

The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Department of Theatre/Dance proudly presents



BY MOLIÈRE, ADAPTED BY NEIL BARTLETT
DIRECTED BY BRUCE COHEN



University of Wisconsin
Whitewater

College of Arts
and Communication

Study Guide Companion
created by Leslie LaMuro

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY: MOLIÈRE

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin born before January 15, 1622 and died on February 17, 1673. He was born into a prosperous family and studied at the College de Clermont, and was well suited to begin a life in the theatre. He acted for about 13 years and his stage and pen name was Moliere. As an actor he honed his comedic abilities and then began writing plays combining Commedia dell'arte elements with more refined French comedy. Moliere was widely regarded as one of the greatest writers in the French language and universal literature. His works include

comedies, farces, tragicomedies and more. He received the patronage of aristocrats including Phillippe I, Duke of Orleans, the brother of Louis XIV and gave a command performance for the King at the Louvre, and was then granted the use of salle du Petit-Bourbon near the Louvre, a large room set up for theatrical performance and later was allowed to use the theatre in the Palais-Royal. He was very successful with his plays *The Affected*, *Ladies*, *The School for Husbands*, and *The School for Wives*. Gaining royal favor delivered a royal pension to his troupe and the title of Troupe du Roi (The Kings Troupe). He continued as the official author of court entertainments. Although Molière was popular with the court and Parisians he was criticized by churchmen. The Catholic Church denounced *Tartuffe's* impiety and was banned by Parliament and *Don Juan* was withdrawn and never staged by Moliere. His hard work in so many theatrical capacities took its toll on his health and, by 1667, he was forced to take a break from the stage. In 1673, during a production of his final play, *The Imaginary Invalid*, Molière, who suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis, was seized by a coughing fit and a hemorrhage while playing the hypochondriac Argan. He finished the performance but collapsed again and died a few hours later. In his fourteen years in Paris, Molière singlehandedly wrote thirty-one of the eighty-five plays performed on the stage. Some his most famous titles are: *Tartuffe*, *Le Misanthrope*, *School for Wives*, *L'Avare* (The Miser), *The Imaginary Invalid*, and many more.



ADAPTOR'S BIOGRAPHY: NEIL BARTLETT

Neil Bartlett was born in 1958. He grew up in Chichester, West Sussex, and now lives in Worthing and London. His career as a director, author and performer began in the early 1980's. He has directed in very prominent theatres including, the Royal Court, The Royal Shakespeare Company, the Lyric Hammersmith, the Abbey in Dublin, The Manchester Royal Exchange, the Bristol Old Vic, and the American Repertory Theatre.

Bartlett's theatre characteristically involves a juxtaposition between the elevated and the immediate, the gorgeous and the stark, the historic and the contemporary. His translations transform plays by authors as different as Moliere, Racine, Marivaux, Genet, Kleist, and Labiche into vivid, stylish and accessible English texts. They have been widely performed in student and amateur productions around the world as well as by the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National, the Goodman in Chicago, and the Arena in Washington in addition to many regional theatres. His adaptations of Balzac, Dumas, Stevenson, Wilde, and Dickens are ingenious applications of contemporary staging techniques to their source-author's original words. For instance, the stage directions of his acclaimed 1996 *A Christmas Carol*, which is all Dickens and nothing but, call for just eight actors and a lightbulb.

WHAT IS AN ADAPTATION?

Neil Bartlett adapted Moliere's *Le Misanthrope* that was written in 1666 as a French comedy of manners, written in verse. Bartlett changed the setting to Hollywood in the 1980's and updated the language to the time, leaving a touch of verse in the language. Bartlett chose the 1080 Hollywood society because it mirrored the mid-late 1600's in "society-France" (the apex of Louis XIV's reign, the construction of Versailles); roughly the time period that Moliere wrote the original play.

"Adaptation for the stage involves taking an original work and recreating it to fit new needs. Whether it is a strict preservation or just an inspiration is up to the adapter."
–Melissa Oulton

"Adaptation is a process. It involves an idea coupled with the firm belief that this work is relevant and then putting it onstage."
–Jennifer Chapman

"Adaptation for the stage encompasses looking at an original work, finding the essence, the meaning the author is portraying, and working it into a new text in which the words on the page paint the story, movement, and spectacle onstage."
–RoseAnne Simpson

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What book or story do you think would make a good adaptation to a stage play?

Try writing a scene from a novel that you think would make a good play. Make sure to set the scene, write the dialogue, and create different ways for each character to express themselves.

Have you seen other plays or films that have been adaptations from a novel, how did they differ from the novel?

Which did you like better?

MAIN CHARACTERS

Célimène: A young woman of nineteen or twenty, a flirtatious gossip and a rising star in Hollywood. She is desired by most of the men in the play but refuses to make a commitment to any of them.

Alceste: The protagonist and title character is a critical misanthrope with a passion for sincerity who is in love with Célimène and in turn she is his greatest source of agony. He is unforgiving and incapable of coming to terms with the flaws of human nature and enjoys pointing out the faults of others.

Philinte: A kind practical friend of Alceste's who seeks social harmony and peace of mind.

Éliante: Célimène's sensible and sincere cousin who is Philinte's love interest.

Oronte: An outspoken man who thinks of himself as multi-talented but his mediocre poem shows us otherwise. He is also in love with Célimène and very rich.

Arsinoe: Célimène's friend is an older bitter woman who is not attractive to men and this causes frustration which she masks with snobbishness.

HYPOCRISY & SOCIETY

Hollywood is filled with hypocrisy, they will flatter you to your face and turn around in the next moment and criticize your character. It is the land of looking good no matter what, cosmetic surgery is the norm, not for repairing injuries, but to alter the physical person to an image of perfection. Hollywood is a land of make believe, where sound stages become other countries, where make-up transforms beautiful faces into frightening creatures, where the desire to look young costs ridiculous amounts of money and may alter the way one looks permanently.

In the 1980's when young people were suddenly wealthy due to silicon valley and the tech boom, fashion became somewhat similar to the French society of Louis XIV. Hair was very big and mostly curly similar to the French court. Both men and women were concerned about how they looked and wanted to flaunt their wealth in rich fabrics. Women wore lots of jewelry and embellishments to the clothes (sequence, jeweled items, beading).

Society has long put forth various images of the perfect female. In France in 1666 women had tiny corseted waists, off the shoulder necklines that revealed their full bosoms in gowns made of silks and satins with lots of embellishments. Men showed off their legs in short pantaloons with high heeled shoes and knee length overcoats with scarves tied at the neck. Their hair was long and curly, with both men and women wearing elaborate wigs. The hypocrisy of the court of Louis XIV was summed up in the famous line by Marie Antoinette, "Let them eat cake" which was sarcastically hurled at the poor who were struggling to eat while the court languished in silks and satins eating, gourmet food. As we know this did not end well for Marie, who was beheaded in the French Revolution.

FASHION IN LOUIS XIV'S REIGN



EMBELLISHMENTS

**BIG
HAIR**



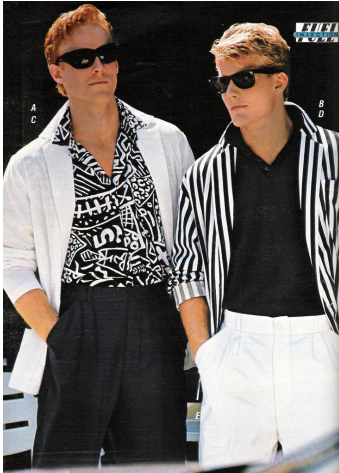
ACCESSORIZE



80'S FASHION



ACCESSORIZE



BIG HAIR



EMBELLISHMENTS

COMEDY OF MANNERS

Comedy of manners, witty, cerebral form of dramatic comedy that depicts and often satirizes the manners and affectations of a contemporary society. A comedy of manners is concerned with social usage and the question of whether or not characters meet certain social standards. Often the governing social standard is morally trivial but exacting. The plot of such a comedy, usually concerned with an illicit love affair or similarly scandalous matter, is subordinate to the play's brittle atmosphere, witty dialogue, and pungent commentary on human foibles.

The comedy of manners, which was usually written by sophisticated authors for members of their own coterie or social class, has historically thrived in periods and societies that combined material prosperity and moral latitude. Such was the case in ancient Greece when Menander (c. 342–c. 292 BC) inaugurated New Comedy, the forerunner of comedy of manners. Menander's smooth style, elaborate plots, and stock characters were imitated by the Roman poets Plautus (c. 254–184 BC) and Terence (186/185–159 BC), whose comedies were widely known and copied during the Renaissance.

One of the greatest exponents of the comedy of manners was Molière, who satirized the hypocrisy and pretension of 17th-century French society in such plays as *L'École des femmes* (1662; *The School for Wives*) and *Le Misanthrope* (1666; *The Misanthrope*).



COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

Commedia dell'arte, (Italian: "comedy of the profession") Italian theatrical form that flourished throughout Europe from the 16th through the 18th century. Outside Italy, the form had its greatest success in France, where it became the Comédie-Italienne. In England, elements from it were naturalized in the harlequinade in pantomime and in the Punch-and-Judy show, a puppet play involving the commedia dell'arte character Punch. The comical Hanswurst, of German folklore, was also a commedia dell'arte character.



ESSAY OR SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

On Ego:

How was the ego reflected in the court of Louis XIV? How is ego reflected in 1980's Hollywood? Can you think of a figure in today's world whose ego seems to rule their life? (WI core Standards TP.Cn.13.h)

On Relationships:

There are many different kinds of relationships in *Le Misanthrope*, friends, adversaries, and romances. Choose one of the relationships in the play and write about its hypocrisy or how that relationship is a reflection of Hollywood society. (WI core Standards TP.Cn.16.h)

On Misanthropy:

The character most associated with misanthropy is Alceste? Do other characters in the play display misanthropic behavior? Why do you think Alceste became so disillusioned with everyone and everything? Do you know anyone today who displays misanthropic tendencies? (WI core Standards TP.Cn.14.h)

On Characterization:

Critically analyze the effectiveness of character choices by an actor in this production? Did the choices enhance the play and add subtext to the role? (WI core Standards TP.Cn.14.h)

On Research:

Choose a scene from the production and reflect on the effect that lighting, set and costume effect the outcome of the play? Did the lighting create a mood? Did the set design create a feeling of a specific place? (WI core Standards TP.R.11.h)

On Style:

Discuss how Moliere's choice in creating a comedy of manners was easily translated to Hollywood of the 1980's. Can you think of a current television show or film that is done in the style of comedy of manners? Compare and contrast the similarities from the 1980's to 2020.

COMEDY OF MANNERS

BY JUSTIN CASH · PUBLISHED JULY 19, 2006 · UPDATED JUNE 11, 2020

A Comedy of Manners is a play concerned with satirising society's manners. A manner is the method in which everyday duties are performed, conditions of society, or a way of speaking. It implies a polite and well-bred behaviour.

Comedy of Manners is known as high comedy because it involves a sophisticated wit and talent in the writing of the script. In this sense it is both intellectual and very much the opposite of slapstick, which requires little skill with the script and is largely a physical form of comedy. In a Comedy of Manners however, there is often minimal physical action and the play may involve heavy use of dialogue.

A Comedy of Manners usually employs an equal amount of both satire and farce resulting in a hilarious send-up of a particular social group. Most plays of the genre were carefully constructed to satirise the very people watching them. This was usually the middle to upper classes in society, who were normally the only people wealthy enough to afford going to the theatre to see a comedy of manners in the first place. The playwrights knew this in advance and fully intended to create characters that were sending up the daily customs of those in the audience watching the play. The satire tended to focus on their materialistic nature, never-ending desire to gossip and hypocritical existence.

Comedy of Manners has spread itself over several periods in theatre history. A theatrical genre can begin in a certain era but span many periods if the works of later playwrights successfully revive it. The most valuable material of this genre occurred during the Restoration. English theatres were officially closed between 1642 and 1660 when Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans ruled England and there was no aristocracy. In 1660 King Charles II restored the English throne and one of his first actions was to grant several key theatrical figures licences to produce plays and breathe life into the theatre once more.

Technically, the Restoration period ended with the death of Charles II in 1685, but theatre historians usually extend the period to about 1700. Along with this revival was a type of performance that became known as Comedy of Manners. Major contributors to the genre in England at the time were William Wycherley with his play *The Country Wife* (1675) and William Congreve with *The Way of the World* (1700). During this period in France, Moliere was also writing Comedy of Manners plays. Three of his most famous works include *The School for Wives* (1662), *Tartuffe* (1664) and *The Misanthrope* (1666) where Moliere satirised aspects of 17th century French society.

A hundred years later, Irish playwright Richard Sheridan and Englishman Oliver Goldsmith revived the Comedy of Manners genre. The best examples of their work include Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777) and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773).

Again, a little over a century from this date, Comedy of Manner plays were being perfected in England by famous Irish playwright Oscar Wilde, with wonderful works like *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).