

Bryanna Yosick

Global Lit II

Professor Locke

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Tartuffe: Balanced Beliefs verses Religious Extremism

In the play Tartuffe written by Molière, there is deep exploration of the ideas of false piety or religious fatalism which can lead to or influence extreme devotion in faith or religion. Within the plot line of Tartuffe, there are many characters that represent individuals who possess balanced beliefs versus those who gravitate towards extremism. These varying levels of devotion are evident within many people regardless of religion. These characters help support the relationship in the play between the spiritual and the secular.

The character Tartuffe within the play is the quintessential example of a hypocrite and extremist. Molière created Tartuffe to represent the hypocrisy rife among some groups in the conservative Roman Catholic Church. Tartuffe is not truly religious, but he takes on the outward appearance of extremely conservative Roman Catholic fanaticism. In essence, Tartuffe uses religion as a tool to manipulate all of those around him. This is demonstrated in the following lines: "*Dear Son, do treat me as perfidious /Infamous, lost, a murderer, a thief, Speak on, because my sins, beyond belief, Can bring this shameful sinner to his knees, In humble, paltry effort to appease.*"

(Tartuffe, III.vi, p.)

On the other end, Tartuffe's story contains characters who represent individuals who possess more balanced beliefs. For example, the character Cleante the brother in law of Orgon represents the height of reason and good sense, he is one that uses logic in terms of making judgement and is a huge contrast in comparison to the extreme Tartuffe. An example of Cleante's balance and logic put to work is demonstrated in the following line " "Your man and his life, honestly, are hollow. / I believe you praise him quite sincerely, / I also think you'll pay for this quite dearly. / He's a fraud, this man whom you adore". At this point of the play, Cleante is able to see very clearly Tartuffe for the liar and hypocrite he really is.

Spiritual and Secular themes are demonstrated all throughout the play of Tartuffe created by Molière in relation to one another. French culture in the time of Molière was closely entangled with society and religion with the church holding a large amount of power. The character Tartuffe however misuses religion and becomes a symbol of hypocrisy. This theme is both religious, yet secular all at the same time. In the Christian faith, hypocrisy is a sin and Christians are to obey the commands of the Lord and follow his word. In a secular sense, hypocrisy is not seen to carry as much weight. When meaning the character Tartuffe, he uses religion as a way to manipulate, but he was not necessarily religious or spiritual. In essence, Tartuffe's hypocrisy represents both a religious and secular theme throughout the context of the play.

Works Citation

Gupta, Anil, et al. Tartuffe. Oberon Books, 2018.