Molière

Tartuffe

Translated by Prudence L. Steiner

Introduced by Roger W. Herzel

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Jean-Baptiste Poquelin de

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Introduction

Tartuffe is the most famous play by Molière, whom many consider the world's greatest comic playwright. It is one of the two plays by Molière, the other being *The Misanthrope,* that are most frequently read in literature classes and performed by university and professional theater companies in the United States. The plot is strong, clear, and timeless: the scoundrel Tartuffe, through a hypocritical display of religious piety, gains so much influence over the wealthy bourgeois Orgon that he very nearly succeeds in ruining Orgon's entire family; but at the end Tartuffe is exposed, and life returns to normal.

Tartuffe thus, in a sense, needs no introduction. But it does need interpretation, because it has been surrounded by controversy since the very beginning. Even before the play was completely written, some factions of the religious community in seventeenth-century France objected so vigorously to it that it was banned from public performance; the Archbishop of Paris threatened excommunication for anyone who saw, read, or listened to a reading of the play; and one excitable priest declared that Molière should be burned at the stake (as had been done to a heretic in Paris the previous year). Molière maintained that their interpretation was the wrong one, that there was nothing in the play that was disrespectful of religious faith or observance; but it took five years before he was able to persuade the King to lift the ban, and questions have persisted to this day about the meaning of the play, both in Molière's time and in our own. Any reader of the printed play engages in an act of interpretation, as do the director and the actors who put on a production of it, as well as the audience, who must further

interpret the director's interpretation. What follows is an attempt not to impose any particular interpretation upon the reader but to point out some of the major questions and to provide information that may help in enjoying the play.

Molière's Life

Perhaps the most important thing that can be said about Molière is that he was an actor before he was an author. Molière was the name he adopted for the stage. He was born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin in January 1622 in the heart of Paris, near the markets. His father, like both his grandfathers, was a *tapissier*—an upholsterer and interior decorator—who had prospered greatly in his business and secured an appointment at court. It was understood that the son would inherit the father's business and royal appointment, and he was well and expensively educated in preparation for that career.

Jean-Baptiste's boyhood home was near the two professional theaters operating in Paris. The longer established of these, the troupe of actors performing at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, was noteworthy for a brilliant trio of farce-players. Their leader, Gros-Guillaume (Fat William), a popular favorite, played rustic and naive characters and dressed in a flat cap, striped trousers, and a loose tunic secured by two belts above and below his impressive belly; his moonface was whitened with flour. He was joined by the long-legged and extremely thin Gaultier-Garguille, who played the old man, wearing a black costume, large spectacles, and a mask with a long, pointed beard; he was said to move like a perfectly controlled marionette. The third member, Turlupin, was well built and handsome; he also wore a mask, and he played sharp, knavish characters. There is a legend, unsubstantiated but perfectly plausible, that Jean-Baptiste's grandfather took him to see this trio perform; any memories Jean-Baptiste would retain would be early ones, however, because the first of the trio died when he was eleven and the last when he was fifteen.

The other company, recently arrived in Paris and playing at the Théâtre du Marais, had the French theater's first genuine star actor and its first great playwright. A few days before Jean-Baptiste's fifteenth birthday, these two combined in the opening of Corneille's *The Cid,* officially called a "tragedy" but perhaps better described as a romantic adventure play about love and honor; the passionate, charismatic Montdory played the title role. The opening of this play was one of the great events in French literary history, as it changed the course of French drama and for the first time attracted a wealthy, educated, and fashionable audience to the theater.

In 1643, when Jean-Baptiste was twenty-one years old, he signed legal documents renouncing his right to inherit his father's business and joined a young acting company that was rashly trying to establish itself in competition with the Théâtre du Marais and Hôtel de Bourgogne. The troupe, calling itself the Illustrious Theater, was headed by a remarkable woman named Madeleine Béjart, four years older than Molière (as he soon began to call himself)—a powerful actress, talented writer, shrewd businesswoman, and free spirit who was Molière's lover for a time and remained an actress in his company until her death in 1672, one year to the day before his own. Her brother and sister were among the ten members of the original acting company, and two more family members joined it in later years. After two years of struggling to make a living in Paris, the troupe left for the provinces. Little is known of the next thirteen years; the troupe moved from town to town, normally performing double bills of a five-act main play followed by a one-act farce afterpiece, losing some actors along the way and gaining others. When the troupe returned to Paris in October 1658, with Molière now heading it, only he and the three Béjarts remained from the original company. An audition before the twenty-year-old king Louis XIV had been arranged by the King's brother; the main play, a tragedy by Corneille, was not well received, but the afterpiece, a farce called *The Doctor in Love,* so amused the King that he granted permission for the troupe to perform in Paris and allowed them to use, on alternate days, the

theater occupied by the commedia dell'arte company headed by Scaramouche. This arrangement gave Molière the opportunity to observe and learn from the masters of Italian comedy.

At this point, more than halfway through his thirty-year career in the theater, Molière was not in any significant sense a playwright: he had written only two full-length plays and had written, borrowed, or adapted a number of short French and Italian farces, of which only two survive. Nor did he think of himself as a specialist in comedy, though this was clearly what he was best at. Comic skills were useful to an actor because they pleased the audience, but comedy was considered a markedly inferior form of theater; for an ambitious actor, the way to gain prestige was through tragic and heroic roles—or, in the vocabulary of the time, "serious" theater. Molière had been reasonably successful in such roles in the provinces, but in Paris he was ridiculed for his ungainly bearing, his choppy vocal delivery, and above all, for his insistence on employing a natural, conversational style in serious plays, like those of Corneille, that were written in an idealized and declamatory mode.

But these same qualities, when employed in the performance of comedy, won him the entire approval of the Paris audience, who had seen nothing like him before; and he began to write new plays—twenty-nine of them over the next fourteen years—that made use of his own talents in the central comic role and that, just as importantly, exploited the abilities of his supporting cast. Writing style was inseparable from acting style: his scripts, based on sharp observation of contemporary Parisian social behavior rather than the conventional and artificial world of previous comedy, required his troupe's "natural" delivery. Molière's contemporaries were struck by the apparent lack of artifice in the performances of his actors: "they seem to be born for all the characters they portray."[1]

Molière's first years in Paris were marked by daring experimentation and the continual effort to try new material in each

1. Gabriel Guéret, quoted in Roger Herzel, *The Original Casting of Molière's Plays* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 57.

play instead of repeating himself. The only interruption in this string of successes was his one attempt at a heroic play, *Dom Garcie de Navarre* (1661), which was a complete and humiliating failure for him as an actor and a playwright, but he bounced back quickly from this disaster with two more innovative comedies in the same year: *The School for Husbands,* the first of his character comedies, and *The Bores,* commissioned as part of a lavish entertainment for the King. *The Bores* was the first of the comedy-ballets, a hybrid form in which comic scenes performed by professional actors provided breaks and time for costume changes between dances performed by Louis' courtiers; the scenes Molière provided were caricatures of courtly eccentrics—a hunter, a cardplayer, a pedant, and so forth—of whom Molière played four. The success of this venture led to a series of demands by the King for Molière to provide entertainment for festivals at Versailles and the other royal residences.

In 1662 Molière produced the play that definitively established him as not just an entertainer but a literary author to be taken seriously: *The School for Wives,* a verse play in five acts, which was the norm for high drama. It was a tour de force for him, La Grange, and Catherine de Brie, the troupe's three best actors, and a great success with audiences. But Molière's good fortune over the past few years had earned him some enemies—both people in society who viewed his satirical brand of comedy as threatening and rival actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne who had grown increasingly resentful of his success and his favor with the King. When some moralists claimed to find the play indecent and impious, on the basis of some very mild sexual innuendo and a scene that can be interpreted as a parody of the Ten Commandments, his enemies blew this into a storm of controversy, with printed pamphlets and polemical afterpieces, that lasted two years (and, incidentally, increased attendance at both theaters). Earlier in the year Molière, at the age of forty, had married the nineteen-year-old Armande Béjart, who was either the sister or, as most believe, the daughter of Madeleine; she now made her acting debut in the two plays that Molière contributed to the controversy, *The Critique of the School for Wives*

and *The Versailles Impromptu.* Montfleury, the leading tragic actor of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, whom Molière satirized in these plays, was so enraged that he accused Molière of having married his own daughter; the King, to whom this complaint was addressed, responded by standing as godfather to the couple's first child and by commissioning and dancing in the performance at the Louvre of Molière's second comedy-ballet, *The Forced Marriage.*

The controversy over *The School for Wives* was just beginning to die down when, in May 1664, Louis XIV summoned Molière to provide entertainment for a massive seven-day festival inaugurating his splendid new château and park in Versailles. The troupe was kept busy, participating in a costumed parade and a ballet and presenting revivals of *The Bores* and *The Forced Marriage* plus two new plays: *The Princess of Elide* and *Tartuffe.* This was not the same *Tartuffe* that we now read because it was a play in three acts rather than the eventual five. How it differed from the final version is, of course, a question that has given rise to much lively speculation, since it was the three-act version that was considered offensive enough to be banned. I will return to this question in more detail later; but for the moment, it is fair to say that it probably would not have mattered much what the earliest version was like, since opposition to the play was already forming a full month before it was first performed. The Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament, a secret society with ties to many powerful individuals, including the King's mother, resolved in mid-April to work for the suppression of the play; and though Louis himself found the performance very amusing, within a few days of the performance he banned the play—temporarily, until it could be completely finished and examined by experts—making it clear that Louis was confident of Molière's good intentions but concerned that some spectators might not be able, as Louis himself was, to distinguish between true and false piety. Religious tensions were high at the moment, the subject matter of the play was potentially explosive, and the King, in dealing with the crisis, acted like both a statesman and a politician. This temporary ban lasted for more than five years.

The opposition may not have caught Molière by surprise, but the ban certainly did. The crisis was both artistic and financial: the troupe needed new plays to produce income, and something had to take the place of *Tartuffe.* Two more great plays on the theme of hypocrisy followed. In *Don Juan* (1665), La Grange played the charming, amoral seducer and Molière the nattering, moralistic valet who attempts in vain to dissuade Don Juan from his life of sin. Denunciations from the pulpit were thunderous, focusing on Molière's performance. Attendance was excellent, but for reasons we can only guess at, the play abruptly vanished from the repertory and was never revived in Molière's lifetime. In *The Misanthrope* (1666), Molière played Alceste, who prides himself on his sincerity and who perceives and denounces hypocrisy everywhere in contemporary fashionable life; he continually threatens to withdraw from society but contradicts his principles by his love for the elusive, coquettish Célimène, who embodies all of society's faults. The play is comic but ends in sadness and frustration.

Always the experimenter, Molière in *The Misanthrope* had gone as far as he could go in exploring the possibilities of comic realism, and this play marks a watershed in his career: after it he wrote only one more "regular" play—that is, a five-act play in verse—and prose, visual spectacle, and fantasy dominated the second half of his career. Most of Molière's later plays defy traditional classification: even *The Doctor in Spite of Himself,* the next play after *The Misanthrope,* is a play-within-a-play, a commedia dell'arte plot framed by a native French farce, while *The Tricks of Scapin* is both a throwback to commedia and a parody of it. Two of Molière's most enduringly popular plays, *The Would-Be Gentleman* (1670) and *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673), combine the characteristics of the comedy-ballet and character comedy; in each play the ending, instead of restoring the deluded central character to reality (as Orgon is restored in *Tartuffe*), carries him off in a final ballet sequence into the realms of permanent fantasy.

During that ballet in the fourth performance of *The Imaginary Invalid,* Molière, playing the role of the perfectly healthy

man who imagines that he is ill, was stricken with a fatal hemorrhage of the lungs; he finished the show and died at home a few hours later. The Church, implacable to the last, refused to allow him to be buried and then, under pressure from the King, permitted only a burial at night without a service.

After his death, the troupe was held together by La Grange and Molière's widow, Armande. Four actors defected to the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and the remaining ones joined forces with the actors of the Théâtre du Marais. After seven years these companies merged, by order of the King; thus the number of theaters in Paris had been reduced from three to one, which soon became known as the Comédie-Française.

Tartuffe in Three Acts and Five

Tartuffe as originally played, and banned, at Versailles was a three-act play. What was it like? Various answers have been proposed, all of them somewhat unsatisfactory and none of them provable. La Grange wrote in his notebook (probably after the fact) that the troupe performed "three acts of *Tartuffe* which were the three first";[2] if we take this at face value, it means that Louis saw Acts I, II, and III of the play we now have. Here is a brief summary of the plot by act:

> **Act I.** Orgon, a rich bourgeois of Paris, has become so infatuated with the ostentatious piety of Tartuffe that he has showered him with gifts and brought him to live in his house, to the dismay of most of the rest of the family, who consider Tartuffe a fraud. **Act II.** Orgon announces that he will give his daughter Mariane in marriage to Tartuffe, breaking his promise to her fiancé, Valère, whom she deeply loves. **Act III.** Elmire, Orgon's young second wife, tries to persuade Tartuffe to give up the plan of marrying

2. *Registre de La Grange 1659-1685,* ed. Bert Edward Young and Grace Philputt Young (Paris: Droz, 1947).

> Mariane; he responds by declaring his desire for Elmire and making a crude pass at her. Damis, Orgon's son, overhears this scene and denounces Tartuffe to his father, but Orgon refuses to believe any ill of Tartuffe, throws Damis out of the house, and instructs Tartuffe to spend as much time as possible with Elmire. **Act IV.** Elmire persuades Orgon to see with his own eyes whether Tartuffe is a traitor; Orgon hides under a table while Tartuffe attempts again to seduce Elmire, emerging only when he hears Tartuffe call him a gullible fool. He orders Tartuffe out of the house, but Tartuffe replies that the house belongs to him because Orgon has given him the title, along with a box of other documents. **Act V.** Tartuffe dispossesses the family of everything they own. An officer arrives to arrest Orgon for treason, on the basis of that box of documents; but instead he arrests Tartuffe, because the King knows of his bad character and will not allow fraud to succeed. The family is rescued, and Mariane will marry Valère.

The first question is whether the troupe presented the play to Louis and his guests as a complete work or a work in progress. The latter suggestion seems highly implausible: such an ostentatious social and political occasion would not be a good time to ask the audience to watch something half-finished. Does this mean that something corresponding very closely to Acts I, II, and III of the play we have was presented as a complete work? Strong arguments have been made in favor of this idea. The play would thus end with Tartuffe victorious and Orgon the (unconscious) victim; Tartuffe's seduction of Elmire and cuckolding of his benefactor would occur after the final curtain and be left to the imagination of the audience, but the point would be clear enough. The play would be, in short, an old-fashioned farce. The difficulties are that there would be no follow-up to the Mariane plot, making Act II irrelevant, and that Tartuffe would be on stage for only one of the three acts.

An alternative proposal suggested by John Cairncross has received a good deal of favorable attention: that the play as first

presented consisted of something very close to Acts I, III, and IV of the present version.[3] Thus Tartuffe is on stage for two-thirds of the play; he is exposed and defeated at the end of the wonderful table scene, and there is no need for the sudden introduction of the previously unmentioned box of documents or for the King's miraculous intervention. The play has a smaller cast and a simpler plot, since Mariane and Valère do not appear and there would be no discussion of her marrying Tartuffe, but the plot would still end happily with order restored. The entire tone of the play would be much different from the version consisting of Acts I, II, and III.

Needless to say, there is no proof of either theory; this is all pure speculation. It is speculation with a purpose, however, because the plot is the primary guide to a play's meaning, and considering the possibilities for the early version of *Tartuffe* is a way of bringing into focus our interpretation of Molière's intentions in writing the play.

Tartuffe and the Comic Tradition

In the absence of the early version, we can still usefully compare the finished script of *Tartuffe* to the generality of the comic tradition. This was much more familiar and more useful in guiding the expectations of the audience in the seventeenth century than it is today; indeed, from the time of Plautus (and before) until the end of the eighteenth century, comic playwrights tended to use familiar formulas and plot devices over and over again, basing their claims to originality on their success in surprising the audience with fresh variations on a well-established theme.

Probably the oldest comic theme of all is that of one person playing a trick on another, which places the audience, who witness the playing-out of this action, in an ambiguous moral position. The trickster is generally someone of a low social

3. John Cairncross, *New Light on Molière* (Geneva: Droz, 1956).

position—a servant or slave, an outlaw, or someone with a deservedly bad reputation. The victim is generally someone of the respectable middle class, with power in society. The audience members who laugh at the situation resemble the victim more closely than the trickster, and the victim clearly is morally superior. And yet the audience is always on the side of the trickster, wanting to see him succeed—an opposite response to what their reaction would be to the same events in real life. This suspension of moral disapproval is one of the reasons why strict moralists have always maintained that the theater is a dangerous institution that erodes the audience's sense of right and wrong. The ending of the play makes some difference in the overall moral tone, but not a great deal: if the trickster is defeated and punished at the end, rather than getting away with his dishonesty, it is possible to pretend that the play is not completely cynical but is consistent with conventional morality; the fact remains, however, that while the plot is in progress the audience is laughing *with* the cleverness of the rogue and, even more important, laughing *at* the credulity of the victim. We have examples of both kinds of endings in the two hypothetical structures that have been proposed for the earliest version of *Tartuffe*—Acts I, II, III or Acts I, III, IV—and the difference between them is real. But in either case, of course, the plot in three words is "Tartuffe tricks Orgon," and the fact that he does so by feigning religious piety vastly increases the opportunity for moralists to take offense.

Equally basic to the comic tradition is the ancient plot on which the huge majority of traditional comedies are based: boy gets girl. To fulfill his desires, the boy must overcome some obstacle, represented by an older man who has power, and this basic triangle of old man, young man, and young woman is the core of comedy in the European tradition. Other characters in the play are there to serve this conflict; for example, since the young man lacks power, he may decide that he needs to resort to trickery and therefore enlist the aid of that very popular character, the clever servant. The mating plot thus goes hand in hand with the trickery plot. This basic situation is capable of an

almost limitless number of variations. For example, the old man may be the boy's father; he has arranged for his son to marry the daughter of his friend—a perfectly wise match from a social and financial point of view—but the son has fallen disastrously in love with a gypsy girl. There is thus a conflict of values between the generations: prudence, respectability, and the kind of wisdom that comes from calculation on the one hand and instinct, impetuosity, and sex drive on the other. The son in despair calls on the trickster to help him out. Chaos ensues. At the last moment, by chance, it is discovered that the supposed gypsy girl is in fact the long-lost daughter of the father's friend, and all ends happily. The generations are reconciled and the conflict of values disappears, because the instinct of the son had led him to fall in love with the very girl that the prudence of the father had chosen. This is the plot of Molière's *The Tricks of Scapin,* stolen from *Phormio,* a play written eighteen centuries earlier by the Roman playwright Terence. Like most traditional comedies, Molière's and Terence's plays end with a wedding, which is the symbol of reconciliation between sex and respectability in the theater just as it is in real life.

Another possibility is that the young man and the old man can be in direct competition for the possession of the young woman. This is the situation in Molière's early plays *The School for Husbands* and *The School for Wives,* in which the old man is the guardian of the girl and intends to compel her to marry him. This clear abuse of power is thwarted by the young couple, with the girl herself taking on the function of the trickster, and the plays end in marriage; reconciliation between the generations, however, is not possible in this situation, as the happy ending requires the clear defeat of the old authority figure.

But what if the wedding has already taken place before the beginning of the comedy and the old man is the husband, the young woman his discontented wife, and the young man her would-be lover? This is the situation in William Wycherley's famous Restoration comedy *The Country Wife* (1675), adapted from both of Molière's *School* plays. Clearly the only way for the young people to satisfy their desires is to engage in adulterous

sex, which they do with considerable gusto. Watching and enjoying this play requires the audience to suspend, at least temporarily, conventional reverence for the sanctity of marriage, and thus the play was considered overtly immoral from the eighteenth century until well into the twentieth. More recent interpretations point out that marriage itself, as practiced among the upper classes in Restoration England, was a cynical and mercenary business with little concern for the happiness of the wife, and that pious declarations about its sanctity were themselves a hypocrisy that Wycherley was satirizing. However that may be, the situation in which the young wife and her lover (sometimes the village priest) attempt to cuckold the elderly husband has been frequently used in comedy and farce throughout the centuries; sometimes the young couple succeeds and sometimes not, depending on how much raciness the audience will tolerate, but the plot still depends upon the assumption that marriage is the problem rather than the solution. Molière used the cuckolding plot in two of his shorter plays, and it would have been dominant in either of the hypothetical versions of the first three-act *Tartuffe.*

But beginning with the final version of *Tartuffe* and continuing through many of his greatest plays—*The Miser, The Would-Be Gentleman, The Learned Ladies,* and *The Imaginary Invalid*—the version of the comic plot that Molière made distinctively his own leaves no moral ambiguity. These character comedies are set in prosperous bourgeois families; the young man and young woman are in love with each other from the beginning of the play, they want to marry and may have already obtained parental consent, and their marriage is an unmistakably good thing from every conventional point of view. The eventual announcement of their marriage at the end of the comedy provides a satisfying sense of closure and return to normalcy. The function of the old man who, as always in comedy, serves as an obstacle to the young people's happiness, is personified in this set of plays by the girl's father (with the very interesting exception of *The Learned Ladies,* in which it is the mother), who has become warped by a particular obsession and who wants the daughter

to marry a different person who will serve that obsession: piety, thrift, social climbing, intellectual life, or physical health. All these obsessions (except social climbing) are good things in themselves, but they have become distorted by selfishness, and the choice of husband is based on a desire for the parent's happiness, not the daughter's. The miser wants his daughter to marry someone who will take her without a dowry; the social climber wants her to marry a nobleman; the learned mother, a poet, for the intellectual prestige it will bring the family; the hypochondriac, a medical student (surely the funniest and most incompetent medical student who has ever appeared on the stage), so that the father will always have a doctor on call. The motives of these other parents are perfectly clear. Thus we should ask, why does Orgon want his daughter to marry Tartuffe?

The focus of comic and psychological interest in all these plays is on the obsessed parent, played in every case (except, again, *The Learned Ladies*) by Molière himself. This is particularly the case in *Tartuffe.* Although Tartuffe is the title character and a very showy role, the real interest of the play is not how Tartuffe tricks Orgon but how and why Orgon allows himself to be tricked—indeed, collaborates so enthusiastically in his own deception. Tartuffe is not a master deceiver: only Orgon and his mother, Madame Pernelle, fall for Tartuffe's act, and all the other characters in the play see through him without difficulty. Yet Orgon does not appear to be a stupid man: he is wealthy, apparently because of his own efforts, and it seems that he had played an important and respected role in bourgeois society—until recently, when he met Tartuffe. Why such a man should blind himself so willfully is one of the most intriguing psychological questions that Molière raises in any of his plays.

All of Molière's character comedies take place within a bourgeois family, but the family in *Tartuffe* is the most extensive, comprising eight members and three generations: the father, Orgon; his children by a deceased wife, Mariane and Damis; his future son-in-law, Valère; his mother, Madame Pernelle; his young second wife, Elmire; Elmire's brother, Cléante; and Mariane's companion, Dorine.

The character of Orgon, like all the characters in any play by Molière, is inseparable from the actor for whom he wrote the role. In this case that actor was himself. His contemporaries knew him, after he gave up his heroic ambitions, as the leading farce-player in France, and he always played the leading comic character, a list that includes heavy fathers, clever or befuddled valets, hapless husbands, rustics, and silly young noblemen. The constant is what contemporaries called the "naturalness" of his acting style. This term implied a contrast with his predecessors based on an entirely different approach to comic acting. Earlier comedians, like the famous farce-players Molière may have seen in his boyhood, based their success on always presenting the same character name, costume, and bag of tricks, so that the audience always knew what to expect. Molière defied expectation and individualized the name and costume of each character he played. His comic success was not achieved in a vacuum but in his interplay with the other actors in his troupe and their varying styles. His performance on stage was always contrasted with one or several characters who appear relatively normal and well adjusted—in this play, Valère, Elmire, and especially Cléante. On the other hand, he always also included one or two characters in smaller roles whose acting styles were markedly grotesque in some way—Madame Pernelle and Tartuffe. Molière thus occupied the middle place in the spectrum, appearing comic in contrast to the one group, effortless and natural in contrast to the other. This was an important strategy, since he was always on stage for more time than any other actor.

Tartuffe is naturally the character who attracts the most attention in any modern production. How will he be played? The range of possible interpretations is very wide, and they can all be justified because the essence of the role is that his external appearance, whatever it may be, is misleading: he is a hypocrite through and through. Thus he can be and often is played as a straight villain—somber, threatening, and dangerous; he could equally well be charming and ingratiating. Whatever choice is made, it has consequences for the dynamics of the play. To reduce the question to its simplest terms, is he attractive or

repulsive? In the great scene in Act IV, he attempts to seduce and virtually rape Elmire while Orgon, hidden under the table, listens and does nothing as the scene goes on and on. What is Orgon thinking, and how does the audience respond? Is the prospect of sex between Tartuffe and Elmire unthinkable and her predicament horrifying, or does it remind the audience of the old farce triangle between the pretty wife, her handsome lover, and her decrepit husband? In the original production the role was written for Du Croisy, who began his career playing young lovers and seems to have been handsome in a fleshy way; Dorine (who, of course, does not like him) describes him as fat, ruddy complexioned, rosy lipped, and self-indulgent in his appetites, eating and drinking hugely, belching, snoring—a comic contrast to his self-proclaimed image as an ascetic. Tartuffe was by far the biggest role Du Croisy ever played: he had a ponderous, overemphatic style of speaking, stressing every syllable, that was highly comic in small doses, and he was very useful as a bit-part player, claiming the center of attention during his brief times on stage in dialect roles, or as poets and pedants.

Madame Pernelle, Orgon's mother, is the only other character in the play who is deceived by Tartuffe. She is an ill-tempered, impetuous, sharp-tongued, malicious old woman, and like all elderly female characters in seventeenth-century France, she was played by a man. This actor, Louis Béjart, was Madeleine's younger brother, who only played small roles in Molière's plays. A quarrelsome person, he had received a wound in a sword fight that left him with a pronounced limp, and he was something of a favorite with audiences as a result; actors in the provinces playing roles he had originated were said to imitate his limp. It is no coincidence that the first thing we see in the play is this character in violent motion, limping so fast that Elmire cannot keep up: it is a grotesque image, made more so by the fact that it is a travesty role. The year after *Tartuffe* opened Béjart retired from the theater at the age of forty-five to pursue a new career in the army.

Cléante, Elmire's brother, has no blood relation to Orgon's children but takes a kindly interest in them as an adoptive

uncle. His somewhat detached perspective makes him the most reasonable character in the play, which is a rather thankless task for an actor but an important one in maintaining the play's balance. Molière was fortunate in having for this role a versatile actor with a strong stage presence, La Thorillière, who played kings, peasants, or energetic comic roles as needed, in addition to roles like Cléante that called for eloquence and social grace.

The young lovers, Mariane and Valère, have a rather limited role in this play, appearing only in Acts II and V. As we have seen, it is possible that they were not part of the original conception of the play when it was first presented at Versailles, and when Molière revised it to make it more acceptable to his moralist critics, the insertion of the positive message of their love story, along with the effusive tribute to the King at the very end, may have been part of his strategy. The roles were played by two of Molière's most valuable actors, Catherine de Brie and La Grange, who began their careers playing young-lover roles similar to these and grew into more complex and interesting assignments. La Grange, with his poised and gracious demeanor, was Molière's favorite foil to set off his own acting style; over the course of their careers, he and Molière played more scenes together, by a wide margin, than any other pair of actors.

Damis, Orgon's hot-headed son, bears a strong family resemblance to his father and grandmother. These three are the only characters in the play with a tendency to physical violence: Damis wants to fight Tartuffe, Madame Pernelle slaps her servant, and Orgon tries, but comically fails, to slap Dorine. André Hubert, who created the role, often played nervous, unstable characters who echoed the mannerisms of Molière's characters. He was a versatile actor and a wickedly good mimic. After Louis Béjart retired in 1670, Hubert took over the role of Madame Pernelle and went on to achieve fame as a female impersonator, much more subtle and realistic than Béjart.

Elmire, Orgon's young wife, was played by Molière's own young wife, Armande. She had a simple directness to her acting style, which, paradoxically, served her well in her most famous

role: the elusive, coquettish Célimène in *The Misanthrope.* This style is also evident in the role of Elmire, a grounded, self-possessed young woman who keeps her head even in very trying situations and who, unlike the stepmother of fairy tales, is on good terms with Mariane and Damis and seems to be about the same age.

The fact that the mother of Orgon's children is dead and that Orgon has remarried was so common in the seventeenth century that it needed no explanation: childbirth was dangerous for both mother and baby. There is an additional reason why mothers of grown children appear very rarely as characters in comedy: actresses were unwilling to date themselves as members of the older generation, and such roles had to be played by men—as Hubert did with great success in *The Would-Be Gentleman* and *The Learned Ladies.* Both the social and the theatrical realities need to be kept in mind when considering Dorine, a character difficult to categorize in modern terms. Molière identifies her as Mariane's *suivante,* perhaps best translated as "paid companion." She is an employee of the household, but her status is higher than that of a servant. How old was Mariane when her mother died? We do not know, but Dorine is the closest thing to a mother that Mariane has. She belongs to a large and varied category of women in early-modern life and literature who, despite their respectable social origins, lack the financial means to marry within their own class and are thus reduced to a twilight existence as companion, spinster cousin or aunt, duenna, or governess to the daughters of the more financially fortunate. The *suivante* role is common in early French comedy because, unlike the mother, it implies no particular age and can also be played by actresses who are not well suited to young-lover roles. This was the situation of Madeleine Béjart, Molière's first mentor in the theater, his constant companion, and perhaps the mother of his wife. She was an excellent, authoritative actress, best suited for tragic roles but with limited options in comedy; she played a number of *suivantes* and, in several farces, formed a sort of Punch-and-Judy team with Molière playing his quarrelsome wife; there are echoes of this in Act II.

Setting

The entire action of *Tartuffe* takes place in one room in Orgon's house in Paris. This convention is so commonplace in the modern theater that we do not give it a second thought, but it was Molière who invented it. The plays of the Greeks and Romans were performed in open-air theaters, and it was always assumed that the fictional location of the action was likewise outdoors: the space in front of the palace, or the street in front of two or three houses. Any action in tragedy or comedy took place in public. This assumption persisted up to the time of Molière; certain scenes of a play might be set in a room, but never until *The Misanthrope* (1666) and *Tartuffe* (1669) had the setting for a full-length play in a commercial theater portrayed a private, domestic interior space. The novelty of this setting reinforced its importance as a visual symbol of the issues at stake in *Tartuffe.* The stage does not represent a public space; it represents what belongs to Orgon and is the concrete embodiment of his status as a bourgeois—someone who owns property in the city. When Tartuffe threatens to turn Orgon and his family out of the house, he is taking away their entire existence. Likewise the house symbolizes Tartuffe's status as an intruder: it is the space of the family, and he is not a member of the family.

Language and Style

Molière wrote some of his plays in verse and some in prose. Prose was the language of farce and low comedy, while verse was obligatory for the high forms of tragedy and heroic drama, which portrayed idealized and noble characters speaking a heightened language that did not attempt to reproduce the way ordinary people speak in everyday life. The verse form used was the Alexandrine: rhyming couplets of twelve-syllable lines, each line with a break after the sixth syllable. The form was a great deal more flexible than this description makes it sound.

More refined comedy with claims to literary merit also used the Alexandrine, with the same technical characteristics but a closer approach to ordinary conversational speech. This was the form Molière used, brilliantly, in *Tartuffe,* and there are serious difficulties in attempting to translate its effects. The long tradition in French drama of rhymed verse makes it familiar and therefore inconspicuous; in English it is a novelty and a distraction. The rhythms of English speech do not lend themselves as well to a regular stress pattern; unless the actor is very careful, a verse translation can sound bouncy in a way that the French does not. Furthermore, the sounds of the language make rhyme more difficult to achieve in English than in French, and rhymes thus sound more self-consciously clever; this can be an advantage in a play like *The Misanthrope,* in which many of the characters spend a good deal of energy trying to be clever, but in *Tartuffe* there is a danger of conveying a sense of lightness in the characters' conversation that would be misleading. Something is always lost in translation; in translating *Tartuffe* into English prose, the danger of loss is perhaps greatest in the long speeches, where the verse patterns help shape the rhetorical builds. But that loss is more than made up for if the prose gives a more direct sense of what the characters are feeling and how they are coping with their bizarre situation.

Cleverness is not the goal. A reader familiar with the English comic tradition will find that Molière is funny in a different way. English comedies tend to draw their effects from lines that are funny in themselves, independent of the context. In all of Molière's work there is one such line. His is a different approach to comedy: when a line in his plays draws a laugh from the audience, it is not because the line is witty but because of what it reveals about character and situation, which are the foundations of his enduring popularity.

Roger W. Herzel

Translator's Note

One of the problems in translating Alexandrine couplets is that the meter and rhyme may require the poet to change natural word order, to use extra words, to choose synonyms that will fit both the meaning and the formal constraints. The translator who tries to keep as close as possible to the original runs the risk of producing a text that sounds neither like the original nor like the language of the translation. Sentences may have to be longer or shorter than the original, and the order of words in the sentences may be quite different. Words that are appropriate in the new language may not be the exact equivalents of those in the original language. Idioms in both languages change in meaning and in connotation, especially over the course of three hundred or more years; equivalents are often not literal translations. I have done my best to keep close to Molière's text, but this is not a literal translation.

A second issue is the cultural difference between the reign of Louis XIV, the setting of this play, and the world of the twenty-first century. References to court, to the classics, and to the physical appearance of the characters make this clear, and the details are indicators of character rather than simply stage settings. The formality with which the seventeenth-century French talked to one another (even outside the constraints of drama) is quite foreign to modern ears. Giving a flavor of that formality seemed important, but reproducing it as exactly as possible emphasizes the differences between the two cultures and conceals the universality of the plot, the characters, the issues, the moral reactions, the irony, the humor. I have chosen as neutral a style as possible, trying to avoid turns of phrase,

idioms, and colloquialisms that would stamp the translation with the flavor of this particular time and place. I have, however, tried to give each character the appropriate voice, from the pomposity of Tartuffe to the nagging tone of Mme. Pernelle.

In preparing this translation I have tried to keep in mind the sound and rhythm of speech as it might be heard on a modern stage. To Molière's contemporaries, who were accustomed to hearing Alexandrine verse, the speech of his characters may have sounded quite unremarkable. I have assumed that Molière's drama, wit, and irony can and must be transmitted, even if the form is prose rather than poetry, colloquial rather than formal.

The faults are mine. Great thanks are due to Walter Kaiser, whose meticulous and generous help at the beginning of this project were of enormous importance and value, and to the *Cercle des Lectrices de Cambridge,* whose comments in the last stages were equally important. I dedicate this translation to my sister, Susan E. Linder, in whose company I first met Molière in Molière's own city.

Molière's Preface
March 1669

This is a comedy about which there has been a lot of talk, which was persecuted for a long time, and those whom it displays made it very clear that they were more powerful in France than those whom I had presented earlier. The marquis, the pretentious folk, the cuckolds, and the doctors, peacefully allowed themselves to be presented on stage; and pretended to have fun—as everyone did—with the portraits that were painted of themselves. But hypocrites do not understand a joke; they were instantly enraged and were appalled that I had the effrontery to present their grimaces and to try to describe a way of life that so many people engage in. Mine was a crime that they could not forgive, and they attacked my comedy with dreadful rage. They did not bother to attack the places that attacked them; they were too clever for that and knew all too well how to prevent themselves from revealing their souls. In their praiseworthy fashion, they concealed their own interests in the name of God; and in their mouths *Tartuffe* became a play that attacks piety. It is, from one end to the other, full of abominations, and there is nothing in it that does not deserve to be burned. Every syllable is blasphemy; even the gestures are sinful; the least glance, the least shake of a head, the smallest step to left or to right hides secrets that they are able to explain in ways that harm me.

Never mind that I submitted it to the judgment of my friends, to the criticism of everyone; despite all the corrections I made, and the opinion of the king and the queen, who saw the play, the approval of great princes and ministers of state who honored the

play by their presence, the testimony of right-thinking people who found it useful—all that was of no use. They refused to let go, and even now they continue to provoke the foolish zealots who piously curse me and charitably condemn me.

I would worry very little about what they say were it not for the tricks by which they have made those whom I respect become my enemies, and enticed into their party some truly honorable men on whose goodwill they depend, men who—because of their love of Heaven—are easily made to believe what they are told. This is what required me to defend myself. I want to justify my comedy to the truly pious; and I beseech them, with all my heart, not to condemn things before seeing them, to abandon their preconceptions, not to fall prey to the passions of those whose grimaces are unworthy of them.

If one takes the trouble to examine my comedy in good faith, one will surely see that my intentions were completely innocent, that the play never mocks the things we ought to revere, that I treated my subject with all the precautions that the sensitivity of the subject demanded, and that I used all my art and all the skills I possessed to distinguish clearly between the hypocrite and the truly pious man. I used two acts to prepare for the entrance of my scoundrel. Nothing he did could deceive the listener; he is recognized immediately by the way I presented him; and from beginning to end he says nothing, does nothing, that does not reveal to the spectators the character of a wicked man who can but make the honorable man shine all the more brightly.

I know very well that in rebuttal these gentlemen try to suggest that the theater is not the place to present these matters; but I would ask, with their permission, what is the basis of this worthy assumption? It is a maxim that they can at best assert and that they cannot possibly prove. Indeed, it would not be difficult to show them that comedy, in the ancient world, had its roots in religion and was a part of their sacred mysteries; that our neighbors the Spaniards never celebrate feast days without including a comedy; and that, among ourselves, comedy owes its birth to the efforts of a confraternity to which the House of Burgundy belongs; that the stage was a place set up to present

the most important mysteries of our faith; that to this day we see comedies printed in gothic letters under the name of a learned doctor of the Sorbonne; and that, without looking further afield, we have seen in these days the sacred plays of M. Corneille, which have excited the admiration of all of France.

If the task of comedy is to correct the vices of mankind, I do not understand why some of those vices should be exempt. In the State, the vice of hypocrisy is far more dangerous than all the others; and we have seen that the theater is a strong force for its correction. The most beautiful phrases of a serious sermon are frequently less powerful than satire, and nothing alerts men more effectively than the display of their vices. Displaying vice to the mockery of men deals it a great blow. Men put up with admonition but are loath to be mocked. One might be willing to be wicked; one cannot bear to appear foolish.

People attack me for putting pious language in the mouth of an impostor. Well! How could I fail to do this if I wanted to present accurately the character of a hypocrite? It was enough, it seemed to me, to reveal the criminal motives that made him say these things and to have omitted those holy words that it would have been horrible to hear him misuse. But, say they, at the beginning of the fourth act he uses a pernicious and casuistic argument. Yet has not everyone heard such casuistry being used? Does my comedy present anything new? Who could believe that such widely detested behavior would influence anyone; that I make it more dangerous by presenting it on the stage, that it would receive some validity because it is presented by a scoundrel? That does not seem possible, and the comedy of *Tartuffe* should be approved or all comedies banned.

This is the argument that rages so furiously nowadays; never has there been so much agitation against the theater. I do not deny that some Fathers of the Church have condemned comedy, but one cannot also deny that some have discussed it more leniently. Thus the authority that is supposed to support the censure is destroyed by this division of opinion; and the only conclusion one can reach, given this division and also the support of enlightened men, is that they viewed comedy differently; that

some discussed it in its purest form while others looked at its corrupted form, confusing it with all those lewd spectacles that are rightly considered indecent.

And in fact, since one must discuss things and not words, and since most disagreements are caused by failing to understand and by using the same word to encompass two different ideas, all that is necessary is to remove the veil of ambiguity and see what comedy is in itself, to see whether it should be condemned. Then, since it is only a clever poem that pleasantly rebukes the defects of mankind, it will be seen that we cannot justly condemn it; and if we are willing to listen to the testimony of the ancients on this subject, we would learn that its most famous philosophers, who claimed so austere a form of wisdom and who ceaselessly attacked the vices of their era, themselves praised comedy. We would learn that Aristotle gave many an evening to the theater and took the trouble to state the principles governing the art of comedy. Antiquity would teach us that its greatest and most revered figures took pride in writing comedies, that others did not scorn to perform those that they had written, that Greece demonstrated its esteem for this art by awarding it prizes and by building the superb theaters in which it was performed, and finally, that in Rome this same art received extraordinary honor—I am not referring to Rome in its debauched state, governed by licentious rulers, but to the disciplined Rome of the times of the consuls, the days of its most strenuous virtue.

I admit that there were times when comedy became corrupt. And what is there in the world that is not constantly being corrupted? There is nothing so innocent that men cannot turn toward vice; no art so beneficial that cannot be distorted; nothing so intrinsically good that it cannot be used for ill. Medicine is a useful art, and everyone honors it as one of the best that we have; and yet there have been times when it was odious and often used to poison. Philosophy[1] is a gift of Heaven, given to

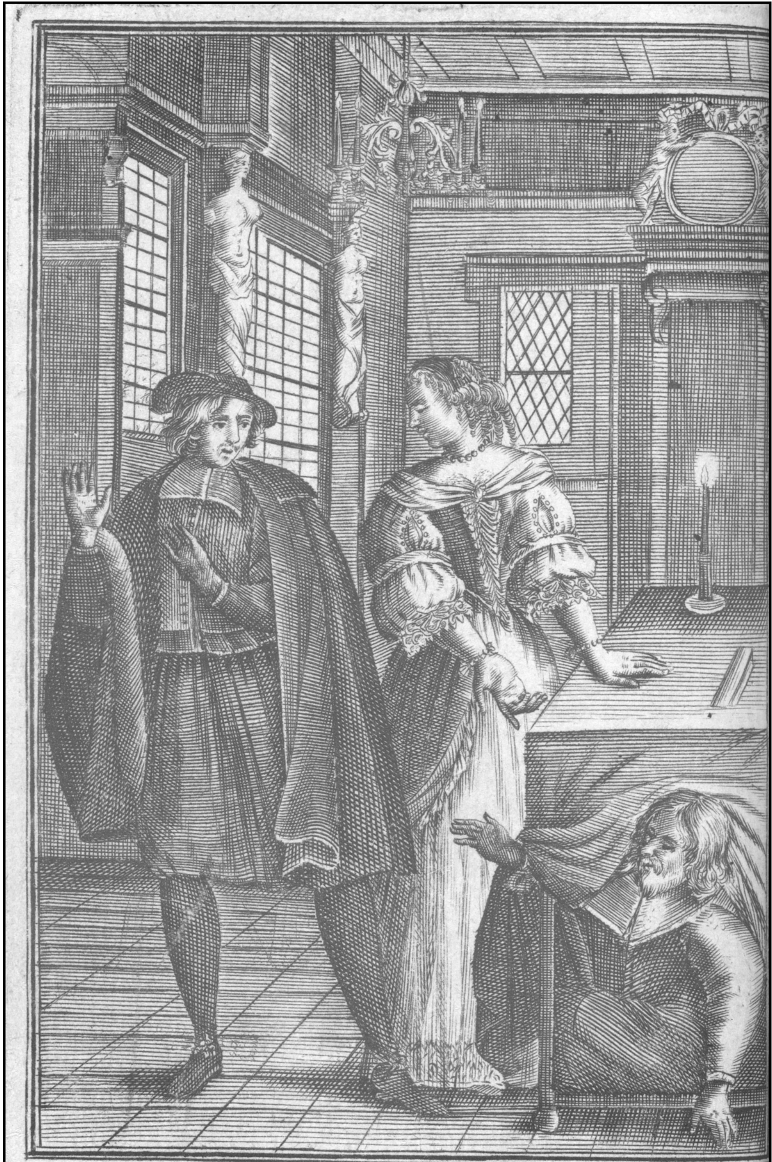
1. Molière uses "philosophy" both in its present sense and as a synonym for natural sciences, which was common in his day.

us to raise our thoughts to the knowledge of a God through the contemplation of the wonders of nature, and yet we know that it has often been diverted from its proper work and used to support heresy. Even the holiest matters cannot be protected from human corruption, and we see, every day, scoundrels who take advantage of piety and use it wickedly to support the most criminal actions. But this should not prevent us from making important distinctions. We should not confuse the value of things that have been corrupted with the malice of those who corrupt it. Everyone distinguishes between the misuse of an art and the art itself; and since we do not forbid the practice of medicine because it was banned in Rome, nor philosophy because it was condemned in Athens, neither should we forbid comedy because it was censured in times past. This censure was justified for reasons that are no longer relevant. Such censure was constrained by what it was able to see; we must see it in its own terms, understand it as it was then, or ask it to account for innocence as well as corruption. The comedy that this censure attacked has nothing to do with the comedy that we wish to defend. We must take care not to confuse the one with the other. They are two completely different entities with completely different natures. They are similar only in name; it would be a horrifying injustice to condemn Olympia, a virtuous woman, because there was an Olympia who was debauched. Such acts would, without doubt, cause great disorder in the world. In the end, no one would escape condemnation; and since we do not insist on this rigor when we see so many things misused these days, we should be equally generous to comedy and approve those performances designed to demonstrate and teach virtue and honor.

I know that there are some whose sensitivity cannot bear any levity, who say that the most decent comedies are the most dangerous, that the emotions they present are most seductive because they are virtuous, and that souls are moved by such performances. I do not understand why it is so great a crime to feel moved by honorable passions; and those who want us to be unmoved demand of us an exceptionally high level of virtue. I

doubt that such perfection is within the power of human nature, and I do not know whether it is not better to try to correct and to soften the passions of men than it is to eliminate those passions completely. I acknowledge that there are better places to go than to the theater; and if one wants to condemn all activity that does not directly address God and our salvation, it is certain that comedy is one of those activities and I would not oppose condemning it with the rest. But if indeed there are intervals between acts of piety, and if men need distraction, I believe that one cannot find one that would be more innocent than comedy. I have said too much. Let us end with a word about *Tartuffe* spoken by a great prince.

Eight days after it was banned, actors presented to the court a play called *Scaramouche the Hermit,* and the king, leaving the performance, said to the prince the words that I am about to report: "I would like to know why those who were so scandalized by Molière's comedy say nothing about *Scaramouche."* To which the prince replied: "The reason is that the comedy of *Scaramouche* mocks Heaven and religion, which those gentlemen do not care about, but Molière's play mocks those gentlemen themselves, and they cannot endure that."



LE TARTVFFE

Tartuffe

Cast of Characters[1]

MME. PERNELLE, mother of Orgon

ORGON, husband of Elmire

ELMIRE, wife of Orgon

DAMIS, son of Orgon

MARIANE, daughter of Orgon and beloved of Valère

VALÈRE, beloved of Mariane

CLÉANTE, brother-in-law of Orgon and brother of Elmire

TARTUFFE, a hypocrite

DORINE, maid and confidante of Mariane

M. LOYAL, a beadle

an OFFICER of the court

FLIPOTE, maidservant of Mme. Pernelle

The play takes place in Paris.

1. See the note on the names of characters on page 109.

Act I

Scene 1

Mme. Pernelle, Flipote,
Elmire, Dorine, Damis,
Cléante, Mariane

Mme. Pernelle
Come on, Flipote, come on, so I can get away.

Elmire
You walk so fast: it's hard to keep up with you.

Mme. Pernelle
Stay where you are, Daughter-in-Law—don't come any farther. I don't need manners like yours.

Elmire
We have behaved properly, Mother; why are you leaving so quickly?

Mme. Pernelle
I cannot stand the way this household is run. No one ever makes any effort to please me. Yes, I am leaving. I've seen some

shocking behavior: my instructions are rejected; no one respects me; everyone speaks arrogantly—it's Bedlam here.

Dorine
If . . .

Mme. Pernelle
You, Miss, are a chatterbox, not a proper lady's companion, and a rude one too, who insists on sharing your opinions about everything.

Damis
But . . .

Mme. Pernelle
You are a four-letter . . . fool. I'm your grandmother and I should know. I've told your father a hundred times that you act like a good-for-nothing and that you'll never be more than a nuisance to him.

Mariane
I think . . .

Mme. Pernelle
Now, now, Mademoiselle, you may act discreetly and seem meek and well behaved, but "still waters run deep," as they say. I know you're simply covering up unsavory behavior.

Elmire
But Mother . . .

Mme. Pernelle
Daughter-in-Law, your conduct, if I may say so, is perfectly shocking. You should be setting a good example for these children—which their late mother certainly did. You're extravagant; I'm horrified to see you dressed up like a princess. A

woman whose only concern is to please her husband doesn't need to wear such finery.

Cléante
But Madame, after all . . .

Mme. Pernelle
As for you, her brother, I admire you; I like you, honor you—but if I were my son, her husband, I would beg you never to set foot in this house. You're forever offering advice on how to live that no decent people should accept. I don't mince words; that's the way I am, and I don't hesitate to say what's on my mind.

Damis
Your Monsieur Tartuffe is a lucky man, no doubt . . .

Mme. Pernelle
He is a righteous man; you should listen to him. I cannot bear to see him challenged by a fool like you.

Damis
What, should I allow a bigoted hypocrite to be a tyrant in this house? Are we forbidden to enjoy ourselves unless that fine fellow deigns to permit it?

Dorine
If we're to believe what he says, we're all acting like criminals; that fanatic controls everything.

Mme. Pernelle
And he controls everything properly. He intends to lead you to Heaven, and my son is right to urge you to love him.

Damis
No—look here, Grandmother, neither Father nor anyone else can make me wish him well. I'd be a traitor to myself if I said anything else; everything he does infuriates me. Something's

going to happen; someday I'll be forced to lock horns with that lout.

Dorine
It's a scandal to see a stranger become the master here. That beggar who arrived barefoot, his clothes in tatters—well, now he forgets who he is, contradicts everyone, and tells everyone what to do.

Mme. Pernelle
Good Lord! Things would go better if everyone followed his pious example.

Dorine
You imagine that he's a saint; well, believe me, he's only a hypocrite.

Mme. Pernelle
Watch your tongue!

Dorine
Me, I wouldn't trust him or his servant Laurent unless I had a solid guarantee.

Mme. Pernelle
I don't in fact know about the servant, but I'll guarantee that the master is a righteous man. The only reason you wish him ill and defy him is because he tells you the truth. Sin infuriates him; it's the wishes of Heaven that drive him.

Dorine
Oh, to be sure . . . And why did he recently forbid us to admit visitors? Does an innocent guest offend Heaven? What's the reason for all this uproar? Shall I tell you what I think? I think, to tell the truth, he's jealous of Madame.

Mme. Pernelle
Stop that! Watch what you are saying. He's not the only one to criticize these visits. All the commotion that those people make, all those carriages parked in front of the door, all those servants making a hubbub in the neighborhood . . . I'd like to think that nothing scandalous is happening, but people do talk, and that's bad.

Cléante
Come, come, Madame, can one possibly stop such talk? It would be a shame if we had to abandon our friends because of silly gossip—and even if we did, do you think we could silence those folks? There's no defense against slander. Let's pay no attention to their cackling; we'll try to live virtuously and let busybodies have their say.

Dorine
Our neighbor Daphne and that little husband of hers—aren't they the ones who talk about us so maliciously? It's always the most ridiculous people who are the first to slander others. They never miss a chance to point out the slightest hint of a romance, and happily spread the word far and wide, putting their own slant on stories that they want others to believe. They color the facts, insisting they are true, and hope—in vain, of course—that their own intrigues will seem as innocent as others' really are or that they can tar their neighbors with the same brush.

Mme. Pernelle
That's beside the point. Take [our neighbor] Orante: she leads an exemplary life; she cares only for heavenly rewards—and I have heard that she thoroughly disapproves of the things that go on here.

Dorine
An admirable example—a worthy woman! Yes, she lives austerely, but she's prudish only because she's an old lady, and straitlaced because she has a feeble body. When she was

attractive she made the most of it—now she turns her back on the world that's left her behind. All that pompous morality is just a disguise to hide her worn-out looks. That's what they do, those aging flirts who hate to see their suitors abandon them. Once they're deserted all they can do is to play the prude. Those righteous women censure everything, pardon nothing, scold everyone loudly—out of envy, not pious concern—and won't allow anyone else to enjoy the pleasures that age has denied them.

Mme. Pernelle
Those are the kinds of fairy tales you tell yourself so you can feel comfortable. Daughter-in-Law, in your house you hold the floor all the time, and we're not allowed to speak. Well, now it's my turn to talk, and I'm telling you that the wisest thing my son ever did was to welcome this virtuous man into his home. Heaven sent him here because someone had to bring your lost souls back to the right path. You should listen to him for your own good; he rebukes what needs to be reformed. These visits, balls, and evenings of chitchat are all inventions of the devil. I've never heard a pious word exchanged; it's all idle talk, foolishness, gossip about the neighbors, slanders, backbiting, a thousand false reports based on absolutely nothing. Honest folks' heads are spinning with all this confusion; no wonder that the other day a wise man called it a second tower of Babylon. Everyone babbles on and on and on. I'll tell you the story that provoked this comment—right—this gentleman [*Pointing to Cléante.*][1] is snickering already! Right, you'll have to look elsewhere for the fools who can make you laugh, and without . . . Good-bye, Daughter-in-Law, I don't want to say another word. You should know that I've told only half the story—and it will be a long time before I set foot in here again. [*She slaps Flipote.*] Come on, don't stand there gaping! Just wait! I'll give you something to listen to. Come on, Slip-Slop, come along.

1. The italicized notes in brackets are stage directions that date from the first performances of *Tartuffe*.

Scene 2

CLÉANTE, DORINE

Cléante
I don't want to leave yet; I'm afraid she'll continue to scold me. May that old lady . . .

Dorine
A pity she didn't hear you say that! She'd say, "Thank you very much" for the compliment and that she's not old enough to deserve it.

Cléante
She gets angry with us about nothing, and she seems to be besotted by her Tartuffe.

Dorine
She's nothing compared to her son. If you'd seen him, you'd have said, "He's much worse!" In the recent "troubles" he was known as a level-headed man who backed his king courageously.[2] But he's become a blockhead since he became infatuated with Tartuffe. He calls him brother, loves him a hundred times more than his own mother, son, daughter, wife. He tells Tartuffe all his secrets; he treats Tartuffe like his confessor, who judges his acts. He cherishes Tartuffe, embraces him; he couldn't love a mistress more tenderly. He makes Tartuffe sit

2. See the note on this sentence on page 111.

next to him at dinner—happily watches him eat enough for six people, makes everyone give him the best bits, and when Tartuffe belches, says, "God bless you." [*This is a servant speaking.*] Orgon is crazy about him, thinks the world of him, quotes everything he says as if it were gospel, and Tartuffe, who knows his dupe and how to play him, bamboozles him with a hundred sanctimonious tricks. His hypocrisy has made him rich and entitles him to criticize everything we do. Even his stupid servant makes it his business to tell us how to behave, preaching wildly at us and throwing out our ribbons and our makeup. That fiend snatched away—with his own hands—a bit of lace that he found pressed flat in *The Lives of the Saints* because, said he, we were polluting holy writings with the devil's finery.

Scene 3

ELMIRE, MARIANE,
DAMIS, CLÉANTE, DORINE

Elmire
You're lucky that you weren't at the speech that she [Mme. Pernelle] gave as she was leaving.—I've just seen my husband; since he didn't see me, I'll go upstairs to wait for him.

Cléante
I'll wait for him here so that I don't waste time; I'll just say hello.

Damis
Say something to him about my sister's marriage; I suspect that Tartuffe opposes it, since he forces my father to delay it so much. You know that I take a special interest in all this. If my sister and Valère love each other, well, Valère's sister is very dear to me, and if it were necessary . . .

Dorine
Here he comes.

Scene 4

ORGON, CLÉANTE, DORINE

Orgon [*To Cléante.*]
Hello there, Brother.

Cléante
I was just leaving, and I'm delighted to see you. The countryside isn't much in bloom just yet.

Orgon
Dorine . . . Brother-in-Law, wait a moment, please; just let me reassure myself by hearing all the news . . . Has all gone well these past two days? What's happened? Is everyone well?

Dorine
Madame's had a fever until the day before yesterday in the evening, with a terrible headache.

Orgon
And Tartuffe?

Dorine
Tartuffe? He couldn't be better: fat, happy, his complexion is good, his lips are rosy.

Orgon
The poor fellow!

Dorine
Last evening she had no appetite and couldn't eat any supper because her headache was so bad.

Orgon
And Tartuffe?

Dorine
He was the only one who ate—while she watched—and he piously consumed two partridges and half a leg of chopped lamb.

Orgon
The poor fellow!

Dorine
She scarcely closed her eyes all night; fevers kept her from sleeping, and we had to watch her closely until dawn.

Orgon
And Tartuffe?

Dorine
He grew pleasantly drowsy as soon as he left the dining table, went to his room and hopped quickly into his nice warm bed, where he slept until morning.

Orgon
The poor fellow!

Dorine
Finally she agreed to be bled and immediately felt better.

Orgon
And Tartuffe?

Dorine
He was very brave, and he drank four large glasses of wine to strengthen his soul against harm and to rebuild the blood that Madame had lost.

Orgon
The poor fellow!

Dorine
Both are doing well, and I'll go tell Madame how encouraged you are by her convalescence.

Scene 5

ORGON, CLÉANTE

Cléante
Brother, she's laughing in your face. I don't want to upset you, but I must say she's right. Who ever heard of such foolishness? How can he charm you enough to make you forget everything except for him? He has recovered from his troubles since he's been living here, and now you have come to the point that . . .

Orgon
Stop, Brother-in-Law. You don't know the man you're talking about.

Cléante
Well, perhaps I don't know him, but to recognize what kind of a man he may be . . .

Orgon
My brother, you would be delighted to know him, and your admiration would be endless. He's a man who . . . hmm . . . a man, well then, a man. Anyone who takes his teaching seriously feels profound peace, looks at the world as if it were only a dunghill. Yes, I become a changed man when I listen to him. He teaches me to love nothing in this world, he frees my soul from all affection, and I could watch my brother, children, mother, wife die without the least concern.

Cléante
What humane emotions those are, dear brother!

Orgon
Oh, if you had known how I first met him, you would have had the same affection for him that I have. He came to church every day, knelt near me, looking so humble. Everyone noticed how fervently he prayed, sighed, groaned, how often he kissed the ground; and when I left the church, he hurried ahead of me to offer holy water. I learned about his poverty and his origins from his servant, who imitated him in everything; I gave him alms, but he modestly insisted on returning some of what I had given him. "It's too much," he said, "too much by half; I'm not worthy of your compassion." And when I refused to take any back, he rushed—right then and there—to give it to the poor. At last Heaven allowed him to come to live here, and since then all seems to be well. He looks better and even pays very special attention to my wife, warning me about those who flirt with her; he's six times more jealous than I am. And you wouldn't believe how high-minded he is: he calls the least little thing sinful; a mere nothing scandalizes him—to the point that the other day he condemned himself for having caught a louse while he was praying and squeezing it to death too angrily.

Cléante
Good grief, Brother, you seem to me to have gone mad. Are you making fun of me? And do you really think that this silliness . . .

Orgon
Brother, this kind of comment smells like impiety to me. Your soul is beginning to be corrupted; I've told you at least ten times that you are in spiritual danger.

Cléante
People like you always say things like that. They want everyone to be as blind as they are. They think that seeing clearly is impiety, that those who refuse to worship false idols have no respect

for true faith and true religion. Such talk doesn't frighten me; I know what I'm saying, and Heaven itself knows what I think. I'm not a slave to fraud. Look: some people pretend to be religious the way others pretend to be brave. We can recognize brave people by what honor has pushed them to do, but the truly pious, whom one should imitate, don't smirk and show off. Come on! Can't you tell the difference between hypocrisy and true piety? You treat them as if they were identical; you respect a mask as if it were a real face. Do you think that pretense and sincerity, appearance and truth, phantom and reality, counterfeit and real currency are all the same? What strange creatures men are! They're always off balance; they think being reasonable is too limiting; they spoil what's best by pushing things too far.—All this is just a casual observation, dear brother-in-law.

Orgon
Oh yes, without a doubt you're a revered professor who embodies all the wisdom of the world, the only truly wise and enlightened man, an oracle, a Cato[3] in our generation; compared with you, of course, all other men are fools.

Cléante
Brother, I'm not a revered professor; I don't embody all the world's wisdom. What I do know is how to distinguish between true and false. I don't know any heroes more worthy of respect than the truly pious or anything more noble and beautiful than holy passion and saintly zeal. And I don't know anything more hateful than those whited sepulchres, the phony zealots, the obvious charlatans with their ostentatious piety, their sacrilegious and deceitful behavior, who brazenly take advantage of others, who distort, whenever they please, what we human beings think is most saintly and sacred. They dedicate their souls only to their own interests; for them, religion is a business,

3. Cato (234–149 BCE)—a distinguished lawyer, soldier, legislator, and ambassador—was considered a model of morality both in his day and in later generations; his name became a synonym for civic and personal virtue.

or merchandise, and they try to buy honor and position by deceptive winks and exaggerated enthusiasm. I'm talking about those sanctimonious fellows who use religious zeal to fatten their bank accounts, who attach themselves to the Court while preaching austerity, who adjust their piety to fit their vices. They're treacherous, hasty, vindictive, full of tricks; they hide their envy and claim that their desire to ruin others is God's will. Their hostility and fanaticism—much good may it do them—are all the more dangerous because they use our own holy weapons against us. We see these liars all too often, and yet it's easy to recognize those who are truly devout. There are splendid examples these days, dear brother: look at Ariston, Périandre, Oronte, Alcidamas, Polydore, Clitandre—no one doubts what they are. They don't parade their virtue; they're not ostentatious; their piety is on a human scale—it's sober, well balanced. They're not constantly censuring what we do: they think it's arrogance to condemn others. They let others speak angrily; meanwhile their behavior silently corrects ours. Though they're not impressed by appearances, their instinct is to think well of others. No cabals, no intrigues: their chief concern is to live properly. They don't attack sinners, though they hate the sin. They don't confuse Heaven's will with their own zeal. These are the ones I admire; this is how one should behave; this is the model to imitate. Your fellow isn't like that. You praise his zeal in good faith; well, I'm afraid you've been dazzled by his pretentious behavior.

Orgon
Brother-in-Law, have you said all you want to say?

Cléante
Yes.

Orgon
Your servant, sir. [*He starts to leave.*]

Cléante
One more word, Brother. Let's turn to something else. You know that Valère has asked to marry your daughter?

Orgon
Yes.

Cléante
You had fixed a date for the wedding.

Orgon
True.

Cléante
Why have you delayed it?

Orgon
I don't know.

Cléante
Have you some other plan?

Orgon
Perhaps.

Cléante
You would break your word?

Orgon
I wouldn't put it that way.

Cléante
There's no obstacle, I imagine, to keeping your promise.

Orgon
As you say.

Cléante
Is it so difficult to go ahead with it? Valère asked me to speak to you about it.

Orgon
Heaven be praised!

Cléante
But what shall I tell him?

Orgon
Whatever you like.

Cléante
But we need to know your plans. What are they?

Orgon
To do as Heaven demands.

Cléante
Let's talk frankly. Valère has your promise; will you keep it or not?

Orgon
Good-bye.

Cléante
I feel uneasy about the prospects for Valère's happiness; I'd better warn him about what has happened.

Act II

Scene 1

ORGON, MARIANE

Orgon
Mariane.

Mariane
Father.

Orgon
Come a bit closer. I have something to say to you privately.

Mariane
What are you looking for?

Orgon [*He looks in a little closet.*]
I'm making sure that no one can overhear us; this little closet could hold an eavesdropper. Fine: all's well. Mariane, I've always known that you have a gentle soul, and you have always been very dear to me.

Mariane
I'm deeply grateful for your fatherly love.

Orgon
Well said, Daughter, and if you want that love to continue, all you have to think about is pleasing me.

Mariane
It's my pleasure to please you.

Orgon
Quite right. Now, what do you think of our guest, Tartuffe?

Mariane
Who, me?

Orgon
Yes, you. Be careful what you say.

Mariane
Oh goodness, I'll say anything you like.

Orgon
Well said. Now, Daughter, say that his good works shine through him everywhere, that he touches your heart, and that you would be delighted if I chose him for your husband. Well?

Mariane [*She jumps back in surprise.*]
Well?

Orgon
What's the matter?

Mariane
I beg your pardon?

Orgon
What?

Mariane
Did I misunderstand?

Orgon
Misunderstand?

Mariane
What do you want me to say, Father? Who has touched my heart? That I would be pleased if you chose whom as my husband?

Orgon
Tartuffe.

Mariane
Not at all, Father—none of that is true. Why do you ask me to invent something untrue?

Orgon
But I want it to be true. You should be satisfied with what I have decided.

Mariane
What? You want, Father . . .

Orgon
Yes, Daughter, I intend to join Tartuffe and our family in marriage. He will be your husband, I've decided that, and since your wishes . . .

Scene 2

DORINE, ORGON, MARIANE

Orgon [*To Dorine.*]
What are you doing there? Are you so curious, Miss, that you have come to listen to us?

Dorine
So curious, Monsieur, that I can't believe what you have said.

Orgon
I know how to make you believe it.

Dorine
Oh yes, you're telling us a joke.

Orgon
Just wait and see.

Dorine
Fiddlesticks!

Orgon
Daughter, I am not joking.

Dorine
Come on, don't believe Monsieur your father; he's teasing.

Orgon
I tell you . . .

Dorine
No, say what you will, no one will believe you.

Orgon
I'm growing very angry . . .

Dorine
Very well, then, we believe you, and so much the worse for you. Come on, Monsieur, with all those fine whiskers in the middle of your face, you look like a wise man; can it be that you are crazy enough to want . . .

Orgon
Listen here! You're being very impertinent. I don't like that; I'm warning you, Miss.

Dorine
Let's not become angry, Monsieur. Are you making fun of us with this plot? A religious fanatic doesn't need a girl; he should be thinking about other things. Moreover, what advantage to you would such a marriage be? You're well-to-do; why choose a beggar for a son-in-law?

Orgon
Be quiet! If he is a beggar, all the more reason to respect him. His poverty is no disgrace; it's more honorable than any worldly titles. After all—as you know—he was poor because he was intensely spiritual and didn't pay enough attention to earthly matters. Well, my support will help him get out of his difficulties and regain his property, which is highly regarded in his part of the country. As anyone can see, he comes from a very good family.

Dorine
Yes, he says so himself. Is vanity like that really a sign of piety? Someone who embraces an innocent and holy life shouldn't boast about his family; humility and devotion don't go along with ambition like his. What is the point of this pride? . . . Oh, these comments upset you? Let's talk about him as a person and not as a nobleman. Do you think it's a good idea to give a young woman like your daughter to a man like that? Think about what's appropriate; can't you foresee the consequences of such a marriage? Be careful: a young woman's virtue is in danger if she's married off to someone she doesn't want. Her willingness to live an honorable life depends on the character of the husband she's been given. Men who behave badly force their wives to do the same. It's very difficult, I must say, to be faithful to certain kinds of husbands. Someone who gives his daughter to a man she hates becomes responsible for her sins. Think of the dangers you face with a plan like this.

Orgon
What! Am I supposed to learn how to live from her?

Dorine
You cannot do better than follow my instructions.

Orgon
Let's not distract ourselves with nonsense. [*To Mariane.*] I know what you need, and I am your father. Yes, I did promise you to Valère. Now, in addition to the fact that people say he gambles, I suspect he's something of a freethinker. I haven't seen him in church very often.

Dorine
Do you want him to go there on a schedule, like the people who go only to be noticed?

Orgon
I'm not asking for your opinion. Tartuffe is in Heaven's good graces, and that is the best kind of wealth. [*To Mariane.*] This fine marriage will give you everything you want; you'll have nothing but sweetness and pleasure. You'll live together, joined by faithful love, like two dear children, two turtledoves. You'll never quarrel, and you can make of him whatever you might wish.

Dorine
All she'll be able to make of him is a fool.

Orgon
What kind of a thing is that to say!

Dorine
I tell you that he's born under the sign of the fool, and the alignment of his stars will trump all your daughter's virtues.

Orgon
Stop interrupting me! Be quiet! Stop poking your nose into other people's business.

Dorine
I'm only trying to help you. [*She interrupts him each time he turns to talk to his daughter.*]

Orgon
Don't trouble yourself on my account; just be quiet.

Dorine
If I didn't care for you . . .

Orgon
I don't want you to care for me.

Dorine
I want to care for you, despite yourself.

Orgon
Oh!

Dorine
Your honor is important to me. I can't bear to see you become the butt of other people's jokes.

Orgon
Will you never be still?

Dorine
It would be unconscionable to let you make such a marriage.

Orgon
Will you stop talking, you viper, you outrageous . . .

Dorine
Oh, you're so pious, but you still lose your temper?

Orgon
Yes, I do. Listening to this stupidity makes me feel sick. I insist that you hold your tongue.

Dorine
Very well. But even if I don't speak, I'm thinking.

Orgon
Think if you must, but keep it to yourself, or . . . That's enough. [*Turning to Mariane.*] As a wise man, I have thought soberly about everything.

Dorine
I'm furious that I'm not allowed to speak. [*She stops speaking as Orgon turns his head*.]

Orgon
Though Tartuffe isn't a fashion plate, he's . . .

Dorine
Oh yes, he's cute enough.

Orgon
. . . personable, so that even if you don't relish all his other abilities . . . [*He turns toward Dorine and looks at her, his arms folded.*]

Dorine
There's a lucky girl! If I were in her shoes, no man would force me to marry, and if it happened, I'd show him soon enough that a woman always has her revenge prepared.

Orgon
So, no one pays attention to what I have said?

Dorine
Why are you complaining? I wasn't talking to you.

Orgon
Then what were you doing?

Dorine
I was talking to myself.

Orgon
Right. The back of my hand will teach you something. [*He prepares to slap Dorine, and each time he looks at her, Dorine stands still without talking*.] Daughter, it is your duty to accept my plan. Please believe that the husband I have chosen for you . . . [*To Dorine.*] What? You're not saying anything?

Dorine
I have nothing to tell myself.

Orgon
Just one word.

Dorine
I don't want to.

Orgon
I was watching you.

Dorine
My word, what a fool!

Orgon [*To Mariane.*]
Daughter, do your duty and defer to my choice.

Dorine [*Running away.*]
I'd be laughed at if I accepted such a husband. [*Orgon tries to slap her and misses.*]

Orgon
That girl of yours, dear daughter, is worse than the plague. If I had to put up with her, I don't know what I'd . . . I'm in no condition to go on; her insolence drives me wild. I'm going out for a walk to calm down.

Scene 3

DORINE, MARIANE

Dorine
Have you lost your tongue; do I have to do all the talking for you? To put up with such an insane proposal without saying a word!

Mariane
With a tyrant for a father, what can I do?

Dorine
Whatever you can to ward off this disaster.

Mariane
Such as what?

Dorine
Tell him that hearts don't fall in love at someone else's command; that you marry to please yourself, not him; that since you are the one who is involved, you are the one whom the husband has to please—and if he loves his Tartuffe so much, he should marry him.

Mariane
But a father has so much power over us that I've never had the strength to say anything.

Dorine
Let's be serious. Valère has courted you; do you love him or don't you?

Mariane
You are unfair to me. How can you doubt my love? Haven't I told you a hundred times how I feel about him, how much I love him?

Dorine
Who knows whether that's your mouth or your heart speaking. Then you really do love him?

Mariane
You're wrong to doubt me; I've shown my feelings all too clearly.

Dorine
Well—do you really love him?

Mariane
Yes, passionately.

Dorine
And as far as one can tell, he loves you too?

Mariane
I believe he does.

Dorine
And both of you are desperate to marry each other?

Mariane
Certainly.

Dorine
Then what do you think of this other proposal?

Mariane
If I'm forced to do that, I'll kill myself.

Dorine
Right: that's a remedy I hadn't thought of. All you have to do to get out of this difficulty is to die. A wonderful remedy. That kind of talk infuriates me.

Mariane
Good grief! What a temper you're in! You don't seem to have any sympathy with other people's unhappiness.

Dorine
I have no sympathy for people like you who talk nonsense and tremble when they face difficulties.

Mariane
But what can I do? I'm easily frightened.

Dorine
Lovers must be brave.

Mariane
But don't I still love Valère? Isn't he the one who must ask for my hand?

Dorine
Come on, even if your father is a stubborn fool, enamored of his Tartuffe, determined to break the marriage contract that he agreed to—is that your lover's fault?

Mariane
But if I reject my father's choice out of hand, if I show my disgust, wouldn't I also show my feelings too much? If I let others know how much Valère dazzles me, wouldn't I be abandoning proper womanly modesty and my duties as a daughter? Do you want my passion broadcast . . .

Dorine
No, no—I don't want anything. I see that you want to belong to Monsieur Tartuffe, and when I think about it, I see that I'm wrong to deter you from this marriage. What reason is there to oppose your wishes? In himself, he's such a good catch. Monsieur Tartuffe! Well, well! You're not being offered a nobody. In fact, Monsieur Tartuffe isn't a buffoon; it's a bit of luck to become his better half. Everyone already honors him. At home he's a nobleman—handsome, red ears, and ruddy complexion—you'd live a very happy life with such a husband.

Mariane
My God! . . .

Dorine
What joy you'll feel when you find yourself the wife of such a fine man!

Mariane
Oh, please stop talking that way, and show me how to rescue myself from this marriage. That's it. I give up; I'm ready to do anything.

Dorine
No, a daughter must obey her father, even though he wants to marry her to an ape. You're a lucky girl; why are you complaining? You'll go in a wagon to his little town, which you'll find full of uncles and cousins whom you'll be happy to entertain. First of all, they'll make you visit the best families. You'll be welcomed by the wife of the bailiff and the tax collector; they'll honor you by offering you a folding chair. At carnival time you can expect to go to a ball where you'll be entertained by two bagpipes, a trained monkey, and a puppet show—that is, if your husband . . .

Mariane
Oh, you're killing me. Give me some advice that will help me.

Dorine
I'm your servant, Miss.

Mariane
Dorine, please . . .

Dorine
You'll just have to put up with this marriage.

Mariane
My dear . . .

Dorine
No.

Mariane
If my wishes, which I've told you . . .

Dorine
Not at all. Tartuffe is the man for you, as you'll soon find out.

Mariane
You know I've always confided in you and trusted you. Please . . .

Dorine
No, indeed. I promise: you'll be thoroughly Tartuffified.

Mariane
Well, since you're not sympathetic to my troubles, leave me alone with my despair, which will steady my heart. I know the infallible cure for my troubles. [*She starts to leave.*]

Dorine
Wait! Come on, come back. I've stopped being difficult. Despite it all, I do have pity on you.

Mariane
Can't you see? If I am condemned to be tortured, I tell you, Dorine, I'm better off dead.

Dorine
Don't worry; we can prevent it quite cleverly . . . But look, here's your beloved Valère.

Scene 4

Valère, Mariane, Dorine

Valère
I've just had some news, Madame, that I did not know and that must surely be good.

Mariane
What is that?

Valère
That you are to marry Tartuffe.

Mariane
Well, my father certainly has this plan in mind.

Valère
Your father, Madame . . .

Mariane
Has changed his mind; he has only just presented this idea to me.

Valère
What? Seriously?

Mariane
Yes, seriously. He has publicly announced that he wants this marriage.

Valère
And what do you think about this, Madame?

Mariane
I don't know.

Valère
A truthful answer. You don't know?

Mariane
No.

Valère
No?

Mariane
What do you advise?

Valère
Me? I advise you to accept this husband.

Mariane
That's what you advise?

Valère
Yes.

Mariane
Really and truly?

Valère
Without doubt: it's a prestigious match, worth paying attention to.

Mariane
Well, then, Sir, I accept your advice.

Valère
You won't have any difficulty taking it, I suppose.

Mariane
No more than you had in giving it.

Valère
Me? I gave you that advice to please you.

Mariane
Then I will take it to please you.

Dorine
Let's see what comes of all this.

Valère
Is this what love means? Were you deceiving me when you . . .

Mariane
Please, let's not talk about this any more. You told me bluntly that I must accept the husband who has been chosen for me, and I intend to do it, since you give me such helpful advice.

Valère
Don't blame me: you had already made a decision, and you are using a very feeble excuse to break your word.

Mariane
Oh yes, well said.

Valère
Indeed. And you never truly loved me.

Mariane
Alas . . . you may think so if you wish.

Valère
Yes, yes, if I wish. But I've been hurt, and that may push me to act before you do; I know how to change my mind and to whom to offer my hand.

Mariane
Oh, I don't doubt it, and merit excites passion . . .

Valère
Forget about merit: I clearly have very little, as you have just demonstrated. But I'm sure that others might be kind to me and would happily compensate me for my loss when they learn that I've been dismissed.

Mariane
You haven't lost much, and you'll easily comfort yourself in this changed situation.

Valère
I'll do my best, you may be sure. When your self-respect is hurt, when you're abandoned, then you ought to forget the person who hurt you. Even if you fail, you have to pretend you've succeeded. No one forgives the coward who continues to love someone who doesn't want him.

Mariane
What a lofty and noble sentiment.

Valère
Yes indeed, and everyone will certainly agree with it. What—do you want me to keep on loving you forever? Do you want me to watch you in someone else's arms and not look for someone who would welcome the heart you rejected?

Mariane
Not at all. It's the very thing I hoped for; I wish it were already done.

Valère
You do?

Mariane
Yes.

Valère
You have insulted me enough, Madame; I'll leave and make you happy. [*He takes a few steps and then turns back.*]

Mariane
Fine.

Valère
Please remember that you're forcing me to do this.

Mariane
Yes.

Valère
And my intentions simply imitate your own.

Mariane
My own. Very well.

Valère
Fine. You'll find yourself obeyed.

Mariane
All the better.

Valère
You have seen the last of me.

Mariane
Good enough.

Valère
Oh? [*He leaves and when he reaches the door turns back.*]

Mariane
Yes?

Valère
Did you call?

Mariane
I? You must be dreaming.

Valère
Ah, well then, I'll keep going. Good-bye, Madame.

Mariane
Good-bye, Monsieur.

Dorine
This foolishness makes me think you both have lost your wits. I've let you quarrel to see what would happen. Holà! Seigneur Valère. [*She holds his arm, and he pretends to resist.*]

Valère
Hey! What are you doing, Dorine?

Dorine
Come here.

Valère
No, I'm too angry; don't interfere with what she's forcing me to do.

Dorine
Stop.

Valère
No. Can't you see I have made up my mind?

Dorine
Oh!

Mariane
Seeing me hurts him; my being here drives him away. I'd better leave.

Dorine [*She leaves Valère and runs to Mariane.*]
Here's the other one. Where are you running to?

Mariane
Leave me alone.

Dorine
You have to come back.

Mariane
No, no, Dorine, holding me here is useless.

Valère
I see that the very sight of me is torture for her; it would be better to relieve her pain.

Dorine [*She leaves Mariane and runs to Valère.*]
You again? Devil take me if I let this happen. Stop these games, and come here, both of you. [*She pulls them together.*]

Valère
What are you up to?

Mariane
What are you trying to do?

Dorine
Put the two of you back together, pull you out of this mess. Are you crazy to be squabbling like this?

Valère
Didn't you hear how she was speaking to me?

Dorine [*To Mariane.*]
Are you crazy to have lost your temper this way?

Mariane
Didn't you see how he treated me?

Dorine
Double craziness. All she cares about is keeping you—I can testify to that. He loves only you, and the only thing he wants is to marry you—I swear it.

Mariane [*To Valère.*]
Then why did you give me that advice?

Valère [*To Mariane.*]
Why did you ask for advice on such a subject?

Dorine
You are both crazy. Here—give me your hand. Come on, you.

Valère [*Giving his hand to Dorine.*]
Why do you want it?

Dorine
Ah! Now yours.

Mariane [*Giving her hand to Dorine.*]
What's all this for?

Dorine
Hurry up; come here. You love each other more than you think.

Valère
Don't be so difficult; stop looking at people so angrily. [*Mariane looks sideways at Valère and smiles a little.*]

Dorine
I must say, all lovers are crazy.

Valère
Ho! Don't I have a right to complain about you? Tell the truth: weren't you wicked to enjoy telling me such terrible things?

Mariane
And you, aren't you the most ungrateful man . . .

Dorine
Let's leave such talk for some other time. Right now we must think about preventing this dreadful marriage.

Mariane
Tell us how to do it.

Dorine
We'll do everything we can. Your father is being a fool, talking nonsense. But it would be best for the two of you to pretend you agree to his foolish ideas. That way, it will be easier for you to delay this proposed marriage if you have to. Once we have time, we can do anything. You could suddenly have a terrible illness, which will mean postponing the wedding, or you will have had a terrifying nightmare that foretells disaster. Maybe you saw a dead man or broke a mirror or dreamed of a swamp. In any case, no one can force you to marry anyone unless you

say "yes." Now, I think it would be better if you two were not seen talking together. [*To Valère.*] Leave, and urge your friends to help you get what was promised to you. We'll go and warn Orgon's brother-in-law and enlist Elmire's help.

Valère [*To Mariane.*]
Whatever else is done, you are my chief source of hope.

Mariane [*To Valère.*]
I can't be responsible for a father's wishes, but I will not give myself to anyone other than to you.

Valère
You fill me with joy! And though I dare . . .

Dorine
Oh, lovers! They never stop chattering. Leave, I tell you.

Valère [*He takes a step and turns back.*]
Well . . .

Dorine
What's all this jibber-jabber? You, go this way. And you—the other. [*She pushes them by the shoulders.*]

Act III

Scene 1

DAMIS, DORINE

Damis
All right! Come on, lightning, strike me! Or maybe I should just bash my head against the wall! Don't try to stop me—I'm no fool!

Dorine
Calm down: all your father did was talk about it. Not everything that's proposed is done—there's a long way between starting a plan and finishing it.

Damis
I've got to stop that upstart in his tracks and tell him a thing or two.

Dorine
Slow down! Let Elmire help you with your father and that fellow. She's got some influence over Tartuffe. He agrees with everything she says; for all I know he's a little bit in love with her. Let's hope so! That would be a great help. After all this fuss

she'll have to send for Tartuffe so she can find out what he thinks of this marriage that disturbs you so much and warn him that if he encourages these plans, there will be unpleasant consequences. I haven't been able to see him; his valet says he's praying and that he'll be coming here soon. So leave, please, and let me wait for him.

Damis
I could stay for the whole conversation.

Dorine
Certainly not. They must be alone together.

Damis
I won't say a word to him.

Dorine
Don't be silly; I know how excitable you are—you'd just spoil everything. Leave.

Damis
No. I want to watch. I promise I won't become angry.

Dorine
What a nuisance you are. Here he comes! Go away. [*Damis hides.*]

Scene 2

Tartuffe, Dorine

Tartuffe [*Seeing Dorine.*]
Laurent, put away my hair shirt and my lash, and pray constantly for Heaven's instruction.[1] If someone comes to see me, say that I have gone to visit those in prison, to distribute the little alms money that I have.

Dorine
What an affected show-off!

Tartuffe
What do you want?

Dorine
To tell you . . .

Tartuffe [*He pulls a handkerchief from his pocket.*]
O Heaven! I beg you, take this handkerchief before you say another word.

Dorine
What?

1. See the note on this sentence on page 112.

Tartuffe
Cover your bosom, which I may not see. Souls are harmed and sinful thoughts are generated by such sights.

Dorine
Are you tempted that easily? Are you so preoccupied by the flesh? How come you're so hot? I'm not aroused that quickly; I could see you stark naked from head to toe without being the least bit tempted.

Tartuffe
A bit more modesty in your speech, Miss, or I shall leave immediately.

Dorine
No, no, I'll leave you alone; I only have a couple of words to tell you. Madame is coming down here and begs you to allow her to speak to you for a moment.

Tartuffe
Aha! Yes, very willingly.

Dorine [*To herself.*]
He mellows pretty quickly! I think my suspicions were right.

Tartuffe
Will she come soon?

Dorine
I think I hear her—yes, here she is in person; I'll leave you two together.

Scene 3

ELMIRE, TARTUFFE

Tartuffe
May Heaven in all its mercy assure your health in soul and body, and may it bless your days. This is the wish of the most humble of those inspired by sacred love.

Elmire
Thank you for those pious wishes. Now, let's sit down and be a bit more comfortable.

Tartuffe
Are you feeling somewhat better after your illness?

Elmire
Much better; the fever has broken.

Tartuffe
My own prayers do not have enough merit to attract Heaven's mercy, but I have not ceased praying for your return to health.

Elmire
Such zeal was unnecessary.

Tartuffe
No one can pray too much for your well-being; I would gladly give my own health for yours.

Elmire
That's pushing Christian charity very far; I thank you for your kindness.

Tartuffe
I do far less for you than you deserve.

Elmire
I wanted to talk to you privately about a certain matter, and I am very glad that no one is listening.

Tartuffe
I too am delighted; how sweet it is, Madame, to be alone with you. I have prayed many times for such an opportunity; only now has Heaven granted my desires.

Elmire
Well, now, I hope our conversation will let me know everything that's in your heart.

Tartuffe
And I hope only to show you my whole soul, and to assure you that I am not objecting to all your admiring visitors because of malice, but rather because of an irresistible passion and an overwhelming . . .

Elmire
I understood as much, and I know that you are concerned about my welfare.

Tartuffe [*He grasps the tips of her fingers.*]
Yes indeed, Madame, and my passion is such . . .

Elmire
Ouch! You are holding me too tightly.

Tartuffe
It is an excess of zeal, Madame. I have no intention of harming you, and indeed I would rather . . . [*He puts his hand on her knee.*]

Elmire
What is your hand doing there?

Tartuffe
I was fingering your skirt: the fabric is very soft.

Elmire
Please stop, I beg you; I am very ticklish. [*She pulls her chair back, and Tartuffe moves his forward.*]

Tartuffe
My word! What elegant embroidery! Such wonderful work is being done these days; I've never seen anything better made.

Elmire
Quite. Now, let's talk about our situation. I understand that my husband wants to break his promise and give his daughter to you. Is this true?

Tartuffe
He said a couple of words about it, but Madame, to tell the truth, this is not the happiness for which I yearn; I see elsewhere more delightful charms that would give me all the joy I desire.

Elmire
That is because worldly things don't attract you.

Tartuffe
The heart inside my bosom is not made of stone.

Elmire
Yet I think of you as devoted only to Heaven and untempted by anything here on earth.

Tartuffe
The love that draws us to eternal beauty does not stifle love of this world. Those perfect objects made by our Creator easily arouse our senses. His virtues are brilliantly reflected in yours; He has endowed you with extraordinary graces: beauty that startles the eyes and ravishes the heart. O perfect creature, I cannot see you without admiring the Author of nature, without feeling ardent love for the most beautiful portrait that He has ever painted. At first I feared that this secret passion was a clever temptation of the Evil One, and I even tried to avoid you, thinking you might be an obstacle to my salvation. But at last, most adorable beauty, I recognized that such love need not be sinful, that I could reconcile it with decency, and I surrendered to it. I dare, with great audacity, to offer you my heart, but I rely on your great kindness and not my own weak efforts. You are my hope, my good, my peace. My suffering or my salvation depends on you; your sole decree determines my happiness if you wish it, my sorrow if that is what you want.

Elmire
Such gallantry is, to tell the truth, rather surprising. You should, I think, have strengthened your heart somewhat more and thought more carefully about your intentions. A pious man like you, whom everyone calls . . .

Tartuffe
Ah! Pious one may be: one is still a man. The heart, seeing such celestial charms, is captivated and is incapable of reason. Perhaps what I have said seems unexpected, but after all, I am a man, not an angel; and if you fault this admission that I have made, blame your unearthly beauty, which provoked it. As soon as I saw it, you became the mistress of my being. Your inexpressibly sweet glances overwhelmed my stubborn heart,

conquered all fasting, weeping, prayers; your beauty became the object of all my former vows. My eyes and my tears have told you this a thousand times; to explain myself more clearly now, I must speak. If you are benevolent enough to acknowledge the suffering of your unworthy slave, if your kindness were willing to console me, to condescend to my inadequacy, I would offer, O marvel of delight, unparalleled devotion. Your reputation is not at risk; you need fear no disgrace because of me. All those men about town whom the ladies adore—they boast about their conquests and talk nonsense, they brag about their affairs and pollute the altar on which they have sacrificed their hearts. But men like me burn with hidden passion, and we keep our secrets safe; we take as good care of our reputation as we do of others'. Those who accept our hearts find love without scandal, pleasure without risk.

Elmire
I understand you; you've presented your argument quite clearly. But aren't you afraid that I might be in the mood to describe this gallant ardor to my husband and that, when he learns about the love you've described, he might want to rethink his affection for you?

Tartuffe
I know that you are infinitely kind, that you are quite willing to overlook my audacity, to forgive this human weakness, these violent expressions of a passionate love, and that you'll understand—as I see you can—that one is not blind and that a man is flesh and blood.

Elmire
Others might behave differently, of course, but I want to demonstrate my discretion. I'll say nothing of all this to my husband, but in return I ask something of you: encourage the marriage of Valère and Mariane; give up the unjust desire to enrich yourself at the expense of others and . . .

Scene 4

Damis, Elmire, Tartuffe

Damis [*Leaving the little closet in which he had hidden.*]
No, Madame, no, this must be known. I was here; I heard everything. I think Heaven itself must have made it possible; at last I can confront the arrogant traitor who usurped my position, and take revenge for his hypocrisy and insolence. Now I can reveal him to my father and show him the soul of this double-dealer who was making love to you!

Elmire
No, Damis: all he has to do is to behave better and try to be worthy of my generosity. Don't challenge me; I made a promise. I'm not inclined to make trouble. Real women laugh at such foolishness; they don't bother to tell their husbands about it.

Damis
You may have your reasons to react this way. I have my own reasons for reacting differently. Spare him—what a joke! His hypocrisy and insolence infuriate me and have made trouble in the family. This cheat has taken advantage of my father for much too long; he has frustrated me as well as Valère. Father must be made to recognize this traitor for what he is, and Heaven has now given me a way to do that. I'm grateful to Heaven for what it has done; all this is too useful for me to ignore. If I neglect this opportunity, I deserve to have it taken away.

Elmire
Damis . . .

Damis
No, thank you, I'll trust myself. I'm as happy as I can be; nothing you can say could persuade me to abandon the pleasures of revenge. I'm not going to wait any longer to put an end to all this; now I have just what I need to do that.

Scene 5

ORGON, DAMIS, TARTUFFE,
ELMIRE

Damis [*To Orgon, who has entered.*]
We're going to delight you, Father, with news of something that has just happened that will really surprise you. All your kindness has been rewarded, and this gentleman here has repaid you handsomely. He has just demonstrated how much he respects you: by doing his best to dishonor you. I've just caught him here making scandalous propositions to Madame, who is so generous, and whose desire for discretion is so strong, that she wanted to keep this from you. Well, I can't allow his audacity to go unrecognized, and I think that failing to tell you about it is a crime.

Elmire
Well, I believe that one should not trouble one's husband with such trifles. Honor doesn't depend on reporting silliness like this; all that's necessary is to defend oneself against it: at least that's my opinion. You wouldn't have said anything, Damis, if I'd had any influence on you. [*Elmire leaves.*]

Scene 6

ORGON, DAMIS, TARTUFFE

Orgon
Oh Heavens! Can I believe my ears?

Tartuffe
Yes, my brother, I am a wicked man, a guilty one, a miserable sinner, full of vice, the worst scoundrel who ever lived. Every moment of my life has been corrupt; it is a history of crime and filth; I see now that Heaven wants to mortify me with this punishment. I will not deny committing any crime I'm accused of. Believe what you have been told; give way to your anger; drive me from your home as if I were a criminal. I would suffer less shame than I deserve.

Orgon [*To Damis.*]
You traitor! How dare you tarnish his purity with such lies?

Damis
What? Does his hypocritical confession deceive you?

Orgon
Shut up, you damned wretch.

Tartuffe
Ah! Let him speak; you are wrong to accuse him. You would do better to believe him. Why be so lenient with me? Do you really

know what I'm capable of doing? Do you trust me and think I'm a good man because of what you see? No, no, you are letting appearances deceive you; I am much less than one thinks; I am considered a righteous man, but the truth is that I am worthless. [*To Damis.*] Yes, dear son, call me a traitor, monster, sinner, thief, murderer—accuse me of even worse things; I won't contradict you. I have earned those titles, and I am willing to kneel beneath the weight of this shame, which is the result of my criminal life.

Orgon [*To Tartuffe.*]
My brother—it's too much. [*To his son.*] Will you stop now, you traitor?

Damis
What? Were his speeches so seductive that . . .

Orgon
Shut up, you good-for-nothing! [*To Tartuffe, who is kneeling.*] Dear brother, stand up, I beseech you! [*To his son.*] Brute!

Damis
He can . . .

Orgon
Shut up.

Damis
I'm going mad! What, should I . . .

Orgon
If you say one more word, I'll break your arm.

Tartuffe
In the name of God, my brother, don't let yourself be carried away. I prefer to suffer the harshest penalty rather than to have him feel the slightest scratch.

Orgon [*To his son.*]
Ingrate!

Tartuffe
Leave him in peace. If I must plead for him on both my knees . . .

Orgon [*To Tartuffe.*][2]
Come—are you joking? [*To his son.*] Scoundrel! Don't you see how good he is?

Damis
Then . . .

Orgon
Stop!

Damis
What? I . . .

Orgon
Stop, I said. I know your motives for attacking him all too well. Everyone—wife, children, servants—hates and resents him. All of you are brazenly doing everything you can to take this holy man from me. But the more efforts you make to send him away, the more efforts I'll make to hold on to him. And I'll hurry to marry my daughter to him just to show up the arrogance of this family.

Damis
You'll force her to accept him?

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2. Reports of early performances indicate that at this moment Orgon fell to his knees and embraced the kneeling Tartuffe, and that they rose as Damis began to speak.

Orgon
Yes, ingrate, and I'll do it tonight just to spite you. Ha! I defy you all; you'll see that you must obey me, that I'm the master here.[3] Come on, apologize, you mischief-maker; kneel at his feet and ask for his forgiveness.

Damis
Who, me? From this scoundrel whose pretenses . . .

Orgon
Ah! You defy me? You insult him? A stick! A stick! [*To Tartuffe.*] Don't try to stop me. [*To his son.*] Right, leave now, and don't you dare to come back.

Damis
Yes, I'll leave, but . . .

Orgon
Hurry up! Out of here. I'm taking away your inheritance and giving you my curse.

3. See the note on this sentence on page 114.

Scene 7

ORGON, TARTUFFE

Orgon
To insult such a holy person!

Tartuffe
Dear Heaven! Pardon him for the pain he has given me! [*To Orgon.*] If you could imagine how dreadful it is to see someone trying to defame me to my dear brother . . .

Orgon
Alas . . .

Tartuffe
Just the thought of this ingratitude is pure torture to me . . . The horror . . . My heart is so heavy that I cannot speak; I feel as if I'm about to die.

Orgon [*He runs, weeping, to the door through which he chased his son.*] Wretch! I'm sorry that I held back and didn't destroy you on the spot. Dear brother, please calm yourself; don't become angry.

Tartuffe
I beg you, let us stop talking about this. I see what troubles I have brought upon this house; dear brother, I think I must leave.

Orgon
What? Are you joking?

Tartuffe
Everyone hates me, and I see all too well that they doubt my loyalty.

Orgon
What difference does that make? Do you see me paying attention to them?

Tartuffe
They won't stop doing it, and the stories you reject now may one day seem believable.

Orgon
No, dear brother, never.

Tartuffe
Oh, my brother, a woman can very easily dominate her husband.

Orgon
No, no.

Tartuffe
Let me leave quickly so that I can remove all cause for complaint.

Orgon
No, you'll stay: my life depends on it.

Tartuffe
Ah well, then I shall have to mortify myself. But, if you insist . . .

Orgon
Ah!

Tartuffe
Right, we'll say no more. But I know what must be done. One's reputation is a delicate matter, and to prevent anyone from gossiping or taking umbrage, I shall avoid your wife, and you will not see me . . .

Orgon
No. To spite them, you must visit her frequently. Infuriating people is my greatest joy. I want you to be seen with her at all hours of the day. And that's not all: I'll defy them further by making you my heir, right now, fair and square, and I'll give you all that I have. A true and honest friend, whom I will have for my son-in-law, is dearer to me than son, wife, family. Will you accept what I offer?

Tartuffe
In all things may Heaven's will be done.

Orgon
The poor fellow! Come, we'll write the document and let the others choke on their envy.

Act IV

Scene 1

CLÉANTE, TARTUFFE

Cléante
Yes, everyone is talking about it. Trust me when I tell you that what people are saying doesn't reflect well on you. I'm glad I met you, Monsieur, so that I could tell you exactly what I think. I haven't investigated everything that people are saying; I'll assume it's true and start with what I believe is the worst part. Granted that Damis didn't behave well and that people are accusing you falsely, wouldn't a true Christian forgive him and stifle his instinct for revenge? Is this incident a reason to let a father drive his son away? I must tell you—speaking frankly—that everyone is scandalized by this; if you believe what I've told you, you should make peace between the two of them and not push things to extremes. Let go of your resentment, sacrifice it to God, and reconcile the son and his father.

Tartuffe
Alas! I would love to; I feel no bitterness toward him. I pardon him; I do not accuse him of anything. With all my heart I'd like to help him, but that would not be in the best interests of

Heaven. If he comes back, I will have to leave. After his unbelievable performance, any relations between us would be scandalous. God knows what people would think! They would assume that I was being devious, that, knowing I'm guilty, I'm simply pretending to be charitable so that I could catch him and force him to be silent.

Cléante
No phony excuses, please, Monsieur; they are quite threadbare. Has Heaven made you responsible for its interests? If it wants to punish the guilty, does it need your help? Leave vengeance to God. Instead you should remember His insistence that we forgive the sins of others, and not substitute human legalisms for God's commands. Come on! Can a foolish concern for what people think keep you from the glory of a noble act? No, no: let's do what Heaven commands and not let other worries distract and confuse us.

Tartuffe
I've already told you that my heart forgives him, and that is what Heaven commands. But after today's shocking insults, Heaven does not command that I live with him.

Cléante
Does it command you to obey his father's capricious act and to accept the gift of a fortune that the law forbids you to claim?

Tartuffe
Those who know me will not believe that I act out of self-interest. Worldly goods have no attraction for me; I'm not dazzled by their deceitful appearance. If I have decided to accept the gift his father wishes to give me, it's only, I assure you, because I fear it may fall into unworthy hands, that those who share it will use it for some criminal purpose, and not—as I will—for the glory of the Lord and the welfare of my neighbor.

Cléante

Come, come, Monsieur, don't let excessive scruples persuade you that the rightful heir could behave that way. Let him have his inheritance and run the risk himself without your interference. And consider: if he were to misuse it, that would be better for you than being accused of trying to take it from him. I'm surprised that you had no misgivings about permitting this; does religious zeal include the precept that one should defraud the rightful heir? And if Heaven does teach you that there is an invincible obstacle to living with Damis, shouldn't you, as a virtuous man, withdraw honorably rather than allow the family's son to be driven out on account of you? Believe me, Monsieur, that would give your rectitude . . .

Tartuffe

It is, Monsieur, three-thirty. A pious duty requires me to go upstairs; please excuse me now.

Cléante

Ah!

Scene 2

ELMIRE, MARIANE,
CLÉANTE, DORINE

Dorine [*To Cléante.*]
Dear Monsieur, please help us with Mariane. She is horribly unhappy; the arrangements that her father made for this evening have pushed her to despair. Here he comes. We're all so upset. Please work with us; somehow or other, we must stop this terrible plan.

Scene 3

ORGON, ELMIRE, MARIANE,
CLÉANTE, DORINE

Orgon
Ah! I'm delighted to see you all together. [*To Mariane.*] I'm carrying a contract that will please you, and you know already what it says.

Mariane [*Kneeling.*]
Please, Father, in the name of Heaven, release me from my misery, from my vows of filial piety, from the obedience that could push me to confess to Heaven that the life you gave me is now a torment. If you must take away my hopes and forbid me to marry the man I love, I beseech you, on my knees—save me from being given to someone I abhor; don't force me to a desperate act by insisting on your power.

Orgon [*He feels himself weakening.*]
Come, be strong, my heart: no human weakness.

Mariane
Your affection for him doesn't hurt me. Let it shine, give him everything you own, and if you need more, give him what is mine as well. I consent willingly; I surrender all that I have to you. But don't give *me* to him; instead let me enter a convent and live under its discipline for the rest of my days.

Orgon
Oh yes, women become very religious when their fathers challenge their romantic ideas! Stand up! The more your heart rejects him, the more meritorious it will be to accept him. You want to mortify yourself: you can do so in this marriage. Stop irritating me!

Dorine
But what . . .

Orgon
Quiet, you! You can gossip with your cronies, but I forbid you to say another word here.

Cléante
If you would permit a word of advice . . .

Orgon
Brother, your advice is the best in the world, well thought out, admirable. But excuse me for not taking any of it.

Elmire [*To her husband.*]
I don't know what to say when I see all this; your blindness astonishes me. He must have intoxicated you and warned you well since you spring this on us now.

Orgon
With respect, Madame, I know what I have seen. As for that scoundrel my son, I know how you spoil him. You were afraid to condemn him for playing a trick on this poor fellow; well, you were too calm to be believable. You should have been more upset.

Elmire
Does a foolish declaration of love really threaten a woman's honor? Must we glare and insult people when they say such things to us? As far as I'm concerned, statements like his make

me laugh; I dislike making a fuss about them. I prefer quiet good manners; I don't want to be one of those screeching prudes who defend their honor with claws and teeth and insist on scratching faces. Heaven keep me from such behavior! A virtuous woman doesn't need to act like a spitfire; a cool rejection is quite enough to discourage a lover.

Orgon
Well, I know what happened, and I won't change my mind.

Elmire
I must say, I continue to be amazed by your stubbornness. Would you change your mind if I showed that we are all telling the truth?

Orgon
Showed?

Elmire
Yes.

Orgon
Nonsense.

Elmire
How so? If I could prove it without a doubt?

Orgon
Empty talk.

Elmire
What a man! At least answer me. I am not asking you to trust us. But what if you were in a place where you could see and hear everything, what would you say about your righteous man then?

Orgon
In that case, I would say . . . I would say . . . I would say nothing; such things are impossible.

Elmire
You've accused me of telling untruths long enough. I want you, without moving one inch, to be a witness to what I have said.

Orgon
Right. I'll take you at your word. Let's see how clever you are and whether you can keep your promise.

Elmire
Ask him to come here.

Dorine
He's very clever; it may not be easy to trick him.

Elmire
No, it's easy to be fooled by what we want; our vanity is always ready to betray us. [*Speaking to Cléante and Mariane.*] Have him come here, and you go away.

Scene 4

ELMIRE, ORGON

Elmire [*To Orgon.*]
Come here and get underneath this table.

Orgon
What?

Elmire
You have to hide.

Orgon
Why under the table?

Elmire
Oh good Heavens, just do it. I have a plan, and you'll be the judge. Hide, I tell you, and when you're under there, make sure that no one sees or hears you.

Orgon
I must say I'm putting up with a lot; remember, if there are any difficulties, you'll have to get out of them by yourself.

Elmire
I don't think you will have anything to complain about. [*To Orgon, who has hidden under the table.*] I warn you: I'm going to start in a very strange way; don't let yourself be shocked. No

matter what I say, let me say it; I'm doing it to convince you, as I promised. To get that hypocrite to take off his mask, I'll have to act very sweetly, play up to his lecherous advances, let him behave brazenly. I'm doing it only for you, and I'm doing it to trap him—I'll pretend to encourage him until you're convinced, and I'll stop the moment you ask me to. You'll be the one to put an end to his crazy passion as soon as you think he has gone far enough—you'll save me from any more shame once you have seen what you need. You'll protect your interests; you'll be the master, and . . . Here he comes. Don't let him see you.

Scene 5

TARTUFFE, ELMIRE, ORGON

Tartuffe
I was told that you wanted to see me here.

Elmire
Yes, I have something a bit private to tell you. But close that door before I say more, and look everywhere to be sure no one can overhear us. We don't need more incidents like the one that just happened. I've never been so startled in all my life; what Damis did terrified me on your behalf. You saw how I tried to disrupt his scheme and calm him down. I must say that I was so dismayed that I couldn't think of how to contradict him. But happily all ended well, and the situation is much better now. Everyone so respects you that the storm has blown over. My husband cannot possibly take offense: indeed, to put a stop to any malicious gossip, he wants us to be together as much as possible. That's why I'm able to be here alone with you without fear of scandal and to reveal, perhaps a bit too quickly, a heart that's receptive to your passion.

Tartuffe
Such words are difficult to understand, given the way you spoke just a few moments ago.

Elmire
Oh, did what I said then trouble you? How little you know of a woman's heart if you didn't understand why my reaction was so lukewarm! Modesty is always fighting with desire. No matter how much love persuades us, we always feel a tiny bit of shame. So we start by pushing our lover away, but anyone can see that our hearts have yielded. We say one thing and mean another; rejecting is really a promise of something else. I'm admitting all this because my modesty has given up the fight. But since I've begun to speak freely—would I have tried to restrain Damis, would I have listened so carefully to your offer of love, would I have behaved as I did if your proposition hadn't pleased me? And when I pushed you to reject that marriage, shouldn't that have hinted at my own interests, my distress that this wedding would force me to share a heart that I wanted for my own?

Tartuffe
It is, dear Madame, a delight to hear such words from someone whom one loves. The honey that trickles through me is one that the mouth has never tasted. My only concern is the joy of pleasing you; my heart is blessed by your confessions. But I hope you will allow that heart to feel a bit uncertain of its happiness. You might simply be trying—honorably—to break off the proposed marriage. Let me be frank: I cannot trust those delicious words you have spoken unless you give me some evidence that you really mean them; your behavior must assure me of your feelings.

Elmire [*She coughs to warn her husband.*]
What? Do you want to move so quickly, to have me reveal all my affection at once? I have tortured myself by making this confession; isn't that enough for you? Will you only be satisfied by my complete surrender?

Tartuffe
The less merit one has, the less one dares to hope. Words alone, in these matters, are little reassurance. We may imagine all

sorts of good fortune; we must enjoy it before we believe in it. Since I do not believe I deserve your kindness, I cannot believe the happiness I dare to dream of. Indeed, I cannot believe anything, dear Madame, until actions themselves convince me.

Elmire
Lord! Your love is tyrannical; it insists on what it wants so violently! I feel overwhelmed! Come on—can't I prepare properly? Couldn't you give me a moment to breathe? Is it right to push me like this, to demand what you want the moment you want it? You risk jeopardizing your good reputation when you take advantage of it.

Tartuffe
But if you welcome my advances, why refuse more direct proofs?

Elmire
How could I consent without offending Heaven, of which you speak so often?

Tartuffe
If it's only Heaven that stands between us, that's easy for me to deal with; that should certainly not make you hold back.

Elmire
But Heaven's laws are so frightening!

Tartuffe
Let me chase away your foolish fears, Madame; I know how to dismiss such scruples. It's true that Heaven forbids certain pleasures [*A villain speaks these lines.*], but it's possible to make bargains. Depending on what's needed, there are ways to accommodate our consciences and to justify bad acts by the purity of our intentions. I can be your teacher, Madame; you have only to let me be your guide. Satisfy my desire; never fear,

I'll answer for it all and take your sin on my shoulders.—You have a bad cough, Madame.

Elmire
Yes, it's torturing me.

Tartuffe
May I offer you a bit of licorice?

Elmire
It's a stubborn cold; I fear there's no remedy for it.

Tartuffe
That certainly is a shame.

Elmire
Yes, more than I can say.

Tartuffe
In the end, I assure you, it's easy to dismiss your scruples. I promise complete secrecy; only when others make a fuss can there be any harm. Something is scandalous only when it is known; sin that no one knows is no sin.

Elmire [*Having coughed again.*]
Well, I see I must surrender, and let you have your way. I can't expect you to be content with less. I give in. I'm sorry that things have gone so far, that I must yield despite myself. But since you insist on it, since you won't believe what I have said, and require more convincing proof, I'm forced to make you happy. If doing so carries with it some guilt, so much the worse for the one who forces me; surely I am blameless.

Tartuffe
Yes indeed, Madame; I am responsible, and the act in itself . . .

Elmire
Please open that door, and look to be sure that my husband isn't in the hall.

Tartuffe
What need to be so careful? He is, between us, a man you can lead by the nose; he's proud of our relationship, and I've persuaded him to see everything and to believe nothing.

Elmire
Never mind that; please take a good look.

Scene 6

Orgon, Elmire

Orgon [*Climbing out from under the table.*]
What an abominable man! I can't believe it! I'm overwhelmed!

Elmire
What? You're coming out so soon? Don't be silly. Go back under; it's not yet time to come out. Just wait to the end to be sure of what you see; don't trust your suspicions.

Orgon
No. Nothing more wicked ever came out of Hell.

Elmire
Goodness, don't be too quick to believe. Go slowly; let yourself be thoroughly convinced; wait to be sure you haven't misunderstood. [*She hides her husband behind her.*]

Scene 7

TARTUFFE, ELMIRE, ORGON

Tartuffe
Everything is as I had hoped: I looked everywhere, no one is there, and my delighted soul . . .

Orgon [*Stopping him.*]
Slowly now! Your desire pushes you much too fast; don't become so excited so quickly. Oh, oh, you virtuous man, you want to bless me! How quickly your soul yields to temptation! You'll marry my daughter and seduce my wife! I always wondered what the truth was; I always suspected that you'd change your tune. But I've seen quite enough: I'm satisfied; I don't need to see any more.

Elmire
This is not the way I wanted things to happen, but I was driven to behave this way.

Tartuffe
What? Do you think? . . .

Orgon
That's enough, not another word. Get out of here immediately.

Tartuffe
My plan . . .

Orgon
Your comments are worthless here; leave at once.

Tartuffe
You're the one who has to leave, you, who pretend to be the master. The house belongs to me. I'll make that known, and I'll prove that you have no recourse, no way to challenge me with these cowardly tricks. You can't injure me. I have the power to resist; to face down your claims; to avenge Heaven, which you have attacked; to make you sorry you tried to throw me out.

Scene 8

ELMIRE, ORGON

Elmire
What is he saying? What does he mean?

Orgon
I don't know; this is no laughing matter.

Elmire
What?

Orgon
I see how wrong I was; I should never have made that gift.

Elmire
Gift?

Orgon
Yes, it's signed and sealed, and there's something else that worries me.

Elmire
What's that?

Orgon
I'll tell you in a moment. Right now I've got to be sure that my little box is upstairs.

Act V

Scene 1

ORGON, CLÉANTE

Cléante
Where are you going?

Orgon
Damn! I don't know!

Cléante
I think you and I should talk about the best thing to do in the circumstances.

Orgon
That little box is on my mind; I'm more worried about it than about anything else.

Cléante
What's in that mysterious box?

Orgon
Argas, that friend for whom I feel so sorry, secretly gave it to me as he was escaping; he said it contained papers on which his life and his possessions depend.

Cléante
Then why did you let someone else have it?

Orgon
It was on my conscience. I went to that traitor to confide in him; he persuaded me that I should let him guard the box so that if Argas were investigated, I'd be able to deny having done him a favor: that way, telling a lie wouldn't be on my conscience.

Cléante
As I understand it, you're in trouble. Let me speak candidly: you don't seem to have taken your responsibility for the box and the secret seriously enough. Promises like that have significant consequences. You'll have to approach Tartuffe more tactfully, so that his hold on you doesn't become stronger.

Orgon
Damn! To hide deceit and wickedness under such a fine appearance of piety! And I welcomed him as a poor beggar who had nothing . . . That's it! I'm finished with all these virtuous souls; I'll avoid them like the plague and become worse than any devil.

Cléante
Come on! You've blustered enough! You always exaggerate; you lack judgment; you throw yourself from one extreme to the other. You see that you were wrong, that phony piety took advantage of you: but why correct one mistake by rushing into another that's even worse? Just because you've known one scoundrel, do you think that everyone else is just as bad? Here's a knave who deceived you brazenly by pretending to be a pious

ascetic; do you think everyone is like him, that there are no truly religious people? Let freethinkers have foolish ideas like those; you should distinguish between mere appearances and true virtue. Avoid taking impostors too seriously, but don't insult real commitment. If you insist on leaning too far to one side or the other, try to err on the side of generosity.

Scene 2

DAMIS, ORGON, CLÉANTE

Damis
Father, is it true that this rogue is threatening you? That he's forgotten all the benefits he has received? Is that arrogant coward—who deserves to be punished—using your gifts against you?

Orgon
Yes, Son, it's true. No one has ever suffered as I do.

Damis
I'll cut off his ears; we can't ignore his insolence. I must free you of him at once; I must kill him.

Cléante
There speaks a brave little lad; come on, calm down. We live under the rule of law; we can't take violence into our own hands.

Scene 3

MME. PERNELLE, MARIANE,
ELMIRE, DORINE, DAMIS,
ORGON, CLÉANTE

Mme. Pernelle
What's all this? I've been hearing terribly strange stories.

Orgon
Unheard-of things have happened, which I've seen with my own eyes. Just look at what my good deeds have cost me. I eagerly welcomed a miserable man, housed him, considered him my brother, loaded him with gifts, promised him my daughter and all my possessions. And meanwhile this traitor, this wretch, tried to seduce my wife; and as if that hadn't been enough, he's taking advantage of my benevolence to threaten me. He wants to ruin me by using the gifts I foolishly gave him; he wants to drive me from my house and reduce me to the condition in which I found him.

Dorine
The poor fellow.

Mme. Pernelle
My son, I cannot possibly believe that he would have done such a vile deed.

Orgon
Pardon?

Mme. Pernelle
Worthy folks are always envied.

Orgon
What in the world do you mean by that remark, Mother?

Mme. Pernelle
That people carry on in strange ways here, and everyone knows how much he is hated.

Orgon
What does hate have to do with what you have heard?

Mme. Pernelle
When you were a little boy I told you this a hundred times: virtue is always a target—envious people may die; envy doesn't.

Orgon
But what does that lesson have to do with what is happening today?

Mme. Pernelle
People have been saying ridiculous things about him.

Orgon
I tell you I saw it all with my own eyes.

Mme. Pernelle
Spiteful gossipers tell dreadful stories.

Orgon
You're pushing me to extremes, Mother. I tell you I saw this brazen behavior with my own eyes.

Mme. Pernelle
Nothing in this world can deflect the venom of malice.

Orgon
What you are saying makes no sense at all. I tell you I saw what I saw, myself, with my own eyes. Do I have to box your ears to make you listen?

Mme. Pernelle
My Lord! You know how often appearances can be deceptive; you mustn't always believe what you see.

Orgon
I can't stand this.

Mme. Pernelle
Everyone is a victim of false suspicion, and sometimes even good deeds are misinterpreted.

Orgon
Am I to believe that he tried to seduce my wife simply out of Christian charity?

Mme. Pernelle
If you are going to accuse someone, you have to have a good reason and be absolutely sure of what you know.

Orgon
Damn it all! Be absolutely sure? So I was supposed to wait until I saw him . . . I was about to say something indecent.

Mme. Pernelle
It's true that he can be overzealous, but I cannot possibly bring myself to believe that he tried to do the things he is said to have done.

Orgon
Look here! If you weren't my mother, I don't know what I'd do.

Dorine
Turn about is fair play, Monsieur: you didn't want to believe, and no one believes you.

Cléante
We're wasting time with this foolish talk; we should be using it to stop this wretch who's threatening us all.

Damis
How far do you think he'll dare to go?

Elmire
This lawsuit seems ridiculous. Who could take it seriously? Isn't his ingratitude all too obvious?

Cléante
Don't be too sure; he has the means to prove you wrong. Even a flimsy scheme can trap people when a clique supports it. I'll say it again: with the resources he has, he shouldn't be confronted directly.

Orgon
True enough, but what to do? I'm infuriated when I think about this traitor's arrogance.

Cléante
I really wish that there could be some way to reconcile the two of you.

Elmire
If I'd known the weapons he held, I would never have provoked him, and my . . .

Orgon
What does that man want? Go and find out right away! I'm in no condition to see anyone.

Scene 4

M. LOYAL, MME. PERNELLE,
ORGON, DAMIS, MARIANE,
DORINE, ELMIRE, CLÉANTE

M. Loyal
Good morning, my dear sister; please allow me to speak to Monsieur.

Dorine
He has company with him; I doubt that he would be able to see someone.

M. Loyal
I do not wish to intrude. I believe that my mission, rather than causing him any discomfort, will please him.

Dorine
Your name?

M. Loyal
Just tell him that I have come on behalf of Monsieur Tartuffe, on a matter that will, he says, be gratifying.

Dorine
There's a soft-spoken man who comes, he says, from Monsieur Tartuffe on a matter that will, he says, be gratifying.

Cléante
We'll have to see this man and find out what he wants.

Orgon
Maybe he has come to settle our differences. How should I treat him?

Cléante
Don't let him see that you're angry, and if he speaks about coming to some arrangement, you must listen to him.

M. Loyal
Greetings, Monsieur. May Heaven vanquish those who wish to harm you; my wish is that all may go well for you.

Orgon
This affable introduction makes me feel better; perhaps there can be some accommodation.

M. Loyal
Your family has always been dear to me, and I was a servant of your honorable father.

Orgon
Monsieur, I am ashamed that I do not recognize you and ask you to forgive me for not knowing your name.

M. Loyal
My name is Loyal; I am from Normandy, a beadle, who has for forty years honorably filled that position, thanks be to God. With your permission, Monsieur, I have come with a court order to dispossess . . .

Orgon
What! You have come . . .

M. Loyal
Monsieur, calm yourself; it's only an order to leave the premises, you and your family, put your furniture out, make room for someone else without delay, as the situation requires . . .

Orgon
Me? Leave the premises?

M. Loyal
Yes, Monsieur, if you please. As everyone knows, the house now belongs entirely to our good Monsieur Tartuffe. He's the owner of all your holdings, by virtue of a contract that I have here. It's properly executed; it cannot be challenged.

Damis
What unbelievable insolence! I've never seen anything like it.

M. Loyal
Monsieur, I have no business with you; I address myself to this gentleman. He is reasonable and calm, and since he knows the way a respectable man should behave, I am sure he will not oppose the law.

Orgon
But . . .

M. Loyal
Monsieur, I know that you would not obstruct justice for anything in the world and that, being an honorable person, you will permit me to carry out the orders I have been given.

Damis
Get yourself and your staff of office out of here.

M. Loyal
Monsieur, please tell your son to keep quiet or leave. I should hate to have to make note of all this and add it to my testimony.

Dorine
This Monsieur Loyal seems to be a pretty disloyal fellow to me!

M. Loyal
I am always perfectly civil to the well-to-do; I was only willing to do this because I wanted to please you and save you from someone who might have less affection for you and would treat you less gently.

Orgon
And what could be worse than telling honest folks that they must leave their home?

M. Loyal
We're giving you time—I won't require you to comply until tomorrow. All I'll do is spend the night here with ten of my men—no fuss, no scenes. Just for the sake of formalities, please give me your keys. I won't disturb you or allow anything inappropriate to happen. But tomorrow you must be quick to empty everything out, right to the last spoon. My people will assist you—I've brought strong men to help you haul everything out of the house. No one could be more generous, in my opinion, and since I'm treating you so kindly, I hope you'll respond as you should and not make any difficulties for me.

Orgon
I'd gladly give a hundred pieces of gold—if I had any—for the pleasure of punching this fellow in the snout.

Cléante
Let it be; don't make matters worse.

Damis
I'm itching to attack this insolent fellow.

Dorine
Since you're so strong and handsome, Monsieur Loyal, I doubt that a few good thwacks with a stick would do you much harm.

M. Loyal
It's quite easy to punish such disrespectful talk, Miss, and laws apply to women as well as to men.

Cléante
Enough of all this, Monsieur; please give me the summons, and leave us alone.

M. Loyal
Until tomorrow. May Heaven bless you all!

Orgon
May it curse you and the one who sent you!

Scene 5

ORGON, CLÉANTE, MARIANE,
ELMIRE, MME. PERNELLE,
DORINE, DAMIS

Orgon
Well, Mother, now do you see that I was right? What just happened confirms what I told you. Now will you acknowledge his treachery?

Mme. Pernelle
I'm speechless; I can't believe my ears!

Dorine
Don't complain or blame him. His pious wishes have come true. He cares for the welfare of others; he knows that worldly wealth often corrupts, and out of pure charity he has taken it from you to save you.

Orgon
Once again: be quiet!

Cléante
Let's see whether we can get some useful advice.

Elmire
Go—tell everyone about the way this traitor lied to us. Behavior like that must surely void any contract. Once people know how he betrayed us, no one will let him succeed.

Scene 6

VALÈRE, ORGON, CLÉANTE,
ELMIRE, MARIANE,
MME. PERNELLE,
DAMIS, DORINE

Valère
Monsieur, I'm deeply sorry to disturb you now, but in the present circumstances I feel I must. A very close friend who knows my concern for you has told me a state secret; something has happened that means you'll have to flee. That villain who took such advantage of you has denounced you to the King, accusing you of treason, and has given him that box that you had hidden. I don't know what crime you are accused of, but a summons against you has been sworn and Tartuffe himself is ordered to come with the officer who is to arrest you.

Cléante
So this is his weapon! That's how he thinks he can claim all your possessions!

Orgon
Animals: that's what men are!

Valère
Any delay may be fatal. My carriage is waiting at the door to take you away, and here are a thousand pieces of gold. Lose no time. This is an explosive situation; the only way to defend

yourself is to run from it. I promise to lead you to a safe place, and I'll go with you all the way.

Orgon
Oh Lord! How grateful I am for your kindness! I'll have to thank you properly at another time; I hope Heaven will allow me to recognize your generosity properly. Good-bye, take care of yourselves . . .

Cléante
Go quickly, Brother; we'll think about what to do.

Last Scene

THE OFFICER, TARTUFFE,
VALÈRE, ORGON, ELMIRE,
MARIANE, MME. PERNELLE,
DORINE, CLÉANTE, DAMIS

Tartuffe
Just a moment, Monsieur, just a moment, not so fast. You won't need to go far to find a place to stay. You are a prisoner, by order of the King.

Orgon
So, you snake in the grass; you kept this blow for last. Is this the way you'll destroy me? Is your treachery complete? Is this the final touch?

Tartuffe
Your insults cannot annoy me; Heaven has taught me to endure all for its sake.

Cléante
Admirable restraint!

Damis
Listen to him shamelessly taking the name of Heaven in vain!

Tartuffe
All that ranting fails to disturb me; I simply want to do my duty.

Mariane
You can surely be proud of what you are doing—this act is a credit to you.

Tartuffe
Any act on behalf of the person who sent me here can only be honorable.

Orgon
But have you forgotten that my generosity pulled you out of your misery, you ungrateful wretch?

Tartuffe
Yes, I know what help it might have given me, but the wishes of the King are my first obligation. The justifiable urgency of that sacred duty stifles any gratitude in my heart, and to that duty I would sacrifice even more powerful demands: friends, wife, family, even myself.

Elmire
Fraud!

Dorine
How neatly he dresses up his treachery in pious words.

Cléante
But if this religious zeal that you claim and boast about is so perfect, how is it that Orgon found you making love to his wife? Why did you wait to denounce him until his own honor forced him to chase you out? I'll say nothing at this point about the fact that he gave you all his wealth, but why are you still willing to accept it when you claim he is a traitor?

Tartuffe [*To the officer of the court who has come with him.*]
Monsieur, stop all this nonsense, please, and get on with the orders you have been given.

The Officer
Yes, we have waited too long; you've reminded me to do my duty. My orders, which I will execute, require you to follow me immediately to the prison that has been assigned to you.

Tartuffe
Who? I, Monsieur?

The Officer
Yes, you.

Tartuffe
Why to prison?

The Officer
I am not obliged to give you an explanation. Monsieur [*To Orgon.*], please calm yourself. We live under a king who is the enemy of fraud, a king who is guided by moderation and intelligence, who knows all his subjects, who is never deceived by impostors. Mere acquaintance does not influence him; he knows what the truth is and understands what is happening; he sees to it that honorable men are properly recognized. He loves virtue, but he recognizes the reality of wickedness; a rogue like this might set traps but could never deceive him. The King knows this man's heart; when Tartuffe came to accuse you, he simply revealed his own treachery. Someone else had reported this charlatan's long train of abuses, his cowardly ingratitude and disloyalty. The King let things go this far simply to see how far they would go and to demonstrate conclusively how firmly he could act. Here and now he takes all the documents that this traitor claims are his and nullifies the contract that puts your wealth in his hands. Moreover, in recognition of the zeal you exercised on your monarch's behalf in the past, he pardons you for accepting the secret information that your friend gave you. The King

rewards good deeds, sometimes when it's least expected; he prefers to remember the good than to focus on error.[1]

Dorine
May Heaven be praised!

Mme. Pernelle
I can breathe again.

Elmire
What a wonderful outcome!

Mariane
Who could have dared to expect it?

Orgon [*To Tartuffe.*]
There you are, you traitor . . .

Cléante
Dear brother—stop. Don't stoop to indignity. Leave that miserable person to his misfortune; don't add to his remorse. Pray that he'll turn toward virtue, that he'll change his way of life and reject his vices, and that our great monarch will moderate his strict justice. Go to the King; acknowledge his magnanimity, and thank him for his kindness toward you.

Orgon
Yes, well said; let's go gratefully to the King to praise his generosity. And once we have begun to pay our debt to him, let's think of someone else's happiness and reward Valère's devotion and sincerity by celebrating his marriage to Mariane.

The End

1. See the note on this speech on page 115.

Notes

Note on the names of characters in *Tartuffe*

We meet the characters before the curtain goes up, each (save three) defined by his or her relationship with the other characters. Mme. Pernelle, mother of Orgon; Orgon, husband of Elmire; Elmire, wife of Orgon; Damis, son of Orgon; Mariane, daughter of Orgon and beloved of Valère; Valère, beloved of Mariane; Cléante, brother of Elmire; Tartuffe, a religious hypocrite; Dorine, companion and maid to Mariane; M. Loyal, a beadle; an officer; Flipote, servant of Mme. Pernelle. A perfectly ordinary list—except for the names. It's true that the consonants and vowels in Flipote and Pernelle invite us to think these names are meant to be comical; Mariane is quite conventional, and Valère sounds enough like *valiant* in French to be an appropriate name for a young lover. But what about Orgon, Elmire, Damis, Cléante, and Tartuffe? It's highly unlikely that these were names given at a baptismal font in the Paris of Louis XIV.

Stepping back from *Tartuffe* and looking at *The Misanthrope, The School for Wives, The Doctor Despite Himself,* and *The Miser,* we see the same pattern of names: some recognizably French, others clearly from some other idiom. To the audience in the theater of 1669, the source was obvious: these non-French names are Greek or pseudo-Greek, taken directly from the classics or copied from the novels and poems of the *Précieux* and the *Précieuses,* the highly educated nobles and gentlefolk of both sexes who considered themselves arbiters of society, manners, education, and language.

England, Spain, and Italy had had equivalents—the Euphuists in England, the Gongorists in Spain, the Della Cruscans in Florence—but these had not had the influence of the *Précieuses* in France. Parisian society was captivated by the elegance and refinement of the learned ladies whose letters and novels, derived from Greek histories and drama (some of which, like *Artamène, ou Le Grand Cyrus* by Mme. de Scudéry, extended to several volumes), were impatiently bought, diligently read, and enthusiastically imitated. So the playgoers in the theater of the Palais Royal or at Versailles recognized the names in Molière's comedies as soon as they heard them.

The name they did not recognize was Tartuffe. Some scholars believe that the name came from the Italian *tartufo,* or truffle: bulgy and subterranean, a fungus attached to the roots of noble trees like oaks and beeches. Others think Molière simply invented it. In either case, it was an announcement to the audience that this character emerged from a context different from that of the elegant and learned *Précieux.*

Characters in twentieth- and twenty-first-century drama have the same names as we in the audience have. In some cases, dramatists have deliberately started with a real person—*Einstein on the Beach, Nixon in China, The Madness of King George III*—and have invented or extrapolated to create new insights into the conventional understanding of these protagonists. In other plays, less obviously tied to historic figures, the names are those we hear every day. The hero of *Death of a Salesman* is Willy; James, Edmund, and Mary are the principal characters in *A Long Day's Journey into Night;* Shaw's characters include Barbara, Charles, Andrew, Eliza, Freddy, Henry, and Alfred.

Then what was Molière doing when he chose names that reminded his audience of the Greek and Roman classics and of the elaborations of the *Précieux*? The performance history of *Tartuffe* answers the question. First performed in 1664—and immediately banned, revised, performed, and banned again in 1667—it was finally presented in February 1669, and only then was it allowed to continue. With Molière himself playing

Orgon, it enjoyed the longest run and the largest box-office receipts of any of Molière's plays.

Religious hypocrisy was an inflammatory topic at that time. It was one thing to present a comedy that criticized the follies or even the vices of the time; it was another to appear to censure the behavior of prelates and their noble supporters who were highly placed political figures. The names allowed Molière to claim that he was writing a general comedy, to put some distance between the characters on the stage and those who might have been their models.

Censorship in the Western world today poses no threat to comedians; writers can afford to name names and point fingers on television, on radio, in the theater, and in the movies. Would a comedy like *Tartuffe* be written today? In what circumstances might playwrights in Paris, London, and New York choose names for their characters that would disguise or dilute the criticism they were making of contemporary figures or morals? By being explicit, what has been lost or gained?

Act I, scene 2: Dorine: "She's nothing compared to her son [Orgon]. . . . In the recent 'troubles' he was known as a level-headed man who backed his king courageously."

"Troubles" is a tactful reference to almost a decade of civil war in France, a period of intrigue and shifting political and familial loyalties. The first manifestation of these troubles was called the Fronde (Uprising) of the Parlement (1648–1649). Anne of Austria, mother as well as regent for her son Louis XIV, and her chief minister, Cardinal Mazarin, decreed that the crown would raise revenue by stopping the pay of all magistrates of the high court for four years. In return, the Parlement presented a document severely limiting the power of the crown. Members of the Parlement, led by the Prince of Condé and

Armand de Conti (one of Molière's patrons), were arrested; riots ensued; and royal troops besieged Paris until an agreement was reached with the Parlement in 1649.

But the nobles resented the power of Anne of Austria and Cardinal Mazarin and in 1650 began a second Fronde. The Prince of Condé, in alliance with the king of Spain, again provoked battles elsewhere in France and riots in Paris that drove Anne of Austria, the young Louis XIV, and Cardinal Mazarin out of the city for almost two years. Long negotiations re-established royal power, although real domestic peace was not finally confirmed until 1658.

Molière's major plays were written after 1653, when Paris was once again free to enjoy the theater, the court could indulge in elaborate balls and spectacles, the literary ladies and their salons could meet for untroubled conversation, and the loyal bourgeoisie, from whose ranks the King increasingly drew his most important ministers, could begin to profit from their financial security and social status. Such was Orgon's situation in the world until Tartuffe came into his life and his household.

Act III, scene 2: Tartuffe: "Laurent, put away my hair shirt and my lash."

When at last Tartuffe appears, this is how he introduces himself. Thus far the audience has seen him only indirectly: Dorine described a glutton who boasts of his social standing; Orgon described a man so tenderhearted that he grieves over a squeezed louse; Mme. Pernelle said that Heaven sent him to Orgon's house; Mariane said she would rather die than marry him; Damis called him an oaf. Where do the hair shirt and the lash fit into this kaleidoscopic portrait?

Although some monks and priests in seventeenth-century Paris may have used hair shirts and lashes, Tartuffe—a layman,

plump, with rosy lips—is highly unlikely to have used such stringent methods of self-discipline. Molière assumes that his audience will know this is a pose; he also assumes that his audience knew where to place Tartuffe in the landscape of religious controversies that engaged the court, the clergy, and the laymen of his day.

Louis XIV ruled by "divine right"; his political advisors were cardinals and priests as well as laymen. All capitals are places for cabals (Molière uses this term freely in his plays), power and pressure groups that included nobles and merchants, priests and laity, the discreetly virtuous as well as the doctrinaire reformers. A number of these zealots belonged to the Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament, a semisecret organization whose members included priests and dukes, some of whom were closely allied with the royal family. Its mission was to care for the poor and to correct the immorality and religious laxity of the times. Lay members occasionally took it upon themselves to join households and become confessors and directors of conscience; some may also have served as conduits of information between the court, the clergy, the nobility, and the prosperous families with which these laymen were connected. Tartuffe, adopted by Orgon's family, might have hoped to be taken for a member of this prestigious confraternity.

Religion and the secular world were tightly entwined in the reign of Louis XIV. Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin had been prime ministers for Louis XIII, and Mazarin continued in that role for Louis XIV. Bossuet, one of the most rigorous and persuasive of preachers, had succeeded in detaching the King's mistress from him, and although Louis reinstated her officially in his household, the jostling between the worldly and the rigorous factions of the church and its supporters did not entirely subside. When *Tartuffe* was finally performed in 1669, religious cabals and intrigues were still potent, and characters like Tartuffe were quick to take advantage of the moral uneasiness of the times. Tartuffe, then, was an all-too-recognizable figure. Molière was painting with a very broad brush: Tartuffe—glutton and prude, lecher and ostentatious puritan—had no single

model in the court or the city. He was the sum of all religious hypocrites; the hair shirt and the lash (never again mentioned) are disguises that reveal rather than hide his character.

Act III, scene 6: Orgon: "You'll see that you must obey me, that I'm the master here."

Mariane is told she must abandon her beloved; Dorine is told she must be quiet; Elmire is told that sin is no disgrace. Orgon and Tartuffe believe that men are the masters; we do not. The women in *Tartuffe,* as in many of Molière's plays, are in fact those who move the plot along, who straighten out the complications, who avert the bad results of foolish decisions.

In some circles of the French bourgeoisie and the nobility, the seventeenth century was an era of powerful women. Anne of Austria, the wife and then the widow of Louis XIII, was the regent of France in name and in fact until her death; her political and religious expectations and decisions stirred up controversies and smoothed them over. Louis XIV's wife and his mistresses continued this pattern of influence. The *Précieuses*—the learned ladies who set the tone for language and amorous behavior—attracted the attention of courtiers and authors, painters and musicians, grammarians and leaders of armies. For Molière, these learned ladies were sometimes the object of comedy, even mockery, but in the more serious plays—*Tartuffe, The Misanthrope, The Miser, The School for Wives*—the women are as significant as the men, and often even more powerful.

Their power is the power of common sense. In Act III, scenes 4 and 5, Elmire says, "All [Tartuffe] has to do is to behave better and try to be worthy of my generosity. . . . I'm not inclined to make trouble. Real women laugh at such foolishness; they don't bother to tell their husbands about it. . . . Honor doesn't depend on reporting silliness like this; all that's necessary is to defend

oneself against it: at least that's my opinion." Damis, Elmire's hot-tempered stepson, is ready to attack Tartuffe; Orgon is ready to beat Damis with a stick; Valère, willfully misunderstanding Mariane, rejects her. Elmire and Dorine will have none of this; theirs are the voices of moderation.

There were, of course, extravagant women in as well as outside of Molière's plays. Their contemporaries recognized the ridiculous and pretentious ladies of *Les Précieuses Ridicules* and *Les Femmes Savantes* and their equivalents who slavishly and indiscriminately copied the modes of speech and behavior of authors and leaders of society like Mme. de Scudéry, Mme. de Sévigné, and Mme. de Lafayette. Opinionated and stubborn old women, saucy and meddling maids who irritate their masters and mistresses—stock figures in comedy and daily gossip everywhere—were equally well known. But Molière's job was to hold up a mirror to all of society. It's important to see, reflected in that mirror, the temperate, wise, quiet, and effective women: they too were a recognized and important part of his world.

Act V, Last Scene: The Officer: "The King rewards good deeds."

The court and the theater were, at times, one and the same during the reign of Louis XIV. When the king greeted ambassadors from foreign countries, the receptions were as thoroughly stage-managed and costumed as any theatrical performance. Kings were expected to dazzle their subjects as well as to govern them; like the signing of peace treaties, royal marriages and births were occasions to transform Versailles, the Louvre, and the Palais Royal into spaces for elaborate performances of comedies, tragedies, ballets, and farces, accompanied by music and enhanced by theatrical machinery.

Molière was not an invisible playwright. The King knew him, had commissioned many of Molière's plays, and had, shortly before the first performance of *Tartuffe,* served as godfather to Molière's first son. More, the King had performed in some of Molière's plays, had made suggestions for an addition to one of them, and had paid for the costumes, the musicians, and the theatrical machinery necessary for plots that included disguises, betrayals, and revelations at the last minute. He would have recognized the King's officer, appearing like a deus ex machina to resolve the drama, as a device that fit easily into a familiar pattern of comedy and stagecraft.

Nonetheless, this ending seems abrupt, unexpected, even unsatisfactory. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the play was translated into English by a certain M. Medbourne, who explained that he had "render'd [it] into English, with much addition and advantage." Those additions and advantages were changes that allowed the other characters—Dorine and Laurent, Cléante and Elmire, Valère and Mariane—to construct a counterplot in which to trap Tartuffe without recourse to the sudden appearance of the King's emissary.

Although Medbourne thought that Molière's ending required "addition and advantage," it is possible that Molière's audiences disagreed because they recognized a second drama being enacted at the end of this comedy. In the almost five years since Molière had first presented *Tartuffe,* it had been repeatedly banned by the archbishop of Paris despite the tacit and explicit approval of Louis XIV himself, who saw the first performance and found it entertaining. Molière had written a preface to the play and two appeals to the King, explaining that he meant no disrespect to the Church and intended only to criticize those who disgraced it by behaving like hypocrites. But it required the personal intervention of the King before the play could open in February 1669. The unexpected appearance of the King's officer, the long speech in praise of the King—"a king who is the enemy of fraud, a king who is guided by moderation and intelligence, who knows all his subjects, who is never deceived by impostors," who recognized "the zeal [Orgon]

exercised on [his] monarch's behalf"—this abrupt reversal that saves Orgon served also as Molière's tribute to the King, his friend, who had at last allowed his play to be seen.

First Appeal

Presented to the King
Concerning the comedy of *Tartuffe*

Sire:
Since the task of comedy is to reform men while amusing them, I thought that, given the work I do, I could do nothing better than to attack by caricature the vices of my age; and since hypocrisy is, without doubt, one of the most common, the most harmful, and the most dangerous of these, I thought, Sire, that I would render no small service to all the honorable men of your kingdom if I were to make a comedy that would discredit the hypocrites and present all the artificial gestures that these worthy folk display, all the hidden deceptions of these counterfeit saints who want to entrap men by their spurious zeal and compromising morals.

I wrote this comedy, Sire, as carefully as I could and with all the circumspection that the delicate nature of the topic required; and to preserve the honor and respect owed to those who are truly devout, I was at pains to distinguish them from the character that I was presenting. I included nothing that might appear equivocal; I omitted anything that could confuse good with ill and used, in this portrait, only the colors and the essential characteristics that reveal the true and accomplished hypocrite.

Nonetheless, my precautions were useless. People have, Sire, taken advantage of your sensitivity to religious affairs and have attacked you in the only place where you might be vulnerable—that is, your respect for sacred matters. The tartuffes, disguised, were clever enough to find favor with

YOUR MAJESTY, and those who were its originals suppressed the copy, however innocent it may have been and however recognizable some may have found it.

As strong a blow as this suppression of my work might have been, my distress was nonetheless softened by the way in which YOUR MAJESTY explained himself; and truly, SIRE, this removed all cause for complaint, since YOUR MAJESTY had the goodness to state that he found no cause for complaint in the comedy that I had been forbidden to present to the public.

But, despite this gracious statement by the world's greatest and most enlightened king, despite the approval of the Pope's emissary and the greater number of our prelates who all, in the private readings that I presented to them, agreed with YOUR MAJESTY'S sentiments, despite all this, I say, we have seen a book written by the curé of . . .[1] that noisily challenges these honorable opinions. Despite what YOUR MAJESTY may have said, despite the opinions of the Pope's emissary and the prelates, my comedy, said he without having seen it, is as diabolic as is my brain; I am a demon clothed in flesh and dressed like a man, licentious, an apostate worthy of extraordinary punishment. Burning my book in public is not sufficient expiation—that would let me off too easily. The charitable zeal of this gallant gentleman does not stop there: he wishes to deny me God's mercy; he has absolutely decided that I should be damned.

This book, SIRE, was presented to YOUR MAJESTY, and YOUR MAJESTY can without doubt understand how distressing it is for me to see myself exposed daily to these insults, the damage that such calumny does to me if indeed it must be tolerated, the need I have to clear myself of these fabrications and to show to the public that my comedy is nothing but what one might wish it to be. I will not describe, SIRE, what I might need to restore my reputation and to demonstrate to all the innocence of my work; enlightened kings like yourself need no instruction or requests; they see, as God sees, what is necessary,

1. This is a reference to Pierre Roullé, the curé of Saint-Barthélemy.

and they know better than we do what we should receive. It is enough to put my interests in YOUR MAJESTY'S hands, and I await, with much respect, anything that YOUR MAJESTY should please to command.

SECOND APPEAL

Presented to the King in his camp outside the city of Lille in Flanders, by DE LA THORILLIÈRE and DE LA GRANGE, HIS MAJESTY'S comedians, and colleagues of M. MOLIÈRE, concerning the ban, dated 6 August 1667, that forbade the presentation of *Tartuffe* until HIS MAJESTY should give a new order.

SIRE:
It is a very daring thing for me to importune a great monarch at the time of his glorious conquests; but, given my situation, where, SIRE, could I find protection other than where I have come to seek it? And whom might I enlist to counter the forces that overcome me, if not the source of power and authority, the just dispenser of orders, the sovereign judge and the master of all things?

My comedy, SIRE, cannot enjoy the benefits of YOUR MAJESTY'S kindness. In vain did I produce it under the title of *The Impostor* and disguise the character as a man of the world. In vain did I give him a little hat, a great wig, a big collar, a sword, and lace all over his jacket; soften his behavior; and carefully omit anything that I thought would give the shadow of an excuse to the well-known originals of the portrait I wished to paint: all that was of no avail. The cabal armed itself simply because of what it suspected of the play. They found a way to take by surprise those who, in other respects, boast that they cannot be thus taken. No sooner had my comedy been presented than it was struck by a blow from a force that commands respect; and at that moment all that I could do to save myself from the violence of this tempest was to say that YOUR MAJ-

ESTY had had the kindness to allow the performance and that I had not thought it necessary to seek permission from others, since it was only YOUR MAJESTY who might have forbidden it.

I do not doubt, SIRE, that those whom I depict in my comedy have pressed YOUR MAJESTY quite hard and have once again drawn into their party many worthy people who are the more easily deceived because they judge others to be like themselves. Those folks have the skill to dress all their schemes in fine colors. No matter what they may seem to be, it is not God's interests that move them; they have shown this clearly enough by allowing certain comedies to be produced so often without saying a word against them. Those comedies attack piety or religion, which concerns them very little—but this one attacks them and shows them on the stage; that is what they cannot bear. They cannot forgive me for revealing their pretenses to all the world, and certainly none of them will fail to tell YOUR MAJESTY that my comedy has scandalized everyone. But the truth, SIRE, is that all of Paris has been scandalized only by the prohibition, that the truly scrupulous have found the play useful, and that many are surprised that persons so known for probity should have deferred to others who ought to disgust everyone and who are so opposed to the true piety that they themselves profess.

I await with respect YOUR MAJESTY'S decision on this matter, but it is certain, SIRE, that I must no longer think of writing comedies if the tartuffes win the day, that they will feel justified in persecuting me more than ever and will find more to say about the most innocent things that I might write.

Deign in your kindness, SIRE, to protect me from their venomous rage, and may I, when you have returned from your glorious campaign, be capable of giving you some relief from the weariness of your conquests and of entertaining the monarch who makes all Europe tremble.

Third Appeal

Presented to the King
5 February 1669

Sire:
A highly respected physician, one of whose patients I have the honor to be, promises and undertakes, in the presence of a notary, to keep me alive another thirty years if I can persuade Your Majesty to grant him a request. I told him that I do not ask such a promise of him and that I would be satisfied if he would simply have the kindness not to kill me. His request is to be granted a canonical position in the royal chapel at Vincennes, made vacant by the death of . . .

Dare I ask this favor of Your Majesty on the very day of the resurrection of *Tartuffe,* resurrected by your kindness? Thanks to that kindness I have been reconciled with the faithful and, by this one, I will be with the physicians. Perhaps this shows me too much kindness at one time, but perhaps it is not beyond the power of Your Majesty, and I await, with respectful hope, a response to my appeal.

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Prudence L. Steiner took her Ph.D. at Harvard University, where she served as Lecturer and Director of the Harvard Extension School Writing Program. Between 1953 and 1954 Dr. Steiner studied at the Sorbonne in a program for the training teachers of French as a foreign language. Because the instructors believed that teaching French required a full knowledge of French history and culture, she attended plays—Molière, Racine, Corneille, Marivaux, Victor Hugo, Jean Anouilh, Paul Claudel, and others—at the Comèdie Française, the Théâtre National Populaire, and other theaters in Paris. From this Dr. Steiner developed a continuing interest in and enthusiasm for the classical French theater of which Molière is one of the first and most important creators. Also available from Hackett is her translation of Voltaire's *Philosophical Letters* (2007).

Prudence L. Steiner's lively prose translation of Molière's great comedy remains close to the original French while casting the speech of the characters in a slightly compressed and formalized way that comes very close to the original effect created by Molière's verse. This edition includes translations of Molière's three appeals to the King, as well as an introductory essay by Roger W. Herzel, which discusses Molière's life; *Tartuffe* and the comic tradition; and the setting, language, and style of the play.

"The new Steiner *Tartuffe* offers welcome relief from all the rhymed translations that make Molière sound like a third-rate Restoration poet while creating the (false) impression that verbal dexterity and wit trump all other values in the great comic playwright's dramaturgy. Steiner's crisp, lucid prose—her adroitly balanced sentences are especially effective at conveying the slippery rhetoric of Tartuffe's seductions—unfolds the plot and characters of Molière's play with an unaccustomed clarity, presenting the ideological clashes of the play with a bluntness many other translations attenuate.

"Roger Herzel's introduction is well-focused for those encountering Molière for the first time and informed throughout by his own excellent scholarship."

—Jim Carmody, University of California, San Diego

"This dynamic new translation of *Tartuffe* conveys the subject matter of Molière's perennial masterpiece in a way that resonates for contemporary audiences. Prudence Steiner has modernized and revitalized the text, making its burning and scandalous tone stand out, as it does in the original French. The thorough introduction to the play skillfully invites the reader into the dark and controversial world of *Tartuffe*."

—Florent Masse, Princeton University

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