

Tartuffe by moliere essay sample

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Prior to reading the book, my first encounter of the word “ Tartuffe” fascinates me. It sounded like a pseudonym of an artist, perhaps a title of a great painting, or a name of any piece of art for that matter. It also sounded like a name of a fictitious good place that lies somewhere between heaven and hell, between dreams and reality. But sadly it is not.

Tartuffe is identified in the modern French and even English languages as a namesake for any religious hypocrite who overstates and overuses the virtues of its faith for the wrong reasons. This unpleasant description is the aftermath of Tartuffe, the most popular play by Moliere, whose real name is Jean-Baptiste Poquelin.

In the play, Tartuffe is the character who acts as a holy man to everybody as well as an impostor luring the wealthy Orgon and his family to put their trust on him, but with the secret motive of acquiring everything that this family owns - riches, important documents of an exiled friend, and even the hands of Orgon's daughter for marriage. He takes into Orgon's emotions by advising him to be good and all that. To earn Orgon's full trust, he practices what he preaches.

Tartuffe's scheming tactics are slowly paying off as he is almost victoriously taking Orgon by the neck. As soon as Orgon finds out his true nature and agenda on his family, Tartuffe is already taking control of his wealth, documents, and soon a marriage to Orgon's daughter. However, tables do turn still, and the good still resides over evil. The king intervenes with what is supposed to be the arrest of Orgon and eviction of the family in their properties. So, Tartuffe is instead the one arrested by the officer. Orgon is

finally relieved off Tartuffe's spell. And the previous comfortable life Orgon enjoys with his family all went back to its normal place.

True enough, Moliere's Tartuffe is a satire taking into account religious fanaticism and the charlatan who adhere to its very phoniness. It is comedy play of religious conformity and social pretenses between individuals from different class status. Readers should not be misguided as to the reasons why it was actually banned. Its crucial criticisms against religious frauds, the elite's snob-hopping attitude, and the scandals in the society that the pretentious man of faith brings forth to one's life are at times enough to make church goers or people on that plane of thought and practice be maddened or be embarrassed by the reading.

The play in another perspective is rather tragic. Not because of how Tartuffe fails to make his wishes come true, but because of how Orgon is easily lured by these facades of Tartuffe by mere superficial display of affections and outward holiness. Well, this takes Orgon's character into an analysis of a traditional Christian's response to its faith. Tartuffe's kind of faith is something that is insane and wild, mistakenly leading Orgon into him.

The actions of Orgon toward his family's perception of the real Tartuffe are also another tragic evidence of his dangerous devotion to his faith, relentlessly neglecting his family for that one wrong faith. As a spectator, I do not abhor Orgon's faithful devotion to religion. What I abhor is his personality being an easy prey for fake devotees.

An excerpt of the dialogue in Moliere's play, where Orgon's family is debating and convincing each other of the true nature of Tartuffe, is presented below (4).

Damis

Your man Tartuffe is full of holy speeches...

Madam Pernelle

And practices precisely what he preaches.

He's a fine man, and should be listened to.

I will not hear him mocked by fools like you.

Damis

Good God! Do you expect me to submit

To the tyranny of that carping hypocrite?

Must we forgo all joys and satisfactions

Because that bigot censures all our actions?

Obviously, Moliere as a playwright is a man of concern with the conventions of the society and the social problems haunting its people. I notice that he makes it a significant point to incorporate in each of his characters an individual virtue that is solidly describing their roles in the play and completely shaping the climax and themes of the story.

Take for example the characters of Cleante and Elmire. Cleante is the voice of logical reasoning and utmost calmness in the most stressful situations. With Orgon's temper, his role keeps reminding Orgon to keep his calm over everything. On the other hand, Elmire is the whistle blower in the story, who uncovers the truth for Orgon with her scheming strategy to attract Tartuffe.

One would think that Tartuffe is the central character or at least the protagonist in the story basing it on the book title. But, surprisingly, Moliere's strategy presents him to be the other way, he is the antagonist who started the conflict in the play and almost made life miserable to those he befriended. The central character is Orgon, an interestingly hot-tempered wealthy man whose emotions have been taken over by a deceitful faith imposed by a deceitful man.

Moliere extends to us that the true virtue of any Christian faith always wins over hypocrisy imposed by deceiving men. No evil of any kind has ever won over goodness. The existence of a true Supreme Being always prevails over every human condition. Tartuffe is the very lucid representation of human hypocrisy.

Another theme that Moliere illustrates is how gullible men could be sometimes in the character of Orgon, and the power that our words in Christian faith could bring. Orgon's mind is polluted by Tartuffe thru the use of holy preaches. Orgon believes every word Tartuffe says because it is thru his spirituality that the latter gains his trust.

Love in its most beautiful form. What everyone could have neglected one way or another is the theme of true love, how cliché as it may already seem. I have been taken aback by these beautifully-laid out words of Madam Pernelle reminding how true love transcends physical appearance. An excerpt is stated below (Moliere 3):

Elmire

Now, Mother...

Madam Pernelle

And as for you, child, let me add

That your behavior is extremely bad,

And a poor example for these children, too.

Their dear, dead mother did far better than you.

You're much too free with money, and I'm distressed

To see you elaborately dressed.

When it's one husband that one aims to please,

One has no need of costly fripperies.

Cleante

Oh, Madam, really...

The dangers of obsession can also be regarded as an underlying message in the play. Both characters of Tartuffe and Orgon exemplify this wicked wanting of more than what one can chew or need. Tartuffe's case is wanting for the wealth and happy family disposition of Orgon. And, Orgon wanting to achieve the supposed-to-be holiness of Tartuffe's life, and be like him in spirituality.

The book is definitely a sharp, witty, intriguing, and very entertaining depiction of a religious life of a man in Paris during the 17th century. The play being his most comic writing also attempts to bring the reader in his historical milieu. He validates both the play and the comedic approach used in general by emphasizing the comedic value that can be seen in the union of the good and bad, the right and wrong, and true wisdom and folly.

Moliere uses a popular ending whereby magic or the Supreme God suddenly just makes things right in a wave of a mysterious wand. Everything is resolved and retribution is finally served. Being tired of the fairy tale ending where everybody-lives-happily-ever-after, I am hoping he has given its ending a different technique, but still instigating a happy note toward the end. Despite the zippy ending, Tartuffe still remains a worthwhile read depicting a devious man using a traditional faith as his means to achieve his goals.

I am one of those critical readers who believe in the power of proper translation by a credible writer. Richard Wilbur, with its track record as a Pulitzer Prize Winner and a National Book Awardee, makes it easier for me to

accept the fact that every word is crucially understood by the translator, making his translation very much credible and believable.

I have gone through some translations of different books and found evidences of inconsistency. It leaves me wondering which one is right and wrong, accurate and not accurate. The interpretation of a literary writing depends greatly in the actual text readings. If the translation itself is not sufficient enough to give justice to the original text, how can one reader still see through multiple interpretations and understand the book? As far as I can see, Wilbur has done an excellent job in the translation.

Moliere's Tartuffe is one of the greatest classics I have ever read. It is one of those fine reads that you can share with your family and learn the virtues of trust and togetherness. It is one of those stories you can always retell to your children and to your children's children. A book that deserves a space in any reader's book shelf, lest you let it be unread and be dusted forever.

It brings you on rollercoaster emotions of fun, laughter, hate, anger, love, passion, and frustration. Then, helps you regain your sanity in a flash and reach enlightenment. Tartuffe, whether in original French or translations, is best read with the best brewed coffee on the table. And when you're done with the reading, like a hot coffee, it leaves you craving for more.

Works Cited

Moliere. Tartuffe. Trans. Richard Wilbur. New York: Harvest Books, 1968.