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THR 498-02

19 April 2024

Costume Designing UNCG Theatre's Spring 2024 Production of *Tartuffe*

Over the last three years, I have been assigned to many varying costume practicums in the costume shop at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Through those assignments I have built mermaid tails and created a pair of pants that I then went on to distress and destroy (per the design). I have also made a head piece in the shape of a mohawk with triangles of fabric, and built and altered numerous costume pieces that have been worn by characters from fairies to princes, to rockstars and more. As a culmination of my degree and all the skills I have learned through costume practicums and design and technology courses, I was assigned to be the Costume Designer for the School of Theatre's Spring 2024 production of Moliere's *Tartuffe* as my capstone project in the THR 498-02 course.

This paper will cover the historical research that went into the design, the various decisions and why they were made, and my personal experience as a costume designer. To give background to the play I referred to numerous times during this process, and what guided our conversations and decisions as a directing and design team, here is how *Tartuffe* is described by the Dramatist Play Service:

“The story takes place in the home of the wealthy Orgon, where
Tartuffe—a fraud and a pious imposter—has insinuated himself. He succeeds

magnificently in winning the respect and devotion of the head of the house, and then tries to marry his daughter and seduce his wife and scrounge the deed to the property. He nearly gets away with it, but an emissary from King Louis XIV arrives in time to recover the property, free Monsieur Orgon, and haul Tartuffe off to jail. And so his duplicity is finally exposed and punished. But not before the author has mercilessly examined the evil that men can commit in the guise of religious fervor and the dangers that imperil those who would believe only what they choose to believe despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary.”

(Dramatists Play Service, Inc.)

Through the design process, historical research was done in support of the concept we called “1660s France meets 2023.” This inspired my costume design statement for this show:

Tartuffe is a show that is about hypocrisy, class systems, deception, and the dangers of the idolization of people. Through the show, we follow an upper middle-class family whose patriarch has been deceived by a man who claims piety but is anything but. Through costumes, we will portray a family who is dressed within the original period, 1660’s France, but allude to current fashion, creating an idea of 1660’s France meets 2023. Through this, we will suggest that this play's content is not exceptionally separated from where we are today, and that hypocrites still surround us.

In addition to historical research, we researched into what modern costume piece each character would wear, their color palettes, and the relationships these color alliances would infer. Through all these decisions and conversations with the director and the design team, the final

design was preliminarily set, but would change in several ways through the production process in our shops, as well as in dress rehearsals.

In addition to myself as costume designer, I worked on this show with a number of very talented designers and technicians, as well as our director. The design and direction team included:

- John Gulley, Director
- Randall McMullen, Scene Design
- Jenni Propst, Lighting Design
- B. Hollis, Assistant Costume Designer
- Kendyl Shaughnessy, Hair and Makeup Design
- Rory Greene, Sound Design
- Courtney Swank, Stage Manager

With this team, many conversations were held, including discussions of how we each felt about what *Tartuffe* has to say as a production we were setting out to produce in 2024, how we felt this show could be adapted to make it more accessible for theatergoers today, and what the characters were representing, not only in the 1660s, but in 2023 and 2024. Collaboration is at the heart of theatre and is vital in putting on a production. We collaborated not only in person in our design and production meetings, but also through countless emails that held information from break out costume meetings to design meeting notes to daily calls with costume fitting information that allowed for collaboration with actors.

With collaboration being such a huge part of what we do as creators in theatre, we were constantly meeting, interacting with actors in various fittings, and coming together at dress rehearsals to perfect what we had been building on for a number of months. Our design meetings began in August, and from there, we met about every two weeks bringing in research and ideas

that became more specified as our production became more realized. In November we held shop presentations where designers showed what direction designs were going and to get feedback on what was and was not possible to create within our shop schedule and budget. After these responses came back, we were able to hold our final design presentations on November 28th, where the entire production team and cast came together to see the world the play would be living in.

After these presentations and some time off for final exams, I returned to the costume shop to work on getting things ready for my technicians who would be returning after winter break. Within this time, I shopped for fabrics for the garments that would be built by the UNCG Costume Shop, pulled pieces from our costume stock, and visited Wake Forest University to rent some costume pieces to utilize. Also, during this time, my assistant and I organized paperwork and set up the show binder, where all the actor measurements, build packets where the garments that would be created in the shop had their information stored, and set up rental tracking for the items we borrowed.

During our shop time for this show, which was held from 2 to 5:30 each weekday afternoon from January 3rd through February 15th, I ran fittings for our actors as we called them in to try costume pieces on, helped with alterations as they came out of fittings, shopped online for items we did not locate in our stock that we determined we needed, and kept up with paperwork. Along with these tasks, I was also available to answer questions from the technicians working on the show. Once dress rehearsals began, my assistant Hollis and I would attend each evening rehearsal to watch the actors in costume and to take notes on things that needed to be fixed, changed, or altered. We were also there during the time the actors were getting ready to

help dressers learn how to put certain costume pieces on, and to answer questions from dressers and actors.

During the time I spent in the costume shop for this show, I learned a significant amount about how designers operate in a shop setting. In the past I have been an assistant costume designer where I had a focus on paperwork and note taking, and so being the person making the decisions was challenging but pushed me to learn more about the functioning of a Costume Designer. During shop time I ran fittings, swatched fabric samples to be bought, shopped for fabrics and costume pieces, pulled various garments for fittings, and pulled rental items at Wake Forest University. As I ran fittings, I learned about how to interact with actors as they are trying on costume pieces, which is an especially crucial element to working with costumes. During these fittings I would collaborate with our costume director to make sure each piece fit well, as well as pinned and noted alterations to be sent to the shop. Pulling and shopping costumes was a large chunk of what I did during the shop hours leading up to the time when we would have technicians with us. By pulling, I would go into our costume stock each afternoon with a list of items I was looking for along with the measurements of each actor and look through what we have before adding to the rental and shopping list. Renting from Wake Forest University was a similar experience to pulling from UNCG's costume stock, and upon return to UNCG with the Wake Forest University rentals, I was created paperwork, photographed, and labeled each rented piece with a number to make sure we kept track of everything. Shopping came once we knew we could not pull or rent the items we were searching for. The shopping I did for this show consisted mostly of accessories and shoes, as we were unable to find what we were looking for in UNCG's costume stock.

During the design process, I completed a large amount of historical and non-historical research to accompany the ideas and the decisions I was making for each character, in addition to referencing the script. Through this research, I explored men's and women's wear in the 1600s, contemporary clothing pieces that we wear today, and French fashion in the 1660s. The following will describe some of the information I learned and referenced to as I designed.

As fashion history is a large topic, this will only cover the research I utilized during the design process of the show. I acknowledge there is more information than what I can cover in this paper. Men's wear of around 1650 to 1680 was made up of shortened doublets, breeches that were knee length, and vests (Tortora and Marcketti 176). According to Justine De Young, "a member of FIT's History of Art department since 2015," "the 1660s was a period of transition in menswear from the shrunken doublet and petticoat breeches to the adoption of the long straight-cut coat and vest" (De Young). Doublets often included "thin panes on the sleeves" that would "allow the white of the shirt to show through" (De Young). This use of panes on the sleeves made its way into the costume design, seen in Orgon, Clèante, and Damis' doublets. Also seen in men's wear was the "large floppy lace collar" that was "preferred by the French" (De Young).

As for the women's wear, chemises and under petticoats were worn, as well as bodices that "lengthened and narrowed" from previously seen silhouettes (Tortora and Marcketti 182). Also seen in women's wear were gowns "edged by a wide lace collar or band of linen called a whisk" (Tortora and Marcketti 182). Necklines "tended to be low, wide, and horizontal or oval in shape" with sleeves that were "set low on the shoulder, opening into a full puff that ended below the elbow" (Tortora and Marcketti 182-183). Typically, a "chemise or shift" would be worn underneath "a boned bodice or a separate pair of stays" (De Young). Stays were a type of "stiff

corset that originally sought to create a smooth surface to prevent the wrinkling of expensive dress textiles, but came to be appreciated for their ability to shape the woman's body to the desired silhouette of the period" (De Young). In the design, we opted for modern undergarments such as camisoles for our actors' corsets. Corsets (or bodices) typically came "a very deep point and has a very low, off-the-shoulder neckline" (De Young). I used this typical shape for most of the corset looks, with a few small adjustments made during the build of each garment for the actors' comfortability. For our actors wearing skirts, petticoats were worn underneath to create a fuller look and cover undergarments such as tights and bloomers. One historical aspect that was used for some costumes but not for others was the length of gowns. In the 1660s, "skirts were typically floor-length," but for the modernization of some of the looks, it was opted to shorten the skirts (De Young).

Once I had gathered a good amount of historical research, I began considering what each character's modern twist would be. This idea had been brought about by John Gulley, the director, when he asked, "what does a pair of red sneakers look like in this world?" This was the jumping off point, and while no red sneakers ever made it to the final look of the show, some purple sneakers did! Because we were bringing this show into the 21st century, I began to have conversations with my assistant costume designer Hollis and the supporting costume team about what these characters would look like and wear in the current time. This led to many decisions being made, and while there are so many more than what I will refer to here, these are the main ones.

Shoes were the most across the board modernized aspect of the show, with every character having a modern shoe. Valère and Mariane, the lovers, had matching purple slip-on Vans, Dorine, Mariane's lady's maid, had black Crocs with light up decorations, the two

additional servant characters had Converse and Toms. We knew that shoes were something that could easily be modernized and would make our job easier, as sourcing modern shoes would be much easier in our costume stock and online shopping than finding period accurate shoes.

Along with shoes, the male presenting characters all had modernized pants, with the exception of Valère. Originally, Tartuffe was to wear black cargo pants, but this was changed during dress rehearsals to be a pair of blue jeans as it was determined by the group that the character might look too severe, and we wanted to bring him back to the comical world we were striving for the play to exist in. Orgon, Cléante, and Monsieur Loyal all wore dress pants rather than period typical breeches. Valère also had a wallet chain for his money pouch, which was a modern addition to his costume that also had a nod to his personality, which was a bit clumsy. We thought it might be funny to infer that he would lose his wallet or money if it were not attached to him. Damis, the hot-headed son of Orgon, was given black jeans and black circular sunglasses as his contemporary items. He does a lot of brooding in the show, leading to the decision to give him sunglasses to brood behind. We opted to put him in jeans as he is meant to be on the younger side of the characters, and we thought dress pants would be too formal for him.

Mariane and Valère also wore matching friendship anklets that were the colors of their costumes. Originally these were meant to be worn on the wrist, but as Valère was in long sleeves, we opted to move them to the ankle. This decision worked to our advantage as Valère was in a pair of mid-calf length breeches, and Mariane was in a knee length dress, another modernization of her costume. As it was determined that Mariane would be doing a lot of movement on the floor, we decided that a long gown would not be the best idea and chose to go with the second rendering I had created which depicted the shorter version of the gown. In addition to the

shortening of Mariane's dress and her matching shoes and anklet to Valère, her costume also included some modern accessories. She had a headband with hearts painted on (referring to her being one of the lovers), and a tattoo choker necklace in the same color purple as her shoes and anklet.

Elmire's modernization was in the form of accessories and her shoes, with her accessories being two necklaces she traded out during the show. We went with a necklace as she was the kind of character who would take pride in caring for her belongings and the nice things she had that she was gifted by her husband. The main necklace seen during the show was a green statement necklace, and the second necklace was a "diamond" necklace. The reasoning behind the diamond necklace was for her to "seduce" Tartuffe in what came to be known by the production team as the "seduction scene." In this scene she is attempting to trick Tartuffe into coming on to her so her husband, who is hiding under the table, can see it and see that Tartuffe has been tricking him all along. Other modernizations of the costumes came in the form of colorful mismatched socks for Flipote, Madame Pernelle's mute ladies' maid who we thought would care very well for her socks as she is a working person who is on her feet quite a bit. Madame Pernelle's large fuchsia feather was stuck into her hair to give her height and an overall absurdity to go along with her characterization. Also in the costumes were modern clothing hardware such as zippers.

Beyond historical and non-historical research, special attention had to be paid to a few elements of the show that included color relationships between characters, comical skirt layering for the "seduction scene," and pockets for unrealistically long licorice. The color relationships in the show were one of the very first things I did when we started the process. I had an idea of what colors represented each character to me, and after some collaboration with Hair and

Makeup and the director, color palettes were set even before I knew what the characters would be wearing. In these color palettes, relationships between the characters can be seen. One relationship is that green is seen on both Orgon and Elmire, the husband and wife. I chose to not make them the same green as I thought it may look too matchy, and I also wanted it to be seen that even though they are married, they are not on the same page about Tartuffe. The servants that work for Orgon are seen in very muted blues and creams, with the blue tying them to the other color seen in Orgon's color palette. Mariane and Valère both have matching purples and pinks in their color palettes to relate them back once again to them being the "lovers." Dorine, Mariane's lady's maid who is employed by Orgon, was in red and blue, with the red representing her passion to do and say what she believes is right, and the blue tying her to Orgon and the other servants. Damis, the hot-headed son, was in orange to reiterate this hot-headedness, and Clèante was in yellow as some believe yellow represents perceptiveness, and he is one of the most perceptive characters in the show (*Yellow Color Meaning*). Tartuffe was in mostly dark blues, grays, and blacks in the show to represent his character attempting to be seen as not as well off, until the ending where he came out in deep reds and purples, as these colors are thought to represent wealth and luxury (*The Color Purple and Its Many Meanings*).

The skirt layering conversation and the pockets for the licorice were both collaborative efforts. We needed to layer several skirts on the actor who played Elmire as she needed to be able to have a few layers to pull up during the seduction scene, as the director wanted this to add to the physical comedy. This led to a conversation with the actor about what was comfortable for her to move around the stage in, and after a fitting where we tried about three petticoats under her gown, we determined what combination would work. For the licorice, Tartuffe needed a pocket to store a piece of fake licorice that props built that was about two and a half to three feet

long. It needed to be stored in a pants pocket, so while pulling pants for the actor, we had to take this into consideration. Props sent over the prop licorice for us to try on in a fitting, and we got the correct placement for it.

Through my time as costume designer for UNCG's spring production of *Tartuffe*, I learned very much about how a designer functions in a production schedule, how one shops and pulls costumes, how to run fittings, and much more. I learned how to take feedback and use it in my next piece of work and how to communicate with collaborators towards a common goal. I will look back at this experience fondly and I am proud to have this show in my portfolio as I make my way out into the professional world. I am thankful to the amazing team of people who worked with me on this show and cannot wait to see what is next.

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