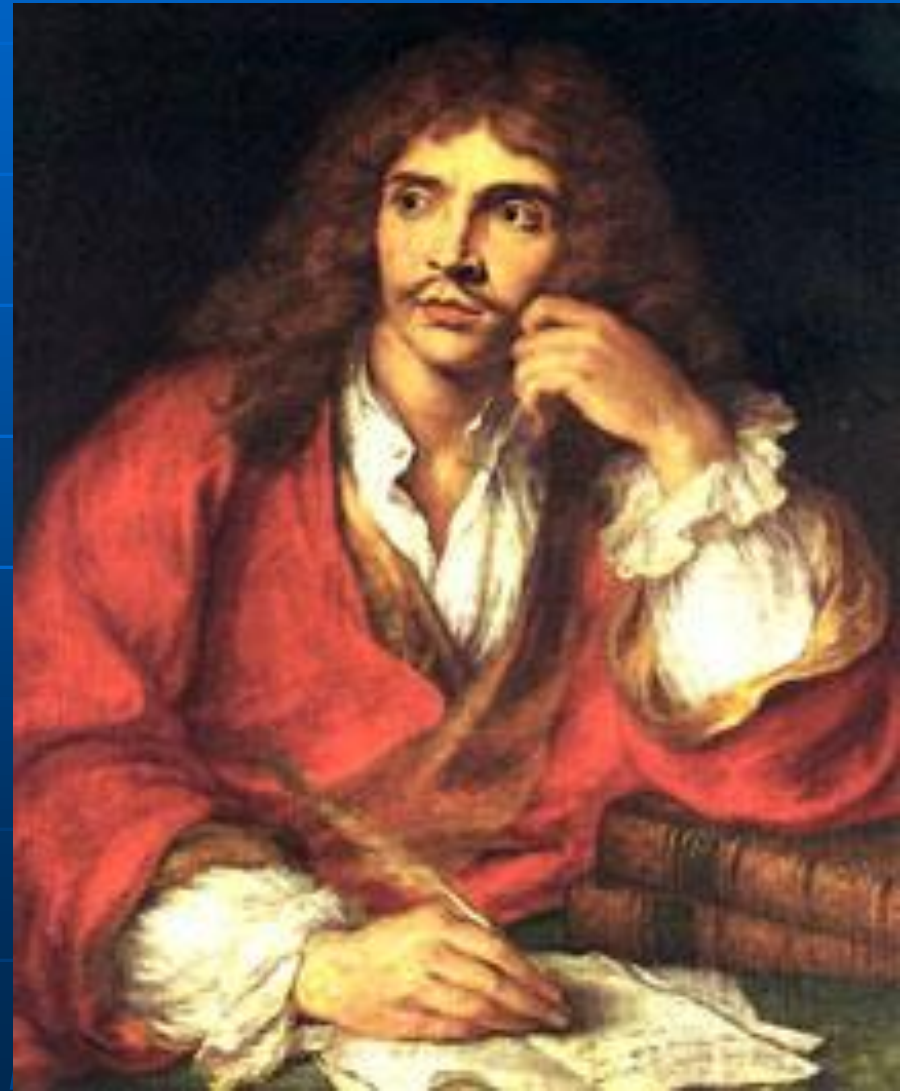


# Moliere and Racine: Theater in the Court of Louis XIV

Alan Haffa

# Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Moliere (1622-1673)

- Father, valet de chambre tapissier
- 21, entered the theater
- Toured Provinces for
- 1658, service of the King's brother; *Les Précieuses Ridicules* satirized Mme. de Rambouillet (Leader of a Salon)
- Théâtre du Palais Royal and King Louis XIV's protection



# Tartuffe

- Tartuffe: Clerical Hypocrite
- Organ: Foolish, Obstinate, Bourgeois Husband and Father
- Elmire: Understanding and Enlightened Wife
- Controversy
- Satirizes the non-spiritual members of the church and those foolish enough to be taken in by them.
- The “king” in the end restores order and justice



LE TARTUFFE



# Dom Juan (1665)



*Ino et dessiné par F. Brucher.*

*Gravé par L. de la Haye.*

DOM JUAN.  
*ou le festin de Pierre.*

- Dom Juan – A wealthy Aristocratic “libertine”
- Sganarelle – Servant, a weak voice of Bourgeoisie morality; most concerned with his wages
- Supernatural: The Commandant
- Hypocrisy: False Conversion
- Play was closed due to criticism from Clergy

# Dom Juan's theory of Love

- **DON JUAN:** What! would you have a man bind himself to the first girl he falls in love with, say farewell to the world for her sake, and have no eyes for anyone else? A fine thing, to be sure, to pride oneself upon the false honour of being faithful, to lose oneself in one passion for ever, and to be blind from our youth up to all the other beautiful women who can captivate our gaze! No, no; constancy is the share of fools. Every beautiful woman has a right to charm us, and the privilege of having been the first to be loved should not deprive the others of the just pretensions which the whole sex has over our hearts. As for me, beauty delights me wherever I meet with it, and I am easily overcome by the gentle violence with which it hurries us along. It matters not if I am already engaged: the love I have for a fair one cannot make me unjust towards the others; my eyes are always open to merit, and I pay the homage and tribute nature claims.

# Misanthrope (1666)

- Alceste – Misanthrope (Hater of Mankind); in particular, hates Hypocrisy of both Bourgeois and Aristocracy
- Philinthe – l'honnête: Reasonable, upright, polite, decent, moderate
- Celimene: Coquette; Young Widow who strings along Alceste as well as two Aristocratic Suitors;
- Parody of Uncompromising and theoretical Virtue



# Racine (1639-1699)

- Went from common origins to become “royal historiographer”
- Education at Port-Royal by Jansenists; they thought that Man could not overcome Passion by Reason and that Faith was achieved only by Grace
- Enjoyed support of Louis XIV
- Represented strong kings who are decisive, ruthless, and majestic
- Broke from the Baroque: Classical themes; Three Unities; Amoral?
- Moral Dilemmas born of Circumstances, not Heroic Flaw



# Andromaque



- Love Triangle: Andromache (widow of Hector) is loved by Pyrrhus; to save her son she must marry him
- Pyrrhus (son of Achilles) by Hermione
- Hermione by Orestes (son of Agamemnon)
- Hermione gets Orestes to kill Pyrrhus
- Suicide of Hermione
- Andromaque is Queen and Orestes flees



# Hermione Disowns Orestes: Passion must be controlled by Reason

- HERMIONE: Ah, who would believe an outraged lover? You should have read my spirit better. Saw you not through all my rage that my heart have the lie to my lips? Even if I said it, should you have consented? You should have made me repeat it a hundred times. You should have returned to consult me before giving the blow. You should have left to myself the care of my revenge. Adieu! you may depart. I remain in Epirus. I give up Greece, Sparta, my country, my family. It is enough for me, traitor, that they have produced a monster like you.

# Phedre



# Comments on Andromache

- Shows the aristocracy as flawed: Pyrrhus is a serial liar and breaks his oath to the Greeks by marrying and protecting the wife and child of their enemy and to Hermione, his betrothed
- Obsessive Love: Passion leads you to abandon honor and duty—



# Phedre Analysis

- Psychological Drama
- Phedre – Wife of King Theseus, daughter of Minos and Pasiphae; Loves Step-son
- Hippolytus – Devoted to Virgin Goddess, Diana; Loves Aricia, rival claimant to the throne of Thebes
- Oenone, Nurse – Low class character who enables the Fall of Phedre
- Phedre betrays Hippolytus and frames him when she discovers that he can love, but doesn't love her.

# Euripides vs. Racine

- Racine emphasizes the internal struggle of the characters more as a psychological battle; Euripides emphasizes the role of the gods
- Racine makes all the characters sympathetic, even Phedre; he also makes it clear that Hippolytus loves Phedre also, although he won't act upon it.
- Some critics see Phedre as an example of the Jansenist belief in predestination; despite herself she is full of sinful desire and she is denied the grace of being able to resist it;

# Conclusions

- Classical Theatre broke with conventions of Baroque
- Observe Three Unities
- Racine reinforced the attitudes of the court of Louis XIV
- Moliere Satirized the morality of court, clergy, and bourgeois; Racine upheld the moral uprightness of Court