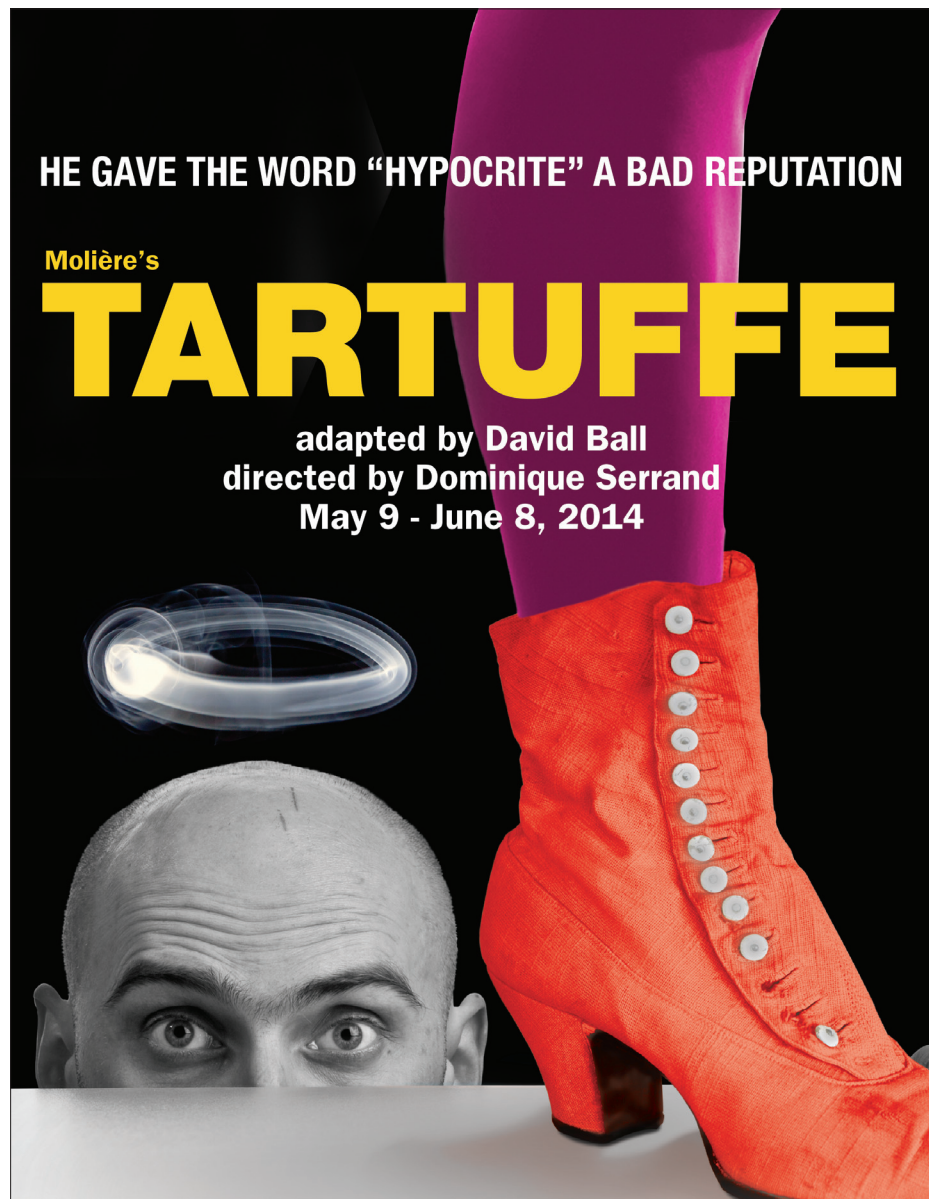


# South Coast Repertory

## PLAYGOER'S GUIDE



Prepared by Production Dramaturg Kimberly Colburn



## Molière's Life

**J**ean-Baptiste Poquelin (later known as Molière) was baptized on January 15, 1622; his parents, Jean Poquelin and Marie Cressé, were stolid French middle-class.

His father was a master tapissier, what today might be known as an interior decorator; he supplied tapestries, furnishings, and magnificent matrimonial beds to rich families. Jean-Baptiste attended the Collège de Clermont, a fashionable Jesuit school in the Latin Quarter, and he was clearly intended for a career in the family business. After studying civil law at the University of Orléans, Jean-Baptiste began a life in the theatre, much to the displeasure of his parents.

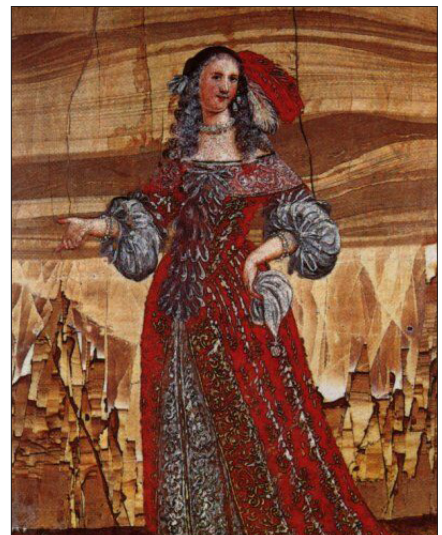
In June 1643, Jean-Baptiste formed the Illustre Théâtre with his girlfriend and actress Madeleine Béjart, an independent, redheaded woman several years older than he was. Although a young company, the Illustre Théâtre took on the Hôtel de Bourgogne and the Théâtre du

Marais, the two established professional troupes in Paris. Jean-Baptiste assumed the stage name of Molière, a common practice for French actors. The Illustre Théâtre survived for 18 months, eventually overcome by debt, rivalry and a lack of leading men. The Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, a fundamentalist religious organization, also contributed to its demise, attacking the actors and discouraging parishioners from attending performances.

In 1645, Madeleine and Molière fled debt in Paris by joining a touring troupe of actors. By 1653, the pair had assumed management of the troupe. Molière began to write and star in full-length plays inspired by commedia dell'arte scenarios, finding that his true talent lay in comedy. In 1658, Madeleine and Molière returned to Paris. She had saved funds to sublease the Théâtre du Marais and Molière had acquired a patron, the brother of King Louis XIV. On October 24, 1658, the troupe performed a tragedy by Corneille for the court, but Louis preferred the

farcical one-act that followed. Parisian audiences also preferred the troupe's comedies to tragedies.

Molière wrote his first great comedy after settling back in Paris. *Affected Young Ladies* (1659) mocks the pretensions of upper-class Parisian women. The play angered several important people, a pattern that



Madeleine Béjart

would be repeated over the next 14 years, as Molière acquired a long roster of enemies, both political and artistic. Molière wrote several plays about obsessive jealousy, including *The School for Husbands* (1661), his first huge hit. These plays, which feature older men attempting to attain young women, would prove strangely prophetic.

Around this time, Molière and Madeleine began to live apart; in 1662, he married her beautiful daughter Armande (passed off as Madeleine's "sister"). Molière's enemies whispered that Armande, some 20 years younger than the playwright, was his own daughter. If the one-act autobiographical comedy *The Versailles Impromptu* (1663) is any indication, it was not a happy marriage.

During the final decade of Molière's life, he achieved great success: he wrote entertainments for the court, and garnered patronage from the king, which further provoked his rivals. Molière's later works were ma-

ture satires tinged with sadness. *The School for Wives* (1663), *The Misanthrope* (1666), *Tartuffe* (1664), *Don Juan* (1665), *The Bourgeois Gentleman* (1670), and *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673) all explore obsessive male behavior. They also attack hypocrites in society, from the simpering courtiers flattering Louis XIV to the religious fanatics preaching salvation while lining their pockets. Outraged by the attack on religious hypocrisy in *Tartuffe*, the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement used its court connections to have the play banned. In this instance, even Molière's close relationship with the king could not save him. After countless rounds of censorship, the play was finally performed five years after it was written.

Molière's final years were filled with bad health and personal troubles. He and Armande separated several times, and only one of his children survived infancy. Theatrical myth has it that Molière died onstage during a performance of *The Imagi-*



Molière's tomb in Père-Lachaise cemetery, Paris

*nary Invalid*. Molière actually made it through the performance; afterward, he began hemorrhaging from tuberculosis contracted years earlier and died several hours later on February 17, 1673. Another myth is that Molière was denied burial in sacred ground. Armande petitioned the archbishop of Paris and the king and was granted the right to bury her husband at the parish cemetery of St-Eustache.



Louis XIV invites Molière to share his supper – an unfounded Romantic anecdote, illustrated in 1863 painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme

# Molière's Theatre

Molière's theatre celebrated the drama of artificiality. Like the literature, art and social customs of the time, the 17th-century French theatre was based on a formal set of rules and customs. While there were touring troupes who would travel through the country, often performing in makeshift spaces and on the streets, attending the theatre in Paris or at the court was a formal social event.

Performances in Paris were held either in public theatres or by special invitation only at the palace court. The theatres had a proscenium arch or a border framing the stage. Behind the arch, the scenery was composed of lavish painted sets, and the actors' costumes were ornate. The lights remained on over both the audience and the stage, allowing the members of the audience to see and be seen at the event. When performing at court, the king would sit in an enormous throne in the center of the room with the rest of the audience positioned around him.



From *Les plaisirs de l'île enchantée*, the play performed on the stage is Molière's *La Princesse d'Elide*. It was the first time it was ever performed in public.

Like any event at court, strict rules of social behavior were expected to be followed. The creation of theatre also was subject to rigorous guidelines. The Académie Française, created by Cardinal Richelieu in 1635, was a group of intellectuals charged with regulating French language and culture. Their taste in theatre was firmly Neo-classicist: "Neo" meaning new, and "classicist" referring to the classics, the great works of Greek and Roman drama. The Académie created guidelines for "good" theatre, based on the writing of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle.

Aristotle wrote that a tragedy contains three unities: time, place and action. Unity of time dictated that the action of the play take place in a single day and unity of place that the play take place at a single location. Unity of action determined that the action of the play contribute to the main story, without any distracting subplots. French tragedies were criticized by academics based on how well they adhered to these unities.



Aristotle depicted by Raphael, holding his *Ethics*: detail from the Vatican fresco *The School of Athens*, 1510 – 1511

While these rules might seem limiting, there were several playwrights, including Pierre Corneille (1606-84) the father of French tragedy, who flourished within them. In Corneille's heroic epic, *Le Cid* (1637), as well as many of his other plays, the main character makes a moral choice to do what is right, regardless of personal cost. Jean Racine (1639-99) was another highly respected writer of tragedy. His plays, including *Phèdre* (1677), are very passionate and poetic and often focus on doomed love.

The language of tragedy also was expected to conform to strict rules. French plays were written in Alexandrine couplets—a verse form that consists of two rhyming lines of 12 syllables each. Each rhyming couplet was to contain a complete thought. As the verse form developed, so did rules about when pauses could occur (between the sixth and seventh syllable of each line.)

Molière began his career in the theatre as an actor, but found French tragedy too difficult. Delivering the

Alexandrine lines was very demanding on an actor's voice. As a performer, Molière found he did not have enough breath to perform the Alexandrine verse of tragedy, but instead he excelled as both an actor and writer of comedy. An evening at the theatre often would include a comedy as a companion piece to the more serious tragedy that was considered the main event. Louis XIV and the courtiers often would prefer the lighter fare of the comedies, especially Molière's. While French tragedies were considered great literature by the academics, comedies were not taken as seriously and therefore not as subject to criticism of form and language. Molière had the freedom to write in both verse and prose, and he was considered the greatest comic writer of his time. (SCR's production uses David Ball's adaptation of *Tartuffe*, which abandons Molière's use of rhyming couplets in all but a few scenes.)

Molière's comedies were influenced heavily by Italian commedia dell'arte troupes touring Europe. Commedia dell'arte was based in improvisation and included stock characters in a variety of predetermined scenarios. The actors wore masks to define their character type and performed slapstick gags, called lazzi. Molière's early comedies were based on commedia scenarios with scripted dialogue, instead of being improvised. They included stock characters and stunts, many of which Molière performed himself. Molière wrote comedies for his company, knowing who would play each part, and generally he would play the lead role.



**"Masks of the Italian comedy," an anonymous painting of the seventeenth century.**

Molière also incorporated masks into his work, but instead of simply using them to define character types, Molière used the masks as a metaphor for the masks people wear to hide their true selves. Molière's comedies were sharp social commentaries, satirizing the behavior and hypocrisies of the nobility. Though Molière's company had the support of the court, and was frequently asked to perform there, his plays often were censored or banned because they would insult the nobility and the religious clergy.

In a society of artifice, Molière used the theatre to mock the affectations of his audience of socialites. While occasionally getting him into trouble, his satires earned him the reputation of one of the greatest comedians of all time.



**Commedia dell'arte scene in an Italian landscape, oil on canvas by Peeter van Bredael (1629-1719)**

# 17th-Century France

**T**he 17th century is perhaps one of the most important centuries in the shaping of the modern world. It was during the 17th century that major discoveries were made by Galileo and Newton, which would become the foundation for modern science; that modern philosophy and the concept of international law were introduced; and that European countries such as France, Spain, England and Portugal were competing with one another for wealth and power in the colonization of America and Asia. It also was a time when France began to rise as one of the greatest powers in Europe.

The century began under the leadership of King Louis XIII, who took the throne after his father's assassination in 1610. At age nine, Louis was too young to rule so his mother, Marie de Medici, guided by her advisor, Cardinal Richelieu, acted as regent until Louis turned 16. In 1615, Louis XIII married the Spanish Infanta, Anne of Austria. The union—an arranged marriage that had been settled by the Treaty of Fontainbleau—was an unhappy one and they spent many years apart.

Although declared of age to rule in 1614, Louis XIII was barred from affairs of the state by his mother. In 1617 he, along with one of his favorites, was accused of bringing about the assassination of his mother's minister, Concino Concini, thereby forcing Marie de Medici into exile. The king eventually reconciled with his mother and entrusted the government to Cardinal Richelieu. Marie de Medici, noting the influence that Cardinal Richelieu had over her son, urged the king to get rid of him. Instead, Louis XIII

sent his mother into exile again, from which she would not return.

Louis XIII relied heavily upon Cardinal Richelieu during his reign, and, as a result, Louis became one of the first examples of an absolute monarch. Richelieu strengthened the power of the royal authority and kept the nobility in check by limiting the power of the sovereign courts: “noble courts around the country with so many rights they were nearly independent of the crown” (Richard Cohen, *By the Sword*).

Richelieu's control extended to press and the arts. He was one of the first to use the media to further the government's agenda. *The Gazette*, a weekly periodical sponsored by the government, often contained articles written by the king and got its news stories directly from Cardinal Richelieu. In 1635, Cardinal Richelieu founded the Académie Française with the primary goal of establishing a French dictionary. The Académie Française not only created the official French language but also approved literature, art and architecture.

After 23 years of marriage, Anne of Austria gave birth to the royal couple's first child. Louis XIV, christened Louis-Dieudonné—meaning “Gift of God”—was born on September 5, 1638. Louis XIII died shortly thereafter and his child, the great Sun King, Louis XIV, assumed the throne of France in 1643 at the age of five. The longest-reigning monarch in European history, Louis XIV ruled as king of France and king of Navarre, a small country situated be-



Louis XIII, by Frans Pourbus the Younger, in 1611.



Maria de Medici, attributed to Frans Pourbus the Younger, 1605.



Cardinal de Richelieu, by Philippe de Champaigne, in 1642



Portrait of Louis XIV of France in 1701 by Hyacinthe Rigaud.

tween France and Spain, for the next 72 years. Because of Louis' young age, his mother, Anne of Austria, ruled as regent along with her advisor Cardinal Mazarin for 18 years. It was during the years of Mazarin's rule that the French civil war, known as the Fronde, began. Mazarin, continuing where Richelieu left off, attempted to increase the power of the crown at the expense of the nobility through taxation and other financial edicts. When Cardinal Mazarin arrested members of Parliament for not paying taxes in 1648, Paris broke out into rioting, and Louis XIV fled Paris along with his court. The rioting was led first by the nobility and then by commoners.

Anne's regency ended when Louis XIV turned 13, but Louis continued to allow Cardinal Mazarin to control the affairs of state until his death. When Louis finally took over full control of the throne in 1661, he chose to rule without a

chief minister—intending to rule as an absolute monarch. Louis XIV believed that his power came from God and therefore took the sun as his emblem. Many pieces of art from that time depict Louis as the Greek sun god, Apollo.

Louis XIV continued to reduce the influence of the nobility. He began by appointing only commoners to high executive offices, believing that he could more easily dismiss a commoner than a nobleman. He also moved his court outside of Paris to his new, lavish palace in Versailles, which became the official residence of the king. Louis XIV housed courtiers in the chateau and its outbuildings, thereby keeping the nobility close and unable to plot against him.

At the palace of Versailles, life centered on grandeur. Courtiers were expected to be dressed marvelously and display expensive and luxurious items. Life at Versailles was filled with balls, dinners, performances and celebrations, which kept the nobility endlessly busy.

"Having gathered a deliberately underemployed higher aristocracy under his watchful eye at Versailles, Louis XIV elaborated endless rules of behavior and extremes of formality. Every move was prescribed by a court convention, dress was determined by social standing, and l'étiquette was strictly maintained. Unlike the English aristocracy, who oversaw their lands or attended Parliament, the French nobility stewed in a pressure cooker of egos and intrigue—literally thousands of courtiers all fighting for favor" (Cohen, *By the Sword*).



Louis and his family portrayed as Roman gods in a 1670 painting by Jean Nocret.



The Palace of Versailles, circa 1668, as painted by Pierre Patel (Versailles Museum). The Grand Trianon, begun in 1670, is not depicted.

Louis loved the flattery and adulation of the court. In a letter, the Duc de Saint-Simon said of the king, “There was nothing he liked so much as flattery, or, to put it more plainly, adulation; the coarser and clumsier it was, the more he relished it. . . . His vanity, which was perpetually nourished—for even preachers used to praise him to his face from the pulpit—was the cause of the aggrandizement of his Ministers.”

Louis XIV was a great supporter of the arts and under his rule, France became the cultural center of Europe. During his reign, the five basic steps of classical ballet were established, the architecture of Versailles influenced numerous buildings, and the French Academy dictionary

was completed, ensuring that French “became the European tongue, the medium of diplomacy, the language of aristocracy, even of fine cooking” (Cohen, *By the Sword*). Theatre was an important form of entertainment and the plays of Racine and Molière were extremely popular. In fact, Molière was a favorite of the king’s and, in 1664, Louis XIV became the godfather of Molière’s son. Molière, like Shakespeare, drew much of his inspiration from the world around him, and, even though his plays were social satires mocking commoners and nobility alike, he was careful not to directly attack the king or the church.

While Louis XIV placed France at the forefront of the European powers, amassing land and wealth, toward the end of the 17th century, the nation was quickly becoming bankrupt. Louis’ constant wars, extravagant palaces and high taxes took their toll on the people of France. While the royal court lived in lavish excess, the common people experienced extreme hardships; many suffered starvation, fled France, or lived in fear of religious persecution. The peasantry also opposed the royal absolutism established by Louis, something that would greatly influence the French Revolution in 1789.



Molière Dining with Louis XIV by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres

*Molière’s Life*, *Molière’s Theatre* and *17th-Century France* were written by the Education Department of Shakespeare Theatre Company and reprinted with permission. The full text of their study guide for Molière’s *Don Juan* can be found here:

[http://www.shakespearetheatre.org/\\_pdf/first\\_folio/folio\\_donjuan\\_about.pdf](http://www.shakespearetheatre.org/_pdf/first_folio/folio_donjuan_about.pdf)

# List of Major Works by Molière

*Le Médecin volant* (1645) — *The Flying Doctor*

*La Jalousie du barbouillé* (1650)

*L'Étourdi ou Les Contretemps* (1655) — *The Blunderer*

*Le Dépit amoureux* (1656)

*Le Docteur amoureux* (1658), the first play performed by Molière's troupe for Louis XIV (now lost) — *The Doctor in Love*

*Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659) — *The Affected Young Ladies*

*Sganarelle ou Le Cocu imaginaire* (1660) — *Sganarelle, or the Imaginary Cuckold*

*Dom Garcie de Navarre ou Le Prince jaloux* (1661) — *Don Garcia of Navarre or the Jealous Prince*

*L'École des maris* (1661) — *The School for Husbands*

*Les Fâcheux* (1661) — *The Mad*

*L'École des femmes* (1662; adapted into *The Amorous Flea*, 1964) — *The School for Wives*

*La Jalousie du Gros-René* (1663)

*La Critique de l'école des femmes* (1663) — *Critique of the School for Wives*

*L'Impromptu de Versailles* (1663)

*Le Mariage forcé* (1664) — *The Forced Marriage*

*Gros-René, petit enfant* (1664; now lost)

*La Princesse d'Élide* (1664) — *The Princess of Elid*

*Tartuffe ou L'Imposteur* (1664) — *Tartuffe*

*Dom Juan ou Le Festin de pierre* (1665) — *Don Juan, or the Stone Guest*

*L'Amour médecin* (1665) — *Love Is the Doctor*

*Le Misanthrope ou L'Atrabilaire amoureux* (1666) — *The Misanthrope*

*Le Médecin malgré lui* (1666) — *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*

*Mélicerte* (1666)

*Pastorale comique* (1667)

*Le Sicilien ou L'Amour peintre* (1667) — *The Sicilian, or Love the Painter*

*Amphitryon* (1668)

*George Dandin ou Le Mari confondu* (1668) — *George Dandin, or the Abashed Husband*

*L'Avare ou L'École du mensonge* (1668) — *The Miser Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669)

*Les Amants magnifiques* (1670) — *The Magnificent Lovers*

*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670) — *The Bourgeois Gentleman*

*Psyché* (1671) — *Psyche*

*Les Fourberies de Scapin* (1671)

*La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* (1671)

*Les Femmes savantes* (1672) — *The Learned Ladies*

*Le Malade imaginaire* (1673) — *The Imaginary Invalid*



*Félix Philippoteaux inv. del.*

1866

*Frédéric Hiltmacher sculp. f.*

La Thorillière arguing with Molière; group of actresses on the right, actors on the left; a headpiece to *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, act I, scene 2, in *Le Théâtre de Jean Baptiste Poquelin de Molière* (Lyon, Scheuring, 1864-70); 1866 etching.

# Synopsis of *Tartuffe*

Madame Pernelle is visiting her son Orgon's house and uses the opportunity to criticize all the members of the household and to praise their boarder, Tartuffe, because he is a man of such holiness and zeal. The others object to Tartuffe, maintaining that he is false and hypocritical, but Madame Pernelle will not entertain such thoughts. Instead, as she leaves, she admonishes everyone to follow Tartuffe's precepts.

After Madame Pernelle leaves, Cléante, who is Orgon's brother-in-law, and Dorine, Orgon's daughter's maid, discuss the situation and their boarder and agree that Tartuffe has beguiled not only Madame Pernelle, but Orgon as well. Orgon's son, Damis, adds to the situation by wondering out loud if his father, after being influenced by Tartuffe, will still allow his daughter, Mariane, to marry her love, Valère. Damis is also concerned because he wants to marry Valère's sister; thus he asks Cléante to question Orgon about his earlier promise to allow the marriage to take place.

Orgon arrives and seems much more concerned about the welfare of Tartuffe than anything else around him, including his wife's illness. Cléante tries to discuss Tartuffe with Orgon, but fails and discovers that Orgon is only interested in singing Tartuffe's praises. When he questions Orgon about the intended wedding, he dodges the issue and refuses to give a direct answer; however, when his daughter arrives, Orgon tells her that he wants to ally Tartuffe with his house and that this can best be done by Mariane's marrying Tartuffe. Mariane is so shocked that she cannot believe her ears.

After Orgon departs, Dorine, the maid, reprimands Mariane for not having refused to marry Tartuffe. Mariane's beloved, Valère, arrives and accuses her of consenting to the marriage. Dorine listens to them argue and then, after they are reconciled, promises to help them expose Tartuffe's hypocrisy.

Damis, incensed about Tartuffe, is also determined to reveal Tartuffe's hypocrisy, and, as he hears Tartuffe's approach, he hides in the closet. Elmire, Orgon's wife, arrives, and Tartuffe, thinking they are alone, makes some professions of love to her and suggests that they become lovers. Having heard Tartuffe's plans, Damis reveals himself and threatens to expose Tartuffe. When Orgon arrives, Damis tries to inform his father about Tartuffe's proposition, but Orgon is so blind that he thinks his own son is evil in trying to defame Tartuffe's good name—and he immediately disinherits his son. As Orgon and Tartuffe leave, Orgon reveals his plans to make Tartuffe his sole heir and also his son-in-law.



Scene from Molière comedy *Tartuffe* by Jacobus Buys

Cléante later confronts Tartuffe and tries to reason with him, but Tartuffe will only respond in religious clichés and, as soon as the opportunity presents itself, he hastily excuses himself from the room. Orgon and Elmire arrive, and when she hears Orgon's plans, she extracts a promise from him to hide in some concealed place and observe Tartuffe's actions. Orgon consents and Elmire sends for Tartuffe. When he arrives, he is accosted by Elmire and soon he begins to make not only declarations of love to her but also derogatory comments about Orgon.

Finally convinced of Tartuffe's hypocrisy, Orgon emerges and orders him from the household. Tartuffe then reveals that legally he is now the owner of the house, since Orgon has signed over all his property. Alone with his wife, Orgon reveals that he is frightened because, earlier, he had entrusted some secret documents to Tartuffe's care—documents which could ruin Orgon's trusted position in the court.

When Orgon's mother arrives, he cannot convince her that Tartuffe is a hypocrite; it is only when news arrives that Tartuffe is having the entire family evicted that Madame Pernelle is convinced. Tartuffe brings with him officers of the court, but, as the family is about to be evicted, an officer reveals that the king has seen through the hypocrisy of Tartuffe and has ordered him to be imprisoned for this and for other crimes. The king has also restored to Orgon all his rightful property.

(from Utah Shakespeare Festival study guide):  
<http://www.bard.org/education/studyguides/Tartuffe/tartuffesyn.html#U0cIaFVdVA0>

# About the Creators

Director Dominique Serrand and adaptor David Ball have collaborated on multiple projects over the past 25 years. In addition to *Tartuffe*, they have worked on productions of Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid* and *The Miser*. Serrand is known for his visually captivating aesthetic that illuminates the complex themes of classics. By highlighting these complexities, he makes them relevant to today.

Ball says, "...Dominique is one of the few true geniuses directing in American theatre....Just having a script of mine done is no longer important to this old guy—been there done that a hundred times—but tempt me with Serrand...and I'm all in."

A native of Paris, Serrand is co-artistic director of The Moving Company in St. Paul, Minnesota, and he was one of the co-founders and the artistic director of Theatre de la Jeune Lune from 1978 to 2008. Serrand conceived, directed, acted and designed for most Jeune Lune productions, concentrating primarily on directing. His regional directing credits include Berkeley Repertory

Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Yale Repertory Theatre, American Repertory Theater, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Guthrie Theater and the Children's Theatre Company, among others. Mr. Serrand has been knighted by the French Government in the order of Arts and Letters.

David Ball, an award-winning playwright, director, novelist, and drama theoretician, wrote *Backwards and Forwards*, the standard script analysis textbook for the past quarter century. He was dramaturg and playwright at Minneapolis' Guthrie Theater in the 1970s; professor of acting, directing, playwriting and dramaturgy at Carnegie Mellon University in the early 1980s; artistic director of Pittsburgh's Metro Theater; and director of Duke Drama through 1991.

In addition to directing the production, Serrand designed the set, a creative role he undertook when this production of *Tartuffe* first premiered at Theatre de la Jeune Lune in 2006. His collaborator, Sonya Berlovitz, designed the costumes. The two artists have worked together on numerous productions, includ-

ing *Amerika or the Disappearance* (Theatre de la Jeune Lune), *The Miser* (Jeune Lune, American Repertory Theatre and Actors Theatre of Louisville) and David Ball's adaptation of *The Imaginary Invalid* (Play-Makers Repertory Company).



Dominique Serrand



David Ball



Theatre de la Jeune Lune's 2006 production of *Tartuffe*.

# The World of *Tartuffe*

This production of *Tartuffe* has an interesting history and presented some unique challenges. Director Dominique Serrand has mounted this adaptation twice before, in 1998 and 2006, in theatre spaces that are very different from South Coast Repertory's Segerstrom Stage. Serrand designed the sets for those productions, and for this outing he is partnering with longtime SCR set designer Tom Buderwitz to adapt the original design to SCR's stage. They have re-imagined the feeling of the original. They are going to re-imagine the feeling of the original—an almost monolithic set evoking a house of worship—with imposing walls surrounding the stage that dwarf the actors. This newly remounted production is a co-production with Berkeley Repertory Theatre and Shakespeare Theatre Company, and after its run at SCR will be travelling to those theatres, each of which has a different footprint from the Segerstrom Stage. Buderwitz and Serrand worked to create a set that is adaptable, and the walls will come apart to allow for expansion and contraction in Berkeley and Washington, D.C.

Costume designer Sonya Berlovitz worked on the previous productions of *Tartuffe* with Serrand and has returned to reinvent the elegant and occasionally anachronistic seventeenth century costumes. Her design incorporates the feeling of the period, while exaggerating the lines and excess, appropriate for a comedy that is also tragic in its content. The sound design by Corinne Carillo is based on Serrand's original sound design, with rich and complex music, often using opera to underscore and heighten the dramatic action of the play. The design team is completed by lighting designer Marcus Dilliard.



Elmire



Tartuffe



Valere



Elmire



# Discussion Questions

1. Translator David Ball used a contemporary lens when adapting *Tartuffe* and, as a result, the language is clear and approachable to the modern ear. If you were translating a play from another language, what are some of the things you would have to consider? How would *Tartuffe* in particular be challenging?

Teachers: See <http://www.nvcc.edu/home/vpoulakis/Translation/tartuffetr1.htm> for activities around translation and *Tartuffe*.

2. After its singular first performance, *Tartuffe* faced a five-year battle against censorship. Why do you think it was so incendiary? Could it still be seen as controversial today? Why or why not?
3. What makes *Tartuffe* a classic? What do you think makes a play a classic? Why do you think it continues to be performed today?
4. Molière was writing during the French Renaissance, when major discoveries were made by Galileo and Newton that would become the foundation for modern science; when modern philosophy and the concept of international law were introduced; and when European countries such as France, Spain, England and Portugal were competing with one another for wealth and power in the colonization of America and Asia. How does *Tartuffe* fit in the context of what was going on in France at that time? How is it a product of its time?
5. What does Molière say is the function of comedy in his preface to *Tartuffe*? (see <http://faculty.cua.edu/shoemaker/versailles/texts/files/moliere.html> for that text) Do you think comedy works this way? What do you think is the function of comedy? Why did some people attack Molière's play? Do you think their attacks are justified in some measure?
6. How effective is reason in stemming the passions of various characters (especially Orgon) in the play? What (if anything) really works to change people's behavior, to make them see the error, extremity, and blindness of their passions? What do you think Molière is saying about the relations between reason, passion and authority?
7. Who has power in the play and why?
8. What do you think Molière thinks of religion? Could his critics have been partially right—that his play

might in some ways lessen religious devotion? In what ways does *Tartuffe* support the notion of faith? How does *Tartuffe* distinguish faith from fanaticism?

9. Name some of the ways in which passion destroys order in the play. In what way is order restored? Does the resolution (or dénouement) of the plot in Act V seem satisfying to you? Why or why not?
10. Who has control in the play and who loses it and why? What are some extremes of loss of control depicted in the play? Relate control to the virtue of moderation, the use and abuse of power, and the legitimate and illegitimate exercise of authority (discuss specific scenes).



A scene from *Le Tartuffe*, showing Tartuffe stepping back as Elmire points at her husband, Orgon, coming out from under the table; working proof of illustration to Houssaye's *Molière, sa femme et sa fille* (Paris: Dentu, 1880). c.1880 etching.

# Other Reference Materials

## Websites

Study Guide for Richard Wilbur's translation of *Tartuffe* from A Noise Within Theatre:

[http://www.anoisewithin.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/02/Tartuffe\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.anoisewithin.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/02/Tartuffe_Guide.pdf)

Study guide for Molière's *Don Juan* from Shakespeare Theatre Company:

[http://www.shakespearetheatre.org/\\_pdf/first\\_folio/folio\\_donjuan\\_about.pdf](http://www.shakespearetheatre.org/_pdf/first_folio/folio_donjuan_about.pdf)

A short article on the history of *Tartuffe*:

<http://www.theatrehistory.com/french/tartuffe001.html>

## Books

*Banned Plays* by Dawn B. Sova, Checkmark Books, 2004

*Controversy in French Drama: Molière's Tartuffe and the Struggle for Influence* by Julia Prest, Palgrave Macmillan, Jan 2014.

*The Life of Monsieur de Molière* by Mikhail Bulgakov, translated from the Russian by Mirra Ginsburg, Funk and Wagnalls, 1970

*The Strategy of Letters* by Mette Hjort, Harvard University Press, Jan 1993

*Time and Ways of Knowing under Louis XIV* by Roland Racevskis, Bucknell University Press, 2003.



Frontispiece and titlepage of *Tartuffe* or *The Imposter* from a 1739 collected edition of his works in French and English, printed by John Watts.



19th-century costume design for *Tartuffe*.