Tartuffe Study Guide

Tartuffe by Molière

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Introduction

Molière's play *Tartuffe* (also sometimes referred to as *Tartuffe, or, The Imposter*) is a masterwork by France's most celebrated comic playwright. *Tartuffe* is set in the realm of seventeenth-century Parisian high society during the reign of King Louis XIV.

In *Tartuffe*, Orgon, a wealthy family man, takes in a stranger by the name of Tartuffe to stay in his home. Tartuffe appears to be an extremely pious and devout man of religion, and Orgon regards him almost as a saint. Orgon offers Tartuffe his best food and drink and places the needs of his guest above those of his wife and children. He plans to force his daughter to marry Tartuffe and to disinherit his son in order to make Tartuffe the sole heir to his fortune. All of Orgon's friends and family regard Tartuffe as a con man who only pretends to be of the highest moral authority but who does not practice what he preaches. Orgon is warned that Tartuffe may be deceiving him in order to gain both financially and socially, but Orgon is blind to these warnings. Orgon finally learns that he has been betrayed by his guest when he overhears Tartuffe trying to seduce his wife. However, when he orders Tartuffe to leave his house, Tartuffe seeks revenge by trying to seize all of Orgon's property and to have Orgon arrested. In the end, through the intervention of the King, Tartuffe is arrested, and harmony is restored to Orgon's household.

The character of Tartuffe represents those members of society who preach religious piety but do not themselves live by the morals they try to force upon others. Because the play focuses on the issue of religious hypocrisy, it was highly controversial at the time it was written and was banned from public performance for five years.

A translation of *Tartuffe* in verse form by Donald F. Frame is published by Signet Classic in *Tartuffe and Other Plays by Molière* (1967).

Author Biography

Molière, born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, was baptized in Paris, France, on January 15, 1622. His father was a furniture merchant who, in 1631, was appointed chief provider of furnishings for the home of the king. Molière's mother died when he was ten years old, and in 1633 his father remarried. Molière received his education at the Jesuit Collège de Clermont, after which he studied law and, in 1641, was admitted to the bar. After practicing law for six months, Molière decided to pursue a career in the theater instead. In 1643, he joined the newly formed theater company, the L'Illustre-Théâtre, soon taking the stage name of Molière. In 1645, he joined a touring theater company, with which he traveled throughout the south of France for the next thirteen years. The first public performance of a five-act comedy written by Molière was staged in 1655. In 1657, Molière's theater company, having earned considerable renown as a traveling troupe, moved to Paris. Their first performance before King Louis XIV, *Le Docteur amoureux* (*The Amorous Doctor*), a farce written by Molière himself, was given in 1658. It was a great success with the king, who found it amusing and offered them the patronage of his younger brother, known as "Monsieur." Now called the "troupe de Monsieur," Molière's company was provided performance space in the Petit- Bourbon theater. Molière's first great personal success as an actor and a playwright came with the performance of *Les Précieuses ridicules* (*Such Foolish Affected Ladies*) in 1659. When the Petit-Bourbon was demolished in 1660, the company was given space at the Palais-Royal theater. In 1662, Molière, at age forty, married Armande Béjart, then nineteen years old. That year his comedy, *L'École des femmes* (*The School for Wives* or *The School for Women*), was a popular success but created controversy that continued for over a year. In 1663, Molière was granted a royal pension and, in 1664, King Louis XIV was named godfather of his firstborn son, Louis, who died less than a year later. The year 1664 also began a five-year-long controversy over the play *Tartuffe*, which was banned from public performance until 1669. In 1665, Molière's play *Dom Juan* (*Don Juan*) was cancelled after just fifteen performances due to its controversial nature and was never performed again in his lifetime, although it was never officially banned. Nonetheless, that same year the troupe earned the patronage of the king and the appellation Troupe du Roi (The King's Troupe), and Molière's pension was raised considerably. In 1666, while he enjoyed professional successes, Molière's health began to decline seriously, due to tuberculosis, which occasionally prevented him from performing. In 1672, his wife died. A year later, during his performance as the hypochondriac in *Le Malade imaginaire* (1673; *The Hypochondriac* or *The Imaginary Invalid*), Molière collapsed on stage and died later that evening. Although he requested a priest for his final confession, none arrived in time, and, not given the right to a proper funeral because he was an actor, Molière was buried at night.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Tartuffe is set in the Paris home of Orgon, a wealthy man who lives with his wife, Elmire; his daughter, Mariane; and his son, Damis. Orgon also has several houseguests, including Madame Pernelle (his mother), Cléante (Elmire's brother), and Valère, who is engaged to Mariane. Orgon has recently befriended a man named Tartuffe, who has presented himself to Orgon as an extremely pious and devout man. Orgon invites Tartuffe to stay in his home as a moral guide and religious teacher. Orgon regards Tartuffe with extreme reverence, devotion, and adoration and treats him with greater love, affection, and favor than he does his wife and children. Orgon has taken Tartuffe as his close confidante, dotes on his guest excessively, and worships the man as if he were a saint.

In the opening scene, Orgon's mother, Madame Pernelle, announces to the other members of the household that she is leaving to stay elsewhere because she is disgusted with the manner in which they all (except Orgon) criticize Tartuffe. Madame Pernelle advises the others to take Tartuffe's advice and reform their lives, but they protest that there is nothing immoral about their behavior.

Orgon, who has just returned from two days spent in the country, asks Dorine (Mariane's lady'smaid) how everyone has been doing in his absence. Dorine tells him that Elmire, his wife, has been sick, suffering fever, headache, loss of appetite, and insomnia. Orgon, however, expresses no interest in his wife's illness and repeatedly asks about Tartuffe. Dorine describes Tartuffe, in contrast to Elmire, as having been in fine health and having eaten, drunk, and slept excessively. Orgon makes no comment about his wife's suffering and expresses concern only for Tartuffe's well-being.

Orgon describes to Cléante how he met Tartuffe in a church and was so impressed by his piety and virtue that he decided to take the man into his home. Cléante attempts to convince Orgon that Tartuffe is not as virtuous as he pretends to be. He warns Orgon that Tartuffe is using the pretense of religious devotion for the purpose of his own social and material gain. Orgon, however, dismisses Cléante's warnings about Tartuffe.

Act 2

Orgon informs his daughter, Mariane, that he wishes her to marry Tartuffe. Mariane is surprised to hear this, because Orgon had already agreed that she could marry Valère, the man she loves. But Mariane is too obedient to openly protest her father's wishes, and she remains passive while Orgon insists that marrying Tartuffe is a good idea. Dorine, meanwhile, repeatedly interrupts Orgon in an attempt to talk him out of forcing Mariane to marry Tartuffe.

After Orgon leaves the room, Dorine tells Mariane that she must tell her father she refuses to marry Tartuffe because she wishes to marry Valère. Mariane replies that she cannot go against her father's wishes, that she is too timid to fight him for the marriage she wants, and that she will simply kill herself if he forces her to marry Tartuffe. Dorine, however, assures Mariane that they can devise a plan to change Orgon's mind and allow her to marry Valère.

Valère tells Mariane he has heard that she will be marrying Tartuffe. Neither Mariane nor Valère wants to admit to the other to feeling hurt by this change of plans, so they both pretend to be perfectly happy that their engagement has been broken off. However, it is clear that they are both still in love with one another and are merely trying to keep their pride. Dorine then steps in, makes Mariane and Valère hold hands, and forces them to admit that they still love each other. Dorine then assures them that they can devise a plan to gain Orgon's consent to their marriage.

Act 3

Damis, Orgon's son, hides in a closet in order to overhear a conversation between Elmire and Tartuffe. During this conversation, Tartuffe propositions Elmire with the offer of an elicit affair behind her husband's back. He assures Elmire that he would keep her infidelity a secret in order to safeguard his own reputation as a pious man. Elmire lets Tartuffe know that she has no interest in conducting an affair with him. However, she tells him that she will not tell her husband about his sexual advances if he promises to convince Orgon to allow Mariane to marry Valère. At that moment, Damis steps out of the closet where he has been hiding and states that he must report Tartuffe's inappropriate behavior to his father. Elmire pleads with Damis not to tell Orgon of Tartuffe's behavior, but Damis insists that Orgon must be informed of the matter.

Damis tells Orgon that Tartuffe tried to conduct an illicit affair with Elmire. Orgon responds to this information by accusing Damis of lying about Tartuffe's behavior. In his anger, Orgon orders Damis to leave the house immediately and declares that he will disinherit him. Orgon announces that he will make Mariane marry Tartuffe that very night and states that he is going to make Tartuffe the sole heir to his estate.

Act 4

Orgon tells Elmire that he does not believe Tartuffe made a pass at her. Elmire tells Orgon to hide underneath a table in order to overhear her conversation with Tartuffe. While Orgon is hiding under the table, Elmire tells Tartuffe that she would like to have an affair with him. Tartuffe responds that she must prove to him that she is sincere through an act of physical passion. Elmire then asks Tartuffe to look out in the hallway and make sure her husband is not listening in on the conversation. While Tartuffe is out of the room, Orgon comes out from under the table and admits to Elmire that Tartuffe has betrayed him. When Tartuffe returns to the room, Orgon orders him to leave the household immediately. Tartuffe responds that he will get revenge against Orgon for

turning against him. Orgon explains to Elmire that he has given Tartuffe certain information that will make it possible for Tartuffe to ruin the family out of revenge.

Act 5

Orgon explains to Cléante that he gave a strongbox containing important documents to Tartuffe for safekeeping. This strongbox had been given to Orgon by a friend who fled the country in order to escape legal problems. Orgon now fears that Tartuffe will use these documents as evidence against him by turning them over to the legal authorities. These documents would serve as evidence that Orgon has been concealing a crime committed by the friend who gave him the strongbox.

Monsieur Loyal, a bailiff, comes to the door and shows Orgon a legal document that names Tartuffe as the rightful owner of the house. He tells Orgon that he must move his family out of the house by the following morning. After Monsieur Loyal leaves, Valère tells Orgon that Tartuffe has handed the strongbox full of incriminating documents over to the King and that there is now a warrant out for Orgon's arrest. Valère has brought a carriage in which Orgon may flee immediately in order to escape arrest.

Before Orgon has a chance to flee, Tartuffe arrives with a Gentleman of the King's Guard and states that Orgon is under arrest. However, just at this moment, the Gentleman of the King's Guard states that he is in fact arresting Tartuffe, not Orgon. The Gentleman of the King's Guard explains that Tartuffe is being arrested for countless crimes he committed under another name. The Gentleman tells Orgon that the King has decided to restore Orgon as rightful owner of his home and wealth and to forgive him for withholding the strongbox of documents.

In the final moments of the play, Orgon decides to go thank the King and then to see to the marriage of Valère and Mariane.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

As the first act begins, Madame Pernelle is preparing to leave her son's home. The other members of the family follow her and try to speak, but Madame Pernelle is quite good at having the last word. The family attempts to pay her the respect due Orgon's mother, but she takes each of them to task. First, she criticizes Elmire, her son's wife, for the activities that take place within the home and attempts to silence Dorine, the maid. Then she tells Dames, her grandson, that he is a plain fool and will never amount to anything, and accuses her granddaughter, Mariane, of devious behavior. Madame Pernelle goes on to tell her daughter-in-law that she sets a poor example and is far too extravagant. When Elmire's brother, Cléante, attempts to defend his sister, Madame Pernelle dismisses him and says that she cannot understand how her son can continue to allow him to visit.

After Madame Pernelle makes her attacks on each of the family members, they bring up the subject of Tartuffe, Orgon's pious houseguest. Madame Pernelle defends Tartuffe and praises his piety and his actions. Damis calls Tartuffe a sanctimonious bigot and Dorine says he is a pious busybody, for forbidding all that they find pleasurable. Madame Pernelle continues to defend Tartuffe's position, and says that they should all follow Tartuffe's example if they are to live a holy life and be saved from sin. Madame Pernelle further says that her son should make them all love Tartuffe as he does.

Damis predicts that he and Tartuffe will certainly come to blows, as he cannot abide the man's behavior and feels he would be a hypocrite to like him. Dorine chimes in about how Tartuffe came to their house without shoes and dressed like a beggar. Now, she claims, he dresses and acts as if he were the master of the house. Madame Pernelle thinks that they would be better off if they paid attention to Tartuffe's instructions, but Dorine continues to call him a hypocrite and says that she would not trust Tartuffe or his servant. Madame Pernelle says that Tartuffe is a good man, and that they would do well to heed him, for sinfulness is all that he preaches against. Dorine asks why it is sinful for the family to have visitors, unless Tartuffe is interested in the mistress of the house. Madame Pernelle continues to defend Tartuffe's position, and says that all of the carriages coming and going is bad because it gets the neighbors talking and gossiping about them.

Cléante takes Madame Pernelle to task for this statement and he suggests that they try to live virtuously, but ignore the things that neighborhood gossips may say about them. Dorine suspects that the gossip and malicious talk is coming from a slanderous neighbor, whom Madame Pernelle defends as a God-fearing woman. Dorine says that this woman is only recently virtuous, as she is no longer young enough to turn the men's heads, and that her righteous behavior stems from envy. Madame Pernelle further dismisses Dorine as a chatterbox, and makes certain that she has the last word in defending Tartuffe as a holy man who should be listened to and followed. Madame

Pernelle then takes her leave, as she cannot stand the fact that they are all against her position on Tartuffe.

After her long dissertation on godliness, and her reproval of Tartuffe's challengers, she slaps her maid, Flipote, who has said nothing throughout the scene, then calls her a slut.

As the others walk Madame Pernelle to the door, Dorine and Cléante discuss how the old woman dotes on Tartuffe. Dorine points out that this is nothing compared to the adoration bestowed on the houseguest by her son, Orgon. Tartuffe has become his most trusted advisor and confidant, and Dorine thinks that Orgon is more than a little bit obsessed with Tartuffe. Dorine goes on to describe how Tartuffe knows Orgon's weaknesses and takes full advantage of them.

Elmire re-enters, then immediately retires to her suite to await her husband's return. Cléante stays to welcome Orgon home. Damis asks Cléante to discuss Mariane's upcoming marriage to Valère with Orgon, as he (Damis) is also in love with Valère's sister. Damis suspects that Tartuffe may be trying to oppose the marriage, which would also hurt his chances with the sister.

Orgon returns and Cléante welcomes him. To set his mind at ease upon his return, Orgon questions Dorine about the status of his family. Dorine tells of his wife's recent illness, and Orgon asks of Tartuffe. Dorine says that Tartuffe is doing quite well, to which Orgon responds, "Poor fellow!" This exchange continues, as Dorine describes Elmire's sickness in great detail, while describing Tartuffe's hearty appetite, restful sleep, and enjoyment of several glasses of wine. After each description of Elmire's ailments, Orgon asks about Tartuffe. At each description of Tartuffe, Orgon exclaims, "Poor fellow!" Dorine reports that they are now both well, and says that she will let the mistress know how concerned her husband was for her health.

Cléante points out to Orgon that Dorine was all but laughing in his face. Cléante agrees with Dorine's assessment of the situation, and questions Orgon about how he can be so enamored of this poor visitor. Orgon goes on to try to describe Tartuffe's many great attributes. In describing him, Orgon is at a loss for words, "He's a man who...who...ah! A man...in short, a man!" Orgon further states that he is grateful to Tartuffe for teaching him to let go of any affection that he has for mere humans. Orgon then says that he could probably see his entire family perish, and thanks to Tartuffe's influence, he would not care very much. Cléante responds tongue-in-cheek about how humane Orgon's point of view is.

Orgon tells of how he first met Tartuffe at church. Tartuffe's fervent prayers drew the attention of the entire congregation. Tartuffe's manservant told Orgon how needy he was, and when Orgon gave him money, he would always declare it too much and return part or share it with other poor people. Orgon was then inspired to welcome this prayerful man into his home. Orgon praises Tartuffe's piety and religious zeal, and tells of Tartuffe feeling great remorse for killing a flea the other day with too much vindictiveness. Cléante cannot believe that Orgon can be fooled so easily and

completely by this stranger and Orgon replies that Cléante's statements sound sacrilegious and calls him an atheist for not believing in Tartuffe. Cléante tells Orgon that he thinks he is being duped by Tartuffe. Orgon chides his brother-in-law and mocks his wisdom and knowledge. To this, Cléante responds that he is not all knowing, but that he can certainly tell the difference between true and false. Cléante describes true pious and religious people, who do not have to call attention to their good acts and virtuous lives and he speaks of truly godly people who do not assume the worst of everyone and do not judge just by appearances. Cléante feels that Tartuffe is not one of these men, but is a hypocrite and an imposter and is trying to take advantage of Orgon's kindness and generosity. Then he tells Orgon that Tartuffe is deceiving him, and that truly virtuous men hate sin, not sinners. Orgon lets Cléante know that he is finished listening to his opposing opinion.

Cléante then changes the subject to Mariane's upcoming wedding to Valère. To each of Cléante's questions, Orgon gives a short answer that does not amount to any sort of commitment. Orgon did promise Valère his daughter's hand, and set a date, but now he is hedging. The ceremony has been postponed, and Orgon will not tell anyone what his intentions are regarding the wedding. When Cléante finally asks him directly if he intends to keep his promise to Valère, Orgon dismisses him with a "good-bye," and exits. Cléante does not think that this is a very good sign, and goes to warn Valère.

Act 1 Analysis

The comic elements of Moliére's *Tartuffe* are made evident from the beginning of Act I. Moliére makes it obvious which characters are acting irrational, in his mind, and which are wise to the con being carried out by Tartuffe. The foolishness of Madame Pernelle's position, and later, her son's, is pointed out by the other characters, including her grandchildren and even the servants. The dialogue at the opening of the play is witty and quick. Madame Pernelle always seems to try to have the last word, and won't listen to any of the reasoning presented by the other characters. It is particularly interesting that Dorine, Mariane's maid, is the most outspoken. Dorine points out the foolishness of Tartuffe's actions and words, and the preposterous behavior of Orgon and his mother toward the beggar.

Orgon is further made fun of by Dorine upon his return home. The comedic timing of his exchange with her is made evident by the cadence of the speech. Orgon asks after his wife, Dorine replies about her ailments, and Orgon immediately responds, "And Tartuffe?" Dorine describes Tartuffe's hale and hearty behavior, to which Orgon consistently replies, "Poor fellow!" When Dorine reports that they both doing well now, she further makes fun of Orgon by saying that she will go and tell his wife of his concern for her well-being. Cléante then points out to Orgon that Dorine was laughing in his face, but Orgon is again oblivious to the humor.

In addition to the humor, Moliére also makes a strong statement about class in these scenes, in the manner in which he treats the servants. On the one hand, Dorine is a smart and sassy girl, who always has her say, and often puts her superiors in a poor

light. On the other hand, we have Flipote, Madame Pernelle's maid, who isn't even allowed to say a word throughout the entire act.

More humor comes through as Orgon tries to describe and defend Tartuffe. Orgon simply cannot come up with the words to describe Tartuffe, and ends by saying he is "in short, a man!" Cléante's responses to Orgon's praise of Tartuffe are comical, too. When Orgon says that he could see his whole family perish without being very bothered by it all, Cléante responds, "Very humane sentiments, I must say, brother!" Cléante is clearly being sarcastic, but Orgon takes his words at face value and continues on his diatribe.

When Cléante changes the conversation to Mariane's upcoming marriage, Orgon offers a series of very short answers, none of which commit him to anything. Cléante's frustration is evident, and he continues asking Orgon what his position is on this marriage that he has already approved of. When asked outright if he intends to keep his promise, Orgon merely dismisses Cléante, and exits.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

The second act begins with Orgon speaking to his daughter, Mariane. At the beginning of the conversation, Dorine eavesdrops, unobserved. Orgon tells Mariane that he is happy that she has always been an obedient daughter, and Mariane responds that she shall try to always do what her father wishes. Orgon then asks her what she thinks of their houseguest, Tartuffe. Mariane doesn't know how to respond, as she detests the man, but wishes to please her father with her answer. Orgon tells her that he would like her to say that she is in love with Tartuffe, and would be happy to marry him, as her father desires. Mariane has trouble admitting this untruth, even to please her father.

At this point, Orgon finds Dorine hiding in the room. Dorine treats the subject of Mariane marrying Tartuffe as a joke. Dorine tells Mariane that she is sure that Orgon is just teasing, which further infuriates him. Dorine then asks Orgon why he would insist on his daughter marrying this poor beggar. Orgon defends Tartuffe, while Dorine continues to point out his faults and his hypocrisy. Dorine further infuriates Orgon, by saying that if he forces Mariane to marry against her wishes, then he is only asking for her to be unfaithful to her new husband. Dorine points out that Tartuffe is the epitome of a hypocrite, going to church only to be noticed and recognized. Orgon orders Dorine to hold her tongue, which she attempts, but without much success. Each time he tries to speak to Mariane, Dorine cuts in, stating her concern for Orgon's good name. Dorine continues to say that any woman who is married against her will has the power to make her husband's life miserable. Dorine finally shuts up, which also aggravates Orgon, who is now waiting for her further interruptions. Orgon finally takes his leave, thoroughly incensed at the whole situation.

Dorine then confronts Mariane for not speaking up to her father. Mariane is concerned about disobeying her father's authority, for she doesn't want to go against his wishes, but the thought of marrying Tartuffe is extremely unpleasant. Dorine asks how committed Mariane is to Valère, and Mariane can't believe that the maid is asking her such a question. Finally, Dorine gets Mariane to admit her love for Valère, and asks how she plans to get out of her father's proposed marriage of her to Tartuffe. Mariane states that she would sooner take her own life than agree to marry Tartuffe, to which Dorine chides her for her stupidity. Mariane says that it is up to Valère to deal with her father, and Dorine asks her why her lover should be blamed for her father's unrealistic demands.

Mariane is torn between her love for Valère and her inability to defy her father's wishes. Dorine tires of this conversation and tells Mariane that she must *want* to marry Tartuffe. Then she continues to tease Mariane about what a fine fellow Tartuffe is, and how she will surely be quite happy with him as a husband. Finally, Mariane gives in and asks Dorine's help to get out of the marriage. Dorine continues to tease her, saying that Mariane deserves to be "thoroughly Tartuffed." Dorine takes pity on her, and vows to

find a way to help prevent the marriage of Mariane and Tartuffe. At this point, Valère enters.

Valère has just heard the news that Mariane and Tartuffe are to be married. Mariane says that this is, indeed, her father's intent. Valère says that Orgon had previously promised Mariane to him, and Mariane says that he has changed his mind. The lovers go back and forth discussing this, and Mariane will not say that she intends to disobey her father. Valère is frustrated by this turn of events. Mariane asks his advice, and since Valère is hurt by her lack of action in this matter, he advises her to take Tartuffe. The spat escalates and the lovers continue to put on airs that they are no longer interested in each other, and that Mariane's marriage to Tartuffe is the solution. Both are hurt deeply by the other's reaction. Valère turns to leave, as he is heartbroken and insulted. Mariane, feeling much the same, tells him that that is fine with her. The conversation continues, as each tries to have the last word, and each waits for the other to break down and admit that this is a farce. After numerous good-byes, Dorine finally intervenes and drags them both back into the room together.

As Dorine tries to get the two lovers together, they both act indignant and indifferent to the other. Valère says he is only doing what Mariane wishes by leaving. Mariane goes to leave because she thinks Valère cannot bear to look at her anymore. Valère goes to leave again, claiming that Mariane hates the sight of him. Dorine dismisses this quarrel as sheer silliness. Dorine tells Mariane that Valère loves her, and she tells Valère that Mariane could never love another. Valère says that Mariane was cruel to taunt him with this terrible news, and Mariane argues that Valère gave up too easily.

Dorine puts a stop to this squabbling, too, by telling the pair that they must quit arguing and figure out a way to prevent the proposed marriage to Tartuffe. Dorine comes up with a plan to delay the marriage and she urges Mariane to come up with excuses to postpone it, and tells Valère to rally his friends to convince Orgon to keep his initial promise. Finally, the two lovers make up, and begin gushing about how they will only be happy with each other. Dorine urges them to get moving on their plan. At the end of the act, she succeeds in sending them out in opposite directions.

Act 2 Analysis

The second act is fast-paced and continues the comedy. The act begins with the humor of the eavesdropping servant. She is quickly found out and engages in an exchange with Orgon, which infuriates him. Even funnier, is when Orgon silences Dorine, and she continues to get it her comments. Again silenced, Dorine continues to comment, through a series of asides, as she talks to herself.

The elements of class are further addressed with the exchanges between Orgon and the maid. The manner in which Mariane feels that to honor her father she must do as he commands, is telling of the period of this piece. Even though she loathes Tartuffe, she is not inclined to speak out against her father or go against his wishes.

Humor is again brought forth as the lovers quarrel. The fine line between love and hate seems evident as Mariane and Valère argue, and the spat escalates into each feeling that the other no longer loves them. Dorine must interject, and remind them of their feelings of love and devotion. These feelings are expressed in the lovers' actions, but are counterpoint to their words, resulting in a humorous exchange.

Finally, the scheme is hatched to delay and, hopefully, eliminate the upcoming marriage of Mariane to Tartuffe. Dorine is very instrumental in bringing the lovers together and then sending them on their separate ways to carry out her plan.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

In Act 3, the plans are set in motion to prevent the wedding of Mariane to Tartuffe. Damis wishes to take physical action against Tartuffe, for he is deeply troubled not only that their father wishes for Mariane to marry Tartuffe, but also that his father is now opposing her marriage to Valère. Dorine tries to calm him, telling him that her plan will accomplish the same end, but without violence. Dorine has arranged for Elmire to speak with Tartuffe alone and try to persuade him to tell Orgon that he does not wish to marry Mariane. Damis wants to witness this conversation, but Dorine knows his temper, and tells him that he should leave before he ruins everything.

At this point, Tartuffe enters, babbling about all of the good and holy work he is doing. Dorine speaks to him, and he insists that she cover her bosom with a handkerchief so that he doesn't give in to unholy thoughts. Dorine counters that he is rather easily lead into temptation, and that she wouldn't be the least bit interested in him, even if he were stark naked in front of her. Tartuffe demands modesty, and Dorine offers to leave, telling him that Elmire is coming down to speak privately with him. Tartuffe eagerly agrees, and Dorine thinks that he is a bit too eager, giving credence to her thoughts that Tartuffe is quite interested in the mistress of the house.

As Elmire enters, Tartuffe greets her enthusiastically and asks of her recent illness. Tartuffe then attempts to modestly discredit the effect that his prayers must have had on her recovery. Tartuffe says that he would have gladly sacrificed himself for her, which is absolutely opposed to the previous reports of his actions during Elmire's illness.

Elmire continues that she wishes to speak privately and candidly with him. Tartuffe replies that it is his wish to speak openly with her, as he proceeds to "put the moves" on her, first by squeezing her hand, then by placing his hand on her knee. Elmire attempts to move the conversation around to discussing Orgon's promise of Mariane's hand to Tartuffe. Tartuffe says his interests lie elsewhere, meaning Elmire herself, but she interprets his statement to mean that he is too interested in his heavenly pursuits to care for this earthly relationship. Tartuffe then says that he is, indeed, interested in earthly pleasures, but that Elmire's beauty is something that the holiest of men would not be wrong in desiring. Tartuffe expresses his interest in a discreet encounter with Elmire, and promises no fear of being discovered. At this point, Elmire realizes what he is talking about and asks why he doesn't fear that she would tell her husband of his overtures. Elmire decides to use his indiscretion as a bargaining chip, and offers to not speak of this to her husband if, in return, Tartuffe will convince Orgon that Valère should have Mariane's hand in marriage.

Timing is everything, and at this moment, Damis jumps out of the closet where he has been hidden. Damis has observed the entire exchange, and threatens to take his story to Orgon, certain that this will convince him to kick out Tartuffe. Elmire tries to convince

Damis to hold his tongue, and allow her plan to work. As they argue over the best course of action (exposure of Tartuffe versus blackmail), Orgon enters, and Damis rushes to tell him of Tartuffe's actions.

Damis explains to Orgon that Tartuffe has taken his trust and devotion, and used it to take advantage of Elmire. Damis explains that Elmire wished to keep this encounter discreet, but that he is certain that Orgon should know of it. Elmire still thinks that a wife should not trouble her husband with "such silly nonsense" as Tartuffe making a pass at her, as she is able to discourage such behavior on her own. Elmire then leaves the room.

Orgon asks Tartuffe is this rumor is true, and Tartuffe admits everything, calling himself "a guilty wretch, a miserable sinner steeped in iniquity, the greatest villain that ever existed..." Orgon turns to Damis and scolds him for accusing the virtuous Tartuffe. Tartuffe continues to confess, and says that Damis is right to accuse him, that the family is correct in thinking poorly of him, and that he is deserving of their scorn.

The conversation goes back and forth, with Tartuffe defending Damis and asking Orgon to not punish his son. Orgon takes all of the protests as further evidence of Tartuffe's goodness and Damis' insolence. When Orgon threatens Damis with physical punishment, Tartuffe begs Orgon to punish him instead. Damis is dumbfounded, as every word of confession that Tartuffe utters, only makes Orgon angrier with Damis and more doting on Tartuffe. To put an end to the disagreement, Orgon vows to take action immediately and let the entire family know that he is completely devoted to Tartuffe. Orgon declares that not only will Tartuffe marry Mariane, but that the wedding will take place immediately. Orgon threatens Damis with a stick, then kicks him out of the house and says that he is disinherited.

Orgon then rushes to apologize to Tartuffe. Tartuffe says that the entire family is against him, and that he's afraid that Orgon's wife will influence his feelings. Orgon denies that this could happen, and Tartuffe says that he must stay away from Elmire so that there is no further suspicion about him. Orgon is furious at this thought, and tells Tartuffe that he *wants* him to spend as much time with Elmire as possible. To further confound the family, Orgon says that he will immediately draw up the paperwork to make Tartuffe his sole heir and give him all of his money, and his daughter's hand in marriage.

Act 3 Analysis

Once again, Dorine takes control. Damis has other plans at the beginning of Act 3, but Dorine is convinced that her plan to have Elmire speak with Tartuffe about the marriage is the best course of action.

Tartuffe makes his first appearance in this act, and immediately demonstrates the hypocrisy that the others have been describing. Tartuffe's description of his holy acts is so over-the-top, that he is instantly transparent. The modesty rings so false, that even Dorine is taken aback, but his demeanor changes right away when the subject turns to

Elmire. Dorine expressed her theory about his interest in the mistress early in Act 1, and again in her conversation with Damis. Tartuffe's eagerness to speak with Elmire gives credence to her suppositions, which she points out in an aside.

Tartuffe's hypocrisy is certainly pointed out in his long speeches to Elmire. Elmire's responses seem to give Tartuffe the benefit of the doubt at first, but she soon catches on to his meaning, especially as he becomes physically close to her. Elmire seems to be a smart woman, and quickly decides that she can use Tartuffe's indiscretion to her advantage, in a veiled threat of blackmail. Elmire takes control of the situation, and lets Tartuffe know that he needs to submit to *her* desires - the support of Valère's marriage to Mariane.

This would be a suitable end to the problem of Tartuffe, and the problem of Orgon's broken marriage promise, but Damis' temper comes into play and he will not listen to his stepmother's voice of reason. Being young and hot-tempered, Damis is convinced that Tartuffe's flirtations must be exposed. Of course, as in past dialogues about Tartuffe, Orgon simply does not listen to reason, and is thoroughly bamboozled by Tartuffe's sly ways.

Tartuffe further takes advantage of Orgon's devotion, and each time Tartuffe makes an "I am not worthy" declaration, Orgon counters with bestowing more and more trust upon his visitor. Tartuffe plays Orgon like a fool, and in the end, Orgon is willing to give every worldly possession to Tartuffe, in his own effort to be pious and holy, too. The true picture of the religious zealot is painfully evident as we see how far Orgon will go to prove that his belief in Tartuffe is true and righteous.

Act 4

Act 4 Summary

In this act, Cléante comes to speak with Tartuffe about the news around town. Cléante asks Tartuffe to pardon Damis' offense and not stand in the way of familial peace. Cléante speaks to Tartuffe about showing that he is a true Christian and encouraging Orgon to take his son back.

Tartuffe counters that he would be happy to see the father and son reunited, but that he is concerned about what people would think and feels he would have to leave the house, which would upset Orgon further. Cléante is fed up with Tartuffe's many "pious" excuses. Cléante's arguments are that God should be the one to punish the sinners, and that if Tartuffe were truly a charitable fellow, he would forgive Damis and wish to see him return home. Cléante further asks Tartuffe how receiving all of Orgon's money and possessions can make him good and godly man. Tartuffe disavows any real interest in the worldly possessions and wealth, and claims that he is just pleased to keep the money out of undeserving hands, who would use the wealth for evil purposes.

As Cléante questions this argument, and how taking from a lawful heir can be doing God's will, Tartuffe tires of the conversation and excuses himself, leaving a very frustrated Cléante.

Cléante is joined by the women of the house, distressed at the upcoming wedding. Orgon enters and Mariane begs him not to make her marry the man she despises. In an aside, Orgon shows a moment of potential weakness, as he tries to be unfeeling towards his daughter. When Mariane offers her inheritance in lieu of marrying Tartuffe, and threatens to join a convent, Orgon regains his authority and insists that by doing this thing that she thinks is so dreadful, her soul will be better for it. Dorine and Cléante try to dissuade him, but are summarily dismissed.

Elmire marvels at her husband's obsession with Tartuffe, and surmises that he must be actually *infatuated* with the man, something that she cannot understand. Elmire questions why Orgon will not believe what Damis told him about witnessing Tartuffe's advances. Orgon says that he doesn't believe the story because Elmire did not seem overly bothered by the situation, which she feels is a proper way to react to such advances.

Ultimately, Elmire decides that Orgon needs to see proof of Tartuffe's advances toward her. Orgon finally agrees to allow her a chance, and Dorine summons Tartuffe. Elmire makes Orgon hide under a table so that he can see Tartuffe's actions with his own eyes, but she asks him to stop them as soon as he is convinced, so that she doesn't need to go very far with the charade. Orgon hides and Tartuffe enters warily.

Tartuffe is suspicious of Elmire's change of heart. Elmire continues trying to convince him to pick up where they left off earlier. Finally, Tartuffe begins to express his passionate desires. Elmire hopes this will be enough to convince her husband, and coughs a bit to get his attention under the table. Tartuffe begins making advances, and Elmire tries to keep a bit of distance, while trying to summon Orgon out into the open.

Frustrated at Orgon's lack of action, Elmire agrees to submit to Tartuffe's advances. Before things go too far, though, she asks Tartuffe to look out in the hallway to make sure they aren't being heard. Tartuffe says he isn't worried a bit about Orgon, that he is easily lead, and that even if Orgon saw this with his own eyes he would not believe what he saw.

When Tartuffe goes to check the door, Orgon emerges and declares Tartuffe a scoundrel. Elmire, a bit miffed at how long it took Orgon to catch on, urges him to hide again, until he is absolutely certain, till the very end. When Tartuffe reenters, Elmire quickly steps in front of Orgon to hide him from view. Tartuffe begins to advance on Elmire and Orgon jumps out and confronts him. Finally, Orgon is no longer listening to Tartuffe's rebuttals, and in his anger orders Tartuffe out of his house.

Tartuffe reminds Orgon that he now holds the deed, and that he can't order Tartuffe out of the house. Tartuffe threatens to make Orgon regret trying to do this. A panicked Orgon realizes that there is a secret he entrusted with Tartuffe that Tartuffe will likely use against him.

Act 4 Analysis

In Act 4, the family comes together with the goal of tricking the trickster. Cléante begins by attempting to use reason with Tartuffe, to convince him that it doesn't look good for him to have come between Orgon and his son. In the first act, we learned that Tartuffe was concerned with appearances and neighborhood gossip, so Cléante attempts to use this knowledge to persuade Tartuffe to encourage a reconciliation. Cléante also uses religion, asking Tartuffe if he wouldn't be better off letting God take care of Damis' actions. Tartuffe uses the same arguments that worked so well with Orgon - that he is willing to forgive Damis and that he harbors no resentment. Tartuffe turns it around, though, and talks of the possible scandal if he were to live under the same roof as Damis. Tartuffe is worried that people would talk further if he appeared to fear Damis and left the house.

Cléante has difficulty making sense of Tartuffe's changing attitudes and arguments. Tartuffe seems to use God and Heaven's will in whatever way best suits his personal interests. Cléante then asks Tartuffe how he can justify accepting the gifts that Orgon has bestowed upon him. Tartuffe again turns everything around to make it seem that by taking Orgon's possessions, he is only trying to keep the money out of the hands of those who would do evil with it. Tartuffe's illogical arguments and counterpoints seem like they could be talking in circles forever, but eventually Tartuffe tires of the conversation and makes an excuse to leave.

Elmire has now decided that she must take matters into her own hands if she is to convince her husband that Tartuffe is truly a menace to the family. The scene with Orgon under the table observing Tartuffe's passionate advances on Elmire gives us another look at Moliére's expert use of humor.

We have the master of the house, on his hands and knees under a table while this scene plays out - a visually funny element, to say the least. As Tartuffe declares his intentions, we have Elmire coughing to get her husband's attention, with Orgon ignoring the cue. The more intense the scene with Tartuffe gets, the more Elmire coughs, until Tartuffe finally offers her a licorice to help her cough, while there is still no sign of Orgon emerging. At her wits' end, Elmire sends Tartuffe out of the room, so that she can speak to her husband before things go too far.

Emerging from under the table, Orgon is finally convinced, but Elmire is rather peeved that he has taken so long. Elmire counters his anger with a bit of her own, by insisting that he stay hidden longer, until things have really gotten out of hand and gone too far.

Tartuffe reenters and is hastily confronted by Orgon. The tables have turned quickly, as Orgon realizes what a scoundrel Tartuffe is. Tartuffe turns this back on Orgon, by reminding him of their deal, and that he is now the master of this house. Orgon realizes now that he has made an even greater error in trusting a secret with Tartuffe, which he is certain he'll regret.

Act 5

Act 5 Summary

Orgon explains to Cléante the contents of the casket that he entrusted to Tartuffe. Argas, a friend of Orgon's, entrusted him with certain documents when he fled the country. It is vital that these documents remain secret, and Tartuffe convinced Orgon that his conscience would be clearer if Tartuffe took possession of them. Cléante understands that Tartuffe has much power over Orgon now, both monetarily and with the possession of this guarded secret. Cléante asks Orgon how he could provoke Tartuffe, knowing how much is at stake and suggests that Orgon should not have angered Tartuffe with so much that could be used against him.

Orgon fails to see the wisdom of Cléante's advice and continues to show his anger. Orgon immediately decides that he will no longer trust pious or godly men. Cléante points out that Orgon rarely acts in a moderate manner, but is given to taking one extreme and now the other. Damis comes in to see if the news about Tartuffe is true. Damis is angered and wishes to take drastic measures against Tartuffe. Again, Cléante tries to be the voice of reason and he urges Damis to consider moderation, too, and to not resort so quickly to violence to solve his grievances.

Madame Pernelle returns to find out what is going on. Orgon tells her of Tartuffe's betrayal, and she refuses to believe it. Dorine chimes in with, "Poor fellow!" Madame Pernelle begins to defend Tartuffe, and wonders how the family convinced Orgon to go against him. Orgon insists that his decision was not based on the tales of the family members, but on what he saw with his own eyes. Dorine reminds him that he refused to believe when others were telling him of Tartuffe's faults, and makes fun that now Orgon is the one who is not being believed.

Cléante urges everyone to consider a plan of action to thwart Tartuffe's threats. The others don't think anyone will believe the scoundrel and that there probably isn't much to worry about. The group is interrupted by Mr. Loyal, a bailiff from the courts. Loyal gains admittance by claiming to bring news that will please Orgon, but instead presents him with a court order to vacate the premises. This is the evidence that makes Madame Pernelle finally accept Tartuffe's insincerity.

Again, they are trying to decide on a course of action, when Valère arrives with more bad news. Not only is Tartuffe taking possession of the house and evicting them, but he has also delivered Argas' secret documents to the King, and a warrant has been issued for Orgon's arrest.

Tartuffe returns with an officer to arrest Orgon. Orgon reminds Tartuffe that he took him in, clothed him, fed him, and made him part of his household. Tartuffe brushes this off and claims his first duty is to the King. Tartuffe then instructs the officer to do his job.

The officer agrees and states that in order to fulfill his instructions, he must take Tartuffe away to prison. Shocked at this turn of events, Tartuffe questions the officer, who tells of the long investigation and tracking of the unscrupulous imposter, Tartuffe. Additionally, the King is aware of Orgon's previous record, and gives him clemency for harboring his friend's documents. Cléante stops Orgon from expressing his anger towards Tartuffe, and instead they go to thank the King for his kindness and then set about to get Valère and Mariane married.

Act 5 Analysis

Suddenly, everything appears to have turned out quite poorly for Orgon. Cléante asks why Orgon trusted Tartuffe so much with his friend's secret. Orgon explains that Tartuffe convinced him that by not having the documents in his possession, he would be able to deny any connection with them. Now Orgon is thoroughly angered at all men who claim to be holy or pious. Cléante, ever the voice of reason, tries to urge Orgon to a more moderate point-of-view, as his extremism is what got him in such a bad position with Tartuffe. Cléante urges moderation from the violent-tempered Damis, too.

The tables are turned on Orgon when he tries to tell his mother of Tartuffe's unscrupulous behavior. Orgon didn't believe the family members who spoke out against Tartuffe, and now his own mother won't believe him. Madame Pernelle finally acquiesces when the bailiff brings the eviction papers - obviously, this is proof of Tartuffe's evilness.

Mr. Loyal, the bailiff, as Dorine points out, is not aptly named. When he gains entrance into the house, he declares that Orgon will be pleased with his news. When he throws them out of their home, Dorine points out that he should be called "*Dis*loyal." Dorine doesn't have a lot to say in this act, which is uncharacteristic for her, but she has already pointed out the foolishness and hypocrisy throughout the play. In the final act, she doesn't need to call attention to these things, as they have all become self-evident.

The final justice is delivered when Tartuffe revels in the accompanying officer arresting his benefactor, and the officer turns to Tartuffe and says that it is he that is being taken to prison, not Orgon. Orgon begins to vent his anger at Tartuffe again, but finally listens to Cléante's request for moderation. A happy ending, with every detail tied up, brings the final act to a quick close, as everyone sets off to thank the King and celebrate the marriage of the two lovers.

Characters

Cléante

Cléante is the brother of Elmire and brother-inlaw of Orgon. Cléante tries to convince Orgon that Tartuffe is not sincere in his religious devotion and is using Orgon for his money and influence. He observes that Tartuffe makes an outward display of religious devotion but does not practice what he preaches. He points out to Orgon that there are many pious people who live moral lives without making a public display of their piety. Orgon, however, is not convinced by Cléante's reasoning and does not heed his advice about Tartuffe. In the final moments of the play, Cléante advises Orgon to go before the King and thank him for arresting Tartuffe and for restoring Orgon's property to him. He states that Orgon should not harbor ill will toward Tartuffe but should hope that Tartuffe will one day mend his ways and become a truly virtuous person. Many critics have commented that Cléante represents the voice of reason in the play, providing guidelines for the sincere practice of Christian morality in contrast to the false piety of Tartuffe.

Damis

Damis is the son of Orgon, stepson of Elmire, and brother of Mariane. Of all the characters, Damis is the most outraged by Tartuffe's behavior, reacting impulsively and threatening violence on several occasions. Damis is very upset when he learns that Orgon wishes Mariane to marry Tartuffe. Damis is engaged to the sister of Valère and fears that if the engagement between Mariane and Valère is broken, Valère's sister will break her engagement to him as well. Damis hides in a closet in order to overhear the conversation between Tartuffe and Elmire, in which Tartuffe attempts to seduce Elmire. Upon hearing this exchange, Damis becomes extremely upset and goes to tell his father of Tartuffe's behavior. Orgon, however, responds to this information by chastising Damis for daring to speak against Tartuffe. Orgon orders Damis out of the house immediately and declares that he will disinherit his son. Once Orgon learns of Tartuffe's deception, he takes Damis back into the household and wishes to restore his son's rightful inheritance to him. Damis, an emotional and impulsive young man, offers to slay Tartuffe out of revenge but is advised to be patient until a more reasonable plan for dealing with Tartuffe is devised.

Dorine

Dorine is the lady's-maid to Mariane. Although she is a servant, Dorine has a very strong personality and is never afraid to speak out against Orgon or anyone else with whom she disagrees. When Orgon tells Mariane that she must marry Tartuffe, Dorine immediately and emphatically protests the arrangement. She argues with Orgon that if he forces Mariane to marry a man whom she does not love, the result will be that she will be unfaithful to her unwanted husband. Dorine later tells Mariane that she absolutely

must stand up to her father and insist that she be allowed to marry Valère, the man whom she loves. Dorine helps to mend the hurt feelings between Mariane and Valère after Valère learns of the engagement to Tartuffe and assures the young lovers that she will devise a plan to allow them to marry one another.

Elmire

Elmire is the wife of Orgon, stepmother of Mariane and Damis, and sister of Cléante. As divorce would have been extremely uncommon in the seventeenth century, the reader is left to assume that Orgon had a first wife who was the mother of Mariane and Damis and that this wife died young. Accordingly, the reader may assume that Elmire is Orgon's second wife. Although Elmire is the stepmother of Mariane and Damis, she seems to treat them as if they were her own children, and they seem to regard her as their mother. In the play, Elmire has a conversation with Tartuffe in which Tartuffe attempts to seduce her into having an affair with him. Elmire politely but clearly refuses Tartuffe's advances. She tells him that she will not tell her husband about his behavior toward her if he promises to convince Orgon to allow Mariane to marry Valère instead of him. This arrangement is foiled when Damis reports this conversation to his father. Because Orgon refuses to believe that Tartuffe tried to seduce his wife, he accuses Elmire of making the story up in order to malign Tartuffe and support the interests of Damis and Mariane. In order to prove to Orgon that Tartuffe has betrayed him, Elmire instructs him to hide underneath a table while she speaks to Tartuffe. While Orgon is hiding, Elmire tells Tartuffe that she would like to have an affair with him, and Tartuffe responds that she must prove this to him through an act of physical passion. At this point, Orgon is convinced that Tartuffe has betrayed him and orders Tartuffe to leave immediately.

Flipote

Flipote is the maid of Madame Pernelle. Flipote appears only in the opening scene of the play and has no dialogue. As Madame Pernelle is leaving Orgon's house, she slaps Flipote and, calling her a "slut," tells her to hurry up.

A Gentleman of the King's Guard

In the final scene of the play, Tartuffe arrives at Orgon's house with a Gentleman of the King's Guard. Tartuffe announces that they have come to arrest Orgon. However, the Gentleman of the King's Guard informs them that he is in fact going to arrest Tartuffe for various crimes committed under a different name. The Gentleman of the King's Guard also tells Orgon that the King has restored to him all of the property he had signed over to Tartuffe.

The King

Although the King does not appear as a visible presence or speaking character in *Tartuffe*, he is an important offstage character to the plot resolution of the play. Just when Orgon thinks he is about to be arrested, the Gentleman of the King's Guard arrests Tartuffe instead. The Gentleman of the King's Guard explains that the King has pardoned Orgon and will restore his property to him because of the fact that Orgon fought loyally on the side of the King during the civil wars (known as the Fronde). Thus, although the King is not a visible presence onstage, he is signi.cant to the play's theme of loyalty versus betrayal. The ending suggests that loyalty to the King, as well as to one's friends and family, will always be rewarded.

Monsieur Loyal

Toward the end of the play, Monsieur Loyal, a bailiff, arrives at Orgon's house with a legal document that declares Tartuffe to be the rightful owner of the property. Monsieur Loyal informs Orgon that he and his family must vacate the house by the next morning. Monsieur Loyal adds that he has employed several men to spend the night in the house in order to be sure that they leave in the morning. His name, Loyal, is ironic in that he is in fact disloyal to the King when he acts on Tartuffe's behalf.

Mariane

Mariane is the daughter of Orgon, stepdaughter of Elmire, and sister of Damis. Mariane is in love with Valère and, as the play opens, has been granted her father's permission to marry him. However, Orgon tells her that he wants her to marry Tartuffe instead of Valère. Mariane is horrified by the prospect of having to marry Tartuffe but is too obedient to stand up to her father. She tells Dorine that she will simply kill herself if she is forced to marry Tartuffe. Dorine, however, tells Mariane that she must stand up to her father and insist on marrying Valère;, but when Mariane pleads that she is too afraid to resist her father, Dorine assures her that they will find a way for her to marry Valère. In the final lines of the play, Orgon states that they all must see to the marriage of the "loving pair," Mariane and Valère.

Orgon

Orgon is the husband of Elmire, father of Damis and Mariane, and son of Madame Pernelle. The play takes place in Orgon's home, where he lives with his family and several houseguests. As the play opens, Orgon has met Tartuffe at a church and, impressed with his piety, has invited the stranger to stay in his home indefinitely. Orgon is completely taken with Tartuffe and treats him better than he treats his own family. He regards Tartuffe as his religious guide and is blind to the fact that Tartuffe is deceiving him. When his friends and family try to convince Orgon that Tartuffe is faking his piety and deceiving his host, Orgon dismisses their warnings. In Orgon's eyes, Tartuffe is a

model of religious devotion whom all others should emulate. He informs his daughter, Mariane, that he wants her to marry Tartuffe, even though he has already promised that she could marry Valère. When Damis reports to Orgon that Tartuffe has tried to seduce Elmire, his wife, Orgon does not believe him. Instead, Orgon accuses Damis of insulting Tartuffe, orders Damis to leave the house immediately, and announces that he will disinherit his son in order to make Tartuffe his sole heir.

Elmire tells Orgon to hide underneath a table while she talks to Tartuffe so that he will hear for himself what kind of man Tartuffe really is. After Orgon hears Tartuffe trying to seduce Elmire, he is convinced that he has been betrayed. Orgon orders Tartuffe to leave his home immediately, but Tartuffe warns him that he has ample means for getting revenge. Orgon has given Tartuffe a strongbox of papers incriminating himself and has also signed all of his property over to Tartuffe. Thus, Tartuffe arranges to have Orgon arrested and the family turned out of their home. At the end of the play, however, Orgon is informed that he has been pardoned by the King and his property restored to him, while Tartuffe is arrested for a long list of previously committed crimes. In the closing lines of the play, Orgon announces that he will go to the King to thank him and then see to the marriage of Valère and Mariane.

Madame Pernelle

Madame Pernelle is the mother of Orgon, mother- in-law of Elmire, and grandmother of Mariane and Damis. In the opening scene of the play, Madame Pernelle announces that she is leaving Orgon's home because she disapproves of the way the other members of the household (except Orgon) shun Tartuffe. Madame Pernelle criticizes the others for engaging in parties, dances, and other social events, which she considers to be immoral behavior. She tells them all that they should listen to Tartuffe's moral pronouncements against them and try to take his advice. The others protest that there is nothing wrong with socializing with their friends and that Tartuffe is a despicable man who does not practice what he preaches. Toward the end of the play, Madame Pernelle returns to Orgon's house. When Orgon tries to tell her that Tartuffe has betrayed him and tried to seduce his wife, Madame Pernelle refuses to believe him and insists that Tartuffe is a good man. However, when she sees that Tartuffe has taken Orgon's property and tried to have him arrested, Madame Pernelle finally admits that Tartuffe is not what he appeared to be.

Tartuffe

Tartuffe, the title character of the play, is a seasoned criminal, referred to by the other characters as a hypocrite and an imposter. Tartuffe pretends to be a pious man whose life is devoted to religious worship and moral behavior. Tartuffe met Orgon at a church, where he made such a show of religious devotion that Orgon decided to take him into his home as a religious guide. Tartuffe exerts a strong power over Orgon, who worships him as if he were a saint and shuns his own family in favor of this stranger. Orgon decides to make his daughter marry Tartuffe and disinherits his own son in order to

make Tartuffe his sole heir. When Damis reports to Orgon that Tartuffe has tried to seduce his wife, Orgon does not believe this and instead blames Damis for speaking out against Tartuffe. However, when Orgon hides under a table and overhears Tartuffe trying once again to seduce her, he finally sees that he has been betrayed. Orgon orders Tartuffe to leave his home immediately, and Tartuffe threatens him with revenge. After Tartuffe leaves, he arranges to have Orgon arrested and his property taken away from him. However, at the last moment, a Gentleman of the King's Guard arrests Tartuffe instead and informs Orgon that his property will be restored to him. The Gentleman of the Guard explains that Tartuffe had committed a long list of crimes under a different name and will be sent to prison.

Valère

Valère is in love with Mariane. In the beginning of the play, Valère is engaged to Mariane with Orgon's permission. Thus, when he finds out that the engagement has been broken and Mariane is to marry Tartuffe, Valère is very upset about the matter. When he confronts Mariane with the news of her engagement to Tartuffe, Mariane pretends that she does not care about Valère, and Valère likewise pretends that he will be happy to marry someone else. Dorine, however, brings Valère and Mariane together and forces them both to admit that they are still in love with one another and still wish to get married. Toward the end of the play, Valère bravely does whatever he can to save Orgon from being arrested. He arrives at Orgon's house with a carriage and money for Orgon to escape arrest. Orgon is soon cleared of the charges against him and so does not need to run off or take Valère's money. Nonetheless, Orgon is so grateful to Valère for this offering of help that he announces he will immediately arrange for Valère's marriage to Mariane and reward Valère's "deep devotion." Valère's genuine loyalty to Orgon is contrasted with Tartuffe's false friendship; likewise, Valère's genuine and honorable love for Mariane is contrasted with Tartuffe's underhanded lust for Elmire.

Themes

Religious Hypocrisy versus True Christian Virtue

The central theme of *Tartuffe* is the exploration of religious hypocrisy in contrast to true Christian virtue. Tartuffe is a hypocrite because he creates an outward appearance of extreme piety and religious devotion while secretly leading a life of crime and immoral behavior. Throughout the play, various characters refer to Tartuffe as a hypocrite and can see clearly that he does not practice what he preaches. For example, Tartuffe instructs his servant to tell anyone who asks that he is busy giving out charity to the poor and downtrodden□whereas, in fact, he is busy trying to seduce the wife of his friend. Tartuffe also displays an outward show of religious devotion by assuming a stance of moral authority and telling everyone else in the household how to behave.

In contrast to Tartuffe's hypocritical behavior in regard to religious devotion, Molière offers a view of true Christian virtue in the character of Cléante. Throughout the play, Cléante expresses ideas about true Christian virtue as opposed to religious hypocrisy. Cléante points out to Orgon that there are many people leading truly virtuous lives who do not feel the need to prove to everyone else how devout they are. Furthermore, Cléante points out that "The truly pious people . . . are not the ones who make the biggest show." Cléante adds that "True piety's not hard to recognize"; he describes those genuinely moral people who, rather than showing off their religious devotion, "practice what they preach," in the sense that they "judge with charity and wish men well" and "mainly seek to lead a virtuous life." Cléante comments that he feels no need to show off his religious devotion for others to see because "Heaven sees my heart." In the final moments of the play, Cléante again demonstrates his deeply felt devotion to Christian morality, particularly the value of forgiveness. When Orgon learns that Tartuffe has been arrested for a long list of crimes, he begins to voice his desire to see Tartuffe suffer for his betrayal. However, Cléante cuts Orgon off in mid-sentence in order to point out that he should not desire revenge against Tartuffe but should hope that Tartuffe will repent for his sins and even that he will be granted a lighter sentence by the King. Cléante thus voices the play's message regarding the difference between living a truly virtuous life and being a religious hypocrite who does not practice what he preaches.

Obsession and Excess versus Reason and Moderation

The value of moderation and reason in all things, as opposed to excess and obsession, is an important theme running throughout *Tartuffe*. Tartuffe himself is a figure representing the dangers of excess; he is depicted as a glutton□a man who eats and drinks immoderately at the expense of another man. Orgon is also a man of excess, although his excess takes the form of obsession. Orgon becomes so obsessed with Tartuffe that he loses all sense of reason and, as a result, nearly destroys his own family. Even after Orgon learns of Tartuffe's true nature as a fake and a hypocrite, his

first response is extreme; he determines that he will never trust another man again and will curse all those who claim to be virtuous. Cléante, however, represents the voice of reason in pointing out to Orgon that moderation in all things is better than extremes; he tells Orgon, "You never are content with moderation . . . you fly back and forth between extremes." Cléante advises Orgon that the lesson to be learned from his experience with Tartuffe is not to curse all men who appear to be good but rather to carefully avoid all extremes of behavior and judgment and to act less impulsively. As with the matter of religious hypocrisy, Cléante voices a central message of the play, that moderation and reason in all things is better than extremes or obsessions of any sort.

Loyalty and Devotion versus Disloyalty and Betrayal

Loyalty and devotion versus disloyalty and betrayal is another theme in *Tartuffe*. Tartuffe betrays Orgon's trust and friendship in every way. Whereas Orgon offers Tartuffe his friendship, his home, his food, his confidence, his fortune, and his daughter, Tartuffe uses Orgon for the purposes of his own material and social gain. Tartuffe takes advantage of Orgon's generosity and devotion by trying to seduce his wife, seize his property, and have him arrested. Under the influence of Tartuffe, Orgon himself temporarily betrays his own family. Orgon betrays both Mariane and Valère when he breaks off their engagement□to which he had previously consented□in order to make Mariane marry Tartuffe. Valère, by contrast, represents the virtues of loyalty, devotion, and friendship. Valère demonstrates his deep devotion and loyalty to Orgon when he takes a great personal risk in order to save Orgon from being arrested. Valère arrives at Orgon's house with a carriage and advises him to flee immediately in order to evade arrest. Valère also gives Orgon a large sum of cash to facilitate his escape and promises to accompany him on his journey. Valère thus risks being himself arrested for aiding Orgon's flight from the law. In the final lines of the play, Orgon states that he will reward Valère's "deep devotion" by planning his wedding to Mariane. The theme of loyalty is also addressed in *Tartuffe* in terms of Orgon's regard for the King. In the end of the play, Orgon is pardoned by the King for concealing the strongbox of documents, because he had fought courageously on the side of the King during the civil wars in France (known as the Fronde). Thus, while Tartuffe in the end is punished for his betrayal of Orgon, Orgon and Valère are rewarded for their acts of loyalty and devotion.

Style

Setting

Tartuffe is set in a wealthy family home in Paris, France, in the mid-seventeenth century, during the reign of King Louis XIV. All of the action in the play takes place in the home of Orgon, thus foregrounding the effect of Tartuffe's presence on the dynamics of the family unit. The setting of the play in times contemporary to Molière and his original theater-going audience is also significant in that mention of the King toward the end of the play is meant to be understood as a reference to King Louis XIV; Molière is careful to describe the King as a fair and venerable ruler whose kind treatment of Orgon is regarded with immense gratitude and respect. The setting of the play in France during this period in history is also a significant element of the story. Molière addresses various societal issues of the day, particularly concerning religious controversy. Discussion among the characters regarding the nature of religious devotion and the challenges posed by "free-thinkers" would have been relevant to Molière's audience at the time. Yet, although *Tartuffe* is set in a very specific historical, geographic, and cultural location, critics have often noted that the central themes and characters of the play remain relevant to readers and theater-goers throughout the world and across a span of several centuries. Thus, while the setting of the play is very specific, its significance and appeal remains universal.

Comedy

Tartuffe is regarded as a masterpiece of comic drama by France's greatest comic playwright. During the 1660s, when the performance of *Tartuffe* remained a public controversy for five years, many critics of the day considered religion to be an inappropriate topic for the comic stage. In fact, many religious authorities considered comic plays in general to be immoral. In his preface to the first published edition of *Tartuffe*, however, Molière defended comic drama as an important means of correcting immoral behavior. He pointed out that "It is a great blow to vice to expose it to everybody's laughter," because "We do not mind being wicked, but no one wants to be ridiculed." Donald M. Frame, in *Tartuffe, and Other Plays* (1967), has observed of this corrective effect of Molière's comedies:

> Again and again he leads us from the enjoyable but shallow reaction of laughing at a fool to recognizing in that fool others whom we know, and ultimately ourselves, which is surely the truest and deepest comic catharsis.

In the course of his career, Molière transformed the comic stage in France, adding a depth of humanity and philosophical complexity to the existing standards of comic

theater. Molière's complex use of comedy as a means of exploring serious psychological and moral issues in *Tartuffe* marks the play as a new development in the history of comic drama.

Historical Context

The Reign of King Louis XIV

Tartuffe was first written and performed during the reign of King Louis XIV of France, which lasted from 1643 until the king's death in 1715. The social, cultural, and political atmosphere that characterized the reign of Louis XIV, known as the Sun King, was so distinct that it lent itself to the name of an era in French history. Louis XIV was the son of King Louis XIII and the Spanish Queen Anne of Austria. He was born in 1638 and officially ascended the throne at less than five years of age. During the early years of his reign, Louis XIV struggled through a series of civil wars known as the Fronde (1648-1653). As an adult, Louis XIV worked hard to consolidate his power and eventually became one of the most powerful monarchs in history. The reign of Louis XIV came to be considered the epitome of absolutist monarchy. He combined an international policy of aggressive warfare with a domestic policy of fostering the development of cultural arts such as architecture, theater, and dance. The "Louis XIV style" designates characteristic elements in the visual and decorative arts that developed during his reign, making Paris the European center of fashion, architecture, and culture.

Seventeenth-Century French Theater and Drama

The reign of Louis XIV fostered the development of the theatrical arts, and Molière's career was largely dependent on the direct patronage of the King himself. During the seventeenth century, there were three main theaters in the city of Paris. The first permanent theater to be built in Paris was the Théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, which, after 1610, housed the theater company known as The King's Player's. In 1634, the Théâtre du Marais was created on the sight of a tennis court, which was converted for its purposes and quickly became the leading theater in Paris. The Marais Theater burned down in 1644 but was rebuilt with updated stage machinery. After 1660, Molière's troupe was housed in the Palais-Royal Theater. The Italian commedia dell'arte (also called the Comédie-Italienne), a troupe with which Molière's company shared space in two different theaters, was an equally important presence in the world of French theater.

The year of Molière's death in 1673, the king ordered the close of the Marais, combining its theatrical troupe with that of the late Molière and later with the troupe that had been associated with the Hôtel de Bourgogne. In 1680, this combined theatrical company was named the Comédie- Française, the first nationalized theatrical company in modern Europe.

Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine were two major French playwrights contemporary to Molière. Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) is considered the inventor of French classical tragic theater and was a major influence on Molière. Corneille's major works, known as the classical tetralogy, include *Le Cid* (1637), *Horace* (1640), *Cinna* (1641), and

Polyeucte (1643). These plays are set in ancient Rome and concern themes of love and betrayal. Racine (1639-1699) further developed French classical tragedy to its greatest heights. Racine became a master of the tragic play equal in status to Molière as master of the comic play. Racine's major works include the plays *Andromaque* (1667), *Britannicus* (1669), *Bérénice* (1670), and *Bajazet* (1672). His masterpiece, *Phédre* (1677), concerns a woman who falls hopelessly in love with her stepson.

Critical Overview

In his lifetime, Molière enjoyed immense popularity among audiences, as well as the ongoing favor and patronage of King Louis XIV, while suffering the censorship and banning from the stage of some of his greatest works, as well as harsh condemnation from church and civic leaders. Molière also enjoyed a popular international reputation during his lifetime, and his plays were performed in England, Germany, and Holland. Margaret Webster, in an Introduction to *Molière* (1950), has described Molière's lasting significance as a literary figure, noting, "in his own language he is as towering a figure as Shakespeare is in ours."

The initial performance of *Tartuffe* in 1664 generated a five-year-long national controversy involving the King of France, the municipal government of Paris, the Catholic religious authorities, and popular audiences, as well as Molière's well-known theatrical troupe. For the modern reader to appreciate the impact of this play upon its original audiences, *Tartuffe*'s circuitous path from bitter controversy to immense popular success is worth exploring in some detail.

Tartuffe was first performed as a three-act play before King Louis XIV during a large celebration at the Palace of Versailles. Although the king himself was pleased with the play and did not find it offensive, he was pressured by powerful religious groups to ban it from further public production. The play was newly denounced a few months later by the president of the Parisian Parliament and not long afterward by the Archbishop of Paris. Gertrud Mander, in *Molière* (1973), commented of these denouncements that:

> In other words, the highest secular and temporal powers considered *Tartuffe* to be a very dangerous matter, a revolutionary document which could arouse in the Parisian theater-goers revolutionary thoughts against both the state and religion, thereby endangering the established order.

Subsequent attempts on the part of Molière to stage *Tartuffe* resulted in renewed banning of the play by both governmental and religious authorities. In 1667, the Palais-Royal Theater staged a revised five-act version of *Tartuffe* under the title *The Imposter*. However, with the King away on military operations, the president of police and the archbishop banned the play, closed down the theater, and threatened anyone who went to see it with excommunication. Molière fearlessly defended his play in writing by publishing a public letter in defense of *Tartuffe* as well as sending letters to the king on three separate occasions, pleading to be granted the right to stage the play. But it was not until 1669 that the ban on *Tartuffe* was lifted, at which point the play enjoyed immense popular success, both among theater-going audiences and, in printed form, with the reading public. *Tartuffe* became the greatest popular and financial success of Molière's career.

Over three centuries of international recognition have generated an overwhelming mass of critical response to the work of Molière. After his death, early discussion of Molière's work was frequently concerned with the autobiographical elements of his plays, noting parallels between his own life and career and his central characters. Later discussion was primarily concerned with the question of the extent to which Molière wished to convey a moral message through his plays, as well as the precise nature of this message.

A significant shift in Molière criticism took place in the mid-twentieth century to a focus on Molière as dramatist, rather than on Molière as moralist. Other critics in the latter half of the twentieth century delved into the social and political context of seventeenth-century France in order to illuminate Molière's plays. Hallam Walker, in *Molière* (1990), described Molière criticism since the early 1980s as an amalgam of approaches taking into account significant threads of thought developed throughout the twentieth century so that now "Work is done on Molière in the comic tradition, in the climate of his times, as a commentator on the human condition, and as a creator of theater."

More than three centuries after its initial performance, *Tartuffe* is a world-renowned masterpiece by France's greatest comic playwright and remains one of his most commonly produced plays on the public stage. Walker, in *Molière* (1971), described the lasting appeal of *Tartuffe* as a play that addresses persistent universal themes:

> The subject [of *Tartuffe* was controversial in 1664,
> and it is no less interesting and stimulating at present,
> because we cannot see or read the work without
> sensing the truth of its presentation of the effects of
> belief, love, lust, and power on the human creature.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Brent holds a Ph.D. in American culture from the University of Michigan and is a freelance writer and editor. In this essay, Brent discusses the theme of deception and the motif of the social mask in Molière's Tartuffe.

Deception is a recurring theme in *Tartuffe*. Tartuffe himself is a master of deception, successfully deceiving Orgon into believing he is a virtuous man. *Tartuffe* is sometimes referred to by the title "Tartuffe, or The Imposter." An imposter is one who fools others into thinking that he is someone other than who he really is. Tartuffe turns out to be a sort of professional imposter who has committed a long list of crimes under various false identities.

As in many of Molière's plays, the symbol of the social mask is central to *Tartuffe*. The mask symbolizes the ways in which people tend to present an outward appearance to others that hides their true nature. The mask is a recurring motif in *Tartuffe* through which Molière explores the theme of deception. Throughout the play, various characters refer to the idea of the social mask in relation to Tartuffe. Dorine comments that Tartuffe puts on a "pious mask" in order to gain financially from Orgon's devotion to him. Cléante later points out to Orgon that he has made the mistake of taking Tartuffe's "mask" of piety for the face of his true nature; Cléante tells Orgon that he must learn to distinguish between such false appearances and the true intentions of those around him. After Orgon learns that Tartuffe has been tricking him, Cléante suggests that, in the future, he learn to "strip off the mask and learn what virtue means"□in other words, to learn to distinguish between outward appearances and inner character.

Other characters throughout the play, however, also engage in various forms of deception and social masks. Although deception is a tool of the villain in *Tartuffe*, it is also used as a means for the good characters in the play to reveal Tartuffe's true nature, as well as for other purposes serving their own ends. In two important scenes, for example, one character hides somewhere in order to eavesdrop on a conversation between two other characters. Thus, while Molière in some ways condemns the use of deception on the part of Tartuffe, he also suggests within the play that deception is a common practice among human beings, both for good and bad.

Through the symbol of the mask and the theme of deception, Molière explores a variety of social and familial power dynamics. He demonstrates the use of deception through the social mask to be a function of hierarchies within the family structure. Thus, characters with less power in the family hierarchy (such as the servant, the women, and the children) sometimes employ deception and the social mask as a means of gaining greater power within the household unit.

In one scene, Dorine, a servant, employs various forms of deception and the social mask as a means of protecting Mariane from her father's oppressive authority over her. In this scene, Orgon informs Mariane that he wants her to marry Tartuffe and that he will not take "no" for an answer. Mariane, although horrified by this prospect, is too obedient

and passive to protest her father's wishes. At this point, Dorine appears, and Orgon accuses her of eavesdropping on their conversation. One can surmise that Dorine has intentionally hidden herself from view in order to overhear this conversation. Thus, Dorine has employed a means of deception□ hiding and eavesdropping□in order to protect the interests of Mariane.

Much to Orgon's annoyance, Dorine openly protests the proposed marital arrangement. At first, she argues directly with Orgon, expressing at length the various reasons why he should not make Mariane marry Tartuffe. Orgon responds by ordering Dorine to shut up and allow him to speak to his daughter. Dorine then tries a different approach to protesting Orgon's decision; she repeatedly interrupts him each time he begins to speak to Mariane. In anger and frustration, Orgon tries to slap Dorine to get her to shut up. After this point, however, Dorine stands behind Orgon so that he cannot see her; while Orgon is speaking to Mariane with his back to Dorine, Dorine mimes to Mariane various gestures encouraging her to protest her father's words. By this means, Dorine uses a form of visual deception in order to resist Orgon's dominance over both Mariane and herself. During this interaction, Orgon repeatedly turns around to look at Dorine, prepared to slap her; but every time he turns around, according to the stage directions, Dorine "either freezes, silent and motionless, or changes her signal to Mariane into an innocent gesture." Thus, Dorine is able to present a mask of passivity to Orgon's eyes in order to hide the opinion she is miming to Mariane behind his back□as well as to avoid being slapped by him.

Thus, through the use of deception□such as eavesdropping and a mask of passivity□Dorine, a servant with little or no real power in the household, manages to outwit and resist Orgon, the master of the house. In the process, she encourages Mariane to resist the tyranny of her father and succeeds in frustrating Orgon so much that he ends the conversation.

In another scene, both Mariane and Valère present to each other a mask of indifference in order to conceal their true feelings for one another. Mariane had explained to Dorine that, although she is in love with Valère and wishes to marry him, she does not want to protest her father's wishes because she doesn't want Valère to see how much she really loves him. Mariane's attitude in this matter is a traditional one in which the woman feels that it makes her look unvirtuous if she expresses her love for a man too strongly. Thus, Mariane takes it for granted that a woman is required to wear a mask of indifference with a man she loves in order to conceal her true desire for him. Mariane tells Dorine:

But if I show defiance to a parent,
Won't my love for Valère be too apparent?
Shall I give up, for all his charm and beauty,
The modesty that is a woman's duty?
And is my love a thing you'd have me flaunt . . . ?

In the scene that follows, Valère confronts Mariane with the news that their engagement has been broken and she is now free to marry Tartuffe instead of him. In this scene,

both Mariane and Valère attempt to conceal from one another their true feelings for each other. Mariane does so in order to preserve her sense of feminine modesty, whereas Valère does so in order to preserve his masculine pride. As he tells Mariane:

To show our love for one who's turned us down
Is to be both a coward and a clown.

In the process of trying to hide their true feelings of love for one another behind a mask of indifference, both Valère and Mariane manage to hurt each other's feelings and almost sabotage their relationship. It is only with the intervention of Dorine that Mariane and Valère are forced to drop their masks of indifference and admit that they truly do love one another and wish to get married.

However, once Dorine has gotten Valère and Mariane to admit this to one another, she proposes another deception in order to convince Orgon to allow them to get married. She suggests that they ask everyone else in the family to help them once again gain Orgon's consent, and she advises Mariane in the meantime to present to her father "the appearance of a meek consent" to the marriage with Tartuffe. Thus, once again, deception and the false appearance of the social mask are employed as a means for the good-hearted characters in the play to overcome Orgon's foolishness and Tartuffe's trickery.

In another important scene of *Tartuffe*, Elmire uses deception and the social mask as a means of proving to Orgon that Tartuffe has betrayed him. Orgon has been told that Tartuffe tried to seduce Elmire, his wife, but refused to believe this report. Thus, Elmire tells Orgon to hide underneath a table in order to overhear a conversation between herself and Tartuffe. By this means of deception, Elmire hopes to show Orgon that Tartuffe wants to have an affair with her. Orgon's act of hiding under the table is one level of deception, while Elmire's false expression of passion in conversation with Tartuffe adds another layer of deception.

Elmire explains to Orgon ahead of time that everything she says to Tartuffe will be said for the purpose of revealing Tartuffe's true nature. She warns Orgon of this ahead of time because she does not want him to think that she has any sincere interest in Tartuffe as a lover. She tells Orgon that she will be playing along with Tartuffe in order to "lure this hypocrite to drop his mask" and reveal the "shameless lust" beneath his outward show of moral purity. In other words, Elmire puts on a mask of false passion while speaking to Tartuffe for the purpose of getting Tartuffe to drop his mask of false piety. When Orgon finally comes out from under the table where he has been hiding, he accuses Tartuffe of betraying him. At this point, Elmire tells Tartuffe, "I do not like the part I've had to play"□again highlighting the fact that she has shown Tartuffe only a mask of false passion for him but that the role she played in this conversation was contrary to her true feelings.

Although Elmire does not enjoy the use of the social mask, her deception succeeds in convincing Orgon that Tartuffe has betrayed him. Orgon's stubbornness and persistence in his foolishness and tyranny over his family is only put to an end by Elmire's scheme.

As a woman and wife, Elmire's power within the structure of the traditional family unit is limited, and it is only through deception that she is able to influence her husband's position as master of the household. Like Dorine and Mariane, Elmire, as a woman, has limited power within the household. For these women, deception and the social mask is one means of resisting, or at least in.uencing, Orgon's authority over the rest of the family.

In *Tartuffe*, Molière utilizes the recurring motif of the social mask and the theme of deception in an exploration of power struggles within the traditional family unit. Whereas Tartuffe uses deception as a means of achieving evil ends, the good-hearted characters in this play, such as Dorine, Mariane, and Elmire, use deception as a means of resisting the dominance of Orgon in the household and restoring harmony to the family unit. Though Molière does not seem to place a specific value judgment on the use of the social mask and other forms of deception, the character of Cléante does express a sentiment that may be read as one moral of the play. Cléante at one point comments that he does not concern himself with how his behavior may be perceived by the rest of society based on outward appearances, because "Heaven knows my heart." Cléante's comment suggest that, though many people may at times hide their true nature behind a social mask□for a variety of reasons, both good and bad□it is what's in one's heart that determines one's true virtue.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on *Tartuffe,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Partikian is a freelance writer and English instructor. In this essay, Partikian explains that although Tartuffe *has historically been read as a critique of religion and the church, it can be read more subtly as a critique of France's patriarchal monarchy.*

Censorship and Molière's *Tartuffe* have run hand in hand since the very first production of the play, which scandalized ecclesiastical authorities to the point of banning the play for many years. Many studies on the work examine the trials and tribulations that Molière underwent in order to stage the work; Molière had to rework the play no less than three times over the course of five years in order to have the production finally staged. However, in spite of Molière's extensive changes, there is still an allegorical criticism of authority, especially a patriarchal monarchy which runs throughout the play.

Considering the era in which the play was staged, Molière could not have helped but step on a few toes in writing *Tartuffe*; the comedy, which originally poked fun at religion, when combined with the low regard for theater in general, was bound to cause offense no matter what the author's true intent. Richard Parish sums up the predicament in which Molière found himself:

> Relations in France between the Catholic Church and the theatre were, throughout the seventeenth century and beyond, conflictual, irrespective of any perceived offense. Those sections of the church which promoted an austere morality were predictably uncompromising. . . . Within the climate of disapproval, the threat of *Tartuffe* is easy to account for: if all theatre is sinful, comedy as a frivolous genre, falls into a more sensitive category again; and comedy which addresses itself to religious issues, however superficially, pushes the tension to the limit.

Unfortunately, there is no extant complete text of the two earlier versions which Molière had to emend to appease the ecclesiastical authorities who specifically appealed to the king. Nevertheless, scholars have managed to piece together the major changes implemented in the final version in order to get the seal of approval from King Louis XIV. The most obvious change involves a toning down of the character of Tartuffe in order to make him less priestly. Mikhail Bulgakov summarizes the original *Tartuffe*: "The play portrayed the most complete and consummate swindler, liar, scoundrel, informer, and spy□a hypocrite, lecher, and seducer of other men's wives. And this personage, clearly a danger to surrounding society was none other than a priest. All his speeches were interlarded with honeyed, pious maxims, and in addition to that, he accompanied his reprehensible actions at every step with quotations from the Holy Writ." Of course, the final version of the comedy portrays Tartuffe as an imposter who puts on religious airs but who is clearly not a priest. Tartuffe pretends to be holy, but he holds no official office. He is an imposter, a fact clearly illustrated by the expansion of the title *Le Tartuffe, ou*

L'Imposteur (*Tartuffe, or The Imposter*) a title which is often shortened to just *Tartuffe* in English translations. In addition to no longer wearing holy garb, the final Imposter does not quote directly from the Holy Writ. The Tartuffe who has survived is clearly a flawed man taking advantage of religion to further his material aims, not a legitimate member of the clergy who is a representative of God. In order to emphasize this change, Molière beefed up the lines of the level-headed Cleante, a character who is a counterbalance to all the chaos in the play and who embodies reason and diplomacy and who is not fooled by the imposter Tartuffe. Throughout the play, he attempts to reconcile the feuding family factions. One brief speech stands out as a virtual disclaimer for any religious authorities who might still have been offended by the play:

You've recognized your recent grave mistake In
falling victim to a pious fake; Now, to correct that
error, must you embrace An even greater error in its
place, And judge our worthy neighbors as a whole By
what you've learned of one corrupted soul? Come,
just because one rascal made you swallow A show of
zeal which turned out to be hollow, Shall you conclude
that all men are deceivers, And that, today, there
are no true believers? Let atheists make that foolish
inference.

Appeasing the clergy was only part of the battle. Molière also inserted a new ending which includes a literary device known as *deus ex machina.* Playwrights and authors resort to a *deus ex machina* (Latin for "God out of the works") to create a neat ending. Basically, a deity descends onto the scene to restore order to the chaos. In this instance, the *deus* (god) is literally the king, which in Latin is *rex.* Thus, *deus ex machina* is transformed by Molière to *rex ex machina.* In the final scene, the benevolent and omnipotent king saves the day by jailing Tartuffe and returning Orgon's property. The play winds down with the utterly expected lines by Orgon, "Well said: let's go at once and, gladly kneeling, / Express the gratitude which all are feeling." In other words, "Hail to the King!" Although seemingly obvious to the modern reader, the employment of this modified literary device must have mollified King Louis XIV, since he granted permission for *Tartuffe* to be performed.

While the above changes considerably lighten any tone of religious mockery which may have appeared in the earlier versions, it is still surprising that permission to stage the work was finally granted. Although Tartuffe is a mere criminal and the king a benevolent and wise ruler, there is a subtle allegorical criticism of patriarchal monarchy embedded within the play. If a viewer or reader understands the Orgon family as an allegorical representation of the French monarchy, with Orgon in the role of king, the play can still be viewed as quite seditious.

The prevailing philosophy which dominated the *Ancien Régime* (Old Guard) in France during Molière's era was that of the Divine Right of Kings. This philosophy, which fell out of favor after the French Revolution, compares the king favorably to God. Just as God rules in heaven, the king rules on earth. The king need only answer to God for his

actions. An often overlooked condition in this philosophy is that the king is male. The French monarchy is a patriarchy. Unlike several other European monarchies, France had to be ruled by a king, never a queen. While this system was relatively stable in Molière's era (it was, of course, to come crashing down about a hundred years later during the French Revolution), it was by no means perfect. Nevertheless, questioning the prevailing system was inconceivable. Witness the lines of Monsieur Loyal when he comes to evict Orgon and his family:

Young man, my business here is not with you, But
with your wise and temperate father, who, Like every
worthy citizen, stands in awe Of justice, and would
never obstruct the law.

Although Molière would not dare to openly question authority or the law, he creates a work in which a main character and his family represent a microcosm of the French crown. Orgon is the patriarch, the king within his family. The female characters are all reduced to a state of powerlessness that mirrors French society of the time. Madame Pernelle is the perfect example of the powerlessness of French woman, all complaint and no action. Her status is due only to her son's position as the head of household. Elmire's power resides in her tact and sexual wiles. Mariane is unable to disobey her father. Although her maid, Dorine, has a saucy tongue, she is constantly told to shut up, and on one occasion, Orgon even tries to slap her. The male characters are all reduced to trying to make Orgon realize that he is being duped. Orgon clearly has all the power. Unfortunately, he is unworthy of it. One might even claim that the household is dysfunctional based on the bizarre behavior of a leader, Orgon, whose authority cannot be questioned.

The beauty of the theater resides in the play's ambiguity, where so much rests on the interpretation of a particular performance. Depending on the director's whim, Orgon can come across as a fool, a man undergoing a midlife crisis or even worse, a man with a mental illness. Cleante, always the voice of reason, makes an accurate diagnosis: "That deed of gift, were actions of a kind / Which scarcely indicate a prudent mind."

Orgon's behavior is that of a tyrant who does not have the best interests of his family in mind. In fact he almost brings about the ruination of his family due to his pig-headedness. While Molière may have tamed his play in that the Tartuffe no longer quotes Holy Writ, Orgon's speeches contain allusions to the Divine Right of Kings ("I plan, Sir, to be guided / By heaven's will.") as well as certain phrases which indicate that he believes himself to be a god. There is a certain Old Testament brutality to Orgon's speech, especially while arranging the marriage of his daughter. "Without delay, / I'll spite this household and confound his pride / By giving him my daughter as his bride." (64) Furthermore, religious connotations implicit in the command "mortify" (*mortifiez* in the original), which align themselves well with Augustinian Christian concepts of abstinence as well as the self-inflicted pain and discomfort of saints, make it clear that Orgon suffers from a severe delusion of grandeur:

Get up! The more you loathe the man, and dread him,
The more ennobling it will be to wed him. Marry
Tartuffe, and mortify your flesh!

Although the magical *deus ex machina* appears to restore Orgon to a position of dignity at the end of the play, the questions one might ask concerning his behavior and the irrational power that he wields within his family can lead to some disconcerting conclusions. Why is the family so powerless in the face of the father's mental breakdown? Is there nothing that can be done short of divine intervention to save the family from ruin? And if Orgon is viewed as an allegorical king, how should the family behave when faced with his insanity? Failing to obey would be tantamount to insurrection. Is this an instance□that is, when the king is not in his right mind□that a monarchy is not a reasonable political system?

The French revere Molière much the way the English speaking world reveres Shakespeare. New words, neologisms, were often coined by both authors. Today, the word *tartuffe* in French is a synonym for a hypocrite. Orgon's character is too ambiguous and rife with allusions questioning the legitimacy of monarchy to pigeonhole with a oneword definition; thus there is no word "orgon" in French to describe a delusional tyrant.

Although *Tartuffe* is billed as a comedy with the best laughs reserved for the imposter and the scenes involving seduction, it is no mistake that the character from whom the name of the play derives does not appear until Act 3, Scene 2, about halfway through the work; Molière's play is much more about Orgon and his struggles with his family than the folly of hypocrisy. These struggles contain a minefield of allegorical allusions which question the very idea of monarchy. By focusing attention on the imposter, Molière deflects attention from the uncomfortable questions that Orgon's character poses. If the play were entitled "Orgon," Molière, in spite of all his efforts and textual changes, might never have been given permission to finally stage it; with the title "Orgon," the inherent criticism of French royalty would have been all too blatant and not camouflaged sufficiently by the false piety of Tartuffe.

Source: David Partikian, Critical Essay on *Tartuffe,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Walker explores Molière's treatment of the concept of belief in Tartuffe, *including abuse of faith by religious institutions.*

The shift from a comedy such as *La Princesse d'Elide* to one of quite serious content, *Le Tartuffe*, for a second featured play at the royal fete, may strike us as odd, yet the themes are not too different. Both comedies deal with illusions about love and power, and both show us figures consciously playing roles in situations created by fancy. *Le Tartuffe* treats these ideas and actions against a background of contemporary reality, however, and the result is a theatrical masterpiece.

On the sixth day of "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle" Moliere presented three acts of *Le Tartuffe, ou l'imposteur* (*Tartuffe, or the Impostor*) with the rather unlikely seemingly subject of abuse of religious zeal by a confidence man and his victim. This play had been occupying the attention of the author so fully that he had managed to put into verse only the first scene of *La Princesse*, but Louis had excused this omission because of the merits of *Tartuffe*. He had heard a reading of the new work in April 1664, according to the troupe's register kept by La Grange, and must have approved its performance at the fete, an ideal setting in which Moliere might win support of the courtiers as well as of the king. He would need such support in view of the inevitable opposition to the comedy by churchmen and a powerful faction of laymen who found the comedian's piety very suspect. The controversy started by *L'Ecole des femmes* would be revived and embittered by a comedy that appeared to mock religion. To understand the violent reaction to *Tartuffe*, we must look briefly at the place of church and faith in the intellectual, cultural, and political life of the times because they had important functions beyond religious and moral guidance. Moliere had aimed at human failings and had hit a great power structure.

The fact that the play treated credulity and abuse of faith was beside the point when Moliere's contemporaries were all passionately involved in controversies on the nature of religion and were divided into doctrinal factions. Each might feel that his position was parodied in *Tartuffe* in some manner, and the major Catholic lay brotherhood felt most wronged and most obliged to act to get the play banned. Fakery on the part of a lay director of conscience was no hypothetical case in this period, no matter how unlikely the matter might seem to us three hundred years later, for such figures existed in an era that took its religious forms seriously. We must recall that France had just barely emerged from a time of general slaughter in the name of piety.

Imperfectly and precariously united in a political sense, despite the imposing facade of the monarchy, the French were deeply split in matters of faith after long years of war between Catholics and Protestants. The amnesty and tolerance extended to the Huguenots in the first part of the seventeenth century was jeopardized by the warfare of the "Frondes" when religious groups sided with the various noblemen struggling for power. The increasing pressure upon all segments of society to conform and to serve a central government being built by Cardinal Richelieu and developed by Louis XIV found

little room for independent thinking on the part of anyone, but the main danger to national unity was believed to lie in heresy. Religion and politics were inextricably bound together. The official policy of tolerance set forth in the Edict of Nantes under Henri IV became more and more disregarded, as Protestants were persecuted, suppressed, and exiled, until Louis XIV finally abandoned any pretense at allowing religious liberty and revoked the edict in 1685.

In addition to this great split there was vigorous dissension within the Catholic Church over principles and forms of worship. The puritanical sect of Jansenists opposed what they held to be moral laxity in Jesuit practices, and this controversy had been given a lively public airing in the witty *Provincial Letters* (1656-57) by Blaise Pascal. The literate world of court and city in 1664 was eager to approve or decry further discussion of religious issues, but the comic stage was not considered as appropriate a rostrum as the letters. Moliere was in a delicate area both as to subject and form. The French Catholic church was further subjected to quarrels over the role of mysticism in faith, upheld by "Quietism," and over the degree of independence that the Gallican church should enjoy from Rome. Agnostic, freethinking ideas were very much present, although carefully screened for fear of the real possibility of execution for heresy.

The church was fully supported by the state, and vice versa, so that a clever man like Richelieu could pursue interlocking careers in the church hierarchy and government One path to temporal power was ecclesiastical, not only over the spirits of men but in the political and social sense. Seldom has there been a period when all aspects of a culture were so ruthlessly centralized and that yet produced true beauty of artistic creation and true progress in intellectual matters. The happy chance of the existence of men of genius like Moliere, Corneille, and Racine may explain some of this phenomenon, but the combined forces of church and state must be credited with providing magnificent patronage and great sympathy for creativity that did not offer direct threat to the total structure. To say that Moliere had any direct intention of speaking out against the structure of the world in which he was just beginning to function fully is to misunderstand his situation. The theatrical creator needed material circumstances that would give him full rein; to criticize government or the church united with it would destroy all that he worked to build. But when a subject involving human delusions based on perversion of faith occurred to him, he may well have felt that the lesson of false piety was for the public good. The artist had a serious role as instructor of the people, this age believed, and Moliere's experiments in theater had led him to an awareness of how much comedy could say that was useful as well as amusing.

There were plentiful examples of moral tales about false piety, and actual cases of crimes hidden behind such a front. The author quite possibly had in mind a case of a layman, Charpy de Sainte-Croix, who took advantage of the faith of his patron to seduce the man's wife. The basic scheme of the "deceiver deceived" that was common in farce could be developed from such a situation, the dramatist perceived, if the seducer were duped and caught by justice. Themes of knowledge and blind ignorance, reality and appearances, love and its distortions□all suggested themselves to the comic playwright. The material for *Tartuffe* was artistically and dramatically excellent, popularly appealing, and psychologically fascinating, so there is small wonder that Moliere threw

himself into the project of bringing it to the stage. The subject was controversial in 1664, and it is no less interesting and stimulating at present because we cannot see or read the work without sensing the truth of its presentation of the effects of belief, love, lust, and power on the human creature.

The peculiar mixture of religion and temporal power that existed in Moliere's time at once furnished him this material and the means by which his enemies would get his play prohibited. Even before the Versailles performance, the opposition was bringing pressure to bear upon Louis to keep the comedy from the public, and, failing in this, they redoubled their efforts to suppress it. The archbishop of Paris warned the king of the "bad effects" of *Tartuffe*, and the queen mother expressed her dismay. With such voices raised against the comedy, it suffered legal sanctions against its being presented, although private readings of the work were given by Moliere as part of his campaign to get it before the public. La Grange, the troupe's recorder, says that the comedy was performed in September 1664, and a five-act version was presented in November of the following year, but it was not until 1669 that the present form of the play in five acts was offered on stage and in published version. In order to accomplish this in the face of hard opposition Moliere fought long and skillfully, seeking powerful ears into which to read his play and suggest his arguments. The ultimate triumph he sought was not over religious groups per se but rather over pressure groups that calumniated him as an artist and as a man. Professional success and personal reputation were at stake. An attempt to present *Tartuffe* in 1667 caused the Palais-Royal theater to be closed, and, because Louis was off for eighteen months of military operations, the playwright could not make a direct appeal to his sympathetic patron. When the king returned and rescinded the closing of the theater, all Paris lined up for tickets to the controversial comedy, pouring a large sum into the troupe's treasury for forty-five city performances and five private ones. The author had accomplished a certain self-justi.cation, and the director had fulfilled his obligation to his players to get a hit on the boards. In preserving his *Tartuffe* from oblivion, Moliere gave the world a work that showed a new direction in comedy.

The material that he dealt with was not all original, it must be said, for Italian and Spanish sources suggest themselves. The standard editions of the play indicate these. What he added was the remarkable psychological validity of the forces in the play projected through original theatrical techniques blending the old and the new. The title character of Tartuffe apparently takes his name from the Italian for truffle, and a certain sense of deception is in the verb *truffer* according to H. G. Hall. This critic observes that the sound of the name must have been important to Moliere because he called the character "Panulphe" in the abortive 1667 attempt to give the play. It was good box office, at any rate, for one name to suggest the other. In analyzing the play, we find that it uses and expands situations and characters familiar to us from the earlier comedies and that it stands as a logical development in depth and skill. The complexity of the motives and the behavior of Tartuffe and his patron Orgon moves far beyond that of Arnolphe of *L'Ecole des femmes*, the most significantly ambiguous of the author's figures. The basically clownish quality of a situation of "deceiver deceived" is not absent from *Tartuffe*, but it is a framework for an examination of very complicated motives and their effects.

French theater had had "false" types since medieval farce, but Moliere was the first author to conceive of a character like Orgon, the self-deceiving dupe whose motives are really ugly, or Tartuffe, the wily masker who chooses to drop his mask to satisfy his lust. These are not wholly humorous characters, it is evident, yet they function in the way that farce figures do, that is, as dramatic caricatures. *Tartuffe* thus remains in comic or low mode even as its meanings become serious or grim. The vehicle for such characters is largely a familiar plot with tyrannical father opposing the marriage of his daughter to the man she loves. The routine of the eavesdropper under the table is hardly proper to elevated drama, and an outspoken servant girl adds earthy wit as she aids her mistress to wed her love. A lovers' quarrel in the second act seems to have been added as a filler, or it at least is transplanted from *Le Depit amoureux* to lighten the tone of the play. The resultant total impression is one of the surprising blending of seemingly disparate elements such as physical humor, psychological realism, and conventional form and diction. Boileau, the leading critic of the day, was sympathetic to the author yet disturbed by the odd combination of crude farce and elevated social satire. This style was not to be found in any standard text on drama such as Aristotle's *Poetics.* The very nonconformity, of course, was the reason for Moliere's progress in theatrical invention, and the same phenomenon can be observed in his colleagues in tragedy. Imitation of ancient examples was a principle honored in theory but flouted in practice. So long as the playwright remained within comprehensible boundaries of techniques and expression, his audience was willing to applaud innovation.

Classification as to regular genre appears to be of no great aid in analysis of a play like *Tartuffe*, and it is of more help to try to perceive what thematic ideas are expressed and how. These are set forth, varied, repeated, and even inverted by means of the words and the framing of the players. We are trying to understand just how a stage illusion is created that does not mirror actual life but uses obviously exaggerated and stagy elements to suggest patterns of human behavior. Tartuffe is thus not just a stage imitation of a religious hypocrite of 1664 but instead is a stage caricature of certain traits that are more clear to us as we learn a bit about religion in that period. Tartuffe's primary meaning is as a selfcontained dramatic persona with absurdly contrasting characteristics, an ascetic who is fat and lustful. The same remarks apply to the other characters and to the parts of the plot that seem to reflect faithfully contemporary life because realistic elements immediately take on a stylized effect. By the use of exaggerated, theatrical effects the playwright imparts to us a knowledge that he is dealing with general matters of belief, trust, and love.

The idea of belief is paramount in *Tartuffe* and expressed through many parts of the play, although not as religious belief because the stress in the central figure is upon his belief in himself and in his power over others. Similarly, in Orgon belief is not in the religious faith but in a perverted system of dogma that will make him triumph over his family while gaining salvation. Orgon and his mother, Mme Pernelle, want to believe in Tartuffe because he nourishes their pet notion and desires, while the rest of the characters protest against belief that has degenerated into credulity. The facts of Tartuffe's hypocrisy are evident, but Orgon feeds his mind on fantasy and establishes his own faith in which all doubters are infidels and damned. He treats his family like an inquisitor and declares that for his belief he would see them perish like heretics. The

ruling figure who pursues an existence in a world of illusion to which he tries to bend all reality is characteristic of Moliere's major comedies.

The thematic ideas turning about the axis of belief become more complicated as we observe that the psychology of the situation is that of the "confidence game," the idea that one may reap great rewards (here it is salvation) for belief and an outlay of cash. Belief must be expressed to the confidence man by some tangible means, so that the dupe establishes himself as purely credulous when he gives something for nothing. Tartuffe and his victim need each other in a sort of symbiosis of cupidity. The concomitant faking of belief by the agent is imposture and hypocrisy, and thus the subtitle of "the imposter" for which we might substitute "the confidence man." The word *confidence* is most useful to suggest the basic action of the comedy in which Tartuffe is confided in by Orgon, who in turn feels confident. Trust is misplaced and abused until it becomes distrust and then disbelief. But before such a denouement of shattering of confidence on both sides there must be established an impression of confident belief in Tartuffe and Orgon. Each proceeds with utter trust in his own judgment and control of his life, all the while unknowingly committing part of this control to the other as a system of mutual confidence is created. The play turns upon the relationships between these two figures, and thus we may call it a play of nexus, a drama of a causal link of belief and confidence.

The use of the words "confidence game" also reminds us of the playwright's perception of the game playing that goes on in human contacts and how it may serve as the structure for a comedy. We recall how *Les Facheux* was built on this basis. In the case of Tartuffe we see a masker and poseur of great skill acting out a role designed to dupe others and to give him power over them. The title figure is a supple and strong player in the sparring for advantage that goes on within the family, able to accept small losses while concentrating upon the ultimate goal of control of a fortune. The play shows us the skirmishes of a group of people tightly bound to each other, all disguising true feelings and intentions beneath the exteriors conventionally required for their roles. As the struggle within Orgon's home becomes more intense, the occasional slight dropping of a mask shows us the seriousness of the game being played. The sexual advances by Tartuffe toward his host's wife are a remarkable example. Elmire rapidly makes adjustments in her mask with Tartuffe to play for advantage, suggesting that an affair would not be impossible. The competitive game for the confidence of Orgon is being played in dead earnest beneath the masking that the audience finds so amusing. The tension of a "no win" situation emerges despite the farcical apparatus of placing Orgon under the table to overhear the courting of Elmire by Tartuffe. The power struggle is only intensified.

Tartuffe is not only the consummate masker but also a competitor who does his best to manipulate the other players. Moreover, he is a gambler who engages in a great game of chance because the outcome of his pursuit of power and fortune ultimately lies in factors beyond his control. He gambles upon the unending credulity of Orgon and his own ability to stay ahead of the law. But for the ending, when the king's justice descends upon him like fate, he would emerge the victor in the game. The last scene is not merely a deus ex machina but a reminder that the most adept player in the game for power are

subject to chance or destiny. Translating these observations to the mode of tragedy is not difficult, and the somber cast of *Tartuffe* becomes more understandable. A tragic hero gambles for the highest stakes and loses. Tartuffe is a sort of grotesque caricature of this hero who plays within the social world of comedy, operating as a confidence man. It will be helpful to keep in mind this remarkable character as we come to what Moliere makes of the Don Juan figure in his version of the legend, his next play.

A confidence game involves play with belief and also with a special type of love, that between the gullible victim and the deceiver, Orgon and Tartuffe. The peculiar nature of love in Orgon makes Arnolphe (*L'Ecole des femmes*) seem simple in comparison because the former combines a love of God, love of Tartuffe, and love of self in such a way as to suggest that he is acting in fear and hatred. What he chooses to call Christian love leads him to punish his family and himself, and all this is done through the agency of Tartuffe. Moliere depicts a sturdy bourgeois who becomes infatuated with religious mysticism and its promise of sure salvation for his soul, but this conflicts with demands for love in his temporal life by his wife and children. The selish side of his nature finds an excuse for denying affection and material support to them and for giving these to Tartuffe in the name of God. Tartuffe is evidently the object of his warm feelings because he is a means of indulging tastes that suggest the sadistic, even masochistic. Religion is a ready-made justification for his behavior, and Tartuffe is a living embodiment of the principles according to which he acts. Self-love by Orgon is termed love of God and is directed toward the divinity through a surrogate. The scheme is heavily drawn by the author who shows us Orgon loading gifts and favors upon the sort of alter ego who is his means of evading aspects of life that he wants to deny. If the situation were one of a middle-aged man abandoning wife and family for a young mistress, it would be quite common and comprehensible, with obvious motives of denial of age and search for lost youth. But when the love is fixed upon a Tartuffe with an avowed object of escape from the material world of flesh into a realm of mysticism, then the love expressed in this play has some murky depths.

The other member of the central linked pair is equally interesting. Tartuffe in some ways parallels Orgon, for as Orgon is the "would-be mystic," Tartuffe is the "would-be seducer." The use of spiritual love to deny the flesh by Orgon is balanced by a hardly concealed eagerness in Tartuffe for the pleasures of the flesh with Orgon's wife. The confidence man intends to seduce Elmire, his patron's wife, and his sensual proclivities are seen in his crude eyeing of the bosom of the maid as he rebukes her for immodesty. He plans prudently to combine pleasure and profit by marrying Orgon's daughter for her beauty and her large dowry. The real similarity of the two main characters is their great selflove, however, for Tartuffe is oblivious to the bad impression he makes on all the feminine characters, being supremely confident in his egotism. (We cannot include the deluded Mme Pernelle because she has a function of echoing her son. The old woman is well beyond attracting Tartuffe and the role was taken by a man.) He is shown as plump, gluttonous, and lecherous, hardly a dashing figure to play the Don Juan part that he envisions for himself. The seed of his destruction is in this sensuality that will cause him to drop his mask of puritanism. The spiritual love relationship with Orgon is thus Tartuffe's way to physical triumphs in sex and in control over the lives and fortunes of others. In the idea of power over others Tartuffe and Orgon join hands and work with

similar aims, each one cherishing the other because he offers a means to rule. Their feelings are like those of conspirators cooperating yet planning selfish ends.

Normal and healthy forms of love abound in the comedy to reinforce our impression of the peculiarities of the central characters. The daughter, Mariane, and her suitor pursue the typical romance of comedy and are betrothed at the end, but the picture of family love of mother, sister, and brother for one another and for Orgon is set against the ugly distortions. Such a family situation is treated with a depth of feeling and realism not found before in French theater, and this alone would make the play noteworthy. The middle-class interior has a certain warmth and natural quality despite the obvious conventions observed; the wifely concern and impetuous loyalty of the son emerge despite the alexandrines of their speeches. The reactions of the family to the real threat of destruction naturally create some dramatic interest and tension, even though we know that a proper comic ending will come.

Indeed, we must not forget that comedy traditionally affirms such an ending of love's triumph as part of its values. This genre has as a regular tenet the social goodness and health of mankind, and this is a value that cannot brook distortions and perversions of love, sex, and procreation for alien purposes like those of Tartuffe and Orgon. Selfishness, hatred, and lust that seek to find ways to command are the great enemies in comedy's world, and Moliere moves from merely hinting at them, as he did in early plays, to presenting them boldly. It turned out that the most glaring case of the enemy in action was to be found in the social manifestations of religious faith, or rather the use of the externals of piety to exert political and personal power. The play dwells upon the warping of the principle of love, both Christian and sociocomic, in a household that is a microcosm of society. With no intention of irreverence, we might say that the informing idea or action of the comedy is "to love thy neighbor" and how not to. The strength of this play becomes evident, as does the size of the wrath of ecclesiastical circles in 1664.

The opening scene emphasizes the rupture within what should be a loving family group as Elmire and the son and daughter, Damis and Mariane, accompanied by Orgon's reasonable brother, Cleante, argue about Tartuffe with Mme Pernelle. The old mother-in-law is on her way out, according to the speeches. Elmire: "You are walking so fast that I can hardly follow you." Stage directions are contained within the lines themselves, but the first impression is one of great naturalness. A very contrived arrangement of speeches ensues promptly, however, to remind us of the nature of this sort of play. Each character remonstrates ineffectually in turn with Mme Pernelle who cuts each one off with a withering comment, limiting them to one syllable of speech less at each exchange. The battle lines are clearly drawn as Damis mentions "your Monsieur Tartuffe" to his grandmother and gets the reply, "He is a worthy man to whom you must listen, and I can't bear to hear a fool like you criticize him." The young man sets forth a theme by complaining that Tartuffe usurps tyrannical power in the family, and the rest of the scene illuminates the character of this figure. By the time Tartuffe makes his entrance in the third act he is so well known to us by reputation that the appearance is an exciting moment. According to the maid, Dorine, he "controls everything" and has

made himself "master in the house." "Hypocrisy" is her sharp analysis of his game, nor does she fail to see that he is coveting Elmire: "I believe he's jealous of Madame."

A variation on the discussion of personal integrity and its counterfeit is introduced as Mme Pernelle criticizes what she thinks is shameless social freedom in Elmire. Cleante defends her right to visit friends and to move in polite circles despite any gossip about her. Dorine then describes a prying and slanderous couple who find fault with everyone to cover their own indiscretions. The thematic idea of hypocrisy and good faith in matters of love and sex is thus brought out early in the comedy in the discussion of a wife's fidelity and its appearances in the eyes of others. The scene in which Tartuffe makes his proposition to Elmire is being prepared. The foreshadowing of things to come is neatly accomplished also by a suggestion that physical violence accompanies an assertion of power. Mme Pernelle slaps her servant and rudely shakes off the family, and this farcical version of violence will be followed by scenes of rage on the part of Orgon. Damis is like his father in his impetuous anger. It is to be remembered that the most violent acts are done in the name of persuading people to piety and that Tartuffe will eventually offer a genuine physical threat to everyone. The containment of the threat masked under humble pose is the core of the dramatic plot, and this idea of containing Tartuffe was graphically indicated in early productions of the play in which the police officer is recorded as limiting the movements of Tartuffe in the last scene by means of a staff. The stick can turn violence upon him.

An exposition scene of the customary sort occurs as Dorine explains to Cleante her master's infatuation with his protege, and we are thus prepared for Orgon's behavior in scene 4. Elmire and the young people flee at the news of his return, indicating the fragmenting of the family. The maid relates Orgon's mad actions: "He calls him brother and loves him in his soul a hundred times more than his mother, son, daughter, or wife. He is his sole confidant and director of his actions. He dotes on him, embraces him, and could not have, I believe, more tenderness for a woman he loves." She sums up by calling him crazy, and this exaggeration tends to create an impression of a clownish oaf, a true aspect of the character. Dorine also speaks of Tartuffe's hypocrisy about women, to lead toward the later scenes.

Scene 4 features a famous example of Moliere's effective repetition of a line with increasingly comic results. Orgon's concern for Tartuffe is contrasted with his indifference toward Elmire and the illness she suffered in his absence, for his only inquiry is "And Tartuffe?" and his only comment "The poor man!" Dorine depicts the saintly man in heavily sarcastic terms that are lost on Orgon, who then tries to explain to Cleante the merits of Tartuffe. "He is a man who,□well, a man,□a man, then." The inarticulate wonder at such a creature is grotesque and revealing of the unreasonable state of his mind, but this takes on a serious complexion as he states, "I would see brother, children, mother, and wife die and care no more than that," accompanying the speech with a disdainful gesture. The words actually paraphrase Scripture, which then is debased by the snapping of thumbnail on teeth. The author's prudent regard for criticism by church and lay groups caused him to include a long argument by Cleante about the need for distinguishing real and false piety, a speech that is obvious polemic and not essential to the play, but this is the only place in which adjustment to criticism is

permitted to intrude. By the end of the first act Orgon has been established not only as a deluded tyrant but as a hypocrite, for he can gloss over a breach of faith in the matter of not giving Mariane to Valere as was pledged. He speaks vaguely of "doing Heaven's will."

The second act continues the presentation of Orgon's distortion of love as he insists that Mariane be willing and indeed eager to marry Tartuffe. Parental love seems to lose all meaning here, as it does in the later scene when he disinherits his son. The announcement of the marriage plans is made only after Orgon suspiciously looks for eavesdroppers, an action that serves two dramatic purposes, that of stressing an atmosphere of lack of trust despite all the talk of faith, that of building toward the eavesdropping scenes to come. Spying and suspicion are the results of warped beliefs and affections, so these are important concepts that are acted on in various ways. Orgon is overheard by Dorine, in spite of his precautions, and she stands behind him and mimes her horror at his conversation with Mariane. The essence of this talk is that he expects his daughter not only to appear to love Tartuffe but also to make such "imposture" real. A violently forced semblance of pious love and belief i what he requires of himself, of Tartuffe, and now of his family.

With deceit and falsehood the keynotes, the blunt and truthful words of Dorine are an essential contrast. She tries mocking disbelief, cajolery, and then sharp argument against her master, pointing to the lack of social status and wealth of Tartuffe and declaring that such a marriage would force Mariane to be an unfaithful wife. Such ideas are unavailing against the determination of Orgon, and his description of the joys of marriage with Tartuffe foreshadows the tone of Tartuffe's speeches, which will mix sensuality and piety: "He is most favored by Heaven, and it is a wealth second to none. This marriage will fulfill your desires and will be sugared with sweetness and pleasure. You will live together in a faithful ardor like two children, like two turtledoves." A bit of clowning on Dorine's part ensues as she talks "to herself" when forbidden to speak. Her enraged master finally takes a swing at her, demonstrating that reasonable communication has become impossible and that violence is his recourse.

Mariane despairingly thinks of suicide while Dorine encourages her to fight, enumerating the horrors of life in the country as the wife of Tartuffe. Yet, the girl's notions of proper behavior for a fiancee are limited to precious conventions, no matter how great her wish to escape Tartuffe, and she rejects unmaidenly forwardness. Dorine warns against faintness of heart, saying that this will lead to getting her "Tartufiffied," her own coined term. Valere enters and the young couple perform a neatly balanced lovers' quarrel in which they manage to work themselves up to a point of parting, only to be brought together by Dorine, who then must urge them to break up the love scene. The carefully organized scene has suggested the formality of dance to many critics, and it indeed shows the great use of stylized elements in the midst of this play with its grave implications. The scene is not introduced as an attractive set piece to enliven the comedy, however, for it emphasizes the extent to which love has been disrupted and thus forms a variation on a basic theme.

Act 3 brings Tartuffe on stage at last, and his hypocrisy is entirely equal to what we have been led to expect. References in his first speech to his hair shirt and his scourge contrast with the self-indulgence that Dorine has described. The action moves rapidly toward his first declaration of love for Elmire, the famous speeches blending gallantry and religious zeal in a way both laughable and revolting. Elmire counters by dealing with him frankly in an attempt to talk him out of marrying Mariane, and this conversation is overheard by Damis. The saintly faker fondles Elmire as he elects to unmask his desires, expressing them with pious words. The perversion of love that he terms "heavenly" to sheer sensuality is of great thematic significance, especially so at this midpoint in the play, its crux and turning point. Once Tartuffe openly reveals his inner self, the means of his defeat are in the hands of Elmire and the family. Good faith and true love are called upon for maximum effort to counter the character who speaks thus: "Ah, for being a devout man I am no less a man, and when one sees your heavenly attractions, one's heart surrenders and does not reason." We think of the unreasoning love of Orgon for his holy friend and perceive how Moliere constantly works over his themes.

The words of Tartuffe are in part a parody of casuistry that finds ways to excuse moral turpitude by idea juggling. He says that Elmire can trust him, further distorting this concept. When Damis bursts out of hiding he is convinced that the evidence will rid them of Tartuffe, but Orgon shrugs off the report in his complete confidence. The accused Tartuffe is so sure of his power by now that he humbly confesses to his imperfections: "Yes, brother, I am an evil, guilty, wretched sinner filled with iniquity, the greatest rascal ever." He can express the literal truth and not be believed by Orgon, the great test of his certain control. The father is so angered at the accusation by Damis that he cuts him off from his inheritance and gives it to Tartuffe. This is capped by Orgon's insistence that Tartuffe frequent Elmire to stop any gossip. We wonder whether the perversion of values can proceed any further, for Orgon seems bound to be the voluntary cuckold as well as the tyrant A neat reprise of characteristic utterances ends act 3: Tartuffe says, "The will of Heaven be done in all things!" and Orgon, "The poor man!"

If this point were the original ending of the three-act version presented by Moliere at Versailles, it would certainly form a coherent whole. There has taken place exposition, development, and climax of action based upon a well-defined complex of themes. We do not know whether this was the form of the first *Tartuffe*, and scholars are divided in their opinions on the matter. Some think that the three-act version was intended to constitute a finished play, while others believe that Moliere was just sounding out his public and patron with what he had prepared by May 1664. A recent theory propounded by John Cairncross holds that acts 2 and 5 were the late additions, judging by internal evidence. Our present concern, however, is with the existing form and its theatrical excellence, and we may simply note that Moliere undoubtedly worked over his comedy to a point where some uneven spots are visible. The slick finish of *Le Misanthrope* is lacking, but this in no sense impairs its effectiveness and strength as theater. The parts all function forcefully to illuminate each other and to focus light upon the central ideas.

Act 4 opens with an almost formal debate between Tartuffe and Cleante, the "reasoner" in the comedy. Recapitulation is thus given, and it is shown again that reason is useless against entrenched smugness and hypocrisy. A sense of desperate acceleration is created by the announcement that Mariane is to wed Tartuffe in the evening, and the efforts to prevent this must be swift and clever. Elmire realizes that Tartuffe must be induced to unmask before Orgon, so she urges her husband to test his faith in Tartuffe and listen to his words to her. Orgon gets beneath the table over which Tartuffe continues to try to seduce Elmire, and this farcical arrangement gives physical embodiment to levels of meaning in the talk. The hidden and the evident constitute a clever pattern in actions and words. Elmire coughs to alert Orgon to the meanings of Tartuffe as she leads him on: "But how can I consent to what you want without offending Heaven, of which you are always speaking?" Tartuffe: "If it is only Heaven which is the obstacle to my desires, doing away with that is a small matter for me, and that should not restrain your heart." When he says, "Scandalizing people is what gives offense, and sinning is not sinning if done in silence," Elmire pretends to give in and tells him to be sure they are alone. Tartuffe goes to look out the door, then returns, arms extended to embrace her only to find before him his erstwhile "love" in the person of Orgon. The lifting of the veil from the mind of Orgon comes too late, however, for the power of Tartuffe is now legally established over the property of the household. He is literally the master and can afford to drop his pious pose, giving another variation on the theme of the hidden and the revealed. He does not abandon his vocabulary, we note, as he warns that he has what he needs "to confound and punish imposture, to avenge offended Heaven, and to cause repentance in those who talk of making me leave." The situation of Orgon has become that of "impostor" as owner of his own home, and he realizes that Tartuffe controls his destiny because he has given him a chest containing some damaging evidence against him. In summation, misdirected trust and love have revealed at last that matters have become so distorted that Orgon has ruined himself and his family. The unwilling coming to harsh knowledge has been observed as a basis of other comedies.

The sudden introduction of a new plot element creates suspense in the final act and permits the defeat of Tartuffe by royal justice at the end, but the main thing to be treated is Orgon's rescue from his unhealthy love and beliefs, and this must be done through a reunion of the family that was broken. The plot is to be resolved, the comic entertainment is to be maintained, and the thematic parts are to be summarized, so Moliere deliberately simulates dramatic tension at the start of the act. An impression of danger and urgency is given by Orgon's worry over the papers in the chest, for he explains that they were held for a friend in political trouble. His blanket recriminations against all "holy men" are amusing, nevertheless. Damis arrives, intent upon punishing Tartuffe, but his uncle stops him by saying that they live under a prince who sees justice done. The comic tone is resumed in a scene in which Orgon tries to persuade his mother of Tartuffe's guilt and samples the frustrations of his family. Revelation of truth by actions is another idea repeated here as Mme Pernelle sees the legal officer arrive to order them out of the house that belongs to Tartuffe. Monsieur Loyal is thus the agent of justice that is unjust, the representation of disloyalty and bad faith, as his name ironically suggests. He speaks exactly like a Tartuffe with elaborate politeness and sanctimoniousness.

It now seems that distorted principles will triumph for Tartuffe even though love and trust have returned to the family group, to which Valere brings his added bit of good faith by warning Orgon that his arrest is imminent. Orgon may be saved from his own spiritual folly, but his material situation appears desperate. The villain of the piece returns with an officer to assert his power, and this arrangement is less important for the working out of the plot than for a reprise of the themes of false belief and overconfidence. Trust in his own abilities to control all has led Tartuffe to go to justice and denounce Orgon as a traitor, but the confidence man turns out to be the victim of his own schemes because the law recognizes him as a wanted criminal. A dramatic arrest of Tartuffe shows us the deceiver as the ultimate dupe of himself, and the comedy can end upon a proper note of betrothal of Mariane and Valere.

The denouement is heavily contrived yet so completely appropriate for the purposes of the play that we accept it without worrying about its lack of precise preparation. Thematically and structurally, the final act repeats the idea of the family threatened, and the threat turns out to be its own undoing, just as Tartuffe worked his own downfall in the eyes of Orgon. The perversion of principles of the title character goes full circle and brings evil to him. False love has been unmasked as hatred, misdirected faith has led to punishment and not salvation, and blind confidence has produced disaster. The family unit has been regrouped, as a paternalistic royal power extends its protecting hand to one of society's menaced parts, and the comedy can thus finish with a stress upon a higher and greater structure of power that it is the playwright's duty and pleasure to uphold. Cleante holds back his brother who wants to take revenge upon Tartuffe:

Stop, brother, do not descend to such indignity. Let
the wretch go to his evil fate, and do not be part of the
remorse which is overpowering him. Rather wish that
his heart may return to virtue and mend its ways while
he comes to hate his vice. May the great Prince temper
his justice while you go on your knees to give thanks
for such generous treatment.ORGON: Yes, that is right. Let us go to his feet with
joy to praise his goodness which his heart extends to
us. Then, having performed some of this duty, we
shall have to provide for the needs of another duty and
for Valere crown with marriage the devotion of a
noble and sincere lover.

Within the sheltering limits of a healthy social convention and organization, sincere love is rewarded and the distorted form is condemned.

This analysis has been rather long, not in an attempt to be exhaustive in pointing out themes and their expressions but to show how thoroughly the author controlled a unified theatrical work. Other ideas will occur to the reader of *Tartuffe*, but all will be found woven into an integral theatrical pattern. It may be observed how the comedy fuses together into a new type of creation elements from the traditional farce, conventionalized playing, and a grave moral problem. Moliere managed to offer a study of the abuse of power in the name of religion, a matter seemingly requiring a tragic

dramatic treatment, in standard comic entertainment. He mixed psychological realism, a certain illusion of contemporary reality, and familiar comic routines and techniques. In a word, he was inventive. Unfortunately, all of his public was not ready to welcome theatrical invention that overstepped its bounds of subject matter. Moliere not only had a fight on his hands but also a lack of a new hit for his troupe, so he endeavored to remedy both situations with typical creative industry and wrote a new play. In his *Don Juan* we suspect that he intended to preserve some of the achievements of *Tartuffe* while seeming to move toward theater of spectacle in which latent ideas are less likely to offend. He may have figured to appear to deal in fantasy while holding his ground on the principles of comic theater enunciated by *Tartuffe*.

Source: Hallam Walker, "Some Power Structures Observed," in *Molière,* Twayne Publishers, 1990.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Zwillenberg explores Moliere's use of justice in Tartuffe.

Few will quarrel with the judgment that Molière's *Tartuffe* is a masterpiece, yet those who agree on the excellence of the play frequently express hostility and confusion about the intervention of the King at the end. The King's justice, it is argued, may be thorough and effective, but it is so unexpected as to cast doubt upon the dramatic coherence of the entire comedy. Probably, Molière himself is responsible for this reaction, having resorted to a *deus ex machina* that appears to defy internal resolution. By relying on a device which introduces a new character possessed of sweeping powers, he seems to be saying that there is a break between dramatically motivated expectations of justice and the King's own dazzling display of power and omniscience.

The earliest extant criticism of the play (thought to be written by Molière) is the *Lettre sur la comédie de l'Imposteur,* a pamphlet which circulated after the 1664 version of *Tartuffe*. In it the author assumes the conventional posture of an Aristotelian critic who defends the portrayal of the Hypocrite as a moral corrective to vice. The King's justice does not surprise this critic; on the contrary, he saves his greatest praise for the dénouement:

> Il me semble que si, dans tout le reste de la pièce, l'auteur a égalé tous les anciens et surpassé tous les modernes, on peut dire que dans ce dénouement il s'est surpassé lui-même, n'ayant rien de plus grand, de plus magnifique et de plus merveilleux, et cependant rien de plus naturel, de plus heureux et de plus juste . . . "

Today such hyperbole and its critical perspective seem quaint at best. Nevertheless, the *Lettre* remains more than a charming, but useless antique. The author of that document, like so many generations of spectators after him, sensed the relationship between the tensions generated by the figure of Tartuffe and the audience's desire that he not go unpunished at the end of the play. The comic and unsympathetic nature of the character suggests that he is a ridiculous figure destined to lose the protection of his mask, opaque only to Orgon and his mother. Indeed, it seems safe to say that a final triumph by Tartuffe would betray the comic essence of the play: the folly of both Tartuffe and Orgon would not be amusing if comedy were to dissolve into melodrama, leaving the hypocrite victorious over a helpless family.

Interestingly enough, the author of the *Lettre* skirts completely the issue of Orgon's complicity in Tartuffe's rise to power. This embarrassing omission, no doubt motivated by a desire to defend, rather than analyse the play, has long since been corrected. Lionel Gossman, notably, has summarized modern critical opinion: "Tartuffe cannot be given credit for having bamboozled Orgon. Orgon is as much Tartuffe's creator as Tartuffe himself."

Here it seems, we are arriving at the heart of the dilemma. The comic tensions provoking audience laughter are directly related to situations and characters perceived as unjust. Even where no legal breaches occur□as in the case of Orgon's decision to marry off his daughter to Tartuffe or to banish and disinherit his son□the injustice of such actions is manifest to the audience. To be sure, Molière has taken the precaution of signaling such incidents by having the servant Dorine express her exaggerated moral outrage, a significant device which pinpoints the areas meant to be ridiculous. But even if Dorine were not present, the excessive authority exercised over the sympathetic characters by both Orgon and Tartuffe would be cause enough to desire that they receive their just desserts.

When considered in the light of a need for closure, however, this type of scenario poses thorny problems. Audience expectations of dramatic justice, nurtured through the repeated exposure of comic folly, demand confirmation, usually in the form of order replacing comic disorder. But if there are two strong comic figures, it would surely not do to foil only one of the protagonists. Dramatic justice, in the case of *Tartuffe*, would seem to necessitate the punishment of Orgon and the hypocrite, two figures whose outrageous behavior constitutes an aberration we are willing to enjoy as a comic spectacle, but only with the knowledge that it will not go unchecked.

This conclusion may help to explain the traditional hostility to the dénouement. Even if the ending did not include a *deus ex machina,* it would still be difficult to justify, as a solution, an ending that treats one comic figure so harshly and the other so lightly.

However, a fundamental error in this reasoning derives, I believe, from a narrow view of justice as a final rather than evolving concept. Seventeenthcentury theoreticians traditionally considered only the final reversal in a series to be the dénouement, but if one takes into consideration the comic ten- sions engendered by a multiplicity of evolving characters and situations, it might be more proper to expand the dénouement to include the relaxation of all the major tensions. Moreover, appreciation of the gradual nature of such an extended process might make it possible to perceive not only the means employed, but also its effect upon the dynamics of the play.

Perhaps the most important factor is that the roles of the protagonists do evolve in the course of the play. If one compares, for example, Orgon's early posture of power and insensitivity with his plight in Act IV, scene 7, when Tartuffe announces control over the family's wordly possessions, it becomes clear that the lines of comic force have shifted. Nor is the role of Orgon the only one to change, for this scene also heralds a major change in the role of the hypocrite. Functioning formerly as Orgon's alter-ego and as a ridiculous figure inspiring laughter, he now appears as a menace whose power threatens the internal equilibrium of the comic process.

This striking scene, with its overwhelming reversals, may hold a key to the final proceedings. First of all, it separates the lines of force which permitted Orgon and Tartuffe to function as comic accomplices. This is important because it strengthens the individuality of each figure at the same time it separates the fate of one from the other. Secondly, it serves as a dénouement of sorts because it humbles Orgon, punishing him

for his folly and humiliating him for his blindness. All of his unjust acts make him ripe for humiliation, and Tartuffe's assumption of power provides at least partial justice in the spectacle of Orgon's helpless rage.

But it would be erroneous to see in this scene any complete comic closure for the play. Orgon deserves to be humiliated, but not in so abject□and one could add, unfunny□a manner, and certainly not by a figure who is at least as guilty of misconduct as he. In brief, this pivotal scene shifts the focus to Tartuffe's power, but resolves only a fraction of the tensions present.

If Orgon cannot dispel Tartuffe's power, who is left to do it? A rapid glance at the remaining cast of characters offers little hope of a solution. The docile daughter Marianne cannot even openly challenge her father. Damis, with his adolescent rage and simplistic idealism, has, of course, been banished. Elmire, the discreet and self-effacing wife, would appear to have some chance for success, but she already seems exhausted, having expended all her energy in the plot to trick Tartuffe, a plot so contrary to her nature that she feels obliged to apologize for it. Dorine and Cléante perceive the situation most clearly, but for all their talking, they have been lacking the force and prestige to bring about any significant change. That leaves only old Madame Pernelle, who shares with her son Orgon the blindness and gullibility which make of her another accomplice, rather than a possible savior for the family.

Boileau's suggested dénouement, which would have the family judge and then perhaps chase Tartuffe from the house in a farcical manner, is deftly dismissed by Professor Scherer, who points out that the family, devoid of its legal documents, is hardly in a position to judge Tartuffe. This simple fact, coupled with the dramatic havoc to be created by changing the formerly weak character of the family, would therefore make such a solution impossible. Also, once again, a concerted effort by Orgon and his family would bypass the important issue of Orgon's guilt and posture as a comic figure.

The burden of comic closure falls to Act V which, it will appear, deals with the problem in steps. The proceedings of Act IV have given ample proof of Tartuffe's true nature even to a mind as closed as that of Orgon. Therefore, Orgon's awakening comes as the proper and logical first step. Scene 2 brings the return of Damis, welcomed home by a chastened father. The rhythm then changes, bringing comic relief in the obstinate ramblings of Madame Pernolle during Scene 3. In Scene 5, after she has seen for herself the crimes perpetrated by Tartuffe's henchman, Monsieur Loyal, she, too, awakens to the truth, exclaiming: "Je suis tout ébaubie, et je tombe des nues!" Valère's offer of aid in the following scene puts the final touch on the reunion and shows him to be a worthy husband for Marianne. All would thus seem to be very sweet just before the play's final scene□except for the significant fact that the problems have again only partially been solved. This is the moment of the arrival of the Exempt, representative of the police and the King. The play's final scene is also the moment for the play's greatest reversal, the *deus ex machina* that resolves all of the difficulties still remaining.

It should be noted that this ending does have its supporters, and in recent years most of the arguments have centered about the thematic justification for the King's intervention.

Given the theme of abused authority, set in motion in the play's initial scene and sustained throughout the comedy, the validity of introducing a supreme authority figure at its close seems largely justified. However, thematic coherence alone would not explain Molière's recourse to so spectacular an ending. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the surprise of the Exempt's arrival, his silence, and then his startling revelation of the reasons for his appearance suggest a structural breach as powerful as any thematic link.

Clearly then, any full explanation for the *deus ex machina* must look to structural as well as thematic criteria. One clue can be found in the spectacle of Act V. These scenes are usually cited to show that Molière had reached a deadend: that "real life" drama has brought Orgon and his family to contrition and reconciliation, without a happy ending. However, this interpretation ignores two structural details that have dominated the comedy: the impulse to justice and the pattern of comic equilibrium.

When considered as a dramatic device, the first part of the fifth act reveals itself to be a period of apprehension that makes the coming storm more impressive. The weakness of the sympathetic figures cries out for a strong and just reversal precisely because the comic structure of the play (which descends at times to a farcical level) makes highly unlikely a final victory for the villain of the piece.

Molière's careful attention to detail in Act V would also support this view. The reunion of the family, the conversion of Madame Pernelle, the hope of a wedding for the young lovers *if* Tartuffe's dastardly plot can be thwarted□all combine to create an emotionally charged cliff-hanger. Nor is the solution a particularly difficult one, for having disposed of the other major problems, Molière need solve only one more: foiling Tartuffe.

However, the climate of suspense means that any solution to the dilemma will have to match the emotional heights reached in the first part of Act V. A wink and a pardon, as in *L'Avare*, will not suffice, nor will a happy carnival setting, as in le *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*; on the contrary, a tonic chord will have to be very forceful.

In the final scene timing is all-important. Molière exploits the suspense to an extreme, allowing Tartuffe his final vindictive tirade in the presence of the Exempt whose initial silence seems to bear witness to the hypocrite's victory. This is the moment for the play's most startling reversal, and it comes only after Tartuffe himself has set the trap:

Tartuffe, à l'Exempt.
Délivrez-moi, Monsieur, de la criaillerie,
Et daignez accomplir votre ordre, je vous prie.
L'Exempt
Oui, *c'est trop demeurer* sans doute à l'accomplir:
Votre bouche *à propos* m'invite à le remplir;
Et pour l'exécuter, suivez-moi tout à l'heure
Dans la prison qu'on doit vous donner pour demeure.

No dramatic or linguistic flourish is spared in this or in the Exempt's following speech. One listens in stunned silence to a litany of the King's superhuman qualities and to the sentence he has decreed. Not only for the family, but for the spectator as well, the words bring sweet relief that comes from a reprieve from fear. The intolerable cloud of injustice which has loomed menacingly overhead is slowly lifted, leaving the pure light of *le roi Soleil.* The impulses to justice and to comic equilibrium have been fulfilled after all, and the structural integrity of the play is intact. To be sure, the suspense was painful, but the pleasure is all the more intense for it.

Another major aspect of the dénouement, distinct from the orchestration of the scene, is the means by which Tartuffe is punished and order restored to the household: Tartuffe is discovered as a result of *past* crimes, and Orgon is excused because of *past* favors rendered to the King during the Fronde. The text is very explicit on both points, noting with respect to Tartuffe that he is:

un fourbe renommé
Dont sous un autre nom il étoit informé,
Et c'est un long détail d'actions toutes noires
Dont on pourroit former des volumes d'histories.

As for Orgon's pardon, it is the result of a favor dating back about twenty years:

Et c'est le prix qu'il donne au zèle qu'autrefois
On vous vit témoigner en appuyant ses droits

When these two aspects, the surprise of the *deus ex machina* and the device of relating both the punishment and the pardon to the past, are examined in the light of tensions generated earlier, the ending appears anything but arbitrary.

First of all, the intervention of the King resolves all of the major tensions remaining: it punishes Tartuffe, recognizes and then excuses Orgon's culpability, restores family harmony, and guarantees that such excesses will not soon take place again. In brief, it unties all the knots (and does not merely chop them off, as a wag suggested) at the same time it releases the tensions resulting from the Tartuffe-Orgon fraternity. The audience is rewarded for its correct perception of comic forces by the spectacle of seeing the guilty defeated, and it also experiences the pleasure of suspense preceding the welcome reversal which terminates the play.

Secondly, the device of reverting back in time reveals itself to be a beautifully simple measure for solving a complex problem gracefully. Punishing Tartuffe by other means, such as a judgment by the family or an invalidation of the contract in the courts, would have still left unsolved the matter of Orgon's complicity. Moreover, this sort of ending would have been devoid of the éclat which comes from Tartuffe's final blunder, exposed for all to see in the refracted light of the reversal. Nor is the problem of Orgon's crimes

ignored; they are simply separated from those of Tartuffe, permitting the King to treat each individually.

This is not to say, however, that the substance of the ending is inferior to its form. On the contrary, the device of making the King the agent of justice more than adequately meets the specific needs of the ending. The impulse to dramatic justice, which has been growing more intense throughout Act V, finds an appropriate carrier in the person of the King. Only a figure of superhuman stature could see into the hearts of men, and only he could remember good and evil dating back to the Fronde. In fact, by putting on stage the one mortal figure capable of transcending time, Molière has solved the greatest problem still remaining. Certainly, no solution is possible in the present, but an earlier time, free of complications, easily meets the need for an outside form of justice.

The point is that Molière has paced himself in such a way as to exploit all of the dramatic potential in Tartuffe's rise to power and in his subsequent, inevitable fall. Like an elastic band stretched to its breaking point, the action of Act V creates increased audience apprehension proportional to the growing threat of disaster. Unlike the subtle play of forces which marked the period of complicity between the two comic figures, the technique here is linear and cumulative, building up force for a reversal whose shock is equal to the suspense preceding it.

On the other hand, this does not mean that just any final reversal will have the desired effect. It is the mark of an expert craftsman that the means employed correspond so perfectly to the tensions generated earlier. Moreover, this would appear to be Molière's primary consideration, rather than any attempt to explain the King's interest in Orgon's dilemma. Although such interest comes as a great surprise, it is one which strengthens the force of the Exempt's pronouncements. Surely, a monarch who knows all things past and present should cause little wonder that his perception of injustice is accurate. Just how accurate becomes apparent in his balanced dispensation of justice, which corresponds not only to past crimes or favors, but also to the dramatic exigency of relaxing the tensions caused by the ascendance of a villain.

Looking back to Act IV, scene 6, the dénouement further reveals itself to be the second stage of a process begun much earlier. From a pattern of balanced complicity Molière moved to the imbalance of allowing Tartuffe apparent victory, at the expense of the family's humiliation and helplessness. This permitted him to relax one major tension deriving from the injustice of Orgon's abuse of authority. However, it left another major tension, that of Tartuffe's unjust rise to power, which then demanded an even greater reversal to redress the balance. And since a satisfying solution could ignore neither Orgon's earlier complicity, nor his present helplessness, dramatic equilibrium could be restored only by an outside agent able to transcend the present. Also, by choosing the one figure capable of perceiving all the divisions, justice could be dispensed with an even hand.

When examined in the light of both structural and dramatic exigencies, therefore, Molière's recourse to a *deus ex machina* emerges as a fitting vehicle for the resolution of comic tensions. It effectively restores the equilibrium of the comic universe, releases

all remaining tensions, and confirms the validity of the spectator's perception. *Tartuffe* may disappoint those looking for "real life" drama, but the play itself has no such pretensions. Its internal comedy, nourished by examples of injustice, constitutes a closely controlled dramatic mechanism whose evolving plan leads us to expect a just ending. *Tartuffe* clearly fulfills this expectation, and provides masterful comedy in the process.

Source: Myrna Kogan Zwillenberg, "Dramatic Justice in *Tartuffe,*" in *Modern Language Notes,* Vol. 90, No. 4, April 1975, pp. 583-90.

Adaptations

Tartuffe was adapted to the screen in a 1925 silent film of the same title, directed by the German filmmaker F. W. Murnau and starring Emile Jannings as Tartuffe. This film was released on video with English language intertitles by Grapevine Video in 1995.

Tartuffe; or, The Imposter was adapted to the screen in a 1984 film of the same title, performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company and directed by Bill Alexander. This production stars Anthony Sher as Tartuffe, Nigel Hawthorne as Orgon, and Alison Steadman as Elmire. It was produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and distributed on video by RKO Home Video.

Tartuffe was adapted to the screen in a 1986 film of the same title, directed by Pierre Badel. This production was performed by the Société des Comédiens Français and was released on video with French dialogue with English language subtitles by Films for the Humanities.

Topics for Further Study

Molière's theatrical career took place during the reign of King Louis XIV of France. Write a report about the reign of Louis XIV and his influence on French society, culture, and history.

The playwrights Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine were contemporaries of Molière, as famous for their tragic plays as Molière was for his comic plays. Write a report on either Corneille or Racine, discussing his biography, theatrical career, major works, and the central themes of his plays.

The baroque movement in the arts was contemporary with the theatrical productions of Molière. Write a report about baroque art. What are the central themes and stylistic elements of baroque art? Who were some of the major artists of baroque? What are some of the most famous and important works of art from the baroque period?

With a group of students, pick one of the five acts from *Tartuffe* to perform before the rest of the class. Write an essay discussing how this performance helped you to gain greater understanding of the play and insight into the characters.

Pick one character from Molière's play *Tartuffe*, and write an original short story from the point of view of that character. First, look carefully at the play to get a good sense of this character's personality and signi.cance to the play. In writing your own story, however, be inventive and creative: try to bring out various elements of this character that are not fully explored in the play, and feel free to make up scenes or conversations not included in the play.

Compare and Contrast

Seventeenth Century: From 1643 to 1715, France is ruled by a monarchy under the reign of King Louis XIV. Early in the reign of Louis XIV, a series of civil wars known as the Fronde erupts in France. After this initial instability, Louis XIV becomes one of the most powerful monarchs in history, and his reign is later considered the epitome of absolutist rule.

Today: France, in an era of government known as the Fifth Republic, is a democracy headed by a president who is elected by popular vote.

Seventeenth Century: The reign of King Louis XIV fosters the theatrical arts. Three theaters dominate the Parisian world of drama: the Marais, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and the Palais-Royal. After the death of Molière in 1673, the king orders the merging of the three main theater troupes, which, in 1680, become the Comédie- Française, the first national theater in Europe.

Today: The Comédie-Française performs the classic French plays of Molière, Corneille, and Racine, as well as new and contemporary plays.

Seventeenth Century: Until 1682, the Louvre, a building complex in Paris, serves as the seat of French government. During his reign, Louis XIV oversees major additions to and renovations of the Louvre. Meanwhile, the Palace of Versailles is transformed from a royal hunting lodge into the seat of absolutist power in France. The Palace of Versailles, located in the city of Versailles some ten miles outside of Paris, undergoes extensive renovations between 1661 and 1710 and becomes a model of architecture, landscaping, and interior design. Louis XIV moves the seat of French government from the Louvre in Paris to the Palace of Versailles in 1682, where it remains until his death in 1715.

Today: The Palace of Versailles is no longer the seat of French government. Because of its masterful architecture, landscaping, and interior design, the Palace of Versailles has been maintained as a museum and a major tourist attraction. In 1979, UNESCO names the Palace of Versailles a World Heritage Sight. Some 9 million people per year visit the Palace of Versailles. The Louvre, also once a seat of French government, is now a national museum and art gallery of France, as well as one of the most extensive and celebrated art museums in the world.

Seventeenth Century: French international affairs are characterized by a series of wars with neighboring nations of Europe, especially Spain and England. These conflicts include the Franco- Spanish War (1635-1660) and the War of the Great Alliance (1688-1697).

Today: France is a member of the European Union, an organization of European nations, including Spain and England, that share mutual political, social, and economic

interests. In January 2002, the Euro, a unit of currency common to most member nations of the European Union, is introduced.

What Do I Read Next?

Pierre Corneille, a contemporary of Molière, was a master of French tragic drama and a major influence on Molière. His play *Le Cid* (1637) takes place during the time of the Roman Empire and concerns a conspiracy against the Roman Emperor Augustus.

The School for Women or *The School for Wives* (1662) by Molière, was a popular success in its initial production but created controversy that lasted for over a year. The story concerns a man who, afraid of the power of mature women, opts to marry an inexperienced young woman only to find himself at her mercy.

The Misanthrope (1666) is one of Molière's most celebrated plays. It is set amidst the fashionable Parisian high society of seventeenthcentury France and concerns a young man who is disgusted with the hypocrisy, injustice, and overall corruption of human society. His disdain for society is complicated by the fact that he is in love with a young woman who represents all of the social behaviors he deplores.

Molière himself starred in the initial production of his play *The Hypochondriac* or *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673) as a hypochondriac who is afraid of doctors. Molière had written the part to suit the cough he suffered due to tuberculosis, but he collapsed on stage during the fourth performance and died several hours later.

Phèdre (1677) is the masterpiece of the great seventeenth-century tragic playwright Jean Racine. It concerns a woman who is hopelessly in love with her stepson.

Molière was highly influenced by the French writer Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), who is credited with the invention of the essay as a new literary genre. *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne* (1991) is a comprehensive collection of Montaigne's major works.

Further Study

Auchincloss, Louis, *La Gloire: The Roman Empire of Corneille and Racine,* University of South Caroline Press, 1996.

Auchincloss discusses the historical setting of ancient Rome in the tragic plays of Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine.

Bernier, Olivier, *Louis XIV: A Royal Life,* Doubleday, 1987.

Bernier provides a biography of King Louis XIV of France, who reigned from 1643 until 1715 and was a strong supporter of Molière's theatrical career.

Jones, Colin, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of France,* Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Colin provides a history of France with an emphasis on artwork, engravings, and photographs.

Lalande, Roxanne Decker, *Intruders in the Play World: The Dynamics of Gender in Molière's Comedies,* Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996.

Lalande offers feminist readings of the representation of women and gender in Molière's major theatrical comedies.

Maskell, David, *Racine: A Theatrical Reading,* Oxford University Press, 1991.

Maskell offers discussion of the works of Jean Racine, the greatest tragic playwright of seventeenth-century France.

Walker, Hallam, *Molière* Twayne, 1990.

Walker offers discussion of the development of Molière's dramatic career, focusing on his major works.

Walton, Guy, *Louis XIV's Versailles,* University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Walton provides discussion of the significance of the Palace of Versailles to the reign of King Louis XIV of France.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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