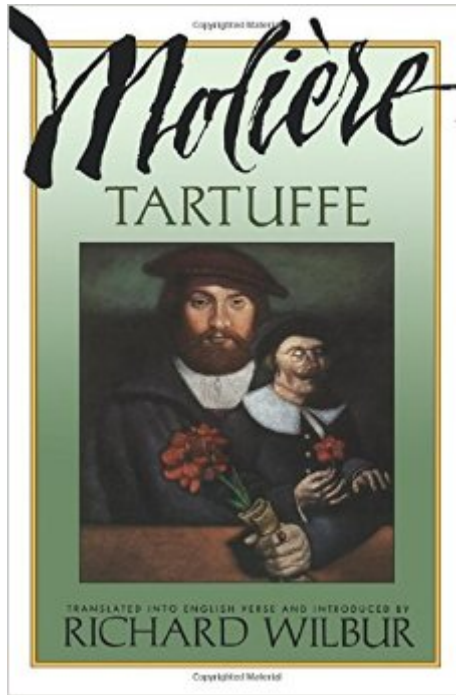


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Tartuffe, By Moliere



Synopsis

The translation into English verse of one of Molière's most masterful and most popular plays. "A continuous delight from beginning to end" (Richard Eberhart).
Introduction by Richard Wilbur.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I often taught Molière's "Tartuffe" as an example of the neoclassical form of comedy in contrast to the romantic comedy represented by Shakespeare. We would read "Twelfth Night," a play set in a faraway exotic land where the point was simply romance, and then turn to "Tartuffe," where the contemporary society becomes one of the primary concerns of the comic dramatist. During the neoclassical period society was concerned with norms of behavior, and in a Molière play you usually find an eccentric individual, out of step with the rest of society, who is laughed back to the right position. Molière was concerned with social problems, which was while this particular play, dealing with the issue of hypocrisy, was banned for years. Keep in mind that originally hypocrisy was specific to religion, although today it can be used with regards to politics, sex, or even uncontroversial subjects. The central character in "Tartuffe" is not the title character, but Orgon, a reasonably well to do man of Paris who is married to his second wife, Elmire, and has a son, Damis, and a daughter, Mariane, from his first marriage. He also has the misfortune of living with his mother, Madame Pernelle. Tartuffe is a religious hypocrite who worms his way into Orgon's confidence in order to take him for everything he is worth. Orgon is completely duped, and

disinherits his son when Damis tries to prove Tartuffe is fraud. The other key character in the play is Dorine, who is Mariane's maid and the smartest person in the house, which allows her to both manipulate the action and comment on the play. There are three crucial scenes in the play that readers should appreciate, even if it will not be covered on a future exam.

Intriguing and entertaining, the play Tartuffe is a satire displaying the scandalous truths and facades of the seventeenth century. Although initially written for the people of King Louis the XIV, the book can be read by an every day high school student or adult. Through reading the play the audience is able to see the deception of people and that we can not always judge by what we see. Moliere brings about this concept through his witty play, and in such a manner that you can't put it down. In Tartuffe, Moliere uses the characterization, rhyme scheme, setting, and irony to effectively inform an every day audience about the distinction between appearances versus reality. Characterization of Tartuffe The perfect example of a hypocritical facade is displayed in the characterization of Tartuffe; in fact the name can be defined as one resembling false piety of religion. Tartuffe's character doesn't appear until nearly the middle of the play and the first image the audience receives is of him demanding his servant to, "hang up my hair-shirt, put my scourge in place, and pray Laurent for Heaven's perpetual grace. I'm going to prison now, to share my last few coins with the poor wretches there." (Tartuffe 3.2). The scourge and hair-shirt are used as a means of penance and chastisement. Religious ascetics will operate these items in private, showing their true devotion to God and to no one else. Tartuffe, however, made it obvious to the entire household what he was doing. Cleante, the character of reason, expounds upon Tartuffe's character, "those whose hearts are truly pure and lowly, don't make a flashy show of being holy. There is a vast difference it seems to me, between true piety and hypocrisy." (Tartuffe 1.5).

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