

Fiction vs. reality: a comparison of themes in "tartuffe" and "candide"



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When reading a work of fiction, one has to be aware of different writing styles that will clue you into the information that the author wants one to pick up on. In the works, Moliere's "Tartuffe" and Voltaire's "Candide" the themes of appearance vs. reality can be found. I will be discussing this theme which is both obvious and subtle depending on the author. I will be discussing the theme of appearance vs. reality. In "Tartuffe", the character "Tartuffe" is touted as a holy zealous man that is supposed to be pious.

Tartuffe is actually a master con-artist who gains entree into the household of Orgon by portraying himself as a holy man.

Throughout the play Tartuffe first gains permission to marry Orgon's daughter Marianne, then he proceeds to try and seduce her mother and Orgon's wife Elmire. This is one of the most obvious scenes in which one can see Tartuffe's facade being challenged. Elmire: 'Your declaration is most gallant, Sir, But don't you think it's out of character? You'd have done better to restrain your passion and think before you spoke in such a fashion.

It ill becomes a pious man like you...' Tartuffe: '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.

I know such words sound strangely coming from me, but I'm no angel, nor was meant to be' (Moliere Act III Sc IV). Tartuffe is trying to gain the affection of Elmire despite the fact that he is betrothed to Marianne. He makes another pass at Elmire again in Act Four. In this scene, Tartuffe is trying to convince Elmire that they can have an affair. Tartuffe uses language and logic that betray that he is not in fact pious at all. Elmire: But how can I

consent with your offense to heaven, toward which you feel such reverence?

Tartuffe: If heaven is all that holds you back, don't worry. I can remove that hindrance in a hurry.

Nothing of that sort need obstruct our path... Tartuffe: 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; its scandal, Madam, which makes it an offence and it's no sin to sin in confidence (Moliere Act IV Sc VII). This scene truly un-masks Tartuffe as the false prude he is. In Voltaire's novel, "Candide", there are many examples of appearance vs. reality. The novel begins by describing different philosophical arguments. Candide's philosophical stance is one that states that everything is the best of all possible worlds.

It can be demonstrated, that things could not be other than they are; for everything has been made to serve a purpose, and so nothing is susceptible to improvement (Voltaire 2). This ideology is one that can be inherently deceiving. When Candide and his companions arrive in Lisbon, there is a huge earthquake that kills many people and creates a great deal of damage. Candide and Pangloss attempt to help the people injured during the earthquake, during which Pangloss attempt to tell someone that the earthquake was for the best, but he ends up being taken by the inquisition:

' For, all this is for the best; for, if there is a volcano at Lisbon, it cannot be anywhere else; for it is impossible that things should not be where they are; for all is well. ' A little, dark man, a familiar of the Inquisition, who sat beside him, politely took up the conversation, and said ' Apparently, you do not believe in original sin; for, if everything is for the best, there was neither fall

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nor punishment. ‘ ... ‘ Your Excellency will pardon me,’ said Pangloss; ‘ free-will can exist with absolute necessity; for it was necessary that we should be free; for in short, limited will...

‘ (Voltaire 120). After this scene, Pangloss is to be hanged. This devastates Candide who travels on without him. Much later in the novel, Pangloss re-appears on a slave ship, where Candide is able to purchase his freedom. Candide believed Pangloss to be dead, but he was really alive, suffering in the slave galley the whole time. This type of situation happens many other times in Candide. When Candide and Cacambo decide to fight on the side of the Paraguayan Jesuits, Candide thinks he killed the brother of Cunegonde when they encountered each other.

It turns out that Candide just wounded the Baron who was also on the slave ship with Pangloss. The use of reality vs. a fake reality makes a story more interesting and gives it more dimensions. These realities are also subjective realities. In Tartuffe’s case, Dorine and Damis both saw through the monk’s false piety and tried to un-mask him. In Candide the reality exists, but Candide may not have been aware of the actual reality. Bibliography: Voltaire. Candide and Related Texts. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc, 2000. Moliere. Tartuffe and other plays. New York: Penguin Group Inc, 1967.