

Article summary



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Moliere's *The Misanthrope* number Moliere's *The Misanthrope* Moliere's play *The Misanthrope* is one of his most famous and acclaimed of plays. This does not, however, mean that the play has not received a lot of criticism. It was condemned by many including Jean Jacques Rousseau himself, who saw in the play the inability to rise above the petty vice of the society that it sought to ridicule. He saw in the protagonist of the play a character who in his extreme opposition to the society's ills, created a caricature of the reformist. There have been critics who have since refuted this argument. This paper shall seek to summarize one such argument, put forth by Seymour Rudin, in his essay, "Moliere and 'The Misanthrope'". The author argues that Moliere satirizes both the protagonist and the society that he is a part of, seeking to bring in an element of moderation in reform (Rudin, 309).

According to Rudin, the argument that Rousseau put forward indicated the ineptness of the critique of the protagonist in so much so that he appeared to be, at the end, at one with very society that he was critiquing. Apart from this, he appeared to be, right from the beginning, a caricature of an extreme form of idealism that was the subject of the comedy that the audience is supposed to laugh at. The Comedy of Manners is something that he becomes a part of through the laughter that he evokes (Rudin, 311).

There are however, according to Rudin, devices, in the form of characters and otherwise, that Moliere employs so as to make the play a critique of both the society and the protagonist. Through these devices, the author is able to propose a middle path that would lead to a society that could then probably not be as dishonest and materialistic as the one that the plays talks of. The foils in the play, Philinte and Eliante are two devices that the playwright uses for the purpose of showing how it is possible to lead a life that is not entirely

at odds with the society but also in accordance with certain rules of it.

Eliante leads a life that is unacceptable to the protagonist, Alceste. However, he is in love with her and this love reveals an opportunity for his moving back to the society (Rudin, 312).

Rudin points to the fact that for different eras, the way Alceste is perceived has been different and for the people of Moliere's era, he was looked upon as a funny caricature while he was looked at as a hero who fought against the entire world of vice, by the Romantics (like Rousseau). He advocates a mixed response that may be possible for contemporary critics and viewers of the play who may see in the idealistic stubbornness of Alceste the power to stand up to a corrupt society and at the same time, also realize that the path that one needs to take is not that of complete renunciation and withdrawal (Rudin, 311-3).

Works Cited

Rudin, Seymour. "Moliere and 'The Misanthrope'". Theatre Educational Journal. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3205214> Accessed 25th August, 2012