

***MOLIÈRE***



***TARTUFFE; OR,  
THE HYPOCRITE***

**Molière**

# **Tartuffe; Or, The Hypocrite**

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# INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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Jean Baptiste Poquelin, better known by his stage name of Moliere, stands without a rival at the head of French comedy. Born at Paris in January, 1622, where his father held a position in the royal household, he was educated at the Jesuit College de Clermont, and for some time studied law, which he soon abandoned for the stage. His life was spent in Paris and in the provinces, acting, directing performances, managing theaters, and writing plays. He had his share of applause from the king and from the public; but the satire in his comedies made him many enemies, and he was the object of the most venomous attacks and the most impossible slanders. Nor did he find much solace at home; for he married unfortunately, and the unhappiness that followed increased the bitterness that public hostility had brought into his life. On February 17, 1673, while acting in "La Malade Imaginaire," the last of his masterpieces, he was seized with illness and died a few hours later.

The first of the greater works of Moliere was "Les Precieuses Ridicules," produced in 1659. In this brilliant piece Moliere lifted French comedy to a new level and gave it a new purpose—the satirizing of contemporary manners and affectations by frank portrayal and criticism. In the great plays that followed, "The School for Husbands" and "The School for Wives," "The Misanthrope" and "The

Hypocrite" (Tartuffe), "The Miser" and "The Hypochondriac," "The Learned Ladies," "The Doctor in Spite of Himself," "The Citizen Turned Gentleman," and many others, he exposed mercilessly one after another the vices and foibles of the day.

His characteristic qualities are nowhere better exhibited than in "Tartuffe." Compared with such characterization as Shakespeare's, Moliere's method of portraying life may seem to be lacking in complexity; but it is precisely the simplicity with which creations like Tartuffe embody the weakness or vice they represent that has given them their place as universally recognized types of human nature.

## **TARTUFFE**

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## **A COMEDY**

## **CHARACTERS**

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MADAME PERNELLE, mother of Orgon  
ORGON, husband of Elmire  
ELMIRE, wife of Orgon  
DAMIS, son of Orgon  
MARIANE, daughter of Orgon, in love with Valere

CLEANTE, brother-in-law of Orgon  
TARTUFFE, a hypocrite  
DORINE, Mariane's maid  
M. LOYAL, a bailiff  
A Police Officer  
FLIPOTTE, Madame Pernelle's servant

The Scene is at Paris

## **ACT I**

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## **SCENE I**

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MADAME PERNELLE and FLIPOTTE, her servant; ELMIRE,  
MARIANE, CLEANTE,  
DAMIS, DORINE

MADAME PERNELLE

Come, come, Flipotte, and let me get away.

ELMIRE

You hurry so, I hardly can attend you.

MADAME PERNELLE

Then don't, my daughter-in law. Stay where you are.  
I can dispense with your polite attentions.

ELMIRE

We're only paying what is due you, mother.  
Why must you go away in such a hurry?

MADAME PERNELLE

Because I can't endure your carryings-on,  
And no one takes the slightest pains to please me.  
I leave your house, I tell you, quite disgusted;  
You do the opposite of my instructions;  
You've no respect for anything; each one  
Must have his say; it's perfect pandemonium.

DORINE

If ...

MADAME PERNELLE

You're a servant wench, my girl, and much  
Too full of gab, and too impertinent  
And free with your advice on all occasions.

DAMIS

But ...

MADAME PERNELLE

You're a fool, my boy—f, o, o, I  
Just spells your name. Let grandma tell you that  
I've said a hundred times to my poor son,  
Your father, that you'd never come to good  
Or give him anything but plague and torment.

MARIANE

I think ...



MADAME PERNELLE

O dearie me, his little sister!

You're all demureness, butter wouldn't melt

In your mouth, one would think to look at you.

Still waters, though, they say ... you know the proverb;

And I don't like your doings on the sly.

ELMIRE

But, mother ...

MADAME PERNELLE

Daughter, by your leave, your conduct

In everything is altogether wrong;

You ought to set a good example for 'em;

Their dear departed mother did much better.

You are extravagant; and it offends me,

To see you always decked out like a princess.

A woman who would please her husband's eyes

Alone, wants no such wealth of fineries.

CLEANTE

But, madam, after all ...

MADAME PERNELLE

Sir, as for you,

The lady's brother, I esteem you highly,

Love and respect you. But, sir, all the same,

If I were in my son's, her husband's, place,

I'd urgently entreat you not to come

Within our doors. You preach a way of living

That decent people cannot tolerate.

I'm rather frank with you; but that's my way—

I don't mince matters, when I mean a thing.

DAMIS

Mr. Tartuffe, your friend, is mighty lucky ...

MADAME PERNELLE

He is a holy man, and must be heeded;  
I can't endure, with any show of patience,  
To hear a scatterbrains like you attack him.

DAMIS

What! Shall I let a bigot criticaster  
Come and usurp a tyrant's power here?  
And shall we never dare amuse ourselves  
Till this fine gentleman deigns to consent?

DORINE

If we must hark to him, and heed his maxims,  
There's not a thing we do but what's a crime;  
He censures everything, this zealous carper.

MADAME PERNELLE

And all he censures is well censured, too.  
He wants to guide you on the way to heaven;  
My son should train you all to love him well.

DAMIS

No, madam, look you, nothing—not my father  
Nor anything—can make me tolerate him.  
I should belie my feelings not to say so.  
His actions rouse my wrath at every turn;  
And I foresee that there must come of it  
An open rupture with this sneaking scoundrel.

DORINE

Besides, 'tis downright scandalous to see  
This unknown upstart master of the house—  
This vagabond, who hadn't, when he came,

Shoes to his feet, or clothing worth six farthings,  
And who so far forgets his place, as now  
To censure everything, and rule the roost!

MADAME PERNELLE

Eh! Mercy sakes alive! Things would go better  
If all were governed by his pious orders.

DORINE

He passes for a saint in your opinion.  
In fact, he's nothing but a hypocrite.

MADAME PERNELLE

Just listen to her tongue!

DORINE

I wouldn't trust him,  
Nor yet his Lawrence, without bonds and surety.

MADAME PERNELLE

I don't know what the servant's character  
May be; but I can guarantee the master  
A holy man. You hate him and reject him  
Because he tells home truths to all of you.  
'Tis sin alone that moves his heart to anger,  
And heaven's interest is his only motive.

DORINE

Of course. But why, especially of late,  
Can he let nobody come near the house?  
Is heaven offended at a civil call  
That he should make so great a fuss about it?  
I'll tell you, if you like, just what I think;  
(Pointing to Elmiere)  
Upon my word, he's jealous of our mistress.