



The Misanthrope

Molière (1622 -1673)

Read by:	Cast	Catalog:	DB-1258
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Alceste, the title character of *The Misanthrope*, has little use for mankind, including himself, rejecting the social conventions of the seventeenth century French salon in favor of brutal honesty and self-imposed isolation. The one notable exception is the vivacious flirt Célemène, who epitomizes the witty frivolity of courtly manners and captures his heart in spite of his disapproval of her manners, thus revealing his own fallibility. Arsinoé, an older, upright woman who is jealous of Célemène, shows him a letter which leads to the discovery that Célemène has written identical love letters to numerous suitors. Alceste issues an ultimatum which Célemène refuses. Alceste exiles himself from society. The play ends with two friends running after him to get him to return. *The Misanthrope* was written in 1666, just

after *Tartuffe* and *Don Juan* had been banned by the government, and the play is more subtle and nuanced. The characters are dynamic and evolve, as opposed to the relatively static stock characters in most farce. Alceste can be admired as a hero for his candor or taken for a fool for his unrealistic idealism. It was not a commercial success in his time, but has become his best-known work and considered his best by many as well.

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.