

If one takes the trouble to examine my comedy in good faith, he will surely see that my intentions are innocent throughout.... I have used all that art and skill that I could to distinguish clearly the character of the hypocrite from that of the truly devout man. I know full well that by way of reply, [my enemies] try to insinuate that it is not the role of the theatre to speak of these matters, [but] if the function of comedy is to correct men's vices, I do not see why any should be exempt. Moliere, Prefatory letter to *Tartuffe*, 1669.

Moliere remains without rival as the French national playwright. He ranks too as one of the greatest comic dramatists of any nation. He single-handedly made comedy a respectable genre in France, for in his hands laughter and satire became the equals of the deepest tragedy. Indeed, many of his most profound comic creations have a tragic spirit buried within them, the result of the author's close observations of our human foibles and failings. Famed French actor Jean-Louis Barrault, one of this century's premiere performers of Moliere, observed that he always found in the plays 'a triple injunction of need, of desire, and of liberty. Moliere, finally, is human life itself.'

Never a stranger to adversity or controversy, Moliere earned both when he composed *Tartuffe*. For in the play's deftly rhyming couplets and intricately twisted maze of affections and allegiances, he offered a sharp lampoon of most of what society held dear--particularly its own self-righteous sense of worth. In a play the author hoped could gently correct abuses while inducing pleasant mirth, the critics of his day found a work dangerous to the very foundations of the state. Warnings about hypocrisy were taken as ungodly attacks on piety itself.

Triumphing at last over these objections, the play gained for Moliere a devoted following among the theater-going public and the nobility, as well as an equally passionate coterie of enemies among the clergy-enemies who would hound him even after his death. In recent times, the play has often been a favorite of those seeking to turn its satire upon specific subjects, recognizing in this classic text prescient parallels to contemporary psychology or modern frauds.

The manners of the 17th Century French bourgeoisie provided terrific raw material for dramatist Moliere. His plays were noted for a certain set of characteristics now known as comedy of manners. Moliere used the comedy of manners to comment on the world in which he lived, especially the social life of his time. Whereas the manners, movements, and physical attitudes of the characters in *Tartuffe* may seem far removed from our current much less structured society, the themes of this play resonate today: the difference between our real selves and the masks we hide behind, the lack of moderation and rationality that leads to downfall, the degree to which people are driven by their own whims and obsessions, and of course, the hypocrisy of some religious people.

True to his own words that "the duty of comedy is to correct men by amusing them", Moliere presents *Tartuffe* in a style that has been described as "farical, comedy of manners," and even "comic ballet." If such weighty matters as mentioned earlier must be corrected, I can think of no more delightful way than through Moliere's comedies.

Jean Galloway, Director

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Ever wonder where all of our beautiful costumes and wonderful sets come from? We build them. Yes, that's right. All of the costumes and sets you see on our stage are built right here in the department by our students. Many of the same students you see acting on stage also work in the costume or scene shop, building the costumes and sets. In fact every student that graduates from our program has spent time in the shops learning how to build costumes and scenery. The guys (and gals) learn how to sew and the gals (and guys) learn how to cut wood and hammer nails. We are very proud of the skills our students exhibit. Many go on to work in professional Costume and Scene Shops. You will find our graduates working at Actors Theatre Louisville, The Alliance Theatre, Arkansas Rep, in Las Vegas with Cirque du Soleil, and in New York City.



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