberal arts such as music and poetry were considered to be genteel pursuits suitable to the nobility, a status that artists hoped that painting could also achieve. Painters were often associated with general craftsmen, a fact reflected in the variety of craftsmen and types of painters that were members of the

¹⁹ Faith Paulette Dreher, "Chateaux and Their Proprietors in the Work of David Teniers II" in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 60 No. 4 (Dec. 1978): 686.

²⁰ Walter Liedtke, *The Royal Horse and Rider: Painting, sculpture, and horsemanship 1500-1800*, (New York: Abaris Books in Association with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 275.

²¹ Dreher, 684.

traditionally St. Luke's guild.²² In Antwerp the painter's guild of St. Luke had even gained the adjunct guild of the Violieren Chamber of Rhetoric, which focused on literature and theater.²³ Nevertheless, with the exception of the few painters who managed to become important servants to courts, painters did not usually enjoy any desired elevation of status.

Court service and royal patronage had existed as a way for artists to elevate into the nobility since the Renaissance. Artists such as Albrecht Dürer, Pieter Paul Rubens, and Anthony Van Dyck were all granted nobility through their service to the court. Achieving nobility for an artist was rather extraordinary and even artists who served the court were by no means guaranteed ennoblement. By the 17th century it was not uncommon for artists to try and gain knighthood through their service to the court, but even after gaining titles as courtiers, the artists' status often remained ambiguous in comparison to born noblemen.²⁴ Regardless of the nuances of ennoblement, when considering the success of Rubens and Van Dyck at court and their subsequent ennoblements just a generation before Teniers, it is understandable why Teniers viewed court service as a means to ennoble himself. Teniers was personally connected to Rubens, and used this connection to help his case for nobility. Teniers petitions for nobility and his connections to Rubens will be discussed more extensively later.

Teniers and the Court

Teniers' popularity and reputation had already gained him important patrons by the mid 1640's. One of the most important of Teniers' new influential and affluent patrons was the Archbishop of Ghent, Antonius Triest. Triest was a great art lover who commissioned various works from Teniers. More importantly, in 1647 he introduced Teniers to the new Archduke of the Southern Low Countries, Leopold Wilhelm.²⁵ David Teniers the Younger became the official court painter of Leopold Wilhelm in 1651,

²² Craig Haribison, *The Mirror of the Artist: Northern Renaissance art in its historical context*, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1995), 64-65.

²³ Davidson, 5.

²⁴ Dreher, 683-684.

²⁵ Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge*, 21.

following the death of the previous court painter Jan van den Hoeck in 1650.²⁶ Court painters are often, like Van Dyck and Velázquez renowned portrait painters. In the case of David Teniers the Younger, this was only one role of many that he played. Court records show that in addition to portrait painting, Teniers went on trips to purchase new artworks, restored damaged works, and produced designs for tapestries.²⁷

Theatricum Pictorum is Teniers most impressive project during his service to Arch Duke Leopold Wilhelm. Even though the Arch Duke had a deep appreciation for contemporary Flemish painting, his personal collection was comprised mostly of Venetian works of the 16th century.²⁸ *Theatricum Pictorum* is a book designed and published by Teniers with printed reproductions of the most important paintings in the Arch Dukes Italian collection. Reproductions of courtly collection were not unknown, but the scale and detail of Teniers' *Theatricum Pictorum* was unprecedented. Teniers produced remarkable miniature copies of every painting to be included in the book, from which the reproductions could be made.²⁹ The undertaking of such a large project, which was a resounding success, could have only benefited Teniers' pursuit of status and social advancement.

By 1656 Teniers was very successful as the court painter and well on his way to completing *Theatricum Pictora*. It was an important year for Teniers and his ambitions of nobility as well. Anna Bruegel, Teniers' first wife, died and was buried in Brussels on May 11 1656, and on October 21 of the same year he married his second wife, Isabella de Fren.³⁰ Two possible explanations have been proposed for why Teniers married so quickly after the death of Anna Bruegel. First, it has been proposed that because Teniers still had children who were minors, he would have wanted to marry quickly for the practicality of having a wife to care for his children.³¹ A more cynical view of this marriage is that Teniers wanted to marry de Fren because she had an undeniable noble

²⁶ Margret Klinge, "David Teniers and the Theater of Painting" in *David Teniers and the Theater of Painting*, edited by Ernst Vegelin van Claerbergen, (London: Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery in Association with Paul Holberton Publishing, 2006), 12.

²⁷ Davidson, 28.

²⁸ Klinge, "David Teniers and the Theater of Painting," 13.

²⁹ Klinge, "David Teniers and the Theater of Painting," 29.

³⁰ Wildman, 227.

³¹ Davidson, 26-28.

ancestor and access to potential noble patrons.³² There is probably some truth to both these interpretations of the marriage. Teniers already sold paintings to many important people through art dealers as well as connections at court, so de Fren's connections to patrons was probably not influential in Teniers' decision to marry her. However, her status as lower nobility was almost certainly a factor, as shortly after the marriage Teniers filed a petition to obtain a noble title of his own.³³

Teniers had begun to use a coat-of-arms as early as 1649. As we have seen through the examples of *Horse Trade* and *A Family Concert*, by that time Teniers had been aggressively shaping an aristocratic self-image, but nevertheless he was still not a member of the nobility. Furthermore, it was illegal for a non-noble to use a coat of arms without approval, approval that Teniers apparently did not have. This led to some controversy, as in 1649 an unknown informant turned Teniers into the Kings-at-arms for his offence.³⁴ In 1655, before his marriage to de Fren, Teniers received approval of his family's heraldic crest.³⁵ Obtaining a family crest was a relatively modest mark of elevation and it did not include a title. Philip IV had written to Leopold Wilhelm complaining about how many people in Flanders had petitioned for actual titles.³⁶ This is a very important point because of the indication of Teniers' character in a society rampant with social climbing. Teniers, before petitioning for a noble title, had already gained validity for his family through the legitimizing of its coat of arms. Teniers therefore was not guilty of aggressive and groundless social climbing in 1657 when he submitted his first petition for a title. He truly believed that he was a member of the hereditary nobility, as demonstrated by the family coat of arms, and was thus worthy of a title. This is an important distinction to make when considering Teniers' attitude towards himself and other valid nobility, versus the comic apes he painted of unworthy nobility.

Teniers had a strong case when he submitted his request for nobility. Court receipts indicate that Teniers had been given the title of *ayuda da camera*, which was an

³² Klinge, *David Teniers de Jonge*, 22.

³³ Dreher, 683.

³⁴ Vlieghe, 57.

³⁵ Vlieghe, 57.

³⁶ Dreher, 690.

honorary title.³⁷ He had also gained the right to use a coat-of-arms. In his petition he also included an argument that his skills as an artist were worthy of the nobility, and referred to the fact that Rubens and Van Dyck had gained titles while serving as court painters.³⁸ Perhaps the most important pieces of evidence that Teniers had provided were his own family history and the status of his wife. He pointed out that his maternal grandfather, Cornelis de Wild had been an Admiral on the Scheldt, successfully defending it against the Dutch fleet.³⁹ Even though the idea of nobility was ever evolving, honor and valor as a military officer was always considered a ground for nobility. Marriage into a noble family was also a time tested means to gain a noble title that still existed in the 17th century.⁴⁰ Teniers was therefore also able to include his wife's status as lower-nobility.

In the 6 years time span between Teniers' request and the receipt of his acknowledgement, Teniers continued to live like a nobleman. He even bought the country estate of the late Peter Paul Rubens *Dry Toren*. Documents regarding the sale are not clear, but he gained possession of the property from the widow of Rubens between 1659 and 1662.⁴¹ In 1663 Teniers received an answer from the king-at-arms regarding his request for a noble title, but the result of the petition for nobility are somewhat puzzling. It is most frequently noted that the court did issue a certificate to Teniers allowing him to use a noble title. However, Vlieghe has pointed out that there was a clause included stating that Teniers was only entitled to use his noble title if he ceased to work as a dealer.⁴² Teniers continued to both paint and to organize art sales for the rest of his life. Therefore, as Vlieghe has noted, even though Teniers noble status was approved he did not officially become a member of the title holding nobility. It seems that for Teniers, the fact that he was able to claim nobility was enough. Thus was not a social imposter, but rather a nobleman who chose not to use his title.

³⁷ Klinge, "David Teniers and the Theater of Painting," 15.

³⁸ Vlieghe, 58.

³⁹ Davidson, 29.

⁴⁰ Dreher, 693.

⁴¹ Dreher, 682.

⁴² Vlieghe, 59.

Ape Painters

I have tried to make it clear that Teniers did not view himself as one of the middle-class social climbers who simply “aped” the nobility. Teniers thought of himself as true nobility, regardless of whether he exercised the right to use his title. Therefore he, like his audience, probably found paintings of monkeys dressed as nobility as comic “inside” jokes about social climbers. As a result it is necessary to discuss his *Monkey Painter* [figure 3]. It is impossible, in a discussion such as this to simply ignore the fact that Teniers painted monkeys performing his own profession. While *Monkey Painter* at first seems problematic, when looking at the historical context and Teniers’ carefully constructed self-identity, the painting actually fits quite nicely into the oeuvre.

Monkey Painter is a painting of a monkey dressed as an artist in an artisan’s clothing. Another monkey dressed in the guise of a member of the nobility stands behind the painter and looks over his shoulder; apparently he is a collector or connoisseur. The studio is very dark, with a few pieces highlighted. A battle scene is most prominent, but there are also a portrait, a landscape, and drinker in the studio.

Obviously the question must be raised as to why Teniers would paint himself and his patron as apes. One explanation that has been proposed is that Teniers is painting art as *Simia Naturae*, or the ape of nature.⁴³ While this is plausible, when considering the rest of Teniers’ ape repertoire and his own aspirations, this does not seem probable. First, in attempting to elevate art to the level of liberal art, why would Teniers wish to demote painting as strictly imitation? It would not serve his purpose of establishing the image of artists as intellectuals. Furthermore, Teniers is one of the first artists to depict painters as monkeys, so the monkey painter as *Simia Naturae* would not have been a common cultural reference.

Teniers is frequently discussed as the inventor of the monkey painter motif, but some of the most famous examples are 18th century adaptations of it, which are often used to support the notion that Monkey painters are indeed meant to depict art as *Simia Naturae*. The best known of the later incarnations of the monkey painter are by Jean Baptise Chardin. Pierre Rosenberg proposes that Chardin’s *Monkey Painter* [figure 4] is a critique of the Parisian art establishment and the high esteem in which paintings were

⁴³ Janson, 308-310.

held if they fit adequately into traditional modes of painting.⁴⁴ Mimicry of old styles was valued over innovation. Chardin's pendant painting to *Monkey Painter, Monkey Antiquarian* [figure 5] applies a similar critique to art collectors and experts. The monkey only appreciates old things that have already been done and is blind to the merit of modern art. Rosenberg points out that it is especially interesting because he is using a motif from a Flemish painter from a century earlier, because copying 17th century Flemish painting had become part of the vogue.⁴⁵

Even though painting as *Simia Naturae* is clearly an element of Chardin's *Monkey Painter* and *Monkey Antiquarian*, it is important to note that social critique of the copying of elitists, even in art, is a very important element of Chardin's monkeys. They critique Parisian types (much like Molière used specific types as the focus of critique), who produce or value art, not based on artistic merit, but on how well it adheres to the values of the academy. Art is not the ape of nature, but instead Parisian artists are the apes of earlier artistic styles. Chardin's use of the monkey painter, much like Teniers' various ape paintings, was a parody aimed at imposters and imitators.

In the case of Teniers' *Monkey Painter* the connoisseur monkey, which is dressed in an outlandishly "noble" outfit, is key to understanding what or who Teniers' is aiming to parody. He has a gold chain, a bright robe, and large feathers in his cap. If the connoisseur monkey is compared with paintings that Teniers made of his most important patron Arch Duke Leopold Wilhelm [figure 6], who always wears tasteful but elegant ensembles, the monkey is clearly another one of Teniers' tasteless imposters, who has become pseudo knowledgeable in the arts to complete his charade as a nobleman. Most striking however, are the similarities between the connoisseur and painter of *Monkey Painter* and Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Painter and the Buyer* [figure 7]. Both the ape connoisseur and its human counterpart peer over the shoulder of the working painter through a pair of round glasses. They both also have a very prominent money pouch. It seems that perhaps in the case of the *Monkey Painter*, Teniers is poking fun at those commoners who collected art as an element of their pageantry in an effort to live as the

⁴⁴ Pierre Rosenberg, *Chardin: 1699-1779*, (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1979), 224.

⁴⁵ Rosenberg, 224.

nobility. Normally it would be naive to propose that a personal drawing by an artist who worked 100 years before Teniers would have influenced his work. If it were not for the fact that the drawing was by the grandfather of Teniers' first wife, Anna Bruegel, I would not dare to make the comparison. Inventories of Anna Bruegel's possessions suggest that she had a great deal of moveable property from her family members.⁴⁶ While the inventories do not specify what this property is, it is not unlikely that it included works of art.

The actual monkey painter in *Monkey Painter* is an allusion to the effect that these false connoisseurs had on the art market. Teniers could have been alluding to the control that buyers had over the art market, which often forced copies onto the market. More likely, Teniers' monkey painter is meant to be one of the many artists who made their career imitating prominent painters. It has even been suggested that one of the reasons that Teniers designed and commissioned so many printed copies of his works was that in addition to spreading his own fame, it would make it more difficult for other artists to counterfeit copies of his paintings.⁴⁷ However, the notion that Teniers was using prints to protect his designs has no documented evidence to support it and seems to be mildly anachronistic. Rather than being concerned with the practice of copying quality artists for lower costs, it is more likely that Teniers wished to demonstrate a distinction between painters who were craftsmen aping other painters, and painters like himself at court. While there is also no documented evidence for this idea, it is an intriguing thought when considering Teniers constant preoccupation with identity construction.

⁴⁶ Vlieghe, 16.

⁴⁷ Jessica Mack-Andrick, "Die Rezeption van David Teniers d.j. in der Reproduktionsgraphik des 17. Und 18. Jahrhunderts" in *David Teniers der Jüngere 1610-1690: Alltag un Vergnügen in Flandern*, edited by Margret Klinge and Dietmar Lüdke, (Karlsruhe: Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, 2005), 77.

Chapter Four Images



Figure 1. *A Family Concert*, David Teniers the Younger, 1645.



Figure 2. *Horse Trading*, David Teniers the Younger, 1645.



Figure 3. *Monkey Painter*, David Teniers the Younger, After 1645.



Figure 4. *Monkey Painter*, Jean Baptiste Chardin, ca. 1740



Figure 5. *Monkey Antiquarian*, Jean Baptiste Chardin, ca. 1740



Figure 6. *The Arch Duke Wilhelm Leopold's Studio*, David Teniers the Younger 1651



Figure 7. *The Painter and the Connoisseur*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1565.

Conclusion

During the 17th century aggressive social climbing by rich commoners forced the nobility to construct a new identity that allowed them to remain pertinent and socially superior. The Nobility engaged in the arts and music and tried to refine their behavior as much as possible in order to distinguish themselves from ambitious commoners. Resentment that the nobility had for social climbers is expressed in the ape paintings of David Teniers the Younger. Monkeys dressed as the nobility are not a parody of the nobility, but rather a parody of the social climbers, who no matter how hard they tried could never fully assimilate into the nobility due to their lack of manners and of other noble qualities. Social imposters also existed within the nobility. Because the nobility believed that it was superior to the other classes by inherited valor and honor, the misbehavior of noblemen in the military was particularly problematic. As a result of the failure of many military officers to act nobly, the nobility tried to divorce themselves from notions of valor and courage as a basis for ennoblement. The nobility who were failures in their military role were as laughable as social climbers. Even though they could dress the part, they were not worthy of their status. They would always remain apes in noblemen's clothing.

Social climbing was also the focus of ridicule and the source of comedy in other art forms. Seventeenth century emblems poke fun at apes that climb too high, exposing their rear ends. More literal critiques of social climbing and aping of the nobility were common on French Stages. The plays of Molière were particularly critical of foolish commoners who tried to live as nobility. Molière took advantage of the juxtaposition of expensive clothing with foolish behaviors and stupidity for a comic effect, just as Teniers put his apes, foolish and stupid as they are, in the clothing of the nobility. Social concerns and the stability of social order are also expressed in dramatic Operas, which usually through a tragic twist, reinforced the values of social normalcy and the values of the nobility.

David Teniers the Younger would have been well aware of aggressive social climbing and the attitude of the nobility regarding it. Teniers was himself a social climber, however he believed himself to be truly of noble blood. In an attempt to appeal

to the nobility and separate himself from social climbers, he used comedy to ridicule those who groundlessly attempted to advance into the nobility. His courtly patrons would have understood the joke and appreciated it. The monkey paintings of David Teniers are much more complex than simple drolleries or parodies of folly. Even though his monkeys were dressed as the nobility, Teniers was not critiquing the nobility. Teniers' monkeys are a comic look at the dynamic social structure of the 17th century Low Countries. The joke was not on the nobility, but on the commoners who aped them in hopes that they could one day become ennobled.

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