

Handout for February 4; Reading for February 11, to accompany Plautus
Pot of Gold

THE MISER. (L'AVARE.) by MOLIÈRE
TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH PROSE WITH A SHORT INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATORY
NOTES. BY CHARLES HERON WALL

This play was acted for the first time on September 9, 1668 Molière
acted the part of Harpagon.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

HARPAGON, _father to_ CLÉANTE, _in love with_ MARIANNE.

CLÉANTE, HARPAGON'S _son, lover to_ MARIANNE.

VALÈRE, _son to_ ANSELME, _and lover to_ ÉLISE.

ANSELME, _father to_ VALÈRE _and_ MARIANNE.

MASTER SIMON, _broker_.

MASTER JACQUES, _cook and coachman to_ HARPAGON.

LA FLÈCHE, _valet to_ CLÉANTE.

BRINDAVOINE, and LA MERLUCHE, _lackeys to_ HARPAGON.

A MAGISTRATE _and his_ CLERK.

ÉLISE, _daughter to_ HARPAGON.

MARIANNE, _daughter to_ ANSELME.

FROSINE, _an intriguing woman_.

MISTRESS CLAUDE, _servant to_ HARPAGON.

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The scene is at PARIS, _in_ HARPAGON'S _house_.

THE MISER. ACT I, SCENE VII

After revealing to his children that he will marry Marianne, whom his
son loves, Harpagon has just told Elise he has engaged her to an old
man. Valere, her lover has been pretending to be a servant in order to
ingratiate himself with her father

HAR. Valère, we have chosen you to decide who is in the right, my
daughter or I.

VAL. It is certainly you, Sir.

HAR. But have you any idea of what we are talking about?

VAL. No; but you could not be in the wrong; you are reason itself.

HAR. I want to give her to-night, for a husband, a man as rich as he
is good; and the hussy tells me to my face that she scorns to take
him. What do you say to that?

VAL. What I say to it?

HAR. Yes?

VAL. Eh! eh!

HAR. What?

VAL. I say that I am, upon the whole, of your opinion, and that you cannot but be right; yet, perhaps, she is not altogether wrong; and....

HAR. How so? Mr. Anselme is an excellent match; he is a nobleman, and a gentleman too; of simple habits, and extremely well off. He has no children left from his first marriage. Could she meet with anything more suitable?

VAL. It is true. But she might say that you are going rather fast, and that she ought to have at least a little time to consider whether her inclination could reconcile itself to....

HAR. It is an opportunity I must not allow to slip through my fingers. I find an advantage here which I should not find elsewhere, and he agrees to take her without dowry.

VAL. Without dowry?

HAR. Yes.

VAL. Ah! I have nothing more to say. A more convincing reason could not be found; and she must yield to that.

HAR. It is a considerable saving to me.

VAL. Undoubtedly; this admits of no contradiction. It is true that your daughter might represent to you that marriage is a more serious affair than people are apt to believe; that the happiness or misery of a whole life depends on it, and that an engagement which is to last till death ought not to be entered into without great consideration.

HAR. Without dowry!

VAL. That must of course decide everything. There are certainly people who might tell you that on such occasions the wishes of a daughter are no doubt to be considered, and that this great disparity of age, of disposition, and of feelings might be the cause of many an unpleasant thing in a married life.

HAR. Without dowry!

VAL. Ah! it must be granted that there is no reply to that; who in the world could think otherwise? I do not mean to say but that there are many fathers who would set a much higher value on the happiness of their daughter than on the money they may have to give for their marriage; who would not like to sacrifice them to their own interests, and who would, above all things, try to see in a marriage that sweet

conformity of tastes which is a sure pledge of honour, tranquillity and joy; and that....

HAR. Without dowry!

VAL. That is true; nothing more can be said. Without dowry. How can anyone resist such arguments?

HAR. (_aside, looking towards the garden_). Ah! I fancy I hear a dog barking. Is anyone after my money. (_To_ VALÈRE) Stop here, I'll come back directly.

SCENE VIII.--ÉLISE, VALÈRE.

ELI. Surely, Valère, you are not in earnest when you speak to him in that manner?

VAL. I do it that I may not vex him, and the better to secure my ends. To resist him boldly would simply spoil everything. There are certain people who are only to be managed by indirect means, temperaments averse from all resistance, restive natures whom truth causes to rear, who always kick when we would lead them on the right road of reason, and who can only be led by a way opposed to that by which you wish them to go. Pretend to comply with his wishes; you are much more likely to succeed in the end, and....

ELI. But this marriage, Valère?

VAL. We will find some pretext for breaking it off.

ACT III, SCENE V.-Preparations for the double wedding

HAR. Valère, you will have to give me your help in this business. Now, Master Jacques, I kept you for the last.

JAC. Is it to your coachman, Sir, or to your cook you want to speak, for I am both the one and the other?

HAR. To both.

JAC. But to which of the two first?

HAR. To the cook.

JAC. Then wait a minute, if you please.

(JACQUES _takes off his stable-coat and appears dressed as a cook_.)

HAR. What the deuce is the meaning of this ceremony?

JAC. Now I am at your service.

HAR. I have engaged myself, Master Jacques, to give a supper to-night.

JAC. (aside). Wonderful!

HAR. Tell me, can you give us a good supper?

JAC. Yes, if you give me plenty of money.

HAR. The deuce! Always money! I think they have nothing else to say except money, money, money! Always that same word in their mouth, money! They always speak of money! It's their pillow companion, money!

VAL. Never did I hear such an impertinent answer! Would you call it wonderful to provide good cheer with plenty of money? Is it not the easiest thing in the world? The most stupid could do as much. But a clever man should talk of a good supper with little money.

JAC. A good supper with little money?

VAL. Yes.

JAC. (to VALÈRE). Indeed, Mr. Steward, you will oblige me greatly by telling me your secret, and also, if you like, by filling my place as cook; for you keep on meddling here, and want to be everything.

HAR. Hold your tongue. What shall we want?

JAC. Ask that of Mr. Steward, who will give you good cheer with little money.

HAR. Do you hear? I am speaking to you, and expect you to answer me.

JAC. How many will there be at your table?

HAR. Eight or ten; but you must only reckon for eight. When there is enough for eight, there is enough for ten.

VAL. That is evident.

JAC. Very well, then; you must have four tureens of soup and five side dishes; soups, entrées....

HAR. What! do you mean to feed a whole town?

JAC. Roast....

HAR. (clapping his hand on MASTER JACQUES' mouth). Ah! Wretch! you are eating up all my substance.

JAC. Entremêts....

HAR. (again putting his hand on JACQUES' mouth). More still?

VAL. (to JACQUES). Do you mean to kill everybody? And has your master invited people in order to destroy them with over-feeding? Go and read a little the precepts of health, and ask the doctors if there

is anything so hurtful to man as excess in eating.

HAR. He is perfectly right.

VAL. Know, Master Jacques, you and people like you, that a table overloaded with eatables is a real cut-throat; that, to be the true friends of those we invite, frugality should reign throughout the repast we give, and that according to the saying of one of the ancients, "We must eat to live, and not live to eat."

HAR. Ah! How well the man speaks! Come near, let me embrace you for this last saying. It is the finest sentence that I have ever heard in my life: "We must live to eat, and not eat to live." No; that isn't it. How do you say it?

VAL. That we must eat to live, and not live to eat.

HAR. (to MASTER JACQUES). Yes. Do you hear that? (To VALÈRE) Who is the great man who said that?

VAL. I do not exactly recollect his name just now.

HAR. Remember to write down those words for me. I will have them engraved in letters of gold over the mantel-piece of my dining-room.

VAL. I will not fail. As for your supper, you had better let me manage it. I will see that it is all as it should be.

HAR. Do so.

JAC. So much the better; all the less work for me.

HAR. (to VALÈRE). We must have some of those things of which it is not possible to eat much, and that satisfy directly. Some good fat beans, and a pâté well stuffed with chestnuts.

VAL. Trust to me.

HAR. Now, Master Jacques, you must clean my carriage.

JAC. Wait a moment; this is to the coachman. (JACQUES puts on his coat_.) You say....

HAR. That you must clean my carriage, and have my horses ready to drive to the fair.

JAC. Your horses! Upon my word, Sir, they are not at all in a condition to stir. I won't tell you that they are laid up, for the poor things have got nothing to lie upon, and it would not be telling the truth. But you make them keep such rigid fasts that they are nothing but phantoms, ideas, and mere shadows of horses.

HAR. They are much to be pitied. They have nothing to do.

JAC. And because they have nothing to do, must they have nothing to eat? It would be much better for them, poor things, to work much and eat to correspond. It breaks my heart to see them so reduced; for, in

short, I love my horses; and when I see them suffer, it seems as if it were myself. Every day I take the bread out of my own mouth to feed them; and it is being too hard-hearted, Sir, to have no compassion upon one's neighbour.

HAR. It won't be very hard work to go to the fair.

JAC. No, Sir. I haven't the heart to drive them; it would go too much against my conscience to use the whip to them in the state they are in. How could you expect them to drag a carriage? They have not even strength enough to drag themselves along.

VAL. Sir, I will ask our neighbour, Picard, to drive them; particularly as we shall want his help to get the supper ready.

JAC. Be it so. I had much rather they should die under another's hand than under mine.

VAL. Master Jacques is mightily considerate.

JAC. Mr. Steward is mightily indispensable.

HAR. Peace.

JAC. Sir, I can't bear these flatteries, and I can see that, whatever this man does, his continual watching after the bread, wine, wood, salt, and candles, is done but to curry favour and to make his court to you. I am indignant to see it all; and I am sorry to hear every day what is said of you; for, after all, I have a certain tenderness for you; and, except my horses, you are the person I like most in the world.

HAR. And I would know from you, Master Jacques, what it is that is said of me.

JAC. Yes, certainly, Sir, if I were sure you would not get angry with me.

HAR. No, no; never fear.

JAC. Excuse me, but I am sure you will be angry.

HAR. No, on the contrary, you will oblige me. I should be glad to know what people say of me.

JAC. Since you wish it, Sir, I will tell you frankly that you are the laughing-stock of everybody; that they taunt us everywhere by a thousand jokes on your account, and that nothing delights people more than to make sport of you, and to tell stories without end about your stinginess. One says that you have special almanacks printed, where you double the ember days and vigils, so that you may profit by the fasts to which you bind all your house; another, that you always have a ready-made quarrel for your servants at Christmas time or when they leave you, so that you may give them nothing. One tells a story how not long since you prosecuted a neighbour's cat because it had eaten up the remainder of a leg of mutton; another says that one night you were caught stealing your horses' oats, and that your coachman,--that

is the man who was before me,--gave you, in the dark, a good sound drubbing, of which you said nothing. In short, what is the use of going on? We can go nowhere but we are sure to hear you pulled to pieces. You are the butt and jest and byword of everybody; and never does anyone mention you but under the names of miser, stingy, mean, niggardly fellow and usurer.

HAR. (beating JACQUES). You are a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel, and an impertinent wretch.

JAC. There, there! Did not I know how it would be? You would not believe me. I told you I should make you angry if I spoke the truth?

HAR. Learn how to speak.

ACT IV SCENE VII.--HARPAGON, from the garden, rushing in without his hat, and crying--

Thieves! thieves! assassins! murder! Justice, just heavens! I am undone; I am murdered; they have cut my throat; they have stolen my money! Who can it be? What has become of him? Where is he? Where is he hiding himself? What shall I do to find him? Where shall I run? Where shall I not run? Is he not here? Who is this? Stop! (To himself, taking hold of his own arm) Give me back my money, wretch.... Ah...! it is myself.... My mind is wandering, and I know not where I am, who I am, and what I am doing. Alas! my poor money! my poor money! my dearest friend, they have bereaved me of thee; and since thou art gone, I have lost my support, my consolation, and my joy. All is ended for me, and I have nothing more to do in the world! Without thee it is impossible for me to live. It is all over with me; I can bear it no longer. I am dying; I am dead; I am buried. Is there nobody who will call me from the dead, by restoring my dear money to me, or by telling me who has taken it? Ah! what is it you say? It is no one. Whoever has committed the deed must have watched carefully for his opportunity, and must have chosen the very moment when I was talking with my miscreant of a son. I must go. I will demand justice, and have the whole of my house put to the torture--my maids and my valets, my son, my daughter, and myself too. What a crowd of people are assembled here! Everyone seems to be my thief. I see no one who does not rouse suspicion in me. Ha! what are they speaking of there? Of him who stole my money? What noise is that up yonder? Is it my thief who is there? For pity's sake, if you know anything of my thief, I beseech you to tell me. Is he hiding there among you? They all look at me and laugh. We shall see that they all have a share in the robbery. Quick! magistrates, police, provosts, judges, racks, gibbets, and executioners. I will hang everybody, and if I do not find my money, I will hang myself afterwards.

ACT V. SCENE I.--HARPAGON, A POLICE OFFICER.

OFF. Leave that to me. I know my business. Thank Heaven! this is not the first time I have been employed in finding out thieves; and I wish I had as many bags of a thousand francs as I have had people hanged.

HAR. Every magistrate must take this affair in hand; and if my money is not found, I shall call justice against justice itself.

OFF. We must take all needful steps. You say there was in that casket...?

HAR. Ten thousand crowns in cash.

OFF. Ten thousand crowns!

HAR. Ten thousand crowns.

OFF. A considerable theft.

HAR. There is no punishment great enough for the enormity of the crime; and if it remain unpunished, the most sacred things are no longer secure.

OFF. In what coins was that sum?

HAR. In good louis d'or and pistoles of full weight.

OFF. Whom do you suspect of this robbery?

HAR. Everybody. I wish you to take into custody the whole town and suburbs.

OFF. You must not, if you trust me, frighten anybody, but must use gentle means to collect evidence, in order afterwards to proceed with more rigour for the recovery of the sum which has been taken from you