

# Tartuffe



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MOLIÈRE

An actor as well as a playwright, the artist known as Molière experienced a great deal of success within his own lifetime, but faced severe societal prejudice as well. Despite being adored by both his patrons and the public, Molière faced opposition from the French government and the Catholic Church for his sharp, satiric works, several of which (including *Tartuffe*) were censored by the authorities. Although Molière came from a wealthy family, the French considered theater a shameful career, and the playwright was once imprisoned for his theater company's debts. Having contracted tuberculosis when he was young, Molière collapsed onstage at age fifty-one while performing in his own play *The Imaginary Invalid*—he insisted on finishing the performance, but died later that night. Despite his renown, his status as an actor rendered him legally unfit to be buried on holy ground; only an intervention from the King himself allowed the playwright's family to give him a nighttime burial in a Church graveyard.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Molière wrote during the reign of Louis XIV, whose reign from 1643-1715 brought about a period of prosperity and power that France had never before seen. Louis built the opulent Palace of Versailles, where *Tartuffe* was first performed. Called the Sun King, Louis was believed to be nearly omniscient by his subjects, and was nearly omnipotent in the way he dominated power even over French nobles; it is for this reason that the character of the King displays almost miraculous powers of perception at the end of *Tartuffe*. The Age of Enlightenment (in the 17th and 18th centuries) also coincided with Molière's lifetime, creating increasing conflict between scientists and the powerful Catholic Church. In *Tartuffe*, Molière takes a thoroughly Enlightenment view, depicting emotion as dangerous and irrational, while presenting reason and logic as the pinnacles of human achievement. The character of Cléante represents the perfect Enlightenment man; he is both rational and religious, combining his faith in God with his faith in logic.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Molière's other most famous work, *The Misanthrope*, depicts a severe and serious man in love with a shallow and flighty gentlewoman. Voltaire's *Candide, or Optimism* (1759), the tale of a completely innocent young man who undergoes various trials and travails, represents a later work of French Neoclassical comedy. Racine's *Phèdre* (1677), a retelling of the

Greek tragedy of Phaedra and Hippolytus, explores the darker side of Neoclassicism. Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677), a bawdy tale of mixed up identities and cross-dressing, provides an example of the Restoration Comedy, a British style contemporary with French Neoclassicism. Texts such as Geoffrey Chaucer's comic poem *The Canterbury Tales*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's Romantic Era *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and Charles Dickens' Victorian *Oliver Twist* (1837) all depict different forms of religious hypocrisy. The Pulitzer Prize-winning *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1997) by Dario Fo, an absurdist political satire, provides a modern example of the sort of broad farce on display in *Tartuffe*; so does Poirer's *La Cage aux Folles* (1973), a French farce about homosexuality that eventually became a Tony Award-winning Broadway musical.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Tartuffe*
- **When Written:** 1660s
- **Where Written:** Paris
- **When Published:** The play premiered on May 12, 1664. This version, however, was censored by royal decree, and the published version we use today was not performed until February 5, 1669.
- **Literary Period:** French Neoclassical comedy (mid-17th century)
- **Genre:** Comedic stage play
- **Setting:** Paris in the 1660s
- **Climax:** Elmire exposes Tartuffe as a fraud
- **Antagonist:** Tartuffe and the deceptive hypocrisy he represents

### EXTRA CREDIT

**A Neoclassical Neologism.** So culturally influential is the play *Tartuffe*, that the word "Tartuffe" has entered the dictionary as a synonym for "hypocrite."



## PLOT SUMMARY

The play opens in the Parisian house of the middle-class but wealthy Orgon, who has recently won honor by serving **the King** of France loyally during a civil war, and who is currently on a two-day business trip. In the first scene Madame Pernelle, his mother, who has been visiting, takes her leave of the rest of Orgon's household: his daughter, Mariane; his son, Damis; their stepmother, Elmire; and her brother, Cléante. They are accompanied by Elmire's maid, Dorine, and Madame Pernelle's

maid, Flipote. As she goes to exit, Madame Pernelle scolds each character in turn, for their sinful ways. She saves her special criticism for Elmire, whom she believes to be vain shallow. Madame Pernelle wishes for her son's entire family to follow the teachings of Tartuffe, a poor holy man whom both she and Orgon revere. The rest of the household, however, believes (correctly) that Tartuffe is a hypocrite and a fraud, more interested in Orgon's wealth than in the true teachings of **the Church**. Madame Pernelle will hear nothing against Tartuffe though, even threatening that if they do not listen to Tartuffe, the neighborhood will begin to gossip about Elmire's flirtatious and extravagant ways. Cléante and Dorine, two of the most reasonable characters in the play, contend that people will gossip no matter what, and that the worst moralizing gossips are often the worst sinners as well. Madame Pernelle, suspecting that the two are making fun of her, storms out, though not before slapping her maid (a hypocritical action for a supposedly pious woman).

Once she is gone, Cléante and Dorine discuss the problem of Tartuffe, worrying that the hypocrite has Orgon completely under his power. Elmire, Damis, and Mariane reenter, worriedly discussing Mariane's impending wedding to her beloved, Valère. They believe that Tartuffe has turned Orgon against the match. Damis is particularly concerned, since the ruin of this match would dash his own hopes to marry Valère's sister. Hearing Orgon approaching, all but Dorine and Cléante retire. Upon Orgon's arrival, Cléante witnesses firsthand his brother-in-law's obsession with Tartuffe: as Dorine tries to tell Orgon of Elmire's recent illness, Orgon repeatedly asks about Tartuffe's well-being. Even though Dorine tells him of Tartuffe's greed and gluttony, Orgon responds only with, "Poor fellow!" to great comic effect. Once Dorine leaves, Cléante tries to make Orgon understand how ridiculous he is acting. Orgon tries to defend Tartuffe to Cléante, but cannot even articulate his virtues, simply calling him, "A man who...a man who...an excellent man." Despite this vagueness, however, Orgon asserts that he no longer feels any earthly cares: "My mother, children, brother, and wife could die,/ And I'd not feel a single moment's pain." Orgon, still trying to convince Cléante, describes his first meetings with Tartuffe, during which the hypocrite would ostentatiously and loudly pray at church everyday, showing off his charity and piety, and rejoicing in his decision to make Tartuffe a part of his household. Cléante tries to explain to Orgon that there is a difference between appearance and sincerity, and begs him to listen to moderation and reason. Lastly, he asks Orgon if he intends to break Mariane's engagement to Valère. Orgon, however, refuses to answer, and exits. Cléante worries that there will be trouble, and decides to go warn Valère.

As Act Two opens, Orgon announces to Mariane that he wishes for her to marry Tartuffe instead of Valère. Mariane is appalled, but she is also a dutiful and docile daughter who does not want

to contradict her father. Luckily for her, the brash and fearless Dorine enters, and begins to ridicule the idea of a match between Mariane and Tartuffe. Orgon grows increasingly angry as Dorine continually interrupts, threatening and eventually attempting to strike her. Dorine stands firm, however, and at last Orgon leaves in frustration and anger. Once he is gone, Dorine berates Mariane for refusing to speak up for herself. Mariane responds that she cannot go against her father, but Dorine urges her to resist. She says that if Mariane will not fight to marry Valère, then she does not really love him, noting that there is a difference between professions of love and love itself. Mariane asserts that she will kill herself if forced to marry Tartuffe, but Dorine responds again with sarcasm, calling Mariane self-pitying. Mariane responds that any other course of action would be unmaidenly, and Dorine in turn tells her that she must secretly wish to be married to Tartuffe. Only once Mariane begs for her assistance will Dorine relent, agreeing to help her marry Valère—who, conveniently enough, has just appeared. The two lovers meet, but Mariane refuses to say that she will stand against her father, which creates a huge rift between the two, as each foolishly and emotionally attempts to hurt the other. The absurd fight comes to an end only when Dorine physically pulls the pair back towards each other and makes them hold hands, at which point they renew their vows of love. Dorine, who now must force them apart, wonders at the madness of lovers.

At the beginning of Act Three, Dorine must deal with yet another dramatic member of Orgon's family: this time, the hotheaded Damis, who has unwisely resolved to directly confront Tartuffe. Dorine urges him to let Elmire deal with Tartuffe, for the maidservant has noticed that the holy man has a curious soft spot for his patron's wife. She tells Damis that Elmire and Tartuffe are about to talk in that very room, and Damis demands to hear their conversation. Exasperated, Dorine hides him in a closet, warning him not to lose his temper. For the first time in the play, Tartuffe enters; seeing Dorine, he ostentatiously calls to his manservant, asking for his hair-shirt and his scourge to injure and supposedly purify his body. Dorine scoffs at this display, and continues to mock Tartuffe to his face as he orders her to cover her bosom with a handkerchief, for fear of arousing impure thoughts within him. He becomes far more tractable, however, when he hears that Elmire wishes to speak with him, a fact that Dorine astutely notes before exiting.

As Elmire enters, Tartuffe praises her extravagantly and says that he has been praying for her ceaselessly. Elmire accepts his nauseating flattery graciously, before attempting to turn the conversation towards the match between Mariane and Valère. Tartuffe, however, has other ideas, and decides to seize this moment alone with Elmire to confess his love for her. Grabbing her hand, groping her knee, and even feeling the lace collar of her dress, Tartuffe invades Elmire's personal space and tells

her—blasphemously—that he worships her as if she were divine (in truth his feelings are greedy and lustful). When Elmire asks what Tartuffe would do if she told her husband of what he had said, he responds that he knows that her charity will excuse his sinful speech. Elmire in turn tries to use her silence in exchange for Tartuffe’s support of Valère’s and Mariane’s marriage, but Damis foils her plot, leaping out of the closet and rejoicing that he at last has the proof to expose Tartuffe’s treachery to Orgon. Though Elmire urges her stepson to be quiet, Damis announces Tartuffe’s guilt as soon as Orgon enters the room. Tartuffe makes no attempt to deny it, keeping up his pious act and making Orgon angrier and angrier not at his treacherous friend, but at his own son. As Tartuffe continues to heap blame on himself, Orgon turns against Damis completely, insulting and threatening him, forcing him out of the house, and finally disowning him. Tartuffe pretends to be shocked and saddened by this turn of events, manipulating Orgon into begging him to remain at the house. He then offers to stay away from Elmire for propriety’s sake, but Orgon refuses this offer as well, saying instead that Tartuffe should in fact spend all of his time with Elmire. Furious at his whole family, whom he believes to be conspiring against Tartuffe, Orgon then announces that not only will he marry Mariane to Tartuffe, but that he will sign away all his lands, property, and money to Tartuffe that very day in order to prove the strength of their bond. The two go off to draw up the deed.

Some time has passed at the start of Act Four, and Cléante has come to warn Tartuffe that the whole town is talking about Orgon’s fight with Damis. He urges Tartuffe to cause the two to reconcile, but Tartuffe refuses. The two then have a fight about morality, with Cléante using reasonable, logical arguments, and Tartuffe using slippery, manipulative emotion. Just as Tartuffe is about to lose the argument, he excuses himself to go pray. Immediately upon his exit, Elmire, Mariane, and Dorine enter, begging Cléante to help stop the marriage between Mariane and Tartuffe. Orgon enters next, ordering Mariane to rejoice at her future marriage to his friend. She begs to be allowed to live in a convent rather than marry Tartuffe, but her father (though moved for a moment) will not listen to her or to Cléante. At last Elmire intervenes, asking Orgon how he can do such a thing after Tartuffe’s attempted seduction. Her husband responds that if Tartuffe had actually done so, then she would be more upset. Elmire, calm and collected, asks if she can show her husband proof of Tartuffe’s sinful offer. Orgon is completely disbelieving and skeptical, but agrees that she may try. Sending out the rest of her relatives and concealing her husband under a table, Elmire calls Tartuffe to her, and pretends to return his love, explaining that she was too ashamed of it before, but that she can hide it no longer. Tartuffe, forever greedy and grasping, says that she must prove her love with a physical token of her affection. He tells her too that their potential affair will not really be a sin, and that he will remain discreet about their liaison. Elmire delays, and eventually sends Tartuffe out of the

room to check for eavesdroppers. Shocked and enraged, Orgon confronts Tartuffe upon his return, berating him for attempting to marry his daughter and steal his wife. When he kicks Tartuffe out of the house, Tartuffe responds with the ultimate threat: since his former friend has signed over his lands and properties, the hypocrite now has the power to turn out Orgon and his family. He vows to do so, and to punish Orgon for his betrayal, before exiting. Elmire asks what he means by this, and Orgon refers vaguely to a mysterious but foreboding strongbox that was in Tartuffe’s room.

As Act 5 commences, Cléante has returned to help his family in their time of crisis; Orgon explains to his wise brother-in-law that the strongbox in question used to belong to his friend Argas who was disloyal to the King; to possess it would be considered treason. Orgon, of course, agreed to hold it for Argas, but then gave it to Tartuffe for safekeeping. This decision appalls Cléante, who once again counsels Orgon to choose a path of moderation, rather than one of extremes. Damis returns as well, offering to kill Tartuffe for his father (Cléante opposes this plan as well). Next the women—Madame Pernelle, Elmire, Mariane, and Dorine—enter. The household attempts to convince Madame Pernelle of Tartuffe’s treachery, but she refuses to believe them—until, that is, Tartuffe sends a bailiff named Monsieur Loyal to the house to forcibly evict Orgon and his family by the next morning. The family threatens the bailiff and forces him to leave the house, but he is quickly followed by Valère, who has heard that Tartuffe has shown the contents of the strongbox to the King, who has decided to arrest Orgon. As Orgon prepares to flee (aided by Valère and Cléante), Tartuffe enters with The Officer and announces that they have come to arrest Orgon. The family insults him, but to no avail. Salvation comes only when The Officer announces that he is there not to arrest Orgon, but to arrest Tartuffe. He goes on, explaining that hypocrites such as Tartuffe cannot fool the King, and that he recognized the con man from the first as a common, “vicious” criminal. In gratitude for Orgon’s service, the King has invalidated the deed, and returns to him his lands and property. The family rejoices in the generosity of the King, and Orgon announces that Mariane and Valère will shortly be married.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Tartuffe** – A deceptive con man who has invented a connection to [the Catholic Church](#), Tartuffe pretends to be a pious in order to drain the wealthy but foolish out of his money, property, and status. As the play begins, Tartuffe has already alienated Orgon from his own family, and is currently scheming both to marry his daughter Mariane while also seducing his wife Elmire. Although eventually foiled by the efforts of Orgon’s family members—particularly Elmire—to expose Tartuffe for the fraud he really is, the character exemplifies the

dangerous and pervasive nature of hypocrisy.

**Orgon** – A middle class landowner who served **the King** of France well in a recent civil war, Orgon makes the mistake of placing his trust in the devious, hypocritical Tartuffe. Throughout the play, Orgon bullies his daughter Mariane, disowns his son Damis, and neglects his wife Elmire because of Tartuffe’s negative influence. Although Elmire eventually demonstrates to Orgon the depth of Tartuffe’s trickery, it takes a decree from the King himself in order to save Orgon’s family from Tartuffe’s greedy machinations.

**Elmire** – Although she is beautiful, rich, and popular, Elmire, the wife of Orgon and stepmother of Damis and Mariane, and sometimes criticized for it, she is also intelligent, loyal, and virtuous. As the play progresses, Elmire is increasingly menaced by the advances of Tartuffe, who lusts after her youth and beauty. She, however, uses his actions against him, enduring his attempts at seduction in order to show her husband the falseness of his supposed friend.

**Cléante** – The brother of Elmire (and brother-in-law of Orgon), Cléante represents the height of reason and good sense. Throughout the play he attempts to counsel his brother-in-law against Tartuffe, but is inevitably ignored or even scolded. He eventually aids the rest of the family in coming together against the deceitful hypocrite.

**Dorine** – Despite being a lowly servant girl, Dorine, along with Cléante, is one of the most rational and intelligent characters in the play. Sharp-tongued and quick-witted, she never hesitates to speak out against Tartuffe, even though Orgon eventually attempts to strike her for her words. She, too, eventually aids in the family plot against Tartuffe.

**Damis** – Hot-headed and impetuous, Orgon’s son and Elmire’s stepson makes no secret of his abhorrence for Tartuffe. He feels strongly, too, about his sister Mariane’s engagement to Valère, because he himself wishes to marry Valère’s sister. Enraged when he observes Tartuffe attempting to seduce Elmire, Damis is disowned by his father, who puts Tartuffe in his son’s place as heir. It takes an order from **the King** at the end of the play in order to reinstate this son and heir to his rightful position.

**Mariane** – The dutiful and docile daughter of Orgon, and stepdaughter of Elmire, Mariane is deeply in love with her betrothed, Valère. As the play opens, however, Orgon wishes to break their engagement and marry his daughter to Tartuffe instead. Although she hates Tartuffe and adores Valère, Mariane can do little to influence her fate, and it takes her stepmother’s plot in order to reunite Mariane with her beloved.

**Madame Pernelle** – Unlike many other characters in the play, Madame Pernelle, the grating, scolding mother of Orgon, holds Tartuffe in the highest esteem. At the beginning of the play, she berates her husband’s family for their supposed faults, all while singing the praises of Tartuffe. Like Orgon, she too is shocked

when Tartuffe’s true hypocrisy is revealed.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Valère** – Emotional and somewhat foolish, Valère is betrothed to Orgon’s daughter Mariane. When Orgon attempts to break the engagement, and marry Mariane to Tartuffe, Valère is dismayed and angered, even lashing out at Mariane. In the end, however, love triumphs and the two are reunited.

**Monsieur Loyal** – A malicious and arrogant bailiff who attempts to help Tartuffe evict Orgon and his family from their home.

**Police Officer** – This representative of law, order, and the power of **the King** intervenes in order to keep Tartuffe from snatching Orgon’s lands and wealth.

**Flipote** – The silent maid of Madame Pernelle, whose ill treatment at the hands of her mistress at the beginning of the play demonstrates Pernelle’s cruelty and hypocrisy.

**Laurent** – Tartuffe’s servant.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### HYPOCRISY

The title character of this work, Tartuffe, is the ultimate hypocrite: his sinful actions completely contradict the **Catholic** values that he preaches.

Although Tartuffe claims to be pious, charitable, and holy, he is in fact lustful, greedy, and treacherous. His hypocrisy is infectious and dangerous, destabilizing Orgon’s entire household and negatively impacting those who believe in this supposedly pious man. In fact, those who trust Tartuffe become hypocrites themselves. Madame Pernelle, who preaches Christian charity, strikes her own maid, while Orgon commits a host of sins against his own family.

Of the characters who stand against Tartuffe’s hypocrisy, Cléante, Dorine, and Elmire are the strongest. Cléante and Dorine each use rhetoric – language – to try to combat Tartuffe, but though their arguments are logical, they cannot prevail against Tartuffe. In the end, it is Elmire who unmasks Tartuffe for what he truly is, using Tartuffe’s lust for her in order to prove his hypocrisy to her husband Orgon. Even Elmire’s bravery, however, cannot fully thwart Tartuffe, who still has a legal claim over the family’s property. True defeat comes for him in the form of a royal decree from the **King** negating his claim. This final plot twist is called a *deus ex machina*, in which an

almost magical solution (in this case, the King's decree) overcomes a seemingly impossible situation (Tartuffe's legal claim). Moliere intends for the King's decree to seem miraculous and unbelievable, in order to illustrate the disastrous and dangerous nature of hypocrisy.



## REASON VS. EMOTION

The people of Moliere's society considered reason one of the highest of virtues, and considered emotion weak and irrational. Throughout the play, Tartuffe uses emotion to deceive those around him, while Cléante, Dorine, and Elmire employ reason to combat him. The contrast between the emotion of Tartuffe and the reason of the other characters clearly illustrates the differences between them. Meanwhile Orgon, the primary target of Tartuffe's seductive arguments, becomes increasingly swayed by emotion as the play continues. Tartuffe makes Orgon feel betrayed by his family, causing his supposed friend to lash out at those who are attempting to help him. Their reason and logic only further alienate Orgon, convincing him that Tartuffe is the only man he can trust. As he falls further and further under Tartuffe's emotional spell, Orgon threatens his daughter Mariane, attempts to strike his servant Dorine, and disowns his own son Damis. These are emotional decisions, not logical ones, and within the realm of the play are therefore ill advised and contemptible.

The dangers of emotion also shine through in the subplot of Mariane and her lover Valère. Although the two adore each other, their love makes them unable to communicate. So blinded are they by emotion that they constantly and unintentionally hurt each other. Only the intervention of Dorine, the paragon of reason and logic, can keep their relationship from falling apart entirely. This conflict illustrates how even a positive emotion, such as love, can have negative effects if it is not moderated.



## RELIGION, PIETY, AND MORALS

French culture at this time closely linked society and religion; the **Church** held an enormous amount of power, and piety was considered an essential part of everyday life. Tartuffe, however, misuses religion, his shows of faith contrasting with the quiet but true faith of characters such as Elmire. Though Tartuffe has become a symbol of religious hypocrisy, the play does not condemn religion; rather, Moliere seeks to illustrate the difficulty of discerning the difference between true piety and false pious gestures. Tartuffe does not use religion for good, but rather as a tool to manipulate those around him. He displays piety when others are watching, but drops his act as soon as he sees something he covets (such as Elmire, or Orgon's wealth). Although he occasionally performs good deeds, such as giving money to beggars, he does so only in order to make his charade

of faith more believable.

In contrast, Elmire acts piously even when it is not advantageous to do so. She rejects Tartuffe's advances only to beg Damis not to tell Orgon about the incident. She would rather hide her own virtue than upset her husband. This fact is particularly ironic considering that at the beginning of the play Madame Pernelle condemns Elmire for her impious ways, noting how she wears stylish clothes and entertains many callers. This utterly incorrect judgment yet again illustrates the problems of distinguishing between true and false faith. Elmire seems sinful, yet is in fact virtuous and faithful. Tartuffe, meanwhile, seems pious even though he is a greedy, lustful liar.



## FAMILY AND FATHERS

In *Tartuffe*, Moliere demonstrates both how important family and fatherhood are, and how devastating it is when these structures are corrupted. As Orgon, the patriarch, falls further and further into Tartuffe's trap, all those in his household begin to suffer the consequences, making clear his central role within his family. This truth contradicts Orgon's own fear that his relatives consider him laughable and irrelevant. Although he makes a series of misguided choices—the first and gravest of which is trusting Tartuffe—Orgon's importance to his family is indisputable. He can force his daughter Mariane to marry someone she does not love, disown his son Damis, abuse his servant Dorine, and force his wife Elmire to spend time with a man who seeks to molest her. Each of these characters seeks to talk Orgon out of these terrible decisions, yet in the end they must bow to his wishes. Only when he turns against Tartuffe at last can the family hope to find salvation.

The secondary characters Madame Pernelle and Cléante also demonstrate the importance of family within this society. Madame Pernelle represents family gone wrong; she is a shrill and bitter woman who seeks only to pester and criticize her relatives. Cléante, on the other hand, represents family at its best. He loves his family, and tries only to help them and steer them on the right path. It is also important to note that during this time period, the **King** was considered the father of his entire country. And, at the end of the play, the King acts as a kind of father in restoring order to Orgon's family, righting the structure of the family unit and allowing Orgon to resume his role as the powerful and central patriarch.



## APPEARANCES AND BEAUTY

Throughout *Tartuffe*, Moliere illustrates that appearances can be deceiving. Yet at the same time, he does not condemn that most shallow of virtues, beauty. Rather, Moliere contests that beauty is something to be appreciated and admired, but that it cannot rule our actions. At the beginning of the play, Elmire seems a beautiful, thoughtless

flirt. The rigid Madame Pernelle condemns her son's wife for entertaining too many callers, and caring too much about her appearance, believing that Elmire's pretty face masks inner ugliness. In truth, however, Elmire is beautiful inside and out—a kind, brave, and loyal wife. Tartuffe, meanwhile, is considered to be a holy, pious man whose outward poverty masks his inner beauty. In fact, he is a hypocrite, using Orgon's faith in him for his own personal gain. Although he claims to scorn all worldly things, he covets Elmire, his lust for her revealing his own obsession with beauty.

Throughout the play, Moliere shows his audience how complicated the issues of appearance and beauty really are. Dorine, for instance, is a lowly servant, but possesses a powerful intellect and a strong will. On the other hand Madame Pernelle, despite her high social status, has no insight or intelligence whatsoever. This exploration of appearances culminates when Elmire decides to show Orgon the depth of Tartuffe's treachery after Orgon refuses to believe her. Elmire then uses her husband's belief in appearances to her own advantage, allowing him to see with his own two eyes how faithless his supposedly holy "friend" really is.

This interest in appearances and beauty makes itself clear in Moliere's own writing, as well, which consists entirely of rhymed couplets. In his plays, Moliere strives for both clarity and beauty, using language that both embodies his plot and demonstrates his skill as a writer in creating beautiful language.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

**The Catholic Church** plays a hugely important role in the lives of *Tartuffe's* characters. To them, it represents traditional aspects of religion, such as piety, charity, and faith. Further, because the Church was so powerful in seventeenth-century France, it takes on added significance, representing order and obedience. Tartuffe uses the power of this symbol in order to manipulate the characters around him, especially Orgon, who is completely taken in by his religious charade. Tartuffe is ostentatiously charitable, humble, and pious, taking on aspects associated with the Church in order to seem like a representative of the Church itself. The connection that Tartuffe creates between himself and the Church makes him extremely dangerous. As long as he is linked to this powerful symbol, the characters working against him cannot fully defeat him. Only when the King himself declares Tartuffe a hypocrite, at last severing Tartuffe's ties to the Church, does he cease to be dangerous to Orgon and his family.



## THE KING

Along with the Church, **the King** is responsible for maintaining order and morality within society.

Much of Orgon's status, prestige, and wealth stems from the fact that he aided the King in the recent wars. Although Tartuffe is able to use religion to his own sinister purposes, the King in the play represents incorruptible justice. At the end of the play, Tartuffe attempts to use the law in order to swindle Orgon and his family out of their own property. This act backfires, however, because the King sees through Tartuffe's hypocritical charade, arrests him, and gives Orgon back his property. This last minute decree, seemingly out of the blue, demonstrates the King's power and wisdom. No misdeed is too small and no hypocrite is too cunning to fool the King. He is the ultimate source of order within *Tartuffe*.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harvest Books edition of *Tartuffe* published in 1992.

### Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

☝☝ Damis: Your man Tartuffe is full of holy speeches...  
Madame Pernelle: And practices precisely what he preaches.

**Related Characters:** Damis, Madame Pernelle (speaker), Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 10



### Explanation and Analysis

The family of Orgon comes together to debate the merits and defects of Tartuffe. Madame Pernelle, Orgon's mother, and a prideful, short-sighted woman, believes Tartuffe to be a holy man, true to his word and totally pious. She refuses to hear a word against him, no matter how much her family tries to tell her that Tartuffe is a greedy, grasping fraud.

Damis, on the other hand, Orgon's hot-headed son, hates Tartuffe and makes no secret about his loathing. He claims that Tartuffe is "full of holy speeches" but does not actually follow the pious commands that he speaks. Madame Pernelle, on the other hand, believes that Tartuffe always does "precisely" what he says, completely blind to the many ways in which Tartuffe actually breaks the laws that he himself articulates.

●● But he's quite lost his senses since he fell  
 Beneath Tartuffe's infatuating spell  
 He calls him brother, and loves him as his life  
 Preferring him to mother, child, or wife.

**Related Characters:** Dorine (speaker), Orgon, Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 18

### Explanation and Analysis

Dorine, the family maid, joins the family dispute about Tartuffe. Although lower class, Dorine is far more reasonable and rational than many in the family she serves. She often uses her tart tongue to unmask hypocrisy and foolishness, and does so here, criticizing Orgon for having "lost his senses" under Tartuffe's "spell."

Tartuffe's true evil, in Dorine's view, lies in the fact that he has disrupted the family order. As patriarch, Orgon should care about his family over all else, except for his king. Instead, though, he favors Tartuffe over "mother, child, or wife," putting the supposed holy man's needs above those of his family.

In addition to Orgon's skewed priorities, Dorine also calls attention to Orgon's complete lack of reason now that he's under Tartuffe's spell. Having "lost his senses," he can no longer think rationally, instead blindly following Tartuffe's suggestions no matter what they are.


### Explanation and Analysis

Orgon, the patriarch, returns, and is greeted by his family. Despite having been away, Orgon does not care in the slightest about his family's welfare. Although Dorine tells him that his wife, Elmire, has been sick, Orgon only wants to hear about how Tartuffe has been. He has lost his emotional connection with his family, unable to put their needs over those of Tartuffe.

In fact, blind has Orgon become in his devotion to Tartuffe, that even when Dorine tells him that Tartuffe is healthy, "round and red," he still responds with "Poor fellow!" In Orgon's mind, Tartuffe is a persecuted and pious holy man. No matter what Tartuffe does to prove that the contrary is true, Orgon refuses to see or to hear. He has lost his reason, and is completely under the influence of Tartuffe.

●● There's been no loftier soul since time began.  
 He is a man who...a man who...an excellent man.

**Related Characters:** Orgon (speaker), Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 25

### Explanation and Analysis

Orgon debates with his family about Tartuffe, refusing to hear a single word against his supposed friend. Yet despite his insistence that Tartuffe is the best man he's ever known, Orgon cannot actually find a single substantive compliment to give Tartuffe. Instead, he simply stammers, attempting to find an attribute of Tartuffe's to praise, but failing to say anything at all.

Orgon's inability to say anything good about Tartuffe illustrates the dangers of hypocrisy. Tartuffe is a complete empty shell. Orgon sees whatever he wants to see in Tartuffe because he does not have any actual attributes. At the same time, none of Orgon's family members can catch Tartuffe in a lie because he is so slippery and cunning.

●● Under his tutelage my soul's been freed  
 From earthly loves, and every human tie:  
 My mother, children, brother, and wife would die,  
 And I'd not feel a single moment's pain.

**Related Characters:** Orgon (speaker), Tartuffe

## Act 1, Scene 4 Quotes

●● Orgon: Has all been well, these two days I've been gone?  
 How are the family? What's been going on?

Dorine: Your wife, two days ago, had a bad fever  
 And a fierce headache which refused to leave her

Orgon: Ah. And Tartuffe?



Dorine: Tartuffe: Why, he's round and red,  
 Bursting with health, and excellently fed.

Orgon: Poor fellow!

**Related Characters:** Orgon, Dorine (speaker), Elmire, Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 21

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 25

### Explanation and Analysis


Orgon again praises Tartuffe for having "freed" him from worldly cares, such as his children and his wife. Orgon believes that this sort of apathy towards family life is holy, and that in feeling this way he has ascended to a higher plane. However, Orgon has it completely backwards. In French society of this period, caring for your family--and obeying your king--was innately holy. By displaying disdain for his family, Orgon is in fact betraying his holy duty as a patriarch.

Conversely, although Orgon no longer cares for his family, he has become increasingly obsessed with Tartuffe. His adoration for his mentor has become a kind of worship, with Orgon essentially having replaced God with Tartuffe -- which boils down to blasphemy.

●● He used to come into our church each day  
And humbly kneel nearby and start to pray.  
He'd draw the eyes of everybody there  
By the deep fervor of his heartfelt prayer;  
He'd sign and weep and sometimes with a sound  
Of rapture he would bend and kiss the ground.

**Related Characters:** Orgon (speaker), Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 25

### Explanation and Analysis

Orgon describes meeting Tartuffe for the first time, and describes Tartuffe's various signs of prayer -- weeping, rapturous noises, and kissing the ground -- as evidence of his piety. In fact, Tartuffe's loud and attention-grabbing manner of worship shows just the opposite. He makes sure that all eyes are watching him, and only then does he begin to pray, proof of the fact that he feigns faith rather than feeling it.

Real faith, the play makes clear, does not attempt to draw focus to itself. Instead, it manifests as obedience for your king, care for your family, and good will towards all. Orgon, though, fundamentally does not understand this truth. He

mistakes appearance and reality, believing that since Tartuffe displays a great deal of faith, he must feel that faith as well.

●● He guides our lives, and to protect my honor  
Stays by my wife, and keeps an eye upon her;  
He tells me whom he sees, and all she does,  
And seems more jealous than I ever was!

**Related Characters:** Orgon (speaker), Tartuffe, Elmire

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 26

### Explanation and Analysis

Still attempting to prove that Tartuffe is a holy man and a loyal friend, Orgon begins to speak of how conscientious and attentive Tartuffe is towards Elmire. He describes Tartuffe's various efforts to ensure that Elmire is faithful, not understanding that, in fact, Tartuffe lusts after Elmire and is jealous of those whom she sees.

This speech displays just how deluded Orgon's thinking really is. He believes that Elmire -- a paragon of virtue and fidelity -- might actually be unfaithful to him. At the same time, he has no conception that Tartuffe, his supposedly faithful companion, has designs on his wife. Orgon is not simply blind, but backwards. He has completely reversed the facts of the world, seeing them as he believes them to be rather than as they actually are.

●● How do you fail to see it, may I ask?  
Is not a face quite different than a mask?  
Cannot sincerity and cunning art,  
Reality and semblance, be told apart?

**Related Characters:** Cléante (speaker), Orgon, Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 27

### Explanation and Analysis

After hearing Orgon praise Tartuffe and express apathy towards his own family, Cléante is appalled. Trying to use reason to reach Orgon, he deconstructs Tartuffe's false identity, trying to explain to his brother-in-law that




Tartuffe's holy act is simply a "mask." He highlights the difference between appearance and reality, and attempts to explain to Orgon that one can tell the difference between "[r]eality and semblance" if one only looks.

What Cléante fails to understand, however, is that Orgon is far past a point where reason can reach him. He has been so taken in by the charlatan that he has completely lost the use of his logical faculties. No matter how much Cléante presents evidence that Tartuffe is false and deceitful, Orgon will never believe him.

☞ There's just one insight I would dare to claim:  
I know that true and false are not the same;  
And just as there is nothing I more revere  
Than a soul whose faith is steadfast and sincere,  
Nothing that I more cherish and admire  
Than honest zeal and true religious fire,  
So there is nothing that I find more base  
Than specious piety's dishonest face—

**Related Characters:** Cléante (speaker), Orgon

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 28

### Explanation and Analysis

Having failed to convince his brother-in-law, Orgon, that Tartuffe is a bad influence on him and his family, Cléante grows frustrated. He begins to speak out against all hypocrites, saying that he hates nothing more than false piety and dishonesty – implying, of course, that Tartuffe has displayed both those things.

Even as he expresses his loathing for Tartuffe, the reasonable Cléante also expresses love for that which he believes to be most important in the world: faith, sincerity, and honesty. He is angered by the idea that just because he does not believe Tartuffe, he is branded by Orgon as impious and irreligious. Instead, Cléante states, he is simply able to tell the difference between "true and false."

## Act 2, Scene 2 Quotes

☞ Orgon: Poor though he is, he's a gentleman just the same.

Dorine: Yes, so he tells us; and, Sir, it seems to me  
Such pride goes very ill with piety.

A man whose spirit spurns this dungy earth  
Ought not to brag of lands and noble birth;  
Such worldly arrogance will hardly square  
With meek devotion and the life of prayer.

**Related Characters:** Orgon, Dorine (speaker), Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 44

### Explanation and Analysis

Orgon has announced that he plans to marry his daughter, Mariane, to Tartuffe. Although Mariane attempts to remain obedient to her father, her maid Dorine grows furious. Although Orgon claims that Tartuffe is Mariane's equal in birth though not in wealth, Dorine counters that if Tartuffe were truly holy, he wouldn't claim to be a gentleman; doing so is impious and prideful, she argues.

Dorine's argument displays a conflict within this play between religion and money. Tartuffe lusts for Orgon's wealth, and uses religion as a ploy to steal his money and property from him. He has turned religion into a tool in order to satisfy his own greed – a terrible sin. Dorine, meanwhile, is espousing that the social hierarchy exists according to God's will, and that people should stay in their places rather than try to "move up in the world." While such a worldview seems strange in modern times, when the play was written it was common.

## Act 2, Scene 3 Quotes

☞ Dorine: Faced with a fate so hideous and absurd,  
Can you not utter one dissenting word?

Mariane: What good would it do? A father's power is great.

**Related Characters:** Mariane, Dorine (speaker), Orgon, Tartuffe

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 52

### Explanation and Analysis

After having stood up to Orgon over Mariane's marriage to

Tartuffe – and failed – Dorine scolds Mariane for not being able to tell her father what she really wants. Mariane, however, counters that she cannot go against her father.

This exchange highlights one of the biggest conflicts within the play: the struggle between the family and the father. On one hand, Orgon, the patriarch, is deeply foolish and horrifically misguided. He is trusting Tartuffe at the expense of all around him, and is potentially driving his family towards ruin.

On the other hand, during this time period, the father was considered nothing short of the king of his family. They were supposed to do whatever he said and to go against him, as Dorine suggests Mariane do, was a terrible crime. At the same time, though, the father was supposed to protect his family at all costs--something that Orgon has ceased to do. Since he has failed in his duty as the father, Dorine believes that it is not sinful to defy him, although the timid Mariane disagrees. Through the misguided Orgon, the play both mine's comedy and tragedy from this contradiction in society: that the father must be obeyed by his family, even if his behavior might destroy the family.

well. Yet it is important to remember that despite Tartuffe's barely concealed hypocrisy, Orgon still believes in him – a mark of just how blind and foolish the patriarch of this family truly is.

### Act 3, Scene 3 Quotes

☝☝ Your loveliness I had no sooner seen  
Than you became my soul's unrivalled queen;  
Before your seraph glance, divinely sweet,  
My heart's defenses crumbled in defeat,  
And nothing fasting, prayer, or tears might do  
Could stay my spirit from adoring you  
My eyes, my sights have told you in the past  
What now my lips make bold to say at last,  
And if, in your great goodness, you will deign  
To look upon your slave and ease his pain,—  
If, in compassion for my soul's distress,  
You'll stoop to comfort my unworthiness,  
I'll raise to you, in thanks for that sweet manna,  
An endless hymn, an infinite hosanna.

### Act 3, Scene 2 Quotes

☝☝ Tartuffe: Hang up my hair-shirt, put my scourges in place,  
And pray, Laurent, for Heaven's perpetual grace.  
I'm going to the prison now, to share  
My last few coins with the poor wretches there.  
Dorine: Dear God, what affectation! What a fake!

**Related Characters:** Tartuffe, Dorine (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 82

#### Explanation and Analysis

At last, Tartuffe, who has been the subject of so much conversation but has not yet actually appeared in the play, comes on stage. When he does, he is loudly and ostentatiously telling his servant to put away his "scourges" (with which he presumably beats himself while in prayer) as he goes to give his last pennies to prisoners. With these few lines, Tartuffe has already revealed what a fraud he is. As rational characters like Cléante have already made clear, true faith does not draw attention to itself. The point of piety is not to show off to others, but to display one's faith to God alone. Tartuffe, though, is all about the showing off.

Tartuffe's affected piety should be laughable to all audience members, and for good measure, Dorine ridicules them as

**Related Characters:** Tartuffe (speaker), Elmire

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 91

#### Explanation and Analysis

Alone with Elmire, his patron's wife, Tartuffe at last reveals his feelings: he claims to be in love with her. Of course, this is a massive betrayal. Tartuffe is supposedly Orgon's best friend and closest confidante. Beyond his personal connection with Orgon, Tartuffe is also betraying his faith by attempting to seduce another man's wife.

On this note, it is important to look at the language of Tartuffe's profession of love. He claims that he lusts for Elmire despite himself, and that he has tried to fast and pray in order to overcome his attraction. Yet despite this claim of holiness, Tartuffe also promises to worship Elmire as a god if she will become his. Not only does he want to seduce this woman, but he both uses his supposed piety as a part of his "pick-up line," while at the same time making clear that he is willing to cast aside God in favor of her – terrible blasphemy. With one speech, Tartuffe has proved just how hollow and self-serving his "faith" really is.

## Act 3, Scene 4 Quotes

☞☞ To make a scandal would be too absurd.  
Good wives laugh off such trifles, and forget them;  
Why should they tell their husbands, and upset them?

**Related Characters:** Elmire (speaker), Damis, Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 94

### Explanation and Analysis

Tartuffe, having tried to seduce Elmire, is discovered by Damis, who resolves to tell Orgon what he has seen. Elmire, however, urges her stepson not to reveal Tartuffe's treachery to his father. She explains that although she is a good and honest wife, she has no wish to make a fuss or cause a scandal. Since her faithfulness is unshakeable, she sees no reason to "upset" her husband with news of Tartuffe's attempted seduction.

Elmire's speech reveals her subtle and keen mind. Although a moral and faithful wife, Elmire knows the difference between true honesty, and prideful superiority. She chooses always to keep her married life smooth and simple, invested in faithfulness, but also committed to keeping her husband happy and secure. Her rationality contrasts with figures like Mariane and Damis, who are also honest and faithful characters, but who do not have her even temperament and logical disposition.

## Act 3, Scene 6 Quotes

☞☞ Orgon: Can it be true, this dreadful thing I hear?

Tartuffe: Yes, Brother, I'm a wicked man, I fear;  
A wretched sinner, all depraved and twisted,  
The greatest villain that has ever existed.  
My life's one heap of crimes, which grows each minute;  
There's naught but foulness and corruption in it;  
And I perceive that Heaven, outraged by me,  
Has chosen this occasion to mortify me  
Charge me with any deed you wish to name;  
I'll not defend myself, but take the blame.  
Believe what you are told, and drive Tartuffe  
Like some base criminal from beneath your roof;  
Yes, drive me hence, and with a parting curse:  
I shan't protest, for I deserve far worse.

Orgon (*to Damis*): Ah, you deceitful boy, how dare you try  
To stain his purity with so foul a lie?

**Related Characters:** Orgon, Tartuffe (speaker), Damis

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 97

### Explanation and Analysis

Damis has exposed Tartuffe to Orgon, revealing that the "holy" man has attempted to seduce Elmire. Orgon, aghast, turns immediately to Tartuffe, to question him about this charge against him. The sly Tartuffe, meanwhile, responds by playing into the pious persona that he has created. Rather than defend himself, he castigates himself as a terrible sinner, saying he will accept the blame for any and every sin with which he is charged. In other words, he makes himself look even more wholly in Orgon's eyes by agreeing so completely about his own sinfulness – because, as Orgon sees it, only a holy man would be so honest about his sins.

Of course, Orgon responds just as Tartuffe hopes, with furious anger and a refusal to believe his truthful but rash son. This interaction displays the true, dangerous power of Tartuffe's hypocrisy. Even when he tells the absolute truth – he is a "base criminal," and deserves to be ejected from the house – Orgon still cannot see past his lies and manipulations. Nothing will loosen Tartuffe's sway over his patron, making it nearly impossible for any of Orgon's family members to get through to their foolish patriarch.

☞☞ Villain, be still!

I know your motives; I know you wish him ill:  
Yes, all of you—wife, children, servants, all—  
Conspire against him and desire his fall—  
Employing every shameful trick you can  
To alienate me from this saintly man  
Ah, but the more you seek to drive him away  
The more I'll do to keep him. Without delay,  
I'll spite this household and confound its pride  
By giving him my daughter as his bride.

**Related Characters:** Orgon (speaker), Damis, Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 100-101

### Explanation and Analysis

Infuriated that Damis has tried to tell the truth about Tartuffe, Orgon begins to berate his son. He believes that everyone is against him, and that only he can see Tartuffe's pious and holy soul. Growing increasingly irrational, he



accuses his entire household of being deceitful sinners, and resolves to "spite" his family, resolves to give Tartuffe his daughter, Mariane, as a bride.

Most obviously, this passage displays Orgon's immense foolishness and his vicious temper. Completely under the influence of Tartuffe, he has forsaken those who love him in favor of a lying, grasping hypocrite. Yet despite this massive lapse in judgement, Orgon *still* has power over his family's lives. As patriarch, he controls their money, their house, and his daughter's marriage prospects. Although Orgon seems to display no actual care for his daughter – and though she most definitely does not want to marry Tartuffe – Orgon is free to order her to marry whomever he wishes.

### Act 4, Scene 3 Quotes

☝☝ Sir, by that Heaven which sees me here distressed,  
And by whatever else can move your breast,  
Do not employ a father's power, I pray you,  
To crush my heart and force it to obey you,  
Nor by your harsh commands oppress me so  
That I'll begrudge the duty which I owe—  
And do not so embitter and enslave me  
That I shall hate the very life you gave me.

**Related Characters:** Mariane (speaker), Orgon

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 114

#### Explanation and Analysis

Commanded by Orgon to marry Tartuffe, Mariane begs her unyielding father to spare her from this terrible fate. She acknowledges that it is "a father's power" and right to give his daughter to whomever he chooses. Mariane's acceptance of this fact illustrates the immense power of the patriarchy during this time period, while also illustrating her obedience as a daughter.

Despite her meek and humble nature, Mariane hates Tartuffe so much that she is moved to beg her father for mercy. Pious to a fault, Mariane even uses the name of "Heaven" to make her father understand what it would do to her to marry Tartuffe. Equally striking is her threat that, should she be married to Tartuffe, she would "hate" her very existence. Although a good daughter, Mariane is also a highly emotional character; as we see here, as her heart conflicts with what she perceives as her duty.

☝☝ I am amazed, and don't know what to say;  
Your blindness simply takes my breath away.  
You are indeed bewitched, to take no warning  
From our account of what occurred this morning.

**Related Characters:** Elmire (speaker), Tartuffe, Orgon

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 116

#### Explanation and Analysis

As Orgon continues to dictate that Mariane must marry Tartuffe, Elmire tries to step in, but her husband rebuffs her. Shocked and appalled, the usually calm Elmire grows angry. She accuses her husband of "blindness," adding that he has been "bewitched" by Tartuffe's wiles.

Other characters have attempted earlier in the play to shake Orgon out of his infatuation with Tartuffe. Elmire, however, is the most eloquent, effective, and rational character in the entire piece. She accurately diagnoses Orgon's "blindness," instinctively understanding that her husband cannot see what is right in front of his face.

Despite this incisive and infuriated plea, however, Orgon is not swayed. The fact that even the rational, persuasive Elmire, who truly loves her husband, cannot save him from the seductive power of Tartuffe truly illustrates how powerful Tartuffe's spell over Orgon really is.

### Act 4, Scene 4 Quotes

☝☝ I'm going to act quite strangely, now, and you  
Must not be shocked at anything I do.  
Whatever I may say, you must excuse  
As part of that deceit I'm forced to use.

**Related Characters:** Elmire (speaker), Orgon, Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 121

#### Explanation and Analysis

Elmire comes up with an idea: she will pretend to give in to Tartuffe's advances in order to show Orgon how false his friend really is. Unlike the hypocritical "holy" man, however, Elmire is very clear on the difference between truth and lies. Knowing that her husband finds it impossible to make this distinction between truth and appearance, Elmire makes sure to let him know that she is going to use "deceit," but only because she has been forced to.

It is a mark of the desperate nature of the situation that the honest and straightforward Elmire is willing to use deception in order to ensnare Tartuffe. Although a faithful and loving wife, Elmire knows her own power, and resolves to use her own feminine seductive tactic in order to expose Tartuffe's lies.

☝ If you're still troubled, think of things this way:  
 No one shall know our joys, save us alone,  
 And there's no evil till the act is known;  
 It's scandal, Madam, which makes it an offense,  
 And it's no sin to sin in confidence.

**Related Characters:** Tartuffe (speaker), Elmire

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 127

### Explanation and Analysis

Elmire has laid her trap, and has convinced Tartuffe that she returns his love. Here he tries to seal the deal by explaining to her his philosophy of dishonesty. To Tartuffe, a dishonest action is only "evil" or a "sin" if other people find out about it. As long as he and Elmire keep their infidelity to themselves, he does not believe that there is anything wrong with it.

This view runs completely counter to the basic tenets of Christianity, which holds that sin is sin no matter who finds out about it. Further, Tartuffe's speech illustrates the depth of his hypocrisy: he truly believes that there is nothing wrong with doing one thing and saying the opposite, so long as he doesn't get caught.

This view comes from a mistaken obsession with appearances. Tartuffe believes that appearances are all that matters, and while he will do whatever it takes to maintain his public, "holy" image, he has no qualms about acting immorally in private.

☝ Why worry about the man? Each day he grows  
 More gullible; one can lead him by the nose.  
 To find us here would fill him with delight,  
 And if he saw the worst, he'd doubt his sight.

**Related Characters:** Tartuffe (speaker), Elmire, Orgon

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 128

### Explanation and Analysis

Still pretending to be in love with Tartuffe, Elmire voices concern that her husband will discover their affair. Tartuffe, however, tries to explain that Orgon will not prove a problem. He has knowingly entranced his patron, rendering Orgon so "gullible" that he can manipulate the foolish man in any way he wants.

One line that Tartuffe speaks is particularly notable: "if he saw the worst, he'd doubt his sight." Although dishonest and evil, Tartuffe has a very clear grasp of what he has done to Orgon: he has made the other man so foolish that even if the truth were right in front of his face, he would not be able to understand or accept it. This line sums up the true power of hypocrisy: by saying one thing and doing another, hypocrites can completely destroy others people's understanding of what is true and what is false.

### Act 4, Scene 7 Quotes

☝ Well, so you thought you'd fool me, my dear saint!  
 How soon you wearied of the saintly life—  
 Wedding my daughter, and coveting my wife!  
 I've long suspected you, and had a feeling  
 That soon I'd catch you at your double-dealing.  
 Hust now, you've given me evidence galore;  
 It's quite enough; I have no wish for more.

**Related Characters:** Orgon (speaker), Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 130

### Explanation and Analysis

Enraged, Orgon confronts Tartuffe for his treachery. Yet it's noteworthy that even in this moment the foolish Orgon cares mostly about appearances (even though it was his belief in Tartuffe's appearance that made him follow the man). Here, Orgon claims that he has "suspected" Tartuffe for a long time, and that he knew from the beginning that his friend was false.

Audience members and readers undoubtedly are aware of Orgon's revision of events. His action illustrates that even though he has become clearsighted in regards to Tartuffe, Orgon still remains foolish and self-congratulating. He may have returned to the loving arms of his family, but Orgon cannot face the fact that he was moments away from betraying them. He is no longer in thrall to Tartuffe, but he is still motivated by appearances above all else.

## Act 5, Scene 1 Quotes

☞☞ Orgon: Enough, by God! I'm through with pious men:  
Henceforth I'll hate the whole false brotherhood,  
And persecute them worse than Satan could.

Cléante: Ah, there you go—extravagant as ever!  
Why can you not be rational? You never  
Manage to take the middle course, it seems,  
But jump, instead, between absurd extremes.

**Related Characters:** Cléante, Orgon (speaker), Tartuffe

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 139

**Explanation and Analysis**

Threatened with financial ruin by Tartuffe, Orgon rants and raves, stating that he hates pious men, and will strive to "persecute them" here on out.

Calming Orgon is the long-suffering Cléante, who once again reminds his brother-in-law not to give in to excess and passion. Rather than turning against all holy men, Cléante counsels, Orgon must instead strive for a "middle course." Neither too trusting or too skeptical, the ideal man (represented by Cléante) is moderate in all things, using his reason and his logic to make the best decision in any given situation.

Orgon's passion would have been ridiculous to French audiences, who believed reason and logic to be two of the most important virtues a man could possess.

## Act 5, Scene 6 Quotes

☞☞ Sir, all is well; rest easy, and be grateful.  
We serve a Prince to whom all sham is hateful,  
A Prince who sees into our inmost hearts,  
And can't be fooled by any trickster's arts.  
His royal soul, though generous and human,  
Views all things with discernment and acumen;  
His sovereign reason is not lightly swayed,  
And all his judgments are discreetly weighed.  
He honors righteous men of every kind,  
And yet his zeal for virtue is not blind,  
Nor does his love of piety numb his wits  
And make him tolerant of hypocrites.  
'Twas hardly likely that this man could cozen  
A King who's fouled such liars by the dozen,  
With one keen glance,  
The King perceived the whole  
Perverseness and corruption of his soul,  
And thus high Heaven's justice was displayed:  
Betraying you, the rogue stood self-betrayed.

**Related Characters:** Police Officer (speaker), Orgon, Tartuffe

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 161-62

**Explanation and Analysis**

With Tartuffe about to take Orgon's house, lands, and money, a miracle occurs: an emissary of the King intervenes, punishing Tartuffe, and rewarding Orgon for his service in the recent wars. The representative praises the King, stating that hypocrites like Tartuffe can never fool the monarch, and that the King charts a true middle course between mercy and justice. Both pious and rational, loving and stern, the King is the true symbol of an ideal man.

This ending, though sudden and miraculous, is the perfect capstone for the play. The King, during this period in France, had absolute power over his subjects. They believed him to have a "divine right" as ruler, and he was closely allied with the Catholic Church. In the play, the King is everything that Orgon and Tartuffe are not--honest, wise, and just. He is the ultimate incorruptible authority, and only his decree can save Orgon's family from the terrible troubles that their patriarch has caused them.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## ACT 1, SCENE 1

The setting for the entirety of *Tartuffe* is the house of Orgon, a prosperous middle class man who has served the **King of France** well in a recent war—he is currently away on a two-day business trip to the country. As the play opens his mother, Madame Pernelle, is finishing a visit with the rest of his family: his son and daughter, Damis and Mariane; their stepmother and Orgon's second wife, Elmire; and Elmire's brother, Cléante.

Madame Pernelle scolds each member of the family for what she perceives as their sinful ways. She tells Damis and Mariane that they do not respect their father enough, and upbraids Elmire for entertaining too many callers and caring too much about her appearance. She even tells Cléante that he is too worldly, and should not be allowed in the house. Each character tries in turn to reason with her, but she interrupts them all.

The discussion turns to Tartuffe, a holy man whom Orgon and Madame Pernelle revere. The other characters believe him to be deceitful and hypocritical. They attempt to tell Madame Pernelle about the religious tyranny that he inflicts upon their household. Dorine is especially harsh in her criticism of him, saying that he has “usurp[ed]” Orgon's place in the household, and even implying that Tartuffe may lust after her mistress, Elmire. Madame Pernelle, however, will not hear a word of against him; she believes Tartuffe to be truly pious, and calls her relatives sinful for ignoring his advice. She believes that their sins will ruin the family if they do not begin to heed Tartuffe's wisdom.

The group discusses various pious people they know, particularly citing a supposedly pious neighbor who often gossips about Elmire; Madame Pernelle believes such ostentatiously moral people to be truly virtuous, while Cléante and Dorine assert that they are hypocrites like Tartuffe, using excessive shows of faith to mask their true sins, and perverting the power of **the Church**.

Frustrated by her relatives (particularly Cléante, who is laughing at her), Madame Pernelle takes her leave—though not before slapping the long-suffering Flipote.

*Introducing all of these characters together emphasizes their familial bonds. The absence of Orgon, the father, however, implies that something is amiss within the family unit. The early exposition about Orgon also introduces the symbol of the King and establishes that the family's good standing depends on the King.*



*Madame Pernelle is an unpleasant and laughable moralizer. She loudly believes herself to be pious and pure, yet acts rudely to her own family, judging them solely (and wrongly) by their appearances. She is a hypocrite: demanding others act in a way that she herself does not follow. She is also blind, so certain of her own morality and judgment that she refuses to listen to reason.*



*Moliere turns the audience against Tartuffe before we even meet him by associating him with the loathsome Madame Pernelle. As the other characters use reasonable arguments to display Tartuffe's hypocrisy, Madame Pernelle responds only with anger and stubbornness. She is so taken in by Tartuffe that logical arguments cannot convince her otherwise. Meanwhile, the characters that do see through Tartuffe depict a broken and distorted family unit in which the father's place has been stolen without the father even realizing it.*



*The play broadens the theme of hypocrisy to include not just Tartuffe, but society at large. Cléante and Dorine show themselves to be especially intelligent and reasonable as they point out the hypocrisy around them. Madame Pernelle, however, continues to believe in surface appearances.*



*Madame Pernelle shows herself to be a hypocrite once again, hitting her maid although she claims to be (and demands other to be) a kind and charitable Christian.*



## ACT 1, SCENE 2

Dorine and Cléante stay behind in order to avoid Madame Pernelle. They discuss their frustrations with her, as well as Tartuffe's increasing power over Orgon. Cléante is particularly surprised, because of Orgon's honorable service to **the King** in the recent civil wars. Both characters are especially disturbed that Orgon seems to value Tartuffe more than he does his own family. These two characters, however, see through Tartuffe's trickery, and know that he is simply using Orgon for his money. In contrast, Orgon does not notice Tartuffe's gluttony and greed, ignoring Tartuffe's bad behavior because he thinks him a holy man. Dorine relates how even Tartuffe's servant, Laurent, lectures the members of the household on piety and sin, establishing the sense of an "Inquisition" in the house. The two come to the conclusion that Orgon must be mad.

*Again, Dorine and Cléante prove themselves to be two of the most insightful and intelligent characters in the play. Their frank discussion of Tartuffe's behavior and Orgon's foolishness lays out the situation for the audience, clearly stating the serious nature of Tartuffe's hypocritical trickery and of Orgon's blindness to it. This conversation foreshadows events that take place later in the play, when the depth of Tartuffe's greed and sinfulness becomes clear. The reference to the Inquisition is a reference to a religiously motivated persecution founded on ideals of religious purity, but which became bloodthirsty (which of course does not accord to Christian teachings).*



## ACT 1, SCENE 3

Elmire, Mariane, and Damis reenter, glad to be rid of Madame Pernelle, and anticipating the arrival of Orgon. They discuss Mariane's impending wedding to the man she loves, Valère, and worry that Tartuffe may manipulate Orgon into withdrawing his blessing. Damis, in particular, is worried, because he wants to marry Valère's sister.

*The negative effects of Tartuffe on the family unit become clearer, as the characters reveal that Mariane's and Damis' marriages are in jeopardy. While a father is supposed to manage a family to set up marriages for his children that secure both wealth and love, Tartuffe is looking to break those things, probably for his own benefit.*



Hearing Orgon, all exit except for Cléante and Dorine.

*Tartuffe has already alienated Orgon from his loved ones.*



## ACT 1, SCENE 4

Orgon enters, and Cléante attempts to greet him. Orgon, however, interrupts his brother-in-law in order to ask Dorine how the household has fared in his absence. Although the servant girl attempts to tell him of Elmire's recent illness, Orgon cares only for Tartuffe, repetitively (and comically) asking "And Tartuffe?" as Dorine attempts to speak. Though Dorine tells him again and again of Tartuffe's gluttony and sloth, Orgon believes his friend to be a "poor fellow," and pities him.

*Orgon's first scene is deeply comic and farcical, and it is worth it to remember that Tartuffe fits into the genre of farce, which entertains through exaggerated situations and behaviors. The scene also illustrates the depth of Orgon's misguided foolishness. He ignores his brother-in-law, seems to care little for his wife's illness, all while completely failing to understand the depth of Tartuffe's deception. In short, Tartuffe has alienated Orgon from his own family, and essentially has complete power over his patron.*



Sarcastically, Dorine takes her leave, telling Orgon that she will let Elmire know how worried her husband was about her.

*Again Dorine demonstrates her intelligence and fearlessness, despite her low status.*





## ACT 1, SCENE 5

Cléante, appalled by what he's just witnessed, attempts to reason with Orgon, and to warn him of the dangers Tartuffe poses. Orgon, however, refuses to listen to reason, asserting that he loves Tartuffe more than his "mother, children, brother, and wife." He recounts meeting Tartuffe in a Church, and marvels at this "holy man's" ostentatious shows of piety, which Orgon considers to be sincere.

Accused of impiety by Orgon, Cléante explains the difference between hypocrisy and honesty, asserting that men often fail to listen to reason when they become emotional and immoderate. Using various examples, he contrasts true holy men with those who simply use religion for their own hypocritical ends. He states that a man can be pious while also being reasonable, but warns Orgon that Tartuffe is not that kind of man.

Cléante cautiously asks Orgon if he is indeed postponing his daughter Mariane's marriage to her beloved, Valère. Orgon replies that he is considering doing so, but refuses to tell his brother-in-law anything else. Cléante leaves to warn Valère of the trouble that is to come.

*Despite Cléante's attempts at reason and logic, Orgon is completely unable to listen. He believes Tartuffe's piety and holiness to be utterly sincere, and is so convinced that he seems incapable of hearing any evidence to the contrary. Orgon's elevation of Tartuffe above his own family is not natural for a father to do.*



*In his speeches, Cléante displays the very type of reason that he praises. Using logical examples, clear language, and clear arguments, he attempts to construct a rational case against Tartuffe. Orgon, however, is too emotional to be swayed by reason.*



*Under Tartuffe's influence, Orgon is abusing his position as the head of his family, acting in a way that is unjust to those under his power.*



## ACT 2, SCENE 1

Orgon finds his daughter Mariane and praises her for her obedience, though not before checking for eavesdroppers. Mariane is flattered by his praise, and replies that doing as her father says delights her. When Orgon asks her opinion of Tartuffe, his daughter asserts that she will say whatever her father wishes her to say; but when he tells her that he wishes her to marry Tartuffe, Mariane grows hesitant and upset, unable to believe that her father would truly give her to Tartuffe.

*Mariane is the "ideal" daughter—docile, tractable, and modest. Yet even she finds it difficult to obey her father when he makes his odious request. It is also worth noting how the behavior of the ideal daughter gives total power over her to her father. A foolish father can therefore have a devastating impact.*



## ACT 2, SCENE 2

Dorine, who has clearly been eavesdropping, interrupts an angered Orgon and begins to mock him, saying that she has heard evil gossip that Mariane is to be betrothed to Tartuffe. She states that her master would never do such a thing.

*Intelligent and brave yet again, Dorine violates the family hierarchy in order to protect Mariane from a marriage to Tartuffe.*



As Orgon attempts again and again to speak to Mariane, Dorine interrupts him at every turn. When she criticizes Tartuffe's hypocrisy and low social status, Orgon defends him, asserting that Tartuffe lost all his money because he cared more about Heaven than he did about Earth.

*The incisive Dorine takes issue not with Tartuffe's lack of funds, but with his ostentatious piety. She, like Cléante, understands that Tartuffe has exaggerated his holiness in order to manipulate Orgon.*



Dorine goes so far as to suggest that, should Mariane be forced to marry Tartuffe, she will not be faithful to him, asserting that Orgon will be culpable for all of Mariane's sins, since he will be responsible for the match.

Orgon claims that he does not want to give Mariane to Valère because her betrothed does not go to church enough and gambles too much. Dorine asks if Valère should go to church whenever Orgon does, in order to make sure that he is seen there.

As Orgon once again tries to persuade his daughter of the benefits of marriage to Tartuffe, Dorine interjects again and again, saying that she does so only because of her love for Mariane and Orgon. The master of the house grows increasingly angry, eventually threatening Dorine. When the maid continues to mock him, Orgon attempts to hit her, but misses. Incensed, he leaves for a walk, hoping to calm himself, and blaming Dorine for his "sinful" annoyance at her.

### ACT 2, SCENE 3

Dorine scolds Mariane for her inability to stand up to Orgon. Mariane responds that a daughter must obey her father, but Dorine urges her to remember her love for Valère. When Mariane responds angrily, reminding Dorine of how many times she has told her servant of her adoration for her betrothed, Dorine counters that professions of love are not the same thing as love itself.

As Dorine continues to question her, Mariane claims that she will kill herself if she must marry Tartuffe. The servant girl responds sarcastically, telling Mariane that she is self-pitying and timid. Mariane says that she cannot stand up to her father, and that Valère must do so instead. Dorine claims that Orgon is too obsessed with Tartuffe to listen to reason, and warns Mariane of how miserable she will be while married to the vulgar, low-class Tartuffe.

*Clever and brash, Dorine uses the holy language of "culpability" and "sin" against Tartuffe, demonstrating how easily the vocabulary of religion can be manipulated. Also note how Dorine references a reality beneath appearances, in which a wife married to an unworthy man won't be faithful to him.*



*Dorine's subtle point here is that Orgon has been tricked by Tartuffe: she is saying that Tartuffe makes it look like he goes to church all the time by making sure that he is at church whenever Orgon is (but that otherwise Tartuffe doesn't go to church at all). In other words: Tartuffe makes it seem to Orgon like he goes to church all the time without actually going all the time.*



*Once again, Orgon abuses those around him because of his loyalty to Tartuffe, which is ironic as his devotion to a supposedly religious man here drives him to try to hit his servant. He also displays his hotheadedness, which will be even more destructive later when his temper drives his fatherly decisions. His blaming of Dorine for his own behavior is typical for an overly righteous hypocrite, who cannot see his own flaws and therefore can't even see his own hypocrisy.*



*Mariane, the dutiful daughter, is torn between her loyalty to her father and her love for her betrothed. Dorine, meanwhile, has no patience for Mariane's docility. The issue of appearances, too, comes up here, too in relation to love as Dorine reminds Mariane her professions of love might not be sincere if she won't follow through on them.*



*Despite her hatred for Tartuffe, Mariane cannot even consider defying her father. Dorine refuses to let Mariane wallow in emotional self-pity, however, instead emphasizing to Mariane the dark future that she will face if married to Tartuffe and reminding the girl of her father's utter infatuation with the deceitful hypocrite.*



Mariane begs Dorine to help her avoid marriage to Tartuffe, but the servant refuses. When Mariane in turn claims that her despair will help end her life, Dorine tells her mistress that she will, indeed, aid her.

*The rational Dorine playfully manipulates the emotional Mariane by at first refusing to help her, proving the power of reason over passion.*



## ACT 2, SCENE 4

Valère enters, stunned and angry at the news that Mariane may be betrothed to Tartuffe. Ever submissive and docile, Mariane cannot tell her true beloved that she wishes to marry him and not Tartuffe. Even further enraged, Valère spitefully tells Mariane that he advises her to marry Tartuffe. Equally hurt, Mariane agrees to do as he says. The quarrel escalates, with Valère accusing Mariane of never having loved him, and Mariane retorting that he should find another lady who will love him as he deserves. Dorine watches, equally amused and appalled.

*Like Mariane, Valère is ruled by emotion—so much so that, although these two love each other, they often hurt each other without meaning to. Dorine’s rational and sardonic presence acts as a counterbalance to the two lovers’ foolish quarrel. Her mockery of the two highlights for the audience the true ridiculousness of their overly emotional behavior.*



After Mariane tells him to seek consolation in the arms of another rather than pining after her, the livid Valère goes to leave. Instead of exiting, however, he continues to tell Mariane that she has driven him away (without actually leaving); Mariane, in turn, stubbornly agrees with him. As Valère reluctantly goes to leave, Dorine at last steps in, physically pulling the lovers towards each other and telling them that they are both “mad.”

*The lovers’ quarrel escalates ridiculously, such that they are yelling about leaving each other while, because they are in love, neither is able to actually leave. This is yet another amusing example of the power of emotion to turn people into fools (Orgon and Damis similarly fall prey to passion during the play—perhaps it runs in the family).*



After a scene during which Dorine comically runs back and forth between Valère and Mariane in order to keep them from leaving the stage, the maid forcefully tells the lovers how ridiculous they’ve been, urging them to reconcile. At last she makes them hold hands, at which point they smile at each other—and then begin to fight again. Dorine cuts them off completely, and reminds them that Orgon’s plan to marry Mariane to Tartuffe must be stopped. She advises Mariane to “postpone” the marriage by pretending to be sick or superstitious, and urges Valère to tell others of Orgon’s foolishness.

*The two emotional lovers are not unable to reconcile without the aid of the thoroughly reasonable Dorine; nor can they think of a plot to ensure they get to stay together without her guidance. Their sudden fight and equally sudden reconciliation are clearly comical both to the maid and to the audience—but to the pair of lovers, this scene is incredibly fraught and serious (which of course makes it even more comical).*



Heartened by Dorine’s words, Valère and Mariane pledge their undying love to each other. Dorine, exasperated by the pair of them, physically pushes them away from each.

*Even when they are not fighting, the lovers are dramatic and unreasonable.*



## ACT 3, SCENE 1

Damis, who has just heard of Orgon's plan to marry Mariane to Tartuffe, enters in a fury as Dorine tries to calm him down, urging him not to give in to emotion. Dorine reminds him that Elmire has a great deal of influence over Tartuffe, and even speculates that Tartuffe may be in love with her mistress.

Dorine reveals to Damis that Elmire means to meet with Tartuffe in the very room in which they are standing in order to persuade him not to marry Mariane. The impetuous Damis replies that he wishes to hear their conversation. Although Dorine warns him that his temper will get the best of him, Damis refuses to leave, and she ends up hiding him in a closet onstage.

## ACT 3, SCENE 2

Tartuffe enters, and upon seeing Dorine, calls offstage for his "hair-shirt" and "scourge"—tools that particularly religious men would use to harm their own bodies as a way to repent for their sins. He then announces his intent to go to the prison and share his "last few coins with the poor wretches there." Dorine, in an aside, rolls her eyes at Tartuffe's ostentatious display of piety; she knows that he is a "fake."

Tartuffe gives Dorine a handkerchief and urges her to cover her chest with it lest she inspire impure thoughts. Dorine replies that his piety must be very weak if even the sight of her excites him—even if she saw him "naked as a beast," she says, she would not feel tempted by him.

Insulted, Tartuffe tells Dorine that he will leave, but when Dorine tells him that Elmire is on her way to talk with him, Tartuffe immediately replies that he will stay. As Elmire enters, Dorine exits, commenting that her guess about Tartuffe's fondness for Elmire must be correct.

*Yet another character—this time Damis—means to act unwisely because of emotion. The long-suffering Dorine must once again attempt to stop him. Meanwhile, we hear again that Tartuffe seems to have a soft spot for the lovely Elmire, establishing that relationship as crucial to the plot.*



*Damis' insistence upon watching this meeting will later have severe consequences for him, even further emphasizing how foolish it is to give in to emotion rather than listening to reason.*



*After two acts and a scene of building anticipation, Tartuffe finally comes on stage. And he doesn't disappoint: notice that his pious act begins only when he sees that Dorine is there, too. Dorine, of course sees through him. It is worth noting that Tartuffe's hypocrisy is different from those of Orgon and Pernelle. Those two are hypocrites based on their self-importance and blindness; they don't even realize they are hypocrites. Tartuffe is a purposeful hypocrite, saying one thing and doing another to try to get what he wants.*



*Once again the pious blame others for inciting their own impious thoughts (though of course here there is another layer as Tartuffe is only pretending to be pious). Ever the trickster, Dorine uses Tartuffe's exaggerated show of modesty in order to mock and insult him.*



*The moment that Tartuffe hears Elmire's name, his pretense of modesty vanishes. Piety means nothing to Tartuffe when it stands in the way of something he wants (in this case Elmire).*



## ACT 3, SCENE 3

As Elmire enters, Tartuffe attempts to overwhelm her with flattery, telling her that he has been praying ceaselessly for her to recover from her recent illness. Elmire responds graciously, thanking him for his prayers and saying that she doesn't deserve them. She tells him that they must discuss a "private matter."

Tartuffe takes this opportunity to tell Elmire that he wishes to bare his "inmost heart and soul" to her. He goes on to say that the emotion he feels for her is pure and holy—all while grabbing her hand and touching her knee. He goes on to compliment her clothes while essentially groping her.

Despite being uncomfortable, Elmire stays focused on her goal: to keep Tartuffe from marrying Mariane. When she asks Tartuffe about the match, he replies that he looks "elsewhere" for "bliss." Although he clearly means Elmire, she continues to be tactful, asking if he means that he looks for bliss from heaven. Tartuffe, however, explains to her that he can love beauty on both heaven and earth, and tells her that her own beauty is the work of God, and therefore holy. He says that although he used to think his love for her was a trap from Hell, he now believes that it was sent from Heaven, and begs her to accept it.

Elmire responds graciously to Tartuffe's declaration of love, telling him that he should attempt to restrain his emotion. Tartuffe, however, asserts that all men must give way to emotion, and that her beauty has made her the queen of his soul. He goes on to say that, if she will love him in return, she will become his new god, and he will pray to her. He ends by insinuating that, should they begin an affair, Elmire need not worry about gossip, because of his piety.

Still reasonable and polite, Elmire asks Tartuffe if he is worried that she will tell Orgon about his feelings for her. Tartuffe replies that he knows her to be so charitable and kind that she will forgive him and remain silent. Elmire, in turn, tells him that she will remain silent only if he refuses to marry Mariane and advocates for Valère instead.

*Elmire, like Dorine, can see through Tartuffe's hypocrisy. She, however, is polite to him, maintaining the appearance of goodwill, and even attempts to use his obvious feelings for her for the good of her stepdaughter Mariane.*



*Tartuffe may speak pious words, but his actions tell a different story. He is violating Elmire's personal space and taking advantage of her politeness in order to satisfy his own lust.*



*At last Tartuffe unmasks himself as not pious and as lusting after a married woman, although he does so in the most slippery and hypocritical way possible. Although he claims that his love for Elmire is holy, he is essentially asking her to violate the holy bonds of marriage. Once again, Tartuffe's words say one thing, but the meaning beneath them is entirely different.*



*Tartuffe has left piety so far behind that his declaration of love borders on Christian blasphemy. He worships Elmire's beauty as if she herself were divine—he essentially tries to seduce her by saying he would abandon Christ for her, and then says she can trust him because he is so pious! He is both in thrall to his emotions and lust for her, and completely without morals in pursuing her.*



*Practical and rational, Elmire again attempts to use Tartuffe's emotion against him. Although he has insulted her honor by attempting to seduce her into an affair, she will remain silent for the good of her stepdaughter. Here Elmire is trying to use appearances—pretending everything is normal—to trap Tartuffe.*



## ACT 3, SCENE 4

Enraged beyond endurance, Damis springs out of the closet and declares that if Elmire will not tell Orgon of Tartuffe's treachery, then he will. Elmire explains to him that a good wife ignores such foolishness in order not to upset her husband, but Damis refuses to listen to her, his hate for Tartuffe and his need for vengeance interfering with his better judgment.

*Elmire followed a careful, rational plan to allow her to exchange her silence regarding Tartuffe's proposition of her for Tartuffe's refusal to marry Mariane. The emotional Damis wrecks it.*



## ACT 3, SCENE 5

Fortuitously enough, Orgon immediately enters. Damis seizes the opportunity to tell his father that Tartuffe has made an offer of adultery to Elmire, calling him a liar and a traitor. Elmire, however, holds that Damis should not have told Orgon—she could have handled the situation herself—and she exits.

*Damis, in his emotional anger, thinks that merely revealing the truth will be enough. Elmire, in contrast, understands appearances, that she could have managed the situation far better without revealing anything than Damis could by simply blurting everything.*



## ACT 3, SCENE 6

Shocked, Orgon asks Tartuffe if this is true; and Tartuffe replies that it is, extravagantly and “piously” criticizing himself and telling Orgon to throw him out of the house. Once more manipulated by Tartuffe's hypocrisy, Orgon turns on Damis, furious at his son's supposed slander of Tartuffe, accusing Damis of making the whole thing up.

*Tartuffe actually tells the truth in this moment, admitting to sins that he actually has committed. But he does so with such an act of piety that Orgon assumes that Tartuffe's self-criticism is actually a further sign of his devoted religiosity (which is exactly what Tartuffe wants him to think). So, in a moment of dramatic irony, Orgon does not believe Tartuffe during one of the few moments in which Tartuffe tells the truth!*



Tartuffe goes even further, apparently defending Damis from his father, and telling Orgon that one should not trust in appearances. He urges Damis to insult him more, saying that he deserves the punishment for his sins. Of course this has the opposite effect, making Orgon angrier at Damis and more sympathetic towards Tartuffe.

*Every time Tartuffe criticizes himself, he only makes his appearance of piety more believable in the eyes of Orgon. Further, by then using this appearance of piety to pretend to defend Damis, he uses reverse psychology to make Orgon even angrier with Damis. Of course, that Orgon falls for such reverse psychology only makes him look even more foolish.*



Even further angered by what he views as Tartuffe's blamelessness, Orgon berates and threatens his son. Tartuffe continues to “defend” Damis (which of course only makes Orgon more upset). As he becomes more and more enraged, Orgon accuses his entire household of plotting against Tartuffe, even falling on his knees because of his supposed friend's apparent holiness. He resolves to give Mariane to Tartuffe as his bride that very night in order to “spite” them all.

*Orgon believes that his family wishes to separate him from Tartuffe, when actually the opposite is true: Tartuffe has been alienating Orgon from his family. An expert at manipulation, Tartuffe knows exactly how to make Orgon more upset while maintaining his pious act. With the promised marriage to Marianne, Tartuffe has manipulated himself right into the family.*



Appalled, Damis attempts to keep his father from carrying out this terrible course of action, but Orgon only becomes increasingly stubborn, calling his son a “monster” and a “villain” as Tartuffe begs him to stop (while secretly egging him on). Orgon becomes crazed, eventually trying to attack Damis with a stick. Physically restrained by Tartuffe, Orgon orders Damis out of his house and disinherits him. Damis exits.

*The hypocrite has now caused Orgon to betroth Tartuffe to his daughter, and disinherit his own son. Orgon the foolish father was wrecked his own family. The drama and anger of this scene clearly illuminate the catastrophic nature of these actions, and again illustrate the power of both emotion and deceit.*



## ACT 3, SCENE 7

With Damis gone, Tartuffe calls Orgon “brother,” and tells him how deeply it hurts when someone tries to slander him “in my dear Brother’s eyes.” He tells Orgon that the wickedness of men makes him physically ill, and even “close to death.” At this, Orgon begins to weep and almost runs out the door to beat his son.

*Alone with Orgon, Tartuffe continues his pious act, playing on Orgon’s emotion in order to cement their alliance, and drive the family further apart. Wholly without reason or common sense, Orgon is completely at Tartuffe’s mercy.*



Tartuffe says that he would rather leave the house than create further discord, but Orgon begs him to stay. Tartuffe then warns Orgon that his family will continue to plot against him, making sure to mention that Elmire in particular may say slanderous things about him.

*Tartuffe’s manipulation continues as he attempts to ensure that Orgon will ignore his family’s warnings.*



Continuing his tactic of reverse psychology, Tartuffe tells Orgon that from now on he will stay far away from Elmire to avoid any impropriety. Orgon replies that he wishes to spite his family by making Tartuffe and Elmire spend time together “day and night.” He goes on, saying that in order to upset his family even more, he will make Tartuffe his heir, signing away all of his lands and property that very day. This, he says, will prove that he cares more for his friend and future son-in-law than for any of his blood kin. The two exit together to draw up the deed.

*Orgon falls right into Tartuffe’s trap, so enraged against his own family that he disastrously decides to give Tartuffe everything that he owns. The audience can see how catastrophic this decision is, but Orgon is utterly blinded by Tartuffe’s deception, and his own emotions.*



## ACT 4, SCENE 1

Time jumps forward, and the next act opens with Cléante telling Tartuffe that the whole town is talking about Orgon’s fight with Damis.

*Even unseen townspeople within the play think that Orgon has acted foolishly—only he remains blind to it.*



Cléante asserts that, no matter who is in the wrong, it would be Christian of Tartuffe to persuade Orgon to forgive his own son. Tartuffe, however, contends that if he does so, he will appear to be doing so out of guilt. Cléante responds skeptically, saying that Tartuffe is being vengeful; but Tartuffe fires back that he may forgive Damis, but this does not mean he must live with someone who wishes to slander him.

*In this debate, Cléante represents reason and true faith, while Tartuffe represents hypocrisy and deceit. Although Cléante is a rational man, he uses his reason to follow the precepts of Christianity; Tartuffe, meanwhile, twists Christianity to suit his own purposes.*



Cléante turns the conversation towards Orgon's decision to give Tartuffe his entire estate, telling the hypocrite that he should not have accepted the offer. Tartuffe responds that he was reluctant to take the "gift," but that he wishes to use the money for "Heaven's glory and mankind's benefit."

Not at all deceived by Tartuffe's claim, Cléante reprimands him, saying that Damis should have been given the chance to use his wealth morally as opposed to having it taken from him. He goes on to say that it is, in fact, immoral for the rightful heir to be deprived of his property, and that if Tartuffe did not want to live with Damis, then he himself should have left Orgon's house.

Tartuffe makes an excuse, saying that he must go pray, and swiftly exits. A frustrated Cléante is left alone onstage.

*Tartuffe continues to hide his greed behind a screen of piety here as he claims he accepted the gift of Orgon's wealth because he could use it to help both people and god, but Cléante argues that a truly good man would not have accepted the gift and in doing so harmed Orgon's family.*



*Cléante has a clear and rational theory of morality and order, which he articulates skillfully and clearly. This argument contrasts with the deceptive and manipulative arguments of Tartuffe who always just claims to be doing whatever he's doing out of religious devotion.*



*Even the slippery Tartuffe cannot hope to stand against Cléante's rational, forceful arguments. Yet he can still escape them by refusing to engage.*



## ACT 4, SCENE 2

As soon as Tartuffe exits, Elmire, Mariane, and Dorine enter, and Dorine begs Cléante's assistance, telling him that Mariane's heart will break if she must marry Tartuffe. Hearing Orgon coming, she urges the family to "stand together" to try to change their patriarch's mind.

*The family, pushed to the breaking point by the foolish whim of the father, is forced to try to confront him to change his mind. In modern times this would be a scene of emotional intensity. In this time, when the father had total power over the family, the confrontation will be even more fraught.*



## ACT 4, SCENE 3

The moment that he enters, Orgon shows Mariane her marriage contract, and essentially commands her to be happy about the match. In response, Mariane falls to her knees and begs her father not to force her to marry Tartuffe. She says that if she cannot marry Valère, then she may need to consider more "desperate" options.

*The family simply cannot stand against Orgon, despite his foolishness. He, as a father, has too much power. He can make the family members do whatever he wants.*





Orgon is almost swayed, but when Mariane says that she would rather become a nun than marry Tartuffe, her father grows angry again, telling his daughter that the more she loathes Tartuffe, the more “ennobling” it will be for her to marry him. He becomes even more harsh, ordering her, “Marry Tartuffe, and mortify your flesh!”

*Orgon is moved by Mariane’s genuine emotions, but reacts angrily to any criticisms of Tartuffe. One might argue that any criticism of Tartuffe is also a criticism of Orgon, since Orgon has stated his belief in Tartuffe so completely. Meanwhile, Orgon has gone from oblivious to cruel, essentially telling his daughter that he wants her to be miserable. He seems to believe that misery and piety are the same thing—or even that misery leads to piety—a completely warped understanding of the Church’s teachings. This is also a view of Christianity that Tartuffe plays on to manipulate Orgon.*



Dorine and Cléante each try to intervene, but Orgon will not even let them speak.

*Orgon’s alienation from his family reaches its height as he stops them even from trying to communicate with him.*



When Elmire reminds him of Tartuffe’s attempted seduction of her this morning, Orgon asserts that she is doing so merely to back up Damis. He goes on to say that, if Tartuffe had really done as she said, then she would have been angry, instead of calm and reasonable. Elmire responds that she feels no need to get angry over such offers—unlike some women, she feels no need to humiliate men “for the slightest cause.”

*This discussion reveals the core of Orgon’s blindness: he thinks that drama and emotion are equivalent to sincerity; he does not understand the difference between appearances and reality. This is why he trusts Tartuffe. Elmire’s response is more nuanced, an argument that appearance is not reality and goodness does not always have to be display. Rather, here, she argues that one can be kind to others by not exposing certain things, by recognizing and accepting and keeping hidden flaws (with the implication that this is acceptable only so long as you do so without sinning yourself).*



When Orgon tells Elmire that nothing anyone says will shake his faith in Tartuffe, his wife asks him if she can instead show him the truth. He responds with skepticism, but Elmire persists. At last Orgon says that he will take her “challenge,” although he remains positive that he is right

*At last, Elmire discovers a way to free her husband from Tartuffe’s spell: rather than telling him about Tartuffe’s hypocrisy, she will instead show him, thus using Orgon’s faith in appearances in order to discredit Tartuffe.*



Elmire asks Dorine to bring in Tartuffe, while sending away Cléante and Mariane. Although Dorine warns her mistress that Tartuffe is devious, Elmire is not worried. She knows that “amorous men are gullible,” and plans to use Tartuffe’s feelings for her against him.

*The reasonable Elmire knows that she can manipulate Tartuffe with emotion (just as Tartuffe has manipulated her husband), using his lust for her in order to unmask him as a hypocrite.*



## ACT 4, SCENE 4

Alone with her husband, Elmire tells Orgon to hide himself under a table. He remains completely unconvinced, but does as she says. Once he is concealed, she tells him that she is going to encourage Tartuffe's advances in order to expose his true treacherous nature. She begs Orgon, however, to intervene and save her from Tartuffe's "odious lust" as soon as he is convinced.

*Elmire knows how difficult it is for Orgon to differentiate between truth and appearances, and makes absolutely certain that he understands that she will only be pretending to return Tartuffe's affection.*



## ACT 4, SCENE 5

Tartuffe asks Elmire what she wants with him and, hearing that she has a secret, closes the door to ensure that the two of them are alone (all as Orgon keeps watch from under the table). Elmire, pretending to be flighty and foolish, apologizes to Tartuffe for not defending him from Damis' accusation, saying that she simply "didn't have the sense" to do so. She pretends to gloat, saying that she is glad that Orgon has ordered her to spend more time with Tartuffe because it will give them a chance to be alone—and ends her speech by professing her love.

*In order to uncover Tartuffe's deception, Elmire acts deceptively herself, pretending to be in love with the hypocrite in order to tempt him into revealing his lust. One might then call Elmire in this scene a "hypocrite" in the strict sense of the word: she is saying what she does not believe. But what separates her from Tartuffe is her intent: she seeks to save her family, while Tartuffe's in his hypocrisy seeks to ruin it. By pretending to be stupid, and by falsely confessing her love to him, Elmire plays on Tartuffe's emotions and feelings.*



With Tartuffe perplexed by her speech, Elmire continues, explaining that women's modesty often prevents them from speaking their hearts, and that she has been signaling one thing with her words, but another with her actions. She goes on to say that she was calm during Tartuffe's earlier seduction because his words actually pleased her, that she wished to defend him from Damis, and that she tried to thwart his marriage to Mariane only because she wanted him for herself.

*Elmire is painting a false picture of women in general as hypocrites and deceivers who say one thing but do another. It is worth noting that this was a common idea about women at the time (and in some ways still is today); think of nearly all of Hamlet's rants about women, for instance. Here, though, the situation is deeply ironic, of course, because Elmire is talking to the greatest hypocrite of all.*



Although overjoyed, Tartuffe remains cautious, suspicious that Elmire is pretending to love him only to stop his match with Mariane. He tells her that she must show him physical affection in order to prove her love. Unwilling to be unfaithful to Orgon, Elmire attempts to signal him to reveal himself but he does nothing. Tartuffe, meanwhile, asserts that since he does not deserve her love, he will not believe he has it until she satisfies him in some way. Elmire continues to try to delay, but Tartuffe insists that she give him proof of her affection.

*A liar himself, Tartuffe knows to be on the lookout for deception. He wants Elmire to back up her words with actions in order to prove their truth—he refuses to be convinced purely by the "appearance" she is spinning with her words. His demand for proof is ironic meanwhile, as this whole scene is in fact manufactured by Elmire to give Orgon proof of Tartuffe's hypocrisy.*



Still attempting to delay, Elmire asks Tartuffe if he is afraid of Heaven's wrath, and the sin of adultery, but he responds that he will teach her how to act wrongly, but remain innocent in the eyes of Heaven.

*This is the essence of Tartuffe: he acts wrongly, yet always manages to present himself as blameless and innocent. That he phrases it in the way he does here suggests that he sees no difference between tricking men into seeing him as innocent and tricking God into seeing him as innocent. In fact, the statement is dangerously close to conflating what men and God think so closely as to be a denial of God even existing—profoundly not pious.*



Elmire tries to signal her husband by coughing repeatedly, until Tartuffe wants to know if she is ill. He goes on to ask if she is still troubled by the idea of a liaison with him, telling her once again that he will keep their potential affair a secret. Unable to delay any further, Elmire says that she will give Tartuffe “concrete evidence” of her affection. She urges him to see if Orgon is near, but Tartuffe mocks Orgon, saying that his host grows “[m]ore gullible” and blind by the day. After she asks again, however, he relents, and goes to make sure no one is eavesdropping in the hall.

*Elmire's coughing and attempts to delay giving Tartuffe “proof” of her love for him are deeply comic. She has engineered this scene to give Orgon proof of Tartuffe's hypocrisy. But now Orgon—who was taken in so easily by Tartuffe—seems to need so much proof before acting that he is making it almost impossible for Elmire not to go further than she wants to with Tartuffe! Meanwhile, Elmire at last causes Tartuffe to reveal his contempt for Orgon, her ultimate goal throughout this scene. She then uses Tartuffe's fear of scandal and love of appearances against him, manipulating him into stepping outside so that she can escape his attempts at seduction.*



## ACT 4, SCENE 6

Appalled, Orgon comes out of hiding, but Elmire (despite signaling him moments before) tells him to go back under the table, telling him that she must convince him further and urging him not to be “hasty” in making his judgment. As Tartuffe re-enters, Elmire hides her husband behind her skirts.

*Even though she has finally convinced Orgon of her side of the story, Elmire is still attempting to teach her husband how to be thoughtful and rational. At the same time, Orgon hidden behind Elmire's skirts while Tartuffe attempts to seduce her is also just plain funny.*



## ACT 4, SCENE 7

As Tartuffe comes back to announce that the house is empty, Orgon leaps out from behind Elmire and begins to berate Tartuffe for attempting to marry his daughter while coveting his wife. He falsely states that he has suspected Tartuffe for a long time, and refuses to listen when Tartuffe attempts to talk his way out of the situation, ordering the hypocrite to leave his house.

*Ever emotional and irrational, Orgon immediately convinces himself that he has always suspected Tartuffe. Even though he no longer is duped by Tartuffe, he still remains volatile and dramatic.*



At this, Tartuffe shows his true colors, saying that since Orgon made him his heir and signed over all he owned, it is his former patron who should be turned out of the house. Before leaving, he warns that he will return, and says that Orgon has offended Heaven and will be punished for his wicked ways.

*Orgon's decision to make Tartuffe his heir has come back to haunt him (of course!); in theory, at least, Tartuffe does now have the legal power to turn Orgon and his family out of their own house.*



## ACT 4, SCENE 8

Elmire asks what Tartuffe meant, and Orgon explains to her that he has indeed signed over all his lands and property to Tartuffe. He then mentions something else: a certain locked chest up in Tartuffe's room. Upset and worried, he runs off to check on the mysterious box.

*Orgon now sees the full extent of his blindness, but can't do anything to save his family from his own terrible decisions. By signing over everything to Tartuffe he has given up the legal standing that gave him power. In a sense, he has given up his fatherhood, his central status and ability to protect and control his family.*



## ACT 5, SCENE 1

Act 5 opens a short time later, with Cléante trying to calm down Orgon, who is extremely upset about the previously mentioned strong-box. He reveals that the box was full of the papers of a friend who was disloyal to **the King**, and that he would be ruined if they were found in his possession. So uneasy did they make him, in fact, that he gave them to Tartuffe for safekeeping. Cléante scolds Orgon for acting so foolishly.

Orgon bemoans that such a seemingly pious man could be so evil and degraded. He resolves to hate all holy men and “to persecute them worse than Satan could.” Cléante responds by begging Orgon for moderation, telling him that he should attempt to take a middle road instead of jumping between different extremes.

*Moliere continues to ratchet up the tension: Orgon’s foolishness could have grievous consequences not just for himself, but for his entire family. And the contents of the strong-box suggests this threat may extend beyond losing their wealth to even more dire consequences. Orgon has been foolish for a long time.*



*The emotional Orgon, who loved holy men like Tartuffe, now completely hates them. Meanwhile, as always, Cléante remains wise and rational, and makes the case that Orgon’s fundamental issue is not trusting Tartuffe but his emotional extremism, his belief that everything must be entirely one way or entirely the other. Instead, Cléante advises a mindset of rational moderation.*



## ACT 5, SCENE 2

Damis returns to his father’s side, begging to be allowed to kill Tartuffe for Orgon’s sake. Cléante scolds him as well, telling his young nephew that he, like his father, must learn moderation.

*Like father like son—Damis, like Orgon, immediately jumps to the most dramatic (and probably disastrous) course of action.*



## ACT 5, SCENE 3

The women enter: Madame Pernelle, Mariane, Elmire, and Dorine. Orgon’s mother says that she has heard “strange tales of very strange events.” Orgon tells her that Tartuffe has betrayed him, but Madame Pernelle (as her son did before her) utterly refuses to believe that Tartuffe could ever do anything wrong. She suggests that other members of the family must be trying to slander Tartuffe, and fights with her son about the hypocrite’s reputation. Frustrated beyond endurance with his mother, Orgon asks her what kind of proof she needs to be convinced of Tartuffe’s guilt. Madame Pernelle says that nothing will convince her, and as Orgon fumes, Dorine points out that Madame Pernelle is acting just as Orgon once did.

Cléante reminds Orgon that they are wasting time, and that they must figure out how to stop Tartuffe. Elmire expresses regret at her “little plot,” saying that if she’d known about Tartuffe’s power to hurt her family, she would not have angered him.

*The tables—quite ironically—have turned. Orgon, who was once as stubborn and misguided as his mother, now must try to convince her of Tartuffe’s treachery. But just like Orgon, his mother cannot be convinced by any “telling” of Tartuffe’s hypocrisy and treachery. Her mind is set.*



*Even now, Elmire remains calm and practical, attempting to come up with the most effective way to protect her family from Tartuffe. Yet her regret at the way her “little plot” only angered Tartuffe mirrors in a way the way that the other character’s attempt to sway Orgon only angered him, and emphasizes that Tartuffe has become a kind of monstrous “father” to this family, able to do whatever he wants to it.*



## ACT 5, SCENE 4

As the family attempts to plan, a bailiff (officer of the court) named Monsieur Loyal enters and asks to speak with Orgon. He says that he has come from Tartuffe, and that he bears a message. Although at first Loyal seems kind and courteous, he has in fact come to serve Orgon with an order of eviction.

Although the family is furious, Monsieur Loyal will not budge, saying that the law is on Tartuffe's side and that Orgon's household must leave Tartuffe's property. He goes on to say that he is going to return with ten men who will confiscate all of Orgon's furniture, but that he will give the family until the morning to leave. Orgon, Damis, and even Dorine are furious, threatening Loyal with bodily harm. Cléante attempts to maintain order as Loyal exits.

*Hypocrisy is contagious. Like Tartuffe, Loyal seems trustworthy, but is actually malicious. His presence also underlines the dire nature of the situation for both Orgon and his loved ones—the law appears to be on Tartuffe's side.*



*At last, the full weight of Orgon's poor judgment has come crashing down on him and his family. Because of his belief in Tartuffe, all those Orgon loves may soon be homeless and penniless. Tartuffe has manipulated both him and the law. In this extreme moment the family reacts with extreme emotion, except for Cléante who maintains at least some calm.*



## ACT 5, SCENE 5

Madame Pernelle now believes Tartuffe's treachery and, as Orgon was before, is "thunderstruck." Dorine reacts sarcastically. Orgon scolds her, but Cléante and Elmire intervene and urge the patriarch to decide on a course of action.

*Like her son, Madame Pernelle had to actually see evidence of Tartuffe's deception in order to believe it for herself. Orgon once again reacts emotionally (scolding Dorine) rather than planning rationally for what to do next.*



## ACT 5, SCENE 6

Valère enters urgently, bringing terrible news: he has heard that Tartuffe has brought the contents of the strongbox to **the King**, and that police officers are on their way to arrest Orgon...led, of course, by Tartuffe. He urges Orgon to flee, as does Cléante.

*Disloyalty to the King is a terrible crime, one that would lead to an awful punishment for Orgon well beyond the loss of wealth: torture, even death. Tartuffe has made good on his threat, having thrown aside all pretense of Christian charity and in a triumph of hypocrisy appears even to have manipulated the King's anger against Orgon (remember how in the first scene the good will of the king was established as the basis for all of Orgon's prosperity, so this is a dire blow indeed).*



Before Orgon can run away, however, Tartuffe enters, followed by the Officer, and announces that Orgon must go to prison. Although the other family members hurl verbal abuse at him, Tartuffe remains implacable and self-satisfied, claiming that he wishes only to serve his **King**. Dorine marvels that Tartuffe can pervert such a sacred symbol and use it for his own purposes, while Cléante attempts to argue with the hypocrite, but to no avail.

*Just as Tartuffe used the Church to manipulate Orgon, now he uses the king to threaten his former "friend." He has moved, just as Dorine says, from one sacred symbol (the Church) to another (the King). Cléante again attempts to use reason, but in the face of Tartuffe's power even reason has no strength.*



Tartuffe orders the Officer to arrest Orgon—but instead of doing so, The Officer announces that he means to arrest Tartuffe. He explains to a shocked Orgon and his family that **the King**, unfooled by hypocrisy, easily saw past Tartuffe's lies, and recognized him as a criminal and an imposter who had committed many other "vicious crimes." He goes on to return Orgon's papers from the strongbox, and to invalidate the deed that gave Tartuffe all of Orgon's property, all in the name of the King, whom he says is rewarding Orgon for his recent service in the civil wars.

The family is relieved; as the women praise God, Cléante stops Orgon from insulting Tartuffe, telling him that it is undignified to do so, and that he should instead hope that one day Tartuffe will understand the error of his ways. He urges Orgon to give thanks to the mercy of **the King**. For once, Orgon takes his wise brother-in-law's advice, and the play ends with Orgon resolving first to give thanks to the King, and second to give Mariane to Valère, whom he at last recognizes as a man worthy of his daughter.

*This turn of events is nothing short of miraculous. It takes an almost divine act of the King in order to extract Orgon from Tartuffe's grip. This is a testament to Orgon's catastrophic blindness, and to the all-powerful nature of the King, who has essentially stepped in to protect the family since Orgon—the family patriarch himself—was incapable of doing so. This turn of events while sudden and shocking, also does two things: it makes the King seem almost divine in his wisdom and mercy, and in doing so exalts King Louis IX, who was the extremely powerful King of France when Moliere was writing. It also extends the metaphor of fatherhood, as the King, the "father" of the nation, steps in to restore order to Orgon's family when that order had been destroyed by Orgon's foolishness and Tartuffe's monstrous usurpation of Orgon's "fatherly" power over the family.*



*The play ends on a largely optimistic note, as the characters praise the King and Orgon for once gets the better of his emotions and follows Cléante's advice in favor of moderation and thanksgiving. Mariane's impending marriage also creates both a true religious note to end the proceedings, as well as re-establishes the proper order of the family by providing Mariane with a suitable and loving husband.*





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