“The sense of reality was deepened by the curtain, which was painted especially for Mrs. Steele’s use in this play. The set represented the front of Arnolphe’s house and the street in which the entire action takes place. The gray walls and arched entrances were beautiful settings for the many statuesque poses.”*

* Erie Dispatch-Herald, Erie, PA, April 30, 1932.
Molière

Molière was born in 1622. He was the son of an upholsterer to the king, named Jean Poquelin. He did not care to follow his father's trade, and thanks to his grandfather, was placed in the college of Clermont directed by the Jesuits where he began his classical studies. Very soon the theatre attracted him irresistibly. Son of an artisan, he received the education of an aristocrat, but dreamed only of becoming a comic actor—a calling without honor in his world.

In order not to compromise his father's name, he took another; he called himself Molière.

When he was twenty-four he joined a group of young people who produced plays as amateurs for their friends and neighbors. Encouraged by their success, they became professionals and created the “Illustre Theatre.”

This venture ended in failure and Moliere was imprisoned for the debts of the company.

On his release the troupe reformed and toured the provinces for a dozen years with varying degrees of success. At last, in 1658, they returned to Paris to find immediate popularity.

At this time began for Molière the fulfillment of the glorious destiny which made him the first of the comic poets destiny which today is perpetuated in the immortal theatre, the Comédie-Française, which he founded. The Comédie-Française in the heart of Paris is more than a theatre, more than a group of distinguished actors, more than an idea, it is the classical tradition of Molière incarnate.*

* The above was quoted from Suzanne’s program guides.
CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY
(in order of speaking)

CHRYSALDE, Arnolphe’s friend.
ARNOLPHE, (known to Agnès as Monsieur de la Souche.)
ALAN, a peasant, Arnolphe’s valet.
GEORGETTE, a peasant girl, Arnolphe’s maid.
AGNÈS, a young, artless girl brought up by Arnolphe.
HORACE, son of Oronte, in love with Agnès.
ORONTE, father of Horace and friend of Arnolphe.

PLACE—A Paris street in front of Arnolphe’s house.
TIME—About three hundred and fifty years ago.

ACTS I AND II: One Morning
ACTS III AND IV: Two Hours Later
ACT V: Dawn of the Following Morning

The play opens with a conversation between Arnolphe and his friend Chrysalde, as the two men come out of Arnolphe’s house, Chrysalde speaking first: “You tell me you’ve come back home to marry the girl?”

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY. Arnolphe, a conceited, selfish man of middle age, has had his young ward, Agnès, trained in a convent to become a model wife for himself, simple, pliable and unspoiled. He has kept her mind entirely undeveloped, and her imagination free from all knowledge of good and evil. He has recently taken Agnès from the convent and kept her cloistered in a house near his own, in Paris, awaiting the day of their marriage. Business, meanwhile has taken Arnolphe from town for ten days, and in his absence Agnès has met and fallen in love with Horace, son of Arnolphe’s old friend Oronte. Arnolphe is attempting to change his own name to the more aristocratic one of ‘de la Souche,’ the only name by which Agnès and the servants know him. Horace, on the other hand, knows him only as ‘Arnolphe,’ his father’s friend.

This masterpiece of Molière is a play of youth and love, written and produced in France nearly three hundred years ago. It pleads the cause of youth and ridicules the pretensions of those who would use their authority to mold the lives of others.*

Acts I & II

One Morning
School for Wives by Molière

Act I

Scene I.—Chrysalde, Arnolphe.

CHRYSLADE  (Entrance, face front. Tiny glance as he walks behind.)
You tell me you’ve come back home to marry the girl?

ARNOLPHE  (Complaisant—never looks down.)
Yes, I want to conclude the affair tomorrow.

CHRYSLADE  (Comfortable) We are here alone, and may converse, I think, without fear of being overheard.
Would you have me open my heart to you as a friend? Your intention makes me tremble for you; it is a very great piece of rashness in you to marry. (Camaraderie)

ARNOLPHE  That’s true, friend.
(Sly, shifting head to glance at him. Corner of eye—mean. Don’t look down)

Perhaps you can find reason at home to be apprehensive for me!

CHRYSLADE  (Mild argument—quick shot with eye.)
(Most comfortable. Big—pleasant) You know that neither high nor low have been exempt from your criticisms; that your chief delight, wherever you are, is to make a great outcry about secret intrigues.

ARNOLPHE  Very good. Is there any other city in the whole world where husbands are so patient as here? Does not one see all kinds of them fooled at home in every way? May not I, as a looker-on, laugh at them? May I not of our fools…

CHRYSLADE  (Big. Comfortable.) Yes; but whoever laughs at others, should fear that in return others will laugh at him.

ARNOLPHE  (Complaisant.) Oh, my friend, don’t trouble yourself. He’ll be mighty clever who catches me on that point. I am acquainted with all the artful tricks and subtle contrivances women employ to make fools of us; and since we’re duped by their clever—
ness, I’ve secured myself against that accident, for the lady I shall marry will have innocence enough to preserve my forehead from any evil influence.

CHRYSLADE

And do you suppose that a foolish girl, in one word…

ARNOLPHE

(No anxiety. Complacent.) To marry a foolish girl does not make me a fool. I believe, like a good (sly) Christian should, that your better half is very discreet. But a clever wife is a bad omen, and I know what it has cost some people for having married wives with too much talent.

(Hands together in air.)

Do you think I am going to charge myself with the care of a witty wife who would talk of nothing but clubs and private parties, whom marquises and wits would visit, whilst, under the name of madame’s husband, I should be like a saint whom no one notices?

No, no, I don’t want a lofty mind; a woman that writes understands more than she should do. I intend that my wife shall have so little of sublime that, in a word, I would have her (Spiral hand.) extremely ignorant; it is enough, (Impromptu, think it out.) to speak plainly, if she knows how to say her prayers, to love me, (Stress, big thing.) to sew and to spin. Trivialities wouldn’t do any harm.

CHRYSLADE

(Summation. Comfortable, not serious.) So, then, you have a fancy for a stupid wife?

ARNOLPHE

So much so, that I would prefer an ugly fool—to a very handsome woman with a great deal of wit. (A satisfaction to express himself.)

CHRYSLADE

Wit and beauty …(Run right on.)

ARNOLPHE

Virtue is sufficient.

CHRYSLADE

(Comfortable.) But, how, after all, could you ever teach a fool to know what it is to be virtuous? Besides I should think it very tiresome for a man to have a fool with him all his lifetime.

ARNOLPHE

(Affirm creed.) Everyone to his own way. (Throw hand over.) With a wife, as in everything, I’ll follow my own wishes. I’m rich enough, I think, to take a wife who may owe everything to me, whose humble and entire dependence on me can never reproach me either with her birth or her fortune. —A soft and quiet look amongst other children inspired me with a love for this girl, whom I’m going to marry, when she was only four years old. Her mother being very badly off, it came into my mind to ask for her; and the poor country woman, understanding my desire, was very glad to get rid of her.

I had her brought up in a little out-of-the-way convent, in strict accordance with my views—that is to say, enjoining them to bring her up as much like a fool as possible. Thank heaven, the result answered my utmost expectations; and when grown up, I found a wife—a fool—so simple minded that I could not be sufficiently thankful for having found a fool entirely to my mind.

I brought her home, and, as my house is continually open to a hundred kinds of people, as it is necessary to take precautions, (increasing intensity) I have kept her apart in this other house, where no one comes to visit me; and that her good disposition not be spoilt, (set stage) I only have persons about her who are as foolish as herself.