

Moliere the misanthrope

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The Misanthrope Moliere's play The Misanthrope is a comedy that represents social satire, satirizing the conventions of the society which Moliere lived in and observed. Perhaps the character of Alceste best demonstrates the elements of comedy and tragedy that co-exist in Moliere's play. Alceste, after all, realizes his jealous nature makes him a comic figure. In fact, humankind's tragedy as expressed by Moliere is that it cannot admit how funny, hypocritical, and ironic most of its actions and views are.

Because of this, Moliere's play is much more comedy than tragedy. Alceste represents an "everyman" of his social milieu and culture in Moliere's perception. He would like to be honest but knows he lives in a social system that is dishonest. Alceste chastises Philinte because of his hypocritical behavior toward strangers, who he hugs and professes great love for but then reverses his position the minute they are gone. As Alceste tells him, "Once the man's back is turned, you cease to love him, / And speak with absolute indifference of him! By God, I say it's base and scandalous / To falsify the heart's affections thus; / If I caught myself behaving in such a way, / I'd hang myself for shame, without delay" (Moliere 17). While the above treatment of one's fellow man may seem tragic, Moliere seems to be suggesting in a humorous way that all humans are often guilty of such behavior. In fact, it is Alceste's failures to recognize his own foibles that makes him so comical and his reaction to others hypocritical. Alceste is indignant and humorless with others like Oronte, who writes a poem about his beloved Celimene.

He fails to realize his jealousy makes him just as guilty of treating others poorly as does Philinte's hypocrisy. He is a jealous lover. He is a jealous

friend. And he is hard on all those around him but himself. Moliere is maintaining this lack of self-perception may be man's tragedy but from it springs much of the humor and comedy in life. We see this humor when Alceste maintains he would get rid of all those who wooed Celimene were he his beloved, " Were I this lady, I would soon get rid / Of lovers who approved of all I did, / And by their slack indulgence and applause / Endorsed my follies and excused my flaws" (Moliere 68).

In essence, Alceste endorses his own follies and excuses his own flaws. In conclusion, though there are definitely tragic elements that co-exist with the satire and comedy in Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, overall the play is much more of a humorous and funny comedy than it is tragic. Though lack of insight and self-perception may be a tragic condition of humankind, Moliere sees much more humor and comedy stemming from it.

Work Cited Moliere, Jean Baptiste. *The Misanthrope and Tartuffe*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965.