

# Molière's Tartuffe.

by

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During the reign of Louis XIV a controversy over the theater arose, in which all of the most illustrious writers<sup>1</sup> of the time took part, with Molière at their head. The question under discussion was: Is the theater moral or not? Can it or can it not improve society? Should it be suppressed? a question which dates from Plato, Aristotle, Ovid, Seneca, Pliny, Tacitus, Valerius Maximus, Plutarch, and Cicero. The church had always taken a stand against the theater in these discussions: Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Jerome, Basil, Cyprian, Lactantius, Ambrose, Augustine, Cyril and others had condemned the theater and this attitude had been continued by François de Sales, Vincent de Paul, Ollier (the founder of St. Sulpice), and by the St. Sacrement. Ollier's lieutenant, Du Ferrier, writes that he is astonished that priests confess comedians, gypsies, and such dogs and swine. The Ritual of the Bishopric of Paris<sup>2</sup> contained this significant statement: "All the faithful may be admitted to holy communion except those who for some just reason are forbidden to receive it; and we must exclude those who are obviously unworthy, such as those who are excommunicated, interdicted, and manifestly infamous: to wit, women of bad reputation, concubinaires, comedians, usurers, magicians, sorcerers, blasphemers, and other like sinners, unless they are faithful and have done penance for their sins," etc. Nicole, in his *Traité de la Comédie*,<sup>3</sup> attacks even Corneille, whom we now consider to be the repository of the noblest sentiments of duty. Pascal expressed the same point of view:<sup>4</sup> "All great diversions are dangerous for the Christian life; but of all those that the world has invented, there is none more to be feared than comedy."

1. Corneille, Racine, Pascal, Nicole, Bossuet, Fénelon, Boileau, La Bruyère, Bourdaloue, Massillon, Fléchier, etc.
2. Printed in 1641.
3. 1658.
4. *Pensées*, Art. XVI, LXIII.

Molière became the enemy of these people after the *Ecole des Femmes*. His respect for nature and for the irresistible power of love were attacked even after his death, for the Curé of St. Eustache refused him burial while granting it at the same time to Scaramouche. But of all his plays none aroused such a storm of protest as *Tartuffe*, which became the most important document in the great quarrel over the theater which took place towards the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Why did Molière strike such a blow at this time? It is generally admitted that the play is so bold that it could not have been given at any other time in the history of France. Voltaire<sup>2</sup> has described this unique moment in detail; the king of Spain had just been obliged to yield the supremacy to Louis XIV; Cardinal Chigi was at this time at the court to offer the pope's excuses for an offense done to the French ambassador; Dunkerque had been added to France by a glorious bargain; what better time could have been chosen to celebrate the glory of the Roi Soleil by the most magnificent festivities that have ever been conceived. The celebrations were held at Versailles and lasted for a week. They combined the most brilliant conceptions of chivalry from the *Orlando Furioso*, the *Amadis*, and the *Astrée* with the most beautiful myths of antiquity, and to that combination were added three plays<sup>3</sup> by Molière which gave the finest expression to the cultivation of the time, crowned by what is perhaps the boldest work of French classical literature. More than six hundred persons arrived at Versailles on the fifth of May, besides a small army of artisans and other people necessary for the comedies. The weather was perfect. At the first dinner Mlle. de la Vallière sat the sixth from Madame at a crescent shaped table laid in a garden lighted by thousands of torches held by gorgeously costumed masks. On the second day the *Princesse d'Elide* was given, which celebrated<sup>4</sup> the king's love for Mlle. de La Vallière, whose

1. A Lefranc: Lectures on *Tartuffe* at the College de France. *Revue des Cours et Conférences*, Vol. XV, 1906-7.

2. *Siècle de Louis XIV.*

3. *La Princesse d'Elide, Les Facheux, Le Mariage Forcé.*

4. Act. I, sc. 1, lines 15-32.

first child had been born five months before. Both the *Princesse d'Elide* and the *Mariage Forcé* were suggested to Molière by Rabelais<sup>1</sup> and in general the festivities followed Renaissance traditions. On Saturday a tourney was held, on Sunday the *Facheux* was given, on Monday a lottery was held and on Monday evening the first three acts of *Tartuffe*, but, as the official account of the festivities states, "the king, whose extreme delicacy in matters of religion was shocked at the idea that some might mistake the false devotion painted in the play for the true, although he did not question the author's good intentions, forbade its public presentation, and deprived himself of the pleasure of seeing it played in order to prevent those incapable of making as careful a distinction as he from misunderstanding."<sup>2</sup>

M. Lefranc's comment on the festivities is as follows: "*Tartuffe* marks the apogee of paganism under Louis XIV and is a natural continuation of festivities.... I should like to impress upon you their anti-christian, or at least their profoundly pagan character. In fact they are above all theatrical and symbolical representations given in honor of women, or rather of women in general. We might call them the apotheosis of the feminine sex. But that means radical opposition to the tendencies and ideas of the rigorists! Is it surprising that the latter became Molière's bitter enemies?"<sup>3</sup>

How are we to account for Louis XIV's tolerance in regard to the play? We have no reason to suppose that he appreciated Molière's genius to the full. Louis Racine has related an anecdote in his *Mémoires* which we may accept as probable, since it does not add to his father's glory. He says: "The king, having asked one day (of Boileau) who was the rarest of the great writers who had honored France during his reign, he (Boileau) named Molière. 'I did not think so', replied the king; 'but you understand these matters better than I.'" The explanation lies rather in the fact that the king and Molière had the same enemies. But just who

1. Books III and IV.

2. Gazette, May 17, 1664.

3. In 1663 M. and Mme. de Navailles had locked the doors leading to the apartments of the ladies of honor, an action for which they were later exiled from the court.

were involved in the attack? The literature on the subject is enormous and includes at least six distinct hypotheses, each of which has been defended by critics of some distinction.<sup>1</sup>

1. Hypocrisy (that is, Molière was making a distinction between true and false devotion).....Voltaire, Augier.
2. Jansenists.....Anatole France
3. Jesuits ..... Sainte-Beuve, Coquelin.
4. Illuminés ..... Michelet
5. Saint-Sacrement..... Allier, Rigale
6. All religion.....Brunetière, Rémy de Gourmont, Abel Lefranc, Lanson, Lemaitre, Lavissee, Mesnard.

Some of the critics of the last group have qualified their statements in some way, but they may be fairly grouped under this head. Louis XIV evidently thought that one religion was enough, and he had no intention of allowing even that one to interfere with his private life. Molière felt the same way in regard to the censors of the theater, but being more of a conscious philosopher than the king, he must have seen that he was taking a stand in the age-long battle between the liberty of nature and the morality of constraint, and that his play was in reality an anti-christian pamphlet in its implication. Bossuet realised that a great enemy to the church had appeared in the person of Molière and he wrote:<sup>2</sup> "Posterity will perhaps see the end of this comic poet, who, while playing his *Malade Imaginaire* or his *Médecin par Force*, received the last attack of the malady of which he died a few hours afterwards, and passed from the pleasantries of the theater, among which he took almost his last breath, to the court of Him who has said: 'Woe to ye who laugh, for ye shall weep'." Fénelon cannot pardon Molière for having made "vice graceful and virtue odious," and the sentimental Rousseau calls the theater of Molière a "school of vice".

1. For a good summary of the question see Oscar Hühnel, *Die Tendenz von Molière's Tartuffe* in der französischen Kritik. Dissertation, Mannheim, 1911.  
 2. *Maximes sur la Comédie*.

Molière's "philosophy" has perhaps been best defined by Ferdinand Brunetiere<sup>1</sup> and Gustav Lanson: confidence in "nature" (in the sense that Rabelais used the word), that is, *wise* nature, reason, common sense, as opposed to deviations, anomalies, social and moral exaggerations. Molière had the lucidity of mind which implies a certain amount of religious, moral and political indifference. The wonder is that in the circumstances he was able to achieve the detachment which he displays, which is so essential to comedy. It would have been so easy to rail. We have some reason to suppose that Molière was acquainted with the philosophy of Gassendi through his friendship with Chapelle at whose house the philosopher stopped when at Paris, and we have anecdotes to the effect that he sometimes discussed this philosophy as well as that of Descartes. It is probable also that he was acquainted with Cyrano de Bergerac, who was first a follower of Gassendi and later attempted a vulgarisation of Descartes in the *Fragment de Physique*. We are also told that Molière translated Lucretius and that his widow was refused publication of the translation because it did not conform to Christian principles. Molière's ideas seem to be in line with Gassendi's *Syntagma philosophicum, pars tertia quae est ethica*, which is divided into three books, *De felicitate*, *De virtutibus* and *De libertate*, and in which the four cardinal virtues are defined: I. Prudence, the art of life, II. Courage, the spirit that neither does nor suffers wrong and enables us to endure evils, III. Temperance, (to be taken in the Greek sense), and IV. Justice, which is divided into four heads: 1, Love of benefactors, 2, If you have time and opportunity, there is no harm in doing good even to others, provided it entails no loss to yourself,<sup>2</sup> 3, Love of life, 4, Love of Society, all of which Molière follows. Gassendi also points out that if we desire finality we labor in vain. The greatest lesson of the past is that we are doomed to be superseded. Nevertheless it is a duty and a joy to attain a knowledge of the world in which we live. Rémy

1. *Etudes Critiques, IVe Série*, p. 179.

2. "ut quisque se amet, plusquam ceteros, seu ut sibi bene quam alteri malit."

de Gourmont<sup>1</sup> thinks that it is from Theophile and Cyrano, rather than from the equivocal Gassendi, that Molière got his philosophy, and quotes Theophile's

“J'approuve qu'un chacun suive en tout la nature.”

As for Descartes, we may say that he, like Gassendi, starts from experience and like him is empirical. Descartes, however, begins with a prejudice for rationalism (*cogito ergo sum*) as compared with Gassendi, who works with pure experience. Molière must have been familiar with Epicurus' doctrine of moderation through his translation of Lucretius, and from the latter had learned that the fear of the gods is the source of a good many of our difficulties. We cannot be certain how conscious Molière was of these ideas, but the extraordinary unity of his work seems to indicate that he realized in some fashion that of the two criteria experience or observation on the one hand and belief on the other he chose the former; that an emphasis on belief “put nature under foot”<sup>2</sup>; that restraints curbed the flesh only as “a group of rocks curbs a river in its course, by obtaining falls, cascades, whirlpools, and a great deal of scum”; and that a “sense of humor keen enough to show a man his own absurdities as well as those of other people, will keep him from the commission of all sins, or nearly all, save those that are worth committing.”<sup>3</sup> With his great power of observation he must have observed that some of our most cherished institutions are only the legitimate channel for abnormal passions, and that “as the law courts often serve to legitimize revenge and the institution of marriage legitimizes lust, so the church is a channel for cant and hypocrisy.”<sup>4</sup>

Molière wishes then to defend the theater against those who had attacked it. Some of these people were hypocrites and some merely victims of the idea that human nature can be forced to conform to an ideal of Christian asceticism. Hypocrisy implies credulity. He is obliged then to use a double-edged sword which will strike at once the two enemies, each of whom is equally offensive. The

1. Essay on Théophile.

2. Emerson, *Nature*.

3,4. Samuel Butler, *Notebooks*.

comedy lies in what Jules de Gaultier calls Bovarysme, that capacity which every human being has for seeing himself other than he is, when under the empire of some enthusiasm, admiration, interest, or vital necessity. In the case of the dupe, Orgon, this assumption of a different character is *explained* by his interest in his own salvation, and the quality of character is *determined* by his admiration for a man who, he thinks, possesses the secret of the other world. He pursues this idea to the point of fanaticism; is even prepared to sacrifice his whole family to it, and he might easily have become the instrument of tragedy, from which dénouement he is saved only by a *deus ex machina*. But in spite of the seriousness of the situation, Orgon is an essentially comic character who descends at times even to farce, as we shall note later. Dorine's position in the family and the attitude of the whole family towards Orgon seems to indicate that he has not always been in the state in which we first see him, but that his hardheartedness dates from his acquaintance with Tartuffe.

The nature of the man on whom Orgon is modelling his life is somewhat more complicated. Molière here goes a step further. Tartuffe through motives of interest—perhaps vital necessity!—consciously assumes a character the notion of which already exists in the mind of the dupe Orgon, and by this method of applied psychology counts on making the dupe identify his person with the ideas which his attitude evokes. Here the explanation lies in a love of ease on the part of Tartuffe which does not necessarily imply hypocrisy, but occurring as it does in an essentially vulgar nature which disdains no instruments in the accomplishment of an end, allows hypocrisy to become the very texture of his being. Molière is careful to show that hypocrisy is not in itself a vice, but rather a necessary instrument to be used with precaution and only when the situation requires it. The sympathetic characters in the play meet Tartuffe with his own weapon. Elmire and the exempt use it to expose Tartuffe, and Dorine in the first scene with Mariane uses the same tactics as those used by Tartuffe when he defends Damis in order to protect himself and incite Orgon to greater ire. Brunetiere has said of certain statements of

Moliere in the prefaces "He lied." Yes, Molière was forced to adopt the enemy's weapons and to fight the devil with fire.

The qualities then that will be first emphasized in *Tartuffe* are his gluttony and his love of ease, while his sensuality is rather a logical outcome of his mode of living. He hides his love of ease under a Jansenist severity and uses to satisfy his sensuality a Jesuitical casuistry. (But here we are treading on that dangerous ground which crumbled under the feet of so eminent a critic as Sainte-Beuve. Just as casuistry among the Jesuits was the natural result of their attempt to square their theological premise with a certain moral scepticism, so in the case of *Tartuffe* it is the logical outcome of his attempt to square his assumed character of piety with the situation in which he found himself, and he did not need to go to the Jesuits to learn this. It is true, however, that the rules which *Tartuffe* laid down for Orgon are the very ones<sup>1</sup> which Pascal applied in his own family, and that the forms of casuistry which he uses and which he has taught Orgon to use had already been practised by the Jesuits and satirised by Pascal in the *Provinciales*.

Jules Lemaitre has, it seems to me, been excessively logical in separating the character of *Tartuffe* into two distinct elements—that of the vulgar and physically repulsive beadle and the elegant adventurer of the scenes with Elmire. Yet there is a difficulty here and I believe it to have arisen in a change from the original conception of the character made necessary by Molière's determination to give the play in public. In the original three act form *Tartuffe* was understood to be a priest, even if the proprieties did not permit him to wear the complete costume of one. In

1. Cf. Mne. Périer's life of her brother in which she says: "Et lorsqu'il arrivoit que quelqu'un admirait la bonté de quelque viande en sa présence, il ne le pouvoit souffrir; il appelloit cela estre sensuel. . . . Si je disais quelquefois que j'avois vu une belle femme, il se fachoit, et me disoit qu'il ne falloit jamais tenir ce discours devant des laquais ni des jeunes gens, parceque je ne savois pas quelles pensées je pourrois exciter par là en eux. . . . Lorsqu'il reçut cette nouvelle (the death of his sister) il ne dit rien, sinon: 'Dieu nous fasse la grace d'aussi bien mourir'. . . . et il disoit sans cesse: 'Bienheureux ceux qui meurent, pourvu qu'ils meurent au Seigneur!' C'est ainsi qu'il faisoit voir qu'il n'avoit nulle attache pour ceux qu'il aimoit." Cf. *Tartuffe* Act. I, sc. 5, 11, 15-21, and Act III, sc. 2.



1660 he appeared as a man of the world. The comedy of the scenes with Elmire depends on the contrast between the vain and vulgar imposter and the elegant and scornful woman. If he was understood to be a priest, the presence of so vulgar a person in the house of Orgon could be explained on the basis of his authority, but as soon as Tartuffe became a man of the world, it was necessary to give him certain qualities of grace and elegance that would compensate for this lost authority. The essential quality of the man remains however the same, although he uses on different occasions the jargons that he has picked up from various sects that he has encountered. The character holds together amazingly well but is at the same time sufficiently complex to have allowed the audiences of the last two hundred and fifty years to expand it to include all forms of hypocrisy.

From the consideration of these two characters it is evident that Molière was concerned not simply with hypocrisy, but that his satire has a twofold object, hypocrisy and credulity, the one implying the other, and we might say that he wields a two edged sword which strikes in quick succession the two enemies, each of whom is equally dangerous to society. We are not to suppose that Molière, in spite of his statement in the preface, is interested in making a fine distinction between true and false devotion. Of the characters who typify his ideas, the hypocrite is the more offensive, but the fanatic is the more ridiculous, and Molière himself took the part of the latter in the performances of the play.

As a corrective to these two "dévots" (true or false), we have a group of charming people in whom (with the exception of Damis and Mariane, whose lack of measure can be explained by their youth) *le bon sens* rules. Cléante, Elmire, and Dorine represent those people who pin their faith to experience and observation rather than to belief. The reaction of this group to the absurdities of Tartuffe and Orgon is frequently humorous even in the most serious situations; as that in which Elmire takes Orgon humorously to task for remaining so long under the table when she is suffering from a most unpleasant situation. Tartuffe and Orgon have no sense of humor. In fact, this first bourgeois drama in French literature is so

serious that Molière had to use the whole bag of conventional devices to keep it in the realm of comedy. A step further and he would have created the bourgeois tragedy. There are some devices, however, that Molière scorns to use. He presents his characters by means of action and dialogue, using soliloquy and aside only occasionally for comic effect. In this he is very modern. Even Tartuffe never drops his mask to the audience, who know him in spite of himself, as one might know a hypocrite in real life.

Before taking up certain details of technique, I might say that although the superficial form of the play is very carefully worked out, its greatness does not depend so much on this surface quality as on a much deeper one that has been called "a flux and reflux of document". It is on the basis of a drama of character rather than as a comedy of intrigue that it must stand. However the author punctiliously observes the three unities. His experience with the *Ecole des Femmes* had made him more careful about the rules.

The first thing that Molière had to do was to set his story in motion. The exposition had to be long. Orgon had to be made plausible before Tartuffe could be made possible. When the curtain goes up the interest of the audience is instantly secured by a character which though traditional is in this case highly specialized; the managing mother-in-law.<sup>1</sup> If there were nothing else in this scene, Mme. Pernelle and Elmire would interest us, but one after another a housefull of interesting, clever people come into the dialogue, which is pregnant with the seeds of the coming struggle. Before the scene has progressed far we know the essential fact that Tartuffe, the character that we came to hear about and to see, is in the opinion of one party a hypocrite, in the eyes of the other party, a good man (*homme de bien*). Many of the oldest traditions of comedy are here used but with a difference that shows Molière's mastery of characterization by dialogue. Mme. Pernelle's violence as a censor of manners strikes a comic note at the outset, gives the subject of the play, and serves to make Orgon's bigotry more plausible. In the rapid

1. The audience was already familiar with the name as well as the type through Sorel's *Polyandre*.

dialogue that follows the character of Tartuffe is brought out by such striking contrasts as these:

Mme. Pernelle

C'est un homme de bien.

Immediately answered by Damis'

un cagot de critique

Dorine

Car il contrôle *tout*, ce critique zélé!

Mme. Pernelle

Et tout ce qu'il contrôle—est fort bien contrôlé!

and so the antiphonal chant goes on until it is crystallized for the audience by Dorine's crisp judgement

Il passe pour un saint dans votre fantaisie—

Tout son fait, croyez-moi, n'est rien qu'hypocrisie.

The details are brought out by longer and longer speeches, in which the original idea is embroidered with a rich network of satire. No comedy can afford to seek only one end and although the main drive is perfectly clear, Molière strikes in turn: the fear of one's neighbors, the attempt to justify one's own manners by criticising others, the lady who is austere because her charms are fading, and so on.

Molière's choice of *scenes à faire* is made very carefully. The *pauvre homme* scene would not be credible in narration. To be sure Dorine has told us:

Il le choie—il l'embrasse, et POUR UNE MAITRESSE

On ne saurait, je pense, avoir plus de tendresse.

But Orgon's infatuation must be seen to be believed. The method here used is the comedy of absentmindedness (Bergson's *automatisme*). Dorine's remark at the end:

Et je vais à madame annoncer par avance

La part que vous prenez à sa convalescence.

releases the laugh of the audience whose credulity has been somewhat strained, and also serves to carry us behind the scenes, which art Molière possesses as do all great

dramatists. This remark serves also as a link to the serious discussion between Orgon and Cléante, for Orgon's infatuation must be seen to be more than comic, in order that the serious undercurrent of the first scene be adequately explained. In this last mentioned scene (I, 5) Orgon reaffirms all that has been said of his infatuation and even declares that he will sacrifice the whole family in the pursuit of this idea. He so exceeds the limits of good sense, particularly in his description of his meeting with Tartuffe in church, that the audience must see the situation from Cléante's point of view and sympathize with his dry retort:

Les sentiments humains, mon frère, que voilà!

In spite of Cléante's argument Orgon hints that he is going to marry his daughter to Tartuffe. This suggestion is followed up by the scene between Orgon and Mariane (II, 1). Dorine's entrance makes argument possible which would have been impossible with Mariane, for Molière is very careful to make the character of the young girl in keeping with a family where *le bon sens* rules. Dorine's absolute self-possession is here put to the test and her position in the family made quite clear. By this time the seriousness of the subject has become rather heavy for comedy, and the last two scenes of the second act are chiefly comic. The comedy arises when Dorine, who has been urging Mariane to resist her father's will, suddenly abandons her argument and takes the side of Orgon. The irony is clear to the audience. Mariane, however, is surprised into taking sides against herself and the spectacle of Mariane pleading with Dorine to help her to do what she had just declared that she would die rather than do, is sufficiently diverting. The situation is again turned when Mariane suddenly falls into despair. Dorine, convinced that Mariane is serious, is obliged to come down from her 'high horse', which operation is always amusing. The entrance of Valère brings new comic matter, for a lover's quarrel ensues which descends to pure farce when Dorine is almost pulled in two in her efforts to bring them together and then must resort to physical efforts to separate them. In fact, almost all of Act II serves as a relief to the intensity of Act I, which was itself relieved by many devices, the

managing mother-in-law, the pert servant, age versus youth, the old woman's half jealous contempt of the young girl, fear of God and the neighbors, the woman who can afford to be austere because her charms are fading, the "pauvre homme" scene (comedy of absentmindedness), the exaggeration of Orgon's credulity, (Act II) the old device of the father making his daughter happy in *his* way, Orgon's sentimental mention of Mariane and Tartuffe living together like turtle doves. A good example of the use of physical comedy occurs in Act II, scene 2 in the triangle situation where Dorine interrupts Orgon whenever he speaks to Mariane. A good deal of the verbal humor is supplied by Dorine, as in the lines:

Et que si son Tartuffe est pour lui si charmant  
Il le peut épouser sans nul empêchement.

(II, 3)

Tartuffe has been carefully presented in the exposition. Dorine, the personification of frankness, common sense and authority, has characterized him as *gueux*, *hypocrite*, *cagot*, *traître*, and Cléante, *honnête homme par excellence*, calls him *franc charlatan*, *dérot de place*. His appearance has been sufficiently indicated by Dorine and Mariane. His first speech is a masterpiece. It justifies everything that has been said against and for him.

Laurent, serrez ma haine avec ma discipline,  
Et priez que toujours le Ciel vous illumine.  
—Si l'on vient pour me voir, je vais au prisonniers  
Des aumones que j'ai, partager les deniers.

Tartuffe drops a good deal of his severity when Dorine mentions Elmire, so that Dorine remarks:

Comme il se radoucit!  
Ma foi, je suis toujours pour ce que j'en ai dit.

(III, 2, 11 23-4)

We have been carefully prepared for the scene which follows by Dorine's hints and Orgon's innocent statements. The device of the hidden auditor would be unparco-

nable if the audience were not already enlisted against Tartuffe. The setting had been carefully prepared in Act II where Mariane asks her father:

Que cherchez-vous?

Orgon

(Il regarde dans un petit cabinet) Je voi

Si quelqu'un n'est point là qui pourrait nous entendre;

Car ce petit endroit est propre pour surprendre.

(I, 2)

But we must see Tartuffe put to the proof. Molière is now to bring the charming Elmire, a character delicately *nuancé*, into a bold situation. Elmire has not had much to say for herself but we have seen that it is on her that even the authoritative Dorine relies for a solution to the situation. She is gay, worldly, accustomed to being admired and not easily shocked. The scene is thoroughly comic by reason of the contrast between the nonchalant and charming Elmire and the unctuous Tartuffe, who drops his mask and shows himself for the first time for what he is. He speaks at first like a spiritual director, then like a practised roué, then like a casuist. Elmire's dry humor in answer to Tartuffe's statement that he would give *his* health to establish *hers* recalls the "pauvre homme" scene:

C'est pousser bien avant la charité chrétienne,

(III, 3)

The very ease of Elmire's honesty increases Tartuffe's assurance, and he launches into the mystical and sensual language of a certain type of revivalist, some of whose tactics, in fact, he has. Molière seems here to anticipate modern psychoanalysis. Tartuffe's suggestion that Elmire is safe because it would not be to his advantage to boast of a conquest had been used by Boccaccio and by the author of the *Garduña de Sevilla*, and Rabelais makes use of a similar tale which he took from Erasmus. It is probably, however, that it was sufficiently practised at the time for Molière to have heard it in anecdote. Tartuffe's parting shot "Que l'on n'est pas aveugle" shows that he had learned something from another type of woman, even if he did not understand Elmire.

In the sixth scene we have the apotheosis of impudent hypocrisy and credulity. It is as incredible as Falstaff's agility. There is a comic motif—affirming guilt to prove innocence, or double Bovaryisme, which had already been used by Barbadillo—but the situation is so tense that the effect is dramatic rather than comic, in spite of the fact that Stapfer calls this the most comic scene in the literature of the world, where Orgon falls on his knees before the kneeling Tartuffe. (This business did not appear as a stage direction until 1750. It may, however, have been a tradition from the first performance.) The climax follows in the words of Orgon:

Offenser de la sorte une sainte personne!

and in Tartuffe's reply:

O cel pardonne-lui comme je lui pardonne!

(III, 7)

in which culminates the enormity of Orgon's credulity and of Tartuffe's hypocrisy. Orgon drives his son from the house and regrets that he did not murder him. Here Tartuffe, candidate himself for Dante's nethermost hell, weeps over the ingratitude of Damis. (III, 7).

Le seul penser de cette ingratitude

Fait souffrir à mon âme un supplice si rude. . . . .

L'horreur que j'en conçois. . . J'ai le coeur si serré,

Que je ne puis parler, et crois que j'en mourrai.

Tartuffe's double Bovaryisme is done adroitly but not adroitly enough to absolve Orgon of the charge of almost inhuman credulity. Herein I believe lies the offense of the play. In this and in the following scene Molière's double edged sword flashes this way and that, slashing with murderous certainty both the hypocrite and the dupe. The triumph of the hypocrite and the self-satisfaction of his dupe must give deep offense to the church.

It is a fault common to five-act plays that the interest drops out in the fourth act. This is true to a certain extent of Tartuffe. The construction is here not so close. Perhaps the white heat of the unique moment when he conceived and

executed the play for the Fêtes de Versailles had somewhat abated in the three years that followed. However, the happiness of the whole family still hangs in the balance, and after Tartuffe's triumph we look to see how he bears himself. He appears with a new tone of smug certainty in his intrenchments, and is coolly insolent to Cleante, knowing that Cléante sees through him. The marriage intrigue goes on. Tears and entreaties fail to move him. Orgon had said that he would sacrifice his whole family to Tartuffe and after his treatment of Damis we are prepared to believe it. Now Molière has another essential scene to write. He must make Orgon see with his own eyes. Will he even then believe? No one less perfectly poised than Elmire could manage the situation and keep it comic when so much is involved. She plays the coquette, lulls Tartuffe's suspicions and convinces him that she loves him. Here is a masterly bit of comedy arising from the conceit of an unattractive man played upon by a woman so charming, so honest that she is fearless. Here we have the full revelation of the casuist.

Et ce n'est pas pécher que pécher en silence.

(IV, 5)

Tartuffe reveals himself completely, even to the point of speaking contemptuously of Orgon. Such a scene might easily be grossly improbable; Elmire makes it *possible*. (To make Orgon hide behind Elmire is good theater but hardly plausible). Orgon is as incoherent in his wrath as he was in his infatuation. In scene 7 Tartuffe rises to a height of impudence that almost passes belief,

C'est à vous d'en sortir, vous qui parlez en maître.

and he adds a statement that we are totally unprepared for,

j'ai de quoi confondre et punir l'imposture.

that is, the box, which has not been motivated, and which furnishes the suspense before the catastrophe. In a comedy of intrigue this would have been carefully motivated. As it is, the mystery serves to tie the two acts together—all of the acts are carefully tied together in this way—but Orgon's explanation in the next scene must be admitted to be pretty poor stage business. Orgon's foolishness is again



insisted upon, and a new comic element in Orgon's character appears; his sentimental trust in gratitude.

Quoi? sous un beau semblant de ferveur si touchante  
Cacher un coeur si double, une âme si méchante!

In scene 2 Damis' fury is comic against the background of Tartuffe's power. Cléante's reply motivates the *deus ex machina*.

Nous vivons sous un règne et sommes dans un temps  
Où par la violence on fait mal ses affaires.

In the next scene Mme. Pernelle gives occasion for more comedy. She out-Orgons Orgon and his impatience with her credulity is comic in the light of his recent change of heart. Dorine acts as a chorus to bring home this fact.

Le pauvre homme.

Orgon is here seen in the position in which he had placed others.

Dorine  
Juste retour, monsieur, des choses d'ici-bas,  
Vous ne vouliez point croire, et l'on ne vous croit pas.

The suspense rises through the scene with M. Loyal, is somewhat broken by Dorine's words

Et par charité pure, il veut vous enlever  
Tout ce qui vous peut faire obstacle à vous sauver.

With the arrival of Valère the suspense rises again. Will Orgon escape? One wishes his escape more for the sake of the family than for his own. Still a dupe, Orgon is taken in by Loyal's speech in which he uses almost the same words as those already used by Tartuffe. It looks as if Tartuffe were to triumph. This *is* the apotheosis of hypocrisy. The king as a motive is a bit anticlimactic to us,—probably not so to the audience of the time,—certainly not, considering the motive of the play. It is not so serious a matter in a comedy as it would have been in a tragedy. Goethe defends this denouement, but he somewhat sentimentalises the whole play. On the whole it is difficult to justify this conclusion.

Technically it is bad. We must refer the fact to the necessity of flattering the king, and confine ourselves to the task of seeing how he makes the best of a bad matter. Molière was a practical man of the theater, and it would have been no comfort to him that his play was a perfect bit of technique if it could not be performed. As a matter of fact the logical catastrophe of the completed play would have been the actual catastrophe of the three act form; the triumph of hypocrisy and the discomfiture of credulity. The changes that Molière made were made on the advice of a *libertin*, the Prince de Condé; the addition of Cléante's long speeches defining true and false devotion, Tartuffe's change of dress, and the blasphemous

O ciel pardonne-lui comme je lui pardonne  
changed to

la douleur qu'il me donne.

The marriage was added to tie the play together, and we must admit that it is a weak device. The fact that there is no scene between Tartuffe and Mariane seems to add weight to this hypothesis, for as a priest this proposed marriage would have been impossible. The five act form is certainly less offensive.

At any rate, if the play was only an episode in the quarrel over the theater, it has become and was then in its implication—as a result of Molière's sovereign impartiality and philosophical point of view—one of the important documents in an age-long quarrel of much larger scope. Great works of this sort are seldom the fruit of conscious will. It is also one of the finest examples of that laugh which France alone has been able to produce, "a laugh which," says M. Lefranc, "will on the final judgement day rally the French almost as surely as the trumpet of the angel."

1. Molière's Tartuffe excites our hatred; he is a criminal who hypocritically feigns piety and morality to bring into a middle class family every sort of ruin. The dénouement by the police is then very natural and well received!