

The Misanthrope

By Molière

Translated by Robert Cohen

Performance Rights

It is an infringement of the federal copyright law to copy or reproduce this script in any manner or to perform this play without royalty payment. All rights are controlled by Eldridge Publishing Co., Inc. Contact the publisher for additional scripts and further licensing information. The author's name must appear on all programs and advertising with the notice: "Produced by special arrangement with Eldridge Publishing Company."

PUBLISHED BY
ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY
histage.com

© 2006 by Robert Cohen

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
<http://www.histage.com/playdetails.asp?PID=2169>

STORY OF THE PLAY

Molière's comic masterpiece centers on the character of the French courtier Alceste and the beautiful young widow Célimène he hopes to marry. But the two have radically different personalities: Alceste is a snob who insists on telling everyone the truth as he sees it, and Célimène's instinct is to tell people - and particularly attractive men - only what they are dying to hear. So Célimène flirts and gossips with the courtiers who come to her house while Alceste fumes in jealousy.

A virtual menagerie of other characters seek to intervene, either to bring the lovers together or pull them further apart: these include the pompous poet Oronte; the prudish dowager Arsinoé; the quarreling fops Acaste and Clitandre; the sweet Éliante and the loyal Philinte; and the brazen comic servants Basque and Du Bois.

Molière's genius is seen on every page of the play, particularly in his always-engaging delineation of the thousand and one games, tricks, feints, parries and surprises that jealous lovers and witty sophisticates exchange in a single day's battle of the sexes.

With its fast pace, exquisite rhymes and beautifully detailed characters, this play (and translation) draws every possible laugh - and not a few pearls of wisdom - from the universal foibles of human life. And that Molière wrote the role of Alceste for himself, and played it in the play's 1666 premiere (*opposite his own wife Armande Béjart, known to be flirtatious and rumored to be promiscuous, as Célimène*) makes clear that the dramatist knew what he was talking about!

"Robert Cohen's highly entertaining translation is proof, among other things, that there is room for another equally fluent, stageworthy version of Molière's rhymed couplets, but one with a contemporary flavor full of colloquial yet literate pungency." *Los Angeles Times*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 m, 3 w)

PHILINTE: (M) A friend of Alceste. He is in love with Eliante.

ALCESTE: (M) A snob who insists on telling everyone the truth as he sees it.

ORONTE: (M) A pompous poet. Suitor of Célimène's.

CELIMENE: (W) A beautiful young widow, Alceste's love interest.

DU BOIS: (M) Alceste's servant. (Also doubles as Guard.)

ELIANTE: (W) Célimène's cousin. She is in love with Alceste.

BASQUE: (M) Célimène's servant.

ARSINOÉ: (W) A prudish dowager. She has an interest in Alceste.

ACASTE: (M) Suitor of Célimène's.

CLITANDRE: (M) Suitor of Célimène's.

SETTING

The action is set in Paris, variously in front of and/or inside the house of Célimène. Time is the present; i.e. 1666.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

These approximate the pronunciations of French names and foreign words appearing in this translation.

Acaste ah-KAHST
Adraste ah-DRAHST
Alceste ah-SEST
andiamo! ahn-DYAM-oh!
Arsinoé..... ahr-sin-o-AY
artiste ahr-TEEST
au r'voir (for au revoir) orv-WAH
Basque..... bahsk
beau monde bo MAWND

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE – continued

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| beaux | (as used here) boze |
| Bélise | bay-LEEZ |
| Célimène..... | say-lee-MEN* |
| Cléon | klay-AWN** |
| Cléonte | klay-AWNT |
| Clitandre | klee-TAN-druh |
| Damis..... | dah-MEE |
| Damon | dah-MAWN** |
| demoiselles..... | (as used here) day-mwah-ZELLES |
| Descartes..... | day-KART |
| Dorilas..... | do-REEL-ah |
| Du Bois | dew-BWAH |
| Éliante..... | ay-lee-AUNT* |
| faux pas | (as used here) foh-paz |
| gauche | gosh (with the “o” in “go”) |
| Géralde | Zhay-RALD |
| idée fix | ee-day-FEEX |
| Il faut partir..... | eel-foh-par-TEER |
| j'accuse..... | zhah-KYUZE |
| je t'adores | (as used here) zhuh-tah-DORZ*** |
| Jeu de Paume..... | zhuh-deu-POME*** |
| de Sevigné..... | deu-seh-vee-NYAY |
| moi | mwa |
| Molière | mol-YEHR |
| Oronte..... | aw-RAWNT |
| Oubliette | oo-blee-YET |
| foie gras | fwa-GRAH |
| Philinte | fee-LANT |
| soirées | swa-RAYZ |
| savoir faire | sah-vwah-FARE |
| Schnell | shnell |
| tout Paris..... | too-pah-REE |
| très..... | treh |
| vis-à-vis..... | (as used here) VEEZ-ah-VEEZ |

*the first two syllables are rushed together

** the last syllable is something like a honk through the nose, with the tongue not touching the roof of the mouth.

*** zh as the “s” in “pleasure”

ACT I

(AT RISE: PHILINTE and ALCESTE enter in the midst of an argument.)

PHILINTE: What is it? What's the matter?

ALCESTE: Leave me be!

PHILINTE: Good Lord, Alceste! This is insanity!

ALCESTE: Leave me alone, Philinte! Get out of here!

PHILINTE: I'm staying put until I have your ear!

ALCESTE: You hypocrite! You'll never understand!

PHILINTE: Dear friend, your words are getting out of hand--

ALCESTE: "Dear friend"?

You're calling me a friend of yours?

Such friendship's like the so-called love - of whores!

This morning, sir, our friendship was destroyed

When you pretended to be overjoyed.

PHILINTE: Just when did I do that? Why'm I to blame?

ALCESTE: How can you ask that and not die of shame?

Your honesty's been permanently bruised,

And what you did can never be excused!

That man today! You praised him to the skies

And kissed his cheeks! And tears came to your eyes!

But when I asked you what his claim to fame was,

You couldn't tell me what his stupid name was!

And when he left, your smile just sank like lead.

"Can't stand that stupid imbecile," you said.

Good lord, Philinte, it's utterly pernicious

To seem so sweet, yet really be so vicious!

If I were so dishonest with my feelings

I'd hang myself for moral double-dealings!

PHILINTE: (*Lightly.*) Well, I don't think it justifies a hanging

Nor all this philosophical haranguing.

Let's call a truce, Alceste! And let's both say:

We'll neither of us hang ourselves today!

ALCESTE: Philinte, your humor's sickening at best.

PHILINTE: Well, tell me what to do then, dear Alceste!

ALCESTE: Just be sincere! Just say the words you mean!

And nothing more! Or less! Or in-between!

The Misanthrope

-6-

PHILINTE: But when a fellow greets you in the street
You have to be A little bit discreet.

You can't say: "Look at you, you've gotten old!"
Or "Your wife's on the sauce again, I'm told!"

ALCESTE: Well, what's better, showing false affections?
Groveling in social genuflections?

These oily "thee and thou" words, how I hate 'em!
Your flatterers and cowards: Heaven grate 'em
Into microscopic, mortifying shreds!

With all their vile pretensions in their heads!
Their stuck-on-smiling, so-beguiling faces!
Their stupid, grinning, kiss-kiss-kiss embraces!
Their pompous and affected salutations
And condescending, foppish protestations!

That man today? Hypocrisy defined!
He praises everyone. Loves all mankind!
And you, Philinte? Indecently obscene!
To hug that monstrous love-and-praise machine!
What's flattery's appeal if it's from one
Who flatters absolutely everyone?

Ah no, Philinte, I'm one who quite abhors
The fawning tributes of these snobs and bores.
Give me a friend whose mind is still his own -
Who'll give his love to me, and me alone!
If there is praise that's going to be conferred,
Well, then, Philinte, I want to be preferred,
Not loved along with all the human race!
And so, "dear friend," how stand you in this case?
Do you prefer me to that simpleton?

Watch out! Who loves all men cannot love one!

PHILINTE: But in the real world, my "preferred" Alceste,
A little tact might - don't you think - be best?

ALCESTE: No tact! We must explicitly rebuke
All flatterers! Philinte, they make me puke!
Let us be free to say just what we mean;
Reveal our hearts. Emotionally, come clean.
Defy hypocrisy. And speak, in sooth,
The truth, th'whole truth, and nothing but the truth!

The Misanthrope

-7-

PHILINTE: You're crazy! Honesty like that would cause
An overthrow of all our social laws!
What would you say to someone you despise:
"Of all the morons here, you take the prize!"?
Or to that smiling parasite you hate:
"It's you, you ass, that I abominate!"?
ALCESTE: I would!
PHILINTE: Oh, sure! Then tell old Emily,
"I say, my dear, you're looking terribly!
I'm shocked at just how ugly you've become!"
ALCESTE: I will!
PHILINTE: Hah! Tell Dorilas, then, how numb
He leaves his listeners! "I say there, Dor!
It seems you've turned into a giant bore!"
ALCESTE: I shall!
PHILINTE: You joke!
ALCESTE: I do not jest, Philinte!
There's no one here in Paris that I can't
Condemn with every fiber of my being!
My eyes fill up with tears at what I'm seeing!
My blood heats up, my spleen explodes with bile!
Black clouds descend, there's no way I can smile
Or fawn, or grin, or whimper modestly,
There's no participating honestly
In all these treacherous and bald deceptions!
I hate these damn society receptions!
I hate this place! I hate your face!
I hate the wholly-stinking holy-human race!
PHILINTE: (*Pause.*) Alceste, you're really going overboard!
These little things: they're easily ignored;
I laugh them off a hundred times a day,
Just like that pleasant chap in Molière's play!
(*Pause.*) Remember him?
ALCESTE: (*Scandalized.*) You dare to quote Molière?
On what?
PHILINTE: Diplomacy - and savoir faire!
Alceste, you cannot change the world around you
By merely proving sycophants surround you!
When you attack your own society

End of Freeview

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
<http://www.histage.com/playdetails.asp?PID=2169>

Eldridge Publishing, a leading drama play publisher since 1906, offers more than a thousand full-length plays, one-act plays, melodramas, holiday plays, religious plays, children's theatre plays and musicals of all kinds.

For more than a hundred years, our family-owned business has had the privilege of publishing some of the finest playwrights, allowing their work to come alive on stages worldwide.

We look forward to being a part of your next theatrical production.

Eldridge Publishing... for the start of your theatre experience!