

DIRECTING MOLIÈRE: PRESENTING THE FRENCH
MASTER TO AMERICAN AUDIENCES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the presentation of the plays of Molière by American directors for American audiences. How have his works been produced and reimagined by directors from his own country? What are the qualities of successful American productions of a French masterpiece? What is the best way to present these works to American audiences? How have specific American directors put their stamp on Molière? What can Molière teach American audiences 350 years after his death?

Chapter one presents a control group in an overview of the works of Molière conceived by French directors for French audiences. Using specific productions directed by Jacques Copeau, Louis Jouvet, Robert Planchon, Antoine Vitez and Ariane Mnouchkine, the importance each director places on Molière and the necessity to bring his plays to life on stage will be traced throughout the twentieth century. Chapter two shifts the focus to three

American productions of *The Misanthrope*. Examining the 1989 production directed by Robert Falls and two 1992 productions in Baltimore and Philadelphia, the techniques of each director are explored to illustrate a path to their creations using three different translations. Chapter three discusses director Kenneth Albers and how early productions of Molière influenced his professional career, through an examination of his work directing *The Imaginary Invalid* in 1995 and *The Misanthrope* in 1996 for The Missouri Repertory Theatre in Kansas City. Chapter four presents a case study of a production of *The Learned Ladies* in 2015, directed by Theodore Swetz at the University of Missouri–Kansas City. As the author of this thesis played a role in the production, he possesses first-hand knowledge of the process. Through interviews with the director, and through the dissemination of the author’s own observations throughout the process, the methodology the director employed is discussed as he shaped the production for a twenty-first-century American audience.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “Directing Molière: Presenting the French Master to American Audiences,” presented by Collin M. Vorbeck, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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The genesis of this thesis came from the opportunity I was given to join the cast of *The Learned Ladies*. When Theodore Swetz extended that offer, I had no idea how deeply the production would impact my academic and professional life. I am indebted to Swetz and the rest of the gracious cast who all embraced me as one of their own and provided me with the experiences I was able to draw from for the final chapter of this piece.

I must also acknowledge the generosity and kindness of Kenneth Albers, the professional director and actor whose career I examine in the third chapter. My process

initially consisted of a study of the man's work through second- and third-hand sources, but Albers was quick to respond to my request for his personal thoughts on directing with more information than I ever imagined. Albers exemplifies how the theatre community is one, big support system that fosters genuine care among its members.

My professional experiences in Kansas City have also profoundly shaped my studies, and most stem from Sidonie Garrett, artistic director of the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival. My time spent in the cast of *King Lear* in the summer of 2015 afforded me the opportunity to study how a gifted director can share her vision with a company of actors and communicate that vision to thousands of patrons visiting the park each year. Performing in the festival always reinforces my passion for how necessary theatre is for our community, and that passion comes directly from Garrett.

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INTRODUCTION

It is human nature to want to excel at what we choose to do with our lives. The theatre world is no exception, and I daresay the need to be “number one” is more pressing than in most fields, as fierce competition abounds in every corner of the industry. Such was my experience as a young theatre enthusiast: like countless others, I wanted to be the best at whatever I endeavored to undertake. I dreamed of acting awards, of scenic design accolades, of high praise for my costume and lighting work, and I longed to be the director that every actor clamored to work with and every producer fought for in every theatrical season. As a junior in college, I was chosen by my peers to direct the student production the following spring. Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* was my charge, and I embraced the opportunity to prove my lauders right and my doubters wrong. The production was a monumental failure.

I have carried that experience with me in my personal and professional life for the better part of two decades. Of course our failures shape our lives by giving us lessons from which we can grow and change, but this particular moment in my life still lingers in the back of my mind, asking me how I failed so greatly at directing. Obvious reasons for the poor outcome of my production are easily assimilated and dismissed: casting best friends as leads, poorly communicating with designers, not taking the process as seriously as was necessary in the first place. Naturally those choices led to a negative result. But there had to be something more. All things being equal, would the final result have been any better had I

prepared more, communicated better and separated myself from my actors? Perhaps, but a far more interesting question emerges: What makes directing so difficult? And why is comedy, specifically, so hard to master? To find an answer to such a broad question, I have elected to use the works of Molière and their productions on both the French and the American stage to shine a light on the directing process.

Directing the plays of Molière provides an interesting challenge. The prominence of the stage director as he or she is recognized in the theatres of the today did not emerge until the late-nineteenth century. In order to analyze how best to stage his plays today, I feel it is necessary to study how the plays were viewed initially and why they were written in the first place. A knowledge of Molière as a burgeoning playwright is essential in discovering the way to properly tell his stories. And how better to understand the man than to examine the circumstances under which his plays were first created?

Many volumes have been written on Molière. I've chosen books by Virginia Scott and Robert W. Goldsby to provide certain points of context, but while each contains brilliant depth and clarity about the man and his life, that level of scope is not the intention here. This introduction will discuss specific plays in terms of their initial production, and thereby illuminate the intention of the playwright in an effort to better tell his story.

The man we know as Molière was born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin in 1622. The son of the upholsterer to the king, a young Jean-Baptiste tasted the theatre at an early age, visiting the Hôtel de Bourgogne with his grandfather to view the king's players in their staged farces. A war of sorts raged within the family's house between the father, desiring that his son take up the family business, and the grandfather, exposing his grandson to the inspiration of the theatre. Grandfather won the battle, and in 1643, records indicate Jean-Baptiste signed a

contract to form the Illustre Theatre.¹ He chose a life in the theatre, and to leave behind his father's work with the king (though he would soon serve the king not two decades later in a much different capacity). Scholars note that the influences of his early introduction to the *farceurs* of the French stage can be seen in every one of his comedies, and therefore the importance of this early immersion benefited not only young Jean-Baptiste by whetting his passions for the stage, but also the theatre of the future that would embrace his yet-to-be-written masterpieces.

The beginning of their company was also when the name "Molière" surfaced in official records and "Jean Baptiste" began to fade away. Many historians and biographers believe that the name change was to save his father from the embarrassment of having an actor for a son, but Scott notes that most actors of 17th-century France took stage names, and his new name was more appealing than the family name.²

Arguably the most important member of the new company in the eyes of Molière was Madeleine Béjart. The relationship the two would share began as a romance but evolved into something harder to define. She would become his dearest friend and lover, and either his mother- or sister-in-law, depending on the documentation one chooses to believe. Around the time of the troupe's formation, Madeleine bore an illegitimate daughter, Armande. Molière helped to raise her and he eventually fell hopelessly in love with her, a love that may have been the spark that ignited some of the best writing the theatre has ever seen.

¹ Virginia Scott, *Molière: A Theatrical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31.

² Scott 59.

After fifteen years of touring the French provinces, the troupe returned to Paris to perform for Louis XIV at the behest of one of their biggest fans, the king's brother Philippe. The well-known story of their performance tells how the actors' performance of tragedy was less than successful, and in an effort to minimize the offense to the king, Molière begged the court for the opportunity to perform a comic afterpiece, which delighted the king so much that the company was granted future performances in Paris.³

The praise of Louis XIV allowed the company to exhale a bit, and allowed Molière the time to write the plays that would make him a legend, starting with *Les Précieuses ridicules* (*The Pretentious Young Ladies*) in 1659. Still widely performed today, the play explores the foolishness of two young ladies as they attempt to find learning and love. The subject matter of the play mocks those who place so high a value on affectation, so much so that the heroines are easily duped by the clever servants of the very men the ladies were trying to seduce. Molière played one of the two conniving imposters, while Madeleine played one of the naïve ladies. Goldsby discusses the importance of the relationship between Molière and Madeleine, noting the play “depicts a love where the two participants are equals.”⁴ In a play dealing with such a light subject, it's impressive to find the amount of depth Molière gave to his characters in their interactions, and helps to enlighten just how deeply he felt for his partner, on and off the stage.

³ Scott 92.

⁴ Robert W. Goldsby, *Molière on Stage: What's So Funny?* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), 18.

Molière's next play, and first full-length hit, was *L'École des maris* (*The School for Husbands*) (1661). Using a formula he would repeat with great success,⁵ Molière began the play with a discourse between two of its main characters, this time on the subject of how husbands and wives should behave. *The School for Husbands* follows Sganarelle (played by Molière) as he attempts to keep his young ward and intended wife locked away from the outside world, while his older brother Ariste espouses the view that freedom is necessary for young ladies. There are two interesting points in this play, in regards to its inception. The first is that Madeleine did not play the role of the young lover, she played a companion-less, older woman. Had Molière stopped seeing Madeleine through the eyes of a lover? The second is that Sganarelle's young ward in the piece, Isabelle, schemes to cuckold her master to get the man that she really wants. This second point is intriguing when you consider that not a year later, Molière married a woman who was raised in a similar situation: his lover's daughter, Armande. In his next play, a very different picture of marriage would be painted.

On the heels of Molière's marriage to Armande, the troupe premiered *L'École des femmes* (*The School for Wives*) (1662), and Molière had his "first enormous hit."⁶ Molière again played the leading role, Arnolphe, another older man trying to hide his intended wife, Agnès, away from anyone or anything that will distract her from loving him. Once more, the play's protagonist is less than successful, but in this play Agnès does not attempt to scheme or trick the old man in order to marry her true love, Horace; she is simply honest to Arnolphe, saying she never will truly love him.

⁵ Scott 120.

⁶ Ibid 122.

The first production of *The School for Wives* is remembered not only for its success on stage, but also for the scandal that surrounded it. In the play, Agnès is said to have been raised by Arnolphe since she was a young child, much as Armande was raised by Molière. But the question of true parentage of Armande was what drove the critics to scold Molière: while it was widely presumed that Madeleine was her mother, no one ever claimed to be her father. Had Molière married his daughter? The play also uses lurid language, including one famous scene in which young Agnès seems to hint that she and Horace had been together intimately, though in the end she claims that he had “taken her ribbon.”⁷ These instances made Molière’s critics beg Louis XIV to put an end to the play, though the king would not comply. The critics did, however, succeed in one thing: giving the world a new and unexpected piece by Molière called *The Critique of the School for Wives*, which the troupe would debut a year later as a short afterpiece to the original with great success.

In the chronology of Molière’s work, *Tartuffe* is listed next, though the version we experience today on stage is far different from the three-act version that passed before the eyes and ears of Louis XIV in 1664. As scandals go, *Tartuffe* surpassed even the gossip that surrounded *The School for Wives*, and for a very different reason: religious mockery was not tolerated by the church, especially not in the theatre, and *Tartuffe* presents a very pointed view of religious hypocrisy of which the church did not approve.

Molière did not write the titular character for himself this time. Instead, he played the master of the house, Orgon, duped into believing his houseguest Tartuffe is a devoutly religious man with pure intentions. Tartuffe, meanwhile, spends the majority of the play attempting not only to secure the hand of Orgon’s daughter in marriage, but also to seduce

⁷ Goldsby 41-42.

Elmire, Orgon's wife. Armande played his wife on stage, and had been his wife for only a couple of years off stage when the play first premiered. How interesting that Molière would present a family portrait to his audience that showed a husband more interested in pleasing Tartuffe than his wife. This would be interpreted in a variety of ways in the centuries to come.

As to the scandal of the play, Scott believes the play must have been viewed harshly by members of the church, prompting an equally harsh response from the king.⁸ A play with a central character who claims to be deeply religious only as a tactic to fulfill his sexual and fiscal desires must have been frowned on by many in the audience, the clergy notwithstanding. As a result, when the play returned to the stage in 1669, Molière turned it into a five-act piece that included a classical *deus ex machina* ending involving an emissary from the king who saves the family and takes Tartuffe away.

In between the two versions of *Tartuffe*, Molière's two best plays echoed his own personal life in a manner that moved away from the broad comedy to which his audiences had grown accustomed. *Le Misanthrope* (1666) was not a popular play when first performed, perhaps because of such a departure. However, it remains one of his most-produced plays today, undoubtedly due to the maturity of the writing and the brilliance of its leading man, Alceste. Writing the role for himself, Molière created in Alceste a man who is tired of the false flattery of the world that surrounds him. He would flee from that world were it not for the deep love he feels for Célimène, a young widow who welcomes the praise and flattery from all she entertains. Célimène personifies all he hates, yet he loves her still and is tormented by this duality. He begs her to run away with him and when she says she could

⁸ Scott 162-163.

never be happy if it were just the two of them, he vows to go off to live his ideal life, alone. Armande played the original Célimène, and for Molière to have played opposite such a character, desperate for some reciprocation of love where none was forthcoming, must have been painful for the lonely husband. As Armande did not return the affections Molière lavished on her, every performance was a personal reminder of the emptiness of his marriage. Audiences may not have fully grasped how painful this must have been at the time, but today we appreciate the agony Molière must have felt.

If *The Misanthrope* possesses the deepest emotional character Molière would play, then surely *L'Avare (The Miser)* (1668) possesses its antithesis in its leading man, Harpagon.⁹ Alceste speaks of “vice,” and what better example is there than the avarice of Harpagon? Where Alceste feels the need to fight for the love of Célimène, Harpagon has eyes for his money alone. Like *The Misanthrope*, this play was not well received by the public, possibly owing to its slightly serious nature and a protagonist devoid of the pangs of love. But with Harpagon, Molière was able to again perform a role where he could “work an audience,”¹⁰ something that surely resonates with audiences of today. Since Harpagon lusts for riches, not companionship, *The Miser* aided Molière’s catharsis at being so emotionally drained by his relationship with Armande. Both *The Miser* and *The Misanthrope* seem to purge Molière of some of the pain he was experiencing in his marriage, and he was finally able return to the writing that made him so popular less than a decade earlier.

⁹ Goldsby believes Harpagon is the next logical step for Molière, following the final speech of Alceste in *The Misanthrope*: “Meanwhile, betrayed and wronged in everything, I’ll flee this bitter world where vice is king...” (122).

¹⁰ Ibid 124.

I'll conclude with *Les Femmes savantes (The Learned Ladies)* (1672), which presents a return to the themes Molière touched upon in *The Pretentious Young Ladies*, though like Molière himself, now his “young” ladies are all grown up. Goldsby believes Molière must have been working on the piece for some time, as it is written in verse and possesses some of the same qualities of his other successes.¹¹ The interesting point of this play is the initial casting choices. Molière played the father Chrysale, hardly a leading role nor the most entertaining, the role of the wife Philamente was filled by a man.¹² Armande played the role of the young Henriette, who is the daughter, not the lover, of Chrysale. More than anything, the play is a family comedy, allowing for all the characters to share a bit of the limelight, another hint that the writing of Molière may have evolved. With *The Learned Ladies*, Molière chose not to inflate his own ego but instead to allow the complete story to convey his opinion on French life and pedantry.

Even before the director existed, plays demanded to be told the proper way. The essence of directing must lie in the ability to accurately and honestly present the story the playwright has created to a willing audience. By studying both the initial productions and various twentieth-century productions of Molière’s comedies, I believe I will uncover the best ways to present these stories to American audiences of today. By unlocking his secrets of the past, I am confident his voice can not only speak to us in the present, but also reverberate into the future.

¹¹ Like *The School for Wives*, *The Misanthrope* and *Tartuffe*, which all focus on Molière’s disdain for hypocrisy, though in this play the tone is softened a bit (159).

¹² Goldsby 158.

CHAPTER 1

A FRENCH FOUNDATION

As I endeavor to glean the best ways to direct Molière for an American audience, a foundational understanding of the origin of his plays will not be sufficient. Necessary, too, is a study of how successful directors and their companies have brought these plays to life within the last century. Staging classical Shakespeare would be difficult without some knowledge of how the British theatre has chosen to present his plays, and no production of the work of Chekhov would be undertaken without first considering how the Moscow Art Theatre has previously envisioned it. Similarly, preparing to direct the plays of Molière must begin with a focus on how his masterpieces have taken shape on the French stage.

The importance of the plays of Molière to the theatres of France cannot be questioned. The Comédie Française, the subsidized French national theatre, produces at least one of his works in every season dating back to its inception, and the awards celebrating the very best of French theatre are called *Les Molières*. Certainly productions of his plays over the three and a half centuries had many different interpretations that both helped and hurt the playwright's prominence in the eyes of the theatre world. Critical to discovering the essence of Molière is to study a few of these interpretations and see if any universal truths about directing his works are revealed in the process.

Twentieth-century directors were (and continue to be) instrumental in maintaining the relevance of the French master through their use of innovative staging and interpretation of the text, who not only produce for their home country but also for a foreign audience that may have never seen a French production before. Jacques Copeau, Louis Jouvet, Robert

Planchon, Antoine Vitez and Ariane Mnouchkine are five such directors I've chosen, who, when faced with the task of presenting the works of Molière to their audiences, fought the urge to be complacent and traditional and instead shined a brave new light on the classical texts. Their revolutionary stage direction provided stark contrasts to the way the works had previously been anticipated, and illustrated just how necessary it was to challenge the audience by using text from yesterday to inform upon today. This chapter will discuss how those five directors staged their versions of Molière's classics, what each director valued most about the playwright's work, and how audiences responded to seeing interesting twists on such familiar stories.

Jacques Copeau

Born in 1879 to a middle-class family, Jacques Copeau was fortunate to have experienced the duality of the French theatre throughout his early years. His parents took him to the Boulevard for escapist entertainment, while his grandfather exposed him to the "museum" theatricals of the Comédie-Française. During his school years, Copeau also visited the theatres of André Antoine and Lugné-Poë, which further inflamed the need to create more serious work. This similarity to the upbringing of Molière seems serendipitous, as the grandfatherly-influence again won out and inspired Copeau to leave behind a crumbling family business and endeavor to create the theatre he felt the world deeply needed.¹

Copeau worked as a writer for magazines, where he criticized the theatre that was currently being produced and championed a theatre he soon would establish. In 1913, after

¹ Bettina L. Knapp, *The Reign of the Theatrical Director* (Troy: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1988), 171-172.

years of work with Jacques Rouché at his Théâtre des Arts, Copeau was ready to give France his theatrical vision in the form of the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier. Copeau's intention with his new creation was to return the focus of the theatrical event to the text. He wanted to do away with the excessive spectacle and realistic settings and to simply allow the actors to use the words of the playwright to tell the story.² With such a bold initiative, he knew his theatre's opening performance had to include something special, so he chose a short play by Molière called *L'Amour médecin* (*The Love Doctor*).

Copeau believed Molière was a necessary component of the theatre. According to John Rudlin's translation, Copeau wrote that Molière was "a perfect model because he is essentially an infallible *metteur en scène* [director], that is, a man whose imagination takes fire..."³ For the theatre he was creating, it was crucial that his actors base their performances in the truth of the character before speaking even one word of the text. He preferred the farces of Molière because these plays initially grew from general ideas and scenarios. His actors developed their skills and their plays in the same way the actors of Molière's troupe had, almost three centuries earlier. This foundation was necessary not only to successfully producing Molière, but also to producing the rest of the company's repertoire as well.⁴

How important was the selection of a play by Molière for the opening of the company? Maurice Kurtz says it may have been imperative to the theatre's future viability. *The Love Doctor*, which is not full-length piece and is usually considered more of an

² John Rudlin and Norman H. Paul, eds., *Copeau: Texts on Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1990), 23-24.

³ Ibid 143.

⁴ Ibid 145.

afterpiece, was performed in conjunction with *A Woman Killed with Kindness* by Thomas Heywood. André Suarès, a critic who viewed the opening night performance, wrote he had “never seen Molière better done...” while a fellow critic scoffed at a French theatre choosing to open with an English play (“and not even Shakespeare”).⁵

Photos from that 1913 production illustrate the colorfully-dressed actors on a bare stage, just as Copeau had hoped to create. There is no stage spectacle to take away from the work the actors were creating, as Copeau was not interested in using ornate scenery to distract from the actors. Costume renderings suggest a link to Commedia Dell’Arte, which had influenced Copeau’s imagination of *The Love Doctor* just as it had inspired Molière’s initial creation of the play. But the sparseness of the production is what I find most captivating. That theatre could be so widely praised and wildly heralded by critics and public alike when produced on such a small scale speaks to the talents of Copeau and his company.

Indeed, selecting Molière for the company’s premiere may have saved Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier from shutting down after only a handful of performances. But the first World War summoned all able-bodied Frenchmen into service, and the theatre was forced to close its doors after just one season. Copeau was not deemed physically fit for duty, so he decided to continue on his theatre’s mission alone, for a time. In 1917, after a few of his actors were discharged from service, the company travelled to New York and again chose a piece by Molière to serve as emissary, *Les Fourberies de Scapin (The Rogueries of Scapin)*.

Kurtz notes how the American audiences raved at the production of *The Rogueries of Scapin* and the newly-created *Impromptu of Vieux-Colombier*, a piece that saw a depiction of

⁵ Maurice Kurtz, *Jacques Copeau: Biography of a Theatre* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 3.

Molière crowned by the son of Copeau.⁶ Kurtz also relayed the comments of New York Times critic John Corbin, who called it “Molière reborn!”⁷ The experience allowed Copeau and his company the opportunity to present their new style of performance, one that placed the focus back on the actors and the text.

Douglas Crowder wrote about the company’s time in New York, recounting the impressions Copeau and his company made on the American audiences. He echoed the comments of Corbin above, but what’s most interesting is his discussion of the successes and failures of the transplanted Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, and how their successes seemed to revolve around the production of the works of Molière. *The Rogueries of Scapin* was praised as “revolutionary”⁸ and the acting had the intended effect. Other performances were not as successful and there were times, Crowder postulated, when Copeau “gave in” to the desires of his local audiences and performed plays that were in no ways considered classical or masterpieces.⁹

But Molière could always stir up a crowd, and with the return of one of Copeau’s best actors, Charles Dullin, the New York audiences were at last presented one of Molière’s masterpieces, *The Miser*. Dullin had been released from the army after being wounded¹⁰ and in 1918, appeared as Harpagon to much fanfare. This production was hailed as one of the

⁶ Ibid 53.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Douglas Crowder, “Jacques Copeau in New York,” *The South Central Bulletin*, Vol. 29, No. 4, Studies by Members of SCMLA (Winter, 1969), 125, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3187332> (accessed 15 November 2015).

⁹ Ibid 126.

¹⁰ Kurtz 57.

company's best of the season, a season that included twenty different productions. Kurtz notes that even a critic who did not care for Copeau's revolutionary staging techniques said the company "touched the highest point of artistic excellence of its entire first season."¹¹

Before the company's return to France, Copeau would give America one more masterpiece of Molière, *The Misanthrope*. Knapp points out that it had been a 19th-century custom to present this play as serious piece, if not altogether tragic.¹² Owing to Copeau's love for Molière's intent of its initial creation, the production was treated as a comedy and was well-received by the New York audiences. Copeau himself played Alceste, and his performance "fascinated" the audiences, his subtle gestures and glances set against the recklessness and outrageousness of the character's intention.¹³ Of all productions in their final season, *The Misanthrope* was praised as the company's best. The Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, throughout their two years in America, had given ample proof as to the genius of Copeau when handling the plays of Molière.¹⁴

Copeau's contribution to the revitalization of French classical theatre, and specifically to the production of the works of Molière, is unquestionable. Robert W. Goldsby calls him "the most influential French director in the twentieth century," praising him for "putting the focus back on the text."¹⁵ Knapp notes that Copeau doesn't "treat Molière as some relic from

¹¹ Ibid 58.

¹² Knapp, *The Reign of the Theatrical Director*, 214.

¹³ Ibid 215.

¹⁴ Crowder 128.

¹⁵ Goldsby 138.

the past, but rather as a contemporary.”¹⁶ Copeau returned to Paris with his head held high, as the successes of his Molière productions for a foreign audience reinvigorated his future presentations for his native land. Copeau’s ability to communicate the essence of the classical texts of Molière through action, without the use of scenic tricks or spectacle, provided a sturdy foundation for his company, and ultimately led to the emergence of another revolutionary French director of the seventeenth-century master.

Louis Juvet

Any discussion of Louis Juvet (1887-1951) as a director begins with his work as an actor with the Théâtre du Vieux-Columbier, where Copeau’s influence shaped the style Juvet would ultimately make his own. In the company’s first season, Juvet was hired not only to work as an actor, but also to assist in scenic and lighting design and work as mechanic and stage manager. It was in all of these very different capacities that Juvet was able to earn recognition as vital to the theatre’s operation. In fact, as Knapp notes, Juvet first distinguished himself as an effective manipulator of stage lighting before being recognized for his acting or directing talents.¹⁷ The theatre’s use of minimal scenery allowed his lighting to be quite evocative, as did its removal of the footlights.¹⁸

The same opening production of Molière’s *The Love Doctor* that so delighted the French audience also proved to be Juvet’s first of many standout performances with the Vieux-Colombier. Of the gangly actor, the critic Suarès wrote: “I am crazy about your two

¹⁶ Knapp, *The Reign of the Theatrical Director*, 216.

¹⁷ Bettina L. Knapp, *Louis Juvet: Man of the Theatre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 27.

¹⁸ *Ibid* 32.

doctors, the fat one... and the other one, that tall stammering skeleton. I almost died laughing.”¹⁹ These accolades for supporting roles afforded Jovet larger roles later in the season, and following the hiatus caused by the war, his presence in New York was duly lauded by American critics as well. The same articles praising Copeau’s staging of Molière also mention the work of Jovet in their excellence.

Whitton says that of all the actors to come out of Copeau’s company, “Jovet must be considered the most classical.”²⁰ What’s interesting about this statement is that pages and pages of Jovet biographies are dedicated to his direction of the plays of twentieth-century playwright Jean Giraudoux. How was he coined as such a classicist? It has everything to do with his production of *L’École des femmes* (*The School for Wives*) in 1936. This was his first attempt at staging Molière since his departure from Copeau’s company and the beginning of his own journey to create his own technique.

Jovet had appeared in a production of *The School for Wives* as a much younger actor, playing Arnolphe in a university production in 1909. But that was long before he had the opportunity to grow his talents with Copeau and Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier. Comparatively, Whitton says that “Jovet did to Molière’s high comedies what Copeau had attempted with his farces, he freed them from the accretions of fossilized tradition and academic commentary that they had accumulated over the centuries.”²¹ Likewise, Knapp says of his preparatory process that unlike his predecessors, he intended to “evoke the play

¹⁹ Ibid 28.

²⁰ David Whitton, *Stage directors in modern France* (Oxford Road: Manchester University Press, 1987), 79.

²¹ Ibid 88.

from the text” using “skill and broad humanity.”²² This combination of primacy of text and actor is undoubtedly drawn from his experiences with Copeau.

The School for Wives was an important production for many reasons. First, the play was at last viewed as a light comedy by its audiences, spearheaded by Jouvét’s enthusiastic and energetic performance as Arnolphe. Knapp notes that even the famous French actor “Lucien Guitry made him sober and severe (and by doing so, he had turned a comedy into a tragedy...)”²³ Jouvét’s interpretation made his Arnolphe relish the tricks he was playing on the young lover Horace, and his stage presence was light and quick, ever-changing to each tactic he’d undertake. Knapp praises this ability in Jouvét specifically, citing his shift from the proud, would-be husband expounding his great qualities to Agnès in act three to the impotent, if only for a second, rebuffed old man in act four.²⁴ Jouvét’s acting was the highlight of the production, a clarity of performance that drove the action of the entire play.

Another reason for the prominence of Jouvét’s production of *The School for Wives* was its departure from the mountains of theory that surrounded the play. Previous productions had ultimately failed to engender comparable results to Jouvét’s work because they were bogged down by thoughts of how to recreate the play the way Molière had intended it to be staged. According to Whitton, the work Jouvét created took into consideration some of the previously-accepted staging techniques and assumed “right ways” of doing the play but tossed most of them out the window. Instead, Jouvét believed that a better way to create the world of the play would be to use the text as the foundation for

²² Knapp, *Louis Jouvét: Man of the Theatre*, 171.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid* 172-173.

“expressing the play’s essential situations in ways appropriate to modern audiences.” In Jouvot, Whitton saw a director who truly understood Molière as a man who was not a “moralizer” but as a theatrical professional who knew how to present a subject to his audiences and let them make their own opinions.²⁵

A final perspective on the greatness of Jouvot’s creation ascribes the success of the 1936 staging of *The School for Wives* to “Molière’s timeless dramaturgy.”²⁶ What does this mean and how can it be applied to Jouvot? Remember that Jouvot was accustomed to working with the newest works by his favorite contemporary playwright Giraudoux. Considering the countless hours Jouvot undoubtedly worked on the text with his contemporary, it is easy to see how his approach to the work of Molière was impacted by this relationship. Jouvot’s collaboration with Giraudoux established an appreciation for everything that surrounded the play’s genesis, both in works of the past and the present. If Jouvot was to employ a dramaturgical process for his production, he was certainly aware of how necessary it would be to process all of the elements of the play, including everything that was known about Molière, before considering his preparations completed.

For starters, he dismissed what previous directors called the “flaws” of the script and decided to shape his directorial process, or *mise en scène*, around these vagaries.²⁷ Shaping a director’s vision to hide the shortcomings of a script is one thing, but with *The School for*

²⁵ Whitton 88-89.

²⁶ Jim Carmody, *Rereading Molière* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 119.

²⁷ Ibid 116

Wives, Jouvét chose to embrace anything deemed as difficult and to stage the supposed weakness as an intentional choice.

Carmody points specifically to the scenic elements of the play for one example of this work. As Jouvét's scenographer for *The School for Wives*, Christian Bérard designed the solitary dwelling of Agnès to be directly in the center of the stage. This staging is contrary to any naturalistic portrayal of the play, certainly flying in the face of previous productions. Molière's text claims the house is in the center of the square, and the free-standing unit, enclosed by three walls lined with bushes and trees, treats this quite literally. Two of these large walls would open at the front to reveal the hidden house and close for scenes on the street. The added bonus is that the text of the play is equally observed by allowing Horace to first see Agnès while wandering through the town square.²⁸ Carmody's impression of the scenic elements suggest a "selective realism" in the design process, one that is neither entirely Copeau's influence nor is it the influence of the realistic stage design that clamors for naturalism. Huge, swinging walls certainly would not allow an audience to forget or overlook the theatricality of the scenic design. Arnolphe's house is clearly in the middle of the stage, which is really the middle of the town square: does this mean others could or should be nearby as well? It's up to the audience to decide, but at least the world of the play was created as Molière intended.

Another important example of the dramaturgical influence on Jouvét's process is the way it emphasized the structural challenges of the play. Carmody praises Jouvét's ability to keep the focus on the text by embracing what some had called an abundance of asides and soliloquies. Jouvét insisted that Molière was not interested in presenting one objective reality

²⁸ Ibid 121.

of the culture of France to his audiences. Conversely, it was Jouvét's belief that the frequent asides, which unapologetically put the focus on Arnolphe throughout the play, only emphasize the fact that Molière's intent was to present a *subjective* reality, his own.²⁹ In a play in which nearly ten percent of the protagonist's dialogue is spoken directly to the audience, Carmody argues that the brilliance of Jouvét is the way he used those moments to focus on that subjectivity.³⁰ *The School for Wives* was revolutionary in its balance of farce, comedy and realism, and production surely laid the foundation for one of Jouvét's most personal performances that was only a decade away, *Tartuffe*.

Jouvét had been preparing for *Tartuffe* for many years before he finally stepped into the role. He opened his play following modest success in his production of Molière's *Dom Juan* in 1947, and following the death of his treasured scenic partner Christian Bérard in 1949. Knapp believes that Jouvét's stoic production of *Dom Juan* followed by the sudden death of a close friend gave him the impetus needed to finally embark on his journey with this piece.³¹

There were two major differences in Jouvét's 1950 production of *Tartuffe* from previous interpretations, and they weren't all appreciated by the critics. Jouvét believed that the text had to be the foremost resource tapped when conceiving a production, and his reading of the text gave him vastly different interpretations of two characters previously seen as French staples: the title character, Tartuffe, and the maid, Dorine. He began to craft his vision of Tartuffe not as a round, lascivious or dirty man, but as a charming and attractive

²⁹ Ibid 118.

³⁰ Ibid 128.

³¹ Knapp, *Louis Jouvét: Man of the Theatre*, 246.

man. After all, Jouvét argued, would Orgon give a slovenly-dressed and poorly-behaved man so much latitude in his house? No, he believed, so Jouvét's Tartuffe would be well-mannered and level-headed, a man who inspires the trust Orgon mistakenly places in him.³²

Jouvét's innovative portrayal of Tartuffe was not well-received by all who witnessed his production, and these detractors were particularly upset by two important scenes that seemed to do disservice to history of the play. Tartuffe, lecherous scoundrel as he had been conceived in countless performances before, reportedly did not even touch Elmire in his attempts to seduce her. The two elaborate scenes that involved Damis and Orgon in hiding were traditionally opportunities for Tartuffe to accost Elmire, but Jouvét carried his Tartuffe with a dignified manner, one that appeared to actually respect Orgon's wife. These departures from the Molière canon were not appreciated by those who viewed the newly-tame imposter, according to Knapp.³³

The other character to change in outward appearance was done so, again, through a thorough examination of the text. Jouvét believed that Dorine had to be a mature woman of the house, not the charming yet insolent maid. He felt these two characters were necessary to balance out the performances, to "perfectly integrate" the production.³⁴

The second of two key differences that the critics deemed outrageous was the delivery of the final speech of the play. Traditionally spoken by one character, serving as the famous *deus ex machina*, Jouvét instead divided it among several actors. His intention was clear: he did not believe a modern audience would appreciate a speech intended to placate a

³² Ibid 247.

³³ Ibid 248.

³⁴ Ibid 249.

nonexistent king. He, instead, gave the audience a different version of salvation, one that utilized judges instead of royalty. One critic in particular was appalled by this, saying: “The grand finale! ... What a nightmare! What potion did dear Jovet swallow?”³⁵

However, there were some who deemed the production worthy of praise. Thierry Maulnier lauded the vision of Jovet, claiming: “he gave us something infinitely precious, the feeling that actors are not brilliant robots...but living beings such as we might encounter in the grip of an incident such as we might have to experience.”³⁶

While heralded for his collaborations with Giraudoux in contemporary French theatre, Louis Jovet is still remembered by critics and scholars alike for his daring and revealing productions of these two Molière masterpieces. With *The School for Wives* and *Tartuffe*, he continued the work he started with Copeau and etched out his own method of using the text as the primary method of presenting his vision. His fervent desire to bring the classics to the stages of Paris, and even the world, provided yet another piece of the strong foundation necessary to successfully produce Molière today.

Roger Planchon

In the years following World War II, nations around the world with state-subsidized theatre saw the benefit of spreading the arts to outlying towns and provinces to grow a more diverse audience, with France perhaps being the greatest example of this decentralization. As a result, great work was created in places other than Paris that was still distinctly “French.” One such success of this expansion was the work created by Roger Planchon (1931-2009). Planchon formed the Théâtre de la Comédie at the young age of twenty in

³⁵ Ibid 250.

³⁶ Ibid 251.

Lyons, nearly three hundred miles from the French capital. He and his fellow artists built this theatre from the ground up, literally, as they worked as laborers to construct the small playhouse that would be their home. With the help of his inspired troupe, Planchon helped to validate the merits of decentralization and to further expand its reach by endeavoring to “play every evening”³⁷ (which was far more often than the touring productions of the day) and “to impose the idea that the public must be extended.”³⁸

Over the next decade, Planchon matured as a director as he incorporated the influences of contemporaries from across the world, the most pervasive being those of Bertolt Brecht. Planchon infused into his own style a lens of historical relevance and societal implication that can be found in Brecht’s work. After meeting the German director and writer in Paris, Planchon restaged his own production of Brecht’s *La Bonne Ame de Sé-Tchouan* (*The Good Woman of Setzuan*) in 1958 in a style closer to that of the Berliner Ensemble, saying he was making his “own modest copy” of the original work.³⁹ Planchon had become one of France’s foremost students of the German theatre theorist, an influence that would shape his imaginations of *Tartuffe*, a play already steeped in its own historical controversy.

What made Planchon’s productions of *Tartuffe* so revolutionary were their departures, yet again, from previous failures (and even successes). His first came just twelve years after Jouvet’s creation in 1950; Jouvet emphasized the primacy of the text in his

³⁷ Yvette Daoust, *Roger Planchon: Director and Playwright* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 4.

³⁸ *Ibid* 5.

³⁹ Whitton 242.

production, and Planchon's 1962 production followed in Jouvot's footsteps. Planchon's dramaturgy delved even deeper than Jouvot's and pushed the limits on the interpretation of the characters. Where Planchon truly distanced himself was in the way he presented the relationship between Orgon and Tartuffe. Any time *Tartuffe* is discussed, the actions of Orgon are called into question. Why does he give his daughter to Tartuffe? Why does he give his possessions to Tartuffe? Why would he throw Damis out of his house instead of Tartuffe? To Planchon, the degree to which he worshiped and acquiesced to Tartuffe was vastly disproportionate to a normal friendship; it bordered on romantic infatuation. Where previous interpretations claimed Orgon must have been stupid to follow the imposter, Whitton notes that Planchon believed Orgon was "not stupid, but profoundly homosexual" and that he was attracted to Tartuffe on some level.⁴⁰

Carmody is quick to emphasize that while the implication of homosexuality was present in the 1962 production, it was by no means gratuitous or explicit.⁴¹ The affection Orgon feels for Tartuffe played out in subtle ways that spoke to the nature of the true action of the play. Carmody points out that this Orgon was not so foolish as to simply overlook the outrageous deceptions of Tartuffe; rather, Orgon falls for Tartuffe in spite of them. Of course there was no text that was spoken to make this directorial choice apparent. Instead, Carmody praises Planchon's direction, noting the knowing smiles and laughter of Orgon as Tartuffe is ridiculed right in front of him. This Orgon is far too infatuated with Tartuffe to care about the detractions posed by others.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Carmody, *Rereading Molière* 83.

⁴² Ibid 82.

Planchon's interpretation was defended in several significant ways. First, while critics often point to Dorine's lines declaiming Tartuffe as repulsive, Planchon said this was simply "angry exaggeration."⁴³ Daoust points to Planchon's choice in casting the "young and attractive" Michel Auclair to play Tartuffe as further evidence of a sound interpretation.⁴⁴ Daoust compares his performance in the role of Tartuffe to similar interpretations of the famous Shakespearean characters Hamlet and Iago. The similarities, she postulates, dwell in the characters' abilities to hide their true motives. Auclair kept from the audience, she observes, the underlying motivation of Tartuffe, an interpretation that was certainly far distant from previous performances.⁴⁵ Planchon himself also played the titular role, and even though it was noted that Planchon lacked the youth and looks of Auclair, the same level of charm and "magnetism"⁴⁶ was present, at least enough to make palpable the fear that both Marianne and Elmire could fall for the man. Like Jouvet's interpretation, this Tartuffe possessed the charisma to not only spirit away Orgon's wealth and posterity, but also his fleeting heart, a piece of himself he was never before apparently at risk of losing.

Certainly the way Planchon presented his version of *Tartuffe* is remembered for such intriguing interpretations of the major characters, but other aspects of his vision also legitimize Planchon's importance in the history of Molière productions and reflect his Brechtian influence. The utilization of scenery and the social and cultural context within which he placed his action are two other ways Planchon's *Tartuffe* stood apart from previous

⁴³ Daoust 95.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Carmody, *Rereading Molière* 83.

imaginings of the play, as Brecht's influence appears again to have had a hand in shaping the physical world of the play. Stage designer René Allio (for the 1962 production) created a set that consisted of large walls and set pieces flying out after each act. Production photography captured that as the play progressed, more and more of Orgon's house is exposed: the transition to act two presented a massive, cloud-like wall decoration that seemed to pour down celestial light; act three revealed what appears to be a horse and rider, wrapped in bandages.⁴⁷ The detailed imagery included large angel-statues hoisted aloft in act two and painted back walls that depicted the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham in act three. A crumbling ancient statue littered the stage in act four. These are just a few examples of Brecht's "alienation" technique.⁴⁸ The more the house was revealed, the more it was revealed that Orgon was gradually losing control within that very house, the exposure of his house mirroring the family's exposure to Tartuffe's villainy.⁴⁹ In Planchon's 1974 production, designer Hubert Monloup kept some of Allio's scenic movement and added more opulence and scaffolding, depicting a house that was under a sort of transformation.⁵⁰ Both productions found depth in presenting a world in transition, a world where perhaps opulence would not be enough to sustain the changes that loomed on the horizon.

Brecht's influence was also found in how the world of the play was created socially and culturally. Planchon adopted the theory that the cultural and social surroundings of the

⁴⁷ *Stage Design Throughout the World* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1976) 74-78.

⁴⁸ *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale, IV* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1978) 289-326.

⁴⁹ Daoust 90.

⁵⁰ Whitton 253.

playwright at the time of a play's creation must be addressed in production. Planchon knew that to ignore the rise of Catholic authority in France in the seventeenth century would be a mistake, and to that end, he set the action in a world where religious salvation was the only possibility of hope for a wealthy, middle-class man such as Orgon.⁵¹ This deems the opulence of both stagings of the play vital to their thematic success. What is more important is the specificity of such opulence. Both designers used what Green calls "almost gruesome Catholic iconography" to present this world, and Green's interpretation of Allio's walls flying out is a suggestion of the "dismantling of the old order."⁵² Carmody, too, feels that this "redecorating project, like those of his king, seems designed to remove all traces of the old order and replace them with those of the new."⁵³

Likewise, the way Planchon made use of costumes, or lack thereof, speaks to the dissolution of the old world. Carmody notes that at many times throughout the play, though the family is a representation of the wealthy class, several characters appear wearing very little clothing. While not obscene, it is noteworthy that in act two, for instance, that Marianne dresses in full view of the audience, and that in final act the family is presented in their underwear.⁵⁴

Such a departure from the normally-refined way to present a well-to-do family is yet another example of a Brechtian influence and leads to an even larger departure from previous

⁵¹ Ibid 253.

⁵² Amy Green, *The Revisionist Stage: American Directors Reinvent the Classics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 118.

⁵³ Carmody, *Rereading Molière* 79.

⁵⁴ Ibid 72-73.

interpretations of *Tartuffe*. Planchon chose not to stage the final scene with The Exempt as the light-hearted, deus-ex-machina ending to which audiences had grown accustomed. Neither did he break up the speech among several actors, as Jouvet did in his production. Rather, Planchon embraced The Exempt as the highest point of drama in the play where he, as Whitton observes, “implied that Tartuffe was to be executed...” and with Orgon’s pardon presented as “a warning against future disobedience.”⁵⁵

Carmody interprets this ending as Planchon’s presentation of a world in transition, a world full of unease about the future.⁵⁶ From this perspective, the world Planchon created was not just a recreation of the seventeenth-century world Molière represented. Indeed, that level of realism would not have been conducive to the type of theatre Planchon had created and would go on to create. Instead, Planchon created a world that spoke both to modern sensibilities as well as those from the past. He adopted and adapted a Brechtian influence that forced these two worlds to be presented simultaneously. Without a break from one reality or the other, how could an audience separate itself from the action far enough to understand its meaning? What makes Planchon at once the greatest French disciple of Brecht and his antithesis is his use of a French classic to tell story and present his style. By speaking for Molière but by using his own voice, Planchon epitomized his own quote when he spoke of *Tartuffe*, saying, “The play does not change over the centuries, but our understanding of it does.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Whitton 254.

⁵⁶ Carmody, *Rereading Molière* 86-87.

⁵⁷ Bettina L. Knapp, *French Theatre since 1968* (New York: Twain Publishers, 1995)

Antoine Vitez

Theatre continued to evolve throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century, including shifts in both dramatic content and styles of presentation. At the forefront of this evolution, it could be argued, were the advances occurring in France during the last quarter of the twentieth century. As the dramatic works of post-WWII absurdist playwrights such as Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco grew in critical acclaim, these plays, that sometimes presented fragmented and non-linear paths of dramatic action, rightfully demanded a different method of presentation from what had been previously popular with directors in the twentieth century. But though the new and avant-garde scripts provided the impetus for such theatrical evolution, the application of these discoveries to classical texts also proved to be enlightening. One director who embraced this evolution was Antoine Vitez (1910-1990), and the presentation of his Molière cycle proved once more that plays from centuries ago could still be imagined and produced in innovative ways.

After a successful rendition of Racine's *Phèdre* in 1975, Vitez embarked on possibly his most memorable re-creation of French classical theatre, a tetralogy of four plays by Molière. The Molière cycle, which included *L'École des femmes*, *Tartuffe*, *Dom Juan*, and *Le Misanthrope*, was first presented in 1978 at the Avignon Theatre Festival and ran for two years, touring France and parts of Western Europe. Vitez's company consisted of twelve actors, each of whom assumed roles in all four plays, which ran on successive nights and used the same set. But a company of actors performing in repertory alone does not make the production cycle revolutionary. What set this cycle apart from the way Molière had previously been experienced was the manner in which Vitez crafted and shaped his company.

This process would not only train his actors, but also solidify his vision of how best to present classical works to contemporary audiences.

As the theatre evolves and its new forms take shape, those forms often find inspiration in the past. So as Vitez shaped his own methods of directing, the foundation of his new techniques was rooted in some of the fundamentals of how Copeau and Stanislavski prepared their actors. Though Whitton notes that Vitez rejected “the Stanislavskian idea of the actor’s identification with his role,”⁵⁸ Vitez’s techniques were similar in that they focused on using the actor’s body to tell the story of the play. What made his process unique and separated him from Copeau and Stanislavski was his emphasis on the actor in a physical sense and his avoidance of full character development. His rehearsal process and final product on stage echoed this emphasis.

Like these predecessors, Vitez also established a communal atmosphere for his company. There was a freedom of discourse between actor and director, allowing his troupe to feel comfortable sharing opinions on the process with one another. This aspect also informed Vitez as a director, since the feedback he received helped to “enrich his understanding of the play(s) under discussion.”⁵⁹

My appreciation of the Molière cycle starts with how Vitez assembled his company. Instead of using age-appropriate actors to fill the familiar roles, his company contained only one person over the age of thirty. Nowadays, we talk about how important “non-traditional” casting is to the evolution of theatre, and this is a prime example of the benefits of seeing beyond those preconceived limitations. Of the many interesting results from such a casting

⁵⁸ Whitton 279.

⁵⁹ Knapp, *French Theatre since 1968* 93.

choice, the way this must have forced audiences to reimagine or reinterpret the relationships of the central characters is paramount. If the perception of Arnolphe is no longer one of an aging, lecherous man who lusts after Agnès in *The School for Wives*, the relationship between Arnolphe and Horace pits the two as vying equals, rather than as a cunning old man trying to outsmart a naïve young suitor. With age taken out of the equation, the men differentiate themselves by their actions, as opposed to their physical appearance. Carmody also feels that to present Arnolphe as a younger man might even take away the perception that the character is a representation of Molière himself, a mirror for the struggles he was having with his new, young wife at the time the play was written.⁶⁰ This effect would have certainly echoed through *Tartuffe* and *Dom Juan*, where the aging, titular predators were replaced by more outwardly-youthful adversaries. If Orgon is seen to be a young father, his willingness to be seduced by Tartuffe becomes a result of naiveté more than a choice grounded in the experience that comes with age.

As one would expect, the art of staging four full-length plays with the same group of actors demands a great deal of time and endurance, for the director and actors alike. Vitez broke this down into small sections; he rehearsed the play out of order and jumped from scene to scene. The seven-month rehearsal process was “hard and taxing,”⁶¹ and surely required something cerebral from the actors as well, as this segmented style allowed deeper meanings of each scene to be clarified and exposed the physicality of the play.

Nada Stancar, an actress from the original production, described her impressions of working with Vitez in an interview a few years following his death. She said that when the

⁶⁰ Carmody *Rereading Molière* 140.

⁶¹ Knapp, *French Theatre since 1968* 93.

process began, Vitez discussed the themes and ideas of the cycle for a few moments, then the actors “took our books and started doing this and that, letting ourselves be led by our instincts” with no table work done beforehand. She explained how he would “glean one or two ideas” from watching what was being created and shape the play from those observations. Stancar said that most of the direction given to the company consisted of shaping acting styles, to forget the “psychological and middle-class jumble of the nineteenth century”, the “psychoanalysis” of the twentieth century and the “sociological approach in favor at the time.”⁶²

Didier Sandre, another actor from the original production, also shared his thoughts about the process, highlighting Vitez’s focus on the physical. Sandre remembers how Vitez emphasized the elements of farce and how Vitez wanted to return to the “physical heritage that was at variance with the literary ‘tradition’” passed down from earlier generations. Vitez chose to give his actors “only two chairs, a table and a stick” with which to create their characters, a scenario that Sandre felt allowed the actors to “imagine his or her part and to show his or her feelings about the author's work, the character, the situations.”⁶³

Certainly Vitez was not concerned with promoting a social or political agenda in the way Planchon created his *Tartuffe*. Though Whitton describes Vitez as a “committed Marxist”⁶⁴ who, like Planchon, was influenced by Brecht, Vitez produced his Molière cycle in an effort to create a theatrical change, not a social or political one. The initial staging in

⁶² Jean-Michel Charles Lanskin, "Antoine Vitez Re-Staging Molière For The 1978 Avignon Festival." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 6.1 (1997), 17.

⁶³ *Ibid* 18.

⁶⁴ Whitton 278.

Avignon took place outdoors on a built platform in front of architectural ruins. The theatricality of such a production vastly outweighs any sense of societal or political undertone. Quite the contrary, the production had a clear focus on presenting the plays as vehicles of farce.⁶⁵

Production photography illustrates the specificity Vitez was able to bring to life in his Molière cycle. What first jumps off the page is the juxtaposition of the elaborate costumes and the physicality of the performances being photographed. One picture in particular, from *The School for Wives*, shows an actor mid-cartwheel in the foreground with another looking on behind him, both lavishly dressed in a way that belies the agility and action of the scene. Another shows Tartuffe as he grovels at the feet of a woman. A picture of *The Misanthrope* depicts Célimène and Philinte commiserating together at the lone table. In each of these, the artful seventeenth-century costumes draw the focus to the actors, as the empty stage leaves nothing else to distract from the facial expressions and physicality of the performers.⁶⁶

Yet the production did not attempt to represent any realities of seventeenth-century France, and Vitez's use of language in the play reinforces this break from reality. Carmody describes the dialogue of the play as being more near its music than its language, as the actors intoned their lines rhythmically and stressed the poetry of the alexandrine.⁶⁷ Both Stancar and Sandre felt that previous productions which attempted to turn the poetry of

⁶⁵ Carmody, *Rereading Molière* 151.

⁶⁶ Lanskin 13-19.

⁶⁷ Carmody, *Rereading Molière* 150.

Molière into a more conversational “prose” did the plays a disservice. The poetry of the language was of the utmost importance and permeated the Molière cycle.⁶⁸

The “radical reframing of Molière’s dramaturgy”⁶⁹ by Vitez provides one more example of just how much more we can learn from classical texts. His creation at Avignon did not subvert or alter the plays, it simply shed new light on them. Much like his predecessors who labored over the scripts in their attempts to find undiscovered truths, Vitez labored over the performative aspects of the plays in an attempt to present a different perspective. Vitez refused to perpetuate the artifice of representational theatre to his audiences, and by doing so, developed his fragmented interpretation in a way that challenged the long-standing belief that Molière had to be grounded in realism. His production allowed the actors of his company to physically tell a story without representing any specific reality, which in turn allowed those stories to come alive to audiences in ways they’d never before experienced.

Ariane Mnouchkine

The number of French directors who have created impactful productions of Molière is probably in the hundreds, and while this thesis must pivot to American directors and their contributions to Molière, I feel that one final director demands attention. Ariane Mnouchkine (b.1939) is one of the most appreciated and well-respected directors in France, and her Théâtre du Soleil has been a beacon of inventive theatre since its inception in 1964. As my last example of integral French productions of Molière, I’ve chosen Mnouchkine’s *Tartuffe* (1995). This production serves as the perfect bookend to the French foundation, and

⁶⁸ Lanskin 16.

⁶⁹ Carmody, *Rereading Molière* 150.

spotlights how a thoughtful and focused director presents the work with startling relevancy to a contemporary audience.

The formation of the Théâtre du Soleil is reminiscent of Copeau's intentions with his Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier: to gather artists to work communally to present theatricals in innovative ways. But while we again see a hint of the influence Copeau had on twentieth-century French directors, Mnouchkine's company is yet another departure from Copeau's methodology. One noteworthy distinction is the equity shared by all members of the Théâtre du Soleil. Mnouchkine founded her company with an emphasis on collective collaboration throughout the process. Actors would be painters, designers would be carpenters. Mnouchkine, as director, created the work of the company in tandem with the actors, so much so that two actors actually left the company during the early years because Mnouchkine was not a "real" director in their eyes.⁷⁰ Mnouchkine paid everyone the same, so there was no hierarchical power struggle and no "star system" present to disrupt the communal environment. When rehearsing Arnold Wesker's *La Cuisine (The Kitchen)* (1967), for example, roles were not assigned to specific actors at the outset. Each actor in Mnouchkine's company learned multiple parts throughout the process as they concurrently studied the routines of actual kitchen workers in several French restaurants. This rehearsal process paralleled that of Vitez in that it afforded the actors the necessary time to assimilate the natural behaviors of the workers they would soon be portraying on stage. As the performance grew nearer, roles were specified and the actors were then able to imbue their assigned characters with the lessons they had observed.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Whitton 258.

⁷¹ Ibid 259.

While this process sounds like a “Stanislavskian” approach to acting, Mnouchkine did not adhere to this model when presenting the play itself. Imbuing her company with the knowledge necessary to represent these kitchen workers allowed her the opportunity to bend and inflate the reality of the situations the play presented. For instance, miming the act of taking food out to tables and exaggerating the gridlock of an over-worked kitchen allowed an audience to relate that hustle and chaos to its own life. In 1960s France, factory workers would have seen this as a mirror image to their struggles on the job, and thus the specificity of the actors’ movements and choreography could generally appeal to a wide audience.⁷²

Productions by Théâtre du Soleil surrounded the spectators with spectacle, another departure from her predecessors. Once Mnouchkine’s theatre found its home in the expansive munitions factory, the Cartoucherie de Vincennes, typically an evening at the theatre required a full night’s commitment. After traveling to the outskirts of Paris, audiences were greeted by the company, some of whom were vigorously preparing the meal for the evening and others preparing themselves for the night’s performance by getting into costume and putting on make-up, in full view of the spectators. It was no secret that “theatre” was about to happen, though a formal “theatre space” could not be readily identified. Any attempt at realism had been dismissed by Mnouchkine and her company.

The early productions of the Théâtre du Soleil provided the foundation for what the company would build upon for the next three decades. *Le Songe d'une Nuit d'Ete (A Midsummer Night's Dream)* in 1968 and *1789* (arguably Mnouchkine’s best production) in 1970 established the company as one of the most innovative in France. For example, in the production of *1789*, six separate stages surrounded the audience, high off the ground.

⁷² Ibid.

Lighting instruments were in full view, as well as the back walls and high ceilings of the factory. All scenic imagery suggests an almost Brechtian-influence in the stage design. These artistic tactics prepared the company for its first undertaking of a Molière comedy, although at first glance there appeared to be little humor in what the Théâtre du Soleil created.

Mnouchkine's boldest departure from productions of *Tartuffe* by previous directors was in the world of the play she chose to present. Her production was not set in seventeenth-century France, but in a modern-day Muslim community. In an interview she gave not long after the play opened, Mnouchkine said that what first drew her to *Tartuffe* was its timelessness. She said she felt that the play could find relevance in any country in any decade of the century. She mentioned how many of her Muslim friends who had come to France were dealing with Islamist fundamentalism, and how this drew a direct correlation to Molière's play being "a war play," something "the youth of our country has to deal with."⁷³

The world she created was simple yet vivid; it was distant yet recognizable. The actors were clothed in traditional Muslim attire, with men dressed in long, black robes with long beards and women wearing modified burqas. In production photography, *Tartuffe* is pictured always wearing a taqiyah (skull cap), and the female characters have their heads covered with a hijab. There was nothing exceptionally ornate or ornamental about the costume design. Rather, it was the scenic design that spoke to the impending persecution of those who did not follow the fundamentalist ways of this world. High stone walls lined the sides of the stage adorned with religious relics, and barred doors and walls upstage appeared

⁷³ Maria M. Delgado, "Ariane Mnouchkine." *In Contact with the Gods? Directors Talk Directing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 179.

to separate actors from one another. We don't see a traditional family home, we see a prison.⁷⁴ Just who or what this prison intended to keep out, or keep locked inside, was a matter of audience interpretation, but the stage design did not induce a feeling of comfort.

In this jarring world that Mnouchkine created, McFarren notes the "Brechtian" style of the production in her analysis. She says that by presenting a world that isn't traditional "*haute bourgeoisie*" of previous productions, an audience wouldn't be able to relate to the situation because it's a world they don't "know implicitly."⁷⁵ This unfamiliar world also was an ambiguous one. Where exactly was this play taking place? Adornments and relics aside, this house of Orgon could be any Muslim house in any part of the world. Was it as distant as the West Bank or was it just around the corner in Paris? McFarren pairs this ambiguity with the general fear that most people have of the unknown.⁷⁶ Could such a situation be happening right under my nose? This was certainly a question Mnouchkine intended the audience to ponder.

Mnouchkine's *Tartuffe* presented a decidedly darker version of the classical play than any other I've discussed, but this doesn't mean the director took liberties with the original source. Mnouchkine reminded many audience members who had asked her if she had published "her" version of the play that everything she presented was entirely Molière's text.⁷⁷ But the darkness is present, and in some scenes, heightened. The famous "table

⁷⁴ Théâtre du Soleil, <http://theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/images/photos/le-tartuffe-1995.682?lang=en> (accessed 4 February 2016).

⁷⁵ Cheryl Kennedy McFarren, "Mnouchkine's *Tartuffe*," *Tartuffe*, Constance Congdon and Virginia Scott, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009), 209.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Delgado 182.

scene,” for example, depicts a cowering Orgon hiding under the very table upon which his wife is being assaulted. The production photography gives no indication there is anything funny going on; Orgon looks terrified. Mnouchkine admitted that the fear the play evoked was an important part of the production. She said that Molière describes “a state of war, a sort of hostage situation.”⁷⁸

With such an emphasis on the dark, it’s curious to read responses praising the lighter side of the production. In her review for *Theatre Journal*, Miller praises the use of humor to offset the foreboding tone that permeated the production, particularly in both Dorine and Damis. She mentions how Dorine would repeatedly use a pitcher of water to “cool off” whichever character was fuming at her. She notes how the choice to cross-gender cast Damis feminized him (her?), which engendered even more humor in the scene where Dorine must comfort the spurned-lover Damis. Humor again materialized in the tragic final moments of the play, where just before exonerating Orgon and condemning Tartuffe, the king’s officers stuff their pockets with the riches of the household.⁷⁹ Whether or not the audience would succumb to this urge to laugh, it’s certain the tongue-in-cheek presentation of governmental corruption was intended to lighten the tone of such a dark production.

What fascinates me most about this particular production is the precision of Mnouchkine’s vision. The parallel between Islamic fundamentalism and the church about which Molière was writing may be an easy one to draw, but to execute the comparison within the confines of the script must have required steadfast focus. Mnouchkine had to commit to

⁷⁸ McFarren 179.

⁷⁹ Judith Graves Miller, “*Tartuffe* (review),” *Theatre Journal* Vol. 48, No. 3 (October 1996) 370-371, https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theatre_journal/v048/48.3pr_moliere.html (accessed 4 February 2016).

many choices in her fundamentalist world. Goldsby discusses how effective Mnouchkine's use of entrances expertly presented her vision. The play opened with the women of the compound happily performing their menial chores, until Madame Pernelle entered and the mood changed. The devoutly-religious Orgon was a "fanatic," so his adherence to the ritualistic routine of removing his outer garments as he entered his own home could be viewed as an act of worship.⁸⁰ Tartuffe's eventual entrance, surrounded by his entourage of fellow fanatics, would have likely inspired fear rather than levity. How easy would it have been to rely on the humor of the play, to relax the tension she worked so hard to build? Undoubtedly easy to be sure, but that would have lessened the impact of the world Mnouchkine created. The specificity of her choices allowed her vision to paint this parallel world in a way that was unmistakably relevant to her contemporary audience yet simultaneously reminiscent of the tone and intention of Molière's original text.

These five French directors provided history with imaginative interpretations of the work of Molière, and each deftly crafted his or her unique vision and shaped the worlds of the plays in ways that illustrate how France celebrates their seventeenth-century genius. Copeau and Jouvet laid a foundation upon which Planchon, Vitez and Mnouchkine were able to devise their own Molière methods, giving rise to deeper understanding of the original texts. But how a nation honors its own hero is vastly different from the way that same hero is viewed by an international community. These voices, after all, were all speaking French. When interpretation morphs into translation and adaptation, what happens to the original voice of the playwright? How does altering the very language of a play impact a director's duty to "let the play speak for itself"?

⁸⁰ Goldsby 58-60.

CHAPTER 2

THE MISANTHROPE ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

In the early twentieth-century, American theatre audiences experienced Molière in both French and English. Copeau's relocated Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, a French-speaking company, performed two successful seasons in New York. The company's performances met with critical accolades, and the language barrier didn't seem to hurt its attendance. English translations of Molière were also becoming more widely available to the public. A newspaper advertisement from 1911 touts the first-ever performance of Molière's *Les Femmes savantes*, as translated by Curtis Hidden Page (1870-1946).¹ Page translated several of Molière's plays, many of which are widely available in the public domain.

This leads directly to the greatest challenge American theatre faces when handling foreign plays: translation. The purpose of this thesis is not to deconstruct the nuances of every English translation of Molière's work; still, the choice of which translation to use is arguably the most important one a director makes, and therefore a general understanding of what is out there to choose from is mandatory. While my focus is on how directors craft the production as a whole, the language of the play factors greatly in that end result. In the three American productions of *The Misanthrope* from the end of the twentieth century I have

¹ "Les Femmes Savantes Molière's Play Produced For First Time on American Professional Stage by Drama Players," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Nov. 11, 1911, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19111111-01.2.23#> (accessed Feb. 11, 2016).

chosen to examine, some of the most illuminating analysis is found in the reactions to the chosen translations, both by scholars and critics alike.

I must first admit that in my youth, like many students entering the theatre, I had no idea that translation played a part in understanding foreign texts. As a college freshman playing Valère in *Tartuffe*, I even remember commenting to a cast-mate how surprising it was that a French playwright wrote in a style so similar to that of Shakespeare. For some reason, my Anglo-centric mind did not process that our text was not original to Molière, but was instead an interpretation of his original words by another writer. It wasn't until a few years later than I realized my error and processed the missed opportunity of comparing our version (by Richard Wilbur) to the other versions available at the time.

The American theatre community widely considers Richard Wilbur (b.1921) to be the foremost authority on English translations of seventeenth-century neo-classical French drama, as he has published more than a dozen translations of the plays of Racine, Corneille and Molière. Beginning in 1955 with his version of *The Misanthrope*, Wilbur has utilized his background in poetry to present the words of Molière, originally written in *alexandrine* (twelve-syllable lines, rhyming couplets), in the more-familiar iambic pentameter, while still adhering to the rhymed-couplet structure. This style is also seen in his translations of Molière's *Tartuffe* (1963), *The School for Wives* (1971), *The Learned Ladies* (1978) and *The School for Husbands* (1992), to name a few. It is interesting, too, that other plays by Molière that were originally written in prose, like *L'Avare* and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, were not initially translated by the poet, presumably because a poet's touch was not necessary to give these plays a life in English.

In America, Wilbur's translations are the gold-standard to which most theatre companies adhere when producing Molière. Indeed, even his contemporaries knew the precision of his work, as Donald Frame said of Wilbur's versions in the introduction to his own volume of Molière translations, "They are the best Molière we have in English."² It is curious, therefore, that in my search for noteworthy examples of American Molière productions, the first that crossed my path was a staging of *The Misanthrope* that chose to use a different translator to tell Molière's story.

In 1989, a co-production with the La Jolla Playhouse and the Goodman Theatre of Chicago presented *The Misanthrope* as translated by Neil Bartlett (b.1958). In his essay on landmark Molière productions, Carmody includes this one "because it was the first major American production to use a translation of the play by somebody other than Richard Wilbur."³ Bartlett's translation further updated the language of the play, pairing a twelve-syllable rhymed couplet structure (a veritable English-*alexandrine*) with a twentieth-century social setting. Director Robert Falls brought Bartlett's script to America from the London stage, and in doing so, also chose to move the action of the play from London's media environment to America's Hollywood.⁴ The production opened at La Jolla and moved to the Goodman a few months later, and starred David Darlow and Kim Cattral in the leading roles.

² Molière, *The Misanthrope and other plays*, Donald Frame, trans. (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), xiii.

³ Jim Carmody, "Landmark twentieth-century productions of Molière: a transatlantic perspective on Molière: *mise en scène* and historiography," in *Cambridge Companion to Molière*, ed. David Bradby and Andrew Calder (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 198.

⁴ *Ibid.*

One of the biggest questions this production poses is how to define the difference between translation and adaptation? Perhaps the answer is different for every director, so it is a matter of degree, without an absolute, line-in-the-sand that says “here is where the play stops being Molière’s and starts becoming my own.” After all, no one bats an eye anymore at “reimagined” Shakespeare productions. Is it cultural bias that allows us to accept the English-born Shakespeare to be transported to times and realms never imagined by the author, yet scoff at such imaginations applied to the French-born Molière? Thankfully, contemporary productions like the Falls/Bartlett *The Misanthrope* leave behind writing and research that provide some insight as to how directors view their responsibilities to both the original text and the production they’ve created.

The first place to look for answers about this production is with the director himself, Robert Falls (b.1954). Why did he feel that in order to present Molière’s story to a contemporary audience, it was necessary to use an updated, contemporary frame of reference? He answered this question in an essay sent out to the season subscribers of the Goodman Theatre when he wrote that to “set the play in 1989 in the Hollywood Hills... provides a perfect modern analogue to Molière’s world.”⁵ What makes his production unique is the updated design combined with the new translation, whose adherence to Molière’s original meter grounded the play in the past while the visuals bombarding the audience were sights and sounds they could easily witness while walking down the street. Falls went on to write: “Then *is* now, the great works of the stage reflect our time just as they

⁵ Robert Falls, “Alceste in Hollywood: A Semiotic Reading of *The Misanthrope*,” in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 43.

reflect times past and future.”⁶ With such a specific intention to tie the two worlds together, it is easy to see how Falls used the translation as a sturdy foundation upon which he built his original vision of Molière’s play.

In an interview in 2007, Falls spoke about directing in a way that echoed from the past: “I look at the playwright really as the god, and my responsibility is to interpret his text.”⁷ In a quote that could have come from the mouth of Copeau, Jouvet or Planchon, Falls summarized his approach in a way that embraces a director’s duty to decipher exactly what the playwright intended with the script. But where does interpretation end and adaptation begin? If Planchon believed that the latent homosexuality of Orgon should be a focal point of *Tartuffe* and Mnouchkine believed that the play’s religious fundamentalism deserved the brightest spotlight, can they both be right? Is interpretation simply a rubber band that when stretched to its breaking point only then becomes adaptation? Whether the scholars and critics used the word “translation” or “adaptation” when they discussed the Falls/Bartlett production of *The Misanthrope*, they all agreed on one point: America had never seen Molière like this before.

In a production that attempts to marry two distinctly different time periods on stage, an inherent temptation is to immediately pick out the incongruities of the union. Carmody’s study of the *mise-en-scène* instead chose to examine the ways both the visual and audible stimulants succeeded in bridging the gap between seventeenth-century France and twentieth-century Hollywood. While he concedes that far more investigation would be necessary to

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Phoebe Hoban, “Robert Falls,” *The New York Times* (Feb. 25, 2007) <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/25/theater/25hoba.html> (accessed Feb. 12, 2016).

properly include all aspects of the production, his chosen “selected marginal details” serve as an adequate sampling of how Falls used Bartlett’s translation to merge these two worlds together.⁸

Carmody frames his analysis of *The Misanthrope* through a lens of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols. He focuses his discussion of the play on three choices made within the production: a set piece that combined exercise equipment with the image of a guillotine, Kim Cattrall’s final bow, and the director’s note in the Goodman Theatre’s publication to season subscribers. He believes each of these symbols reflects directly on the production’s ability to present two simultaneous worlds to the 1989 audiences. For my purposes, his examples underscore and inform my study of the methodology Falls used to contemporize a French classic while trying to stay true to the original script’s intent.

A guillotine almost always symbolizes execution, usually a French execution, to be more precise. Even to those who have not studied French history readily recognize the guillotine as a means of organized decapitation. Yet in the Falls/Bartlett production, the ever-present device was also a piece of workout equipment, one utilized by Célimène repeatedly throughout the play.⁹ Therefore, the use of a hybrid set piece, one that evokes both a means of shaping and toning one’s body and a way to swiftly end one’s life, would have certainly presented the audience with a mixed message. Was this a depiction of a healthy lifestyle or of a looming death? With the “well-toned body” of Célimène on display in her workout clothing, she personified the “stay-in-shape” mentality of Hollywood.¹⁰ The

⁸ Carmody, “Alceste in Hollywood...” 46.

⁹ Ibid 39.

¹⁰ Ibid.

exercise equipment spent most of its time turned profile on the stage, so that the lowering “guillotine blade” of the counterweight was only visible during the one scene in which it was rotated (in act three, prior to intermission).¹¹ Therefore the purpose all along may have been to hypnotize the audience with the rhythm of Célimène’s workout only to blindside them with the designer’s true intentions. Once the equipment was moved to its profile position again, it would have been impossible to erase the image of impending danger descending with every repetition.

This emphasis on the set piece, which according to production photography was more than two-times human height, spotlights a curious departure from Molière’s original text, intended or otherwise. If we are watching this Hollywood starlet feverishly labor to keep up her appearance, does the entire focus of the play shift away from the misanthropic Alceste? *Le Misanthrope* in its original form mirrors the sadness of its author, a husband married to a woman who did not, by all accounts, appear to return his affections. This Alceste/Molière character feels torn between a life of solitude and a life with the woman he loves. The text evidence, therefore, makes this Alceste’s play. But if the visual focus of the Falls/Bartlett production centered on Célimène and her exercise regimen, it must have been hard for an audience to follow the play’s original intent.

Carmody’s second semiotic analysis provides further evidence of this departure from the text. His description of the final moments of the production, when Cattrall’s Célimène was the only actor to take a solo bow, challenges conventional interpretations of the piece. If this is Alceste’s play, why wouldn’t he be the one taking a bow? Cattrall’s bow itself was also a source of confusion, as Carmody describes it as a blend of “a traditional deep curtsy

¹¹ Ibid.

with a flexing of both biceps in a gesture of exultant triumph.”¹² This paints the picture of a seemingly-victorious Célimène, but what victory has she won? Carmody argues that perhaps Falls intended to suggest Célimène successfully survived the rejections from earlier in the play, or to merely present the audience with an image of “the-film-actress-from-Hollywood” celebrating where nothing happened worthy of celebration.¹³ Regardless of Falls’s intentions, it’s clear this ending would have altered the way the play was understood by its audiences. While virtually no reading of *The Misanthrope* leaves us with the impression that Alceste “wins” by leaving society behind to live in solitude, most theatre professionals would probably have a difficult time finding the textual evidence to support a “win” for Célimène in the end either.

Regardless of any intention to change the plot of the play, the updated production of *The Misanthrope* attempted to tell Molière’s story in a contemporary setting, generally speaking. Falls’s own words to his Goodman Theatre subscribers prepared them to experience a play from “Louis XIV’s court... that’s turned up again and again...”¹⁴ This dissemination, coupled with the union of seventeenth- and twentieth-centuries displayed on stage, probably aimed to acclimate his audiences to a world with which he knew they’d be unfamiliar. This is where the use of Bartlett’s translation really paid off. His translation updated Molière’s original text, including references to late-1980s pop culture and Hollywood idioms. Only the meter and rhyme remained to anchor the production in the

¹² Ibid 41.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid 43.

world of its inception, along with, of course, the names and titles original to Molière and seventeenth-century France.

Carmody notes that only the Goodman audiences received this introductory essay, and that La Jolla's audiences received only the theatrical program, which included a few notes from the translator's "Letter to the Company" and a brief history of Molière's life.¹⁵ This may be why the critics in California reviewed the play so differently from those in Chicago. The articles from the California papers read as though they didn't quite understand what Falls was trying to do with his production, or if they did understand, they didn't seem to care for his efforts. Dan Sullivan's review in the *Los Angeles Times* praised the acting but didn't seem to buy the correlation between Louis XIV's France and Hollywood. Sullivan didn't feel that the archaic scenarios (recitations of poems, exchanges of love letters, etc.) could be accepted as "a scandal" in the present-day setting of the play. He called the production "a bit of a fraud;" he said in one breath that we shouldn't care about Célimène's concerns about "being too young to know her own mind" and in another that the "bright idea" of setting the play in Hollywood compensated for "a lack of intellectual follow-thru."¹⁶ Jeff Rubio of the *Orange County Register* called the production "a little trite." Rubio pointed to faults in the way the Falls production used the pretext of Hollywood life as "a gloss to

¹⁵ Ibid 47-48.

¹⁶ Dan Sullivan, "Molière's *Misanthrope* Set on Fast Forward," review of *The Misanthrope*, directed by Robert Falls, *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 1989, http://articles.latimes.com/1989-08-22/entertainment/ca-874_1_moliere-s-hero-moliere-s-story-celimene (accessed Feb. 17, 2016).

entice audiences... instead of a tool for exploration.” Even though he praised the acting, he attacked the script itself by mocking its references to Rob Lowe and “thirtysomething.”¹⁷

Compare these criticisms to those published by the *Chicago Tribune* and it is easy to see how necessary the introductory essay must have been to the Goodman audiences. Both the preview of the production and the review itself published in the paper show evidence that staff writer Richard Christiansen did his homework before tackling these assignments. In his preview article, he cited both the Falls essay and Bartlett’s thoughts to the La Jolla company as clear evidence of the purpose toward which the production was conceived. Falls spoke to Christiansen about being inspired by Hollywood friends whose behavior echoed of Alceste, and of how the impressive Hollywood houses would be a perfect representation of modern-day Louis XIV-lavishness. Christiansen quoted Bartlett’s comparisons that “the Court and the King” were synonymous with “the Studio and the Producer,” and that everyone spoke the same language and played the same games in today’s world “just like their baroque originals.”¹⁸

It is no surprise, therefore, that Christiansen’s critical review of the production was able to recognize all of the nuances the director and translator intended. Christiansen admitted the play came “close to being too clever for its own good,” but appreciated the way Molière’s original text perfectly paralleled the “sexual and social politics” of the current culture. Christiansen didn’t shower undue praise on the actors, as he even specified casting

¹⁷ Jeff Rubio, "La Jolla Gives 'Misanthrope' a Likable Staging," *Orange County Register*, Aug 31, 1989, *ProQuest* (accessed Feb. 17, 2016).

¹⁸ Richard Christiansen, "Moliere in Hollywood Versailles's Remarkable Resemblance to Tinseltown," *Chicago Tribune (pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Oct 01 1989, *ProQuest* (accessed Feb. 17, 2016).

choices that might not have been perfect for the production; rather, he focused his critical comments on the effectiveness of the combination of the two worlds that he said “made Molière’s works timeless and universal.”¹⁹

Though billed as the same show seen in two different cities, these contrary perspectives indicate that the critics may have experienced the production in different ways, and this seems entirely due to information that the Chicago community received that the La Jolla community did not. More than a decade later, in a *Los Angeles Times* review for a different production of *The Misanthrope*, Michael Phillips referred to the 1989 version as “the rather stupid Robert Falls production...rife with aerobicized poseurs.”²⁰ Without the foreknowledge of what Falls and Bartlett intended to do with their production, the west coast media was underwhelmed and unimpressed by what they saw, and even eleven years later, when the director’s note would have been widely available, the opinions of the press evidently hadn’t changed. Still, this production was a critical success, winning the San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Award for best production of the 1988-89 season, an impressive accolade despite a theatre community that really didn’t seem to “get it” in the first place.

A few years later in 1992, two professional productions of *The Misanthrope* were staged within four months of each other in cities barely a hundred miles apart. Baltimore’s Center Stage produced the play to close their 1991-92 season in May, and the Philadelphia Drama Guild produced it in October of their 1992-93 season. Scott T. Cummings wrote

¹⁹ Richard Christiansen, "New 'Misanthrope' Version Delivers Rousing Punch," *Chicago Tribune (pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Oct 11, 1989, *ProQuest* (accessed Feb. 17, 2016).

²⁰ Michael Phillips, “Gossip Still Fuels Molière’s *The Misanthrope*,” Review of *The Misanthrope*, directed by Sabin Epstein, *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 2000, <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/may/17/entertainment/ca-30792> (accessed Feb. 17, 2016).

about these two productions in a study of design choices, and while his analysis illustrates a vivid picture of the scenic elements, it also provides excellent evidence of how the directors chose to present their interpretations of Molière's play. Interestingly, while each play utilized a different translation, translation itself was not a significant part of Cummings's analysis. Through his descriptions of the scenic and staging imagery, combined with the observations from local theatre critics, each production comes into sharp focus and serves as another example of how a director's choices can sometimes alter a play's original intent.

A play about one man's frustration with society's lack of honesty must have been chosen purposefully by these theatres in 1992, a presidential election year. Baltimore's production happened just a month prior to the Democratic Party presidential primary of that election cycle, and Philadelphia's production closed just days before the general election itself. A play whose hero champions transparency in all discourse surely would have spoken politically to theatre audiences. In his discussion as to why Molière was being produced so frequently at the time, Cummings suggests the choice in season probably had to do with the "hypocrisy and moral posturing during the Reagan-Bush era."²¹ The noted political implications of the play make it curious, however, that both directors chose to make their central focus Célimène over Alceste, whose behavior throughout the play would have certainly engendered more political sympathy and stimulated more political discourse.

In Cummings's analysis of the Center Stage production in Baltimore, directed by Irene Lewis, he emphasizes two choices that frame the spectator's attention, appropriately or not, on his assumed intentions of the director: the ostracism of Alceste and subsequent

²¹ Scott T. Cummings, "Interpretation by Design: A Tale of Two *Misanthropes*," *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 6.1 (1997), 37.

centering of Célimène in the physical staging of the play, and the design elements used for scene changes which included a myriad of “busts” appearing throughout the production. In regards to the placement of the actors, Lewis’s choice is reminiscent of the Falls production, in which Kim Cattrall’s Célimène absorbed the spotlight throughout. Lewis chose to personify the outsider Alceste by pushing out towards the audience for several of his scenes, keeping him physically apart from those whose behaviors he abhorred.²² From his first entrance, where an angry Alceste ripped off his mask only to have his wig come off too, the character was presented to the audience as an interloper or as someone who did not belong in this world.

But to separate Alceste from the action of the play so drastically must have weakened the character considerably. In *The Misanthrope*, there arises from the text an idealistic, albeit naïve, quality in Alceste, one that begs we root for him on some level. We want him to win, and if we don’t feel a connection to his absurd desire for a politeness-free world, the play could fail to resonate with a contemporary audience (especially in the 1992-election year). An Alceste placed out on the apron of the stage would appear to be merely a barking dog, upset at the presence of a harmless neighbor but unable to do anything about it. Célimène, the object of his simultaneous affection and antipathy, was placed center stage for most of her scenes, which would have created a tableau that engendered sympathy for the *femme fatale*. But whether or not such sympathy is warranted by the text is debateable.

The second of Cummings’s observations focuses on how the scenic elements shaped the world of the play. Specifically, he discusses how the scene changes were impacted by the fluidity of the design. He first notes that miscellaneous supernumeraries would arrange the

²² Ibid 39.

set pieces, furniture, etc. after the actors began each new scene, so that the setting itself didn't take shape until well into the dialogue of the characters. He mentions that in one scene the character Oronte bends to sit just moments before a chair is brought on stage and placed behind him. Cummings contends that once this convention was well-established, it allowed the audience to maintain their focus on the actions of the characters on stage and not to be concerned with precisely where those actions are taking place.²³ This directing choice also elucidated the position of Célimène in the world of the play. Cummings points out that Célimène, more than any other character in the play, "defines the scenography; a room does not exist unless Célimène is in it."²⁴

This convention was also echoed in the use of prop busts throughout the play, a choice that baffled Cummings and went unreported by the newspaper critics. Still, the presence of these many busts provided further evidence that this was Célimène's world, even if *The Misanthrope* is Alceste's play. One "master-bust" was placed upstage center, while other "mini-busts" were brought on and off the stage throughout the play. The most confounding point that Cummings makes is that none of the characters ever acknowledged the busts, yet their presence permeated the play nonetheless. Why? One possible suggestion Cummings offers supports the overall portrayal of Célimène: her narcissism. The presence of one bust would symbolize "the notability and individuality of its subject,"²⁵ but the replication of this symbol diminished its reverence and expanded the ego-centrism of the

²³ Ibid 44.

²⁴ Ibid 39.

²⁵ Ibid 43.

play's female lead. After all, a room filled with miniaturized statues of herself would leave precious-little room for her lovers.

The end of the play culminated with a final visual that once again depicted the narcissistic nature of Célimène. Lewis chose to leave her on stage at the end of the play, similar to the final image in the production by Robert Falls. However, this ending chose to present an Alceste “who carries the audience’s favor from early on”²⁶ juxtaposed by a Célimène who appeared disinterested in any attention, and therefore the magnanimity of Alceste’s final gesture seems trite and “un-nuanced” to Cummings. In fact, he argues that Lewis’s direction may have unintentionally swapped the personalities of these characters; Alceste seemed to be the one who craved society and Célimène seemed fine being on her own, though “more narcissist than misanthrope.”²⁷ The effect of having Célimène remain on stage following Alceste’s ultimatum certainly could frame the production in a different thematic light.

Célimène is not described specifically as a narcissist in the newspaper reviews from Baltimore’s *The Evening Sun* and *The Washington Post*, but both publications mention the added attention given to the female lead. That these articles support Cummings’s perspective is no surprise, as his analysis was written several years after the production and these sources would have been available from which to draw anecdotal perspectives to complete his essay. But from the immediacy of any newspaper writing, we are left with the fresh reactions an audience might have also had. J. Wynn Rousuck, for instance, admits in her article for *The Evening Sun* that the play usually focuses on Alceste, but praises Lewis’s choice to shift “a

²⁶ Ibid 45.

²⁷ Ibid 46.

chunk of the emphasis on his love interest.”²⁸ Rousuck’s discussion of the production includes the added dance numbers choreographed for Célimène, one shared with her suitors and another with her full-length mirror, as further illustrations of the emphasis on the character.²⁹ In Joe Brown’s piece for *The Washington Post*, he writes about the struggle between Alceste’s condemnation for societal falseness and the titular character’s hopeless love for Célimène. Brown’s perspective is centered on the human side of the production, writing that “everyone will blush with self-recognition at some point in this play.”³⁰ Brown does note the design focus on Célimène in how the character was dressed, as he observes “her eye-popping décolletage,” her “shimmering robes and trains” and her “outlandish foundation garments.”³¹ Brown clearly doesn’t waste time in his criticism on what separated this production from the play’s original intent; rather, he highlights how the choices Lewis made helped to speak to him, and presumably the audience as a whole, personally.

Both of these journalists also mention the benefits of using Richard Wilbur’s translation for this production. While crediting the translator is vital to accurately preserving the historical record of a play (I’ve surprisingly come across a few articles that fail to list which translation was used), sometimes the choice of translation can add the most clarity to a production. Rousuck and Brown were quick to give credit to Lewis’s use of the Richard Wilbur script, and both wrote about how her choice benefitted the production. Rousuck

²⁸ J. Wynn Rousuck, "Center Stage's 'Misanthrope' has Insights for Modern Times," *The Evening Sun*, May 14, 1992, *ProQuest* (accessed Feb. 18, 2016).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Joe Brown, "Theater; Uplifting 'Misanthrope'," *The Washington Post (pre-1997 Fulltext)*, May 14 1992, *ProQuest* (accessed Feb. 18, 2016).

³¹ *Ibid.*

praises the “clowning” one actor displays as a way the show softened “the formality of Richard Wilbur’s magnificent verse translation.”³² Brown calls the translation “agile and supremely actable.”³³ Both reviews discuss the play in terms of its performative qualities, and this must be owed, if not entirely then at least in part, to the use of Wilbur’s translation. The text didn’t get in the actors’ way; it allowed them to elevate their performances to something universal, as Rousuck also correlates the themes of the play to the upcoming presidential election when she writes that “appearance is everything, and truth-telling is the gravest of all political faux pas.”³⁴ Brown’s appreciation centers on Wilbur’s ability to capture “the rhyme and reason of Molière’s 17th-century comedy of manners and morals,”³⁵ and the translation is foundational to connecting the past to the present.

Cummings has much more to say about the scenic design choices than the direction given to the actors in the Drama Guild’s production in Philadelphia, but his observations still help to paint a picture of the world director Mary B. Robinson created. Robinson’s world started with a newer translation of the play, by the English poet Tony Harrison. His translation still adheres to the rhyming-couplet style of Molière, but updates the language and references in ways similar to Neil Bartlett’s translation. An updated script necessitated an updated setting for the play, and Robinson moved the action of the play to 1990s Paris. Cummings spends the majority of his analysis on the visual experience of the production, and his ability to capture this in such specific detail provides the foundation necessary to

³² Rousuck.

³³ Brown.

³⁴ Rousuck.

³⁵ Brown.

understanding how Robinson used the “look” of her play to communicate its theme to her audiences.

This was a big, bold production, in terms of spectacle. From the description Cummings gives us of Robinson’s version of *The Misanthrope*, this production’s use of spectacle added both positives and negatives to the production. At the center of the set created by designer Allen Moyer was Célimène’s massive round bed, around which her suitors would crowd to gush over the young beauty. Cummings notes that this bed is so large that it is “big enough that Célimène, Acaste, and Clitandre can pile on...without getting in compromising positions.”³⁶ The walls were painstakingly lined with squares upholstered in blue fabric with red roses placed in the center. It was in these walls that the secrets of the set hidden, as one wall would open to Célimène’s extensive collection of wigs and dresses while another would turn to reveal large mirrors. Other walls opened to even more closet space, hiding away even more clothing and shoes. Enclosing the acting space was a roof that reflected and refracted light, which set this room, this world, apart from the rest of 1990s Paris. Cummings describes the set as “an ornately decorated multi-tiered birthday cake... and atop that cake a windowless penthouse lined with hidden treasures and creature comforts.”³⁷

With such a focus placed on the way everything looked on stage, it is no surprise that Cummings did not find himself drawn into the conflict of the play. While he enjoyed the spectacle, he also admits “it is hard to imagine anything of consequence happening here.”³⁸

³⁶ Cummings 40.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid 41.

In a production where so many visual stimuli repeatedly draw attention away from the text, this perspective is understandable. C lim ne doesn't really have much to lose in this version of the play. When she says no to Alceste's offer, the stakes aren't high enough for audiences to connect emotionally with the choice she makes. With so much time spent on establishing the world of the play as something lavish and chic, how could the audience be expected to feel sorry for a woman left alone surrounded by so much entertainment? As Cummings points out, at the end, she was "no more or less pathetic than a child with all the toys in the world and nobody to play with."³⁹

Much like the Lewis's production in Baltimore, *The Misanthrope* in Philadelphia by Robinson received general praise from the local theatre critics. This praise, however, was peppered with some criticism as to the efficacy of the confluence of the design and direction by Clifford A. Ridley's review from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. In reading Ridley's remarks about the play, he seems to be saying, "Okay, but why?" From his opening sentence where he describes any update of Moli re as "an exercise in gilding the lily" to his bombshell-lowering "and yet...why isn't it all funnier?", Ridley spends his time highlighting the performances of the actors while questioning the design choices that take focus away from their successes.⁴⁰ He calls the look of the play "trendily decadent" and compares the upholstered walls to "an attractively padded cell."⁴¹ The way Ridley depicts the visual elements of the production compliments the cleverness of the design, but his opinions about

³⁹ Ibid 42.

⁴⁰ Clifford A. Ridley, "The Drama Guild's *Misanthrope* is Up to Date and Decadent," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 16 1992, *ProQuest* (accessed Feb. 18, 2016).

⁴¹ Ibid.

The Misanthrope as a whole indicate something was lacking. He describes the theatrical experience as one where we don't merely wish to see the "playwright's creatures" on stage; rather, we want to be entertained "because of the...recognizable things they do. To become, that is, us."⁴²

The first step in representing "us" on stage must start with the words the actors are speaking, and both Ridley and Nels Nelson from *The Philadelphia Daily News* credit Harrison's translation for making the language of the play easy to understand for a contemporary audience. Ridley actually says Harrison's text is the star of the show. After commenting on the lack of broad humor in this production, he says that "Molière's verbal agility and felicity are doing the work here" and "a staged reading might produce the same effect."⁴³ Nelson's column consists of utter praise, and he spends two full paragraphs on the beauty of Harrison's translation. He hangs the play's success not on the expansive scenic design but on the "buoyancy of his translation" and feels that Harrison's "rhyming sense is at once arresting and delightful."⁴⁴ With a production that seemed to emphasize how an audience would experience the play visually, both theatre critics found Robinson's choice to use the Harrison translation to be revelatory in how the actors communicated and connected to their audiences (or failed to do so at times, as was Ridley's perspective).

An exploration of three different productions of *The Misanthrope* in four different states may not cast the widest net in regards to encompassing every American director's

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Nels Nelson, "Drama Guild Hits with 'Misanthrope'," *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 15 1992, *ProQuest* (accessed Feb. 18, 2016).

perspective, but what it lacks in breadth it makes up for in specificity. Certainly the reactions from two different cities that experienced ostensibly the same production spotlights the successes and failures of how each city's audiences were introduced to the materials of the play in the first place. I find it fascinating that the critical and popular acclaim of the Falls production hinged on how the dramaturgical information was (or was not) disseminated by each theatre. No matter how much work Falls did to perfect his interpretation of the Bartlett translation, and to adhere to the essence of Molière's original script, a director's vision can be compromised without ample communication. The study of Lewis's version of *The Misanthrope* in Baltimore also reveals that just because a director chooses to use a reliable translation, the interpretation of that script can muddy the waters for an audience. No matter how beautiful Wilbur's lines were performed by the company, a shift in focus away from Alceste's solitude and on to Célimène's narcissism changes how the play resonates with its audience, or if it resonates at all. Robinson's adaptation of the play is an example of what happens when a beautiful translation is overshadowed by the designer's vision: an updated text that is desperate to connect to an audience finds itself unable to break through the spectacle of the production. These directors, remarkably successful and prolific in their theatrical careers, breathed life into distinctly original versions of *The Misanthrope* that emanated from what they believed was essential to the story Molière created more than three centuries ago. They presented American versions of a French classic. So maybe their largest contribution to future Molière productions in this country was simply to say, "Who cares if it isn't French?"

CHAPTER 3
KENNETH ALBERS: AN AMERICAN DIRECTOR'S
PERSPECTIVE ON MOLIÈRE

Producing “the classics” has always been an integral part of the mission of the Kansas City Repertory Theatre. Dating back to its inception in 1964, the company’s seasons have always included at least one play that would be deemed foundational to the development of the theatre we know today. Throughout the 1990s (a time during which the company was operating under the name Missouri Repertory Theatre), each season contained titles by prolific playwrights like Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, Tennessee Williams and, of course, Molière. In fact, two of Molière’s plays graced the stage of the Helen F. Spencer Theatre during an eighteen-month span, with a production of *The Imaginary Invalid* in the winter of 1995 and a production of *The Misanthrope* in the fall of 1996. Artistic director George Keathley called upon the same director for both productions, a man who brought with him the experience of having previously directed several of Molière’s plays: Kenneth Albers. From his deep understanding of the original intentions of the French playwright to his ability to successfully communicate those intentions to a contemporary audience, Albers gave the Kansas City theatre community two exceptional versions of these “classics” that spoke both to the clarity of the director’s vision and the importance of the plays themselves.

Upon the discovery of the connection Albers has with Molière and Kansas City theatre history, I quickly reached out to him to see if he would be willing to share his thoughts for this thesis. He graciously accepted and supplied me with copious amounts of his

reflections on directing, Molière, the use of translations, and the theatre in general. These notes, combined with the archival articles and videos of his local productions, form the foundation for this chapter on Albers and his Molière methodology.

Albers's history with professional theatre dates back several decades to his work in La Crosse, Wisconsin, following his graduate work at the University of Minnesota. After receiving his MFA in acting, Albers undertook the duties of running a local community theatre, where he was responsible for directing, designing and producing its season. He discussed this in an interview several years ago with *The Milwaukee Journal*, saying he craved the ability to actually work at his profession. He'd been offered a position with the Guthrie Theatre after graduation, but he chose to run La Crosse Community Theatre in 1969 rather than "carry a spear in Minneapolis."¹ His choice allowed him to direct six shows each season, experiences that greatly impacted his future in the theatre. After a few years with that company, Albers accepted a teaching position at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland where he helped to integrate the theatre department with other disciplines at the school, including the law and behavioral sciences departments. A few years into his tenure at the university, he began to act with the Cleveland Playhouse and performed both duties simultaneously. He was appointed chair of the theatre department in 1978, a position he held for more than half a decade before returning full-time to professional theatre work.²

¹ Damian Jaques, "Rep's Kenneth Albers enjoys change, and it's a good thing," *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 8, 1985, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1499&dat=19850908&id=G2gaAAAIAIAJ&sjid=UCoEAAAIAIAJ&pg=7070,5688522&hl=en> (accessed on March 3, 2016).

² Ibid.

Molière came to Albers early in his theatrical career. In his undergraduate theatre department, he played the role of The Music Master in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*. He admits he was in over his head during that production, but something about Molière stuck with him and “appealed to (his) sensibilities.”³ His next encounter came when he played the title role in *Tartuffe* during his graduate career at the University of Minnesota. Their production used the Richard Wilbur translation, and the rhyming couplets captivated Albers. He remembers being enamored by the use of the word “*tartuffified*” to complete a verse, “I was hooked.”⁴

During his time in La Crosse, Albers used his position as managing director of the company to introduce his audience to Molière, and chose to present *The Would Be Gentleman* in May of 1970. In an article he wrote himself for *The La Crosse Tribune*, Albers invited the town to experience the magic of theatre and declared that “Molière is our theatrical Houdini.”⁵ He briefly summarized the plot and highlighted the acting company and design team before closing his piece with a promise to future audiences. He described the powerful yet taxing genre of farce, one which the theatre had not been accustomed to producing, as “a new direction for the Community Theatre, and the direction has nowhere to go but up.”⁶ Albers was a young director who endeavored to bring to his community a different type of theatrical experience, and he chose the work of Molière to be his emissary.

³ Personal interview.

⁴ Personal interview.

⁵ Kenneth Albers, “LC Theatre Director Says May 8 Will Open Happy Period,” *The La Crosse Tribune*, May 2, 1970, 26, *Newspapers.com* (accessed March 3, 2016).

⁶ *Ibid.*

On May 2, 1970, the front page of *The La Crosse Tribune's* "Weekender Magazine" featured a picture of two of the characters from the production in costume. One was Monsieur Jourdain, the main character of the play, wearing a 17th-century coat decorated with frills, engaged in conversation with another character, dressed far less decorously than Jourdain. The picture teased at the humor and silliness of the piece in the foolish smiles on the faces of each character.⁷ The community was embracing Molière even before the show had opened. A few weeks later, two other interviews were published in the local paper, one with two of the actors and another with the set designer. Both articles praised the production in general terms, but each found time to discuss the impact Albers had on creating the world of the play and what Albers would surely bring to the community in seasons to come.

Patrick and Mary Lynn McDaniel each played a supporting role in *The Would Be Gentleman* and the piece covered their impressions of the importance of the community theatre to the culture of the city. Patrick was excited that the theatre was "offering a wholesome, creative atmosphere in which kids can use their energies constructively." Mary Lynn took a moment to mention the process of working with Albers and what loomed on the horizon. "It's very satisfying to look back and see how the director has molded and shaped a performance," she said. "It's amazing what a good director can get an amateur to do." Both agreed that what Albers was bringing to the table was beneficial to the city as a whole, and Mary Lynn praised Albers for expanding the selection of plays to which the audiences were being exposed so they "will learn to appreciate all types of theatre."⁸

⁷ *The La Crosse Tribune*, May 2, 1970, 13, *Newspapers.com* (accessed March 3, 2016).

⁸ "Married Pair in Top Roles on CT Stage," *The La Crosse Tribune*, May 16, 1970, *Newspapers.com* (accessed March 3, 2016).

Since that theatre did not employ professional designers, Albers utilized the talents of members of the community who wished to be a part of the show. For *The Would Be Gentleman*, local architect Roger D. Roslansky built the set under the watchful eye of Albers. In the newspaper article that detailed how the design complemented the play, Albers talked about how he used the actors to break up the “fearful symmetry” that normally describes a classical French set. Using both the actors’ movements and a specific color palette, the design became “secondary to the play and...more a foil to the action rather than integral to it.” Albers said that the purpose of a stage design and set was to capture the quality of the theatre as “playful – a kind of far-out place,” and he praised the ability of Roslansky’s design to meet those needs.⁹

Over the next several years, Albers honed his talents both in directing and in acting through his work in the educational and professional theatres. During a sabbatical from his teaching duties at Case Western in 1982-83, he performed with the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre and experienced professional work free from the constraints of teaching for the first time since leaving La Crosse. This signaled the end of his teaching career in Cleveland and the beginning of his return to fulltime professional work in his field. A few years later, in 1986, Milwaukee Rep afforded him the opportunity to direct *Tartuffe* while he played the role of Molière in *The Black Cross* by Mikhail Bulgakov in rotating repertory. He points to this project and a later production of *The Miser* he directed as the key moments in his

⁹ “Theatre Set Design Secondary to Play,” *The La Crosse Tribune*, May 9, 1970, *Newspapers.com* (accessed March 3, 2016).

development, when he knew he wanted to direct every play by Molière that “richly deserved to be done.”¹⁰

Nearly a decade later, the Missouri Repertory Theatre welcomed Albers to direct *The Imaginary Invalid*. For the Kansas City production, Albers and artistic director George Keathley agreed to premiere a new translation and commissioned one of Albers’s former colleagues for the task. Managing director for the Milwaukee Rep Sara O’Connor, who previously worked on other new translations of Molière with Albers, joined the production team. Robert Trussell of *The Kansas City Star* interviewed both Albers and O’Connor leading up to the opening of *The Imaginary Invalid* and uncovered great details about the collaborative process required to devise a new translation for the stage. The rehearsal process became a laboratory experiment, not only for how the action of the play unfolds but also for how the language of the play is shaped. Trussell’s piece allowed local readers to look behind the curtain and see how “old meets new,” and to see that Molière really can speak to American audiences if the voice is right.

Initially, translating a foreign text into English must go through a rather boring process: a literal word-swap. As O’Connor explained, “Every bit of the French is there, but it is also very awkward. I call it throwing it into English.”¹¹ The next step involves shifting the sentence structure to comfortably match the way English is spoken. This part of the process may be the trickiest, and it is where O’Connor reminded Trussell of her primary objective: to translate, not to adapt. “It’s a creative process only in so far as I’m trying really

¹⁰ Personal interview.

¹¹ Robert Trussell, “Farce: It’s actually serious stuff – “Imaginary Invalid” cast, crew hard at work on “toughest kind of theatre.”” *The Kansas City Star*, February 25, 1995, *Newsbank* (accessed March 3, 2016).

hard to hear the playwright's voice so I can try to approximate it in our language."¹² Albers distanced himself from the actual work of translating the text ("I do not read French, I do not speak it,"¹³ he told Trussell) but maintained involvement with the second and third drafts. He and O'Connor met one night for several hours to decide on which words sounded best, what was needed and what could be cut.¹⁴

When rehearsals began, the script was still a work-in-progress. O'Connor attended the first few rehearsals and worked with the cast on the evolving language of the play. It must have been an interesting experience for professional actors to work with an ever-modulating "classic" text, but O'Connor used the time to shape the first act of the play and was able to finish the play from back home in Milwaukee. O'Connor likened her process to the way Molière might have originally crafted the script. She told Trussell, "...he had to get it out there because the company finances were often very shaky."¹⁵

The many hours O'Connor and Albers invested in creating the new translation of *The Imaginary Invalid* resulted in "the most inventive, quirky and outrageous comedy"¹⁶ seen in years at the Missouri Rep, according to Trussell. His praise of the production is equally distributed between the performance itself and the text from which it was derived. He mentions the comedic acting prowess of both Argan, the titular hypochondriac, and Toinette,

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Robert Trussell, "In good hands – Missouri Rep's "Imaginary Invalid" is great fun with plenty of laughs and a marvelous cast," *The Kansas City Star*, February 25, 1995, *Newsbank* (accessed March 4, 2016).

the maid who noses her way into the business of everyone in the house. Argan, played by Theodore Swetz, was given “a long leash” which resulted in “extraordinary bits of physical comedy that border on self-indulgence.” Trussell notes that “Swetz exhibits a method to his madness and maintains control throughout.”¹⁷ Toinette, played by Catherine Lynn Davis, performed her role with “idiosyncratic charm and wicked timing” that caused Trussell to “hope that the Rep will bring her back for future productions.”¹⁸ But only with the help of a capable text would any of these performances been possible, and Trussell attributes the production’s success to making the work accessible to a contemporary audience by mirroring the play’s subject matter of scamming physicians with the modern-day guru and self-help charlatans.¹⁹

Albers feels that the key to directing *The Imaginary Invalid*, and most of Molière’s prose plays, is allowing the freedom of farce to infuse the production from the start. He is inspired by Molière’s improvisational genesis, as many of his masterpieces were born out of such devised scenarios. Like Molière, when Albers is in rehearsals, he encourages his company of actors to try new things and to surprise each other. He admits to being blessed with talented actors so such freedom of improvisation never gets too far out of hand. He recalled a moment during *The Imaginary Invalid* that involved Toinette moving unseen offstage before making her entrance, and he asked actress to make it appear that she was hitting things as she was travelling. The actress would hit something loudly (“bang”) then make a vocal noise (“ow”). One day, she made the “ow” first and followed it with the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

“bang” and this caused uproarious laughter in the company. Unfortunately, no one outside the company would ever know why this was funnier than the other way, so it wasn’t able to be used, but such “inspired mistakes” can be found when talented actors are allowed a degree of freedom to experiment. Thankfully, the farcical nature of many of Molière’s comedies welcomes this style of direction. And Albers also notes that even in the world of improvisation’s “inspired mistakes,” sometimes inspired truths appear out of nowhere, thriving on the freedom of comedy.²⁰

Albers returned to Kansas City to direct *The Misanthrope* to open the Missouri Rep’s 1996-1997 season, and although he was again revisiting a familiar source in Molière, this journey would be different from the one he had taken with *The Imaginary Invalid*. The two major differences between these plays are in form and genre. *The Imaginary Invalid* was written in prose to farcically skewer pedantic doctors of the day, while *The Misanthrope* was written in *alexandrines* to mock the manners of high society. The freedom of prose is replaced with the rigidity of poetry and the whimsy of farce is replaced with the refinement of high comedy. Though originally written more than half a decade earlier, *The Misanthrope* is widely considered one of Molière’s most mature pieces.

Albers’s first choice as director, one he made more than a year before the play would be viewed by an audience, was which translation he would use for the production. But considering the way Albers describes his feelings on Molière, this must have been the single easiest part of the process. In an interview prior to the opening of *The Misanthrope*, he recalled that during the conversation with Keathley from the Missouri Rep regarding the initial offer to direct, Keathley asked him which translation he had in mind, to which Albers

²⁰ Personal interview.

remembered saying, “There’s no point in doing it without doing Wilbur, because it’s so literate and so clever and he’s got such a wonderful sense of the word with the character.”²¹ Twenty years later, Albers still feels the same way about Richard Wilbur’s translations. He finds that especially true when he compares versions of Molière’s verse plays translated into prose to the Wilbur version of the same plays. He believes the Wilbur translations hold up better over time and hold truer to the original intentions of Molière.

The next important decision Albers made regarding his version of *The Misanthrope* was how to create the world of the play. Where would his play take place? Albers admitted in the same interview that he immediately knew that his play would be updated to the art deco world of 1920s and 30s. He said he had never been able to read the play without picturing “people in tuxes and long slinky gowns” and “without hearing cocktail glasses clink.”²² He felt it was important to acknowledge that the same behaviors were dominating those decades in the twentieth century just as they were throughout the second half of the seventeenth century.

Albers’s biggest concern after combining the world of this play with the text he had chosen was how these two decisions would coexist. He feared the language might get overshadowed by the opulence of the art deco set or that the design itself might confuse how an audience would hear and process the text. In an effort to avoid these types of confusions, he addressed his concerns with his cast early in the process. He challenged them to find the truth in their lines so deeply that the rhyming couplets would not be a distraction to

²¹ Robert Trussell, “Big Daddy Meets Molière at Rep: Actor-director puts classic comedy “The Misanthrope” in classy setting.” *The Kansas City Star*, September 15, 1996, *Newsbank* (accessed March 4, 2016).

²² *Ibid.*

understanding the meaning of the play. He also told them that some people come to Molière to hear the rhymes and that they should relish the rhymes that are particularly clever. He was surprised to find that the updated setting actually helped the language of the play. He felt that “because we’re not looking at things unfamiliar to us...we are hearing with our eyes a little better than we might normally do.”²³ He found that the world he established would serve the story well.

This production of *The Misanthrope* seemed by all accounts to succeed on every level, from acting to design to conveyance of the play’s message. Albers had picked up where he left off with *The Imaginary Invalid*. Alceste, played by Peter Silbert, was praised for his ability to project both the character’s ego and his sadness. Instead of portrayals that depicted Alceste as emotionless and hard, Silbert presented real conflict on stage. Likewise Célimène, played by Caris Vujcec, offered herself to each of her suitors with a true purpose, taking the necessary time to process how each could benefit her, all the while presenting her most-vulnerable self to Alceste. This depth of character was appropriately balanced by the foppish Oronte, played by Theodore Swetz, and the single-minded Arsinoe, played by Robynn Rodriguez. Albers assembled a truly unified company that took pride in working together to tell the same story.²⁴

After viewing the archival video of the production, it would be easy to see why Albers initially doubted how well the set would blend with the chosen text and the story of the play. It was an expansive display on the Spencer stage. It consisted of three playing

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Robert Trussell, “Rep mixes comedy, sadness; “The Misanthrope” is a fine way to start the company’s 33rd season.” *The Kansas City Star*, September 16, 1996, *Newsbank* (accessed March 4, 2016).

levels, each utilized to perfection. On the lower level, which sat about half a story below the second level (picture a split-level house) and several feet upstage from the audience, the cocktail party was in full swing, though in partial view to the audience. While other versions of the play typically suggest the offstage-revels with sound and lighting effects, scenic designer Victor Becker collaborated with Albers to conceive a set that let the audience actually witness the party throughout the play. In fact, the actors made their entrances not from the wings of the stage but from the party itself. Sometimes they entered from the lavish, winding staircase and other times used a comically-ostentatious elevator that raised and lowered the minute distance that separated the levels. The second level was more of a landing area set at eye-level to the audience that led to two curved staircases on either side of the stage, both leading up to the third level that represented Célimène's bedroom.

Such a spectacle could have easily distracted an audience from what was really happening in Molière's play. Instead, Albers and Becker created a world that reinforced the intentions of the piece. If Célimène always had a party going on, the visual and aural stimulants from the lower level kept that fresh in mind. There was also something to be said about the emotional distance created by specific uses of each acting space. For instance, the second level's acting space was physically closest to the audience, and this was where Albers staged the first encounter between Alceste and Célimène, a scene that establishes the stakes at play for both characters. Had that scene been staged farther away from the audience, its importance would have waned and Alceste might have been viewed as just another suitor to Célimène. Conversely, the third level depicted the most intimate room in the apartment, yet was the furthest from view. Such juxtaposition allowed for audiences to be drawn in

emotionally only so far before stepping back to process the choices Alceste and Célimène had made without being personally invested in their individual struggles.

The positive reviews of *The Misanthrope* suggest that Albers and his team presented a clear depiction of Molière's original intention and framed it in a way that was perfectly accessible to the 1996 audience. "It is, after all, a serious play"²⁵ was how Trussell opened his article for *The Kansas City Star*, and while he admitted that he enjoyed the humor of the piece, he seemed most impressed by the production's ability to bring the seventeenth and twentieth centuries together to present Molière's message in a modern way. He commented that "the final image of the alienated, isolated Alceste is a little sad," and that even though the play was written centuries before, "some things haven't changed at all."²⁶ Albers created a world where both of Alceste's dueling qualities were presented equally. When these qualities were at odds, they fought each other on a level playing field. The contemporary audience was able to relate to an Alceste-like character who longed for honesty and could sympathize with his fight for what his heart truly wanted.

This type of sympathy can only be evoked by a director who understands how to properly tell Molière's stories. Because the humor of this play has more to do with intelligent wordplay than physical exaggeration, Albers found success by infusing his characters with honesty and humanity. Of course it's absurdly funny that Alceste berates the false-flattery in everyone except Célimène, but if we don't believe he experiences any real pain when she rejects him, the play hasn't lived up to its purpose. The scene in which an anxious Oronte presents his sonnet to Alceste is infinitely more enjoyable because Swetz was

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

able to imbue his character with a believable sense of humility and truth. Thankfully for this production, Albers understood how to simultaneously make us laugh and make us think.

In the study guide for *The Misanthrope* published by the Missouri Rep, Albers submitted his perspectives on the world of the play and the central conflict between Alceste and Célimène. His reflections serve as further evidence at the vast amount of thought and reason that went into creating this production. He first separated *The Misanthrope* from other Molière plays in a discussion of genre by pointing to the deeper meanings that lay beneath the skin of farce. With farce in general, the focus on “improbable characters designed solely for the purpose of eliciting laughter” takes center stage, but Albers was interested in both the humor of the play and what it had to teach “about the human condition that is universal and eternal.”²⁷ Albers found this duality in the social environment the play evokes. He noted in his essay that everyone involved in this extravagant lifestyle made the choice to be a part of it. They chose to “forsake...depth for a world which is less demanding,”²⁸ and this resulted in further establishing the humanity of these characters. It would be one thing to ignore that any depth existed, but Albers was intent on having his actors embrace that depth yet “function honestly within a world of banality.”²⁹ This type of characterization was also discussed in greater detail regarding Alceste. As a man whose primary function is to comment on the grotesque world of the play, Alceste is a difficult creation to admire. He relishes the chance to chastise the pain caused by the liars and

²⁷ Kenneth Albers, “Cocktail Party World,” *The Misanthrope* Study Guide, The Missouri Repertory Theatre, 1996.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

deceivers of this world, yet his own guileless admonitions arguably cause even more pain by comparison. Albers viewed Alceste as a tragic hero akin to those in the plays of ancient Greece: he unknowingly brings about his own downfall due to his reckless choices. This downfall is magnified by his relationship with Célimène, and Albers believed the essence of their relationship is yet another sign of the humanity of the piece: sexuality. The text of the play gives no indication that a man so disgusted by societal fakeness could ever be drawn to the vapid Célimène, so the only reasoning Albers could come up with was pure sexual attraction. Albers postulated that Célimène's attraction to Alceste must be based on something far less specific, her "desire to be attractive to all men."³⁰ While engaged in their romantic conversations throughout the play, these two seem to be speaking different languages, so Albers's perspective on their attraction makes sense. Framing the relationship of these two characters in this way must have proven invaluable to Missouri Rep audiences that may have been unfamiliar with *The Misanthrope*. Albers also proved with this essay how important it is to establish the truth of each character before letting them run amok through the world of Molière.

Albers also shared with me his thoughts on the profession of directing and applied those thoughts to his work with Molière for the benefit of my thesis. One of the more interesting comments he shared with me regards his current perspective on creating a world for Molière's plays:

My first lesson in Moliere: leave him in period. I have reached the conclusion that modernizations of period plays more frequently create that which is opaque, rather than that which clarifies. He wrote for his

³⁰ Ibid.

time, not ours, and we must approach classical work with a humility that asks us to understand and not “teach.”³¹

This opinion seems to fly in the face of the 1920s-locale of *The Misanthrope* produced by the Missouri Rep, but what I find fascinating and reassuring is how his comment allows for one’s interpretation to grow and change with one’s experience. He clearly has either witnessed or participated in productions that attempted to modernize Molière unsuccessfully, and his growth as a director rightfully incorporates those lessons. His perspective doesn’t necessarily speak to the physical world of the play but more to the psychological. What I understand from Albers’s opinion is that the essence of Molière must be revered above all; we must let Molière do the teaching for us. Albers believes his duty is to be the “carpenter” as the director of the production. The playwright has already designed the blueprints, so all a director needs to do is follow those plans to their natural conclusion. With many gifted playwrights like Molière, Albers says, “trust that each has provided a brilliant, almost flawless structure, and work from that point.”³²

The prospect of directing a play by Molière might be a challenge many directors choose to avoid. The barriers in language alone provide ample reasons to balk at such an undertaking. Still, some directors have been able to flourish in such an endeavor. Kenneth Albers has established himself as a true emissary of Molière to many theatre communities across the country. In the examples I have briefly highlighted, his dedication to the truest intentions of Molière is evident in his directorial choices, and his appreciation for how the French masterpieces can still speak to contemporary audiences today is illustrated by his passion for presenting these works to as many theatre companies for which he can find the

³¹ Personal interview.

³² Ibid.

time. But even more than a dedication to one particular playwright, Albers demonstrates a strict adherence to his belief that the director's primary function is to speak for the author. His meritorious productions from Molière's canon exemplify his ability to bring to life the voices of all playwrights.

CHAPTER 4
CASE STUDY: *THE LEARNED LADIES*,
DIRECTED BY THEODORE SWETZ

My study of Molière has been a journey that began with an examination of French directors throughout the twentieth century and travelled to America to investigate versions of his plays as interpreted by specific directors in the states. My research thus far has consisted of second- and third-hand perspectives on these subjects, reliable yet undoubtedly distant from their primary sources. My final examination of an American production of Molière offers my own first-hand knowledge on the process undertaken by the director and his company. In the fall of 2015, UMKC Theatre produced *The Learned Ladies* under the direction of Theodore Swetz as a vehicle for its 3rd-year MFA acting students. Remaining roles in the production were filled by other members of the student body, and I was chosen to play the role of Ariste. This chapter provides an insider's view on how Swetz coalesced his company of actors to present an honest and poignant version of Molière's second-to-last masterpiece.

The genesis of this production of *The Learned Ladies* began as the UMKC theatre faculty was finalizing its 2015-2016 season for both its graduate and undergraduate students. When I spoke with Swetz about why this specific play was chosen, he told me that the most important criterion for every graduate production is how that play fits the training. Swetz, chair of the graduate acting program, felt that this particular play by Molière would serve his graduating class of MFA actors perfectly. Additionally, he was excited to explore the

language of the play with his graduating actors. He knew right away that the production would utilize the translation by Richard Wilbur. Having directed other productions of Molière in the past, he is keenly aware of what the Wilbur translation offers his actors and his audiences. Earlier in his time at UMKC, Swetz directed two productions of *Tartuffe*, and utilized two different translations for each production. For the first, he chose the Wilbur translation. For the second, he chose a translation by Ranjit Bolt, published in 2003. Swetz felt that while both told the same story, Wilbur's version really "soared" by comparison. For *The Learned Ladies*, Swetz considered many options and found Wilbur to be the "richest."

Swetz was also intrigued by the rich roles that would give his actors opportunities they had not experienced before. The class of actors for which this play was selected consisted of seven students, four male and three female. As the primary characters in this play consist of three male roles and four female roles, Swetz also found himself able to stretch one actor even further. Michael Thayer was cast to play the spinster aunt, Belize. *The Learned Ladies* came on the heels of another neoclassical French play. *The Liar*, by Pierre Corneille and adapted by David Ives, was performed by the previous year's graduating actors in the spring of 2015. This connection to the classics is a major part of the foundation upon which Swetz has based the MFA acting program at UMKC.

Swetz is a classically-trained actor and director, and places a premium on the benefits of performing classical pieces. His training with Morris Carnovsky and Stella Adler led him to a decade of work performing with the American Players Theatre (APT), a company committed to producing the classics from every corner of the globe. His time with APT afforded him the opportunities to work on Chekhov, Shakespeare, Shaw and Molière, to name a few. His acting and directing careers have included multiple productions of

Molière's plays. *The Learned Ladies* is one play that Swetz had never encountered before on either side of the stage, and he was excited for the chance to join his actors in experiencing this particular piece for the first time.

For our production, the world that was created for our play was as important as the translation chosen to communicate it. Swetz wanted to present the play in a way that would stretch his actors and let them experience a different way of telling a story to an audience. Zoe Still, a graduate student studying scenic and costume design and technology at UMKC, served in both of these capacities for this production, and was instrumental in the creation of the world Swetz and the company inhabited.

Initial scenic designs featured a tennis court-style layout, with audience members sitting on either side of the acting space with the performers in the center, over which hung a lavish chandelier. Swetz and Still agreed early on that this would not be conducive to the necessary entrances and exits the play demanded, so the design morphed into an arena setting. The limitations of the performance space chosen for this production turned out to be a serendipitous opportunity to create a grander design. Since the walls of the space consisted of black cinder blocks and massive noise-cancelling panels, Still insisted on building an entire theatre-within-a-theatre inside the performance space that masked those deficiencies. Her first design called for an acting space nearly five feet wider than the final version, but Swetz wanted to maintain the intimacy of the show and asked for a slightly smaller area. With the shape of the world agreed upon, Still moved on to designing the look of that world.

Still's inspiration for both the scenic and costume elements of the show came from the 18th century. Rather than designing a 17th century salon, which was the play's original setting, Still chose to leap forward in time and draw from imagery surrounding salons and

revivals of the production a hundred years after its initial production. With her 18th-century muse, she was able to create beautiful costumes and ornate wall adornments. Theatre-in-the-round doesn't always leave a designer many opportunities to create pieces for the acting space, since sightlines and traffic patterns have to take priority. Instead, Still created a large salon-like atmosphere for both the actors and the audience to inhabit, with the walls filled with books and delicate accents that surrounded the space. The truest depth of beauty was found in Still's costume design, which featured exquisite 18th-century gowns for each of the leading ladies and formal, 18th-century coats and vests for the leading gentlemen. Each piece was designed by Still and built by the UMKC costume department and added another level of excellence to this production.

The Table Read

I've encountered many different ways a director handles the first rehearsal with the cast and crew. Some directors rush through introductions and design presentations and have all non-essential folks quickly leave the space in an effort to get to the first reading of the script, which tends to be just as abrupt as the introductions were. Other directors welcome the designers to stay and experience the first reading, and ask that the words just "wash over you" as you listen to them being slowly read with little thought or inflection. Neither of these styles describes the experience of the first table read with Swetz as director. Following a general introduction to the production by the director and the presentations by our design team, our company sat around a circle of long tables and began to read the script aloud. Swetz warned us all that this part of the rehearsal process might take longer than any of us expected, and he was right. As we wrapped up our first week of rehearsal, we had finally finished our first complete reading of the script.

During that first week of table work, Swetz ingrained in us his mantra for a proper understanding of the play. It would be repeated over and over throughout the entire rehearsal process, and it is the essence of how Swetz approaches directing. “What makes Molière *Molière*?” This was his rally cry to us as we stumbled our way through our initial interpretations of these characters. Swetz reminded us throughout those first days that as we were building our characters, what we really had to ask of this play was the question: “What are we most at any given time?” Molière gave each of us the framework within which to grow these characters in unique, individual ways. But it must be understood that there is no life for these characters outside of that framework.

The first scenes of the play involve the lovers, Clitandre and Henriette, and Henriette’s older sister Armande. Swetz used these initial moments of rehearsal to teach all of us what he meant by “most at any given time” by highlighting the importance of each of these three characters’ bases. For instance, it is very tempting to read the first interaction between the sisters as an acrimonious war of words, with both women actively engaging in the fight. However, Swetz began by asking the actress playing Henriette, Mariem Diaz, to remember the innocence of the character and to be driven by the love she feels for Clitandre. For Armande, played by Caroline Vuchetich, Swetz asked that she remember the character is a younger version of her mother, a “mini-Philaminte” who bases her opinion in supposed logic and reason. While the first reading of the scene sounded like a contemporary contentious fight between two siblings, the subsequent reading by the actresses highlighted the individuality of the characters. Both Henriette and Armande were truly anchored to what their characters were the “most” and developed depth on top of that foundation. As Daniel Fleming prepared to read the first entrance of Clitandre, Swetz asked the actor to hold on to

the image of a noble hero as he began his lines. Once again, the way Fleming centered his initial interpretation on this specificity of character led to an inspired first reading of the scene. This approach enlightened the company to what the rest of our rehearsal process would entail.

I was surprised at how much work I personally accomplished during that week of table work, and I can unequivocally say that I have never before taken so many notes as I did during our “first read” of the script. I found the whole experience intellectually stimulating. Swetz wants his actors to know the “why” behind their characters, not simply to say the lines and run the blocking. Every word we spoke was important, and to that end, we spent those first days agonizing over how each word was pronounced and how it fit within the world of the play. When we reached my character’s first appearance in act two, Swetz let me have a go at it before stopping to ask me some questions and provide some insight. He suggested I picture Ariste as “the voice of reason” of the play (a subtitle he, in fact, added to the character’s name in the program). Using this as the base of my interpretation that first day, I continued through the rest of the scene, which included interactions with Chrysale, master of the house and brother to Ariste, and Belize, sister to both men. Swetz allowed the three of us to work through this scene without much interruption, only pausing to remind each of us of our characters’ essences when it sounded as if we had forgotten them. We bounced through the scene as a group of actors who were slowly realizing what it meant to be siblings on stage. What I found most exciting about that first day was how Swetz remained focused on his mantra: “What makes Molière *Molière*?”

This is also a question Swetz modifies for his other directing projects. What makes Shakespeare *Shakespeare*? What makes Chekhov *Chekhov*? His time spent with APT taught

him an absolute appreciation for the playwright. The ability to find the voice of the author and bring that perspective to light is paramount. With Molière, essential to understanding his plays is understanding his journey as an actor and playwright. If you don't acknowledge the failures Molière overcame to successfully establish his own company in the provinces of France before returning to Paris, if you aren't aware of where and for whom Molière's barbs were directed when he first created his masterpieces, you'll never fully understand what his plays are capable of saying to an audience today. Swetz told me that one thing he isn't interested in is "putting a personal stamp" on a show. After all, where would that production stop being the play created by the playwright and start being a false interpretation? He stressed this to all of us during that first week. *The Learned Ladies*, Swetz believes, is an evisceration of pedantry, and therefore the play's primary goal is to provide an exposé of those who worship that lifestyle. Swetz reminded us that when this play was first performed, Molière was "safe" in the eyes of Louis XIV, so his attack on false intellectualism could be pointed and vicious, razor-sharp and deadly; he was protected by the throne. It was our duty to not hold back in the representation of Molière's world.

As the week progressed, Swetz took more time with each actor in certain scenes. He spent a great deal of time working with me on the final scene of act two, and this was where I found myself furiously writing notes in the margins of my script while simultaneously trying to process everything he was tossing my way. For this scene, Swetz felt it imperative Ariste come across as the savior of the family, "their only hope." As we worked through two of the longer speeches in the scene, Swetz asked me to try something different. He wanted me to attempt a French accent for the remainder of the reading. He felt it would free me to allow more of my "self" into the character. It had a remarkable effect. Suddenly the stiffness I had

been struggling with melted away and the iambic pentameter flowed with more honesty. This part of the play is important in how the action pivots towards the differing plans the parents have for their daughter, and Swetz wanted to make sure that the lines came out freely and without any affectation. His suggestions helped me to speak more clearly and while the French dialect was quickly dismissed, its effects resonated with me for the rest of the rehearsal process. When we finally wrapped up our table work, each of us braced ourselves for the next step in our journey: blocking. But we all were heading into this next phase with far more preparation than we ever expected to have.

Voice and Movement

Almost as important as an understanding of the language of the play is how that language is presented to the audience. Swetz emphasized this importance on the first day of our table work when he introduced Scott Stackhouse and Jennifer Martin as the vocal coach and movement coordinator, respectively, for our production. Stackhouse is the assistant professor of voice and acting for graduate students and Martin is professor emerita for UMKC in movement. Both brought to the production decades of expertise in their areas of professional study, which further strengthened the foundation upon which we would build our show.

Stackhouse began working with us throughout the first week of table work. He stressed how necessary it was to “get it right” during the first week so we weren’t having to break ourselves of bad habits later on in the process. He coached each of us that week on using the proper support as we were speaking our lines from a seated position, again reinforcing the need to generate good habits in vocal projection. In one specific coaching moment, he took a section of one of Clitandre’s speeches and worked with Fleming on how

to communicate the intention of the line through differences of line-delivery. Stackhouse had Fleming paraphrase the speech and read the text a second time aloud, and instead of a choppy interpretation, what developed was a focused, driven thought. Fleming also carried enough breath in this reading to fully support that thought, and he was able to do so by not wasting energy earlier in the speech.

Another way Stackhouse impacted our development was in the search for what he and Swetz called “reversals.” In *The Learned Ladies*, several characters begin long speeches by listing off one side of an argument or perspective and pivot to the opposing side with a “yet” or “but.” In another example from Clitandre’s first exchange with the two sisters, Clitandre starts by praising Armande but pivots away with a “yet” before launching into why he has chosen Henriette. Stackhouse worked with us on how best to build up to those reversals and to hang on to them for a second or two just before making the pivot. We took turns demonstrating the differences between rushing through them and acknowledging them for a moment. It had a drastic effect, almost comical at times, on how the scene progressed. These moments of discovery during that first week were sublime.

Swetz also utilized Stackhouse in crafting specific voices for a few of the characters in the play. The most noticeable vocal work was seen in Thayer’s portrayal of Belize. Naturally, any time a role is cast across traditional genders, there is a fine line to walk between using too much of the actor’s natural voice or not enough of it. For our Belize, “her” voice had many, many variations as we rehearsed the piece. Thayer had to find the balance between his normal, masculine-sounding voice and a broad, near-caricature voice. Thayer was always challenged by Swetz and Stackhouse to try something new every couple of days. Above all, when Stackhouse was coaching Thayer through these choices, he told the

actor to continually bring himself into the voice to help it “land” with authenticity. Likewise did Swetz use similar terminology with his notes to Thayer. Swetz wanted Belize to be honest more than anything else, and when he was coaching the development of the character voice, he would return to the mantra of our show but modify it by asking “What makes Belize *Belize*?” He felt that if there wasn’t enough of “Thayer” in the portrayal, there could never be true believability.

Stackhouse also worked with Maya Jackson, who played Philaminte, and Vuchetich on developing how the mother and daughter/protégé would sound in *The Learned Ladies*. Central to this work was finding where these voices would fall in each actor’s register. Both characters are symbols of the pedantry-worshippers upon whom Molière was focusing his attacks, so these women had to be exemplars of proper diction and manners. Any voice too high would come across as shrill and aurally offensive, and any voice too low might not be understood at all. The choice was made, therefore, for Jackson and Vuchetich to speak from their lowest natural registers. Both actors worked with Stackhouse on diaphragm-engaging exercises designed to strengthen each actor’s core. Stackhouse also worked with each of them to ensure they didn’t “press” their voices too low, which resulted in a gravelly, rumbling sound. Jackson and Vuchetich added to their warmup routines a series of vocal exercises crafted by Stackhouse aimed at sustaining the low timbre of their natural voices while staying grounded in their lowest-comfortable registers.

Stackhouse’s overall focus for the cast was to ensure we all were properly filling the performance space, and from the very first design presentation, we all knew how taxing that would be. Within the black box space chosen for our production, Still conceived her design in the round, requiring the construction of both an acting space and seating for the audience.

The result was a visually-stunning yet acoustically-challenging environment that was ever-changing until the final dress rehearsal. And that is only referring to the final performance space. There were two other rehearsal spaces that varied in acoustical atmosphere. This kept Swetz and Stackhouse on their toes. The first rehearsal space was a multi-story building with cavernous acoustics. It took a lot of vocal effort to be heard by our partners on stage, let alone to fill the space entirely. After relocating to our second rehearsal space, we encountered familiar acoustics and our focuses shifted away from the vocal demands of the space towards various other opportunities. Once we were in our performance space, those acoustics shifted with every step of set construction. Tall, wooden walls bounced sound around like pinballs, as did the plastic chairs for the audience. Large black curtains were hung to help to absorb some of the reverberating sound, and once those chairs were filled with people, the room finally felt “live” again.

Stackhouse worked to perfect individual character voices as well as how each of us was filling the space. With every scenic addition, we were coached on how our vocal output needed to change. Stackhouse took a few moments with me on how my projection was overpowering the room at times. He suggested I target my partner more within each scene in an effort to pull back some of the volume. This immediately helped me to rein in my sound output, which in turn gave me much more energy, since I wasn't wasting it any longer on vocal projection.

As Stackhouse worked to properly fill the space audibly, Martin trained us to move about the space as citizens of seventeenth-century France. Swetz actually took a few moments during the table read to remind us of the rigorous physical work Martin had in store for us, as he again stressed the importance of uniting the body with the spoken word. In

those first days on our feet, Martin worked with us on the basics of period movement: bows, curtsies, carriage of the arms, the use of props, sitting, standing and walking through the seventeenth-century world. She took us through exercises on how to greet each other and which types of physical contact were appropriate and which were not.

Martin's general goal for the men was to improve our posture and to have us carry ourselves in a more dignified manner. We were each provided with our costume's shoes to grow accustomed to moving in the foreign footwear. Additionally, we were all encouraged to bring suitcoats or sports jackets to rehearsal to see how formal attire affected our movements. The biggest movement challenge for the women in the cast was found in the production's use of corsets. The costume department had been working on original pieces for most of the previous summer, so thankfully Still had corsets and petticoats ready to go as soon as we were into the blocking portion of the process. As soon as each woman was laced into her corset, it became apparent how important it would be to breathe properly while in costume. Swetz mandated that each of these pieces be worn by both the men and women throughout rehearsal, further stressing the benefits of training our bodies to move within the confines of the world of the play.

Martin also created a movement score to help the company infuse their characters with specific movements from the period. We began every movement rehearsal with this score, and after a few times through the sequence, we all had it memorized. The score began with a step into character, as each of us took a brief moment to acknowledge the space we were inhabiting. This was followed by arm movements, character walks and different types of bows. The next phase of the score involved approaching a partner and standing *tête-à-tête*, a shoulder-to-shoulder pose with each partner facing opposite directions. This might

have been the most beneficial part of the score precisely because of the world created for our production. Performing in the round requires deft blocking; the movement cannot seem forced, but at the same it must also be fluid enough to allow all audience members to experience the play as equally as possible. This is a tall order, to be sure, which made our *tête-à-tête* so important. It taught all of us how to maneuver our bodies naturally to include multiple vantage points. At several moments in the final blocking, having such movements included added to the production's sense of "period-realism." The score then progressed through a sitting exercise and two period "stances" before culminating with a section of time devoted to personal character development involving period props. The entire movement score lasted less than five minutes, but it had a vital impact on the outcome of our performances.

I have worked with movement directors in the past, but I have never before experienced the depth Martin brought to our production, the educational environment of our play notwithstanding. Martin was involved in our process throughout, and was always very specific in delivering her observations to us on an individual basis. I recall many times, just before being released for a break, when Martin approached me to give me one sentence of feedback that resonated profoundly. She would say "be sure to straighten your back" or "careful with pointing with one finger" or "nice work on that final exit" and I knew immediately how to modify my performance. She also worked feverishly with those characters whose behavior and movement utilized props from the period. In one scene between Josh Gilman's Trissotin and Fleming's Clitandre, the two fought over a gentleman's cane and hours were invested by Martin and the actors to make sure the piece was handled appropriately and believably.

Shaping the Play

Swetz chose *The Learned Ladies* as a challenge for his graduating actors and decided to add to that challenge the opportunity to perform in the round. The design by Still was his palette and the training provided by Stackhouse and Martin furnished each of us with the arsenal necessary to successfully navigate the journey on which Swetz was leading all of us. In those first days on our feet, Swetz constantly reminded us of the essentials we all needed to bring with us on the journey. We had to have a general understanding of what Molière had gone through to create this play, and we also had to give in to the realities of our characters. He reminded us that Molière had been jailed earlier in his career and that *Tartuffe* caused such a scandal that its first two versions were banned. *The Learned Ladies* came at a time in his life when he wasn't in the best of physical health, yet he poured his strength into creating this exposé on the manners of the salon ladies and the pedants they worshiped. If we were to do the play justice, Swetz insisted we embrace the rituals our characters followed.

Swetz added a few moments to our production that helped to reinforce these behaviors. The first was the opening of the play, which included a procession into the salon by Philaminte, Belize, Armande and Henriette. Swetz carefully crafted this entrance to highlight the worship of a statue of Vaugelas, the Frenchman of letters with a mastery of language. But this entrance also served to offset Henriette from the other three women, as she only pretends to esteem this figure. This prepared the audience perfectly for the first spoken lines of the play by the two sisters who have already shown their stripes in the opening processional. Swetz also choreographed a “dumb show” between my character and Fleming's that pantomimed a brief exchange that showed Ariste ostensibly reassuring

Clitandre that all would be okay for the young lovers' plight, which established Ariste as the play's "man of reason" from his first entrance.

Swetz also gave many characters "grace notes" to enhance one moment or another throughout the play. These grace notes consisted of one-word additions or a series of repeated words to heighten the dynamics in certain scenes. Swetz added a few grace notes that helped to define my interpretation and performance of Ariste. Following the dumb show, he added the phrase "now's my chance!" for Ariste to speak at the moment of Chrysale's first entrance. Later in the play, just before exiting to put Ariste's plan into action, Swetz blocked a dramatic exit for Chrysale, and when Ariste turned to look for his absent brother, Swetz added the line "Where the hell did he go?" for Ariste to mutter as he exited in pursuit. The most beneficial addition he gave to my character came during an exchange between Ariste and Chrysale in the second act. Swetz asked that I insert the phrase "Don't you cry!" into my long speech concerning Chrysale's milquetoast tendencies. The addition was a revelation. It "fueled" my monologue and kept me focused on the action of the speech in a way I hadn't experienced before.

Jackson had a memorable grace note added to her scene with Trissotin in act three, as did Fleming and Gilman during their war of words in the fourth act. These weren't added to inflate the laughter or to cover for something the script was lacking. Rather, Swetz wanted these to help both the actor and the audience fully embrace the story we were telling. When we discussed the production a few months later, Swetz talked about these grace notes. He was happy with how well they came across in performance because they were simple enhancements to our performances. He felt that if the grace notes had received the biggest laughs, it would have been a sign we weren't effectively presenting Molière's play and the

grace notes would have had to be removed. Indeed, everything Swetz added to the play was a calculated decision based on what would underscore important moments of our story.

When it came to the actual blocking of each scene, Swetz faced the challenge of balancing the beautiful period movement designed by Martin with the limitations of a theatre space designed in-the-round. One of the most interesting aspects of the design was also one of his biggest obstacles: how can we make sure everyone can see “most” of the show? This is where the hours devoted to moving in the style of seventeenth-century aristocracy proved invaluable. Swetz integrated the movement score into our characters’ interactions with one another. The *tête-à-tête* became a common pose as it opened up the action to both sides of the audience. His work became, at times, more “choreographer” than director, as we moved around the space in silence with the precision of a dance company: every step we took was purposeful and no motions or gestures could be wasted. Constant movement was often necessary because the longer any one of us stood in one place, the longer we were blocking the view of the guests unlucky enough to be sitting behind us. Our studies with Martin enabled all of us to make these countering moves onstage appear effortless and natural, and Swetz made certain we did so only as the text and our story demanded. Some scenes required nearly every character on stage, so he had to creatively make sure everyone who needed to be seen could be seen. In the play’s final scene, when the notary is called upon to sign the marriage document in the presence of the whole family, the company moved around the space like prizefighters in a boxing ring, each member retreating to separate corners of the room as the focus shifted nimbly from one character to the next. Swetz even went so far as to push a few characters off stage, having only their heads poke in doorways to witness the action.

Since *The Learned Ladies* is a play that skewers pedantry and the seekers of false-intellectualism, Swetz used many of the play's longer speeches to be "teaching moments." The arrangement of the arena setting consisted of one wide entrance on the east side, one narrow entrance on the south side, and two narrow entrances on the west side. The wide entrance was the perfect position to place every "teaching moment" and this convention was carried through the play. Every time one of these moments occurred, the other characters seated themselves on the chaise in the center of the room and listened intently while the lesson was delivered from the "teaching spot." Sightlines became irrelevant during these moments as every audience member had an unobstructed view of the lesson, and the oddity of having actors seated for an extended period of time was perfectly acceptable given the established convention.

Swetz cleverly used these teaching moments to educate both the audience and the company. He hand-picked which speeches were the most important to the play's message and, in doing so, taught us more about *The Learned Ladies* in the process. Swetz would routinely gather the cast together to discuss one or more of these speeches, whether each of us was in the scenes or not, in order to stress their impact on the production as a whole. Chrysale's address to his wife and sister in act two reads as a weak husband's feeble and humorous attempt at convincing the intractable women to change their ways. I remember sitting in the performance space as Swetz worked with Edwin Brown III on executing this speech, and at one point he stopped to tell us all that this moment in the play is at the "heart of what makes Molière *Molière*." Underneath the jokes and clever puns, behind the brilliant couplets crafted by Wilbur, the voice of Molière was speaking to the world about how foolish these women, and all women like them, truly were. By selecting these special moments from

the play and placing them on a pedestal of sorts, Swetz not only added interest to the production but aided in how the company processed the work we were creating. The result was a more-nuanced performance by everyone, and a better appreciation for what truly makes Molière *Molière*.

As our journey progressed toward opening night, the feedback the company received from Swetz became less specific and more thematic. This may sound oxymoronic; after all, shouldn't the work have imperfections polished out it neared completion? Swetz handled these final days of rehearsal in slightly different manner. He knew we had been working tirelessly throughout the process, especially his graduate actors who had to divide their focuses between our production and their preparations for graduation. This is why his coaching during the process had been so precise, because he knew that as we neared our finish line we would all be able to fall back on the techniques he had instilled within us over the course of several weeks. Instead of nit-picking one or two specific movements or line readings, he generalized his notes and the effect was still invaluable. Following a dress rehearsal, he felt we had given "too earnest" a performance, so rather than pointing out the times when we lost our buoyancy, he asked that we remind ourselves of the journey we had taken to get this far. If we remembered how "light" our performances had been, if we recalled how well we had kept our movements and deliveries from just a day earlier, the production would be back on track. He reminded us of the purpose of the play, the "exposé" Molière intended. He also reminded us to again ask ourselves the question from earlier in the process: Who is our character "most" throughout this play? His confidence in our abilities to summon those techniques put all of us at ease. A different approach would have stressed the

company out further and the work we had done over the previous six weeks might have been lost.

Undoubtedly, the training Swetz received as an actor gives him immeasurable insight in connecting to a production as a director. Specifically, his talents in acting allow him to communicate with actors to bring out their very best work precisely because he has learned and still speaks their language. In the last days of rehearsal, Swetz shared with all of us his personal routine when performing a show. He called it “loading up” before a performance: spending time with the script, page by page, to re-familiarize himself with the work and the whole production. This incredibly simple task opened up my eyes to something I had missed throughout my years in the theatre. Our duty to any production often begins with a script, and to that script we typically owe our steadfast allegiance. How arrogant had I been in the past to have taken for granted the very foundation upon which our performances were built? At Swetz’s suggestion, I spent time every night with the script, running through each scene to remind myself of the moments we had shaped throughout our process. I also discovered new combinations of words and thoughts, developed different ways of interpreting Molière’s message, and gained a better appreciation of how best to tell a story on stage.

On the night of our opening, Swetz gave each of us a gift to celebrate the journey we all had taken together: a coin from France commemorating Molière. You don’t find these types of coins lying around in change jars on the kitchen counter, so I know Swetz must have planned this out months in advance. He told us he had spent time recently in France, and while he was certainly thinking about directing *The Learned Ladies* while overseas, I doubt it occurred to any of us that he was considering what to give his future cast on opening night. This gift symbolizes how deeply connected Swetz is to his craft and to his company. When

he says he seeks to understand “what makes Molière *Molière*,” he vacations to the playwright’s homeland. This play, this author, lived with him for months leading up to the first day of rehearsal. In those months, Swetz devoted time to devising his plan for breathing truth into the work. But his dedication to and appreciation for his company is also a part of what makes him so effective a director. While enjoying the beauty of France, he took time out of his holiday to select how he would reward his cast for their job well done. His passion for directing might only be rivaled by his devotion to the company he assembles to make his productions possible.

CONCLUSION

When I embarked on the endeavor to discover the essence of how to direct Molière for American audiences, I had no idea how many differing theories and techniques I would discover that adequately answer the question on one level or another. Copeau's interpretations of Molière's work for French and New York audiences supposes that a high level of physicality might be necessary to bring these works to life. Conversely, Mnouchkine's efforts in her production of *Tartuffe* indicates a focus on the world of the play lends to better communication with an audience. In America, the liberties taken with how certain scenes from *The Misanthrope* were staged in the late-twentieth century grew out of an honest interpretation of the script that ultimately told a different story from the one penned by Molière.

The most surprising discovery of this process was how different interpretations of the same play spawned such drastically divergent productions. From the varying productions of *Tartuffe* throughout the twentieth century in France to the multiple imaginations of *The Misanthrope* in 1980s and 1990s in America, one thing is certain: of vital importance is the perspective a director takes on these plays from the beginning. Whether it is an updated, Hollywood-setting for *The Misanthrope* or a totalitarian-inspired world for *Tartuffe*, the question all of these directors must have asked themselves was "What part of this story am I interested in telling the most?" Whether this is the right question to ask remains to be answered, though ultimately an audience will let you know if the proper choices were made.

Perhaps the two most important lessons I learned from this experience came from directors who claim no prior inspiration from the French forefathers of Molière direction.

The first of these lessons is that a director should be a carpenter, not an architect. While interpretations of these two professions may vary, what this means to me is that the play is the most important part of a Molière production. When Albers told me that he always thinks of himself as a carpenter, this immediately reminded me of how Jouvett and Planchon ardently defended their versions of *Tartuffe*. They created the play as they read it, as they interpreted it from the page. They just followed the plans the architect had given them.

The other lesson that I will carry with me throughout my career came from working with and interviewing Swetz. “What makes Molière *Molière*?” is not only a fantastic foundation upon which to build every piece by the French master, it is also a valuable tool for any director in any production. Swetz echoed this philosophy in our discussions and it permeates his work, so I know how valuable it has been for him and his career. Such a connection to the author’s truest intention is certainly a “French” quality, whether knowingly inspired by such directors or not. To have been able to experience a production with Swetz was an invaluable learning experience, and having preserved how he goes about crafting his productions I hope will serve future theatre pioneers in their quests to discover the intricacies of our art form.

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VITA

Collin Vorbeck was born on January 23, 1980, in Kansas City, Missouri, the eldest of six children to David and Lori Vorbeck. He attended Archbishop O'Hara High School and became involved with his first theatre production during the spring semester of his freshman year. Vorbeck was a last-minute addition to the cast of *West Side Story*, which started him on the path that he would fully embrace in college.

Vorbeck attended Saint Mary College and received an undergraduate degree in theatre. He participated in all four mainstage productions each year during his undergraduate career, with experiences ranging from scenic design (*The Last Night of Ballyhoo*), costume design (*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Abridged*), directing (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*) and numerous acting roles (Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Tevye in *The Fiddler on the Roof* among his favorites). Saint Mary provided Vorbeck with a strong foundation in the theatre, both in its performative aspects and its history. In May 2002, he received a B.A. in Theatre with an acting concentration.

Vorbeck attended the University of Arkansas–Fayetteville for one year of graduate study in acting before returning to Kansas City to pursue professional work. He performed with the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival in the summers of 2004 and 2005, under the direction of Sidonie Garrett (*Julius Caesar* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, respectively). Vorbeck left professional theatre in 2006 to pursue a career in restaurant management, but a role in a community theatre production of *The Music Man* (playing Harold Hill) during the summer of 2013 reignited his passions and he returned to the theatre, this time on the academic side.

Vorbeck received admission to UMKC's Master of Arts program in the fall of 2014, and during his two-year journey participated in a wide variety of university productions and programs. In his first year, he wrote for the *Theatre Training News 2015* and taught two semesters of an introductory theatre course for non-majors. That spring, Vorbeck also directed a production of *The Glass Menagerie* at his alma mater, University of Saint Mary (formerly Saint Mary College). In his second year, in addition to teaching, Vorbeck performed in *The Learned Ladies* while he simultaneously served as dramaturg for *Wittenberg* and as editor of the *Theatre Training News 2016*. During the spring of 2016, he directed UMKC undergraduate students in four original plays, written by current UMKC graduate and undergraduate students. The production, entitled *The Playwright Project*, afforded him the opportunity to work directly with new playwrights and young actors on crafting and developing new dramas never-before seen by an audience. Following graduation, Vorbeck plans to pursue a PhD in Theatre in order to teach and direct at the university and professional level.