

Tartuffe in Texas

Adapted from Moliere's "Tartuffe"

by Gerald P. Murphy

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DEDICATION

To Laurie L. Jones, the world's greatest mother-in-law.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Tartuffe, a supposed "holy man," enters the life of affluent, current-day Dallas family and almost succeeds in destroying a marriage, a wedding, and the lives of all he encounters. The wily opportunist is finally exposed, but not before a series of humorous misunderstandings and some rollicking good fun.

Grandma Perkins, visiting her son Orville's house, uses the opportunity to criticize all the members of the house and to praise their boarder, Tartuffe, because he is a man of such holiness and zeal. The others present offer objections to Tartuffe, maintaining that he is false and hypocritical, but Grandma Perkins will not entertain such thoughts. As she leaves, she admonishes everyone to follow Tartuffe's precepts.

After her departure, Danny and Darlene, a bother and sister, both agree that Tartuffe has beguiled their father. They wonder if Father will still allow Maryanne to marry Vincent. Danny's anxious to know because he wants to marry Vincent's sister. Orville arrives and seems much more concerned about the welfare of Tartuffe than he is about his wife's health. Darlene tries to discuss Tartuffe with Orville, but discovers that he is only interested in singing Tartuffe's praises. When Maryanne arrives, Orville tells her that he wants her to marry Tartuffe. Maryanne is so shocked that she is speechless.

After Orville departs, Darlene reprimands Maryanne for not having refused to marry Tartuffe. Maryanne's beloved, Vincent, arrives and accuses her of consenting to the marriage. Darlene listens to them argue and then, after they are reconciled, she promises to help them expose Tartuffe's hypocrisy.

Danny, incensed about Tartuffe, is also determined to reveal Tartuffe's hypocrisy, and, as he hears Tartuffe's approach, he hides. Elvira, Orville's wife, appears and Tartuffe, thinking that they are alone, makes some professions of love to her. Having overheard, Danny reveals himself and threatens to expose Tartuffe.

When Orville arrives, Danny tries to inform his father about Tartuffe's proposition, but Orville is so blind that he thinks his own son is evil and immediately disinherits him. Alone with

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Tartuffe, Orville reveals that he plans to make Tartuffe his sole heir and also his son-in-law. They leave to execute this plan.

Clint, an in-law, later confronts Tartuffe and tries to reason with him, but Tartuffe will only respond in religious clichés, and as soon as the opportunity presents itself, he hastily excuses himself from the room. Orville and Elmira arrive, and when she hears Orville's plans, she extracts a promise from him to hide in some concealed place and observe Tartuffe's actions. Orville consents and when Tartuffe arrives, he begins to make not only his declarations of love to Elvira but also derogatory comments about Orville.

Finally convinced of Tartuffe's hypocrisy, Orville emerges and orders him from the household. Tartuffe, however, is now the legal owner of the house, since Orville has signed over all his property. When Orville's mother returns, he cannot convince her that Tartuffe is a hypocrite; it is only when the Sheriff arrives to evict the entire family that Grandma Perkins is convinced. Just as the family is about to be evicted, Vince introduces a friend from Austin who knows Tartuffe is really a con man named Molière, who is wanted in that city. The Sheriff takes Tartuffe away and the family, who will now get their home back, is united once again.

THE ORIGINAL

Molière's *Tartuffe* reveals how a religious hypocrite - an imposter - almost succeeds in his plot to jail a naive friend and his family and thereby cheat them out of their home. The social comedy, which satirizes false piety, hypocrites, and certain aspects of the Catholic Church, was perennially banned. Molière had to use his influence with King Louis XIV to get permission for the 17th-century French play to be performed in public

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 5 w, 3 flexible, doubling possible)

GRANDMA PERKINS: Orville's mother.

ORVILLE: Believes in Tartuffe ... at first.

ELVIRA: Orville's wife.

DANNY: Their hot-tempered son.

DARLENE: Their brash youngest daughter; or maid.

MARYANNE: Their daughter, in love with Vincent.

VINCENT: In love with Maryanne.

CLINT OR CLARICE: *(Flexible)* Elvira's older brother; or maiden sister or aunt.

TARTUFFE: A hypocrite.

SHERIFF: *(Flexible)* Dallas police officer.

SAM OR SAMMI: *(Flexible)* Vincent's friend from Austin.

FANNY: Grandma Perkins' servant. (Can double as Sam or Sheriff.)

SETTING

Veranda/patio outside a mansion in Dallas, Texas. Greenery on perimeters. A round patio table, covered with a floor-length tablecloth, and two patio chairs are center stage. A gardening shed, good for hiding, is located stage right.

COSTUMES

Characters wear the garb of the modern American West, including cowboy hats and blue jeans, all very upscale.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: GRANDMA PERKINS berates FANNY, ELVIRA, MARYANNE, CLINT, DANNY, and DARLENE as she is about to leave the Dallas mansion because no one treats her with the respect she thinks she deserves. Grandma turns to leave and changes her mind several times, forcing Fanny to lift and then drop suitcases repeatedly.)

GRANDMA PERKINS: Hurry up, Fanny! Hurry up!

FANNY: Yes, ma'am.

GRANDMA: I'm not staying here one more minute!

ELVIRA: Oh, Grandma, why must you take on like this!

GRANDMA: Because, I can't take it the way all of you are constantly sassing me!

DARLENE: If ...

GRANDMA: Hush up, silly girl! When I want your advice, I'll ask for it!

DANNY: But ...

GRANDMA: And you shut up, too, Danny Boy! As my poor dead husband would have said, "You ain't got the sense you was born with!"

MARYANNE: I think ...

GRANDMA: And then there's poor little Maryanne! Danny Boy's sister. Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, but you're always sneaking around doing sneaky things like a ... sneaky person!

ELVIRA: But, Mother...

GRANDMA: But, but, but, but, but ... but nothing! When you married my son Orville, I thought you and him would make a good match. But you turned out so high-falutin', putting on airs with them fancy clothes! What do you want with them fancy clothes? You should be worried about just pleasing your husband, not the whole dang world! Dressing up so fine! It doesn't fool me any!

CLINT: But, Grandma, after all ...

GRANDMA: And then there's Clint! You know I love you, Clint. But my son is much too easy on you, and you don't deserve it.

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GRANDMA: (*Cont'd.*) If I told him once I told Orville a hundred times that he's got to straighten out his brother-in-law before things get totally out of hand! If I were him, I'd kick you out of here! I would! I'd kick you right out on the street! I try to respect you, Clint, but the facts are the facts. And I don't like to hold back on things!

DANNY: Your friend, Mr. Tartuffe, is mighty lucky ...

GRANDMA: Who are you to even mention his name! Mr. Tartuffe is a holiest man the world has ever seen, and I won't have a bunch of raw-boned idiots like you attack him!

DANNY: Grandma, we can't do anything around here without that holy man of yours jumping all over us!

DARLENE: Every time we try to have some fun, he calls it a sin.

GRANDMA: He's trying to get you people to heaven! I just hope Orville can get all you people to see that.

DANNY: This holy man, Tartuffe, is just a scoundrel, Grandma, a no-account scallywag if there ever was one.

DARLENE: When he came here he was just a beggar with ragged clothes. Now he's riding the gravy train with biscuit wheels!

GRANDMA: He is a pious man, a holy man!

DARLENE: He's nothing but a hypocrite!

GRANDMA: Hold your tongue, girl! I declare you could talk a gate off its hinges! I know you all hate him because he tells you the truth, and you can't handle the truth!

DARLENE: But why can't we have guests in our house any more? If Maryanne tries to bring some friends over to use the swimming pool, your holy man makes a big fuss about parties being sinful. And I'll tell you another thing, (*Points to ELVIRA.*) I think your holy man has a crush on Mom!

GRANDMA: A crush on Elvira! That's just too foolish to even think about. And he's not alone in hating these parties! All they do is bring scandal to my son's house! We don't want any tongues wagging around the neighborhood.

CLINT: Why should we pay attention to gossipmongers? If people want to backbite, there's nothing we can do about it.

DARLENE: If there's anybody gossiping, it's probably Daphne, our next door neighbor, and her little husband. Meanwhile, they should be looking at their own conduct instead of looking over here!

GRANDMA: Daphne lives a clean life and there isn't a Sunday I don't see her praying louder than anybody else at church. If she doesn't like to see us have parties at this house, it's because she doesn't want to see all your souls sent down to perdition!

DARLENE: Daphne's just mad because she's gotten old and looks like a prune. She can't get a lover for herself, so she wants everyone else to suffer. This has nothing to do with religion. She's just full of envy.

GRANDMA: *(To ELVIRA.)* I can't believe you let your youngest daughter go on and on like this, Elvira! She never shuts up! The best thing your husband ever did in his life was to take in this holy man. And that's just what he is, a real holy man! *(SHE shoves FANNY.)* Come, Fanny, wake up you lazy dog!

FANNY: Yes, ma'am.

GRANDMA: Let's get out of this place before we get tainted with their sinful ways!

(GRANDMA and FANNY, carrying several suitcases, exit.)

CLINT: She gets so angry if anyone says anything about her holy man.

DARLENE: Dad is even worse. It took a lot of hard work and brains for him to make his money in the oil game, but now he's like a baby in the hands of this impostor. How could a smart man become so stupid? If brains were dynamite he couldn't blow his nose. Can't he see what he's doing? I swear he loves this old fake more than his whole family put together.

End of Freeview

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