



The Learned Ladies

The original performative readers

The language of Moliere meets the language of Shakespeare in this translated and modernised version of *The Learned Ladies* (*Les femmes savantes*). Despite some more modern references, the text itself is just as sharp and witty as in its original version.

For anyone who hasn't read Moliere's play, or slept through French class in middle school, here's what you need to know. Henriette, the youngest daughter of Philaminte and Chrysale, wishes to marry Alexander who used to court Armande, Henriette's older sister. But the two lovers have to face many trials: Philaminte and Armande have dedicated their lives to knowledge and don't understand Henriette's wish to get married. Armande is not as completely over Alexander as she says she is and tries to sabotage them. Bélise, Henriette's aunt believes that Alexander is secretly in love with her. And finally, all three women think that the best course for Henriette is to marry Trissotin, a self-important poet whom they adore but whose motifs are not as pure as they appear...The young couple, helped by Chrysale, his brother Ariste and the outspoken maid Martine will fight tooth and nail to get the matriarch's blessing for their wedding.

The play was presented by the Red Hat Players, an amateur English language troupe at the Pixel theatre and was directed by Helen Landau. The whole cast had great chemistry, making the different interactions between actors all the more entertaining. Right off the bat, the play opened with the two sisters bickering, and both actresses slipped into this dynamic seamlessly, setting the tone for the rest of the play. Moliere's comedy was certainly done justice: thanks to the actors' great comedic timing as well as their wide range of facial expressions the jokes landed perfectly. From Bélise's diva-worthy entrance to Martine's outbursts, Philaminte's regalness, Alexander's exasperation or Trissotin's pretension, all of the actors really stuck to the choices they had made for their characters and absolutely embodied them. For their efforts they were rewarded by a very supportive audience, whose constant laughter throughout the play proved its success even more than the sold-out room.

The staging was deceptively simple yet thoughtfully designed. A large bookcase in the middle of the stage, a coffee table and some armchairs, that's all there seemed to be at first. But the devil is in the details: a hidden scroll on top of the bookcase turns into a feminist, pseudo-philosophical manifesto, Bélise the fabulously delusional aunt replaces her regular fan with a giant one mid-scene that was also hidden, and half the books were fakes, concealing flasks of alcohol or chocolates. The staging perfectly reflected the meaning of the play, reminding us that making a show out of one's knowledge does not prove we actually know anything.

With this fresh and modernised version of *The Learned Ladies*, the Red Hat Players not only entertained the audience, making the hour-and-a-half show fly by, they also stressed the importance of being educated for more reasons than to show off. This message could not come at a better time than now, when reading can so often be performative and books are becoming the latest accessories of the fashion world. Just as with the one single candle left on the bookshelf and shining in the now darkened room; true knowledge, while not glaring, will always remain bright, even in the dark.

Author Credit

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