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Dramatic Publishing

Skinflints and Scoundrels:

Molière's Miser

(Competition Version)

Translated, adapted and arranged
by

SUZAN L. ZEDER

From J.B.P. Molière's
The Miser



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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SUZAN ZEDER
From Molière's *The Miser*

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(SKIN FLINTS AND SCOUNDRELS: Molière's *Miser*)
– Competition Version –

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This play is dedicated to all of the artists
who have committed their lives
to making the world
a wiser, funnier,
more beautiful place
in which to dwell.

It is offered in the hope that someday
their worth will be
recognized and rewarded.

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NOTES

In approaching Molière's classic play, *The Miser*, I have brought equal measures of respect and irreverence to this translation/adaptation. Some productions of the classics view the text as holy writ, hermetically sealed under the patina of history, while others view the text as a diving board for launching a "high-concept" production into a wildly different time and place. *Skinflints and Scoundrels: Molière's Miser* is respectfully set in the time, place and cultural environment where it was created...a radical idea indeed.

It is well known that Molière used his plays as a means of social commentary. Beneath the wit and flash of his comic invention is the scalpel, which he used to expose and dissect the hypocrisies that surrounded him. It is also interesting to note that the early drafts of many of Molière's other plays were in prose, while later drafts of the same play were polished into verse. *The Miser*, in the original French, is in prose. This seemed to suggest to me that perhaps this play, as it has come down to us through the centuries, was in a relatively early stage of its development. Molière and his company frequently drew upon familiar archetypes from commedia characters and stock stories, often improvising whole scenes of dialogue and physical comedy. These same characters and situations resonate with us today in countless plays, films and television incarnations.

This is an old/new play for me as well. I first created this version almost twenty years ago for a very successful and historically accurate production at Southern Methodist University, directed by my husband, period movement specialist, Jim Hancock. This script was given new life in a production in November of 2004 in a production at the University of Texas at Austin, directed by noted actor and director, Phillip Goodwin. Goodwin's vision underscored the notion of the play within the play and emphasized Molière's struggles to make a point much larger than the stock plot of the play itself. That production triggered a major rewrite and the version of the play you have before you.

It is sometimes hard for us to imagine a time when great classical plays were new; when playwrights, like Molière and Shakespeare, struggled to find words, create characters and build scenes; when actors fought to remember their lines; when bits of business were improvised. But for all great plays, there was a moment, when every word, every choice, every decision was made for the very first time. This adaptation takes you back to that moment and builds a bridge between then and now. Then, as now, artists have had to fight for the respect and support they have earned. Then, as now, artists were hard put to make a living in the practice of their craft. By placing the play in the context of the opulent court of Louis XIV, I hope to shift the meaning of Molière's classic comedy of greed and avarice ever so slightly, to focus upon the true value and creative currency of the artist and the arts.

— *Suzan Zeder, 2004*

SKINFLINTS AND SCOUNDRELS: Molière's Miser
was originally produced by the Theatre Department at
Southern Methodist University on January 28, 1986.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director Jim R. Hancock
Scene Design Matt Aston
Costume Design Mark D. Prouse
Lighting Design Lee J. Dulaney

CAST

Molière / Harpagon Andrew Dolan
Cleante Derrick Lee Weeden
Elise Sarah Peacock
Valere Russ Cusick
Mariane Liza Richardson
Frosine Maggie McClellan
Anselm / La Fleche Daniel R. Escobar
Master Simon / Officer Omar Shawkat
Brindavoine Phil Endicot
Master Jacque Jeff Ricketts
Pierre Pomponne A. Bernard Cummings
Dame Claude Patricia Price
Marquise de Montespan Elizabeth Rouse
King Louis XIV Russell De Grazier

With

The Texas Baroque Ensemble

A substantially revised version of the play was produced by the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Texas at Austin on November 21, 2004.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director Philip Goodwin
Scene Design Paul Alix
Costume Design Clare Capper
Lighting Design Emilio Aguilar
Stage Manager Michael Phillips
Choreographer David Justin
Original Music Rob Deemer

CAST

Molière / Harpagon Matthew Herrick
Cleante Enrique Bravo
Elise Christa Kimlicko-Jones
Valere Michael Walton
Mariane Deepti Gupta
Frosine Elena Manuela Araoz
Anselm / La Fleche Flordelino Lagundino
Master Simon / Brindavoine James Russell
Officer Michael Yager
Master Jacque Conor Brooke
Dame Claude Alexis Chamow
Marquise de Montespan Mary Hill
King Louis XIV Bradley Schneider

With

Kathy Winston: Harpsichord

SKINFLINTS AND SCOUNDRELS: Molière's Miser

Competition Version
For 11m., 5w. (with doubling 9m., 5w.)

CHARACTERS

Harpagon (Molière) the Miser
Cleante (La Grange). Harpagon's son, loves Mariane
Elise (Armand). Harpagon's daughter, loves Valere
Valere (Etienne). Harpagon's steward, loves Elise
Mariane (Du Brie) . . a young woman, loves Cleante, courted
by Harpagon
Frosine (Madame Bejart). . a woman who lives by her wits
Master Simon (La Tour). a broker
Master Jacque (Courtier) . . cook and coachman to Harpagon
La Fleche (Du Park). servant to Cleante, impersonates
Anselm
Dame Claude (Courtier) maid to Elise
Officer (Courtier). a magistrate
Anselm (Courtier) . . a gentleman from Naples, impersonated
by La Fleche
Pierre Pomponne a minor minister of culture
Marquise de Montespan. mistress to Louis XIV
King Louis XIV. the Sun King

PROLOGUE

From the moment the house opens the audience enters a Grande Salle in the palace of Versailles during the reign of Louis XIV. It is a large ball room with an ornately decorated floor. Perhaps there are mirrored panels to suggest the Hall of Mirrors. At one end of the space, a dais with two stools and an ornate throne awaits the KING and his MISTRESS. A huge chandelier blazes in the very center of the room.

As the audience enters, the courtiers are already in action, participating in what is called Appartement, an evening's entertainment of dancing, gambling and gossip. A play is planned for later, but has not begun. A chamber orchestra plays period music on authentic instruments.

In one area of the room, male courtiers play at billiards. On a large flat table, they push a ball around with long sticks flat tened at one end like giant spoons or duckbills. As they play, the men gossip, mostly about women.

In another area, female courtiers play at cards. This is not your casual game of bridge, but a cutthroat gambling game known as vingt-et-un. Huge sums of money are won and lost at these games despite the fact that everybody cheats. As they play, the women also gossip, mostly about men, particularly about the KING.

In the center of the room, several couples dance. As they dance, they also flirt outrageously, arrange assignments, and generally carry on intrigues that they wish to appear private, but they really want to be sure are seen.

Throughout all of this action, LA GRANGE, DU PARK and ETIENNE (actors in Molière's company), ready the room for the play, removing props and costume pieces from a large chest. Two large folding screens are set at the far end of the room hung with ornate tapestries. The actors move swiftly among the courtiers who totally ignore their presence.

As soon as the audience is seated, the main theatre doors are suddenly flung open and MOLIERE, MADAME BEJART and POMPONNE burst into the theatre and storm across the dance floor.

MOLIERE (*in a fury*). LA GRANGE, take it all down!

MADAME BEJART. Please, Jean, reconsider!

MOLIERE. We're leaving!

LA GRANGE. We're leaving?

POMPONNE (*to LA GRANGE*). Touch nothing! (*To MOLIERE.*) Monsieur Molière, I say you are staying!

MADAME BEJART. We're staying.

LA GRANGE. Staying!

MOLIERE. On whose authority?

POMPONNE. On the authority of Pierre Pomponne, Assistant Minister of Culture.

MOLIERE (*ignoring him*). Call the others, Madeline.

MADAME BEJART (*calling*). Armand, du Park, Etienne!

MOLIERE (*to DU PARK*). Pack up the costumes.
POMPONNE. Monsieur Molière, listen to reason...
MOLIERE (*to ETIENNE*). Take the tapestries, the screens,
and the chairs are ours as well.
POMPONNE. But the performance is scheduled, the court
is assembling, and this is VERSAILLES.
MADAME BEJART. It is Versailles, Jean.
POMPONNE. What is it you desire?
MADAME BEJART. Noth ing more or less than we agreed,
154 francs.
POMPONNE. But, Madame, prior payment is very diffi-
cult.
MOLIERE. You would not treat your tailor thus; you
might order from him a pantaloon, and if you did not
pay he'd pack it up and take it back. But a performance
is not a pantaloon, a performance is like virginity, once
it's given it can't be taken back!
POMPONNE. The king is expecting a play.
MOLIERE. And Molière is expectinghis pay!
POMPONNE. Some actors would be only too willing to
play simply for the privilege of performing before the
king!
MOLIERE (*wheeling a round*). With out pay ment?
POMPONNE. ...for the honor and the prestige...
MOLIERE. Without payment?
POMPONNE. ...for the sheer glory of being in his divine
presence!
MOLIERE. That's it! I'll take my suit directly to the king.
POMPONNE. You wouldn't dare. (*MOLIERE starts to-
ward the doors. POMPONNE tries to stop him.*) The

king is at supper! He hates to be interrupted! He'll have your head! He'll have my head!

(Just as MOLIERE is almost to the doors, they fly open and trumpets herald the KING's arrival with a fanfare. MOLIERE stops dead in his tracks and turns his lunge for the doors into a bow. KING LOUIS XIV enters in all his magnificence. Everyone bows deeply. The KING holds out his hand and is joined by his mistress, the MARQUISE DE MONTESPAN. She is equally splendid. A grand processional follows, involving the KING and the whole COURT and ends with the KING and the MARQUISE seated on the dais and MOLIERE's ACTORS ready at the edges of the playing space.)

POMPONNE. Your Most Magnificent Majesty, Madame de Marquise Montespan, mesdames et messieurs of the court! Allow me the honor of presenting to you the entertainment of the evening. *(He looks straight into the stony face of MOLIERE.)* La Troupe du Roi au Palais Royal is proud to present a performance of that most excellent comedy, *La Misanthrope*.

MOLIERE. No! *(MOLIERE reaches into the chest and pulls out a fistful of small scrolls. He turns to face the KING and COURT.)* Mesdames et Messieurs, prepare yourselves to receive a new play performed by the premiere company of all France, *La Troupe du Roi au Palais Royal*, and dedicated to the assistant minister of culture, Pierre Pomponne!

POMPONNE *(astonished)*. Moi?

MOLIERE. I present: *L'AVARE, the Miser!* (*Improvised pandemonium breaks loose. LA GRANGE pulls piles of costumes from the chest as the ACTORS switch pieces of clothing. MOLIERE hands out the scrolls. The ACTORS protest that they are not ready. BEJART fusses and clucks; props are tossed hither and yon.*)

BEJART. But, Jean, it isn't finished! We aren't ready!

MOLIERE. We are now!

LA GRANGE. But I have no costume! (*MOLIERE strips a frock coat off an unwitting COURTIER.*)

MOLIERE (*to the COURTIER*). Pardonnez moi! (*To LA GRANGE.*) You do now!

(MOLIERE strips off his own frock coat and underneath is the far shabbier costume for HARPAGON. He tosses his wig to DU PARK and reveals a baldpate with scraggly whips of hair. The ACTORS rush toward MOLIERE still protesting. MOLIERE grabs a cue stick from a billiard player and snaps it in two using half as a cane for HARPAGON. He shoos the ACTORS to the perimeter of the playing space where they frantically study their scrolls. MOLIERE uses the cane to beat DU PARK. Instantly they are in role as HARPAGON and LA FLECHE.)

ACT I

Scene i

HARPAGON. Get out! Get out! Get out...I say! (*HARPAGON is beating LA FLECHE as he flees.*) Get out of my house and don't talk back! I am Harpagon, master of this house and you are nothing but a pickpocket, gallows bird, a common crook!

LA FLECHE. Monsieur HARPAGON, why are you driving me out?

HARPAGON (*cuing him in*). Monsieur La Fleche, you may be my son's servant but I won't have you standing around my house, planted stiff as a post, watching everything that goes on, spying on all my affairs, coveting everything I own, and ferreting about to see if there is anything you can steal!

LA FLECHE. How the deuce could you be robbed? You lock up everything and stand guard day and night!

HARPAGON. I'll lock what I like and guard what I guard! (*Aside.*) Doesn't he sound like a spy? (*Aloud.*) You are the kind of man who would go around spreading rumors that I have money hidden in my house!

LA FLECHE. You have money hidden in the house?

HARPAGON. No, villain, I didn't say that! (*Aside.*) I shall go mad!

LA FLECHE. Hola!! What difference does it make whether you do or not?

HARPAGON. Argue, will you? I'll knock that argument right out of your head, if you don't get out of here.

LA FLECHE. All right, I'm going. (*He starts out and HARPAGON stops him.*)

HARPAGON (*pointing to his breeches*). Have you anything in there?

LA FLECHE. What?

HARPAGON. Anything of mine?

LA FLECHE. Look for yourself! (*HARPAGON feels around in his breeches.*)

HARPAGON. These baggy breeches are just the place for stolen goods. I wish people could be hanged for wearing them.

LA FLECHE. A plague on all misers!

HARPAGON. To whom are you alluding?

LA FLECHE. Skinflints and scoundrels!

HARPAGON. But whom do you mean by that?

LA FLECHE. I am talking to the inside of my cap!

HARPAGON (*shouting in his ear*). And I am talking to the outside of your thick head!

LA FLECHE. I am just giving myself a little lecture.

HARPAGON. And I will be giving you a little fracture!

LA FLECHE. Look! Here's another pocket! (*Fooling HARPAGON with his own pocket, LA FLECHE steps aside leaving HARPAGON with his hand in his own pocket.*)

HARPAGON. Farewell, and go to hell! (*LA FLECHE exits to the perimeter of the playing space where he almost collapses in relief. ETIENNE and ARMAND are madly checking their scrolls to go over their lines. MOLIERE, as HARPAGON, crosses to the chest and pulls out a few small bags of gold. Suddenly he turns very suspicious. He searches for safe places to hide his gold.*) It's quite a

job to find a safe hiding place in a house filled with thieves and varlets, scoundrels and all such scum! (*An idea strikes him.*) Ah-ha! Of course! (*HARPAGON crosses behind one of the screens. After much grunting and groaning, he returns with a large strongbox in a small red wagon.*) My strong box! (*HARPAGON collects the bags he has hidden and lobs them into the box.*) Ten thousand ecus is a large sum to keep around the house, a large sum, a lovely sum, a luscious sum...ten thousand in GOLD! Soon, my lovely, soon I'll have you safely invested and I'll watch you grow and grow and...THE GARDEN! That's where I'll hide you till then. Who knows, perhaps you'll sprout a little sou or two! (*Delighted by his joke, HARPAGON toddles off to the garden to bury his money.*)

(Music comes in as LA GRANGE gently nudges ARMAND into the playing area and, in a second, he shoves ETIENNE after her. Instantly they become ELISE and VALERE VALERE catches ELISE, sweeps her up into an embrace and kisses her.)

Scene ii

VALERE. What is the matter, my dearest Elise? Do you repent that sweet promise you have given me?

ELISE. Oh, Valere, my heart is bound to you by deep gratitude. For me you neglect your efforts to find your parents, for me you hide your true rank and station, for me you disguise yourself as a servant in my father's house.

VALERE. If I can just find my parents and my sister, lost at sea, they will rally to our cause. I am expecting news of them; but if none comes then I shall go in search myself.

ELISE. Do not budge from here, I beg you. Rather try to ingratiate yourself into my father's favor.

VALERE. You see the mask I wear with him, the part I play every day? The best way to win favor with a man like him is to spout his maxims, praise his defects, and applaud everything he does! If sincerity suffers in the trade, it is not the fault of I who flatter but he who courts the flattery.

ELISE. Why not seek my brother's help as well?

(From the sidelines, MOLIERE gives a high sign to LA GRANGE who becomes CLEANTE and calls out.)

CLEANTE. Elise? Elise!

VALERE. Here he comes. I'll withdraw. Speak to him. Sound him, and see if we may trust his sincerity.
(VALERE kisses her and exits the playing space.)

Scene iii

(CLEANTE enters in a great hurry. He and ELISE speak at the same moment.)

CLEANTE. I am delighted to find you alone, sister! I am burning to tell you a secret!

ELISE. CLEANTE, what luck you are here! I have something to tell you as well...

CLEANTE. Please, go on, dear sister!

ELISE. After you, dear brother. What have you to tell me?

CLEANTE. So many things, sister, all wrapped up in the words "I am in love!"

ELISE. You are in love?

CLEANTE. Yes!

ELISE. You are engaged?

CLEANTE. No, but I am resolved to be, and I beseech you not to try to dissuade me.

ELISE. Me?

CLEANTE. Yes, you, dear sister! You see, you do not love.

ELISE. Brother, I...

CLEANTE. You would not rail so at me if you but knew...

ELISE. Who?

CLEANTE. A young person who has lived in this neighborhood only a short time, and who seems to inspire love in all who see her.

ELISE. Her name?

CLEANTE (*in rapture*). Mariane! She lives with her aged mother, who is almost always sick, and she cares for her with a tenderness that would touch your soul. She serves her, sympathizes with her, consoles her with such grace as you cannot conceive.

ELISE. I can. I can.

CLEANTE. A thousand graces shine in all her actions, a most attractive sweetness, an engaging kindness, an adorable modesty... Oh, sister, if you could but see her.

ELISE. I see her. I see her!

CLEANTE. I have found out secretly that they are not well off. Just think how miserable it makes me to find myself powerless, helpless all because of my father's avarice!

ELISE. I can see how...

CLEANTE. Far more than you can imagine, Elise! Can there be anything more cruel than this rigorous economy inflicted on us? Are we not held in a prison of his peculiar parsimony?

ELISE. Well...

CLEANTE. This is why I wanted to talk to you, to seek your advice and to hear your counsel. (*As she opens her mouth to respond, HARPAGON's voice is heard.*) I hear his voice! We shall have to find another time to continue this discussion.