



The Imaginary Invalid

Molière (1622 -1673)

Read by:	Cast	Catalog:	DB-1257
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Genre:	Plays, Comedies		

The Imaginary Invalid, also known as *The Hypochondriac*, is a *comédie-ballet* in three acts produced in 1673 and published the following year. Act I introduces the key players and conflicts early. The protagonist, Argan the hypochondriac, is auditing his pharmacy bill. He and his daughter Angélique argue over which suitor shall win her hand; his choice is the son of a doctor, hers is the handsome young man Cléante. His insubordinate and outspoken housemaid refuses to believe or indulge his foul temper, prompting an altercation. His second wife Béline appears, calms him down, and helps him procure a notary to help him re-write his will in her favor. The plot spins and twists through Act II. Argan's brother questions his imaginary maladies and convinces him to refuse the treatments of his doctor, who resigns in

a huff. It all comes to a head in Act III when the maid appears in disguise as a distinguished physician seeking an illustrious patient. She debunks all the diagnoses of the “quacks” and suggests the removal of an arm and an eye that are monopolizing his nutrients. His brother suggests he play dead to test the reaction of his wife and daughter. We are not surprised when Béline is overjoyed at his demise and plots to get quick access to his money. His daughter, however, is grief-stricken. The turnabouts climax with Argan blessing his daughter's betrothal to Cléante and deciding to become a doctor himself. *The Imaginary Invalid* was Molière's last major work. He was ailing when he wrote the play, and collapsed while performing the title role and died several hours later.

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, better known by his stage name **Molière** (January 15, 1622 – February 17, 1673), was a French playwright and actor widely regarded as one of the world's greatest writers. His works include comedies, farces, and tragicomedies and are performed at the Comédie-Française more often than those of any other playwright. Born into a prosperous family and educated at the Collège de Clermont, Molière spent thirteen years as an itinerant actor while he began writing. Through the patronage of aristocrats he procured a command performance before the King. Performing a classic Corneille play and a farce of his own, Molière was granted the use of *salle du Petit-Bourbon* and later the theatre in the *Palais-Royal*, where he met success with plays such as *The Affected Ladies*, *The School for Husbands* and *The School for Wives*. Royal favor brought a pension and the title *Troupe du Roi* to his troupe and appointment as official author of court entertainments. Though popular with the court and Parisians, Molière's satires attracted criticism. *Tartuffe's* attack on religious hypocrisy was roundly condemned by the Church, while *Don Juan* was banned from performance. His hard work took its toll on his health. In 1667 he was forced to take a break from the stage. In 1673, during a production of his final play, *The Imaginary Invalid*, Molière, suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, was seized by a coughing fit and a hemorrhage while playing the hypochondriac Argan. He finished the performance but collapsed and died a few hours later.