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# Dying to be Sick

*Le Malade imaginaire* by Molière

a new translation by

Adrienne Clarkson and John Van Burek

an NAC English Theatre / Pleiades Theatre (Toronto) coproduction

## Study Guide

**THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE  
PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENT AUDIENCES  
2007-2008 SEASON**

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This Study Guide was written and researched by **Jim McNabb** for the National Arts Centre, English Theatre, September 2007. It may be used solely for educational purposes.

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## About This Guide

**This Study Guide contains a large amount of varied resource material to accommodate different classes and levels. Teachers need not use all the material found here but should choose appropriate activities from pages 20 – 22, then select the corresponding backup material.** This Study Guide is formatted in easy-to-copy single pages ready to distribute to classes. Topics may be used separately or in any combination that works for your situation. The costume design drawings included herein are intended for display in the classroom but may also be copied for distribution.

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## **About the Play** (page 1 of 2) (see Activities #1 and #9)

### **CHARACTERS:**

**Argan:** A selfish hypochondriac and a fool, with two daughters. He is obsessed with his own imagined illnesses to the point where he seems to think of nothing else, to the consternation of his brother and his daughter Angélique. He is extremely gullible, allowing his doctors to overcharge him, his maid to trick and confuse him and his wife to nearly manipulate him out of his fortune. He is a ridiculous father, sometimes sappy, sometimes tyrannical, almost a stock character perhaps patterned after the Commedia character Pantalone.

**Béline:** Argan's second wife. She is a manipulative woman interested only in Argan's wealth, although she showers him with affection and pretends to indulge him in his imaginary illnesses.

**Angélique:** Argan's elder daughter. She is a kind young woman whose main goal in the play is to marry for love. She hopes to marry Cléante who showed her great kindness when she was in danger. She always acts with deference to her father to whom she consistently shows genuine affection, although she protests against his plan for a marriage with Thomas. She does not get along with her stepmother.

**Louison:** Angélique's younger sister. She is loyal and loving to her sister but fears her father's wrath.

**Béralde:** Argan's brother. He is deeply concerned about his brother's foolishness and cares that his niece marries for love. One of Béralde's most passionate beliefs is that the medical profession is a sham and he voices many of Molière's critical views on quacks and charlatans. Unable to topple Argan's high estimation of the medical profession he eventually helps create the joke of Argan's fake graduation from medical school.

**Cléante:** Angélique's lover. He is a devoted, handsome, young gallant, gentlemanly and chivalrous, even willing to go to medical school if it will please Argan.

**Monsieur Diafoirus:** Brother-in-law to Argan's doctor. He, too, is a well-off but incompetent doctor, unable to see the limitations of his son whom he hopes will marry Angélique. His name is perhaps a play on the French word for diarrhea.

**Thomas Diafoirus:** Argan's choice for Angélique's husband. He is an incompetent, dim-witted, boring doctor-in-training. Unable to think for himself, he has memorized prepared speeches.

**Monsieur Purgon:** Argan's chief doctor. He is a prime example of the incompetent and greedy doctors whom Molière mocks. His name means "cleanse" or "purge" in Latin, a joke relating to his favourite remedy of enemas to clear Argan's bowels.

**Monsieur Fleurant:** An apothecary (which is an old word for pharmacist). He is Monsieur Purgon's assistant.

**Monsieur de Bonnefoy:** A notary. Although he advises Argan on laws regarding inheritance, he is actually scheming to transfer Argan's funds completely to Béline. Ironically, his name means "good faith" in French.

**Toinette:** The clever family servant girl. She is the chief schemer in the plot to arrange Angélique and Cléante's marriage. She is cunning and resourceful, full of tricks and disguises. She is the most astute of the characters, in part because she is not a member of the silly bourgeoisie Molière satirizes, and in part because her snide comments and observations provide witty comedy. She is also quite selfless and completely devoted to Angélique.

## **About the Play** (page 2 of 2)

**SETTING:** Paris; 1670s; the bed/sitting room of the well-off Argan.

**PLOT SYNOPSIS:** While tallying up his medical expenses, Argan demands attention from his servant Toinette. He has decided to discuss something with his daughter, Angélique. When he retreats to the bathroom, in response to his latest enema, Angélique confides in Toinette that she has fallen in love with a young man named Cléante. On his return Argan announces that he is ready to consent to Angélique's marriage. She is overjoyed until she realizes that he has picked out a different young man, Thomas – a medical student and son of a doctor. Toinette argues that Angélique should be allowed to marry for love, but Argan wants a doctor in the house to look after him. Béline, Argan's new wife, consoles him and Argan threatens to disinherit Angélique and leave to the former all his money. Béline enthusiastically endorses this plan, then adds that Angélique should be sent to a convent. A notary is engaged to change the will and a desperate Angélique sends for Cléante in case Argan carries out his threat to marry her off to Thomas. Cléante, disguised as a music tutor, arrives, followed shortly after by Thomas and his father. Thomas reveals himself as a pompous twit but Argan is highly impressed. Angélique is encouraged to display her musical talents accompanied by Cléante and the pair improvise a love duet that parallels their own situation. They are sent off to practice music whereupon Thomas and his father offer Argan some ridiculous medical advice and leave. Béline then informs Argan that she caught Angélique and Cléante kissing, a fact that Angélique's younger sister is forced to confirm. Argan's brother Béralde arrives to cheer him up with a suggestion for Angélique's marriage and brings along a troupe of dancers for entertainment. Béralde learns of Argan's plan for Angélique from Toinette and the two plot to disrupt it. While Béralde accuses Argan of hypochondria and rants about the quackery of doctors, the apothecary and Monsieur Purgon arrive to give Argan his latest enema. They are dismissed and Toinette enters disguised as an old doctor who convinces Argan that his previous doctors were all fools. Béralde then tells Argan that Béline is only trying to get his money and that to see this for himself he need only pretend to be dead. Upon seeing his "corpse" Béline is joyful that the money is hers and she's finished with the ridiculous old man. Argan banishes her in a rage. Béralde then suggests that Argan should try the same trick on Angélique, which brings very different results. Her grief is real and when she vows to enter a convent Argan arises and blesses the union of Angélique and Cléante, provided that Cléante enters the medical profession. Béralde saves the day again by arranging a medical school graduation ceremony for Argan himself, complete with enough Latin mumbo-jumbo to satisfy Argan. Merriment ensues.

### **THEMES:**

- pointed satire of the entire medical profession including the pompous behaviour, incompetence and greed of doctors
- love and marriage
- ridicule of the shallowness and incompetence of the bourgeoisie class

### **STYLE:**

- combination of comedy-ballet (song and dance included), comedy of manners (stock characters used for satirical effect) and farce (buffoonery and physical comedy).

**Who Helped Put the Production Together?** (page 1 of 2) (see Activity #10)

**The Creative Team**

Playwright: MOLIÈRE  
Translated by: Adrienne CLARKSON and John VAN BUREK  
Directed by: Brendan HEALY  
Set Design by: Teresa PRZYBYLSKI  
Costume Design by: Dana OSBORNE  
Lighting Design by: Glenn DAVIDSON  
Original Music by: Boyd McDONALD  
Choreography by: Claudia MOORE  
Sound Design by: Lyon SMITH  
Stage Manager: Tanya GREVE  
Apprentice Stage Manager: Tina GORALSKI

**Cast**

Cléante: Karl ANG  
Angélique: Stéphanie BROSCHART  
Béralde / Monsieur de Bonnefoy: Victor ERTMANIS  
Argan: Hardee T. LINEHAM  
Monsieur Diafoirus / Monsieur Fleurant: Dov MICKELSON  
Béline: Nikki PASCETTA  
Thomas Diafoirus / Monsieur Purgon: Alex POCH-GOLDIN  
Toinette: Michelle POLAK  
Louison: Henrietta ROI

## **Who Helped Put the Production Together?** (page 2 of 2)

### **Adrienne Clarkson - Translator**



Born in Hong Kong in 1939, Madame Clarkson came to Canada as a refugee with her family, during the war in 1942. She received her early education in the Ottawa public school system and later obtained an Honours B.A. and an M.A. in English Literature from the University of Toronto. She also did post-graduate work at the Sorbonne in France and became fluently bilingual.

A leading figure in Canada's cultural life, Madame Clarkson has had a rich and distinguished career in broadcasting, journalism, the arts and the public service. During her career Madame Clarkson has received numerous prestigious awards both in Canada and abroad in recognition for her outstanding contribution in professional and charitable endeavours. She was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1992, and upon her appointment as Governor General in 1999, became Chancellor and Principal Companion of the Order of Canada. Madame Clarkson was the 26<sup>th</sup> Governor General of Canada from October 7, 1999 to September 27, 2005.

### **John Van Burek - Translator**



JOHN VAN BUREK has been active for years in Canada's English and French cultural scenes. He founded the Théâtre Français de Toronto, where he was artistic director for 20 years, and later Pleiades Theatre. He has staged more than 90 plays from various repertoires, in Canada, Great Britain and France. He has taught at the Ryerson Theatre School, at the National Theatre School and at York University. He has skillfully translated several Tremblay, Beaumarchais, Marivaux and Goldoni works into English, and Morris Panych and Dave Carley plays into French. John Van Burek has won many prizes, including the Toronto Drama Bench Award for his exceptional contribution to Canadian theatre.

**PLEIADES THEATRE** (Toronto) produces plays from the Canadian and international repertoires. With excellence the hallmark of its work, its mandate is to celebrate different cultures in the world through plays that originate in languages other than English. It presents these in modern, Canadian translations and innovative productions. New or classical, the plays are selected for their entertainment value and because they introduce writers and styles not widely known to Toronto audiences. Pleiades Theatre maintains a special tie to the French language and its literature, which broadens its access to material from other cultures in the world. Also, through training, workshops and outreach, Pleiades Theatre makes a concerted effort to ensure that the creative process of theatre is accessible to young people of various cultural backgrounds. It does this through a bilingual educational program, "Speak the Speech!", work which is integral to its operation and philosophy. <http://www.pleiadestheatre.org/>.

## **A Word from the Translators** (see Activity #5)

First and foremost, we have wanted to bring the ferocious vitality of Molière's 17<sup>th</sup> century French text to our new, Canadian translation. His use of language is remarkable for being graceful, yet robust and filled with action. You can almost apply a physical activity to every line. The action in Shakespeare's language is often interior: "*To be, or not to be, / That is the question.*" is a man pondering the biggest question in life. In Molière, the action is direct and out front: "*Mon Dieu! Gently. You launch straight into invective. Can we not discuss this reasonably, between us, without flying off the handle?*" Molière was an unrivalled master in attaining this constant flow of action, which is found throughout his plays. This is not surprising because Molière was also a brilliant comic actor and he wrote most of his plays with himself as the central character. (Shakespeare was also an actor but a much lesser one, appearing occasionally and in fairly small roles in his plays.) So, this relentless energy from one crazy moment to the next, and which makes the plays so funny, is what we have tried to capture in our translation.

Another thing that makes this version of the play unique is the fact that we have retained elements of the original French. They blend right in with the English. It is only in Canada that we can do something like this because French is not nearly as foreign to our ears as it might be to say, an American or an Australian. Many English Canadians (indeed a growing number) actually speak French or are learning it. At the very least, we are used to hearing it. This means that in the translation, we can keep some of the true sound and feel of the original. Language is music that resonates from the souls of the people who speak it and character is the instrument that plays it. In doing our translation of *Le Malade imaginaire* into *Dying to be Sick*, we thought that keeping the play connected to its French-language origins would make it more fun for actors and audiences and would take us closer to heart of these characters and their way of being.

Lastly, and this can be an interesting exercise for any student, we have tried to keep the rhythm of a line in our version as close as possible to that of Molière's.

*"Si vous avez le plaisir de quereller, il faut bien que, de mon côté, j'aye le plaisir de pleurer: chacun le sien, ce n'est pas trop. Ha!"*

*"If you can have the pleasure of bawling me out, I can have the pleasure of crying. To each his own, it's only fair. Ah!"*

All of this makes for a delightful challenge while at the same time, it teaches you a great deal about language!

**Adrienne Clarkson and John Van Burek**

## Molière: The Man and His Art (page 1 of 2)

**Molière** was the stage name of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, born in 1622 in Paris into a wealthy bourgeois family, his father selling upholstery to the king's household. He developed a love of theatre at an early age thanks to his maternal grandfather who took him to plays at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. As a child he also enjoyed outdoor theatre at the Pont-Neuf where comedians presented farces while selling patent medicines to the crowds. After graduating from a Jesuit college he joined his father in the interior decoration business where he was able to make important contacts at court. After three years, however, he left to enter law school but soon decided that he was not suited for that career either. His heart lay in theatre.



At the age of 21 he created a theatre company with his lover Madeleine Béjart and several of her siblings called L'illustre Théâtre. Showing more enthusiasm than wisdom, Molière and his troupe soon went bankrupt and he was bailed out of jail by his embarrassed father. It was at this point that he began using the pseudonym Molière to spare his father more shame; actors were not considered the most honourable citizens and were even denied

burial in sacred ground. Prudently, Molière and other members of the former troupe joined a company touring the provinces to learn their acting craft more effectively, staying away from Paris for 14 years. During this time he began writing material for performances influenced initially to a large part by the very popular Italian Commedia dell'arte style of theatre. Although he never left the improvisational Commedia style behind, he did develop a unique style and a genius for mockery that served him well for the rest of his career.

Upon his return to Paris in 1658 he performed at the Louvre (then for rent as a theatre) in one of his early comedies *Le Docteur amoureux* which brought him some attention. Under the patronage of the King's brother, he and his company were invited to perform regularly at an established theatre. There in 1659 he presented the premiere of *Les Précieuses ridicules (The Affected Young Ladies)*, one of his masterpieces. This comedy was the first of Molière's many attempts to make fun of certain mannerisms and affectations then common among the bourgeoisie and nobility in France. In it he also poked fun at the academic desire to create rigid rules for the writing of French theatre: the unity of time and action and styles of verse. With this public criticism of academics Molière earned the first group of many enemies throughout his life as he skewered religious and professional practices in current society. Having gained the favourable attention of King Louis XIV he was invited in 1662 to move into the prestigious Théâtre du Palais-Royal, part of the royal residence itself.

Over the course of the next 13 years, Molière worked hard to make his company the most respected dramatic troupe in Paris. They were eventually awarded the coveted title "Troupe of the King". He directed his own plays and often played the leading role himself. One of his first successes in his new



## Molière: The Man and His Art (page 2 of 2)

theatrical home was *L'École des femmes* (*The School for Wives*) still regarded as one of his masterpieces. That same year he married Armande Béjart, whom he believed to be the much younger sister of his former lover, but who was in fact Madeleine's illegitimate daughter by another lover. Both the controversial nature of the play and his marriage sparked more personal criticism. *Le Tartuffe* (1664) depicting religious hypocrisy created even more outrage resulting in it being banned for several years. Only the intervention of the King enabled it to eventually be performed. In 1666, *Le Misanthrope* whose hero rejects the conventions of society was produced, along with *Le Médecin malgré lui même* (*The Doctor In Spite Himself*) which satirized the official sciences. By 1673, Molière's health was declining. He suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis, possibly contracted in prison as a young man. While appearing in his last play, *Le Malade imaginaire* (*The Imaginary Invalid*, adapted as *Dying to be Sick* in the current production) in the role of Argan, written specifically for himself so he could remain seated throughout the performance, he collapsed in a fit of coughing and died later at home. Priests refused to



visit him to administer last rites and his body was refused burial in holy ground. The King permitted his burial after dark in a separate section of the cemetery, his "secret" funeral being attended by over 800 people. Molière left behind a body of work which not only changed the writing of French classical comedy but also influenced the work of other dramatists the world over.

### Some of Molière's Plays

***L'École des femmes*** (*The School for Wives*) -- Amolphe has raised his ward Agnès to be the perfect wife for himself, keeping her away from all other men. When the Horace, son of a friend of his, arrives, the two young people fall in love much to the concern of the older man. Complications arise when Horace mistakenly reveals his plan for elopement to Amolphe.

***Le Tartuffe*** – When the well-off Orgon welcomes the religious zealot Tartuffe into his household he doesn't realize that the scheming hypocrite has plans to rob him of his wealth, power and daughter. Due to Orgon's gullibility and generosity, Tartuffe very nearly succeeds.

***Le Misanthrope*** – The protagonist Alceste completely rejects his culture's polite social conventions and expresses himself with total sincerity – a quality that makes him extremely unpopular with those around him. The comedy comes from the constant play on words and the very humorous jibes at society and the other pompous characters.

***L'Avare*** (*The Miser*) – This comedy of manners involves a rich money-lender whose feisty children long to escape from his penny-pinching household and marry their respective lovers. The play sends up certain theatrical conventions such as "asides" and ridiculously convenient, contrived endings.

***Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*** (*The Middle-class Gentleman*) -- This comedy satirizes attempts at social climbing, poking fun at the vulgar, pretentious middle-class as well as the snobbish nobility.

## Commentary on *Le Malade imaginaire* / *Dying to be Sick*

(see Activity #1)

*Le Malade imaginaire* was most probably commissioned by Louis XIV for the great royal carnival of 1673. Like all carnival theatre, it is, at heart, a celebration of human silliness, always teetering on the verge of anarchy and absurdity. The play's greatest scene, a musical masque in which Argan is finally initiated as a physician, is a pageant in praise of foolishness. It foreshadows the absurdist comedies of Alfred Jarry and Eugène Ionesco by more than 200 years. By the end of the play, Argan's medical obsession has grown until it is nothing less than a fantasy world.

In keeping with the carnival origin of the play, it is flamboyantly theatrical. One aspect of this is the way it relates imagination, art and performance to reality. It is more than a simple farce; it reaches deep into the lives of the audience – Louis, his courtiers, the bourgeoisie, Molière himself, and also today's observers – and comments on our human folly. A clear hint that the lines between theatre and reality are being blurred is the fact that all of the characters are engaged to varying degrees in performance. Toinette, a servant girl, assumes a role in the household as an equal to the master telling him at one point that she will not allow him to choose a fiancé for his daughter. Later she dons the disguise of an ancient doctor to ridicule Argan's physicians and then gives him even more preposterous medical advice. Angélique and Cléante (disguised as a music teacher) fool Argan by improvising a love duet in order to express their true passions. Béline, the gold-digging second wife, masks her true revulsion for Argan in order to seduce him into making her his sole heir. The notary, ironically named Bonnefoy, plays along duplicitously with Béline's ruse. The various incompetent medics and assistants make a performance of their craft. In fact, medicine, since it has no substance and is an imaginary craft, is shown to be nothing but a performance with an unintelligible script. Béralde, the least dramatic of all the characters, seems to be the voice piece of Molière himself and as such directs the foolish pageant that ends the play.

The one exception to the rule is Argan himself. Incompetent and gullible, Argan is unable to judge the true character of those around him. He is a stock character, much like Homer Simpson, for whom, despite the fact he is an ignorant and dim-witted father figure, we still feel affection. At the end of the play, however, he joins the "actors" when he unwittingly takes on the role of a doctor as a result of a mock graduation ceremony.

Molière's choice of bile as a metaphor emphasizes his strong distaste for the cheap tricks and manipulations of the medical profession, perhaps dating from an early age when he watched his mother die while doctors squabbled about fees and philosophy. To Molière, doctors were petty liars and thieves who survived by taking advantage of the public with elaborate ruses. Their manipulations were offensive and absurd because they failed to appreciate that the human body is a mystery mankind cannot understand. Similarly, Béline's trickery and the notary's shrewdness are offensive because their only object is money.

Finally, Molière's clever joke in the scene between Argan and Béralde creates a confusing problem of perception for the audience by inverting the real world and the theatrical world. In discussing Molière's plays about doctors, Argan and Béralde seem to be in the audience, while the audience naturally appears to be the play. Also, this is one of two scenes most strangely resonant with Molière's actual death, since Argan forecasts that Molière will die from ignoring the benefits of medicine. The other instance is Toinette's appearance as a disguised doctor, in which she attributes all of Argan's illnesses to the lungs, which is the condition from which Molière actually died after his fourth performance in the role of Argan.

## **17<sup>th</sup> Century France: Theatre and the Arts** (page 1 of 2) (see Activity #4)

During the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, a class of wealthy tradesmen, businessmen and professionals who were neither part of the peasantry nor the nobility began to increase in size and power in France. Known as the bourgeoisie, they lived in large towns, especially Paris. Their financial status tended to set them apart from the laboring masses and drew them together as an influential political group. Bourgeois fathers had complete control over their wives and daughters, who had no financial rights under the law, and these fathers tended to marry their daughters into other bourgeois families, which strengthened the ties within the community still further. Members of the established nobility, however, looked down upon these nouveau riche citizens with distaste considering them ignorant and petty, vane and greedy and lacking in morality. Many of Molière's plays contained caricatures and broad satires of bourgeois types, which seemed to please the nobility who were his patrons, as well as the bourgeois theatregoing crowd who seemed to enjoy laughing at themselves. (The church and members of the legal and medical professions, however, failed to see the humour in his barbs.)

The most powerful and privileged persons in 17<sup>th</sup> century France were the nobility, an extremely exclusive group who were the power base of the government and key patrons of the arts. King Louis XIV (also known as The Sun King) who ruled from 1643 to 1715, the longest of any European monarch, was Molière's most important patron. The king not only funded Molière's troupe, he provided them with a performance space. Louis was an incredibly generous spender, tremendously enlarging the hunting lodge at Versailles into an extravagant palace meant to impress the French populace and foreign visitors. His patronage of the arts extended to literature, theatre, visual art, architecture, music, opera and ballet. He even participated in spectacular performances himself. Courtiers vying for his attention lived in opulence at Versailles and took part in an endless series of performances, galas, concerts and spectacles.



*Louis XIV by Hyacinthe Rigaud*

In the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in order to solidify the aristocratic obsession with glory and majesty the Académie française was established to regulate the arts and literature. L'Académie's position was that theatre existed "to please and educate" and therefore advocated that classicism, with its principles inspired by classical Greek and Roman masterpieces such as those of Seneca and Aristotle, be applied to theatrical works. Rules stated that there were only two legitimate forms of theatre: tragedy and comedy and the two should never be mixed. Tragedy could only be written about heroes, nobility and affairs of state (but did not have to have a sad ending); comedy should involve middle and lower classes and deal with love or poking fun at human silliness. In both forms the characters should be upright and honourable so as to uphold good taste and morality. Scripts should be written in five acts and in verse with twelve syllable lines and rhyming couplets. Conflict should be of an intellectual nature rather than physical. Violence, if necessary, should be off stage. Both tragedy and comedy should follow the three unities: unity of time (the action of the play takes place within 24 hours), unity of action (one main plot line with subplots relating to it), and unity of space (action in the same location or house). Credibility was important which eliminated fantasies, miraculous happenings or nonsensical

## 17<sup>th</sup> Century France: Theatre and the Arts (page 2 of 2)

coincidences. Good taste was necessary too, with evil never rewarded and virtue always winning in the end. Plays were often judged solely on how well they followed the rules.



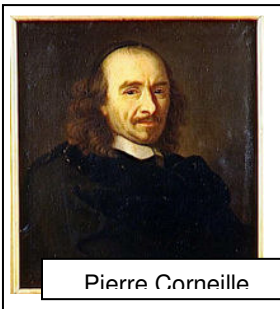
Outside of Paris in the provinces plays could be presented outdoors on temporary stages or in spaces designed for other purposes such as tennis courts, grand halls of mansions or inn-yards. In Paris there were public theatres, theatres in colleges and court theatres. France took its inspiration from Italy in designing proscenium theatres with perspective scenery. Early stages were extremely shallow with little space for scenery, but later grew to accommodate elaborate machines and facilities for scene changes. Theatre performances took place twice a week and encompassed several works: a comic prologue,

a tragedy or tragic-comedy, a farce and finally a song or ballet.

Nobles could sit on the stage at each side and, since there was no way of lowering the lights, audience members were fully aware of each other. Spectators were quite vocal during a performance with a great deal of socializing occurring in the less interesting parts of the performances. The area directly in front of the stage (known as the "parterre") where there were no seats was reserved for men only, and the most elegant gentlemen watched from the galleries. Up until 1630 honest women did not attend theatre but later this practice was relaxed. Unlike England there was no restriction against women performing on the stage, a practice that the English King Charles II, who had been in exile in France since 1640, introduced in London when he was welcomed back to the throne in 1660. However, the church chose to excommunicate actors since it viewed the career of actor (regardless of sex) as morally wrong.



The three most famous French playwrights of the 17<sup>th</sup> century were Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine and Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (Molière). Corneille and Racine were noted for tragedies. Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) was regarded as the founder of French tragedy. He



Pierre Corneille

wrote 30 plays following for the most part the classical rules. His heroes were historical figures such as Oedipus and Attila who suffered in as many extraordinary situations as were compatible with tragedy and the unity of action. Conflict usually ended not with death and destruction but with moral growth and the resolve to do one's duty.

His most famous play was *Le Cid* about the 11<sup>th</sup> century Spanish warrior who learns that he must give up love to a higher sense of purpose. Jean Racine (1639-1699) combined the Greek idea of fate with his belief in human helplessness to produce tragedies showing the struggle of the will against the passions. Racine is best remembered for *Andromaque*. Corneille painted human beings as they ought to be; Racine painted them as they are.



Jean Racine

## Commedia dell'arte Traditions

Commedia dell'arte was a strong influence on the writing and performing style of Molière who knew it intimately from having toured with his troupe in southern France and later sharing a theatre with a Commedia troupe after returning to Paris. The structure of his plays and the makeup of his characters often recall those Commedia roots. Commedia dell'arte was a popular form of improvisational theatre that began in Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and maintained its popularity through to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although it is still performed today. (For example, Odyssey Theatre performs Commedia style plays each summer in Ottawa's Strathcona Park.) The performances were improvised around a repertory of stock conventional situations - adultery, jealousy, old age, love - some of which can be traced to the Roman comedies of Plautus and Terence, which are themselves translations of lost Greek comedies of the Fourth century BCE. The characters included the ancestors of the modern clown, Punch and Judy, mime, the Three Stooges, and even members of *The Simpsons* cast. Characters were identified by costume, masks and gestures and the play scenarios were fleshed out with previously rehearsed lazzis (comic routines or 'schtick'). The classic traditional plot is that the *innamorati* (young lovers) are in love and wish to be married, but one or more elders (Pantalone and Dottore) are preventing this from happening, and so they ask one or more *zannis* (eccentric servants) for help. Typically it ends happily with the marriage of the lovers and forgiveness all around for any wrongdoings. The archetypes represented by the five main Commedia characters are so universal that they show up in the majority of comedies from the 15<sup>th</sup> century on. Some examples include Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* with Bianca and Hortensio as innamorati, Baptista as Pantalone, Petruchio and Kate as Punch and Judy and Petruchio's servants as Zannis. Many young lovers in Shakespeare have to overcome the rigid rules of their elders to gain happiness. Many of his plays contain a comic pedant like Dottore who spouts endless inane wisdom, or a comic servant who outwits his or her master. In *Dying to be Sick* Angélique and Cléante are the obvious innamorati, Argan can be interpreted as a kind of Pantalone, the Diafoiruses are Dottore characters and Toinette resembles Colombina.

### **Traits of Some Commedia Characters:**

**Innamorati:** never wore masks, young, good-looking, high status, sincere in their love for each other; males courteous and gallant, females innocent and faithful.

**Pantalone:** elderly, often rich and miserly, often the father of a family, rigid in his morals but often lecherous towards younger women, loves to give advice, often has an unfaithful younger wife, usually fooled by his servant.

**Dottore:** pompous, elderly member of his profession which is usually medicine, given to lengthy pronouncements in tortured Latin or Greek, usually shown up as a quack by the end of the play.

**Colombina:** attractive and perky young servant girl with higher status than the other zannis, intelligent and witty, full of tricks; builds a strong and confidential relationship with the audience and often has a major influence on the development of the plot.



Colombina



## Comedy (See Activity #2)

**Comedy** is a dramatic genre designed to make us laugh or smile or at least feel satisfied that things end happily for the protagonists. Earning laughs is a difficult process, not only for the writer but also for the actors, director and other theatre artists. Comic elements must be well timed and motivated or they fail to be funny. All elements of the play must fit the “world” created by the director and playwright or the joke falls flat. Because each element must work so precisely with the whole, comedy is one of the most difficult forms to perfect. Learn about Northrop Frye’s definition of comedy at <http://edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/dherring/ap/consider/frye/indexspring.htm>

### **Types of Comedy**

**Satire** – ridicules human folly; makes fun of political, social or moral issues; often uses irony and sarcasm to hold something up to ridicule.

**Parody** – imitation or spoof of another work in order to poke fun at it, its author or its style.

**Irony** - appearance of things differs from their reality in terms of meaning, situation, or action. That is, it is ironical when there is a difference between what is spoken and what is meant, what is thought about a situation and what is actually the case.

**Dramatic Irony** is a situation in which the reader or audience knows more about the immediate circumstances or future events of a story than a character within it), or what is intended by actions and what is their actual outcome.

**Situation comedy (or Sit-Com)** – often focuses on a middle class family or group, awkward moments, surprises, repetition, frustrations.

**Farce** – characterized by ridiculous situations, exaggerated character types, fast pacing, coarse or sexual humour and horseplay.

**Comedy of the Absurd** – a more intellectual form than farce with the characters in bizarre or alien environments faced with almost unsolvable problems.

**Comedy of manners** - romantic intrigues of a sophisticated upper class, including witty repartee and humorous social blundering.

**Romantic comedy** - idealized romantic love, the ups and downs of maintaining a love relationship.

**Black comedy** - laughter as a kind of defense mechanism against serious topics such as war, death, despair, pain.

**Commedia dell’arte** –an improvisational form starting in 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy featuring stock characters, masks, use of slapstick routines and clown techniques.

### **Comic Techniques**

#### **1. Visual techniques:-**

**Comic actions** – repeated actions or gags; coordinated movements of two or more characters; awkward or unexpected movements; looks to audience to denote surprise or conspiracy.

**Slapstick** – broad, aggressive, physical and visual action often involving harmless violence or shock, such as falling, loss of trousers, chasing; vulgar sight gags such as a pie in the face; precarious positions or use of prop; awkward way of walking or sitting.

**Design** – colour or style of costume, hair or makeup; fanciful or unexpected set features; surprising lighting effects.

#### **2. Language Techniques:-**

**Pun** – use of a word with a double meaning or two words that sound the same but have different meanings (eg. name of hair salon: “Curl Up and Dye”).

**Malapropism** – use of a word with a somewhat similar sound and different, but comically appropriate, meaning (eg. “The world is perspiring against me.”)

**Turn of phase** – rewording a comment to mean something else; deliberately misleading words or phrases.

**Repetition** - of word, phrase, sound (alliteration).

**Repartee** – witty, verbal conflict where each character tries to outdo the other.

**Character speech pattern** – unusual accent, tone, trait.

#### **3. Comic Devices:-**

**Mistaken identities** – sets of twins, unexpected similarities, cross dressing.

**Plot complications** – improbable sequence of events especially in farce.

**Coincidences** – chance meetings, surprising relationships, long-lost relatives.

**Incongruities** – differences between the way characters see themselves or pretend to be, as opposed to the way they really are; between the behaviour expected and what is used.

## Medical Practices of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century (page 1 of 2) (see Activity #11)

Medical practices of the 17<sup>th</sup> century were at best rudimentary and at worst lethal. Doctors were trained more thoroughly in Latin and rhetoric than in anatomy and surgery. Following the directives of the Second century CE Greek physician Galen and dismissing all modern scientific advances as the work of charlatans, most graduates of the Paris Faculty of Medicine relied exclusively on two methods of treatment: bleeding and purging. In one year, King Louis XIII received 215 doses of purgative (laxative), 212 enemas, and 47 bleedings. Bloodletting was one of the oldest medical practices being common among the Egyptians, Greeks, Mayans, and Aztecs.

Galen had developed theories which dominated Western medical science for well over a millennium. He discovered that veins and arteries were filled with blood, not air as was commonly believed at the time. There were two key concepts in his system of bloodletting. The first was that blood was created and then used up, it did not circulate and so it could 'stagnate' in the extremities. The second was that "humoral balance" was the basis of illness or health, the four humours being blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Galen believed that blood was the dominant humour and the one in most need of control. In order to balance the humours, a physician would either remove 'excess' blood from the patient or give them an emetic to induce vomiting, or a diuretic to induce urination.



Though the bloodletting was often prescribed by physicians, it was carried out by barbers. This division of labour led to the distinction between physicians and surgeons. The barbershop's red-and-white-striped pole, still in use today, is derived from this practice: the red represents the blood being drawn, the white represents the tourniquet used, and the pole itself represents the stick squeezed in the patient's hand to dilate the veins. Bloodletting was used to 'treat' a wide range of diseases, becoming a standard treatment for almost every ailment, and was practiced in

otherwise healthy individuals to prevent disease. The actual bloodletting was brought about by a variety of instruments to puncture the veins or arteries, or as a home remedy with the use of leeches.

It was the English medical doctor William Harvey in 1628 who described the circulation of blood through the veins and arteries pumped by the heart. The theory behind bloodletting was therefore disproved, but the practice is still retained by some practitioners even today.

Purges in the form of emetics, laxatives, diuretics and enemas were given to rid the body of an excess of the other humours – phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. A wide variety of concoctions composed of ground up or boiled herbs, animal matter and minerals formed the basis for these purgatives which were prescribed by physicians and administered by apothecaries. They may have actually cured the malady on rare occasions but certainly resulted in excessive vomiting, diarrhea and flatulence, an indication that the undesired humours had been eliminated. A recipe for one such purgative of the period follows: *“Take of Cloves, Costus, or Zedoary, Ginger, Cummin, of each two drams, Hermodactils, Diacridium, of each half an ounce: with their double weight of Honey clarified in white wine, make them into an electuary [ground mixture] according to art. It purges hot rheums, and takes away inflammations in wounds. I assure you the electuary works violently, and may safely be given in clysters [enemas], and so you may give two or three drams at a time, if the patient be strong. For taken otherwise it would kill a horse cum privilegio.*

## Medical Practices of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century (page 2 of 2)

Clysters (an old fashioned word for enema) were a favorite medical treatment amongst the bourgeoisie and nobility up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. King Louis XIV, for whom Molière wrote was particularly fond of this treatment for stomach aches and constipation. Clysters were administered with a large syringe, rectal tube and piston which forced the solution into the colon.

Coffee clysters were taken by some people who wanted the effects of caffeine but disliked the taste of coffee, and tobacco smoke clysters were administered to fainting women. Not only did Molière joke about them, they were also a popular theme in the burlesque comedies of that time.

The few physicians who provided treatments other than enemas, bleedings, and emetics gained their remedies from superstition rather than science. According to one source, it was believed that "if a woman had a fall during pregnancy, all ill consequences could be obviated by giving her a morsel of crimson silk, cut up small, and served in an egg; pain at childbirth could be minimized by placing the husband's hat on the woman's belly; and as soon as a woman was delivered, her loins must be wrapped in the fleece of a newly killed black sheep, still warm from the carcass."

The medics of Paris were able to maintain their credibility by allying themselves closely with the Church. Acting as much as priests as doctors, they muttered elaborate prayers and called upon obscure saints over their dying patients. Anyone who was foolish enough to criticize a physician was named a blasphemer in the pulpit. Certainly no physician would dirty himself by touching the sick or performing surgery. Operations, amputations and tooth extractions were carried out by untrained butchers and barbers who were probably better skilled than the doctors in any case. The character Béralde in *Le Malade imaginaire*, voices Molière's own philosophical beliefs concerning the profession: that the mysteries of the human body are too complex to be understood and that the best cure is to rest and let the body cure itself instead of tormenting it with quack remedies. He even suggests that a viewing of a Molière comedy will do the patient more good. It is little wonder that Molière had lost patience with the entrenched practices of the medical profession which was stubbornly opposed to the new scientific methods of clinical observation and experimental investigation. By holding the current medical practice up to public ridicule he was paving the way to the acceptance of the methods that were to come.

Are we still subject to medical quackery? We are constantly bombarded in the media with news of trainers, coaches and gurus, miracle cures, herbal remedies, methods of prolonging youth and beauty, products and techniques to improve sexual attractiveness and performance, ways to grow hair in certain places and lose it in others, teeth whiteners and skin darkeners, aids to weight loss or gain, and potions and injections to build our muscle or lips, or shrink our wrinkles or hips. As long as there are unhappy or desperate people, there will be those to provide a dream cure – at a price. Lively discussions arise over the effectiveness of certain alternative medical practices. Some insist that they owe their lives to a certain ointment or treatment and others who maintain that the claims of the proponents lack scientific proof of their effectiveness or that they are downright dangerous. The sellers of snake oil and patent medicines are a thing of the past but the sales pitches have become more seductive and ubiquitous. Their messages convince us that we need their treatment for survival. Perhaps we have become imaginary invalids also.





Scene Excerpt from *Dying to be Sick* (page 1 of 3) (see Activities #5 and #7)

(Argan has just demanded that his daughter Angélique (who is secretly in love with handsome Cléante) marry the doctor son of a friend of his. Toinette, the saucy maid speaks up.)

TOINETTE: Quoi! Monsieur, you could make such a ludicrous plan? And, with your fortune, you'd go and marry your daughter to a doctor?

ARGAN: Oui. And what business is it of yours, Mademoiselle impudence?

TOINETTE: Mon Dieu! Gently. You launch straight into invective. Can we not discuss this reasonably, between us, without flying off the handle? There now, let us speak calmly. What, if you please, is your reason for such a marriage?

ARGAN: My reason is, that finding myself in poor health and as sick as I am, I want to give myself a son-in-law and some allies who are doctors, so that I might count on their good support in combating my illness, and to have in my family a source for the remedies that I require, and to be sure that I have no less for my consultations and my prescriptions.

TOINETTE: Eh bien, now there is a reason, and isn't it better to speak calmly in this. But monsieur, honestly now; are you really sick?

ARGAN: What? Am I sick? You devil! Am I sick? The nerve!

TOINETTE: Eh bien, oui, monsieur, you are sick; there's no disputing that. You are very sick, I couldn't agree more, and much sicker than you think. But your daughter should marry someone for herself and since she is not sick, there is no need to give her a doctor.

ARGAN: It's for me that I am giving her a doctor, and any good, natural daughter should be thrilled to marry whatever will benefit the health of her father.

TOINETTE: Look, monsieur, may I, as a friend, offer some advice?

ARGAN: And what is this advice?

TOINETTE: To not even think about this marriage.

ARGAN: And why not?

TOINETTE: Because your daughter will never agree to it.

ARGAN: She won't agree to it?

TOINETTE: No.

ARGAN: My daughter?

TOINETTE: Your daughter. She will tell you that she'll have nothing to do with monsieur Diafoirus, his son Thomas Diafoirus, nor all the Diafoiruses in the world.

ARGAN: Well, I have lots to do with it, especially since this match is more advantageous than you'd think. Monsieur Diafoirus has no other inheritor; and, what's more, Monsieur Purgon who has no wife or children, is leaving him everything in favour of this marriage; and monsieur Purgon is a man with an income of at least eight thousand pounds.

Scene Excerpt from *Dying to be Sick* (page 2 of 3)

TOINETTE: To get that rich, he must have killed a lot of people.

ARGAN: Eight thousand pounds is nothing to sneeze at, and that's not counting the father's fortune.

TOINETTE: Monsieur, that's all well and good; but nevertheless: between the two of us, I'd advise you to give her another husband; she's just not made to be Madame Diafoirus.

ARGAN: Yes, but that is what I want.

TOINETTE: Puh! Don't say that.

ARGAN: What do you mean, don't say that?

TOINETTE: Ah, no!

ARGAN: And why shouldn't I say that?

TOINETTE: People will think you don't know what you're saying.

ARGAN: They can think what they like; I'm telling you, I gave my word and she's going to honour it.

TOINETTE: No. I'm sure she won't do it.

ARGAN: I will make her do it.

TOINETTE: I'm telling you, she won't.

ARGAN: She will so, or I'll stick her in a convent.

TOINETTE: You?

ARGAN: Me.

TOINETTE: Hah.

ARGAN: What do you mean, hah?

TOINETTE: You won't put her in a convent.

ARGAN: I won't put her in a convent?

TOINETTE: No.

ARGAN: No?

TOINETTE: No.

ARGAN: Well! Isn't this nice! I won't put my daughter in a convent if that's what I want?

TOINETTE: I tell you no.

ARGAN: And who will stop me?

TOINETTE: You, yourself.

ARGAN: Me?

TOINETTE: Yes. You won't have the heart.

ARGAN: I will, too.

TOINETTE: You're only joking.

ARGAN: I am not joking.

TOINETTE: Fatherly love will get the better of you.

ARGAN: It will not.

Scene Excerpt from *Dying to be Sick* (page 3 of 3)

TOINETTE: A few tears, arms thrown around your neck, a tender little “Oh, my darling papa,” that’s all it will take to get you.

ARGAN: None of that will have any effect.

TOINETTE: Yes, yes.

ARGAN: I’m telling you, I will not budge.

TOINETTE: Nonsense!

ARGAN: You can’t say “nonsense!”

TOINETTE: Mon Dieu, I know you, and you are naturally good.

ARGAN (*exploding*): I am not good, and when I want to I can be downright nasty!

TOINETTE: Gently, monsieur. Don’t forget that you are sick.

ARGAN: I absolutely command her to marry the man I’ve chosen.

TOINETTE: And I absolutely forbid her to do anything of the sort.

ARGAN: Where are we? The nerve, for a hussy of a servant to talk this way to her master?

TOINETTE: When a master has no idea what he’s doing, a level-headed servant has every right to straighten him out.

ARGAN (*running after Toinette*): Ah! The insolence! I’ll knock you silly!

TOINETTE (*running from him*): It’s my duty to oppose anything that might dishonor you.

ARGAN (*angrily chasing her around his chair, his stick in hand.*): Come here, come here, I’ll teach you to talk back!

TOINETTE (*running and escaping to the opposite side of the chair from Argan*): I am making sure, as I should, that you don’t do anything stupid.

ARGAN: Bitch!

TOINETTE: No, I will never consent to this marriage.

ARGAN: Swine!

TOINETTE: I do not want her marrying your Thomas Diafoirus.

ARGAN: You putrid, rotten ...

TOINETTE: She’ll obey me sooner than you.

[next interchange may be omitted in scene rehearsals.]

(ARGAN: Angélique, won’t you tell that witch to stop?)

ANGÉLIQUE: Oh, mon père, please, you’ll make yourself sick.

ARGAN: If you don’t make her stop, I’ll put my curse on you.)

TOINETTE: And if she obeys you, I’ll disinherit her.

ARGAN (*throws himself into his chair, exhausted from the chase.*): Ah! Ah! I can’t take anymore. She’ll kill me!

# 17<sup>th</sup> Century Apparel (see Activity #9)



Bourgeois couples



Fine lady and servant girls



Elegant gentlemen

## Suggested Websites, Movies, Videos and Books

### Websites of Interest



<http://www.site-moliere.com/pieces/malade.htm> The complete text of Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire* in French.

<http://www.site-moliere.com/pieces/> Complete list of Molière's plays.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3uZNnub0Xo&mode=related&search> Trailer for the 2007 movie *Molière*.

[http://www.theatredatabase.com/17th\\_century/moliere\\_001.html](http://www.theatredatabase.com/17th_century/moliere_001.html) A biography and extensive list of links to websites on Molière's life, analysis of his plays, monologues for study, etc.

<http://home.aubg.bg/faculty/ndelchev/17thCenturyFrenchTheaterPractice.ppt> Powerpoint presentation of theatres and playwrights of 17<sup>th</sup> century France.

<http://www.costumes.org/history/100pages/17thlinks.htm#1630-1665> Extensive list of websites of costumes of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### Movies and Videos of Interest



*Molière* (2007) Director Laurent Tirard. French with English subtitles. Comedy tracing several incidents in the young playwright/actor's life which inspired plots in certain plays. This movie does for Molière what *Shakespeare in Love* did for the English bard. Available at Ottawa Public Library and many video stores.

*Molière* (1978) Director Ariane Mnouchkine. (260 min.) Excellent French film biography of Molière from child to esteemed playwright and actor; excellent view of social life and theatre of 17<sup>th</sup> century France. The film won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1978. Available also as a TV mini-series of 5 episodes of 55 minutes each. Available at Glebe Video International, 613-237-6252.

### Books



*Molière* – Harold Bloom; (2002). Includes criticism and interpretation of his plays. Available at Ottawa Public Library.

*Molière: 4 Plays* – trans. Carl Milo Pergolizzi. Includes *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, *The Doctor In Spite of Himself*, *The Affected Damsels*, *The Miser*. Available at OPL.

Copies of many of Molière's plays can be found at the OPL in both French and English.

## Activities (page 1 of 3)

### **Before Seeing the Play**

#### **1. A Reading Assignment**

Distribute copies of pages 1-2 of this Study Guide, "About the Play" and "Commentary on *Le Malade imaginaire / Dying to be Sick*" on page 8. The students should read the synopsis and comments on the play so as to better understand the script and its background.

**2. A Reading and Discussion Activity.** Distribute page 12 on "Comedy". The types and techniques of comedy listed here are not exhaustive. Have students discuss and add to the lists. What makes different people laugh? Are certain things specific to period or culture? Gender or status? Use this material again after viewing the production to analyze the methods used by Molière and Pleiades Theatre to get laughs.

#### **3. An Improvisation Activity**

Experiencing a wide variety of improv topics will help students relate to the material of *Dying to be Sick*. Some improv scenarios could be:

- A saucy nurse must look after a very demanding patient who complains of aches and pains all over the place.
- Two girl friends discuss a cute boy. One of them is sure he is attracted to her. Without letting her down too much, the other points out that he might not be as interested as she thinks.
- A very hard-headed father tries to set his daughter up with a young man while she is secretly very much in love with another whom she knows her father would find unsuitable.
- A girl's secret boy-friend is tutoring her in French while her father (who doesn't understand French) constantly spies on them. Their French conversation expresses their true feelings.
- A gold-digging second wife tries to charm her husband and turn him against his daughters so that she can get her hands on his money.
- A jargon-speaking computer geek tries to fast-talk a gullible man into (needlessly) upgrading his system at great expense.
- A two-faced beautician and health advisor sets a well-off woman up to buy a variety of ridiculous products and remedies.
- Two friends or relatives argue over the effectiveness of a particular bizarre alternative medical treatment.

#### **4. An Enrichment Activity on 17<sup>th</sup> Century Theatre**

View the PowerPoint presentation found at

<http://home.aubg.bg/faculty/ndelchev/17thCenturyFrenchTheaterPractice.ppt> to learn of the architecture of theatres, style of plays and the three great dramatists of the period. Also read pages 9-10 on 17<sup>th</sup> century theatre and arts and the classes who enjoyed them. How did the arts fit into daily life then and now? How are the theatres and plays different?

## Activities (page 2 of 3)

### **Before Seeing the Play**

#### **5. Translation Activity.**

*Dying to be Sick* has been translated and somewhat adapted from Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire*. Before looking at the excerpt of the former in this Study Guide found on pages 15–17 have students look at the original scene (in French) at <http://www.site-moliere.com/pièces/malade105.htm>. The chosen scene begins about one third down this page beginning with Toinette's speech "Quoi? Monsieur, vous auriez fait ce dessein burlesque? Et avec tout le bien que vous avez, vous voudriez marier votre fille avec un médecin?" Have the class create a translation into English and then compare their work with that produced by translators Adrienne Clarkson and John Van Burek. Read page 5 "A Word from the Translators".

#### **6. Enrichment Activity.**

Screen a film either before or after attending the play dealing with the life of Molière as mentioned on page 19 of this Study Guide. Visit the websites mentioned on page 19 for more in-depth coverage of the issues. Read his biography and description of some of his other plays.

#### **7. A Scene Study Activity**

Use the **Excerpt from *Dying to be Sick*** (pages 15-17) for either a discussion on language and use of comedy or for a scene study activity. For the latter, the class could be divided into teams of two actors and a director. Exploration could involve seeing how broad the characters can be played to achieve caricatures or clowns, how physical (both body and facial) the action can become, what kind of lazzis (comic routines beyond the actual script) could be added and what pacing is most effective for humour.

**8. Any trip to the theatre should also involve the students learning proper theatre etiquette while at the NAC. A handout is available on page 23. Please photocopy this page and distribute to students.**

### **Activities After Seeing the Play**

**9. Topics for Class Discussion on the Production** (students may want to review the material on pages 1-2 of this Study Guide, "About the Play".)

- Style of language used in the script;
- Style of acting chosen for this play;
- Themes explored – what was it about?
- Production aspects:-
  - Costumes – How well did they define time period, character, mood? Did colour play a role? Examine page 18 of the Study Guide or visit the suggested website to view clothing of the period.
  - Set – How well did it define location, theme? What mood did it convey? What abstract ideas did it evoke?
  - Lighting –
  - Sound –
- Relevance of this story set mostly 400 years ago in France to today's Canadian audiences.

## **Activities** (page 3 of 3)

**10. Write a Play Review.** While the production is still fresh in their minds, have students review *Dying To Be Sick*. Refer them to play reviews in *The Ottawa Citizen* or *Xpress* to give them an idea of the standard approach to theatrical criticism. You'll find an outline for writing a review on page 12 of the Study Guide for *The 'Vaudevilles' of Chekhov* found in the NAC website <http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/activities/>. Theatre Ontario has an excellent guide at [http://theatreontario.org/content/play\\_reviews.htm](http://theatreontario.org/content/play_reviews.htm). Students should refer to their program (if supplied) or page 3 of this Study Guide, "Who Helped Put the Production Together?" for correct production information. A review should cover, in general and more specifically when merited: design elements (lighting, sound, set and costumes), performances, direction, text (basic narrative, dialogue and the central themes).

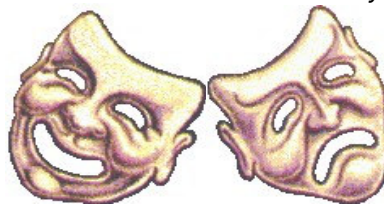
**11. A Research Activity.** Read pages 13-14 on **Medical Practices of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century** including modern quackery. Investigate <http://www.quackwatch.com/>. Break the class into teams of six or seven with each member making brief notes on a modern instance of questionable medical practices today. Have the members of the team share their findings.

**12. A Reading Assignment.** Read two or three other comedies by Molière, such as *Tartuffe*, *The Misanthrope*, and/or *Don Juan*. Compare the common themes and techniques of the plays you read. Which of the plays do you find most applicable to today's concerns? What makes *Dying to be Sick* unique? Many critics have found themes that are present throughout Molière's works; discuss some themes that you notice arising again and again, and compare how they are treated in each play.

**13. Further Viewing.** Two more productions of Molière plays will be seen in Ottawa this season. The Ottawa Little Theatre will be presenting *The Miser* from February 26 to March 9, 2008. This satire features the typical Molière comedic chaos involving lovers, vows, hidden treasures and mistaken identities. Later in 2008 Third Wall Theatre will present *Tartuffe* at the Irving Greenberg Theatre Centre Studio from May 27 to June 7. This satire "*unmasks the true motives of these religious imposters who have plagued and manipulated people throughout the ages.*"

**14. An Advanced Research and Discussion Activity.** Read the theories on comedy expressed by Northrop Frye at <http://edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/dherring/ap/consider/frye/indexspring.htm>. Discuss if his theories are still valid today and how they might apply to modern play, movies and TV shows.

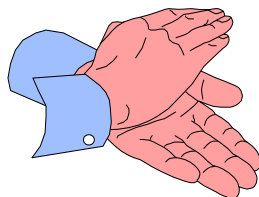




## ***Theatre Etiquette***

Please take a moment to prepare the students for their visit to the National Arts Centre to explain what good **Theatre Etiquette** is and why it will enhance the enjoyment of the play by all audience members:

- 1.** *Dying to be Sick* will be performed in the Theatre of the NAC. Matinées at the NAC are for students and the general public. It is important for everyone to be quiet (no talking or rustling of materials) during the performance so others do not lose their immersion in the “world of the play”. Unlike movies, the actors in live theatre can hear disturbances in the audience and will give their best performances when they feel the positive involvement of the audience members. The appropriate way of showing approval for the actors’ performances is through laughter and applause. For the enjoyment of all, people who disturb others during the show may be asked to leave the Theatre.
- 2.** If you plan to make notes on the play for the purposes of writing a review, please do not try to write them during the performance, as this can be distracting for the actors. Wait until intermission or after the performance is finished to write your reflections, please.
- 3.** It is important that there be no electronic devices used in the Theatre so that the atmosphere of the play is not interrupted and others are not disturbed. **Cell phones, pagers and anything that beeps must be turned off.** Cameras and all other recording devices are not permitted in the Theatre.
- 4.** Tickets with assigned seats will be distributed by your teacher and to avoid confusion it is important to sit in the designated seat. In the Theatre all even numbered seats are on the left side and all odd numbered seats are on the right. This means that seats 10 and 12, for example, are actually side by side.
- 5.** Programs may or may not be distributed at this student matinée. Information on the artists who put this play together, however, can be found in this Study Guide for those who wish to use it in writing a review. Some programs can be made available to teachers if desired as a teaching aid to show how a program is put together.
- 6.** It is advisable to make a trip to the washroom before the performance starts, as anyone leaving while the play is in progress runs the risk of not being allowed back into the Theatre.





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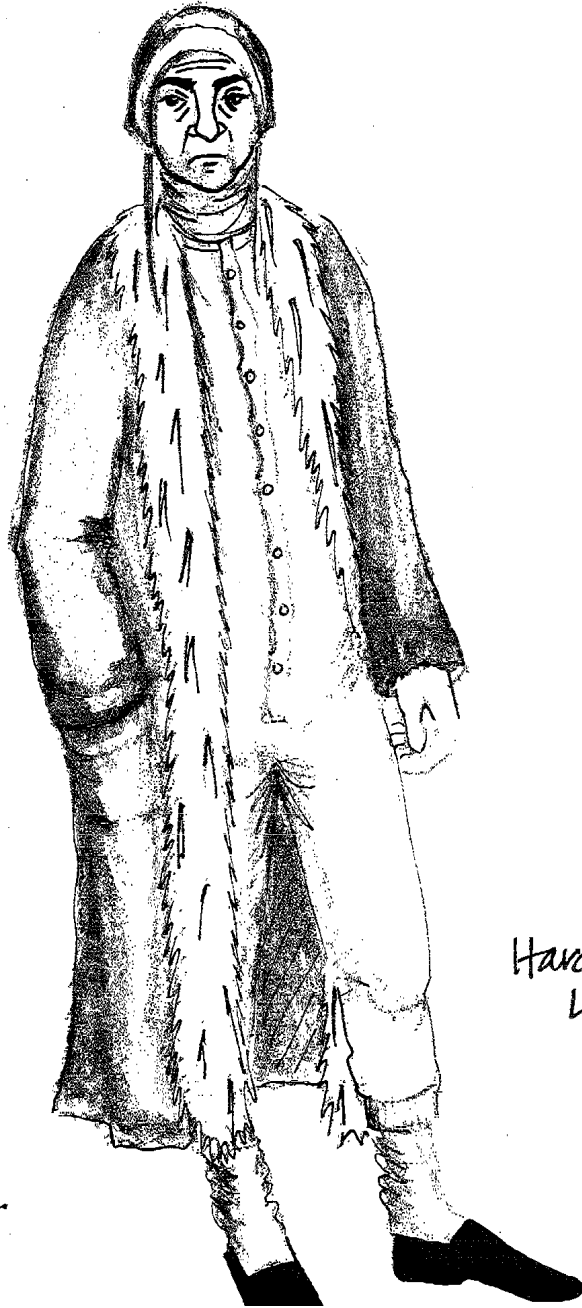
**The National Youth and Education Trust**

Investing in young Canadians through the performing arts:  
as young audiences, through professional training,  
and in classrooms across the country.

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Michael Potter and Véronique Dhieux,  
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**Costume Design by Dana Osborne**



Hardee T.  
Lineham  
as  
Argan

Dying To Be Sick

**Costume Design by Dana Osborne**



Dying To Be Sick

Pleiadis/NAC

Michelle Polak  
as  
Toinette