**WHY READ *TARTUFFE*?**

*Tartuffe* is a delightful play from France's Golden Age. Not only is *Tartuffe* a great classic, it is fun to read or to see (there are excellent films of *Tartuffe* available; it is also performed fairly often). It deals with family troubles, struggles between the generations, thwarted young love, reasonable folks who are ignored, pompous fools who cause great trouble, and a truly evil villain, the hypocrite, Tartuffe.

**LOUIS XIV**

Louis XIV, the Sun King, reigned in France from 1643-1715. He was an absolute monarch who ruled by divine right and was considered God's vicar on earth. The court he ruled over was incredibly elaborate, with complex public ceremonies for every moment of the day and night, including a very public dressing ceremony, where the King would be surrounded by increasing crowds of courtiers as he went through the process of getting dressed each morning.

Early in Louis' reign (1648-49), there had been a brief, but violent **civil war**, the Fronde; this is the uprising that Orgon's friend was involved in; his papers nearly got Orgon arrested.

**RELIGION**

Religion was a very serious issue in 17th century Europe. In the early 17th c., there had been bitter, violent religious wars between Catholics and Huguenots. This was followed by a period of intense religious fervour during Louis' reign.

One powerful group in France was the Company of the Holy Sacrament -- an extreme, influential Catholic organization, which enforced strict religious practices among its members. They emphasized good deeds and a puritanical code of behavior. They also encouraged placing spiritual directors into people's homes, so one can understand why they felt particularly attacked by the character of Tartuffe, an evil spiritual director in the home of a fool. This group was very hostile towards *Tartuffe*.

**LITERARY GOLDEN AGE**

French literature under Louis XIV enjoyed one of the rare "golden ages," like those of Shakespearean England and Classical Greece. French writers drew on the Greek and Latin classics as sources for many of their stories and plays. They greatly admired the restraint, formal excellence and power of these classics. But, this was not a period of hollow imitation--brilliant new literature was created out of these ancient sources. The French classicists of this period venerated reason and good sense, not formal logic. Cleante, in *Tartuffe*, is a fine example of this ideal. He is a reasonable man, a pious man, but not a dry academic. He exhibits good sense, not rigid logic. Of course, within the comic world of the play, no one pays any attention to his reasonable suggestions, and that is part of the fun of *Tartuffe*.

**MOLIERE**

Moliere's primary goal was to entertain, "A...very spoiled, and generally well-educated public... the middle and upper-middle classes of the city, the aristocrats and officials at court, the royal family and...the Sun King himself, who was obsessed with the theater." (Mander, 18)

Louis XIV loved Moliere's satires, so long as they did not make fun of kings. Louis' favor was especially important when Moliere wrote *Tartuffe*, in which the villain is a despicable hypocrite who took advantage of the powerful religious feelings of the age. Moliere created *Tartuffe* as a satirical attack on religious hypocrisy, not religion. The Church, however, saw *Tartuffe* as an attack on its spiritual directors, and "...though Louis XIV took a saner view [of *Tartuffe*] he was pressed by his advisers to prevent a public performance...." (Maland, 258)

**SOURCES OF MOLIERE'S CHARACTERS**

From old French farce, Moliere learned about "... knock-about clowning...stumbling drunks and bewildered cuckolds." From the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* he learned "how to improvise on stock situations according to the nature of each audience; like them he often performed with a mask or floured face..." (Maland, 173)

Moliere first developed his characters from the Italian mask, a kind of comedy which used a set of stock characters who wore masks. These "*masks*" or stock characters included the "...Captain [who] is no more than vanity and cowardice; Scaramouche, roguery and impudence... Harlequin, the naïve and awkward valet...and Pantaloon [who] is melancholy old age, miserly and foolish." (Lanson, 23)

"For Molière a character is a person who is powerfully unified by the domination of a passion or vice that destroys or subdues all other likes and dislikes of his soul, and this quality becomes the motivating force of all his thought and action." (Lanson, 22)

Moliere's comic fools and villains "...retain the ...fixity of characters...of Italian *masks*....the only purpose of the action is...to bring forth inexhaustibly, by different acts and under different light, that feeling which is the single mainspring of the character." Because these characters are changeless, "...their comedy has no denouement, because they have to be as they are from start to finish..." (Lanson, 25)

Thus, when Orgon realizes that Tartuffe has deceived him, he immediately switches from loving religion to hating religion without a pause in the middle to be reasonable. The king may save the day, but nothing will enlighten Orgon and make him into a reasonable man.

The opposition of "...the fool and the villain, the dupe and the intriguer...." is an ancient comic pattern. "Moliere's...comedies...follow this...pattern.... The victim never learns from experience: ridiculous characters are incapable of learning in this manner, for one of their weaknesses is always unreasonableness, lack of insight, and unresponsiveness in the face of attempts to persuade them of their folly.... " (Mander, 32-33)

**THE STORY OF *TARTUFFE***

ACT I

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| Scene 1 | Mme. Pernelle leaves--Orgon's family is not pure enough for her. |
| Scene 2 | Dorine tells about Orgon's obsession with Tartuffe. |
| Scene 3 | We hear worries about the proposed wedding of Mariane, Orgon's daughter, and Valere. |
| Scene 4 | Orgon interviews Dorine about "poor" Tartuffe. |
| Scene 5 | Cleante tries to give Orgon good advice; he's ignored. |

ACT II

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| Scene 1 | Orgon tells Mariane she must marry Tartuffe. |
| Scene 2 | Dorine tries to help Mariane by arguing with Orgon. |
| Scene 3 | Dorine tries to talk sense into Mariane. |
| Scene 4 | Valere and Mariane spat over Orgon wanting her to marry Tartuffe. Dorine intervenes. |

ACT III

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| Scene 1 | Damis, Orgon's son, is furious about Tartuffe and wants to tell him off. Dorine tries to calm him down. |
| Scene 2 | Tartuffe enters with talk of his hair shirt. |
| Scene 3 | Tartuffe woos Elmire; she tries to get him to agree not to marry Mariane. |
| Scene 4 | Damis enters from hiding place and has a fit; Elmire tries to calm him. |
| Scene 5 | Enter Orgon; Damis tells about Tartuffe's wooing of Elmire. |
| Scene 6 | Enter Tartuffe who confesses to all things awful; Orgon feels sorry for him and disinherits Damis! |
| Scene 7 | Orgon tells Tartuffe to spite everyone by spending all his time with Elmire; he makes Tartuffe his heir and will force Mariane to marry him. |

ACT IV

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| Scene 1 | Cleante tries talking reason to Tartuffe; no luck. |
| Scene 2 | Dorine asks Cleante to help Mariane. |
| Scene 3 | Orgon brings the marriage contract. Mariane begs him not to force her to marry Tartuffe; she'd rather die. Cleante tries to intervene but Orgon rejects his good advice. Elmire offers to show Orgon Tartuffe's treachery. |
| Scene 4 | Elmire hides Orgon under the table and tells him to stop matters when he's convinced. |
| Scene 5 | Tartuffe makes love to Elmire; Orgon stays quiet under the table as Elmire nearly gets raped. |
| Scene 6 | Orgon comes out, horrified at Tartuffe. |
| Scene 7 | Orgon confronts Tartuffe and tells him to leave; Tartuffe tells Orgon to leave his house. |
| Scene 8 | Orgon tells Elmire about the deed of gift and the strong box. |

ACT V

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| Scene 1 | Orgon tells Cleante about the strong box; now Orgon hates all religious people. |
| Scene 2 | Hothead Damis offers to kill Tartuffe. |
| Scene 3 | Mme Pernelle won't believe Orgon's tale of Tartuffe's treachery. |
| Scene 4 | M. Loyal brings the eviction notice. |
| Scene 5 | Mme Pernelle now believes in Tartuffe's treachery. |
| Scene 6 | Valere offers to help Orgon escape; offers coach and money. |
| Scene 7 | Officer and Tartuffe arrive to arrest Orgon, but officer arrests Tartuffe instead. Speech about how the King recognized Tartuffe as a criminal and forgives Orgon because he had helped him during the civil war. Happy ending. |

**CHARACTERS IN *TARTUFFE***

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| All Good & All Knowing | Louis XIV |
| Reasonable Characters | King's Officer, Cleante, Elmire, Dorine |
| Unreasonable Characters | Orgon, Mme. Pernelle, Mariane, Damis, Valere |
| All Evil and Knows Quite a Bit | Tartuffe |

* **Tartuffe** is the villain; he is a hypocrite who pretends to be pious, but uses his religous appearance to harm others.
* **Orgon** is a fool and an authoritarian bully who would sacrifice his daughter to please his whims. "....Orgon is bent on using Tartuffe as much as Tartuffe is bent on using him....Orgon sets himself up *against* society as the only true Christian in it. " (Gossman, 73)
* **Madame Pernelle**, Orgon's mother, is another fool and bully.
* **Elmire** is a sensible, sophisticated lady in control of her own emotions. She tries to keep matters calm and comfortable and not to make a fuss unless it is absolutely necessary.
* **Dorine** is clever, loyal, amazingly outspoken, and clearly has her heart and her good sense on the right side, protecting the rights of women and of the young.
* **Cleante** represents the ideal of the reasonable man, His advice is excellent, but Orgon does not listen to reason or common sense. Impassioned fools never do.
* **Mariane, Damis and Valere**, the young people, are naive, emotional, vulnerable, and very much at the mercy of the authoritarian adults.
* **The king, Louis XIV**, although not involved in the action, knows all and judges all fairly and reasonably. His reason is like Cleante's, but it is accompanied by real power, so that he is able to enforce his will, which Cleante is not.

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| His royal soul, though generous and human,Views all things with discernment and acumen;His sovereign reason is not lightly swayed,And all his judgments are discreetly weighed.He honors righteous men of every kind,And yet his zeal for virtue is not blind,Nor does his love of piety numb his witsAnd make him tolerant of hypocrites.  |

**Study Guide Questions:**

**Moliere: Tartuffe - Study Guide**

Preface

1. In the preface, Moliere calls the play "a clever poem which corrects men’s faults by means of agreeable lessons".
2. Honest clergy should not be offended, such literature helps correct men’s faults, and hypocrisy ought to be criticized.
3. Why would the church be so offended? How does Moliere address this in the preface?
4. What does Moliere say is the function of comedy in his Preface to Tartuffe?

Act I

1. Look for the following stock characters as you read Tartuffe: the young lovers whose desires are thwarted by an unreasonable father, the clever servant, the "reasoner," and the impostor or parasite.
2. What are the main complains of Orgon's mother Madame Pernelle about the the way the household is being run?
3. Whats complaints does she have about everyone in the family?
4. Why do you think she is critical of others?
5. What's Cleante's opinion of Madame Pernelle?
6. As you read the first scene, whose word do you trust and why?
7. What do you find out about each character?
8. What is everyone's opinion of Madame Pernelle?
9. In Act I, Scene 2, what does Dorine find wrong in the relationship between Orgon and Tartuffe?
10. What are some of Tartuffe’s qualities that Orgon admires?
11. What passion do you think motivates Orgon to trust Tartuffe?
12. How is Tartuffe scamming Orgon?
13. Why do you think Orgon is fooled so badly by Tartuffe?
14. In Scene 5 Cleante asks Orgon why he can't see Tartufe's hypocrisy. Why, do you think, some people are taken by hypocrits and others are not?
15. Cleante compares the the true pious men to the hypocrits. What are some of the differences, according to him?

Act II

1. What, do you think, are some reasons why Mariane does not actively resist her father’s plan to marry her to Tartuffe?
2. How does Dorine try to convince Orgon against matching his daughter with Tartuffe?
3. The wise servant ridiculing the master. In Scene 2 Dorine, the servant, takes a role that is not proper for her position. She is arguing with the "master" of the house.
4. In Scene 3 how does Dorine try to convince Mariane to deal with her father's objections? How does she tease her? How does she use reverse-psychology?
5. What does this act reveal about Mariane's character?

Act III

1. In Scene 2 we meet Tartuffe for the first time. How is his hypocrisy exhibited in this scene?
2. How does Tartuffe's arrival and behavior in Scenes 2 and 3 live up to our expectations of him?
3. In scene III Elmire admonishes Tartuffe for making passes at her. Tartuffe's reply is "I may be pious, but I am human too;/ With your celestial charms before his eyes,/ A man has not the power to be wise." Think about this question: if passion is part of human nature, than is it possible for man to be pious? Is piety "unnatural" for human beings? Think of examples of contemporary men who'se piety was overcome by passion.
4. Provide some examples of how Tartuffe seems to fault Elmire for his passion.
5. What constitutes the comedy in Scene 3?
6. Why is Elmire opposed to telling her husband Orgon about the incident with Tartuffe?
7. Find examples of how completely Orgon is deceived by Tartuffe's hypocrisy.
8. In asking Orgon to believe the accusations against him, Tartuffe is presenting himself as the saintly person who over exaggerates his own sins.
9. Tartuffe is guilty of all the crimes he confesses to, so why do you think Orgon refuses to believe him and immediately turns on his son Damis?
10. How does Tartuffe use reverse psychology with Orgon?
11. In this Act we see Orgon acting in a way that is contrary to the socially astablished role of a husband and a father. Provide some examples.

Act IV

1. In Scene 1, why doesn’t Cleante think that Tartuffe is a true Christian? If Tartuffe thinks he is a true Christian, then what should he do?
2. Read carefully Tartuffe's response from line 19. In Line 33 Cleante responds with "Your reasoning is badly warped and stretched," What's wrong with Tartuffe's reasoning?
3. In Scene 3, in begging her father not to make her marry Tartuffe Mariane basically lists Orgon's faults as a true father. How is he not acting as a true father?
4. In line 28 on page 346 is another example of Orgon's warped reasonin for why Mariane should marry Tartuffe. What does he say is his main motive in marrying his daughter to Tartuffe? How is this an example of religious fanaticism?
5. How does Elmire's plan to unmask Tartuffe work?
6. Why does Tartuffe doubt Elmire's confession? What kind of proof do you think he is looking for?
7. Elmire suggests that she does not want to commit a sin with Tartuffe. What's Tartuffe's response to such a sin? Read his speech from line 116.
8. What is comical in this scene?
9. Orgon waits to appear from under the table only after he hears Tartuffe's comment about him. What does Tartuffe's say about him?
10. Why is Elmire mad at Orgon?
11. Orgon says that he suspected Tartuffe for a long time. Do you think that's true? If not, why do you think is is saying this?
12. What's Orgon worried about is Scene 8?

Act V

1. In the middle of page 353 Orgon Orgon says he is through with pious men, he'll hate them and persecute them all. What's Cleante's comment on that?
2. Cleante's comments are also directed at the audience and at the reader. How should one relate to pious men, according to Cleante?
3. In Act V, scene 3, why do you think Mme. Pernelle won’t believe her own son’s testimony about Tartuffe’s villainy? What point(s) do you suppose Moliere is making about how to make people blinded by passion see the light of reason?
4. How was Orgon saved by the King?
5. List the ways that order is restored in the family at the end of the play.