Indiana Repertory Theatre

Tartuffe By Molière

study Guide

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Molière: Playwright in the Court of Louis XIV

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin was born in Paris in 1622, the first son of a well-to-do bourgeois dealer in tapestry and upholstery. In 1631, just as Richelieu was coming to the height of his power, the senior Poquelin bought the position of *valet de chambre tapissier ordinaire de roi*, thus becoming one of eight upholsterers who resided with the King in quarterly shifts throughout the year. While little is known of young Poquelin's early life, it is known that he attended the Jesuit school, College de Clermont, where he was well educated in rhetoric and language, and numbered among his classmates some of the most famous youths of his time. He grew up in a Paris which was expanding and flourishing under the management of Richelieu, whose generous promotion of the arts must also have influenced young Poquelin's life, who is thought to have often attended the theatre, accompanied by his grandfather.

Some evidence suggests that Poquelin attended Law school in Orléans, and another story suggests that Poquelin actually took over his father's court position for a brief time in 1642 when he is thought to have gone on campaign with King Louis XIII and experienced the intrigues of court life first-hand. Suddenly, as it would appear to us, he resigned his survival rights to his father's court position, perhaps after this brief experience on campaign, and with this resignation, he forsook an entire future that his father had secured for him. With money left to him by his mother, who had died when he was twelve, Poquelin bought a partnership in a forming acting troupe, run by a family of actors named Béjart. This was in 1642, the same year that both Richelieu and King Louis XIII died and a five-year-old Louis XIV succeeded to the French throne.

This action on Poquelin's part, who, in 1644, first signs himself "Molière," was to set the course for his future, which began without distinction with performances in a converted tennis-court in Paris in a company which soon went bankrupt. Molière's decision to become an actor was extraordinary, especially given his opportunity to inherit a position of esteem in the court. Quite apart from the financial hazards, his new profession stood little above pimping or stealing in the public eye and automatically involved minor excommunication from the Church which was all-powerful in seventeenth century France. Yet obviously young Molière was in love with the theatre and as soon as his father bailed him out of debtor's prison, he signed on with a travelling troupe of actors with the Bèjarts, and left Paris for twelve years of touring in the provinces. These were to be Molière's years of apprenticeship where his company (soon, through natural talent, he became its leader) played in country fairs in summer and in nobleman's chateaus in winter in years when they were lucky enough to gain patronage. But even with a noble patron, the life was nomadic and precarious, and engagements were hard to get. No doubt Molière's troupe played the great tragedies which were the mainstay of drama of the day (Corneille's tragedies mostly), but they must surely have had to learn and play the Italian comedy style know as *commedia dell'arte*, which is largely based on slapstick involving stock comic character types. Molière's first plays, which he wrote in these early years of travel, are based on this farce style.

Finally, Molière's troupe developed sufficient name for itself that they hazarded a return to Paris, which for years had been dominated by two acting troupes who possessed a legal monopoly on all theatrical performances. On October 24, 1658, Molière's troupe appeared before the twenty-year-old Louis XIV, his brother, and the court in the guard room of the old Lourve where they performed a tragedy by Corneille (which the King disliked) and a farcical afterpiece written by Molière himself (which the King enjoyed). This occasion began Molière's steady rise to the top of his profession and gained him the King's brother's patronage – they became the Troupe de'Monsieur and were installed in the Theatre du-Petit-Bourbon, the royal theatre.

Within a year he made his mark also as a playwright with *The Ridiculous Precieuses*, which, though little more than a sketch, bore the stamp of his originality, keen observation, and rich comic inventiveness. Nearly thirty-eight, Molière was to have thirteen more years to live, and was to live them as though he knew this was all. To his responsibilities as director and actor he added a hectic but glorious career as a very productive playwright, author of 32 comedies that we know, of which a good third are among the comic masterpieces of world literature. In addition, Molière became an intimate of the King who, after Cardinal Mazarin's death (Louis' chief councillor) in 1661, established himself as an all-powerful ruler and the great lover of beauty, the Sun King. Molière's rise to prominence parellels Louis' construction of Versailles, and the increased emphasis in the court on lavish entertainment and satirical comedy of manners, which Molière invented and championed.

In 1662 Molière married Armand Béjart, who was twenty years his junior, and in this same year he wrote his first play to be performed at Versailles, *The Versailles Impromptu*. This was followed by a series of successful plays, performed in the Palais Royal, the great theatre built in Richelieu's palace, because the Petit-Bourbon theatre was torn down to make room for the new facade of the Lourve. Both *School for Husbands* and *School for Wives* poked double-edged satirical fun at social conventions of the day and raised much controversy at court. Louis granted Molière his first pension as a playwright, thus support-

ing these plays so often (and occasionally violently) attacked by the press.

In 1664 the first version of *Tartuffe* was performed as one of many entertainments included in a six-day fete called the Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle. The play was promptly banned as anti-religious and Molière began a five-year struggle to have the play produced. He defended its good intentions in the press, he petitioned the King who himself had enjoyed the play but had been forced to ban it by powerful members of the court who believed it to be offensive to all pious people. In truth, Molière had devised a play whose purpose was to expose people who employed pious behavior to masquerade very impious desire for wealth and power, but his arguments were so shrewd that guilty hypocrites tended to see themselves in the play, and to consider this depiction a condemnable offense. Finally, after five years of private readings, agitation among his noble friends and patrons, three petitions to the King, and three rewrites, the play was allowed upon the stage, and from 1667 to the present day, it has remained a favorite among audiences and critics alike. The extent to which *Tartuffe* exposed a great hypocrisy in religious behavior and beliefs remains debatable; the fact that Louis XIV fought many wars to assert his will over religious factions does not. Molière did not attack such a potentially serious topic in his comedy aimlessly, but out of a firm belief, voiced in his Preface to the published version of *Tartuffe*, that comedy can be used to point out and cure social ills of great magnitude if utilized with reason.

Molière's last seven years were dogged by pulmonary illness, separation from his wife, and the disfavor of many who felt that the topics that Molière concerned himself with in his plays were best left to the priests and philosophers. Louis himself turned away from Molière as his tastes became increasingly lavish and turned to ballet and opera. Molière died, hours after playing the main role in his *Imaginary Invalid*, on Feb. 17, 1673. Since he had not been able, while dying, to get a priest to come and receive his formal renunciation of his profession, a regular religious burial was denied at first, and later begrudgingly granted by the King for whom Molière had written so many fine plays. Some years after Molière's death, Louis XIV asked Boileau, the great linguist of the age, 'Who do you think, has been the greatest writer of my reign?' 'Molière, Sir,' answered the loyal Boileau. 'I had not thought so myself,' said the King pensively. 'But of course,' he added, 'you know more about these things than I do.'

Tartuffe: An Overview and Synopsis

Figuring prominently on the stage for *Tartuffe* is a triptych, or a three-sided compartment often used to enclose religious figures. But contained in this triptych onstage is the household of Orgon, the main character of the play, and in this central room of his bourgeois house the action of the play takes place. As the play begins we see the family – Orgon's second wife, Elmire; his children by a first marriage, Damis and Mariane; his mother Mme. Parnelle; his brother-in-law, Cléante; and two maidservants, Dorine and Flipote – collected onstage; Orgon himself is noticeably missing. The atmosphere is strained and irritable. Tempers are short, tongues are sharp. A malignant presence overhangs the scene. Although Tartuffe, the hypocritical villain clothed in the garb and manner of piety, is not to make his entry until Act III, we learn much about him from the others in the household.

Orgon, the master of the household, now away on some unidentified military mission for King Louis XIV, has invited Tartuffe into his house to serve as spiritual director to his family, whom Orgon believes has fallen away from the true meaning of religion and correct behavior in the periods of his absence. The household has decayed in values under a tyranny of women, and Orgon, intent on re-establishing himself as the true leader of the household, has taken Tartuffe into his house for the purpose of righting the situation so that he (Orgon) may assume control. What Orgon does not know is that Tartuffe, masquerading as a pious man, is truly a self-seeking opportunist, who will pervert the doctrines of religion in order to gain control over people. Tartuffe is the soul of evil incarnate. Most of the members of Orgon's family (with the vocal exception of Mme. Parnelle), have seen through Tartuffe's ruse, but all seem to consider him harmless, merely a considerable irritation.

After a stormy exit from Mme. Parnelle, who believes so thoroughly in Tartuffe that she joins her voice to his arguments by condemning the members of the household individually, Dorine, the free-tongued servant, explains the situtation in an expository speech to Cleante. In a word, she says, Tartuffe now rules the house, lecturing everyone, scolding, allowing his servant to throw away their cosmetics and hair ribbons, and all the while, Orgon stands by, approvingly. All this Orgon amply confirms on his return home – accompanied by a mysterious aide-de-camp who proceeds to hide some important papers in the house – as Orgon inquires after the state of the house in the two days that he has been gone, expressing little interest in anyone but Tartuffe, to the great vexation of both Dorine and Cleante.

In the subsequent scenes, Orgon expresses in action his stern desire to have Tartuffe recognized as a force to be listened to – he breaks off Mariane's engagement to a wealthy dandy, Valère, and forces her to consent to marry Tartuffe; and he bequeathes Damis's inheritance to Tartuffe. Elmire confuses the situation by trying blackmail to get rid of Tartuffe – she allows Tartuffe to expose his love for her and then makes a deal with him whereby she will not tell her husband of his unseemly behavior if, in exchange, Tartuffe will refuse to accept Mariane's hand and Damis's inheritance. Though well-intentioned, Elmire's plan does not work because Damis, who has overheard Elmire's scene with Tartuffe, proceeds to accuse Tartuffe to Orgon, who promptly believes Tartuffe's pious story rather than Damis's true tale of Tartuffe's chicanery. Orgon banishes and disinherits his son, seals the marriage plans between Tartuffe and his daughter, so that by the end of the third act, Tartuffe appears to reign supreme.

In Act IV, Elmire again comes up with a plan to rid the house of Tartuffe by employing covert methods. This time, she includes Orgon in the plot, so that he may see, first-hand, the hypocrisy of the man he believes to be a saint. Elmire conceals Orgon under a table and invites Tartuffe to speak with her, knowing that Tartuffe will shortly reveal his passion for her. In this scene, Tartuffe exposes the full weight of his hypocrisy by telling Elmire that she need fear no divine retribution in an adulterous liaison with him because he is a holy man and therefore exempted from God's condemnation, and failing that, a sin is not a sin unless others know of it. But it is not until Tartuffe nearly seduces Elmire on the table over his head that Orgon finally comes out of his hiding place and orders Tartuffe out of his house.

As Orgon turns into a man of clear sight and action, he also realizes that Tartuffe has several trumps up his sleeve. First, Orgon has transferred all his property to Tartuffe in a fit of anger at his misbehaving family, and second, he has entrusted the packet of secret papers to Tartuffe which implicates a friend of Orgon's in dangerous matters. Shortly after discovering that the secret packet is, in fact, no longer in the house, Orgon's worst fears are realized and a bailiff appears to evict the family from the house, making it evident that Tartuffe has gone to the authorities with his case against Orgon. Being a man of feeling, Monsieur Loyal, the bailiff, agrees to allow Orgon and his family to remain in the house one final night. Just as all seems lost, Valère, Mariane's lover, appears at the house. Having heard of Orgon's plight, Valère offers him safe passage, so that he might escape whatever fate might befall him at the hands of the authorities, but just as Orgon prepares to leave with Valère, Tartuffe appears in the doorway, declaring that he has denounced Orgon to the King. Ordering the officers that accompnay him to arrest Orgon for treason, Tartuffe miraculously finds that the officers have been dispatched not to arrest Orgon, but to arrest him: "With one keen glance, the King perceived the whole Perverseness and corruption of his soul, And thus high Heaven's justice was displayed: Betraying you, the rogue stood self-betrayed."

So all ends happily. The King pardons Orgon's involvement with the secret papers, Tartuffe is hauled off to jail, Valère wins his Mariane, and thereby, Damis wins the hand of Valère's sister, and is admitted, lovingly, into the family, and once again, Orgon stands at the head of his reunited family as the triptych closes.

Chronology: List of Significant Events During the Age of Louis XIV and Molière

Politics and Society

1562 Religious liberty to the Huguenots (French Protestants); Outbreaks of religious wars begin, which continue for 40 years.
1589 House of Bourbon begins with Henry IV (a Protestant converted to Catholicism).
1598 Henry IV proclaims Edict of Nantes, which legally protects Protestants' (Huguenots') right to religious liberty without persecution; peace is finally restored, public works are promoted to aid war recovery.
1610 Henry IV assassinated by religious fanatic; Henry's son Louis XIII succeeds to the French throne at age 9, his mother Marie de Medicis is appointed regent.
1617 Louis, at age 16, removes his mother as regent and assumes power himself.
1618 Thirty Years' War begins as civil/religious war in Bohemia, eventually involving all of Europe.
1624 Cardinal Richelieu is made chief minister to Louis XIII; during the next 20 years, he creates the French Navy, firmly establishes military repuration of France, destroys feudal rights for privare warfare between nobles, establishes nobles' subservience to monarchy, secures frontiers of France, forces Huguenots to relinquish military and civic privileges, and encourages growth of Paris outside medieval walls.
1638 Louis XIV born to Louis XIII and Anne of Austria.
1642 Richelieu dies.
1643 Louis XIII dies, leaving Louis XIV, age 5, under regency of his mother; Cardinal Mazarin succeeds Richelieu as chief minister; arts continue to thrive and Paris begins to ascend to its position as chief capital of Europe.
1648 War of the Frondes in Paris, lead by a group of noblemen, protests growing power of King and attempts to take advantage of King's minority to protest royal authority; Louis and mother leave Paris to avoid assassination attempts; eventually, factionalism destroys war effort.
1652 Louis returns triumphantly to Paris, age 14, welcomed by the populace with relief; intervention of Spain in Frondes War continues military aggression between France and Spain.
1660 Louis XIV marries Marie Thérèse of Spain.
1661 Mazarin dies and Louis XIV assumes complete control, abolishing the customary position of chief minister; Louis begins construction on Versailles; Louis' son, known as the Dauphin, is born, and the great age of the rule of the Sun King begins.
1663 Louis commissions Molière to write a play for him, which results in *The Versailles Impromptu*; Louis rewards Molière with an annuity of 1000 livres.
1664 Louis commissions a great 6-day festival performance, *The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle*, to be performed at Versailles with plays, ballets, fireworks, and water shows; Louis raises Molière's annuity to 6000 livres.
1667 Louis begins War of Resolution against the Spanish Netherlands to seize them for France; Triple Alliance (English, Spanish, Swedes) forms to stop Louis' aggression; Louis begins construction on new wing and renovation of Louvre.
1668 Colbert (financial minister) stimulates French economy by establishing factories, thus reducing imports; Gobelin Tapestry Factory creates the great Louis XIV tapestry series.
1671 Versailles becomes the seat of government, and in a 10-year process, Louis moves the court to his remodelled grand chateau.
1671 Louis XIV falls under the influence of the Marquise de Montespan, an intriguing woman suspected of dabbling in black magic, by whom Louis has five children who prove to be his favorites. Their nanny, Madame de Maintenon, a pious and rigid woman, gains inceeasing control over Louis as the children grow up, and he begins to contemplate the damage his adulterous life might cause to his everlasting soul. When the Queen dies in 1683, Louis is thought to have secrerly married Maintenon and led a considerably more sober, pious life.
1678 Louis declares peace with Holland and Spain, returning Europe to tranquility.
1680 France considered most formidable power in Europe.
1685 Louis revokes his grandfather's (Henry IV) Edict of Nantes, thus allowing full-out persecution of Protestants to recommence legally; this drives the Huguenots into exile, robs France of much of its mercantile class, and begins outbreaks of wars that last for another 100 years.

1564 Shakespeare and Galileo born.
1573 Titian at height of fame as painter
1586 Tobacco introduced into Europe.
1588 First newspaper in England.
1590 Telescope invented by Jansen.
1604 Shakespeare writes *Measure for Measure*.
1606 Rembrandt born in Leiden.
1610 Galileo publishes *The Starry Messenger*.
1616 Catholic Inquisition condemns notion of sun-centered planetary system.
1618 Harvey discovers circulation of the blood.
1622 Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, later renowned as playwright Molière, born in Paris into a middle-class family.
1631 Molière's father buys the office of Upholsterer to the King, thus obtaining an honorary title and annuity.
1632 Galileo recants to the Inquisition.
1632 Molière attends famous Jesuit school, the College of Clermont.
1635 Richelieu founds French Academy to purify French language and literature.
1636 Corneille becomes famous as playwright through controversy over *Le Cid*.
1638 Philosopher Descartes publishes *Discourse on Method*.
1641 Molière is confirmed as notary (low level law degree) and travels in entourage of Louis XIII (in father's position as Upholsterer) to Narbonne.
1643 Molière decides to go into the theatre and officially takes the name Molière, gives up the succession to his father's court appointment; he, along with nine other actors (of whom the principal actors were a family named Béjart), sign a contract forming the Illustre Théâtre.
1645 Failure of the Illustre Théâtre under management of Molière; he is imprisoned for debts and his father pays bail; Molière, Madeline and Joseph Béjart join touring theatre company; the troupe performs throughout France for 15 years, a period best known as Molière's apprenticeship to his craft.
1652 Italian composer Lully enters service of Louis XIV.
1654 Molière begins to write farces and scenarios to accompany the troupe's stock of classical tragedies.
1658 Molière's troupe returns to Paris and performs before the Royal Family at the Louvre; the King's brother, known as "Monsieur," takes over the patronage of the troupe and establishes them in the Théâtre du Petit-Bourbon (in the Louvre) where they play alternate days with the Italian Comedians; Molière continues to write comedies of manners and farces which the king enjoys.
1661 Louis XIV attends a lavish entertainment (which includes Molière's farce, *The Facheux*) at chateau of financial minister Fouquet. Considering the entertainment and chateau excessive, Louis has Fouquet imprisoned for life for embezzling government funds and takes Molière as his own court playwright.
1662 Molière (age 40) marries Armande Béjart (age 20) who was Madeline Béjart's younger sister (or perhaps daughter); Molière writes and performs *The School for Wives*, which is met with great controversy; attempts are made to have the play suppressed.
1664 Birth, baptism (with King as godfather) and death of Molière's first child, Louis; Molière contributes a three-act version of *Tartuffe* to the *Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle* – even before it is performed, an interdiction is sought by the Society of the Holy Sacrament to ban the performance; despite the King's enjoyment of the play, he is persuaded to ban it but makes Molière's troupe "The King's Troupe."
1665 Molière writes *Don Juan*; Bernini comes to Paris and carves bust of Louis XIV.
1666 Molière writes *The Misanthrope*; Colbert establishes French Academy of Science.
1667 Racine writes *Andromaque*, heralded as equal of Corneille; Molière attempts to produce *Tartuffe* and again is thwarted because the King is on a war campaign and cannot defend the play.
1667 Milton writes *Paradise Lost*.
1668 Molière writes *The Miser*; separates from his wife, falls gravely ill and cannot act for 3 months.
1670 *Tartuffe* is finally allowed to be publicly performed after 3 formal petitions to the King; Molière publishes *Tartuffe* and defends it amid great controversy; Molière writes *The Would-Be Gentleman*.
1672 Molière quarrels bitterly with court composer Lully, whose operatic ballets Louis begins to prefer over Molière's comedies of manners.
1673 Molière writes *the Imaginary Invalid* and dies following the 4th performance; perhaps because he was an actor and therefore not in the favor of the Church, perhaps because he died unconfessed, perhaps because he had recently fallen out of favor with the King, Molière was buried unofficially in unconsecrated ground at night; Lully takes over Molière's theatre in the Palais Royale and converts it to an opera house.
1674 Boileau publishes *The Art of Poetry*, codifying French literary style.
1680 Louis XIV combines the remainder of Molière's troupe with two others to establish the ancestor troupe of today's Comedie Française.

On Translation of *Tartuffe*

The French of Molière's plays has proved elusive to generations of translators. In part this is caused not by the content and sense of the words themselves, but by the form of the language: Molière wrote his plays mostly in alexandrines, or six-foot iambic lines, which rhyme in sets of two. These rhymed couplets, as they are most often called, are occasionally referred to as heroic verse when used in French, and are thought to have derived this name from the fact that it was much used in Old French romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries describing the adventures of Alexander the Great.

In English, heroic verse is rarely used; Alexander Pope mocks its ponderous effect in these lines:

A needless Alexandrine ends the song,
That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.

Iambic pentameter is the normal verse form in English rather than hexameter, and translators are immediately faced with the decision to retain something of Molière's style by converting the heroic verse into iambic pentameter rhymed couplets, or dedicate themselves entirely to content and translate Molière's lines into prose. Most eighteenth and nineteenth century translators opted for this second alternative, translating *Tartuffe* into prose that proves difficult to make work well onstage because it ignores the very musicality and sparkle of Molière's rhymed couplets which is much of the reason why the plays have remained classics in French.

Not until the twentieth century have good acting versions of Molière been translated into rhymed couplets, most notably, by Richard Wilbur (1961) and Donald Frame (1967). This is a bold decision, as rhymed dramatic verse (native to Molière) is not natural in English. In Frame's introduction to his volume of translations he defends the use of the rhymed iambic pentameter in writing: "In my opinion, rhyme affects what Molière says as well as the way he says it enough to make it worthwhile to use it in English, and the loss in precision need not be great." This loss in precision that Frame refers to is the difficulty in choosing words of specific numbers of syllables that also properly translate a given word in French. In this situation, the translator is constantly faced with the jigsaw-like problem of balancing exact meaning with arrangement of words into five stressed syllables, and approximately five unstressed syllables.

Richard Wilbur, whose translation of *Tartuffe* is being used in the IRT production, is himself a poet, and his translation of the play rings with a clarity and simplicity that accurately reflects Molière's own plain, correct, functional, conversational verse style. In his introduction he explains: " . . . rhyme and verse are required here for good reasons: to play out the long speeches with clarifying emphasis, and at an assimilable rate; to couple farcical sequences to passages of greater weight and resonance; and to give a purely formal pleasure, as when balancing verse-patterns support the "ballet" movement of the close of Act II. My convictions being what they are, I am happy to report . . . that contemporary audiences are quite willing to put up with rhymed verse on the stage."

Source Material and Study Questions

The books used in preparation of this study guide and the slide lecture which is available to accompany it, are deemed highly useful in enriching students' interest and understanding of Molière and the era in which he lived. Many of these books were chosen for their illustrations (subsequently rendered into slides) and may be useful to students interested in this period of history and art. Among the most helpful are: the Time/Life Great Ages of Man volume for this period is *Age Of Kings*, and gives an overall picture of the era throughout Europe; Margarete Baur-Heinhold's *The Baroque Theatre* (McGraw-Hill, 1967), although quite advanced, contains the best pictures, most of them etchings from the period, which illustrate a kind of theatre very different from that which students are familiar with today; Nancy Mitford's *The Sun King: Louis XIV At Versailles* (Harper and Row, 1966), is a delightful and very readable book which some high school students and certainly college students will find accessible. Several incidents involving Molière are recounted, but the book's most important aspect is its detailed description of everyday life at court. Some standard books on Molière and the plays are: James B. Matthews' *Molière, His Life And His Works* (Charles Scribner's, 1916), Sir Frank Marzails' *Molière* (George Bell, 1906), H. Walker's *Molière* (Twayne, 1971). A very good standard text on theatre which includes sections on the major world playwrights is Oscar Brockett's *The Theatre: An Introduction* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974.)

A brief discussion of the religious situation in France in Molière's time will greatly augment high school students' perceptions of *Tartuffe*. It will surely prove thought-provoking (and discussion stimulating) for them to understand some of the reasons why the play was banned from public viewing. Perhaps there are aspects of the play which they themselves can see as grounds for banning the production. As to the IRT's production itself, there is a wealth of discussion and questions in the very style of the play, its slapstick base, its rhymed couplet verse style, the kind of movement that the clothing of the period forces upon the actors, the rather stylized setting enclosed in a triptych. Other noteworthy topics for discussion are: Tartuffe's similarity to the Devil as the soul of temptation; the "deus ex machina" ending of the play in which the King's emissaries appear to save the day at the last moment (a dramatic device which overrides logical conclusion); and the social aspects of the play which have remained unchanged in their emotional difficulty from Molière's time to ours – the father forcing an unwanted marriage on the daughter, the father disowning the son, the grandmother trying to force everyone to act as she would have them, etc. In reverse, there are aspects of the play which do not carry as much meaning to us today because of rudimentary changes in social conditions: the impudence of the maid being rewarded with a slap; the bailiff's charging the father with behaving correctly as befits a man of his social station; or the hyprocisy of Tartuffe accepting an estate to which he has no claim – these aspects may constitute fine points to the students.

Telescoping the play to at once appear both unfamiliar and distant in history and familiar and contemporary, is to best serve a play of this kind, which has survived the intervening three hundred years *because* it is both vital today and an excellent example of life and the state of art in its time.