A COSTUME DESIGN FOR *THE LEARNED LADIES*

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to document and describe the costume design project behind the University of British Columbia (UBC) production of The Learned Ladies. This comedy, written by seventeenth century French playwright Molière (Jean Baptiste de Poquelin) in 1672, is a five-act play composed in verse. Our Production ran from February 7-16, 2008 in the Frederic Wood Theatre and was performed by students in the Bachelor of Fine Arts Acting Program.

MFA candidate Patrick Gauthier directed the production and the creative team included Stephania Schwartz (Set Designer), Kristin Robinson (Lighting Designer). The construction of the costumes by a team of undergraduate costume design students, was supervised by Jean Driscoll-Bell (Head of Wardrobe) and her assistant Charlotte Burke. My own assistants were BFA students Chantelle Balfour, Jessica Jeffrey and Elena Dubova. Alison Green served as my thesis advisor.

The paper starts with a brief synopsis of the play and its significance at the time it was performed in Europe, followed by a description of the creative process and the production concept. The following chapters explain in detail the costume design concept and its elements character by character as well as the technicalities of the costume production.
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1. SYNOPSIS

Molière’s penultimate play is a social satire on academic pretension that also playfully skewers the rationale of early feminists.

*The Learned Ladies* is essentially a parody of the pompous and hypocritical French middle class of the time. During the early seventeenth century, Catherine de Vivonne, Marquise de Rambouillet, began hosting social gatherings, called “salons”, for likeminded fellow aristocrats and intellectuals in her townhouse in Paris. A reaction against the vulgarity and excesses of Louis XIV court, the influential Salon movement eventually became the perceived standard for the middle classes to aspire to.

The story centers on young Henriette, who is in love with and hopes to wed Clitandre. Her authoritarian mother Philaminte, who is the leader of the household’s so-called “academy” and the very embodiment of academic affectation, instead wants to marry her to Trissotin, a vacuous pseudo-poet who is only interested after the family’s money. Trissotin’s real agenda is not exposed until the end of the play; when he is about to be married to Henriette, an unexpected letter announces that the family is penniless, making him abandon his pursuit for her.

Along with Philaminte, the other titular learned ladies include her vain and delusional step-sister Belise (who believes herself to be irresistible) and other daughter Armande, who resents the fact that, after having previously rejected him, Clitandre no longer loves her.

Henriette is portrayed as the most reasonable (or less fanatical) female character of the play and, along with Martine (a servant who is eventually banished from the household due to her “unforgivable grammatical sins”), is the only one among the four women who isn’t obsessed with supposed literary and cultural matters.
The *Learned Ladies* main male characters include the kindly, henpecked patriarch, Chrysale, who supports Henriette’s desire to marry Clitandre, and his loyal brother Ariste.

Secondary characters include Julien, a servant, Trissotin’s equally insipid friend Vadius, and the Notary who marries Henriette and Clitandre after Trissotin is finally exposed as a gold-digging fraud.
2. PRODUCTION CONCEPT

The Learned Ladies opened at the Palais Royal Theatre in 1672, with Molière himself playing the role of Chrysale.

During the century preceding the reign of Louis XIV, France had evolved from a feudal society to an absolute monarchy in which the Catholic Church supported the Crown in its bid to rule by divine right. Despite the long periods of war and crisis, Louis (who preferred instead to be known as the “Sun King”), was determined to be remembered as a passionate and generous patron of the arts. Molière himself eventually became one of the king’s personal protégés.

So began one of the richest eras in French artistic achievement: the Baroque period. French became the preferred language of the European aristocracy and the country’s arts and culture considered the crème de la crème.

The costume and set design process for plays was done a bit differently in those days. As Oscar G. Brockett’s explains in his book The Essential Theatre:

“In France, actors were expected to furnish their own costumes, a major expense for the actors. As on the Elizabethan stage, most costumes were contemporary garments, although there were exceptions, especially for Near Eastern, Moorish and Classical characters. The scenic demands of regular comedy and tragedy were simple. Ordinarily in compliance with the neoclassical rules, the plays were set in one place and required no scene changes... The setting was removed from specificity by using only those stage properties (chairs, tables, beds, and the like) absolutely demanded by the action; thus the stage was largely bare. This emphasis in generalized place served as well to keep down the costs of both scenery and costumes".
Director Patrick Gauthier followed most of these parameters for the set design. However the costumes, as the following will show, were created specifically with the purpose of producing a heightened comedic atmosphere that would highlight the satirical components of the play.

Gauthier was particularly interested in emphasizing how the play was influenced by the stock characters of the Commedia dell’arte. He also wanted to explore contemporary attitudes to women. In his thesis “Pseudowits and polished frauds”: Directing Molière’s The Learned Ladies, Gauthier discusses the academic debate on the play’s feminist content. As he explains, the literary movement of Les Precieuses, has been believed “an early feminist campaign aimed at improving women’s access to education and to improve the condition of women on marriage” (p. 20) and “While dated by twenty-first century standards, the views proposed by Moliere more than three hundred years ago were undoubtedly progressive for their age” (p. 27).

In terms of design, he favored an out of time environment, keeping the silhouette of the period, but moving toward a more modern look in the colours and fabric of the costumes.

One of the director's roles is to convey to the designers as clearly as possible their vision for a production. The designers then interpret and translate into visual terms what the director communicates with words. In this case, Gauthier imagined the production as a bridge between the seventeenth century and the twenty-first. It was important for him to emphasize the ridiculous, nonsensical elements of the characters by exaggerating their flaws through their dress and appearance. In terms of setting, Gauthier envisioned a re-interpretation of an early Parisian Salon presented in a brighter colour (blue) and featuring a giant television screen that changes painting projections on a remote control command by the actors on stage. The use of a remote controlled television screen was
another opportunity for comic action: the screen played a series of Baroque Paintings that could be switched as the people in the house would please. The set also featured traditional Baroque high ceilings, golden motifs, piles of fake books and a fireplace, all of which made the jarring presence of the screen above the hearth a central comedic device.

Fig. 2.1: Finished set  
Source: Stephania Schwartz
3. COSTUME DESIGN CONCEPT

The major sources of information about costumes from the Baroque period are portrait paintings and drawings. Fashion plates also first began to appear in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, which were very useful for my research.

Fig 3.1: Fashion plate from seventeenth century
The main elements in women’s costume in those days were:

- **Chemise**: usually made out of linen and used as underwear.

- **Petticoats** or underskirts (in French: *modeste*): these were used as an under-layer for the gown, visible at the front. Under the Petticoats, women used to wear an underskirt similar in shape, but not visible.

- The **Gown**: a garment constructed by joining a full gathered, long skirt to the bodice. The bodice was built with several layers of stiff fabric, structured inside with “boning”. A corset-like, stiffened insert was put into the front opening, and held tightly in place with lacing that was consequently called a “stomacher.” The neckline was cut low and horizontal, exposing a generous amount of cleavage. The sleeves, attached to the bodice, were full, bulbous and tied around to the arm to create several puffs.

- Women’s **shoes** were slightly high-heeled with ribbon and buckle decorations. There was no difference in shape for left or right soles.

- There was a varied range of women’s **hairstyles**. In general, hair was long, curly and tied up behind the ears into a “chignon”. To frame the face, women wore curly locks around the forehead.

- **Fans** were of the folding kind, and very important accessories for the era, as I explain in further pages.

- Necklaces, bracelets, and rings were worn in profusion.

The main elements in men’s costume were:

- A very full-cut **shirt**, usually made out of linen and with lace-decorated collars and sleeves.
- **Breeches**: full-cut, short gathered pants, usually knee-length and decorated at the bottom of the leg with ribbons or laces. They became less full and with additional ruffles under the knee after 1665.

- **Doublet**: a shorter version of a coat, with short sleeves ending at the elbow

- Circular cloaks and capes were popular for outdoor use.

- The **Casaque** or coat: a wide cut coat with full sleeves, ending about mid-thigh and worn only as an outdoor garment.

- The **Cravate**: a long band of white linen, tied up to the neck

- **Shoes** were high-heeled and with tongues, buckles and ribbon decorations. Boots were generally high-heeled and reached to the knee.

- Knee-high **stockings**

- **Hair**: Men would grow long curly hair or shave their head and wear long curly wigs instead

- **Hats**: used to be wide-breemed and decorated with feathers

As mentioned previously, the director imagined the overall look of the production as a mix of the Baroque and the contemporary. It was important for him to emphasize individual character flaws through exaggerated dress and appearance.

During our first meetings, we discussed our research into what the play meant to seventeenth century audiences, how it was represented and what would work to establish over-the-top visual means to transmit these ideas. In general, our early conclusions were to create a seventeenth century atmosphere with the set furniture, music and costumes, but translated to the modern by simplifying the silhouettes and adding the flashy, bright colours through the fabric material. The sound design would
be a compilation of Baroque tunes reinterpreted with modern instruments and melody, and so the costumes would represent a timeless and otherworldly milieu. The intention was to have the audience connect with the story without the separation that period pieces sometimes can create.

After further research and with my advisor Alison Green’s guidance, I proceeded to create what in costume design is known as a “mock-up”: a full-scale sample that would give us a clearer three-dimensional vision of our ideas. The initial mock-up wasn’t successful in my eyes, nor in Gauthier's; it looked somewhat unsophisticated, which was not where we were headed, but the experiment was certainly helpful for me through the creative process.

After digging further into the costume period, I came to the decision that the best way for me to “modernize” a period form, was to use colour as the main attractive focus. I decided – or rather intuited - that creating a solid colour costume from head to toe (including shoes, stockings, wigs and accessories) for each character would create the desired modern and cartoonish look.

Since we wanted to emphasize the importance of the supposed “learned” element for the characters, we could use printed text on the learned ladies’ costumes themselves as if they were made from the pages of actual books.

Each one of the “Learned Ladies” would have a specific colour. Words taken directly from the original text of the play in French would then be printed on areas of the costume, selecting the words that would represent each character the most. (Since Henriette was not an actual “Learned Lady", she would have some simple Baroque pattern prints instead). The text and decoration motif prints had to be legible from the last row in the theatre. In order to confirm that this idea was feasible, I created a sample to be tried out on stage and under the stage lights. Because the full
text was not going to be legible from the house, I decided to pick some of the key words of each phrase and enlarge them. The random mix of words popping out would create an interesting form to the eye, but would be easier to guess for the people in the audience who knew the script. Some examples follow:

Laissez aux **gens grossiers**, aux personnes **vulgaires**,

Les bas amusements de ces sortes d’**affaires**;

À de plus hauts objets élevez vos désirs,

**Songez** à prendre un goût des plus nobles plaisirs,

Et traitant de mépris les sens et la matière,

À l’esprit comme nous donnez-vous toute **entièr**

![Fig. 3.2 : format of font before silk-screening](image)

![Fig 3.3 : Silk-screened fabric sample](image)
Before the costume concept was approved by the director and the Faculty, I consulted with Jean Driscoll-Bell, head of the wardrobe department. I had concerns that construction of the costumes would be overly difficult and time-consuming as well as not being reusable for other productions.

We decided to find a way to build the costumes while ensuring they could be altered and reused in future productions. In most limited budget shows, it is essential for the costume designer to be aware of this principle, which is why our next step was to embark on a thorough search through the UBC wardrobe cages to “pull” every costume piece that could possibly be transformed or altered to make it work for the Learned Ladies.

The fabric to be used for the four main female characters would be a Dupioni silk, which is well known for its bright colour quality and for beautifully reflecting and absorbing the stage light. I have to acknowledge Driscoll-Bell’s help in this matter; after the design was approved, I was still considering using “artificial, candy-like” polyester materials, but she suggested I use a better quality, more breathable textile. This ended up proving to be a great decision, not only for the ease with which that material reflects the light, but because of how much easier than other textiles it is to sew. Lighting designer Kristin Robinson and I tested the fabric swatches under stage lights and confirmed that because of silk’s reflective quality, the intensity would have to be adjusted so the costumes didn’t appear fluorescent. Kristin adjusted the lighting levels, resulting in a harmonious set of bright fabrics without taking over the stage.

The wigs were a crucial element in my design concept. They had to match the colour of the fabric of each individual character for increased comic effect. This represented another challenge as I didn’t know if we
were going to be able to find the right tone in wigs or if it was possible to spray or dye them to match the costumes.

Hand-held fans also played a significant role in seventeenth century fashion and were an obvious choice to be included in the design. As this text explains, French fashion mavens at the time were rather fanatical fans of fans:

“From the sixteenth century up to the late 1800s throughout the whole of Europe, the dress of no fashionable lady en grande tenue appears to have been complete without the addition of a fan. So prominent a part has this little “modish machine” played in intrigue, love, and scandal that it has been aptly termed “the woman’s scepter.” Invitations were given by it, assignations were made; a gracious furl encouraged the lover; a disdainful furl plunged him into despair. To read aright this language became a necessity in the education of all fine gallants, who must know how to understand each movement and interpret each flutter”1.

Deciding on the final colours was the final step. I wanted to create a colour palette that would draw particular audience attention to the three leading learned Ladies - Philaminte, Armande and Belise - as well as to the self-important Trissotin. I decided to make the female costumes in bright, warm colours: hot pink fuchsia for Philaminte, bright yellow for Armande, and intense orange for Belise. Henriette was given purple for something less bright and to further set her apart from the other women of the household. The idea was that the colours of the women’s costumes would create a kind of rainbow palette when they were all together on stage.

The two older men in the play would wear colder but still bright solid colours: blue for Chrysale, green for Ariste, and a burgundy red for the gallant Clitandre. The servants were dressed in a black and white palette of stock costume pieces to create a foil to the ironic brilliance of the main characters.

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Trissotin, the male lead, had to be flamboyant to the extreme. His final costume would be in a warm colour produced by the combination of the three Learned Ladies: a brown/orange tone with dazzling red ribbons and big red feathers on his wig.

A fundamental part of my design was the role colour would play within the playing space on stage: a different combination of colours would appear in every change of scene, and as the performance approached the end, all of them would be present.

Fig 3.4: Dress rehearsal
4. COSTUMES BY CHARACTER

4.1 PHILAMINTE (Maura Halloran)

Philaminte is a controlling and authoritative woman who intimidates her husband. It is because of her unreasonable infatuation with academic advancement, that she allows her household to fall into chaos. As the leader of the household, the group of the Learned Ladies and as an older woman, Philaminte’s costume was created in deep pink or fuchsia. I chose
this colour, because even if still intense, it expressed Philaminte’s character and social position. Within the three Learned Ladies, Philaminte’s fucisia pink seemed to be slightly subtler and more appropriate for an older respectable woman.

Her bodice was built with several layers of factory cotton, boning, and detailed hand sewing. The skirt was attached to it at the waistline and secured on the sides in the style of the era. The sleeves were attached last. Under the skirt, Philaminte wore a fuchsia petticoat, stockings and shoes. She also wore fuchsia-coloured wig with coordinating drop earrings, necklace and fan. Traditionally, these ladies would have worn a chemise under the bodice, which would show some of its lace edges on the cleavage and sleeves. As mentioned before, the silhouette and function of the garments were simplified and stylized to one single piece with restrained decorative detail. The sleeves were made of a sheer pink organza that gave the illusion of fullness and puffing.

I designed Philaminte’s hair to be the most exaggerated of the women in the play. While belonging to the era style, her hair had to reflect her aspiration to be of a higher status.

Jill Wyness, UBC’s hair and makeup technician, was extremely helpful in advising and in helping to execute what I wanted to convey. Without her expertise, the wigs (which she stylized and painted to match colours) would not have been possible.

A couple of printed text pieces were hand-sewn on the garment so they could be easily removed once the dress was almost finished: one on the stomacher area and another on the front of the skirt. In Philaminte’s case, one of her more character-defining lines from the script is the following in which she refers to one of her servants:
ACT II, Scene Seven

Would you have me keep her in my service here
To give incessant anguish to my ear
By constant barbarisms, and the breach
Of every law of reason and good speech,
Patching the mangled discourse which she utters
With coarse expressions from the city’s gutters?

In this part of the dialogue, Philaminte describes her irritation with a
servant who is unable to express herself “correctly” in the household, so this
paragraph was the final print on her dress. Makeup for the ladies also
needed a conceptual approach. In fashionable seventeenth century
circles, it was common for both women and men to wear heavy layers of
white powder. For women in particular, it was important to include “beauty
spots” or “patches”. These were small black fabric pieces the size of a fly
that women put on different spots of their faces to convey their marital
status or their availability:

“The use of patches as a fashion statement began in Paris,
where young women and men began wearing patches made
of black taffeta, velvet, silk, or thin leather, cut into tiny circles,
crescents, stars, and hearts. These patches were stuck to the
face with gum mastic, a type of glue made from the sap of
trees. More and more elaborate patch designs were created, in
such shapes as sailing ships, horse-drawn carriages, and birds in
flight”.  

I photocopied a few examples from my research and gave them to
the actors so they could choose which beauty spot would suit them the
best.

Philaminte’s shoes were pulled from stock, dyed and decorated.
Because we could not find a matching colour for her wig ,we purchased a

2 Bigelow, Marybelle, *Fashion in History: Apparel in the Western World*, Minneapolis, MN,
Burgess Publishing, 1970
blonde curly wig and Jill Wyness matched the colour with spray paint, which had to be redone every night. Her jewelry was entirely hand-made by Chantelle Balfour with Fimo, a plastiscene material that becomes hard when baked in the oven. Chantelle also covered the ladies’ individual fans with the matching organza sleeve fabric and I printed additional text on them.
Armande is the eldest daughter of the house. She, like her mother, has a profound and absurd love for culture. Even if harshly critical of her sister’s desire to be a wife, deep inside Armande wished she was the one who Clitandre loved. Armande had previously been wooed by him, but after she rejected him, he fell truly in love with Henriette instead. This is the cause of her secret resentment and the reason why she tries by any means to talk Henriette into refusing him and becoming a fellow scholar as well.

I picked a flashy yellow for Armande’s costume, because, within the Learned Ladies’ circle, she represents the youngest and probably the most fanatic of the group. Her costume was constructed in the same manner as
Philaminte’s except for a few more fashionable details for the time, like the shape of the sleeves. Her hairstyle was also more fashionable than her mother’s. Like the other three ladies, Armande was dressed from head to toe entirely in a single colour. The following text was printed vertically as a means to make her to slightly different to the other two:

ACT I, Scene 1

Oh Dear, you crave such squalid satisfactions!
How can you choose to play a petty role,
Dull and domestic, and content your soul
With joys no loftier than keeping house
And raising brats, and pampering a spouse?

Let common natures, vulgarly inclined,
Concern themselves with trifles of that kind.
Aspire to nobler objects, seek to attain
To keener joys upon a higher plane,
And scorning gross material things as naught,
Devote yourself, as we have thought to thought.

Armande’s wig was originally bright yellow. Jill Wyness sprayed one layer of green so it matched the green undertone of the yellow dress, knowing the lights would pick up the tone better. Her shoes were pulled from stock, dyed and decorated as well. She had a scene where she fell backwards, so for modesty’s sake we needed to give her full yellow pantyhose and bloomers.

Chantelle Balfour constructed her jewelry using simple plastic beads found at a local store.
4.3 BELISE  (Kate Hilderman)

She is the eldest of the ladies, and Chrysale's sister, but very much on Philaminte's side. Belise has never married and suffers from the illusion that every single man around is secretly in love with her. It is my belief that Belise is not as dedicated as the other two. It seems she had no choice but to become one of the Learned Ladies out of bitterness for not having raised her own family. Among the men who she believes are madly in love with her is Clitandre. Her unwanted advances give the play a funny and very grotesque ingredient. Belise's costume was designed in a less fashionable way for her time. Because she was older than the other women, I designed...
her costume in the silhouette of a few decades before, yet in a very flamboyant colour and shape. I researched the style of the years before 1672 and found out that the sleeves and skirt were considerably fuller.

Her gown was constructed in the same order as the other three women. Her shoes were also pulled from stock, dyed and decorated by Elena Dubova and her jewelry and fan were made by Chantelle Balfour from plastic beads.

Belise’s hairstyle was very similar to the girls in the painting “The Meninas” by the Spanish painter Velasco: flat on top of the head, and extended on both sides of the face. Gauthier pointed out that it was not crucial for him to have Belise looking elderly, as she was not going to represent age in performance, so we did not have to give her different make-up from the other ladies.

The chosen text on Belise’s dress from a scene with Clitandre read:

**Act I, Scene 4**

Hold, Sir! Don’t say to baldy what you feel.
If you belong, Sir, to the ranks of those
Who love me, let your eyes alone disclose
Your sentiments, and do not tell me bluntly
Of coarse desires which only could affront me.
Adore me if you will, but do not show it
In such a way that I’ll be forced to know it;
Worship me inwardly, and I shall brook it
If, through your silence, I can overlook it;
But should you dare to speak of it outright,
I’ll banish you forever from my sight.
4.4 HENRIETTE (Courtney Lancaster)

Henriette is the youngest daughter and the only woman in the family not a member of the Learned Ladies. Youthful, charming and full of integrity, she doesn’t buy into the household’s hysteria for higher education. Henriette aspires to a simpler life, which includes a husband and the duties of married life, she represents the most balanced and centered temperament. She and Clitandre are in love, and throughout the play will struggle to change Philaminte’s mind about arranging a marriage to Trissotin.
I wanted to make a very strong statement about Henriette not being part of the pretentious world of her mother. Purple is her colour because it compliments the bright yellow, orange and fuchsia without competing with them. Her style in general had to be considerably more sober, yet still youthful and Purple has been associated with nobility, quality that suits Henriette.

Henriette’s costume had to give the feeling of unity with the other women in the family and at the same time had to be separate. I needed the audience to identify her as part of the family but still her own woman.

Her gown was constructed in the same fashion as the other women’s and was somewhat similar to Armande’s as they are the two youngest women in the group. Instead of printed text, I decided to print a baroque pattern as a decorative motif to further set her apart from the others. I reproduced a brocade pattern found in a Baroque furniture book and silk-screened it on her dress panels.

Henriette was likewise dressed all in purple accessories, shoes, and stockings. We decided she would not have a fan as another statement of her modest qualities. She would wear lace gloves instead.

Henriette’s wig was violet and had to be sprayed as well to match the darker purple tone of the dress. Her shoes were pulled from stock, painted and decorated. Her purple jewelry was made by Balfour out of Fimo as well.
4.5 CLITANDRE (Aslam Hussein)

Clitandre is (unofficially) Henriette’s fiancé. He is both sensible and passionate. In order to represent his gallantry and status as a solid love interest, I picked a romantic dark burgundy for his costume.

His coat was pulled from stock and Charlotte Burke added some panels of fabric, mainly because of the motifs I needed to print on it, but also because it was in need of repair. He was given the same Baroque decorative motifs as Henriette. A couple of fake sleeves were sewn into the coat’s sleeves to give the illusion of an actual shirt.
Clitandre’s breeches were built from scratch, as was his cravat. The costume was adjusted a few times after seeing it on stage as it had to seem elegant and not foolish. His boots were pulled from stock and some ribbon laces were added under the knee. The wig was part of UBC’s stock as well.

Clitandre’s make-up was much more subtle, compared to the other characters.
If there is one character in particular that embodies what Molière wanted most to satirize in this play, surely it is the foppish, duplicitous Trissotin, who sees himself as both a towering intellect and dashing eligible bachelor. The villain of the comedy, he worms his way into Philaminte’s house and heart with praise and pretentious poetry while his real motivation is getting his dandy hands on the family fortune. Trissotin is truly an over-the-top character and needed a suitably extreme costume to match.
The design for his costume was then an exaggerated reinterpretation of the already feminine elements of men’s costume of the day. As the character who misguides the Learned Ladies, I decided his look should be a mix the colours of his three female acolytes. Jean Driscoll helped me to find a light corduroy fabric that gathered the perfect mix of orange, yellow and red, while Charlotte Burke also helped me define his look with an overly small waistcoat, baggy breeches, overly decorative buttons and an extremely full shirt. The final result was a decidedly flamboyant costume with red ribbons, bows and ruffles, including a suggestive bouquet of red ribbons on his crotch.

Trissotin’s wig was originally going to be enormous and feature extra-large feathers on top. At some point, the director and I agreed to have his wig lit by small Christmas lights, but had to abandon the idea due to safety and blocking issues. We used a full brown curly wig instead and a comical moustache, combined with heavy makeup.

The costume was built completely from scratch by Charlotte Burke and the lines from the script included on his costume were the following:

**ACT III, Scene 2**

For such great hunger as confronts me here,
An eight-line dish would not suffice, I fear.
My epigram’s too slight. It would be wiser I think, to give you first, as appetizer,
A sonnet which a certain princess found Subtle in sense, delectable in sound.
I’ve seasoned it with Attic salt throughout,
And you will find it tasty, I have no doubt
As the supposed master of the house, Chrysale is instead a frustrated patriarch who struggles unsuccessfully to have his opinion respected. He fluctuates between giving in to make his wife happy (or rather to be out of conflict) and reasserting his authority. Molière represents him as man who is potentially wise and temperate, qualities he develops throughout the play with the help of his brother Ariste.

I chose blue for Chrysale’s costume because the colour stands for stability, peace and intelligence in many cultures. The blue nonetheless had to be radiant so that it fit with the rest of the group, even if not
belonging to the “hot” palette. As another funny element, the set designer and I discussed having him wear the same blue tone of the stage curtains and walls so he somehow “disappeared” in it as another piece of furniture in the house.

Originally, my intention was to have the male secondary characters in flat colours as well. I learned through the process though, that costumes need a combination of colours and contrast in the detail so they produce a more textured effect and make sense to the eye of the spectator. Indeed, the “all-blue” piece looked like a big blue shapeless mass, so some off-white details were added for contrast.

Chrysale’s final costume was composed by a blue coat with lace and soutache ribbon decorations. He wore blue and off-white stripped breeches, blue stockings and blue shoes with white lace decorations. His wig was also blue and I made a moustache out of the same material. His shoes were pulled from stock and re-painted and decorated.
With Ariste as with Chrysale, I learned how unreadable a costume is without texture and contrast of tones. Ariste represents the quality of wisdom in the play. He is the one not fully involved in the chaos and therefore is the only one to see both the controlling game of Philaminte and the real love Henriette and Clitandre have for each other. Because he is the one who sees clearly, to me, he brings balance to the family.

I wanted Ariste to wear a green costume to illustrate his characteristics of wellbeing and balance. Being aware that it also
symbolizes nature, I thought I would find a shade of green that was closer to blue to minimize this aspect.

His costume then was created in an aqua green. Of all the male costumes it was the most complex, partly as a means of showing visual variety on stage. The pieces in the costume included a full-sleeved shirt, a doublet, a cravate, and a rhinegrave (divided short-full skirt) stockings and green shoes.

As mentioned earlier, the costume had to be decorated with black and off-white elements to give the desired effect on stage and to avoid looking flat. This was accomplished by combining opaque, heavy and light fabric materials. Ariste’s wig was a green colour and was styled by Jill Wyness while the moustache was made by myself out of wig pieces. His shoes were pulled from stock, dyed and decorated by Elena Dubova.
Jeff Kaiser was one of two actors who played two characters and therefore had costume changes. He played Vadius, Trissotin’s friend, who was invited to a poetry night with the Learned Ladies. Vadius commits a faux pas when making critical remarks about Trissotin’s poetry without knowing it was his. Their friendship ends after a hilarious argument. By the end of the play, Kaiser becomes “A Notary” who marries the lovers Henriette and Clitandre. Because his character was not of central importance and the quick change had to be figured out, both character’s costumes were pulled from stock. Vadius’ costume consisted
of a black coat and breeches, with blue and red ribbons added to knees and wrists. Cuffs in a different texture in black were attached to his sleeves with snaps so that he could easily remove them for the change of character.

The design of both characters was partly based on what we had on stock and partly on my research. For the costume change, Jeff had to remove Vadius’ wig, cuffs and knee ribbons, change stockings to black, add a new hat with hair and an academic robe on top of his coat. He also transformed his makeup completely to a comical elderly-skeleton face.

His wig was pulled from stock and styled by Jill Wyness. Shoes were pulled from stock and decorated by Elena Dubova.

The actor himself invented the funny, very effective makeup for the Notary.
Even if Martine is a secondary character and does not appear on stage for a long time, her character is very important in the script. A seemingly uneducated but hot-tempered servant to Philaminte, she is dismissed due to her constant grammatical blunders. She manages to come back to the house, ferociously defending Clitandre and Henriette’s love.

Patrick did not want an ordinary servant. She would wear a maid’s uniform, but we had to find something unique for her costume that was clearly imposed by Philaminte, and it had to look absurd. Gauthier
mentioned the idea of a fan awkwardly attached to her maid's cap. The use of black and white for a maid's uniform was not taken from the play's period. We made that decision partly based on what was available in stock combined with a more modern image taken from the early twentieth century notion of servants in these colors. It also had to be clear that she did not belong to the Learned Ladies group.

I made the cap and fan out of silk Dupioni, interfaced and silk-screened. I thought the fan could have some printed text and her apron would have the Baroque motifs, as a proof of her loyalty to Henriette. Her skirt and shirt were drawn from stock and altered. As a maid, her hairstyle was much more restrained, as was her makeup. The decision to wear a patch (beauty spot) was added by the actress as a way to show the character's flirtatious and strong temper.
4.11 LEPINE and JULIEN (Michael Neale)

Michael Neale played two characters as well: the awkward Lepine, a servant who is terrified of his arrogant mistress Philaminte and Julien, the valet who delivers the letter that ultimately unmasks Trissotin’s intentions.

Both costumes were as well taken from stock. For Lepine, we used a black coat and breeches, and an off-white collar. A sash was built and printed with words from the text to contextualize his costume. His quick costume change was relatively easy: He changed cravats for a black one, and removed the sash. He would also wear a black hat as the valet.
As with Martine, Lepine, did not need a wig due to their lower position as a servant.
5. COSTUME REALIZATION

![Costume scene breakdown table]

Fig. 5.1: Costume scene breakdown

Of the thirteen characters, the following were fully-built costumes:

- Philaminte
- Armande
- Belise
- Henriette
- Chrysale
- Ariste
- Trissotin
The following costumes were pulled from stock and altered, or added details

- Clitandre
- Vadius
- A Notary
- Martine
- Lepine
- Julien
- Two stage hands

My assistants worked on the following tasks:
The three of them were responsible for reading the script, helping with research “images” making costume plots and breakdowns. Chantelle Balfour worked on jewelry and fans; Elena Dubova decorated shoes and helped with various sewing activities. Jesse Jeffery pulled appropriate costume pieces from stock and helped as well with sewing.

Besides the assistants, we had a few more students helping with the construction and sewing in general: Candice Barrans, Esther Chen, Shira Elias, Minah Lee, Jin Qin, Sally Song.

I did all the silk-screening process previous to the sewing and helped building accessories such as cravats, sashes, caps and moustaches, as well as a good amount of hand sewing for the bodices. I also dyed eyelets and laces for the bodices and gloves and stockings.

The development of the costumes took approximately three months.
6. CONCLUSION

Words cannot express how grateful I feel for all the lessons I learned during this production. Although I have been a hands-on creative person for most of my life, and even designed the costumes for three shows previous to this, The Learned Ladies gave me a much greater experience in terms of the possibilities of costume design in a theatre production. It seemed to me that the costume design took on a life of its own. I believe this is the kind of magic that happens in a creative career. What I had in mind from the beginning took its own shape completely through the collaborative process.

Once, when having a session with my advisor Alison Green, I was taking note on how to describe the creative process in an articulate and academic form. I discovered then that for me at least, the process has been very intuitive and organic, thus hard to articulate. That intuition could not have been brought to life without her supervision and experience. I also learned how important it is to develop assertiveness and clarity when meeting with directors and the creative team.

I learned that as a professional designer, clarity and eloquence have to be translated as well to the cutters and builders. I also know that I have to improve my renderings in order to present a less ambiguous image of the desired final result.

When I sat down in the audience to see the first dress rehearsal, I actually felt like running away. Everything was what I had in mind, except maybe three times brighter. Faces were lost in fluorescent wigs, the costumes looked to me like walking light bulbs. Actors were still getting used to the costumes, so they were tripping over them and (as is natural) feeling awkward in wigs and high heels. The level of vulnerability that one can feel as the one responsible for all that look can be overwhelming.
Luckily, I had a great team backing me up. Things were adjusting and were polished slowly. By opening night, actors were already “owning” the costumes, and doing wonderful things with them. My main satisfaction was to see what the garments became once they took life by being worn in performance.
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