

MOLIÈRE'S

Le Tartuffe

WRIGHT



Heath's Modern Language Series

MOLIÈRE'S
LE TARTUFFE

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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I. CHRONOLOGICAL MOLIERE'S LIFE

1622. Birth of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin at Paris, the son of a *valet-tapissier du roi*.

1643. In spite of a good education his inclinations lead him to the stage. He takes the name of Molière and founds a theatrical company, the *Illustre théâtre*, which meets with absolute failure.

1646-7. Molière and his company begin a long series of travels in the French provinces, extending over many years, and taking them through all the chief cities of the South.

1653 or 1655. At Lyons Molière plays *l'Etourdi*.

1656. *Le Dépit amoureux* given at Béziers.

1658. Return to Paris.

1659. First Parisian success, *les Précieuses ridicules*, an attack on Preciosity.

1660. *Sganarelle*.

1661. *Don Garcie de Navarre* (a failure). *L'Ecole des maris*. *Les Fâcheux*.

1662. Molière's unlucky marriage with Armande Béjart. *L'Ecole des femmes*; hostile criticism.

1663. *La Critique de l'Ecole des femmes*, a reply to this criticism. *L'Impromptu de Versailles*.

1664. *Le Mariage forcé*. *La Princesse d'Elide*. First three acts of *Tartuffe*. The play is forbidden.

1665. *Don Juan*, the portrait of the atheist. *L'Amour médecin*.

1666. *Le Misanthrope*. *Le Médecin malgré lui*. *Mélicerte*. *La Pastorale comique*. *Le Sicilien*.

1667. *Tartuffe* reappears, somewhat transformed, as *l'Imposteur*. It is again forbidden.

1668. *Amphitryon*. *Georges Dandin*. *L'Avare*.

1669. *Tartuffe* finally allowed in its present form. *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*.

1670. *Les Amants magnifiques*. *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.

1671. *Psyché*, in collaboration with Corneille and Quinault. *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*.

1672. *Les Femmes savantes*.

1673. *Le Malade imaginaire*. Molière, long an invalid, is taken with a hemorrhage while acting in the play and dies a few hours later.

II. HISTORY OF THE PLAY

The first three acts of *Tartuffe* were given at certain festivities of the French Court, on May 12, 1664. The play, even in its incomplete form, aroused the bitterest hostility and intense opposition on the part of the clerical party, who thought they saw, in the satire of religious hypocrisy, an attack upon religion in general. They succeeded, indeed, in getting the play forbidden. Molière, however, finished his comedy, and for some time was in the habit of reading it aloud at small gatherings of people who sympathized with him. Among these was a no less important person than Cardinal Chigi, the papal legate, who was able to distinguish between true piety and hypocrisy. The king, though state reasons obliged him to humor the opposition and to refuse a petition from Molière (the so-called *premier placet*), nevertheless continued to hold him in high esteem, and let his company take the title of *troupe du roi*. Rehearsals of the play were, meanwhile, given before persons like the duc d'Orléans and the princesse Palatine.

Emboldened by this state of affairs, on August 5, 1667, Molière brought out a modified version of the play under the title *l'Imposteur*. *Tartuffe* had now become Panulphe, and was considerably transformed to spare the susceptibilities of his

critics. These were, however, not mollified. The judge, the président de Lamoignon, forbade the new play. Molière at once sent two of his actors, la Thorillière and la Grange, to bear another request (the *second placet*) to the king, who was at the time in Flanders with the army. The latter did not deem it advisable to take any steps, and the archbishop of Paris, Hardouin de Péréfixe, proclaimed the most severe religious penalties against the play. It was not until February 5, 1669, when the storm had somewhat blown over, that, as a result of a third petition, Molière was able to bring out *Tartuffe* in the form which we now possess.

To the same period of strife belongs also *Don Juan* (1665), a play portraying not the religious hypocrite but the atheist. The two plays deserve to be studied together, and, at any rate, one should not omit to read the tirade on hypocrisy in the second scene of the fifth act of *Don Juan*.

III. TARTUFFE AS A PORTRAIT

The person of Tartuffe is one of the most striking character studies in French literature, and the play disputes with *le Misanthrope* and *Don Juan* the right to be called Molière's masterpiece. So vivid a portrait suggests that there must have been a direct model. This has been sought in a Gabriel de Roquette, bishop of Autun; in a certain Charpy who wormed his way into the affections of a family with deceitful intent; in Lamoignon the judge, and Hardouin de Péréfixe, who forbade the earlier play, and of whom are told anecdotes somewhat like incidents in the final *Tartuffe*; in Richelieu, Mazarin, Father Joseph, and in Conti, the early friend of Molière, who turned against him on becoming converted.

But stray anecdotes, incidents and *rapprochements* mean little. The great question remains: Did Molière intend to attack true religion or only pretenders to religion? It was the confusion of these two separate matters which caused the fight

over *Tartuffe* and its suppression. Certainly Molière meant only to portray the *pretender* to piety, in spite of critics even today who maintain the contrary; but this portrait is often indistinguishable from that of the sincere bigot. There were bigots among the Jansenists as well as among the Jesuits; yet the numerous passages on casuistry and mental reservations seem to imply that Molière was attacking Jesuit doctrines, rather than those of Arnauld and his sect, notwithstanding the austerity with which the Jansenists frowned on mere amusements. There may be some truth, if the parallel be not pushed too far, in the recent theory of M. Raoul Allier¹ that Molière was attacking the "Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement," popularly known as the "Cabale des Dévots," a secret society (1627-1666) for the protection of the true Church and the persecution of its foes. After all, there is nothing to prevent us from saying that there were hypocrites among the Jesuits, the Jansenists and the members of the Cabale as well, and that Molière meant to attack these hypocrites wherever he found them.

IV. THE HYPOCRITE IN LITERATURE

It is difficult to say to what degree Molière was indebted to previous plays or authors.² There are similarities with Machiavelli's *Mandragola* (early sixteenth century), in which a certain Frate Timoteo tricks a husband and his wife; with Aretino's *Lo Ipocrito* (1542), in which a parasite under the mask of piety makes his way into a family. It is customary to mention also two minor Italian plays, *Il Dottor Bacchetone* and *Il Basilico del Bernagasso*.

¹ Cf. R. Allier, *la Cabale des Dévots*, Chap. XIX; the arguments are largely based on the use of the word *cabale* in the play. — In 1897, venturing into the realm of fancy, Simon Boubée wrote a very dull novel of adventure, *la Jeunesse de Tartuffe*, in which the hero is an Italian ruffian Onofrio, destined later to become the friend of Orgon.

² Cf. Caspari, *Die Originalität Molières im Tartuffe und im Avare*. Diss. Göttingen.

Among French writings there are much more certain likenesses with Regnier's satire *Macette*,¹ the female Tartuffe, the first satire of the inferior writer Dulorens, the *Hypocrites* of Scarron, and *Polyandre* by Charles Sorel.

The character of Tartuffe is, however, a general type, which authors have been fond of treating. In the Middle Ages in France we find more than one example. Not to lay stress on Rutebeuf's Hypocrisie in *le Pharisien*, the hypocritical character has a famous embodiment in the allegorical *Faux Semblant* of the *Roman de la Rose*. A different aspect of the same character is found in the trickiness or *renardie* of the *Roman de Renart*. This trickiness or foxiness, as time goes on, is sometimes linked with a religious aspect under the name of *papelardie*, a word frequently used by Rabelais. Molière's Tartuffe is but a seventeenth century counterpart of these earlier characters, and in reading the play we are reminded of the saying of La Rochefoucauld: "La plupart des amis dégoûtent de l'amitié et la plupart des dévots dégoûtent de la dévotion." In more recent times we have examples of the type in Beaumarchais' Don Basile, and in the Jesuit Rodin of Eugène Sue's *le Juif errant*. It may, perhaps, not be out of place to mention also the clever comedy by Mme de Girardin (Delphine Gay), called *Lady Tartuffe*.²

In England there are several hypocrites in literature, some of them directly inspired by Molière. In writings before his time Shakspeare's "honest Iago" occurs immediately to one's mind, and Angelo in *Measure for Measure* exclaims, "We are all frail," as Tartuffe assures Elmire that "Madame, après tout, je ne suis pas un ange." In Ben Jonson's *Volpone* one sees the foxiness of hypocrisy, and in *Bartholomew's Fair* the religious bigot appears in Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. Medbourne's

¹ Loin du monde elle fait sa demeure et son giste;
Son œil tout penitent ne pleure qu'eau beniste.

² For a list of works inspired by Molière in France, see Mangold's book on *Tartuffe*, p. 145.

translation of *Tartuffe* is a fairly close rendering, though with such modifications as the appearance of Tartuffe's servant, Laurence, who makes love to Dorine and marries her at the end. Colley Cibber's *Non-Juror* is visibly inspired by the French play and introduces some of its important scenes in the doings of Dr. Wolf. The Maskwell of Congreve's *Double Dealer* reminds us of Tartuffe, and so does Dr. Cantwell of Bickerstaff's *Hypocrite*, which kept the stage in America until well into the nineteenth century. A hypocrite still well known to theatre goers is Joseph Surface, and the reader of Dickens sees different phases of Tartuffe's character in the "umbleness" of Uriah Heep, the moral reflections of Mr. Pecksniff, the cant of Mr. Chadband, with his "fat smile, and a general appearance of having a good deal of train oil in his system," and the consuming powers of the deputy-shepherd, the reverend Mr. Stiggins, of the *Pickwick Papers*.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

General criticisms of Molière will be found in any history of French literature.—Editions of his works are also numerous: the standard today is by Despois and Mesnard in the *Collection des Grands Ecrivains*. The tenth volume contains the biography, the eleventh the bibliography. See also Livet's *Lexique de la langue de Molière*; Lacroix' *Bibliographie Moliéresque*, and the bibliography of the Molière collection in the Harvard Library by T. F. Currier and E. L. Gay.—Important separate editions of *le Tartuffe* are by Livet, and by the actors Régnier (*Le Tartuffe des Comédiens*), and Silvain (*Edition de la Comédie Française*). There are school editions by Bouilly, by Pellisson, by Lavigne, in France; in Germany, see those of Lion, of Friese.—An important study of all topics connected with the play is Mangold's *Molière's Tartuffe, Geschichte und Kritik*.—For literary criticisms and studies, see: Brunetière, *les Epoques du théâtre français*; Coquelin, *Tartuffe*; Lemaître,

Impressions de théâtre, Vol. IV, and *les Contemporains*, Vol. VII; Sainte-Beuve, *Port Royal*, Book III, Chaps. 16 and 17; Sarcey, *Quarante ans de théâtre*, Vol. II; Veuillot, *Molière et Bourdaloue*.

The editor of the present edition has not hesitated to make use of all the material at his command, and has drawn freely from the works mentioned above, as well as from older editions like Auger and Taschereau. Livet's notes have, in particular, proved most useful. Philological information has been kept in the background as being superfluous to the schoolboy or the undergraduate, but many differences between seventeenth century and modern French have been pointed out, and modern equivalents have been given, even though the meaning may be obvious. For this same purpose frequent reference has been made to Haase's *Syntaxe française du XVII^e siècle*. The text is that of the edition by Despois and Mesnard.

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