When plotting the sequence of actions in a play, the first beat that is encountered is the *closing beat*, which literally is the very last action that occurs in the play. The closing beat in “Tartuffe” occurs in 5.7.97-102, when Orgon tells his family that they shall go to the King immediately, kneel before him, and “express the gratitude which all are feeling.” Also, Orgon states that afterward they will see that Valere and Mariane are married –definitively ending the last line of conflict in the play. The next beat to define is the *climax*, which is the highest moment of dramatic tension in the play. The climax in “Tartuffe” occurs in 5.7.40-2, when the Officer reveals that he intends to arrest Tartuffe and not Orgon. The arrest of Tartuffe is the climax because virtually every character in the play, and perhaps everyone in the audience, thought that Tartuffe had triumphed over Orgon and his family. However, with the inclusion of the deus ex machina character of the King, which shall be explained later on, the main conflict of the plot is able to reach its climax. The next beat is the *attack*, which signifies the moment when the plot of the story is realized and the characters (consciously or subconsciously) experience a chain of events (rising action) that inevitably reaches its climax, and then is resolved up to the closing beat (period known as the dénouement). The attack in “Tartuffe” occurs in 3.7.43-4, when Orgon tells Tartuffe that he will legally appoint him as the only son and heir to the family’s estate and fortune: “Come, we’ll go draw up the deed.” This moment arguably is the best-defined point of attack because it adheres to the
main plot line of the play, which is that Tartuffe tries to con Orgon in order to steal his money and possessions. Tartuffe befriended Orgon for the sole purpose of stealing from him, so when Orgon signed over everything he owned to Tartuffe the con artist could begin to push the family out of what was once legally theirs. Another place the attack could be placed would be the moment when Orgon gives Tartuffe Mariane to be his bride, in 3.6.52-4. Although this moment could be an attack in a production of “Tartuffe,” it does not follow the main plot line because Tartuffe is not after Mariane—he is after her family’s estate. While Tartuffe would have presumably been paid a dowry for marrying Mariane, at that moment he did not become the heir to Orgon’s holdings so he could not begin to seize control and backstab Orgon with his friend Argas’ strongbox that held incriminating documents. The final beat that concerns the plot is the opening beat, which, conversely from the closing beat, is the first unit of action in the play. The first thing that happens when the lights come up and the play starts is that Madame Pernelle calls to her servant Flipote in a huff and tells him that she wants to leave Orgon’s house.

There are also other theatrical beats that contribute to the plot lines, and also the larger themes of the play. The major anagoresis, or discovery, of the play is when Orgon (the protagonist) in 4.6 discovers that Tartuffe is a fraud who thought he was gullible and only befriended him to steal his estate. The major peripiteia, or reversal, in the play arguably also occurs in 4.6 after Orgon has eavesdropped on Tartuffe and Elmire’s conversation while under a table. Instead of professing his undying love for Tartuffe as he did in the previous scenes, Orgon formally denounces and threatens Tartuffe for deceiving him. Finally, the maguffin, or hook, of the play could certainly be the antagonist Tartuffe, who is a hypocrite that pretends to be moral in order to become rich
and powerful and in effect keeps the audience’s aesthetic distance great throughout the play due to such blatantly hypocritical actions.

Moliere’s comedy explores many different themes that are revealed through truthful ideas that are based within the overall conflict. Perhaps the most important theme of the play is ironically one that Moliere nearly diminished. The idea that a monarchy can be easily deceived (in this case by religion) and can lead its citizens to certain demise was a subversive and dangerous notion to advocate. After facing harsh criticism from King Louis XIV’s catholic ministers who delayed the play’s production and threatened his banishment, Moliere added the deus ex machina of the King in order to “prove” that neither he nor his play harbored any such seditious or radical feelings. Even though Orgon represents an inept king who is manipulated by religious influences (Tartuffe), while his people suffer (the family), the deus ex machina falsely states that the monarch is an all-knowing, extremely intellectual person who cannot be deceived by any influence. This also relates to the theme of patriarchy and how it should be regarded as fallible, just as Elmire and other family members prove when they observe how Orgon is misguided. Yet, as the King’s inclusion in the plot somewhat reversed Moliere’s meaning toward the monarchy, so did Elmire’s dialogue in 3.4.13-4 when she proclaimed that it is wrong for a woman to go against her husband. Another theme in the play is true love, and how it can never be hindered. In a comedy, a popular line of conflict is to have two young lovers blocked from true intimacy due to an older character. In this case, Moliere used Tartuffe as a blocking character to Valere and Mariane’s engagement, though as all comedies inevitably end in marriage, Tartuffe (and to some extent Orgon) cannot diminish the lovers’ spirits. Finally, one of the last themes in “Tartuffe” is rationality and
how it can stabilize the chaos. Cleante, the embodiment of reason, provides wise adages to the audience, such as not all religion is corrupt, logic trumps blunt action, and (perhaps regrettably by Moliere) that the monarch is a mercifully benevolent leader.