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# The Philanthropist

A Bourgeois Comedy

Christopher Hampton

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL  
FRENCH**  
FOUNDED 1830

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## **THE PHILANTHROPIST**

First presented at the Royal Court Theatre, London,  
in association with Michael Codron, on the 3rd  
August 1970, with the following cast of characters:

<b>Philip</b>	Alec McCowen
<b>Donald</b>	Dinsdale Landen
<b>John</b>	David Ashton
<b>Celia</b>	Jane Asher
<b>Braham</b>	Charles Gray
<b>Araminta</b>	Penelope Wilton
<b>Liz</b>	Tamara Ustinov

The play directed by Robert Kidd  
Setting by John Gunter

The action of the play passes in the living quarters of  
a bachelor don in a university town

### **ACT I**

Scene 1	November—evening
Scene 2	A few days later—evening
Scene 3	After dinner—the same evening

### **ACT II**

Scene 1	The next morning
Scene 2	Later the same day
Scene 3	Evening of the same day

Time - the near future



ACT I

SCENE 1

*Philip's room. An evening in November*

*It is the room of a bachelor don, comfortable but not well-furnished, ordered but not tidy*

*When the CURTAIN rises, Philip and Donald are discovered sitting relaxed but attentive. John, a younger man, sits in a chair C, with a pile of papers on his knee. He holds a revolver*

**John** You needn't think I'm not serious. Because I am. I assure you I am. Can't you see that? I've come here this evening because I think both of you are responsible for this and I think you deserve it as much as I do. If you hate me for doing it, that's your problem. It won't concern me. I just want you to have one vivid image of me, that's all, one memory to last all your life and never vanish, to remind you that if you won, I lost, and that nobody can win without somebody losing. Good-bye. *(He puts the revolver to his head)* Bang. *(He smiles uneasily at them)* Curtain. *(Silence)* Do you like it?

**Philip** Very good. Would you like another drink?

**John** Oh, yes, thanks, er—Philip.

*Philip pours a drink*

**Philip** Ice?

**John** Please.

*Philip exits*

He doesn't like it, does he?

**Donald** Oh, I don't know.

**John** He doesn't. I can tell.

**Donald** I'm sure he does like it.

**John** Do you?

*Philip returns with the ice*

**Donald** Well. Yes and no. I mean there are some enormously promising things in the play. Obviously it's basically a conversation piece, but you do try to give the customers a bit of everything—a touch of melodrama, the odd *coup-de-théâtre*, humour, tragedy, monologues and pastoral

interludes, yes, yes, I like that, generous. But on the other hand I think there are certain—lapses, which, you know, detract from the play as a satisfying whole.

**John** You mean it's stylistically heterogeneous.

**Philip** I think Don prefers to see it as an unsatisfying whole. (*He laughs merrily and alone*) Sorry. Would you like a chocolate?

**John** No, thanks.

**Philip** Don? I think I'll have one. (*He helps himself to a chocolate, and continues to do so throughout the scene*)

**John** Tell me what you don't like about it.

**Donald** Well, one thing is that character who appears every so often with a ladder. The window-cleaner. What's his name?

**John** Man.

**Donald** Yes. Well, I take it he has some kind of allegorical significance outside the framework of the play. I mean I don't know if this is right but I rather took him to signify England.

**John** No, no, erm, in point of fact he signifies man.

**Donald** Ah.

**John** Yes.

**Donald** Hence the name.

**John** Yes.

**Donald** I see.

**John** Although now you come to mention it, I suppose he could be taken to represent England.

**Philip** Is that two n's?

**John** What?

**Philip** In Man.

**John** No, one.

**Philip** Ah, well, you see, I thought it was two n's. As in Thomas.

**John** Thomas?

**Philip** Thomas Mann.

**John** Oh.

**Philip** So I thought he was just meant to represent a window-cleaner.

**John** Well . . .

**Philip** Under the circumstances, I think you've integrated him into the plot very well.

**John** Thank you. (*He seems displeased*)

**Donald** I always think the beginning and the end are the most difficult parts of a play to handle, and I'm not sure you've been entirely successful with either.

**John** Aren't you?

**Donald** I can't really say I like that Pirandello-style beginning. It's been done so often, you know. I mean I'm not saying that your use of it isn't resourceful. It is. But the device itself is a bit rusty.

**John** Yes, perhaps you're right. I'm not really very happy about the beginning myself. (*To Philip*) What do you think?

**Philip** I liked it.

**John** Why?

**Philip** No special reason, I just liked it. You shouldn't take any notice of me, though, I'm not really qualified to comment.

**John** You do lecture in English, don't you?

**Philip** Yes, but in philology, not literature.

**John** Philology? Don't you find that incredibly tedious?

**Philip** No, it's exactly the right subject for me. I'm fascinated by words.

**John** Individual rather than consecutive.

**Philip** Yes. My only advice to writers is "make the real shapes".

**John** Pardon?

**Philip** It's an anagram of "Shakespeare" and "Hamlet".

**Donald** He's obsessed by anagrams.

**John** (*coldly*) Really. (*After a pause*) What's your objection to the end of the play?

**Donald** It just doesn't convince me. It seems artificial. Do you really think he'd commit suicide in front of them like that?

**John** Yes. Why not?

**Donald** It doesn't seem to tie in with his character as we've seen it in the rest of the play.

**Philip** I don't know. I liked it.

**John** You don't have to say that, you know. I'd much prefer to have honest criticism than your if you don't mind me saying so rather negative remarks.

**Philip** Please take no notice of what I say. I always like things. I get pleasure from the words that are used, whatever the subject is. I've enjoyed every book I've ever read for one reason or another. That's why I can't teach literature. I have no critical faculties. I think there's always something good to be found in the product of another man's mind. Even if the man is, by all objective standards, a complete fool. So you see I'd like a play however terrible it was.

**John** So you think my play is terrible.

**Philip** I didn't say that, I . . .

**John** I'm not an idiot, you know, I can take a hint.

**Philip** Please don't get angry.

**John** (*furiously*) I am not angry! I just don't think there's any point in our discussing it any more, that's all. It's different with Don, Don has some constructive criticisms to make, which will probably be very helpful.

**Philip** But I like the play more than Don does, I think it's very good.

**John** There's no need to be hypocritical.

**Philip** I . . .

**John** I have no illusions about this play, you know . . .

**Philip** I . . .

**John** But I do think it has a little more merit than you give it credit for.

**Philip** I'm sorry.

**John** Never mind.

*Silence*

**Philip** Would you like a chocolate?

**John** No.

*Silence*

**John** (*to Donald*) Now, what were you saying?

**Donald** I was just wondering whether the suicide is altogether justified.

**John** Oh, I think so. Given the kind of man he is. I think it could be quite powerful. I think perhaps he might put the revolver in his mouth. Then, if the back wall of the set was whitewashed, they could use some quaint device to cover it with great gobs of brain and bright blood at the vital moment. And just the two of them sitting there gaping. That would be wonderful.

*To illustrate, John puts the revolver into his mouth and presses the trigger. There is a loud explosion. By some quaint device, gobs of brain and bright blood appear on the whitewashed wall. Philip and Donald sit gaping. There is a long silence*

**Donald** Jesus.

*John slumps to the ground*

*Donald gropes shakily for the telephone and begins to dial. The LIGHTS fade to a Black-Out, as—*

*the CURTAIN falls*

*Music: The first movement of the Second Brandenburg Concerto*

## SCENE 2

*The same. A few days later*

*As the CURTAIN rises, Philip enters from the kitchen with a tray of cutlery for six. He lays two places. There is a knock on the door and Donald enters*

**Donald** Hello. Am I too early?

**Philip** No.

**Donald** I wondered if there was anything I could do to help.

**Philip** No, it's all under control. Help yourself to a drink.

*Donald pours himself a Scotch*

**Donald** For you?

**Philip** No, thanks. Not just yet.

*Donald sits down*

**Donald** Where's Celia?

**Philip** In the kitchen. (*He continues to set the table*)

**Donald** Are you all right?

**Philip** Yes. Why?

**Donald** I don't know, you seem a little morose.

**Philip** I am a bit.

**Donald** Why? You're not still upset about John, are you?

**Philip** Well . . .

**Donald** Well . . .

**Donald** I can't think why. You hardly knew the man.

**Philip** That doesn't make any difference.

**Donald** Well, it should do. He was my friend, not yours. And I haven't been sitting around brooding about it for days. You're too sensitive, Philip, really. I mean, the whole thing was just a grotesque accident.

**Philip** I've never seen anyone dead before. I've never seen anyone die.

**Donald** I don't know, the whole evening was a complete disaster. I mean, apart from that, I only suggested we had it here because I knew I'd hate the play, and I wanted someone around who'd say something nice to him. I don't know why he got so ratty with you.

**Philip** Well, I was very tactless.

**Donald** Nonsense, he was absurd. A sad case in many ways. There's no doubt he was very intelligent, but he had no idea how to write. That play was no good at all.

**Philip** I rather liked it.

**Donald** I know you did, but it was no good. The ideas were there, but not the technique, it was far too cerebral.

**Philip** Under the circumstances, I think that's an uniquely unfortunate adjective.

**Donald** What? Oh, oh yes. (*He laughs*) Anyway, I see you've managed to get him off the wall.

**Philip** Don.

**Donald** Sorry.

*Silence*

**Philip** Celia wasn't very sympathetic either. The first thing she said when I rang her up and told her about it was: "I'm not surprised, he's always been ludicrously absent-minded."

**Donald** Did she?

**Philip** Yes.

**Donald** Come to think of it, absent-minded's even more unfortunate than cerebral. (*He laughs, recovers, shakes his head*) No, it was a terrible thing to happen, really. (*He tries to look solemn, but is suddenly overcome by helpless laughter*) Sorry.

*Celia enters from the kitchen with six table mats, which she sets round the table*

**Celia** What's the joke?

**Donald** John.

**Celia** It's all very well for you to laugh, you didn't have to clean him up. He was all over the place.

**Philip** Please, love . . .

**Celia** (*moving to the kitchen door*) Philip had to throw away his Picasso print, didn't you?

**Philip** Can I do anything in the kitchen?

**Celia** I've yet to see any evidence of it.

*Celia exits to the kitchen*

**Donald** Who's coming this evening?

**Philip** Liz.

**Donald** Good.

**Philip** Erm—Araminta, do you know her?

**Donald** Oh, really, where did you pick her up?

**Philip** I didn't pick her up. She's one of the few people I come into contact with who has any interest in my subject at all. She seems quite intelligent, so I asked her.

**Donald** I don't think it's your subject she's interested in.

**Philip** Oh?

**Donald** Haven't you heard about her?

**Philip** No.

**Donald** The quickest drawers in the faculty. Old Noakes was telling me the other day he literally had to beg her to leave him in peace.

**Philip** Did he really?

**Donald** Yes. So I should keep your hand on your ha'penny if I were you.  
(*After a pause*) Who else?

**Philip** Braham Head.

**Donald** The novelist?

**Philip** Yes. He's up here for a couple of weeks. Celia met him at some party and wanted to ask him. Do you know him?

**Donald** Slightly.

**Philip** What's he like?

**Donald** Incredible prick. He's one of those writers who've been forced to abandon the left-wing for tax reasons.

**Philip** I quite like one or two of his books.

**Donald** They're dreadful. Dreadful. The man hasn't a glimmer of talent. And he's so rude and loud.

**Philip** Oh.

**Donald** He left his wife last year. He said to her: "Darling, I hope you're not going to be bourgeois about this, but I'm going to leave you and the children for a few months."

**Philip** What happened?

**Donald** She divorced him. Best thing she could have done. Their whole relationship was soured by her failure even to attempt suicide, which he apparently regarded as unforgivable. He likes to think of himself as a Romantic.

**Philip** Surely he's not that bad?

**Donald** Worse. Worse. (*He broods for a moment*) What about the Prime Minister, then?

**Philip** What about him?

**Donald** Haven't you heard?

**Philip** No.

**Donald** He's been killed.

**Philip** What?

**Donald** Assassinated.

**Philip** Has he?

**Donald** They've had nothing else on the radio all day.

**Philip** How terrible.

**Donald** Most of the Cabinet as well.

**Philip** Killed as well?

**Donald** Yes.

**Philip** How did it happen?

**Donald** Well, shortly after the debate began today this rather comic figure came bowling into the courtyard of the House of Commons on a bicycle: an elderly and rather corpulent woman wearing one of those enormous tweed capes, you know, ankle-length. She parked her bicycle, dropped the front wheel into one of those slots they have, and puffed up to the gallery, where she sat for a bit, beaming amiably and sucking Glacier mints. Then, all of a sudden, she leapt to her feet, produced a sub-machine-gun out of nowhere, and mowed down the front bench.

**Philip** My God.

**Donald** Yes.

**Philip** But—who was she?

**Donald** A retired lieutenant-colonel.

**Philip** Salvation Army?

**Donald** No, no, she was a man. He gave himself up afterwards. He's completely round the twist. He says he did it to save Britain from the menace of creeping socialism.

**Philip** Socialism?

**Donald** Yes.

**Philip** But it's a Tory government.

**Donald** Yes, that's the whole point. He felt, if you can believe it, that the party was slithering hopelessly to the Left. Said he was called to be his country's liberator. Apparently he's been practising in his garden in Wolverhampton for months.

**Philip** God.

**Donald** Nine of them he got, and several others wounded. He probably could have managed more, but he seemed to feel an adequate statement had been made, so he trotted down the stairs, gave himself up like an officer and a gentleman, and sauntered off to the cells whistling the "Dam Busters' March".

**Philip** But—what's going to happen?

**Donald** Oh, I don't know, coalition government, another election, something like that. It's not going to make much difference, whatever happens.

**Philip** Isn't it?

**Donald** Not to us, anyway.

**Philip** But—it's appalling.

**Donald** Yes. (*After a pause*) Worse things have happened. (*After a pause*) I must say, I think it was rather boring to him to do it on November the

fifth. I suppose in the Tory Party that's the kind of thing that passes for aesthetics.

*Celia enters*

**Celia** Did you put the lemons in the fridge? I can't see them anywhere.

**Philip** Oh, God.

**Celia** Don't say you've forgotten them. Honestly, I ask you to get one thing . . .

**Philip** I'm sorry. I'll go and get them now.

**Celia** Everything's shut. We shall just have to have it without lemon, that's all.

**Donald** I think I've got a couple of lemons.

**Celia** Have you?

**Donald** Yes, in my rooms, in the fruit bowl, I think.

**Celia** Can I nip over and get them?

**Donald** Yes, sure.

**Celia** Thanks. (*She moves to the hall door*)

**Philip** Celia.

**Celia** Yes.

**Philip** Anything I can do to help?

**Celia** No.

*Celia exits*

*Philip looks unhappy*

**Donald** When is it you're getting married?

**Philip** I, er, not sure really. Probably some time in the vacation.

**Donald** Are you looking forward to it?

**Philip** Well, yes, I think so. Why?

**Donald** Just wondered.

*Silence*

**Philip** You don't really think it's a good idea, do you?

**Donald** I don't know, Philip.

**Philip** I mean, you don't really like her, do you?

**Donald** It's not that I don't like her, that's not it at all. She's very amusing and intelligent and attractive—it's just I sometimes wonder whether she's your kind of person.

**Philip** What do you mean? You mean I'm not amusing and intelligent and attractive.

**Donald** Of course not. But you're rather—serious, aren't you?

**Philip** I suppose so.

**Donald** And Celia isn't. In fact, she's rather frivolous.

**Philip** But I like that.

**Donald** Oh, I'm sure you do. Sure you do. But it may cause you some trouble.

**Philip** She is very malicious sometimes. She does seem to hate a large

number of people I find perfectly harmless. Intensely. At first, I didn't think she really hated them, but I'm not so sure now.

**Donald** Have you ever thought about Liz?

**Philip** Liz?

**Donald** Ever thought about marrying her?

**Philip** No. Why?

**Donald** She's very fond of you, you know.

**Philip** Really?

**Donald** Yes. I was talking to her about you the other day and I could see she was very fond of you.

**Philip** Why, what did she say?

**Donald** Well, I can't remember exactly, nothing specific, it was just the way she talked about you. I'm sure she'd marry you like a shot if you asked her.

**Philip** Do you think so?

**Donald** I'm sure of it.

**Philip** She hasn't said anything to me about it.

**Donald** Well, she has her pride.

*Silence. Philip broods*

**Philip** And you think I should marry her instead of Celia?

**Donald** I didn't say that. I wouldn't dream of saying that.

**Philip** But you think it.

**Donald** I'm just saying it would be possible if you wanted to do it.

**Philip** Well, I don't.

**Donald** I know you don't. I'm sorry I mentioned it.

**Philip** That's all right.

**Donald** I have this theory which I think is rather attractive. I think we're only capable of loving people who are fundamentally incompatible with us.

**Philip** That's horrible.

**Donald** But attractive.

**Philip** It's not really a very helpful thing to say.

**Donald** Take no notice. You know very well that unless you're a scientist, it's much more important for a theory to be shapely, than for it to be true.

*Celia enters with the lemons*

**Celia** Christ, I must have a drink. *(She pours herself a sherry)*

**Donald** You've got the lemons?

**Celia** Yes. Thanks. *(She sits)*

**Donald** Isn't she marvellous?

*Philip eyes Donald uneasily*

**Philip** I think so.

**Celia** So do I. I can't bear cooking: and I cook. I can't bear working: and I work. *(She smiles)* And I can't bear Philip: and I'm marrying him.

**Philip** It's all part of one basic condition.

**Celia** What?

**Philip** You can't bear being a woman: and you are.

*Celia bristles*

**Celia** What do you mean?

**Philip** It was a joke.

**Celia** Not a very funny joke.

**Philip** It was about as funny as yours.

**Celia** Mine?

**Philip** Yes, when you said you couldn't bear me and you were marrying me.

**Celia** You think that was a joke?

**Philip** I . . .

**Celia** (*laughing*) Your trouble is you have no sense of humour.

*Philip is bested*

**Philip** Sorry.

*There is a knock at the door and Braham enters. He is a tall, good-looking man, fashionably and expensively dressed. He carries a large paper bag*

**Braham** I hope I've come to the right place. (*He sees Celia*) Ah, hello, love. (*He turns to Donald*) You must be Philip.

**Philip** No, I'm Philip.

**Donald** I'm Don.

**Braham** Oh, yes, we've met, haven't we? Well, I'm Braham. (*He shakes hands with Philip*) Very nice of you to invite me.

**Philip** It's kind of you to come.

**Braham** (*turning to Celia*) I went down to the market to buy you some flowers, my love, but they didn't seem to have any. So I got you this instead. (*With a flourish, he produces a cauliflower from the paper bag*) As a token of my esteem.

**Celia** (*dubiously*) Thanks.

**Braham** I'm sure you'll be able to find a niche for it.

*Celia takes it from him*

**Celia** I'll put it in the kitchen.

**Braham** Just the place.

*Celia exits to the kitchen with the cauliflower and the lemons*

**Philip** Can I get you a drink?

**Braham** Lovely girl.

**Philip** Sherry or Scotch?

**Braham** (*abstractedly*) Yes, please. (*He looks towards the kitchen*)

*Philip stands by the drinks table, helpless with indecision*

Lovely. She tells me you're getting married.

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