

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: TARTUFFE COSTUME DESIGN  
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Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies

The following thesis documents the design process and execution of Tyler Gunther's costume design for the Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies' production of *Tartuffe*. The production opened November 6, 2015 in the University of Maryland's Kogod Theater. It was directed by Lee Mikeska Gardner with the set designed by Halea Coulter and lighting designed by Connor Dreibelbis.

TARTUFFE: COSTUME DESIGN

by

Tyler Conrad Gunther

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Advisory Committee:  
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## Dedication

For my parents.

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## Chapter 1: Initial Design Conversations

The first design meeting for our production of *Tartuffe* was held Friday, February 27, 2015 with Lee Mikeska Gardner, the director, Halea Coulter, the scenic designer, Connor Dreibelbis, the lighting designer and members of the MFA design faculty. At this initial meeting my main interest was to discover why Lee wanted to direct a production of this story in 2015 with a cast of exclusively undergraduate student actors. *Tartuffe* has been performed countless times over the centuries and it is without a doubt, a true theatre classic. However, I was still curious what had motivated Lee's play selection. During her presentation at the start of the meeting it quickly became clear she did not have any particular enthusiasm or intention for this production beyond an acting exercise for the undergrad actors.

When we realized Lee had no visual direction for the show, Halea, Connor and myself attempted to utilize the rest of the meeting to collaborate with her on the beginning of a design concept. In response to our questions Lee used words such as "steampunk" and "carnival" to describe possible design directions, but without any logical reasons for their application.

What I found more helpful was when we moved away from discussing general concepts and spoke specifically about the characters. When Lee described the family she spoke of them as being "good and wholesome"; certainly very wealthy, but not corrupt or flashy. According to her they were "decent". While not a dynamic description, it allowed me to start visualizing what kind of characters I would be costuming.

Early the following week Halea, Connor and I met to discuss the direction for our design. As a team we quickly moved past the suggestions for a “steampunk” or “carnival” aesthetic, with each of us admitting that we could not find any dramaturgical basis for that design decision. What we found we were interested in was establishing a distinct visual language to illustrate Tartuffe’s brainwashing religion. It would be a tool we could use to show the audience which characters were under his influence and how his power was expanding within the house throughout the story.

We started to consider the idea that Tartuffe had developed a bastardized version of Feng Shui as part of his religious cult. It would be as if he had developed a set of rules for his religion that would effect the interior design of the family’s house. The traditional elements of an average family’s living room would all be present but arranged in unexpected and ridiculous ways to create a makeshift religious space for Tartuffe. We imagined that characters such as Orgon and Madame Pernelle would treat the newly arranged space as a sacred place of worship, while the remaining characters would constantly be trying to reset the furniture to its original, normal layout.

As a design team we were intrigued by this direction because it felt in line with the tone of comedy in the script and allowed Tartuffe’s evil presence to be felt early on, despite that fact that he does not appear onstage until the second half of the play.

As the costume designer this also helped me realize the visual humor we could create through clothing. Tartuffe’s bold misappropriation of the family’s living

room furniture could be seen in his religious habit as well. He would use whatever traditional religious objects and customs that best suited his needs to create a unique set of religious wear for himself and his followers. The costumes would also hopefully be sophisticated and interesting enough that one could understand how a lost soul, such as Orgon, might be tempted to take part in the visual excitement of the experience.

We also found ourselves gravitating towards a more modern world for this story to take place in. As a design team we wanted the audience to connect very quickly to the family and their frustration with Tartuffe. If the audience did not empathize with the family's struggle to save their husband/father/boss from Tartuffe, then there is not much else to keep them engaged. Costuming the characters in contemporary fashions similar to the ones the audience members themselves would be wearing seemed like one way to accomplish this.

I decided that Orgon's costumes would be particularly helpful in accomplishing this goal. At first he would be seen in a contemporary outfit of no particular importance, but then over the course of the play he would layer on ridiculous religious accouterments until his original clothing was completely disguised. Wearing their unique religious habits, he and Tartuffe would contrast greatly with the rest of the family's more ordinary garments. That is until Orgon realizes he has been deceived all along by Tartuffe and tears the religious garments from his person onstage.

## Chapter 2: Costume Design Research

The design team met again after we had gathered visual research that helped us illustrate our new design direction. As we compared images we found ourselves moving away from the “Bad Feng Shui” idea which affected the entire playing space and more towards a “Shrine” idea that consumed less real estate but would be more visually specific. It would still have a very comedic visual language and would be in line with the religious habits that Tartuffe and Orgon would wear. Also we began to find a design style for the contemporary setting of the family members who were unaffected by Tartuffe’s influence. Halea was attracted to a window installation filled with crystal, pearls and white molding. This seemed to effectively capture the family’s specific degree of elegance which we had discussed as a team. The family was extraordinarily wealthy, but not ostentatious. They came from “old money” who would dress with a great deal of confidence and would not rely on fleeting fashion trends to determine their classic style. My costume research focused on images of clothing that was clean, sleek, and sophisticated. I was attracted to smooth textures, modern tailoring and subtle details throughout my research.

We also decided on a neutral color palette similar to the original window installation image. However we knew that too much unity would allow costumes to disappear within scenic elements. We decided that Halea would utilize cooler greys and blues in the setting and my costumes would be comprised of warmer greys, creams and blushes. This tightly controlled color palette would also allow for Tartuffe’s more colorful religious costumes to appear even bolder against these neutral tones.

The following pages contain the final research plates arranged by character. These images were the central inspiration in creating the preliminary and final costume designs.





The collage features a central image of a man wearing a blue and gold patterned mitre. Surrounding this central image are several smaller images illustrating different types of Tartuffe religious wear:

- Top left: A close-up of a brown, textured fabric, possibly a shawl or capelet.
- Top center: A white, pointed hat, likely a papal tiara or similar headpiece.
- Top right: A brown, textured fabric, possibly a shawl or capelet.
- Middle left: A yellow and black patterned mitre.
- Middle center: A close-up of a brown, textured fabric.
- Middle right: A close-up of a white, textured fabric.
- Bottom left: A close-up of a brown, textured fabric.
- Bottom center: A close-up of a white, textured fabric.
- Bottom right: A close-up of a brown, textured fabric.











# MADAME PERNELLE

ORGON'S MOTHER

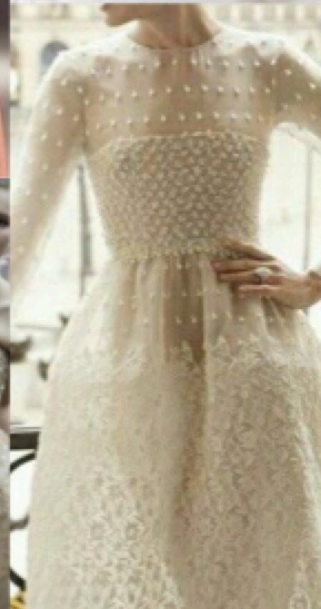
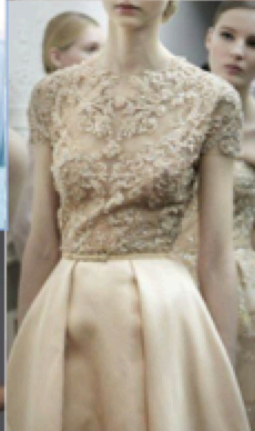


# DAMIS ORGON'S SON



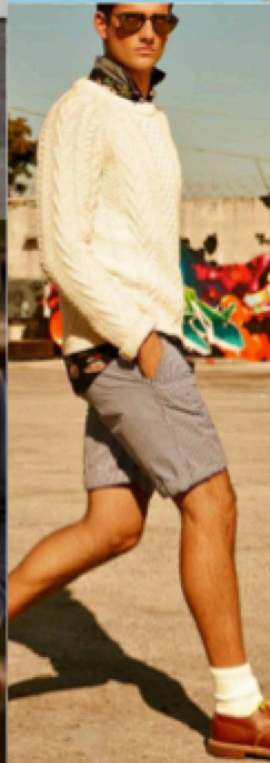


MARIANE  
ORGON'S  
DAUGHTER





VALERE  
MARIANE'S SUITOR









## MONSIEUR LOYAL



## A.S.L. INTERPRETER



## Chapter 3: Costume Design Renderings

At the preliminary design meeting Lee agreed to the modern aesthetic and shrine design idea that the design team presented. The main feedback I received with my costume designs was to focus on creating a sense of playfulness with the costumes without making them too theatrical.

Specific costume designs I worked on revising included Dorine's and Mariane's. For Dorine, I had designed for her a very realistic maid's tunic top, sweatpants and tennis shoes. At the suggestion of my advisor, Professor Helen Huang, I made her costume more playful by designing her a modern version of a traditional French maid's uniform. Also we discussed that Mariane's dress had become too theatrical with its odd silhouette and feathered skirt. I returned to my research and found more realistic contemporary garments for Mariane that still captured the youthful energy I was trying to convey with her look.

The police officer's costume needed to be further developed as well. During the preliminary design process I had avoided thinking in depth about this character because I simply did not understand the role. This character enters during the last 5 minutes of the play and completely changes the course of the story. He enters the stage with the audience assuming he sides with Tartuffe but they quickly discover his allegiance is to Orgon's household. At this point I had divided the costume design into two aesthetics. There were the smooth greys of silk and lace for the family and the rough textures of burlap and macramé for Tartuffe and Orgon's religious wear. The police officer logically fit within neither of these. I decided to use this to my

advantage and costume him in bright red from head to toe to great a strong contrast with his enviroment.

The following pages contain the final costume renderings that were presented to my advisor, Professor Helen Huang, the design team and costume shop.





**Tartuffe**





**Tartuffe**





**Orgon**





Orgon





Elmire





**Madame Pernelle**





**Damis**





**Mariane**





Valere





**Cleante**





**Dorine**



TARTUFFE'S  
SERVANT



**Tartuffe's Servant**





**Flipote**





**M. Loyal**





Police Officer

## Chapter 4: Execution of Design

After the final costume designs were approved by Lee and Professor Helen Huang I worked with Jen Daszczyszak, the costume shop manager, on the costume cost-out process. Because of the contemporary design, we planned that the majority of the clothing would either be pulled from stock or bought. Also, fortunately it was estimated by Jen that I had enough costume shop labor hours to build several costume items in the shop. The costumes to be made were selected because they either were built from a non-traditional fabric or required a specific fit. The costumes constructed by the costume shop included Elmore's suit, Mariane's dress, Cleante's pants and the religious outfits for Tartuffe and Orgon.

I was thankful for the opportunity to shop for these fabrics in New York City's garment district. On the morning of the first shopping day, at Professor Helen Huang's suggestion, I visited Macy's department store to look at the season's fashions and the type of clothing that would be available to buy for the costumes we were not building. It proved to be very helpful and allowed me to identify more clearly what fabric I should be shopping for.

Once I reached the fabric stores the challenge proved to be finding fabrics that were not white or cream, but a soft, warm grey. What I thought would be relatively straightforward quickly became a challenge. The fabric swatches continually shifted hues depending on the fabric store's lighting and what other fabric swatch they were paired with. However after a day of fabric swatching I was able to purchase the needed yardage the next day. During the fitting process it became clear that the fabric for Cleante's pants was too dark in relation to the other fabrics in the show. Professor

Helen Huang graciously swatched for me at a local fabric store and we were able to find a new fabric with the right value of grey.

Also in preparation for fittings Helen and I spent a Saturday shopping at Tysons Corner Center in Tysons, VA. It was a very helpful day. At first we did not limit ourselves to any budget but simply sought out the combinations of color and texture that were most successful. We shopped at the high-end stores that Cleante, Elmire and Mariane would have frequented if they had been in Tysons, VA. Then we started looking at price tags and began to find very similar clothing combinations in stores I could afford to shop in with my budget. At the end of the day I was much more prepared to begin fittings for the cast of *Tartuffe*.

The biggest discovery during fittings was finding the right style lines for Elmire's suit, which the costume shop was building. The way the clothing fit in my costume rendering was not paralleled in the way it hung on the actress's body. With Professor Helen Huang's guidance we reworked the shape of the skirt and jacket peplum to create the best costume possible for the character.

These following pages contain the fitting photo layouts that were shared with the director, the design team and my mentor.



## Tartuffe 1st fittings

### Tartuffe

Look #1- currently mock-up fabric  
hat will be slightly wider  
cloak will be more full



Tartuffe 1st fittings  
Orgon



Look #2- currently in mock-up fabric  
tunic will be much fuller at bottom  
hat will be slightly shorter





## Tartuffe 1st fittings

Elmire

Currently mock-up fabric  
Sleeves and blouse  
will be lace



Tartuffe 1st fittings

Mme. Pernelle  
looking at hat options  
to be worn when the  
religious headdress  
isn't used





Tartuffe 1st fittings  
Damis



## Tartuffe 1st fittings

Mariane

Currently in mock-up fabric  
neckline will be lowered on  
sheer and opaque fabric



Looking at other shoe options



Tartuffe 1st fittings  
Valere





Tartuffe 1st fittings

Cleante

Pants are in mock-up  
fabric



## Tartuffe 1st fittings

Dorine

Black tights will be removed  
Instead of a zipper, the top  
two buttons will be rigged  
with snaps so she can easily  
flash her chest at Tartuffe



Tartuffe 1st fittings

ASL Interpreter

Looking at more  
youthful options  
and jewelry





Tartuffe 1st fittings  
Flipote





Tartuffe 1st fittings

M. Loyal



## Tartuffe 1st fittings Police Officer

Helmet will be painted red and will  
have red feather plummage





## Chapter 5: Production Photos

All photos taken by Stan Barouh



**Elmire and Tartuffe**





**Orgon and Tartuffe**



**Valere and Mariane**





**Dorine, Flipote and Orgon**





**Mme. Pernelle**





**Orgon, Elmire and Tartuffe**



**Orgon and Cleante**



**Elmire and Mariane**





**Full cast**



**Police Officer**





**Full cast**

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Looking back at my costume design for *Tartuffe*, what I believe was most successful was the color story that was presented onstage. The tight color palette created the sense of calm elegance that I had hoped. However, what was least successful were the religious garments of Tartuffe and Orgon. They lacked the visual excitement that I had hoped for. I think I oversimplified their silhouettes and relied too much on the fabric textures to create the contrast I was looking for between the contemporary clothes and the religious garments.

In regards to the design process as a whole I know I learned a lot about myself as a designer and collaborator. During the limited number of shows I have designed, I have been fortunate to always have an excitement surrounding the collaboration of each show. I took this feeling for granted and thought it came as part of the experience of being a costume designer. What I realized from designing the costumes for *Tartuffe* was that it is very easy to lose that feeling. Without a script that motivates you, a director that interests you or a design team that has the confidence to make the necessary decisions, this excitement is easily lost.

I realize now there was not the trust between the director and design team to have the necessary conversations to create a unique, effective design. This could be attributed to a lack of preparation by both the design team and director. If I were to repeat the process I would have done much more dramaturgical research prior to the initial conversation with the director. This would have lessened my dependency on her to provide information to inspire my design process.



Also, I would be less hesitant with my concerns and confusion about the direction and design of the production. Remaining passive served no one and kept collaborative relationships from being honest. Voicing my concerns more vocally would not have guaranteed any major changes, but remaining silent guaranteed nothing would change.

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity I was given as the Costume Designer for *Tartuffe*. It forced me to step outside of my comfort zone as a designer. I was given a great deal of freedom with this design and at times that felt like both a blessing and a curse. I allowed myself to be distracted by this, but I learned for the future how important it is to stay focused on what is important to tell the story. I learned so much from the experience and know it strengthened my skills as a theatre artist.

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