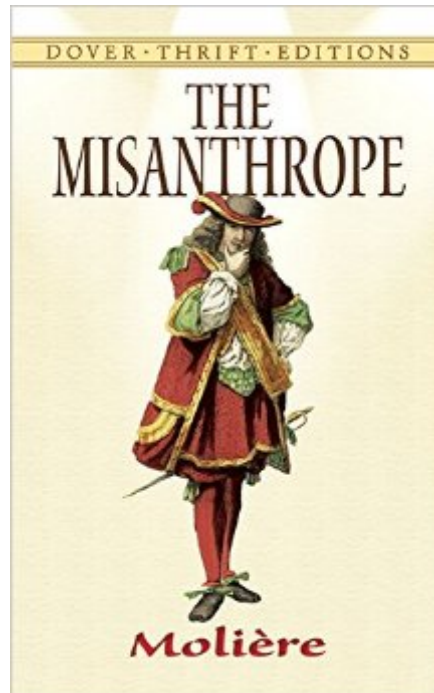


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The Misanthrope (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Molière understood profoundly what makes us noble, pathetic, outrageous and funny, and in his splendid comedies satirized human folly to perfection. One of the best of his plays; and one of the greatest of all comedies; is *The Misanthrope*, first performed in 1666, when the King of France himself had assumed patronage of Molière's company, and the actor/playwright was at the height of his career. Spotlighting the absurdities of social and literary pretension, *The Misanthrope* shows us a man who is quick to criticize the hypocrisies, inconsistencies and faults of others, yet remains blind to his own. As "the misanthrope" grows more and more irritable with others, the play becomes more and more entertaining, even as a happy ending for the hero seems less and less likely.

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Customer Reviews

Molière's "*The Misanthrope*" is the most humorous play written in any language. It centers around the character Alceste, who has a firm belief in being brutally honest all the time. The habit of others to speak harshly behind other's backs and hypocritically praise them to their faces drives him to the brink of insanity. It irks him so much that his only wish would be to become a hermit in the mountains. If it weren't for his love of the beautiful Celimene. However, to make things more complicated, she happens to be the queen of duplicitous thought. Alceste hates himself for loving a woman who behaves in the manner that irritates him the most, but cannot bring himself to confront what troubles him. That, paired with the remarkably written exchanges between Alceste, his friend

Philinte, the pompous Oronte, and the many social courtiers and French aristocracy make this the ideal story to bring you to tears with laughter. I highly recommend this book to all lovers of theater, humor, and excellent writing. It truly deserves all 5 stars.

Donald M. Frame's translations of fourteen Moliere comedies (seven in this volume and another seven in *Tartuffe and Other Plays*) are delightful. Not that Moliere's plays have lacked for translators; some versions have made the comedies leaden and dull, while others have added their own luster to the text in a way that distorts Moliere's intentions. Frame is more faithful to the original text than some earlier translators, while his verse does an admirable job of conveying the comic "thrust" that Moliere must have envisioned. Any translation of this playwright must be compared against the sparkling verse renditions of Richard Wilbur. I personally find Frame to more than hold his own here, and in fact in *The Misanthrope* to do better in giving us the sense of the author stylishly, but without the translator "stealing the spotlight" as much as happens in Wilbur's brilliant version. Frame's version is excellent throughout and augmented by informative introductions and notes

You might not think a play in verse written in the 17th century would be accessible and entertaining today, but this one's hilarious. Somehow the formal rhyming couplets make everything funnier. Get the Donald Frame translation - I've seen some others that weren't nearly as good.

Although Moliere is only half a century younger than Shakespeare, he is less hard work - there is no elaborate rhetoric or difficult, metaphysical poetry. dialogue is plain and functional. This, of course, brings him nearer to us, and we are far more likely to meet a Tartuffe, say, in everyday life than a Lear or Hamlet. However, I don't think he's supposed to be this plain. Wood's translation is a nimble, enjoyable read, but in the two translations, from French to English, from metre to prose, something has been lost; maybe not poetry, but certainly language. What we are left with are breezily amusing farces - this is more than enough for me, but makes me wonder why Bloom had him in his canon. 'Tartuffe' is the most famous play in this collection. Subject to censorship and interdiction in its time, Wood introduces the play with a preface and two petitions to the King from Moliere. Although they are revealing about Moliere's absolute dependency on the monarch, and the need to flatter culminating in the play's preposterous deus ex machina, they necessarily caricature the play's complexity. Tartuffe the religious hypocrite who tries to bring down the social order, who reveals the aristocracy's own hypocrisy (look at the amount of two-facedness needed to expose him), forces

them down to his level, makes blatant the fundamental desires high society would prefer not to acknowledge - sex, food, wealth etc. The true horror of Tartuffe's marriage with Marianne is not that he is a repulsive bigot, but because he is trying to wrest power and means from the nobility (a job already started by the Figaro-like maid). I bet it wasn't really the Tartuffes who hated this play.

As a product this book is excellent. As another reviewer pointed out Moliere's is just a little bit younger than Shakespeare. Of course this book is a translation. But I think that Moliere was more of a popular type playwright. It is inconceivable to me that the average person in Shakespeare's time and place spoke the way he writes in his later plays. In fact in studying other playwrights in England that are contemporaries of Shakespeare I found them much more accessible. Moliere is more like of a popular style, if his translations are accurate and I have studied various translations. Some of his work is extremely witty. I have the same experience with Moliere that I have with other playwrights including Shakespeare. I need to study the play AND see or hear it performed. I have done this with audiobooks with Moliere's plays and it really adds to the experience to me. Thank You...

Moliere said that 'there is no comedy without truth, and no truth without comedy'. And his plays are a scathing and humorous depiction of a simplified, and stylized human nature. Whether it is religious hypocrisy in 'Tartuffe', miserliness in 'The Miser' or misanthropy in 'The Misanthrope' Moliere often focuses on one quality in order to satirize and society and mankind in general. In the Misanthrope the main character Alceste tells the truth to everyone (except himself) and in so doing alienates everyone. This is against the advice of his best friend Philinte. At the same time he is in love with the frivolous Celimene who he attempts to change by constantly criticizing. He begs that she retire with him away from the corruption of society but she prefers society to him. The play ends with Philinte and his fiancée trying to persuade Alceste to remain. Moliere writes in a clear, simple direct language and the surface sense of his work is readily understood. His view of human nature is harsh and critical, but redeemed by a comic laughter suggesting we are wiser if we do not take ourselves all that seriously.

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