

DRAMA *Works*

Plays Through Practice

TARTUFFE
by
MOLIERE

EXTRACT

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PERTINENT HISTORY & INFLUENCES ON MOLIERE	4
BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO COMMEDIA	6
PLOT OUTLINE, SCENE BY SCENE	10
BRIEF CHARACTER SKETCHES	14
COSTUMES OF MOLIERE'S TIME	16
WORKING THROUGH THE PLAY IN A PRACTICAL WAY	20
ACT ONE	
Scene 1	20
Scene 2	27
Scene 3	28
Scene 4	29
Scene 5	30
ACT TWO	
Scene 1	35
Scene 2	37
Scene 3	40
Scene 4	41
ACT THREE	
45	
Scene 1	
Scene 2	46
Scene 3	47
Scene 4	49
Scene 5	50
Scene 6	51
Scene 7	53
ACT FOUR	
Scene 1	54
Scene 2	55
Scene 3	55
Scene 4	56
Scene 5	57
Scene 6	60
Scene 7	60
Scene 8	61
ACT FIVE	
Scene 1	62
Scene 2	64
Scene 3	64
Scene 4	65
Scene 5	66
Scene 6	67
Scene 7	67
TYING UP THE LOOSE ENDS	70

Extract

WORKING THROUGH THE PLAY IN A PRACTICAL WAY

From the beginning the exercises assume a knowledge of the story-line and what happens to the characters. It is important, therefore, that before you start the following work you will have read the play. At the very least, you should have read the plot outline and character sketches that precede this section.

I try never to be dictatorial in the practical work. There is no version that is more right or more wrong than another. What the following work hopes to encourage is the habit of experiment. Too often, when you read a line it is the first meaning that becomes fixed in the mind. Often this could be just the most obvious and other subtler interpretations might add richness and interest to the character.

It is important that you also get into the habit of recording the results of all the work you do. When experimenting with a character this is especially important. At the end you will need to go through all your work on each character once more, checking that your decisions make sense.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

[The Penguin Classics version has each act as a whole, without scene divisions. The three more modern texts all have scene divisions. I intend to use these scene divisions too as they give bite-sized chunks of script to work on one at a time. These scene divisions were used by Moliere, as they were a convention of the Classical French theatre that a new scene always begins when a new character enters, or a number exit. These scene divisions do not denote an interruption in the playing. There should be a smooth flow from scene to scene within each Act.

If you are using the prose version of Penguin Classics, Act One Scene Two begins after Madame Pernelle's exit. Scene two comprises the dialogue between Cléante and Dorine only. Scene Three is the short three-speech exchange between Elmire, Cléante and Damis. Scene Four is Orgon's entrance until the exit of Dorine and Scene Five is the exchange between Orgon and Cléante which continues until the end of the Act. If you are using this text, I suggest you always mark where the scenes would have been in your text. This will make it easier for you to follow my suggestions throughout.]

Madame Pernelle, Orgon's mother, is the only person who agrees with her son that his latest passion, Tartuffe, is a good and holy man of great learning. All other members of Orgon's family are united in their dislike of Tartuffe and their distrust of his motives for being in their household. Without actually meeting Tartuffe yet, we hear that he arrived in poverty but is being paid and dressed by Orgon, who favours his viewpoint in all things. He is now throwing his weight around and ruling the roost.

We learn that Elmire, Orgon's second wife, and her brother Cléante have presided over a merry house, full of visitors and largesse. Now Tartuffe is trying to stop all the fun.

In the first scene, Madame Pernelle castigates all members of her brother's household and tells them they should listen more to the pious words of Tartuffe and try to follow his example.

The setting for the entire play is Orgon's house, though it is up to you whether you make this interior or exterior. In Moliere's day, the play would have had to conform to the rules of French Classical Theatre: the three Unities as laid down by Aristotle. These Unities are of Place, Time and Action. Unity of Time means that the whole play should happen

feasibly within the time-span in which it is acted. Unity of Action means there should be no sub-plots to muddy the central storyline. And Unity of Place means that the whole play should occur in a single location, without scene changes. Of course, you don't have to follow that rule, but if you do it has the advantage of fluidity, since there are no changes.

A single setting needs to be interesting. An audience requires stimulation from a set that works well with the play. You need different levels, or angles. If done as a realistic setting, it would require one room of an open style space, such as a large hallway, but at least one area within it that is more intimate. Or furniture could be brought on into an open space to create a sense of intimacy. One version I have seen recently had the whole play set in a garden or courtyard outside the house. This also works well. One could build in levels of terraces, a main door to the house, a permanent outdoor table and chairs, a garden bench - all in different areas, surrounded by flowers or shrubs in pots, which create screens and/ or an arbour for concealment. This idea would give a feeling of lightness and colour suitable for a comedy.

A less realistic setting might work too. It's a play about deception, secrets. You could design a setting which is all angles, corners and doors that open out into other enclosed spaces. A set could be made out of angled screens, perhaps slightly see-through so that shadows can be seen through it. Perhaps you could make this even more symbolic by having the screens lighten at the end of the play as the dénouement occurs.

Discuss as a group the ideas given above, using them as a starting-point. Of course, bring your own ideas to the mix. Aim to have made a preliminary group decision before moving onto the text. Of course decisions can be altered, and as you work with the text in the next few weeks, you will refine your ideas.

The main thing is to have some preliminary ideas for furnishings decided, so that before you even start working practically with the text, you have an idea where entrances and exits will be and where you will have seating and a table. Mark these out in your studio, creating an intimate area and making sure that there is also a large space for the main acting.

This furniture is not set in stone. You may find as you go along, for instance, that another seat or bench is required elsewhere than the intimate area around the table. Be prepared to make sensible additions and alterations according to the demands of your practice. But make sure that every decision is recorded so that you start each session with the marking out of your set - school chairs standing in for furniture and exits marked by two chairs facing out, with gaps between.

The opening happens, as it were, in the middle of something or as a result of something that has happened. This is a good device for immediately engaging audience interest. What is going on? Why is there such a state of hurry and indignation? What objections are being attempted by the maid, Madame Pernelle's grandchildren and her son's second wife? All these unanswered questions serve to awake interest.

The opening is also a clear way of introducing a number of the main characters. Within a few lines the audience are told that Mariane and Damis are sister and brother, that the main speaker is their grandmother and that Elmire is a second wife, not the mother of Damis and Mariane. In addition, we are told that Dorine is a servant and that Cléante is Elmire's brother. Most of the main characters are thus introduced, all in a rush, within just over a page.

The main question is as yet unanswered. All we know from this opening is that Madame Pernelle is angry and upset and that no one else on stage [except possibly her maid Flipote] agrees with her. So suspense is achieved. It is not until Damis finally manages to utter a few more words [though still not a sentence!] that we hear of the reason for the upset - the man Tartuffe.

What a masterly opening!

Concentrate on these first few speeches up to where Damis first mentions the name Tartuffe. Read it through first to get the gist of what is happening. The family cannot get a

word in edgewise past the explosive outrage of Madame Pernelle. What do you think has just happened to occasion such a furore? Discuss possibilities of your own, but here are some as a starting-point:

Tartuffe, who we learn later from the servant Dorine has eaten and drunk an excessive amount, has upset the family by talking his hypocrisy to Madame Pernelle in the main drawing-room or salon perhaps, within earshot of the family. Perhaps the others could tell how drunk he was and they interrupted.

Tartuffe being out of the house, or upstairs collapsed on his bed, the family have collared Madame Pernelle - who has called expressly to see him - to try to talk her round to their way of thinking. But she won't listen.

Madame Pernelle has been invited here in her son's absence by the whole family. Dorine has shut and locked Tartuffe in his bedroom where he went after his copious meal for a nap, to keep him out of the way if he should wake and, having found this out, Madame Pernelle is incensed that he should be treated so. She refuses to listen to anything else.

Improvise whichever scenario you have chosen. Making sure that the argument becomes more and more heated, until Madame Pernelle leaves in a huff.

This should give you the impetus for the right kind of movement at the beginning of the scene. Madame Pernelle is hurrying to get out of the house, followed by her maid. The others are anxious to continue making their point to her, though she won't let them finish.

Bearing in mind this is the opening of a comedy - the first chance there is for the audience to savour the mood and the pace of the piece - try winding yourselves up with this improvisation again and carrying it on to the first couple of speeches. Learn these if you can, so as to not slow the pace down. Make sure that not just the entrance is considered but also the grouping of the characters. It might be a help to plan these positions first so that you know what you are aiming for when you enter. To secure these positions, look ahead to the rest of the act and consider each person's relationship with the other. Who talks to whom? Who is allied with who? Cléante and Elmire could be close together, as brother and sister, as could Marianne and Damis. Where would the sassy maid Dorine place herself?

Working through the speeches up to Damis's first mention of Tartuffe, group everyone round the central figure of Madame Pernelle, so that each person is visible without spoiling the effect of hurry and upset. Make sure the pace of movement and angry upset tones of voice contribute to the whole feeling of stress in this opening scene.

How can you add comedy to this small opening section? **Consider:**

Flipote having difficulty keeping up - using tiny steps for instance that mean she is having to run, holding her hat on perhaps.

Each person, anxious to make his or her point to Madame Pernelle, pushes the other person out of the way, coming at Pernelle from every angle. People could push, shove, step on toes, etc.

Whatever your choice, Madame Pernelle interrupts each member of the family and then says something critical or insulting to them. **Without speaking the actual words, but using only gobbledy-gook and the tone of voice relevant to what each says, see what this idea forces onto the group movement. It goes: General sweep forward, the family like anxious tugboats bobbing round the mother ship. Each bobs forward in turn and starts to protest but is overridden and forced into submission by the sheer force of the criticism. So each person might come to a full-stop, perhaps on tiptoe, or leaning forward with the desire to get through while Pernelle's force batters at them. They are left speechless -**

upset, or aghast, or struck temporarily dumb with anger, according to personality.

Making sure that everyone is given a character, try this out seeing what such a physical approach does to the shape of the group movement. Does this help to finalise and clarify the opening?

Damis has the first mention of Tartuffe. **Make sure everyone has a reaction to the name, which backs up the impression you are trying to convey through these first pages. For instance, Elmire could look outraged - knowing that he fancies her; Dorine scandalised - enjoying the gossip side of the situation; Mariane sad, foreseeing trouble in her love affair - and so on. Hear the line - react on the name - and then freeze on this position. Check out the frozen positions and the facial expressions. Are they big enough - broad enough - to convey clearly, and comedically, what you are attempting? If not, extend them until exaggeration is clear.**

Now go to the text itself. Madame Pernelle needs plenty of variety in her tone as she delivers her insults. In each case, the insult appears to stop the person addressed in their tracks, so when you piece together the opening, you will be using the grouping, movement and facial expressions of the previous exercises.

For the moment, concentrate on the delivery of the lines. What would be the full sentences that each of the other characters might have delivered if they were allowed to finish?

Your preliminary reading of the play will have given you some ideas about each character and that will help with the tone.

Cheeky outspoken Dorine, who has the first interruption [which is notable for a start and gives a further idea of her lack of awareness of her own status], only manages 'But if ...' Your decision as to what she is trying to say will dictate the way she says this.

'But if, Madame, you bothered to listen ...' 'But if, you could only see the rogue when he thinks he's alone ...' and so on. These are only suggestions.

In pairs [under the principle that two heads are better than one!] come up with a number of possibilities for completion of each character's interruption - one character for each pair or small group if you have a bigger class. In every case consider the tone and the ideas you have already gathered about that character. When you have invented your possibilities, bring them back to the whole group and discuss further, before making a decision as to the most likely remark. Make sure there are contrasts in your final decision. For instance, Dorine might be sharp and rude, Mariane might be trying for a conciliatory tone.

After this line, Madame Pernelle appears to run out of steam a bit. At least, others are able to have their say. Read through the section to the end of the scene, where Madame Pernelle and her maid Flipote leave. Dorine is the main person who is not afraid to tackle the older lady. Damis and Cléante both have a brief attempt to put their viewpoint, but Mariane and Elmire say nothing.

From the point of view of grouping, those that do not speak are as important as those that do. It is clear that at this point a further grouping occurs, with Madame Pernelle and her maid nearer your main exit, Elmire and Mariane making a support grouping elsewhere, with Cléante nearest to them, Dorine still harrying Pernelle and Damis starting near Pernelle but retiring elsewhere, either towards the women or on his own to sulk perhaps, when he gets nowhere with Pernelle.

This is where the use of a set with places to sit and different areas is important. Thus, it could be that Elmire and Mariane, wounded by Pernelle's vicious comments about them, retire to seated positions where they can comfort each other during this section.

See if you can translate the reactions of each of those who are insulted into

movement. Go back to the comments made by Pernelle and your entry grouping. Improvise in your own words what is said by Pernelle and think of the possible reactions to her comments there might be.

Dorine is told that 'Servants should keep their thoughts to themselves.'

Damis is told that he's an 'adolescent fool' and that she always knew he'd be 'a thorn' in his father's 'soft flesh'.

Mariane is told that she's a dissembler and that what passes as still deep waters is actually stagnancy.

Elmire is told that she's frivolous and dresses in an unbecoming way for a married woman. Pernelle hints that Elmire is out to attract other men than her husband.

Cléante, though clearly Pernelle's favourite out of a bad bunch, is accused of encouraging a lifestyle that is dedicated to fun and extravagance rather than to virtue.

In each case, react in a purely physical manner. Exaggerate, so that the reaction is extreme in terms of facial expression and body language. It is better to start too large; the reaction can be pulled back later to fit with the eventual chosen style of your piece. Try seeing Madame Pernelle as a large sharp rock against which each person, in the form of a wave, is battering only to be rebuffed. Experiment with the idea, making sure the furniture of your chosen setting is in place [albeit in school chair form]. Thus, you may find that Mariane's rebuffal takes the form of a bowed body language, as if she's been wounded in her chest; she staggers, bent over, towards a chair where she collapses and nurses her wound.

Elmire's may be more outraged - how dare she? - but she may gather her dignity and end up near Mariane to comfort her. Or near her brother, who would feel protective towards her.

And so on. Experiment with the idea, so that the grouping of the end of the scene will come out of it.

Now try running this whole opening section, up to Damis's mention of Tartuffe. Aim for speed, but without losing clarity. Keep reactions large, in terms of body language and facial expression, and precise.

What might be the completion of Damis's : 'Well, your Tartuffe no doubt is glad ...'

... 'that he has you to champion him as well as my father...'

... 'that he's getting his own way and driving us all mad...'

... 'that he's spoiling all our fun; it's clear you'd like that very much ...' ?

Come up with a completion that fits here. Before you do, try out the three examples I have given, noting how each alters the way the first phrase is delivered. This underlines the importance of having the 'right' sentence in the actor's mind for your own production.

[This exercise works with the other editions too, though the OUP one may need some slight tweaking.]

The different tone of Madame Pernelle's voice after the mention of Tartuffe [Page 5 in NHB] is partly because most of the characters, smarting from her comments, have retired out of her immediate reach, leaving, in order of closeness, Dorine and Damis and later Cléante as the only ones who still try to argue their side of things. Cléante first hovers protectively near to his sister and is out of Pernelle's immediate scope for the first part of this section.

Does Madame Pernelle's first speech defending Tartuffe reflect the different grouping? [*'He's a thoroughly good man'* NHB; *'He's a good man...'* Penguin and ff; *Try listening to him, for he's a worthy man...* OUP] **Try addressing it:**

towards the different areas of the stage - that is projecting it at the new positions of Mariane etc.

only to Damis

See what difference this makes to the speech and decide which works best.