

Moliere: *Tartuffe* Study Guide and Questions

Preface

1. In the preface, Moliere calls the play "a clever poem which corrects men's faults by means of agreeable lessons".
2. Honest clergy should not be offended, such literature helps correct men's faults, and hypocrisy ought to be criticized.
3. Why would the church be so offended? How does Moliere address this in the preface?
4. What does Moliere say is the function of comedy in his Preface to *Tartuffe*?

Act I

1. Look for the following stock characters as you read *Tartuffe*: the young lovers whose desires are thwarted by an unreasonable father, the clever servant, the "reasoner," and the impostor or parasite.
2. What are the main complaints of Orgon's mother Madame Pernelle about the way the household is being run?
3. What complaints does she have about everyone in the family?
4. Why do you think she is critical of others?
5. What is Cleante's opinion of Madame Pernelle?
6. As you read the first scene, whose word do you trust and why?
7. What do you find out about each character?
8. What is everyone's opinion of Madame Pernelle?
9. In Act I, Scene 2, what does Dorine find wrong in the relationship between Orgon and *Tartuffe*?
10. What are some of *Tartuffe's* qualities that Orgon admires?
11. What passion do you think motivates Orgon to trust *Tartuffe*?
12. How is *Tartuffe* scamming Orgon?
13. Why do you think Orgon is fooled so badly by *Tartuffe*?
14. In Scene 5, Cleante asks Orgon why he can't see *Tartuffe's* hypocrisy. Why, do you think, some people are taken by hypocrites and others are not?
15. Cleante compares the true pious men to the hypocrites. What are some of the differences, according to him?

Act II

1. What do you think are some reasons why Mariane does not actively resist her father's plan to marry her to *Tartuffe*?
2. How does Dorine try to convince Orgon against matching his daughter with *Tartuffe*?

3. The wise servant ridiculing the master. In Scene 2 Dorine, the servant, takes a role that is not proper for her position. She is arguing with the "master" of the house.
4. In Scene 3 how does Dorine try to convince Mariane to deal with her father's objections? How does she tease her? How does she use reverse-psychology?
5. What does this act reveal about Mariane's character?

Act III

1. In Scene 2 we meet Tartuffe for the first time. How is his hypocrisy exhibited in this scene?
2. How does Tartuffe's arrival and behavior in Scenes 2 and 3 live up to our expectations of him?
3. In Scene 3, Elmire admonishes Tartuffe for making passes at her. Tartuffe's reply is "I may be pious, but I am human too; / With your celestial charms before his eyes, / A man has not the power to be wise." Think about this question: if passion is part of human nature, is it possible for man to be pious? Is piety "unnatural" for human beings? Think of examples of contemporary men whose piety was overcome by passion.
4. Provide some examples of how Tartuffe seems to fault Elmire for his passion.
5. What constitutes the comedy in Scene 3?
6. Why is Elmire opposed to telling her husband Orgon about the incident with Tartuffe?
7. Find examples of how completely Orgon is deceived by Tartuffe's hypocrisy.
8. In asking Orgon to believe the accusations against him, Tartuffe is presenting himself as the saintly person who over exaggerates his own sins.
9. Tartuffe is guilty of all the crimes he confesses to, so why do you think Orgon refuses to believe him and immediately turns on his son Damis?
10. How does Tartuffe use reverse psychology with Orgon?
11. In this Act we see Orgon acting in a way that is contrary to the socially established role of a husband and a father. Provide some examples.

Act IV

1. In Scene 1, why doesn't Cleante think that Tartuffe is a true Christian? If Tartuffe thinks he is a true Christian, then what should he do?
2. Read carefully Tartuffe's response from line 19. In line 33 Cleante responds with "Your reasoning is badly warped and stretched," What's wrong with Tartuffe's reasoning?
3. In Scene 3, in begging her father not to make her marry Tartuffe Mariane basically lists Orgon's faults as a true father. How is he not acting as a true father?

4. In line 28 there is another example of Orgon's warped reasoning for why Mariane should marry Tartuffe. What does he say is his main motive in marrying his daughter to Tartuffe? How is this an example of religious extremism?
5. How does Elmire's plan to unmask Tartuffe work?
6. Why does Tartuffe doubt Elmire's confession? What kind of proof do you think he is looking for?
7. Elmire suggests that she does not want to commit a sin with Tartuffe. What's Tartuffe's response to such a sin? Read his speech from line 116.
8. What is comical in this scene?
9. Orgon waits to appear from under the table only after he hears Tartuffe's comment about him. What does Tartuffe's say about him?
10. Why is Elmire mad at Orgon?
11. Orgon says that he suspected Tartuffe for a long time. Do you think that's true? If not, why do you think he is saying this?
12. What's Orgon worried about in Scene 8?

Act V

1. In the middle of page 353 Orgon says he is through with pious men; he'll hate them and persecute them all. What's Cleante's comment on that?
2. Cleante's comments are also directed at the audience and at the reader. How should one relate to pious men, according to Cleante?
3. In Act V, Scene 3, why do you think Mme. Pernelle won't believe her own son's testimony about Tartuffe's villainy? What point(s) do you suppose Moliere is making about how to make people blinded by passion see the light of reason?
4. How was Orgon saved by the King?
5. List the ways that order is restored in the family at the end of the play.