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*Dramatic Publishing*

# **Skinflints and Scoundrels:**

## **Molière's Miser**

Translated, adapted and arranged  
by  
SUZAN L. ZEDER

From J.B.P. Molière's  
*The Miser*



**Dramatic Publishing**  
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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 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 Dept. at Southern Methodist University on January 28, 1986. Directed by Jim R. Hancock; scene design, Matt Aston; costume design, Mark D. Prouse; lighting design, Lee J. Dulaney. The cast was:

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 Jacques . . . . . 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. Directed by 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. The cast was:

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 Jacques . . . . . 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

A Full-length Play  
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  
Brindavoine (Courtier) . . . . . servant to Harpagon  
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

\*Expansion possible with inclusion of multiple courtiers.

## 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.  
DU PARK. 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! (*The COURT is amused  
and a little shocked.*)  
POMPONNE . You will be paid, Monsieur.  
MOLIERE. So you promised with *Tartuffe*, but you closed  
it down and banned it for four years.  
POMPONNE . That play was an abomination.  
MADAME BEJART . Monsieur!  
POMPONNE . The queen mother abhorred it.  
MADAME BEJART . And the king adored it!  
MOLIERE. Mark my words, someday that play will be  
seen!  
POMPONNE . Tonight you have for us, something more  
suit able, *La Misanthrope* , is it not?

MOLIERE. Tonight, I have for you nothing, if you do not have for me...my money!

POMPONNE. The king is expecting a play.

MOLIERE. And Molière is expecting his pay!

POMPONNE. The king has been very generous with you, sir.

MOLIERE. True! And I am duly grateful! My problem is not with the king; it's with minor ministers who make promises they can't keep.

POMPONNE. Some actors would be only too willing to play simply for the privilege of performing before the king!

MOLIERE (*wheeling a round*). Without payment?

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 toward 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. Trumpets sound. 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, involv-*

*ing the KING and the whole COURT. The ACTORS in MOLIERE's company dive into the large chest for last-minute costume pieces and props. The processional 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 crosses to DU PARK, removes his wig and tosses it back into the chest.)*

POMPONNE. Uhhhh. That most excellent comedy, *Amphitryon*?

MOLIERE. No. *(MOLIERE takes a prop away from ETIENNE and puts it back in the chest.)*

POMPONNE. *George Dandin?* *(MOLIERE reaches into the chest and pulls out a fistful of small scrolls. He turns to face the KING and bows deeply.)*

MOLIERE. Your Majesty, Madame, for your entertainment and your edification, I have prepared something special. *(He turns to address the COURT.)* Mesdames et Messieurs, prepare yourselves to receive a new play performed by the premier 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. Wait! Are you taking anything of mine?

LA FLECHE. What could I take of yours?

HARPAGON. Show me your hands.

LA FLECHE. Here. (*HARPAGON inspects them so closely he almost sniffs them.*)

HARPAGON. And the others?

LA FLECHE. What others?

HARPAGON. The others! (*HARPAGON slaps LA FLECHE's hands, who wheels his arms in a tight circle and presents his hands again. HARPAGON inspects them closely.*)

LA FLECHE. Here!

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 (*under his breath*). What joy I'd have in robbing him.

HARPAGON (*jumping at the word "rob"*). What did you say about robbing?

LA FLECHE. I said you are poking me everywhere to see if I'm robbing you!

HARPAGON. That's just what I intend to do!

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. What are you worried about?

HARPAGON. I worry about what I worry about!

LA FLECHE. Do you think I mean you?

HARPAGON. I think about what I think about! Who are you talking to when you say 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. I'm not mentioning any names.

HARPAGON. I'll thrash you if you say another word.

LA FLECHE. But if the cap fits...

HARPAGON. I'll stop your chattering with a battering!

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

HARPAGON. Farewell, and go to hell!

LA FLECHE. That's a pretty dismissal!

HARPAGON. Be it on your conscience!! (*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. He romances his money for a few beats. Suddenly he turns very suspicious. He is sure he is being watched. For the next few beats, he searches for*

*safe places to hide his gold: under things, inside things; whatever the set will allow.)* It's no small worry trying to protect a large sum of money! Happy is the man who has his pile well invested and only keeps enough in his pocket for expenses! 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.)*