



Denver Center
Theatre Company

Inside Out

A STUDY GUIDE

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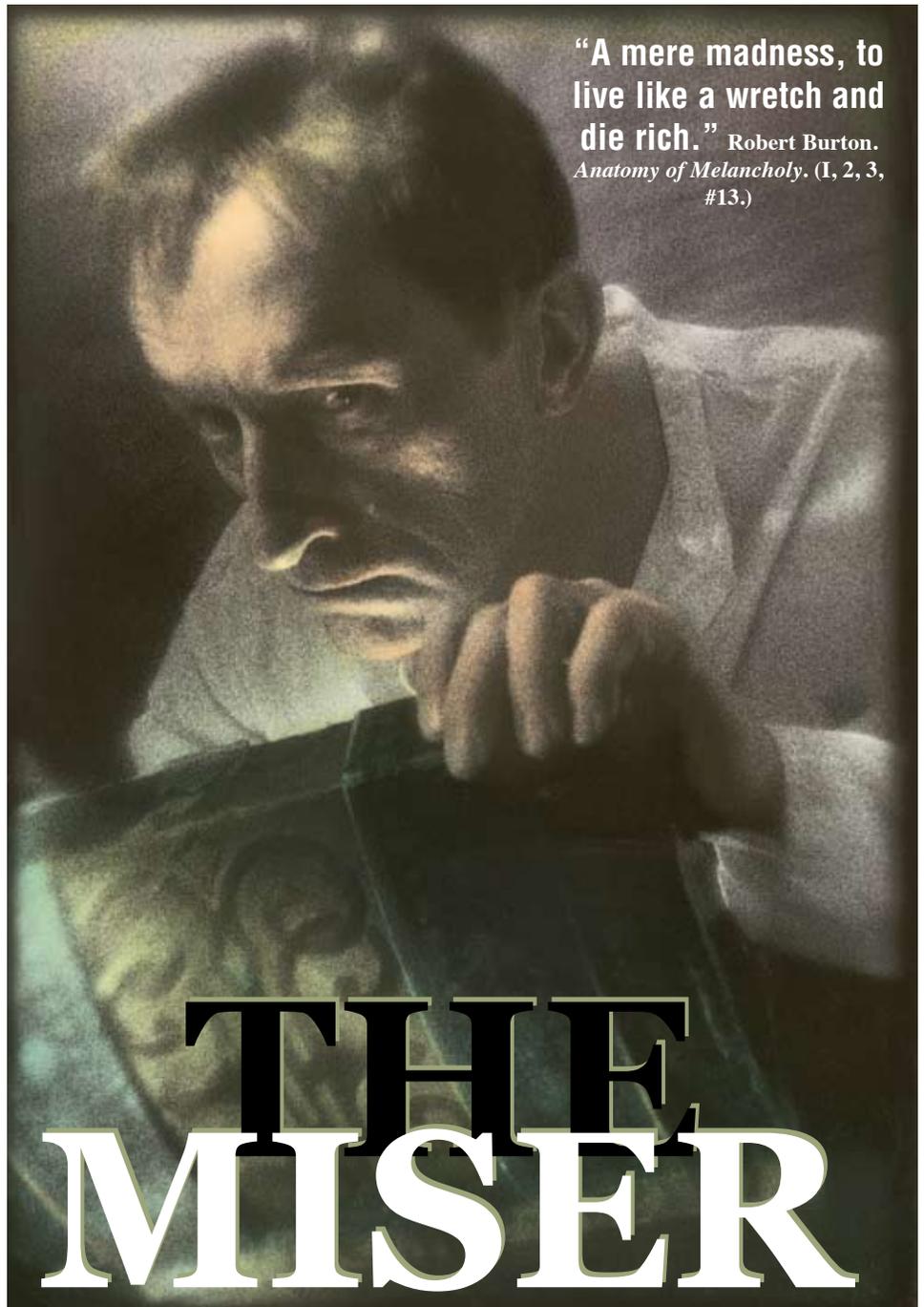
U S WEST World Premiere

Harpagon, a wealthy widower, is in a dilemma caused by his conflicting desires: should he marry Mariane, a beautiful, but poor young girl or continue to hoard his first love, a box of gold? The plot is soon established when we meet Harpagon's son, Cleante, who is in love with the same young girl on whom his father has marital designs.

Harpagon displays no love or sympathy for his children. Cleante can marry someone else, and Elise, his daughter, will marry a rich old man who will take her without a dowry. It is of no concern to Harpagon that Elise is in love with Valere; what worries him is his buried treasure in the garden that he checks out periodically because he fears someone will steal it. Harpagon suspects everyone, but mostly his servants, whom he insults, harangues and generally mistreats.

Misunderstandings abound in this most dysfunctional (and funny) of families. Their failings and foibles become the gist of this farcical comic romp.

"The business of comedy is to represent in general all the defects of mankind."
Molière. *The Impromptu of Versailles* (1663).



"A mere madness, to live like a wretch and die rich." Robert Burton. *Anatomy of Melancholy*. (I, 2, 3, #13.)

THE MISER

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Photo by Gary Isaacs

MOLIÈRE

(JEAN BAPTISTE POUQUELIN)

Jean Baptiste Pouquelin was born in Paris in 1622, the eldest of six children of a well-to-do middle class family. His father held a position as an upholsterer to King Louis XIII. Jean attended the Jesuit College de Clermont, a fine secondary school for children of the rich and noble. He received a classical education, studying dramas by Terence and Plautus. His grandfather took him to the theater productions at the Hotel de Bourgogne. Molière briefly studied law until he inherited his father's position as upholsterer in 1642. Subsequently, he renounced the position and its right of succession for a theatrical career.

In 1644, he adopted the name Molière and helped to form The Illustrious Theater with actress Madeleine Bejart, his leading lady, business partner and mistress. He worked as actor, as well as director and stage manager for the company. The Illustrious Theater soon failed. Rescued from debtors' prison by his father, Molière continued a theatrical career with a newly organized troupe and toured the provinces for the next thirteen years.

On his return to Paris in 1658, Molière premiered one of his plays, *The Amorous Quarrel*. This satire of society was well received by audiences, especially the young King Louis XIV. Molière stretched even farther into social commentary with *The Precious Damsels* the next year. This biting satire on upper class manners was the first of many to enrage the Church and the aristocracy.

Molière had learned during the long years in the provinces how to fuse the jokes, gestures and comic situations so loved by the rural audiences into the strictures of formal urban theater. His writing ability elevated the farce to great literature and gained him the favor of Louis XIV, who, in 1661, installed him in the premier theater of the kingdom, the *Theatre du Palais Royal*.

In 1652, at age 40, he married Armande Bejart, 20 years younger than he and the sister—or perhaps, the daughter—of his former mistress, Madeleine. This unhappy marriage was often the subject of his plays, with *The School for Wives* (1662) only the

first.

However, his most controversial play, *Tartuffe* (1664), infuriated the Church, although the King enjoyed the relentless attack on religious hypocrisy. Deemed sacrilegious by the Archbishop of Paris, the King was forced to ban the play for five years while Molière rewrote it. In 1669, it was publicly performed in its new form and won great public praise.

While revising *Tartuffe*, Molière wrote and staged his other plays, including *The Miser* (1668). He continued his barbed thrusts at the Church and included the aristocracy and the medical profession as well. Ceaseless criticism of his work, his unhappy marriage, and a demanding work schedule took its toll on him. His final play, *The Imaginary Invalid*, in which he played a hypochondriac, led to his death. He suffered a lung hemorrhage during the fourth performance of the play and died the evening of February 17, 1673. The Church refused to allow Molière the

last rites of burial in consecrated ground, but Louis XIV intervened and arranged the burial in a Parisian cemetery.

“However, his most controversial play, *Tartuffe* (1664), infuriated the Church, although the King enjoyed the relentless attack on religious hypocrisy.”



MOLIÈRE, BALZAC and Paris: CIRCA 1820

The director and translator, Nagel Jackson, has chosen to set *The Miser* in 1820s France. The revolution of 1789 had drawn a line between the old French aristocratic economy and the bourgeois one, and a new set of expectations and attitudes developed. Politically, the Bourbon dynasty returned to power when Louis XVIII came to the throne in 1814. Napoleon Bonaparte, again, seized power in 1815, but lost it to Louis later that year. Charles X followed Louis and tried to reestablish that total power of the earlier French kings, but he was overthrown in the July Revolution of 1830 and Louis Phillippe came to the throne.

Culturally, the stirrings of the Romantic movement crept into France from England and Germany. The movement's center was the home of Victor Hugo, author of *Les Misérables*. Here, young poets, novelists, critics and painters gathered to discuss their artistic aspirations and read from their works. In painting, Eugene Delacroix achieved the Romantic breakthrough with his 1824 painting, "Massacre at Scio," which depicted Greek independence fighters and the poet, Lord Byron. It broke with the classical style with its use of brilliant, colors and the universal theme of passionate freedom-fighters. In music, Hector Berlioz conducted his *Requiem* in performance at Saint-Roch Church. Using 150 musicians, and singers, he had composed a piece "of such magnitude and venturesome boldness (that) had never been presented before."¹

The 1820s were a confused time, but they did witness the rise of the mercantile class, the bourgeoisie. Paris was the perfect place "where the bourgeoisie could now acquire high status and where appearances were not the opposite of reality, but the precursor."² The ambitious young men wore shiny leather boots, glamorous waistcoats and properly colored ties. This sort of display created a

confidence of class. It was the time when money became the most important factor governing people's lives and their place in society. It was also the time of the writer Honore de Balzac and his novels about the evil force of money and money-driven social climbing. As the unsurpassed historian of the French middle class during the first half of the 19th century, he wrote of stereotypes: the snob,

the provincial, the prude, the miser, the lecher and others. As Balzac seriously characterized French society of the 19th century, so Molière caricatured the bourgeois of the 17th century. This group "provided comedy with a clearly defined type endowed with characteristic faults and foibles: avarice, cow-

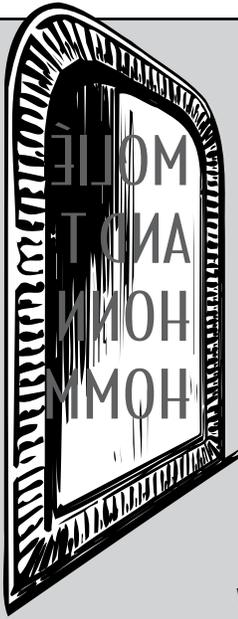
ardliness, jealousy, the oft-foiled inclination toward domestic tyranny egotism and naivete. (They) constitute a lineage along which one finds the same family resemblance, alternately burlesque and repulsive, stemming from a basic mixture of possessiveness and pusillanimity."³

Both Molière and Balzac gave us prototypes of greed. Harpagon in *The Miser* is an avaricious old man who wants gold for its own sake, not for what it can buy. Monsieur Grandet, the other miser in French literature, in Balzac's *Eugenie Grandet*, cultivates abstemiousness. He takes pleasure in self-denial and is the force that determines the destiny of his wife, who dies from his penny-pinching ways, and his daughter, who is emotionally warped by his miserliness. Fortunately for them, Harpagon's children escape his domination. But both men undergo no change in the course of the play or novel. From start to finish, they are miserly and venal—one tragic and one comic.

"Avarice and happiness never saw each other, how then should they become acquainted."

—Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanac*. November, 1733.

THE AGE OF MOLIÈRE



MOLIÈRE AND THE HONNETE HOMME

**“It is difficult to esteem
a man as highly as he
wishes to be esteemed.”
Vauvenargues, *Reflexions*.**

In 1630, Nicolas Faret wrote of the accepted image of the ideal man in his work *Honnête Homme*, a phrase that defies translation. The *honnête homme* should be generous and brave, and be of good conduct and virtue; he should have a good reputation, be well-informed in several subjects and present a pleasant appearance. Most of all, the *honnête homme* knew that man was a rational animal. The ideals of the 17th century—reason, order and clarity—are part of this personality; Molière’s comedies are directed by these qualities.

In her book, *Molière*, Gertrud Mander says the playwright wrote his comedies to please the audience, “l’honnête homme, whether they be courtiers, burghers or men of the people.”⁴ Though Molière portrayed characters of his own times and held a mirror up to society to reflect its customs and morals, his plays entertain contemporary audiences as well. This fact is demonstrated in “the comical drama of human life as arising from conflict in social and personal relationships.”⁵ Molière’s bourgeoisie had difficulties with communication, with problems of authority and identity and with the illusions people hide behind to protect themselves from reality. These predicaments exist today. Molière’s plays are particularly attractive to young people, because the young are usually victorious at the end. “In their struggle for survival, they have sharpened their claws and have learned all sorts of useful—if perhaps nasty—tricks—.”⁶ In their conflicts, they have been given a taste of adulthood, but they are still young enough to believe love conquers all.

Molière’s comedies reveal sins against humanity, but to him the greatest sin was egotism. Whatever its form, this failing upsets the functioning of home and society. The egotist is his own worst enemy because this characteristic isolates him; unloved and incapable of making contact with others, he is condemned to his own company. He has disrupted man’s natural social nature and is not an *honnête homme* in Molière’s sense.⁷ These persons have become caricatures of human beings at whom we laugh, although what they have become is so sad.

Molière’s lifetime (1622-1673) spanned only a fraction of the period known as “The Age of Louis XIV.” This period of French history is characterized by the search for regularity, order and decorum. New cultural institutions emerged that reflected a new sense of formal, regulated and controlled standards unlike any seen in Europe before.

The most structured of these institutions were the official academies established under royal patronage. They set the standards for artistic creations under the close supervision of royal overseers. The French Academy was founded in 1635 by Richelieu to uphold classical drama. The Royal Academies of Painting and Sculpture, Architecture and Inscriptions and Literature followed over the next 35 years. Not until the Impressionists attacked the strict conventions of the academies in the late 19th century was their authority deeply challenged.

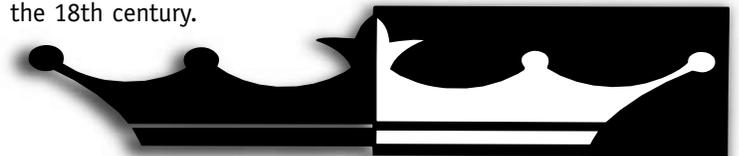
Alongside the formal academies, a second institution developed, that of the salon. While artists of all types have frequently united to share common interests, especially where rich and noble patrons have given them encouragement, a special version of these coteries developed in 17th century France. Groups of artists began to meet in small, intimate gatherings in the drawing room, or salon of the wives of rich aristocrats. These sponsoring women were often ambitious and intelligent, and sought to attract the most brilliant artistic minds of their time. The artists, for their part, came seeking patronage and fame; the rise of Paris as the cultural and political center of the nation was mirrored in the competitive societies of the salon.

The intimate nature of the salon encouraged a shift to a more genteel view of the world, in contrast to the heroic ideals of the early century. Also, the aristocrats and artists circulated through the twin cultural centers of the court and the salon and an increasingly literate nobility vied with one another to provide patronage to those artists in current favor.

The growing urban nature of Paris also provided a wider audience for the creative. Theaters, opera houses and publishers made it possible to pursue a more popular audience, but patronage remained the most predictable route to financial success for most artists. This reliance on the good will of the nobility tended to restrict the range of aesthetically acceptable expression of the age.

Louis XIV was crowned king in 1654, although he had inherited the crown in 1643 at the age of five when his father, Louis XIII, died. Self-titled, “The Sun King,” Louis XIV governed as an absolute monarch under the doctrine, “*L’etat, c’est moi*.” (I am the state.) The opulence of his rule included the conversion of a small country castle into the palace at Versailles, the largest building in Europe. At Versailles, he forced the nobility into subservient roles, justifying his supremacy on the old political concept of the divine right of kings.

While his overall accomplishments made France the envy of Europe, the Sun King’s last years were marked by the ruin of war and famine. These problems marked the end of an era for the lower classes, with brighter prospects ahead in the 18th century.



MOLIÈRE AND THE PRINCIPLES OF NEOCLASSIC THEATER

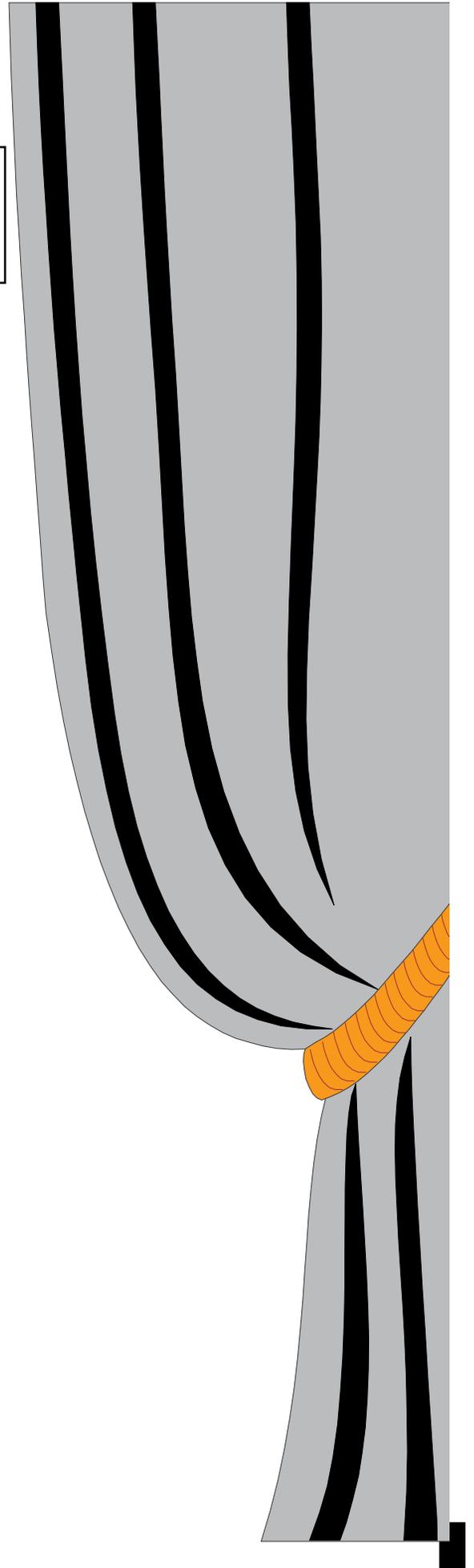
The concept of verisimilitude or the “appearance of truth” was a key standard.

Molière’s plays adhered to many of the standards of French Neoclassic drama. These standards were a synthesis of ideas expressed through centuries of dramatic writing. The concept of verisimilitude or the “appearance of truth” was a key standard. This requirement ruled out fantasy and supernatural occurrences. Soliloquies and choruses were discouraged on the grounds that it was unnatural for characters to speak aloud while alone. Instead, each main character would have a trusted companion on stage to whom he could reveal his innermost secrets. In addition, violence happened off-stage because of the difficulty of making it convincingly realistic.

The dramatist was also asked to teach moral lessons. He could copy life but he had to reveal inner moral patterns. Wickedness had to be punished and goodness rewarded. All characters were expected to be reasonably “normal” men and women, and not too deviant in any way.

Tragedy and comedy, following the analysis developed by Plato, had their own patterns. Tragedy told stories based on the experiences of rulers of the nobility. Its endings were always unhappy in the description of the difficult affairs of the state and the downfall of its rulers. The style was lofty and poetic. Comedy, however, dealt with the private affairs of the lower classes. The endings were always happy and the style was characterized by the use of ordinary speech.

Plays were divided into five acts written around the concept of unity of action, place and time. Thus, only one location could be depicted unless another could be logically reached within a day’s journey; this represented the allotted time frame for a play. Subplots were not written into the scripts.



Molière was influenced by the Roman comedies of Terence and Plautus who lived in the 2nd century BC. In fact, Plautus's play *Aulularia* contributes to the plot of *The Miser*.

Philosophical influences on Molière were Michel de Montaigne's essays that preached the realistic, rational and dispassionate values of French classicism. In addition, the Jesuit Priest Abbe Pierre Gassendi, Molière's tutor, instilled a synthesis of scholastic teaching with humanism, serving as a link between classical philosophy, medieval theology and modern European thought. To Molière, this fusion of ideas made the point that philosophy should have some application to life.

The most important influences on Molière were the *commedia dell'arte* and farce. *Commedia dell'arte* was improvised comedy performed by various troupes of highly professional Italian actors who toured Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. The size of the troupe varied between ten and twenty members and their plays were based on a set of widely known character types. They operated within a varying scenario to which the actors brought a repertoire of jokes, acrobatic feats, set speeches and comic business.

The plots of *commedia dell'arte* were usually based on love intrigues involving people of all ages: masters and servants, mistresses and confidantes. Each actor would specialize in a particular role: the aged, avaricious and amorous Pantalon; the fat and pedantic black-clad Doctor; the vainglorious and cowardly Spanish Captain with the bristling mustache; the shy and acrobatic servant Arlecchino; the deceitful, crooked-nosed, artistic Brighella; the young, unmasked, handsome lovers and a variety of *zanni* or servant figures, instantly recognizable to the audience. Plot and dialogue were often improvised after a basic rehearsal. Improvisation was important because performances could be adapted to local and contemporary needs. The success of a play depended largely upon the comic ingenuity of the performers. It included mime, farce, clownish buffoonery and music in the presentation.

Farce is probably the most consistently popular form of drama. It has existed since the Greek plays through the *commedia dell'arte* to 19th century French farce and contemporary comedy. In farce, characters are subjected to various forms of indignity. They find themselves in compromising situations, lose items of clothing, sometimes suffering physical assault. They do not, however, suffer too heavily



THE INFLUENCES ON MOLIÈRE

either physically or from loss of face.

The characters of farce often have a curious childish innocence, a lack of awareness of other people's concerns and a total obsession with their own. We laugh at them while envying their capacity to ignore the hurts of life. They overcome indignity and chance, but chaos is close and the game is to avert every threat. Thus farce moves quickly. The characters are like jugglers and the situations grow even more complicated. There is not time for deep analysis. Farce depends on our awareness of problems of authority, sexuality and disorder, even while the play pretends to conjure them away.

Molière used elements from farce and the *commedia dell'arte* form of presentation to identify problems with the aristocracy, politicians, the medical profession, religious hypocrisy and society in general. His originality consisted of making great theater of farcical theater. Instead of using the device of a complicated plot, Molière started off with certain fixed masks and made them into human types by adding to them characteristics observed in contemporary life. This genre, called "character comedy," presents a spectacle of inner forces embodied in individualized characters that seek to dominate or protect themselves with a persistence that provokes laughter through its extreme results. Molière's protagonists are thus absolute egotists who invent generally illusory values to satisfy their appetites. Hence the humor occurs as they dupe themselves and become prisoners of their own natures.

"Commedia dell'arte was improvised comedy performed by various troupes of highly professional Italian actors..."

ACTIVITIES

1. If you had a parent or guardian like Harpagon, how would you deal with him/her? Would you get a job, lead a family revolt, leave as soon as possible, try to change him, etc.?
2. Harpagon is obsessed with obtaining money. What other obsessions can you point out in our society, example: our emphasis on looking young, shopping, cleanliness, etc.?
3. We don't know much about Harpagon's first wife. Construct a scenario in which you are his wife or child and want a new shoes, coat etc. How would you approach Harpagon? What tactics would you use to get some of the things that you wanted or needed?
4. Frugality does have some merit. Evaluate your budget or the family budget. Separate the *needs* (things you have to have) from the *wants* (items that are desirable but not necessary). Discuss how you could cut down on your spending to save more. How much could you cut back if it was necessary? What percent of your total budget is spent for necessary items? What percent is spent on unnecessary things?
5. Jack Benny, a famous comedian of the 1940s and 50s and known for his cheapness, had a funny skit where he was approached by a thief. The thief said, "Your money or your life!" Benny replied after several seconds had passed and the thief became impatient, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking!" How would Harpagon react in this same situation? Write a scene where Harpagon had to deal with a thief.
6. Write a scenario between two famous misers, Harpagon and Scrooge (from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*). Or, if you have read *The Great Gatsby*, write a scenario between Harpagon and Jay Gatsby, a spendthrift. How would Jay try to convert him?
7. Much of Molière's comedy comes from his use of stock characters such as the lecherous and miserly Harpagon, the innocent and amorous young lovers, as well as the crew of unabashed servants. Many of these character types can be identified in modern comedy as well. Make a list of stock characters from popular forms of entertainment such as television, movies, or cartoons. First, create a name for the type of character, such as "the grumpy old man," and then list as many examples as you can. After you have completed your list, share it with the rest of the class. Do any of your characters types reflect those you saw in *The Miser*? Why do you think some character types have remained popular since the 17th century? Does your list contain any stock characters that would not have appeared in Molière's plays? If so, why?
8. The theatrical style of commedia dell'arte from which Molière derived much of his comedic devices is famous for their use of masks in costuming the stock characters. Imagine that you have been appointed designer for *The Miser* and design masks for each of the characters. How will the mask reflect the personality of the character? What materials would you use to make the masks? Share your designs with the rest of the class.



Activities cont'd.

9. Acting requires communicating not only with your voice but also with your body. For example, every person has a way of walking that is unique to him/her. Some people walk very erect, some people hunch over, some people take long strides, some people swing their arms widely. Create a character walk for each of the following stock characters.

- The greedy and grumpy old man
- The optimistic and ignorant young lover
- The egotistical aristocrat
- The clumsy and dense servant
- The nagging matriarch
- The sneaky villain

After you have created a walk for each character, perform them for your peers and see if they can guess which walk represent which character.

10. Nagle Jackson, the translator and director of *The Miser* decided to set the play in the 1820s, approximately 150 years after Molière originally wrote the play. Research the year 1820; what was happening politically, socially, economically? Why does the play work in a different era? If you were going to set the play in the year 2000, what would you change? What could stay the same? Do you think the play would still make sense set in modern times? Why or why not?



Notes:

1. Szulc, p. 55
2. Robb, p. 35.
3. Benichou, p. 64.
4. Mander, p. 27.
5. Mander, p. 26.
6. Mander, p. 39.
7. Mander, p. 42.

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