The Miser – Actor Packet
Written and Compiled by Dr. Osborne's Dramaturgy Class
Edited by Dr. Osborne

Moliére is a national icon. The "god of laughter." The Shakespeare of France. The man who wrote so well that French was (and is!) referred to as the "language of Moliére." He is synonymous with the theatrical "classic" and often *the* model of farce, and has even inspired his own term for Moliére scholars – the *Moliéristes*. Yet very little is known of the man himself – only a few documents remain that even have his signature on them. Not surprisingly, rumors abound.

Moliére

We know that he was a writer, actor, and manager, and that Louis XIV became his patron. He married the much-younger Armande Béjart, daughter of Madeleine Béjart, and possibly his own daughter as well. He also died suddenly and without access to a priest; as an excommunicated actor who had no time to recant on his deathbed, this led to all sorts of problems with his burial. Ultimately the King had to register his wish that Moliére be buried in consecrated ground, so the Catholic Church relented. They allowed the burial, but only at night, only with two priests present, and without ceremony. Yet the story does not end there. Indeed, Moliére rose from the grave during the French Revolution. Collectors announced that they possessed Moliére's tooth and one vertebra, and his jawbone was allegedly put on display at the Museum of French Antiquities in 1860. Even stranger, rumor has it that revolutionaries exhumed the skeletons of Moliére and the famous poet, La Fontaine, with the intention of grinding up portions of their skeletons so they could be made into a porcelain cup from which "one could drink patriotically to the Republic."[1]

If nothing else, the rumors prove that Moliére and his work have become the stuff of legend in France. *The Miser* – an utter failure when it premiered in 1668 – was written at a time in French history when, despite extraordinary trouble with France's economy, the king was spending (and borrowing) absurd amounts of money. In 1661, royal revenues totaled about 31 million francs. Of that, 9 million went directly to interest on the royal loans. Yet the King spent and spent, first building the palace of Versailles and later maintaining it and the extravagant lifestyle he had there. The high standard of living – a source of contention and revolt among the French people – surely had an effect on Moliére who had the king for his patron and relied on his goodwill for a living.

Though *The Miser* was based originally on Plautus's *Aurularia*, its themes, characters, and hilarity still resonate with a contemporary audience – especially an audience in the midst of an economic crisis! The information that follows helps to place *The Miser* in Moliére's canon. It also provides a general historical background, information on politics, culture, manners, and much, much more. Please read it, enjoy it, and ask questions as they arise!

One last note – anytime the packet says to see the dramaturgy folder on the intranet, you can find it at Intranet / Documents / Production Management / 2010-11 Season / Miser / Dramaturgy.

~ Dr. Osborne

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[1] Story quoted in Mechele Leon's *Moliére, the French Revolution, and the Theatrical Afterlife*, 141.

Moliére – The Man
Zoe Chase

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, stage name Moliére, was born in Paris in 1622. As a child he went to school and worked for his father who was the upholsterer and valet to the king of France, Louis XIII, a position that Moliére was to inherit when he was older. When Moliére came of age he decided he did not want to be the king's upholsterer and went to college instead, graduating with a law degree. Again he changed paths and decided to pursue a career in theatre. Moliére's love of theatre began when, as a child, his grandfather took him to the theatre. Moliére continued to visit the theatre in college when he and his friends would sneak off campus.

In 1643 he joined the Béjart family's theatre troupe, Illustre-Théâtre, because he was in love with Madeleine Béjart. It was also at this time that he began using his stage name, Moliére. The troupe built its own theatre in 1644 only to have it go bankrupt in 1646. The troupe toured the provinces until 1658 when they returned to Paris and performed a "little entertainment" called *Le Docteur amoureux (The Amorous Doctor)* before King Louis XIV. The rest, as they say, is history!

Contemporaries of Moliére:

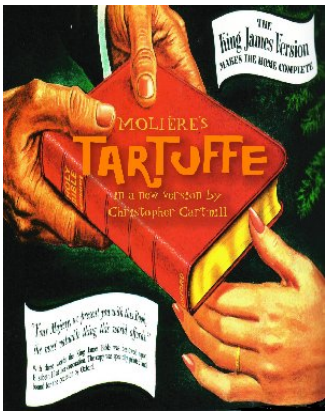
- Jean Racine – poet, dramatist, and historiographer; *Phèdre*
- Jean Baptiste Lully – Ballet master, musician, and opera writer; favorite of Louis XIV
- Pierre Beauchamps – Choreographer and dancer
- Jean de La Fontaine – poet
- Pierre Corneille – poet & dramatist; *Le Cid*

Miles Malleson — Found in Translation
Margaret Medwedew

Miles Malleson (1888-1969) was an English actor primarily known for playing small comedic character parts in the theatre, such as Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice* and Peter Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He appeared in nearly a hundred feature films, including *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1952) and *Dracula* (1958). He worked as screenwriter on such films as *Nell Gwynn* (1934) and *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940), in which he had small roles. As a playwright, Malleson wrote *The Fanatics* (1916) and *'D' Company* (1916), but is best known for his adaptations of Moliére. In the introduction to his "New English Versions" of *The Misanthrope, The Imaginary Invalid,* and *Tartuffe,* Margaret Webster writes that "for the first time in English, the dialogue has style." *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre* credits Malleson with "bringing Molière to the English stage in versions which appealed to the average playgoer, and proved invaluable to repertory and provincial theatres."

"These Malleson versions may not be altogether simple to play. They demand of the actor what Moliére himself must have demanded- and deserved: sharpness of observation, agility of mind, immense speed and precision of speech, fantasy, warmth, breadth; above all, a common humanity[…] He has given to the English speaking actor a medium for playing Moliére which is viable because it is alive."
~ Margaret Webster

Moliére – the Rule Breaker
Zoe Chase



Moliére was notorious for rule breaking. His plays were mostly satirical comedies focused on the political climate (and hypocrisy) in France. During the 17th Century, France was in a state of great unrest and change both politically and religiously. Government and religion were not separate like our modern church and state but rather one and the same. The nation was divided between Protestants and Catholics and the King allied himself with the Catholics from early on in his reign. The church dictated how people should behave and what they should believe, and often this did not line up with the way that people in church and government acted. Moliére often included characters in his plays that brought these discrepancies to light. In fact, he was so good at it that his play *Tartuffe* was banned for more than five years. It had to be rewritten three times (and pushed forward by the King) before the Church allowed it to be performed.

Louis XIV & His Court
Mackenzie McBride

> *"Those who imagine that these are merely matters of ceremony are gravely mistake. The peoples over whom we reign, being unable to apprehend the basic reality of things, usually derive their opinions from what they can see with their eyes."*
>
> ~Louis XIV

Louis XIV, the longest reigning monarch in European history, was also known as the Sun King; just as the sun is emblematic of a center point on the horizon, all of France seemed to be centered on Louis. He built his regime on ceremony, the most important being the daily mass as he was a devout Catholic; he expected his courtiers to attend all ceremonies and follow his demands with no exceptions. When he sensed a need to solidify his power base, he built the palace of Versailles (which cost roughly the same as a modern airport) and required all proprietors of estates across France to live there – an act that forced many of his nobles to go into debt and lose contact with their own bases of support. He then corrupted them with gambling and excesses at court. This meant that the nobles became completely dependent on Louis XIV, and set up an environment that left nobles jockeying for the king's favor. "The court gravitated around ambition. Nobody was tranquil or indifferent; everybody was busily trying to better their position by pleasing, helping, or hindering someone else."[2]

> *"The king is expected to keep the entire aristocracy busy, consequently to make a display of himself . . . It is the life of an actor who is on stage the entire day."*

Louis XIV was extremely perceptive when it came to his nobles and the perception of power. He could glance around a room during an important event and know exactly which nobles had failed to show up. If any nobleman was frequently absent, he would lose his caste ranking and be renounced by the king. Voltaire compared Louis XIV to the Roman emperor Augustus because of his choice to consolidate all of the state's power in his own person.

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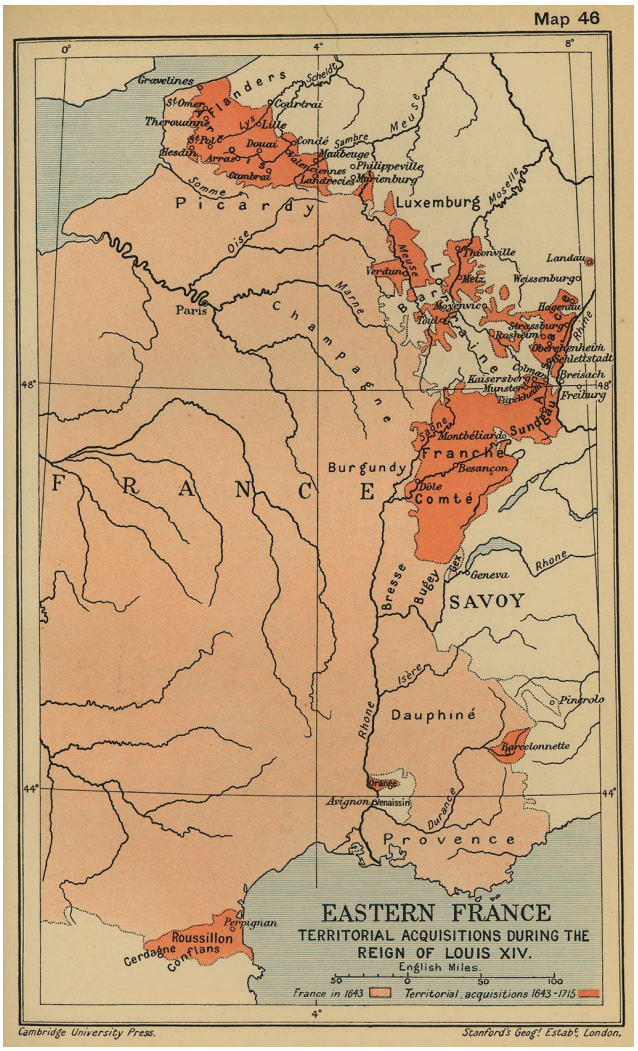
[2] Kettering, Sharon. "Brokerage and the Court of Louis XIV." *The Historical Journal* 36 (1993): 69-87. Accessed January 17, 2011 , <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639516>.

Under the reign of Louis XIV, tensions escalated between the commoners and the nobles. One reason for this was because Louis was spending so much money solidifying his own power. He raised taxes many times, and most of the increases only applied to the poor and working class. Between the taxes (and the terribly difficult economy) and the physical separation of the nobles from the people, the commoners grew to despise the nobles. The nobles were only 160,000 people out of 25 million; they and the king enjoyed immense wealth while the majority of the rest of population was in extreme poverty.

Louis XIV, the Church & Major Money Problems
Heather Reynolds

Throughout much of the 17th century, Cardinal Richelieu of the Catholic Church dominated French politics and public policy. During his reign there were several conflicts between the Catholic powers in France and the Protestant Huguenots, culminating in Richelieu limiting much of their power. By the end of Louis XIV's reign (and repeal of the Edict of Nantes), there were little to no Protestants in France. As a result of Richelieu's expensive public policies, particularly his foreign policy, France had several major economic crises. This was not helped by France's usual entanglement in foreign wars and Louis XIV's habit of showing off the wealth and prosperity of France with elaborate parties, huge, spectacle-driven performances of dance and theatre, and the building of the extraordinary and extravagant Versailles.



Louis XIV's rule was not cheap. The king spared no expense to maintain his hold on his power. He moved the entire court to Versailles to keep the nobles under his thumb while relying only on a small inner circle of advisors – most of whom were bourgeois lawyers who served "at the pleasure" of the King. His persecution of the Huguenots and his huge costs to the treasury alienated many French people – particularly those who were neither noble nor terribly well off financially – and caused serious harm to the economy. France was quite successfully militarily, becoming involved in wars across Europe and exercising its power quite freely over much of Europe, with powerful nations like Austria and Spain falling under French assault.

Some Major Events – A Timeline
Heather Reynolds

- 1598 - Edict of Nantes allows Protestants freedom of religion and some security.
- 1610 - Henry IV is assassinated.
- 1610 – Louis XIII succeeds Henry IV as king of France.
- 1625, 1627 – Protestants revolt and are suppressed by Cardinal Richelieu and the royal troops.

- 1635 – France joins the Thirty Years War against Austria and Spain.
- 1642 – Cardinal Richelieu dies.
- 1643 – Louis XIII dies. Louis XIV takes the throne at the age of five. The regent of France is officially Louis' mother until such time as he reaches adulthood, but Cardinal Mazarin essentially runs the country.
- 1648 – Austria is defeated in the Thirty Years War.
- 1648-1653 – The Fronde sweeps through France. The Fronde were a series of civil disturbances brought on by increased taxes and economic struggles. Mazarin was, like Richelieu with the Protestants, able to suppress the dissident voices.
- 1659 – Spain is defeated in the Thirty Years War.
- 1661 – Cardinal Mazarin dies, Louis XIV takes over rule of France in earnest and rules for a total of 72 years, the longest of any European monarch.
- 1682 – official opening of Versailles
- 1685 – Edict of Nantes is revoked; widespread slaughter of the Protestants

Manners & Etiquette
Margaret Medwedew

While specific rules of etiquette existed, the ideal for social conduct was called honnetete. Honnetete created a society where all could be "equal" as long as they understood the social, moral, political and aesthetic rules. "Equal" here meant that true social status still existed, but that two people of differing social class could meet on a common ground. It was a "celebration of the status quo against the forces of disorder" and included tenets like:

- Talk obligingly to all
- Contradict as little as possible
- Avoid manners that are bizarre, inattentive, mean, and repulsive.

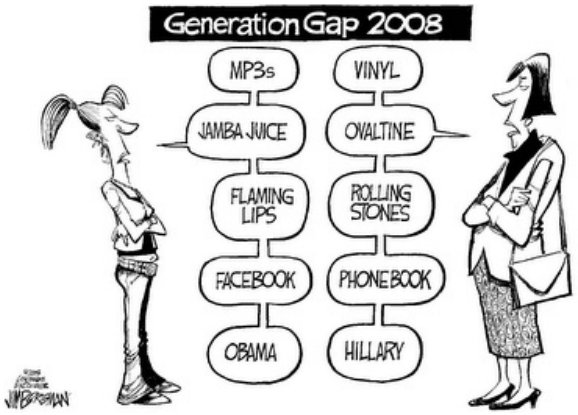
The idea of honnetete differed from the specific rules of etiquette that Louis XIV demanded at court. He insisted upon the formalities of his etiquette, formalities that changed often and were extreme in nature. As with all things in an absolutist monarchy, these customs were dictated by the king and followed at his insistence. These Versailles protocols penetrated to lesser societies and were so important that many books were written regarding the specific interactions between classes. Like honnetete, they were a common ground that all could understand, and included:

- A lady never held hands or linked arms with a gentleman (it was in poor taste, and quite difficult in the large, fashionable skirts). Instead, she placed her hand on top of the gentleman's bent arm.
- When a gentleman sat down, he slid his left foot in front of the right, placed his hands on the sides of the chair, and gently lowered himself down.
- No one crossed their legs in public.
- A gentleman was to do no work other than writing letters, giving speeches, practicing fencing, or dancing. For pleasure, he could engage in hunting, archery, or indoor tennis.

The Generation Gap: Harpagon and his Children
Kelly Terry

Parents and children have battled it out – on stage and off – since the days of the ancient Greeks. Undoubtedly, long ago, a frustrated, chiton-clad Greek soldier shouted in vain at his daughter for flirting with the neighbor boy, wasting money, or disrespecting her father. In 17th century France, this disparity was even more striking because the older generation identified with the policies and governance of Louis XIII, while the younger generation identified with those of his son, King Louis XIV.

Harpagon, and the generation under Louis XIII: The idea of absolute monarchy was not yet embraced by the French people, and Louis XIII was a sickly and nervous king. More historically notable than he, however, was his Cardinal and later Head of Council, Armand Richelieu. Richelieu controlled every detail of life during his 'reign,' from artistic regulations to the nobility. His strict control was vital in squashing rebellion in France and creating a single, central seat of power—something that Louis XIV would take full advantage of when he came into power. Under Richelieu, more sober clothing and a strict self-control was the fashion.



The Lovers, and the generation under Louis XIV: Louis XIV used the paths Richelieu had paved liberally and successfully. He continued to dominate the feudal nobility, but instead of simply continuing the decrease of their power, he moved them all to Versailles and gave them new, largely meaningless duties and titles. In short, he controlled the aristocracy by giving them things that they wanted, while withholding any true power from them. His baroque tastes called for elaborate fashions (in both men and women), gilded rooms, and an aesthetic of more is more.

<u>Disinherited???</u>
Mackenzie McBride

It's a common misconception that in 17th century France the eldest son was the primary heir to his family's fortune. In fact, this was only true of *noble* families. Families that were not of noble heritage followed what were known as the Breton Customary Laws. These laws ensured that the estate of a parent was divided equally among all heirs regardless of age or gender. Heirs were usually children, but if there were no children or the children had been renounced, extended family could also make a claim. Surprisingly, most families were very willing to abide by the Breton Laws and tried to guarantee an equal division of the assets.

So what happened when someone remarried? If a wife died, her husband inherited all of her assets and maintained control over the family and kids. The only inheritance the children would receive at the time of their mother's death was lineage property (property previously owned by their mother's ancestors). If the children were minors, their father would also assume control over that too. Not unlike today, stepmothers faced ridicule and resentment from their stepchildren, who were known to argue that the stepmother received a larger inheritance than she deserved.

Marriage in the 17th Century
Katie Kupferberg

Marriage in the seventeenth century was almost always arranged in some manner, particularly in bourgeois and noble families. They were usually arranged by the family of the bride and were based upon class, money, and political or military alliances. It was not uncommon for women to marry into their own family to maintain the noble line. For example, marriages were often arranged between cousins, even if there was a big age difference. (Matchmakers – or matrimonial agents – appear frequently in late 17th century comedies as the *femme d'intrigue* character, matchmaking, fortune telling, practicing black magic, manipulating, and generally demonstrating bold and ingenious behavior.)

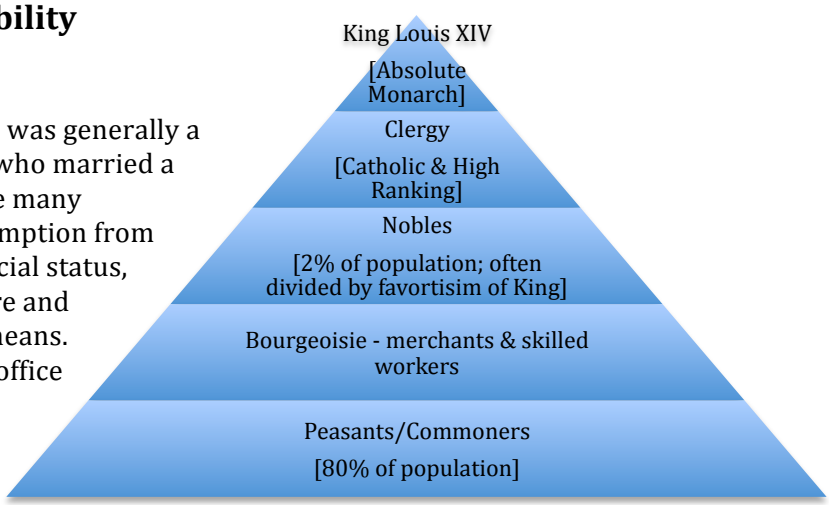
An unmarried woman was generally not accepted into society unless she was widowed and chose not to remarry. If a marriage was arranged for a wealthy woman, she was given no choice but to marry, regardless of her feelings towards the man chosen for her. Dowries depended upon how much the bride's family was worth. (The dowry for Louis XIV's marriage to Maria Theresa was to have been 500,000 écus!) Marriage contracts often included a yearly allowance and a specific inheritance for the wife when the husband died. Women were to oversee servants, care for children, and tend to the home while their husbands worked. Though women were taught to obey their husbands, to bear children and to leave their political thoughts behind, there were any number of exceptions!

...and Remarriage in the 17th century
Merritt Rodriguez

As might be expected for the time, widowhood was common and remarriage was therefore similarly common. It is estimated that between 20-25% of all marriages were remarriages for at least one partner. Widowers remarried more often and more quickly than widows as a whole. Wealthy women had no reason to enter under another mans legal command if they had already attained social standing and a high quality of life, and poor women had difficulty finding second partners.

Social Structure & Nobility
Kat McLeod

Nobility was a social and legal position. There was generally a hereditary transfer; however a noblewoman who married a common man would lose her title. There were many privileges that came with nobility: levied/exemption from taxes, reservation of offices in the military, social status, and much more. During the 16th century, more and more commoners reached nobility by other means. They could achieve noble status by taking an office that would result in a title after several generations or by being granted such title by the king. The hierarchy of titles is as follows (from greatest authority to least):



1. duc (duke) - possessor of a duchy
2. marquis (marquis) - possessor of a marquesate
3. comte (earl) - possessor of a county (French equivalent of Anselm/Count of Alberti)
4. vicomte (viscount) - possessor of a viscounty
5. baron (baron) - possessor of a barony
6. For everyone else, see the pyramid!
7. For servants, see below.

BUT social position in the court of Louis XIV was often determined more by length of time as a noble than by the title itself. So a comte whose family had been noble since the 14th century would have a higher rank than a marquis whose family became noble in the 15th century.

In 1666, King Louis XIV began a massive crackdown on "fake" nobles – probably because he needed additional tax income and the nobles were exempt! No longer was simple testimony about a noble parent or grandparent acceptable; nobles needed written proof that their nobility dated back to at least 1560 or they would be fined, lose their assumed titles, and have to start paying their taxes.

Servants and Apprentices
Merritt Rodriguez

Servants were frequently adolescents who took jobs for educational purposes as well as practicality; they provided cheap labor and relieved their families of the pressures of providing for them. Usually young servants stopped when they finished their education or training, and they typically retained a status and function similar (if slightly below) that of the family children. Both husband and wife had authority over – and responsibility to – their young servants. Masters were responsible for providing the necessities (food, clothing, shelter, etc.), but also taught manners, religion, reading, writing, and more (and had authority to punish their servants as they saw fit). Every household was different; some servants were trusted members of the family, while others weren't.

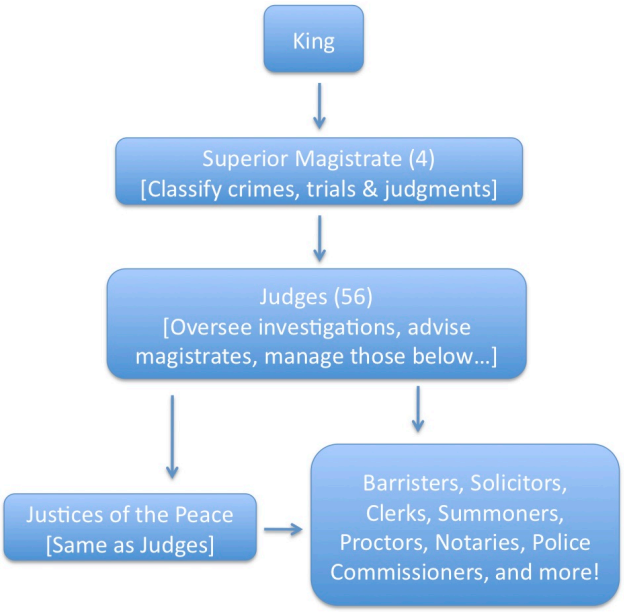
Servants and Apprentices bore similar conditions and often there was little distinction between them besides pay. Servants either were paid or worked for room and board while apprentices sometimes had to pay their masters; both were often forbidden to marry until the age of 21. Despite these differences, both generally inhabited the master's house. Multiple servants and apprentices might live together in one room, each waking up before the sun rose to then work all day.

In 17th Century France, there was also a servant class that catered to the nobility and upper class, and positions were often inherited from mother to daughter or father to son. The average wage for a domestic servant (assuming s/he actually received payment) was around 70 francs a year. Servants who were privy to the private lives of their masters often had some leverage in common negotiations. This was even more evident with their master's children who they were expected to govern and educate to a certain extent.

The French Legal System…Baffling!
Jayme Smith

To say that the legal arguments in 17th century France were bureaucratic and confusing would be an understatement. In an attempt to centralize and clean up a baffling and overwhelmingly corrupt legal system, King Louis XIV passed the Royal Edict of January 1664.

The Royal Edict was based on a system of tiers; each tier was accountable to the tier above (and the king), and each played a slightly different role in the system. The four Superior Magistrates would select the Judges based primarily on economic standing, education, and family history, the idea being the better the person's birth, the better suited for office they would be. Judges could hire as many justices of the peace as they needed in order to govern individual townships. If a justice needed help, he hired a clerk.



Judges worked on a sliding schedule that changed their duties and location every month to prevent dirty dealings; however, this made for inconsistencies among the judges and confusion among the lower tiers. The Royal Edict of January 1664 set pay scales for judges and justices, but "tipping" was customary. Clerks were paid by their employer. While the Royal Edict of January 1664 may have been muddled by bureaucracy, everyone ultimately reported to the king.

Crime and Punishment – Torture, Hanging, and More!
Wes Richter

Until 1804, a large painting of the Crucifixion hung on the wall in the courthouse of Paris. To them, it was a symbol of both the pain and justice that was necessary for human survival. The opinion of France for much of the 17th century was that a crime damaged both the personal victim and the state. It was that state's job, alone, to step in and enact retribution for both parties. And so, the state was authorized to provide punishments of torture in extreme cases.

In fact, in 1667 – the year before *The Miser* was first performed – Louis XIV began work on the *Grand ordonnance criminelle.* This masterpiece of judiciary processes defined everything about investigating, trying, and punishing offenders. It even included procedures for prosecuting (or getting testimony from) deaf-mutes and accused who died prior to trial. Some crimes automatically became "royal cases" and had to go through the royal courts (treason, sacrilege, rebellion against orders or agents of justice, counterfeiting, heresy, etc.). In Harpagon's case, since his "theft" happened in his home and not on a highway or thoroughfare, the local judges and courts would deal with the prosecution.

Torture and punishment could include:

- Breaking on the Wheel — victim's arms and legs were tied to rungs on a wheel, then broken; sometimes the wheel was then rolled through water to drown the victim, much like the wheel on a mill, or the victim was simply left
- Burning — wives who killed their husbands or servants who killed their masters were sometimes burned to death; kind executioners would strangle them with a rope first
- Slow Strangling — usually with a mechanical device of some sort to draw the process out
- Hanging — which could be quick or slow, and could also be preceded by cutting or chopping the victim's body
- And more…remember, France was the country that created the guillotine in an effort to *execute* humanely…

For many years, torture was used as a way to extract "truth" from witnesses. The point of these punishments was to inspire fear into other criminals rather than serve a religious purpose. In old and new France alike, torture and execution became less popular, and the arguments spurred by the "humane" guillotine sparked quite a lot of debate in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Foreign Relations between France and Italy/Spain
Merritt Rodriguez

France had troubled relationships with Italy and Spain for hundreds of years before Louis XIV took the throne. Louis XIII married Anne of Austria (daughter of Philip III of Spain), who gave birth to Louis XIV after 23 years and four miscarriages. Louis XIV – seen by many as a divine miracle – married Maria Theresa of Spain in 1660, finally uniting Spain and France. A few years later, he would invade Spain in the War of Devolution (1665) – an attempt to claim what he thought of as her birthright for his rule.

The Revolt in Naples referred to in the play is probably the Massaniello Revolt (1647). It was a revolt against the Spanish rule and taxes on the poor. It was lead by a fisherman named Massaniello who was ultimately successful in attaining his demands from the government. He was later murdered; however, this did not prevent his followers from continuing for the next nine months.

Money, Gambling, Dowries, and More
Kat McLeod

The **crown** was first established as a British coin in 1544 during the reign of Henry VIII. The name originates from the French gold coronne coin issued in the 14th century. Crowns were manufactured in both gold and silver forms, although the gold coin stopped being produced in 1662.

10,000 crowns in 1600 = more than half a million dollars today!

The **franc** is a gold coin that was brought into the French currency in 1360. The silver franc was circulated from 1575 to 1641. During the revolution, it became the "basic monetary unit" of France – much like the dollar is here in the U.S.

A French Crown

The **écu** is a historic French coin known most for the shield carved on its face.

The term ecu originally referred to the triangular shield held by man at arms in the middle ages. The term was later applied to gold and silver French coins minted from the 17th century, very similar to the English crown. 1 ecu = ~3 francs

An écu

Usury is the lending of money with the intention of regaining it with obscenely large amounts of interest. Usury was considered a sinful (and illegal) practice by Christians, but was more common among European Jews during the middle ages. Resentment built between Christians and Jews over this practice, and it soon became one of the reasons for unfair treatment of the Jews. In Moliére's day, the sons of impoverished nobles were often the victims of usurers. *The Miser* was the first play to address usury in this period.

Gambling – especially at cards – became a widespread form of entertainment during the reign of Louis XIV. It was so popular, in fact, that the king issued six different edicts prohibiting it between 1661 and 1708. Offenders were fined 1000 francs; one-third went to the poor, one-third to the King, and one-third to the informer.

Though we often think of **dowries** as wealth going into the pockets of the husband-to-be, this was not actually the case. Dowries were often divided so that a third went into an account for the wife's use and typically included a yearly income. So, if a woman did not have a dowry, she would be entirely dependent on her new husband.

Loving the Language, or How You Know You're In a Molière Play
Kelly Terry

"May your body shrink to the size of your soul and be swept on to the floors of hell, a sizzling speck of dirt!"

~ Frosine (31)

Molière is famous for his use of language, which shines through in this translation. It's something to be savored! In fact, when folks began a campaign to make French the "official language of European law" in 2004, newspaper articles repeatedly referred to French as "the language of Molière." So celebrate the words!

Insolent Insults from *The Miser:*[3]

- Gallow's bird—a person who deserves to be hanged
- Jackanape—an impudent or conceited fellow
- Scallywag—rascal, rogue, or scamp

Amazing Alliteration:

- "Fiddle-faddles, frills and furbelows and fancy knots"
- "Fawning flatterer"
- "Justice on the Justices"
- "Poaching on my preserves"

[3] Definitions are from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary at http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary.

- Skinflint—one who would save, gain, or extort money by any means
- Usurer—one who charges exorbitant interest on a loan
- New broom—a newly appointed person expected to make both changes and mistakes. From the old proverb, "a new broom sweeps clean, but an old broom knows where the dirt is."[4]
- Blackguard—a rude or unscrupulous person; interestingly, was originally just a term for a kitchen servant
- Jackdaw—a small, crow-like bird, known for its thievishness and talkativeness. As an insult, the word refers to a loud, obnoxious, and possibly criminal person.

Scheming, Poison & Black Magic!
Loren Davidson


Marquis de Montespan

Scheming, intrigue, and manipulation followed many paths in the court of King Louis XIV. One of King Louis XIV's longtime mistresses (and mother of six of his children), Marquis de Montespan, wanted so badly to seduce the king into a lifetime of love that she was rumored to have paid Catherine Deshays (aka – La Voisin) to perform a black mass which entailed sacrificing a baby over her nude body. Allegedly, priests who were rebelling against the Catholic Church took part in the black mass as well.

In 1680, the Marquis de Montespan was implicated in one of the most sensational criminal cases of 17th century France – the infamous Affair of the Poisons. This scandal implicated individuals of all classes – noble, bourgeois, and commoners – in resorting to female fortune-tellers for drugs, poisons, black masses, and other illicit activities. This very public trial sentenced 36 people to death, including La Voisin, who was burned at the stake!


Black Mass

King Louis XIV is known for having a watchful eye over everyone in his court, so it seems logical that he would have known something about these black masses – especially when nobles from his court participated. However, it is said that at times he was lenient of witchcraft and sorcery because it resembled exotic performance. This could be one reason that Madame De Montespan chose this adventurous (and risky!) method to win over her lover. The public inquiry ended any tolerance Louis XIV may have had; he suspended the accusations against his lover, and though she remained at court for another 11 years, she fell out of favor. In 1691, she withdrew to a convent, where she eventually became the mother superior.

Farce – A French Tradition
Jayme Smith

Farce has been a documented part of theatre since the first plays of Aristophanes in ancient Greece. As a serious writing style, farce was fully developed in Medieval France; one might even say farce is a French tradition!

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4 "Sayings," http://users.tinyonline.co.uk/gswithenbank/sayingsn.htm

Farce draws on stock characters, improbable situations and even more improbable solutions that somehow always work out in the end. Stock characters appear in Moliére's work as well, the crafty whore, the country bumpkin, the damsel in distress, the wise hero, and – of course – the old miser! The slapstick nature, highly physical acting, and quick pacing of farce were likely influenced by the Italian touring commedia troupes.

While Moliére is not strictly classified as a writer of farce, his plays are "splashed with elements of farce."[5] Farces – like *Noises Off* or *Lend Me A Tenor* – are often hilarious because they poke fun at social conventions; "these people *do not* realize there are acting outlandishly, in fact, this is always how they behave themselves."[6] The most prominent element of farce used in Moliére's plays would have to be witty wordplay; quick back and forth banter, misunderstandings, double entendres, and perfectly placed pauses… The End.

Commedia dell'Arte & Molière
Kelly Terry

Commedia dell'Arte was a huge hit in France in Molière's time. In fact, it was so popular in France that it earned a French name – the Comédie-Italienne. Commedia was an ensemble-based form that relied on improvisation, masks, stock characters, and lots of comic action. Commedia can be seen in a huge range of works, from Molière and Shakespeare to Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. With the rise of Neoclassicism and the cycling of Italian acting troupes through the region on a constant basis, it is not surprising that shows like *The Miser* display so many characteristics of the Commedia form.

The Arlecchino (Harlequin)

Commedia dell'Arte has become famous for its physical, visual comedy (like the 'pat down' scene between Harpagon and La Fleche). Molière's comic treatment of the theatrical aside may also have its roots in the irreverent, self-aware style of Commedia performances (though they were also used in Roman theatre, including *Aulularia*, one source for *The Miser*). Commedia dell'Arte is also known for the 'recycling' of characters; using the same stock templates and applying them in different situations, usually for great comedic effect. In *The Miser*, many characters mirror their Commedia counterparts – some more strongly than others:

- Harpagon—similar to the ridiculous-but-wealthy Pantalone, father to one of the lovers
- The Lovers—innamorati; identified primarily through their thwarted love
- Frosine—Colombina, the witty, intelligent, and always-ready-for-intrigue maid to the innamorata
- Jacques—Pedrolino; doltish and honest servant; often the butt of jokes
- La Fleche—zanni; one of the many comic servants!

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5 Albert Bermel, *Farce: A History from Aristophanes to Woody Allen*.

6 Jessica Davis, *Farce*.

Dance
Loren Davidson

Court dance was extraordinarily popular in 17th century France. In fact, King Louis XIV was an avid performer of a style we now call Baroque dance. King Louis XIV and his court assembled elaborate ensembles of entertainers not merely for pleasure, but for ritual as well. These court ceremonies often featured Louis XIV – a prestigious and favored dancer. He was most known for his role in a ballet (or ceremony) called *Le Ballet de la Nuit*, in which he performed as Apollo (god of the sun), wearing a flashy corselet and a kilt made of fine golden fabric that seemed to emit rays of sun, hence his nickname "the Sun King."

Louis XIV - the Sun King

Louis XIV loved dance so much that he established the world's first ballet school, the Académie Royale de Danse (1661) and the Académie Royale de Musique (1669). Jean Baptiste Lully, an Italian ballet master, musician, and opera writer, ran the Académie Royale de Musique and established a dance academy within it; it is now the ballet of the Paris Opera. Molière, Lully, and Pierre Beauchamps (often called a "father" of ballet) collaborated frequently on entertainments for the king. Under these three great talents, magnificent, large-scale dances and operas became one of the ways that King Louis XIV could demonstrate the power, influence, and splendor of his court to the world.

Court Dance – A Quick "How To…"
Loren Davidson

"From headdress to heel…Baroque dance relishes precision and subtlety. Modest turnout and low relevès, coupled with controlled, vertical carriage, radiate elegance and ease… Every detail—the raising of an eyebrow, the arching of a foot—is charged with meaning and purpose."
~ Marilyn Lawrence

The opening of the court dance usually began with an overture, always accompanied by a musician (or ensemble of musicians) to guide the gestural steps. This overture was a reverence to the king and an opening of the guests. These dances, driven by the court music, range from rhythms in 3 counts and 4 counts and allow the dancers to emote according to their character. The 3 count phrasing tends to be spritely whereas the 4 count has more flow.

These character dances were never without elaborate staging and decorative fashion. Costumes affect the ways that dancers move, communicate with the audience, and experience their own bodies. From capes and coats to corsets, farthingales, and bum rolls, the body is hidden and revealed in specific and interesting ways. Dancers often wore masks or large, heavy wigs as well, and had to rely on their bodies – not their facial expressions – to show their emotional connection to the work. Louis XIV was so proud of his dance that he commissioned its recording; famous choreographer Raoul-Auger Feuillet was the first to begin dance notation.

For some great clips of reconstructed baroque dance, take a look at the Dramaturgy folder on the intranet.

Culture in the Reign of Louis XIV
Katie Kupferberg

During the reign of Louis XIV, France became a country known for its grandeur and decadent excess with regards to culture and the arts. In fact, Louis XIV consciously used the arts to display his country's greatness, both for his own people and for ambassadors from other countries. Although Italy was renowned for its elaborate architecture and art works, many credit King Louis XIV with making France famous for its lavish – and strictly regulated – palaces, architecture, music, dance, theatre, and culture. After Louis XIV became King, he was no longer happy living in his childhood palace (the Louvre). In collaboration with Jean-Bapitste Colbert, Louis XIV designed Versailles, creating an opulent palace gilt in gold, portraits, art, sculptures and acres of gardens.

The Gates at Versailles

Interior of Versailles

The King moved his court to the countryside, bringing his political rivals and most of the nobles with him in order to secure his power. Music, theatre, and opera became very popular because of the Palais Royal in Paris; Moliére and Jean Baptiste Lully both wrote for the king, creating stunning theatre and opera. The King brought gymnasts, performers, actors, singers, and dancers (and elaborate fireworks displays!) to the palace for daily entertainments. Though art was strictly regulated by the Academies, this era also marked a connection between art and the public. For the first time, abandoned royal gardens and galleries were open to the public. Culture in Paris became important to all – from the aristocrat to the commoner. The 17th century became the time France ruled the world with their cultural renaissance and this was all because of King Louis XIV's focus on the arts in his Court.

Gardens at Versailles

**Thank you to Katie Kupferberg for many of the Versailles images in this packet!

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