The Imaginary Invalid Study Guide

The Imaginary Invalid by Molière

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Introduction

Molière is the stage name of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, one of the most important dramatists in French history. His plays have been delighting and intriguing audiences since they were first performed in seventeenth-century France, at which time they pleased King Louis XIV and changed the face of French comic drama. A subtle and profound satirist, actor, philosopher, and master of character, Molière combined all of these elements into his plays, drawing heavily from tradition but also incorporating his own unique insights. Skillfully combining his acting and writing skills, he was also an incisive social critic, ridiculing institutions from organized religion to medicine, and poking fun at the Parisian bourgeoisie (the middle class made up of prosperous tradesmen).

Le Malade imaginaire (*The Imaginary Invalid*) was Molière's final play, first performed in February 1673 in Paris. A satire of the medical profession and a comedy-ballet, or a comedy combined with song and dance, the play contains a good deal of farce and was written to amuse King Louis XIV. It is also a superb character study of a hypochondriac, or a patient obsessed with being ill, and it contains a brilliant social and political commentary on Paris in the 1670s. Many critics have even found a subtle but powerful philosophical strain in the work, and it is an excellent example of the stylized comedy-ballet popular in Louis XIV's courtly theater. Molière himself played the main role of the hypochondriac Argan, and famously coughed up blood during his fourth performance, dying later that evening in what came to be known as a bitter irony, given the play's subject of imaginary illness. The play is now widely available in collections such as the 2000 Penguin Classics edition of *The Miser and Other Plays: A New Selection*, in which it is translated as *The Hypochondriac*.

Author Biography

Born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin on January 15, 1622, in Paris, Molière grew up in a wealthy bourgeois family. His maternal grandfather introduced him to the theater at a young age. Molière's father sold upholstery to the king's household. His mother died in 1631, and two years later, his father remarried. Molière went to a Jesuit college and worked in the court for his father. He left Paris to study law, but in 1642, Poquelin told his father that he was unsuited to a legal career. He soon signed a contract with Joseph Béjart and Béjart's sister Madeline to set up a drama company called the Illustre Théâtre (Illustrious Theater).

It was with the opening of this theater that Poquelin took the stage name Molière, a name which may come from one of thirteen French hamlets or from the obscure novelist Molière d'Essartines. Staging tragedies and tragicomedies, the Illustrious Theater was not very successful, and within eighteen months it was in enough debt that Molière was put in jail until his father helped the other members of the troupe obtain his release. With the patronage of a duke, the company then spent thirteen years touring the provinces, during which time Molière established himself as its leader both as a writer and an actor, and the Illustrious Theater performed its first Molière comedy by 1655.

In 1658, the troupe finally established itself in Paris, due largely to the fact that they pleased King Louis XIV, and he allocated them a space to perform during the off-days of an Italian troupe that normally performed there. Within two years, the troupe moved into the Théâtre du Palais-Royal (Theater of the Royal Palace), a prominent theater inside the Royal Palace of Paris. As the director of his troupe, Molière commissioned plays as well as staging his own work, which consisted largely of comedies and comedy-ballets. He became increasingly popular and played both to royalty and to a large bourgeois audience, but he came under intense criticism from religious conservatives for his portrayal of marriage. This struggle culminated in a five-year ban of *Tartuffe*, a play about a religious hypocrite, until Louis XIV overcame opposition and allowed it to be staged in 1669.

In 1665, Molière produced his famous play *Dom Juan* (*Don Juan*), about a seductive gentleman who defies God. By this time he had married Armande Béjart, the much younger sister of his previous lover and fellow actor Madeline Béjart, and he had begun to decline in health. In 1673, he staged *The Imaginary Invalid*, acting in the main role of Argan until the fourth performance, during which he coughed up blood. Molière died that evening, February 17, 1673, at his home. His body was refused a Christian burial, as he was labeled an unrepentant actor, until King Louis intervened to have him buried, without ceremony, in the parish cemetery.

Plot Summary

Prologue

The play begins with a prologue and an alternative prologue. The first prologue is titled "Eclogue," which refers to a short poem that is usually "pastoral," or reflecting idyllic, rural shepherd life. This eclogue involves a number of gods from classical mythology, including Flora, the Roman goddess of flowers, and Pan, the Greek god of shepherds and fertility. After an introduction praising Louis XIV and stating that the comedy-ballet was "devised for his relaxation," the prologue praises the king's war efforts with a rustic song and dance, until Pan enters and says that the best way to serve Louis is to entertain and charm him. The much shorter alternative prologue is a monologue, or speech by a single character, in which a shepherdess laments that foolish doctors cannot heal the sorrows of her heart.

Act 1

Act 1 opens with Argan adding up his many doctor's bills and ringing for the maid, Toinette, who reveals her impatience with Argan and goes to fetch his daughter, Angélique. Argan, who is a hypochondriac, then goes off to the bathroom while Angélique asks Toinette for advice about Cléante, the young man with whom she recently fell in love, and who has promised to ask for her hand in marriage. When Argan returns, Angélique is delighted to hear him tell her of a marriage he has arranged for her, until she discovers that she is betrothed not to Cléante but to Thomas Diafoirus, who is about to graduate from medical school. Toinette argues with Argan, but he threatens to put his daughter in a convent unless she marries Thomas, and he chases Toinette with a stick.

Argan's second wife, Béline, enters and consoles him, and Argan calls for a notary to discuss his will, since he would like to leave all of his money to his wife. Toinette warns Angélique that her stepmother is trying undermine her interests, but Angélique is only concerned that her father does not arrange for her to marry a man she does not love. Toinette promises to send word to Cléante about the arranged marriage by talking to Punchinello, an old money-lender. The scene then shifts to the "First Interlude," in which Punchinello sings his lover a serenade, until he is interrupted by an old woman, a chorus of violins, and then a group of archers, who he bribes to avoid being arrested.

Act 2

Cléante enters disguised as a friend of Angélique's music master, and Toinette shows him in to meet Argan and Angélique. Monsieur Diafoirus then enters with his son Thomas, who makes a fool of himself during his elaborate introductions. Argan asks for some music, so Cléante describes a story of a shepherd pained by his lover's father arranging her marriage with another man (clearly inspired by his own predicament), and

he and Angélique improvise a pastoral love song. After Argan interrupts them and Béline enters, Angélique avoids promising her hand to Thomas, and Argan threatens to put her in a convent if she does not agree to the marriage within four days.

Thomas and his father leave after giving Argan ridiculous medical advice, and then Béline enters to inform her husband that she caught Cléante in Angélique's room. Argan questions his younger daughter Louison about it, and she eventually admits that Cléante came in and kissed Angélique's hands. Argan's brother Béralde then arrives to tell Argan that he has an offer of marriage for Angélique. Béralde brings a company of gypsies with him who, in the "Second Interlude," sing about young love and dance a ballet.

Act 3

After plotting with Toinette to prevent Angélique's marriage to Thomas, Béralde argues to Argan that Argan is imagining his illnesses and that doctors are frauds. Monsieur Fleurant enters to give Argan an injection, and when Béralde objects, the doctor complains to his superior□Thomas's uncle, Monsieur Purgon□who then enters and angrily tells Argan he will have nothing to do with him. Argan is very worried, until Toinette enters disguised as a doctor, pretending to be ninety years old, and claiming that Argan's previous doctor is a fool.

Béralde then says that Béline is trying to trick her husband, and Toinette suggests that Argan pretend to be dead so that he can discover the truth about his wife. Argan agrees, and Béline responds to her husband's death by praising heaven, complaining about him, and plotting to get his money. Argan shocks her by sitting up, and then he tries the same trick on Angélique, who laments his death sorrowfully and tells Cléante that she wants to renounce the world and her engagement. Pleased with his daughter, Argan agrees to Angélique and Cléante's marriage provided that Cléante becomes a doctor, but Béralde suggests that Argan become a doctor instead, and Argan agrees to undergo the medical-school graduation ceremony.

The "Finale" of the play is a comical song-and-dance graduation ceremony, written in a corrupt form of Latin that, in the original edition, contains enough French, Italian, and Spanish to make it comprehensible to Molière's audience. Most English editions of the play have translated many of the words in the ballet into English, so readers who do not know any Latin can understand that Argan passes a short and absurd test and gains his degree, with the chorus celebrating.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The Imaginary Invalid was the last piece to be written by the French playwright Moliere. The author was ill and facing his own mortality when he created a character who only imagined a similar fate. Moliere himself played Argan on opening night of the first production of the play.

The play begins with Argan, the main character, sitting at a table adding up his bills from his apothecary, Mr. Fleurant. Argan talks to himself as he uses counters to tick off each bill. At times he stops to read the description of the bill, a healing compound or a prescription, and admonishes Mr. Fleurant out loud, but to himself. Argan takes it upon himself to adjust some of the bills downward to make Mr. Fleurant's prices more reasonable. He does not believe the apothecary should take advantage of the ill. Argan angrily calls for Toinette as the scene ends.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The very title of the play allows for a reasonable inference of the theme of the story. It is either about an imaginary disease, a person who believes that he is ill, or perhaps a truly sick character. With the opening scene, the main character, Argan, is adding up a large tally of bills from his apothecary, and he makes the comment out loud, to himself, that he is ill. He is also obviously taking many prescriptions. The plot element of foreshadowing is used to imply that the main character has many idiosyncrasies to reveal.

The exposition says very little about the setting of the play. The only description is that the scene takes place in a large room, on Argan's vast estate.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Toinette is heard answering Argan's call from offstage before she appears. Argan begins to shout at her; however, Toinette pretends that she has hit herself on the head. She blames her imaginary injury on the fact that Argan has rushed her. Toinette threatens to leave Argan, and this troubles him, for he takes pleasure in scolding her. Their fight is quickly over when Toinette teases Argan, saying that his apothecaries take great pleasure in treating him for so many mysterious maladies. With this, Argan pushes Toinette away telling her to fetch his daughter, Angelique. The order comes too late, since Angelique arrives of her own will.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The way that Toinette and Argan interact with each other makes it hard to ascertain their relationship. Although they are fighting with each other, neither character seems to be truly angry with the other; it is more like a fight among friends. It is finally revealed that Toinette is a servant, one who must be trusted a great deal if she is allowed to speak to her master in such a manner.

Toinette also reveals that the multiple prescriptions that Argan's apothecaries are giving him may be for an imaginary disease. It is her opinion that the older gentleman is a hypochondriac, and her doctors are taking advantage of him. This, an imaginary illness, or the disease of a hypochondriac is the subject of the play. The theme is yet to be fully revealed.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

Argan tells his daughter that he has something to tell her. However, he takes up his walking stick and leaves. Promising to come back shortly, Argan bids the two women wait for him.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

Act 1, Scene 3, is a very short scene, the main purpose of which is to introduce the character of Angelique. As Argan takes his unexplained leave, it gives his daughter and Toinette a chance to talk alone.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

As soon as Argan leaves, Angelique and Toinette talk about Angelique's new love. Toinette agrees with Angelique's assessment of the young man as being kind, handsome, and honest. They both believe that Angelique and the young man are a good match for each other. The two women quickly stop talking as Argan returns.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

It is revealed that Angelique has fallen in love with a young man and that Toinette approves of the match. The fact that the two women stop talking as Argan returns reveals that he does not know of the romance.

Act 1, Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

Argan returns and announces the news he had intended to tell his daughter. He tells her that she might be surprised to hear it, but he has been asked by a young gentleman for permission to marry her. Argan quickly recognizes the expression of joy in his daughter's face and realizes that there is no need to ask of her feelings toward the proposal, and he tells his daughter that he has promised her hand.

Argan goes on saying that it seems as if his daughter's intended is a fine young man. He begins to list the positive attributes he has heard in regards to the young man. Both he and his daughter agree that the young gentleman is known to be handsome and smart; however, confusion arises when Argan expresses his joy that his future son in law is to be a doctor. Angelique did not know that Cleante, her love, intended to be a doctor. It is Argan's turn to be confused as he announces that the name of Angelique's groom is Thomas Diaforus. Angelique is noticeably crestfallen as she explains that she was speaking of one man while her father spoke of another. It is not Thomas Diaforus whom she wishes to marry.

Toinette cannot believe that he would wish to marry his daughter to a doctor, considering the condition he has developed. Argan scolds Toinette and tells her that it is in his best interests to have a son-in-law who is able to practice medicine because he is so ill. Toinette questions whether Argan is truly ill and after he shouts at her, she concedes by agreeing that he is indeed ill. However, she still does not understand why he wishes to marry his daughter to a doctor, because she is not ill. Argan reasons that it is his daughter's duty to marry in her father's best interest.

Toinette pleads with Argan to stop this nonsense let his daughter choose whom she would like to marry. Argan scolds her for talking to him so because she is but his servant, but Toinette does not back down. She tells Argan that it is her duty to step in when he is about to make a mistake. She tries to reason with him by telling him that he is too kind hearted to force his daughter's hand.

Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

Upon Argan's return, he announces to his daughter that a young man has asked for her hand in marriage. A comedy of errors ensues until Angelique realizes that her father is not speaking of her love, Cleante. Rather, Argan is talking about another young man, a Thomas Diaforus, who is meant to become a doctor. Argan is thinking only of himself, and admits thus, by agreeing to this match.

It is here that the theme of the play is revealed as fact that Argan's imaginary illness has morphed its self into a real disease. Not only is he a hypochondriac, but he suffers from selfishness and an inability to see what is really important. While his daughter's

happiness used to be of primary importance to him, he now believes that she must also serve his illness. Instead of becoming an invalid in the physical sense, he has become an invalid in a mental sense.

Act 1, Scene 6

Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

Argan's wife, Beline, who is Angelique's stepmother, enters the scene. Argan asks for his wife's help, since his daughter and servant have angered him. As Argan pleads his case, Beline placates him and tries to calm him.

Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

Beline speaks to her husband as if he were a child. The fact that she treats him like a child is symbolic of the way that the sick and invalids are also treated. Argan seems to respond to this type of treatment and is thus calmed. Argan accepts his illness and the imposition it puts on his family, although he thinks of it strictly as a physical sickness, not the mental abnormality that it is. This allows the plot element of conflict to emerge in the storyline. This is an example of a conflict with self that Argan will be dealing with throughout the rest of the play.

Act 1, Scene 7

Act 1, Scene 7 Summary

After reasoning with her husband, Beline directs her inquiries toward Toinette. Although she admits that she agrees with the servant's beliefs regarding the marriage that Argan has arranged, she will not tolerate Toinette aggravating her husband again. Beline moves to make Argan comfortable in front of the fire, arranging his nightcap so as not to aggravate his illness.

Act 1, Scene 7 Analysis

Beline again reveals her tendency to treat Argan like an invalid. She is the only character, thus far, who sympathizes and supports her husband's imagined illness. This difference in opinion that Beline shows in relation to the other characters foreshadows other important differences that she may reveal.

Act 1, Scene 8

Act 1, Scene 8 Summary

Beline and her husband are left alone. Beline asks him why he allows himself to become so enraged when Toinette was only doing what she thought was right. After Beline calms him once again, Argan expresses his thanks for her kindness and compassion. He reminds her that she will be rewarded in his will. Beline tells him not to speak of such things; however, she has brought the notary as he had previously asked.

Act 1, Scene 8 Analysis

Once again, while Beline and her husband are alone, she begins to baby him and treat him as if he were really sick. She does this even after it has become apparent to the other characters in the play that his illness is completely imaginary. It is then that Argan brings up the subject of his will and more specifically the fact that Beline will be guaranteed a large sum of money upon his death. Beline tells her husband that it does not matter to her; however, she does express some interest. This shows that Beline may have ulterior motives in marrying Argan, and she truly does believe that he is ill. Beline is not humoring her husband as everyone else is.

Act 1, Scene 9

Act 1, Scene 9 Summary

Mr. de Bonnefoi, the notary, enters the room upon Argan's urging. Argan replies to the notary that he knows that Mr. de Bonnefoi is a trusted friend of his wife's, and thus, he too, trusts him with his will. Mr. de Bonnefoi argues that it is against custom to will anything to his wife. The only thing the couple may do is make a donation while they are alive, providing that there are no children.

Argan asks Mr. de Bonnefoi what he must do to ensure that his wife, not his children, gets his fortune. The notary suggests that Argan will his money to a trusted friend of his wife who will then give it to her. Beline protests, telling Argan that there is no need because she will be unable to live without him. Argan tells her that he has 20,000 francs hidden in his room, and the rest of his fortune will be held in a secret trust for her. Beline once again protests; however, she pauses and asks to confirm how much gold he has hidden.

Act 1, Scene 9 Analysis

The case against Beline thickens as she promptly supplies the notary necessary to complete the will paperwork. Argan expresses his wish that his children not get his money under any circumstance. This is because he believes his daughter, Angelique, does not have his best interests in mind since she does not wish to marry the young doctor.

Act 1, Scene 10

Act 1, Scene 10 Summary

Toinette and Angelique are in another room discussing the secret meeting between Beline, Argan, and the notary. Toinette assures Angelique that Beline is conspiring to deprive her of any of her father's money. However, this does not worry Angelique because she would rather have no money and be free to marry her love, not the man Argan has chosen. Toinette promises to do whatever she can to ensure that Angelique is happy, but that to best help her, she must publicly pretend that she is not in agreement wit her. The next day, the servant promises to have her lover, Punchinello, get word to Cleante informing him of Argan's plans for his daughter.

Act 1, Scene 10 Analysis

Angelique, faced with the knowledge that her stepmother is trying to deprive her of an inheritance is unfazed. The fact that she is telling this to Toinette and not plotting with her shows that Angelique truly does not care about the money. Her expressed feelings that she would rather have her love than have the money closely parallels Beline's statement to her husband that she would be lost without him. The plot element of foreshadowing is used again to imply that these two women's feelings and their truth will soon be tested.

Act 1, Scene 11

Act 1, Scene 11 Summary

Beline calls for Toinette, and so the servant wishes Angelique a good night and asks for her trust before they part.

Act 1, Scene 11 Analysis

Act 1, Scene 11 serves only as a transition between scenes.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Cleante, Angelique's love comes to see Toinette. He wishes to speak to Angelique and ask what she will do if her father does indeed make her marry the other man. Toinette warns him that it is not easy for someone to speak to Angelique because she is heavily guarded and does not often leave the house. Cleante tells her that it is for these reasons he has come not as himself, but rather as a friend of her music master in whose place he has come.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

Cleante has not given up on the idea of marrying Angelique. His true feelings are revealed through his willingness to go through with his plan of deception to gain access to Argan's house.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Toinette finds Argan, who thinks that he is alone, pacing his room. He is talking to himself, repeating the instructions that his doctor, Mr. Purgon, has given him for daily exercise. Toinette interrupts him to announce that a gentleman has arrived at the house and wishes to speak with him.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

Argan is found speaking to himself, repeating his doctor's instructions over and over again. This nod to obsessive compulsion is symbolic of his imaginary illness. He believes that he is physically ill, and now he is experiencing symptoms of a mental illness instead.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Cleante greets Argan, telling him that he is looking well. Toinette cannot believe Cleante's comment, for surely Argan is very ill. Argan, for once, agrees with his servant. Toinette goes on to explain that he may enjoy all of the activities of someone who is well, but surely he is very ill. Again, Argan agrees.

Cleante tells Argan that he is a friend of Angelique's music master. He was sent because the music master is traveling and does not want Angelique to miss a lesson. Argan believes this ruse and calls for his daughter after Toinette tries unsuccessfully to convince Argan that the two must practice their music alone.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

By arguing with Cleante's comment that Argan looks well, the author is using the plot element of verbal irony. Verbal irony occurs when what is said is the opposite of what is meant. Toinette often engages in verbal irony as she placates Argan by agreeing that he is ill, while all along she knows that it is all in his head. Toinette tries to help Cleante by persuading Argan to let his daughter and the new music master practice alone, but her efforts go unrewarded. The element of foreshadowing is used again, as the author creates suspense as to what will happen next. The anticipation level is also high regarding Angelique's possible reaction when she recognizes Cleante as her new music teacher.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

Argan announces to his daughter that her regular music master is out of town and that she will have a replacement instead. When Angelique enters the room she is visibly startled upon recognizing Cleante.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

Angelique does indeed express a reaction upon seeing Cleante, but she quickly recovers without incident. Her father is too preoccupied with thinking of his illness to notice her strange behavior.

Act 2, Scene 5

Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

Toinette moves to speak to Argan. She tells him that she has now taken his side in the matter of his daughter's future husband. Mr. Diaforus has brought his son, Angelique's intended, for a visit, and thus Toinette now believes that she was wrong in her earlier negative statements. Upon hearing this news, Cleante moves as if he is about to leave; however, Argan tells him to stay to meet his future son in law. Cleante politely agrees to stay for the meeting and is rewarded with an invitation to the wedding, which will take place in 4 days.

Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

A comedy of errors is foreshadowed as it is announced that the man to whom Argan promised his daughter has arrived for a visit. Cleante, as well as Angelique, will now have to face this unwanted stranger. In this scene Toinette also begins her campaign to help Angelique convince her father to let her marry Cleante. She does this by pretending to agree with everything Argan says in regards to his decision.

Act 2, Scene 6

Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

Mr. Diaforus and his son, Thomas Diaforus, enter the room and are greeted warmly by Mr. Argan. Thomas steps forward, at the prompting of his father, to pay his respects to Argan. He tells Mr. Argan that he is most honored to meet his second father, a father to whom he feels he owes more than his first, biological father. He supports this statement by explaining that his biological father claimed him through birth, but Mr. Argan has chosen him. After this speech, Toinette exclaims her thanks to the colleges and universities for creating such clever men as Thomas Diaforus. Her comment is ignored by the rest of the room.

Mr. Argan gestures to his daughter to bow to Thomas. Meanwhile, Thomas asks his father whether he should kiss her. Thomas turns to Angelique and addresses her as Madam, beginning his speech that is obviously intended for Beline. It is Argan who interrupts him, explaining to Thomas that he is speaking to Angelique, not her stepmother. Thomas is confused and asks his father whether he should wait until Beline arrives. Mr. Diaforus insists that he pay his compliments to his intended bride in the meantime. Once again, Thomas turns toward Angelique; however, this time, he recites the speech prepared for her. Toinette exclaims her gratitude for the institutions that have taught him to be so eloquent, and she is again ignored.

Argan turns to Cleante to ask his opinion. Cleante tells Argan that Thomas's speaking skills are quite impressive and if he is as skilled at being a doctor, then surely he will be quite successful, to which Argan readily agrees. Argan tells Mr. Diaforus that it seems as if everyone is quite impressed with his son, and therefore, he should be quite proud. Mr. Diaforus explains that Thomas was not always this way. As a child he was very quiet and unsure of himself, and he struggled in his schoolwork throughout college. Mr. Diafoirus, however, has always thought this a good omen, as strong trees grow slowly, and indeed he has been proven correct because Thomas is now bright, capable, and strong in his beliefs.

Thomas pulls his thesis from his pocket and presents it to Angelique as proof of his intelligence. Angelique, however, refuses the paper saying that she is unable to understand such things. Thomas, undaunted, asks Angelique to assist him in a dissection of a woman's body, which he will use for future lectures. Toinette observes how welcoming this venture will be, for it is quite different than the usual viewing of a play, to which most men bring the women they are courting.

Angelique asks Mr. Diaforus if he is to apply to be a doctor for the court. Mr. Diafoirus replies that he has never wanted to treat nobility and has rather decided to treat ordinary people. His reasoning for this is that a doctor must meet only minimal standards in the care of ordinary people and that if they die, there are no repercussions. On the other hand, if one is treating nobility, the doctor is required to cure the ill person

and he is watched over quite strictly. Toinette exclaims that these sick people are simply crazy for expecting their doctor to cure them. Surely, Mr. Diaforus' only responsibility is to write a prescription and collect his fee.

Argan changes the subject by turning to Cleante and asking him to have Angelique sing. Cleante proposes to sing an operetta in duet with Angelique. When she looks, he leans in to whisper to her, pleading for her not to refuse, for she will soon understand his intentions. Cleante sets the scene of the operetta by explaining that a shepherd, having saved a young shepherdess from a brute who was harassing her, is confronted with the most beautiful eyes he has ever seen. However, at the time, these eyes, which belong to the shepherdess, are crying, and he wishes to stop the flow of tears. The shepherdess thanks him tenderly for his kindness and leaves. The shepherd is left with a love and passion for her that cannot be broken. He wishes greatly to see the young shepherdess, tell her how he feels, and ask for her hand in marriage. She is closely guarded, however. Then he hears the dreadful news that her father has promised her to another. This is more than the shepherd can bear, so he finds a way to enter the house using a different identity to uncover her true feelings. He successfully gains entrance to the house and meets the inferior, unworthy man to whom his love is now promised. The shepherd looks longingly at his love, unable to speak the truth out of respect and politeness.

It is now that Cleante breaks into song. He sings of the pain the shepherd feels and urges the shepherdess to reveal her true feelings. Angelique, who sings the part of the shepherdess, tells of her love for the shepherd and not her intended. The operetta goes on to reveal the two characters' feelings of love for one another and their anguish over the situation. The two characters also express their agreement that the shepherdess's father is a fool.

With that, Argan interrupts the singing. He announces that the shepherd is an unruly character and the shepherdess is disrespectful toward her father. He grabs the paper from Angelique and is surprised to see only music on the sheets, no words. Cleante explains that a new way has just been discovered to write the words of a song into its notes. Argan tells the substitute music master that his operetta is in bad taste.

Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

It quickly becomes apparent that Thomas does not have one original thought. He needs to be prodded and reminded by his father to give his memorized speeches to each of the family members. When he accidentally delivers the speech intended for Beline to Angelique, he is visibly flustered by his mistake. It is clear to everyone in the room, except Argan, that Thomas's character is too inferior to be suitable for Angelique, Argan is too interested in Thomas because he will soon be a doctor. Once again his illness, mental not physical, has caused him to be so self-centered that he has failed to see even the most obvious character flaws.

In addition to Thomas's character flaws, those of his father and a certain sector of the medical profession are also revealed. Mr. Diaforus shows no shame in explaining his reasoning not to treat the nobility because it is much easier to cheat the middle class. He does not want to be held accountable for his actions as a doctor. This reasoning goes right over Argan's head, and he does not even make the connection to his own situation. His doctors are taking advantage of him and his belief that he is sick by prescribing him numerous, expensive, and useless medications.

Throughout the entire scene, Toinette makes numerous comments, all of which go unnoticed by Argan and the Diaforus men. The comments announce her agreement with Argan that he is quite ill, with Mr. Diafoirus that he has a brilliant business strategy, and with Thomas that he is an intelligent young man who is well suited to Angelique. Each of these comments is an example of irony because she is saying the opposite of what she feels to be true.

To break up the conversation and provide some entertainment, Argan suggests a song to be performed by Cleante and Angelique. Cleante has a new piece prepared and explains it to the group. The story of unrequited love between the young shepherdess and shepherd symbolize the forbidden love between Angelique and Cleante. After the explanation, the operetta is sung by the young pair. However, it is interrupted by Argan, who deems the subject of the play inappropriate. He grabs the music from Angelique only to see that there are no words on the page. Although Argan does not realize it, this shows that both Angelique and Cleante were singing from the heart and truly putting themselves in the places of the characters they so closely resemble.

Act 2, Scene 7

Act 2, Scene 7 Summary

Beline enters the room with the rest of the guests and is quickly introduced to Mr. Diaforus and his son. Thomas turns to Beline and begins his recited speech, which he has already mistakenly used on Angelique. However, Beline interrupts him by telling her how happy she is to meet him. This flusters Thomas, who continues with his speech and flounders until his father tells him to be quiet.

Argan turns to his daughter and tells her to shake hands with Thomas and agree to marry him. Angelique balks at his order and requests more time for them to become better acquainted. She continues to plead with her father, reasoning that if Thomas is truly a man of honor then he will not want her to enter into their marriage by force. Thomas speaks up saying that her reasoning is false, for he is a man of honor. He will accept her hand from her father. Angelique points out that he does not make a strong case for himself when he speaks like that. Thomas explains his point by referring to the ancient practice of carrying by force one's intended bride from her father's house, to which she counters that they are no longer living in ancient times. Toinette reasons that it is impossible for Angelique to argue effectively with him, for he is a fresh college graduate.

Angelique explains that she only wishes to have a husband whom she can love and trust and to whom she can devote herself. She is not like other women, who marry just so they may escape their parents' control or marry just for a fortune. Beline takes this last comment from her stepdaughter as an explanation of her marriage to Argan. She questions Angelique, who responds by saying only that she will not say anything rude. Beline responds by taunting Angelique and calling her names.

Act 2, Scene 7 Analysis

Angelique's refusal to obey Argan's order to agree to marry Thomas is the first time she has disobeyed her father. She does this by telling him that she is only searching for love, not to escape his household or to find wealth. This causes Beline to become angry because she believes that Angelique has made this comment to be rude to her. Surely, Angelique already knows of Beline's interest in her father's money, as evidenced by her knowledge of the meeting with the notary, but Beline's reaction to the comment reveals more about her character. She retaliates by taunting her stepdaughter, trying to provoke a rude response from the younger woman. Angelique, however, proves to be too polite to be provoked.

Act 2, Scene 8

Act 2, Scene 8 Summary

Angelique leaves while Argan calls after her saying that she has two choices in the matter, either marry Thomas or enter a convent. She has 4 days to decide. Beline tells her husband that she has business in town and must leave. Argan reminds her to visit the notary and tell him to hasten his work.

Act 2, Scene 8 Analysis

Argan has given his daughter an ultimatum after her first and only show of defiance. His illness has clouded his judgment, and he thinks only of himself. While he is ridding himself of one of his family members, he is promising another, his wife, that he will provide for her after his death.

Act 2, Scene 9

Act 2, Scene 9 Summary

Mr. Diaforus announces that he and his son must also leave. Argan asks them whether they may first tell him how ill he is. Father and son each take one of Argan's arms to take a pulse. Thomas concludes that his pulse is that of an ill man, and his father concurs. Mr. Diaforus tells Argan that it is most likely his spleen. Argan disagrees, however, because his doctor, Mr. Purgon, has told him it was his liver. Mr. Diaforus explains that it is quite common for both the liver and spleen to be affected and that surely Mr. Purgon has ordered him to eat roast meat. Argan tells him that he has been told to eat only boiled meat. With this, Mr. Diaforus nods and agrees explaining that it is all the same.

Act 2, Scene 9 Analysis

Before they leave, Argan lets Mr. Diafoirus and his son examine him. The two do so and diagnose various diseases and remedies only after first asking what his current doctor has prescribed. Of course, each of their recommendations falls in direct conflict with those of Mr. Purgon. This is meant to install confidence in their abilities and cast doubt on those of his current doctor. Argan listens intently to everything they tell him. He so wants to believe that he is ill that he does not see through the thin veil of their deceit. This reinforces the theme of the play.

Act 2, Scene 10

Act 2, Scene 10 Summary

Beline tells her husband that before she goes she must tell him what she has just seen while passing Angelique's door. Angelique has been with a young man, who left as soon as he saw her. Beline assures Argan that his younger daughter, Louison, was with them, too. With this, Beline leaves, and Argan calls for his younger daughter.

Act 2, Scene 10 Analysis

Beline repays Angelique, for calling attention to her own nasty character by telling on her. Argan believes that this is the last straw, for in his mind, his daughter has become unruly and immoral.

Act 2, Scene 11

Act 2, Scene 11 Summary

Louison enters the room in response to her father's summons. He asks her to look straight into his eyes, and then he asks whether she has anything to say to him. Louison replies that she will tell him a story to entertain him. However, this is not what Argan means, and he believes that Louison's offer to tell an amusing story is proof of her insolence. He asks his daughter whether she has seen anything today that she should tell him, to which she replies that she has seen nothing out of the ordinary. Argan picks up a rod threatening to hit Louison until she finally confesses that her sister had asked her not to say anything about the young man in her room. Louison pleads with her father to forgive her and not whip her, but he refuses. Argan raises his arm and just then Louison collapses, feigning death. Argan cries over her body, admonishing himself for causing his poor little daughter's death. At the sound of Argan's apology, Louison reveals herself to be all right. With this, Argan decides to forgive his daughter this one time if she promises to tell him all that she sees in the future.

Louison makes her father promise not to tell her sister what she is about to tell him before leaning in close so that no one may overhear. She tells him that a young man, who identified himself as Angelique's music master, came to their room. Angelique was surprised to see him and asked that he go, for he was causing her despair. However, the young man told her sweet nothings and kissed her hands. It was then that Beline walked by, and the music master ran off.

Act 2, Scene 11 Analysis

Once again, Argan shows his complete disregard for his children's feelings by threatening his youngest with physical violence if she does not break her confidence. Upon hearing the truth, that Angelique did not invite the young man up to her room, he ignores the fact that the young man with whom she is in love showed her only politeness and respect. He instead focuses on the fact that Angelique has disobeyed him and that their ploy may have cost him his chance at gaining a doctor for a son-in-law. Only the fact that he is ill is of any importance, and therefore he has a one-track, selfish mind. The lack of a real physical sickness, and the belief that one exists, has caused him to become a blind tyrant.

Act 2, Scene 12

Act 2, Scene 12 Summary

Argan's brother, Beralde, who is visiting with him, asks how he feels. Argan, as usual, laments over his bad health. Beralde reveals that the reason for his visit is to present a match for Angelique. Argan is enraged at the mere mention of his oldest daughter and screams that he will soon send her to a convent. Beralde tells Argan that he is glad that his brother is not so ill that it does not prevent him from getting excited. Either way, Beralde announces that he has brought gypsies dressed in Moorish clothes to entertain them with song and dance. Four Moorish women enter and sing a little song about young love and springtime.

Act 2, Scene 12 Analysis

Act 2, Scene 12, introduces a new character, Argan's brother. Beralde has come to visit his brother to act on behalf of his niece. He too, believes that Argan is acting unreasonably. Another belief that he holds in common with Toinette is the fact that Argan is not truly ill; he merely believes himself to be ill. By patronizing Argan and agreeing with him, the plot element of irony is repeated.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

When the Moorish women are finished singing, Beralde asks his brother how he liked the song. Argan liked the song very much; however, he leaves the room promising to return shortly so that he may have a talk with his brother.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

Again, Argan mysteriously leaves the room. This unexplained absence serves as a means for Beralde and Toinette to have a private conversation.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

While Argan is away, Toinette speaks with Beralde alone. Toinette reminds Beralde that they must now allow Argan to go through with his plans regarding Angelique's future marriage. Beralde promises to do all that he can, and Toinette reveals that she will soon play a trick on Argan that may help him come to his senses.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

It is revealed that Toinette and Beralde are in league with each other. They both wish to convince Argan that he is wrong about Angelique, and they do this because of their love for her and their desire to see her happy. At the end of this short scene, Toinette reveals that she has another secret plan that she will be implementing shortly. This is another example of foreshadowing being used as a plot element to create suspense.

Act 3, Scene 3

Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

Argan returns as Toinette leaves. Beralde makes his brother promise that he will remain calm throughout their conversation. Argan promises and so Beralde begins by asking why he would consider sending his daughter to a convent when he already has so much wealth. He does not need to arrange a marriage for her based on money. Argan retaliates by telling his brother that he may do whatever he wishes as head of his household. Beralde continues by asking exactly why he wishes his daughter to marry this doctor, to which Argan replies that a son-in-law who is a doctor will tend to his health needs. His brother asks him to consider that perhaps he should consider his daughter's needs when it comes to her marriage.

Beralde asks his brother whether he would marry Louison to an apothecary if she were old enough, to which Argan tells him it would be a perfect match. This causes Beralde to ask Argan why he is so obsessed with doctors and apothecaries and being ill, when he is obviously not sick at all. He says that the proof of his health lies in the fact that he has not died as a result of the multitude of superfluous prescriptions he takes. Argan thinks that this line of reasoning is nonsense, for it is his prescriptions that keep him alive.

Beralde agrees to drop the matter of his brother's supposed health problems and concludes with a plea for the consideration of Angelique's happiness. He reminds his brother that he should not allow his anger to influence his decision; rather, he should realize that his daughter will be married for life, and it should be a mutually agreed-upon match.

Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

Beralde supports his niece by arguing her case in front of his brother. Argan, however, is unresponsive to his reasoning and goes so far as to explain his own reasoning for the match. He believes that it is Angelique's duty to do what he wishes and provide for his needs. Since he is incredibly sick that means that he needs a doctor whom he trusts to be close by, one who is indebted to him. The perfect way to ensure this is by marrying his daughter off to one such doctor.

Act 3, Scene 4

Act 3, Scene 4 Summary

Mr. Fleurant, Argan's apothecary, arrives to prescribe a clyster to his patient. Beralde asks that he put off the potion. This angers Mr. Fleurant, who asks what right he has to interfere in the doctor-patient relationship. With that, Beralde sends the apothecary away although the man does not go quietly and threatens Argan's brother.

Act 3, Scene 4 Analysis

Beralde angers Argan's apothecary, most likely on purpose. The apothecary knows that Argan is not truly infected with any disease and that the prescriptions are useless. It scares him to think that Beralde has succeeded in convincing his patient that he is well, and Mr. Fleurant is a fraud.

Act 3, Scene 5

Act 3, Scene 5 Summary

After Mr. Fleurant leaves, Argan shares his fears that Beralde's recent actions will cause harm to the inhabitants of his household. Beralde waves away his concerns as just another figment of his brother's imagination.

Act 3, Scene 5 Analysis

Argan is beside himself when Mr. Fleurant leaves. This feeling of helplessness is symbolic of the feeling that actual sick patients feel when they know that they don't have control over their illness. Argan does not have control over his illness, hypochondria, either.

Act 3, Scene 6

Act 3, Scene 6 Summary

Mr. Purgon arrives, having heard that his prescriptions were denied and his assistant, Mr. Fleurant, was turned away. Surely it was a mistake, for no one could be so brainless as to refuse his clyster. Argan, flustered, quickly explains that it was his brother, not himself, who sent Mr. Fleurant away. Mr. Purgon is so angry that he does not hear, or ignores, Argan's pleas. He tells Argan that he will no longer prescribe medicines or care for him as his patient any longer. Furthermore, he will sever all connection he has with him, including ending the arrangement of his nephew, Thomas, marrying Angelique. Before he leaves, he warns Argan that he will soon die of his illness without the necessary prescriptions.

Act 3, Scene 6 Analysis

Mr. Purgon will not listen to Argan's argument that it was his brother, not he, who sent away Mr. Fleurant. Mr. Purgon does this so that he may sever all ties before Argan discovers that he is not truly ill and that they have been taking advantage of his mental disorder.

Act 3, Scene 7

Act 3, Scene 7 Summary

Argan exclaims to his brother that he has killed him with his insolence! Beralde does not see the problem in Mr. Purgon's empty threats. He believes that his brother is a fool for believing such obvious lies.

Act 3, Scene 7 Analysis

Again, Argan becomes excited about his supposed illness while other characters do not see the problem. Argan's reaction represents his feelings that he is the center of everyone's lives; this is one of the reasons why he has created such an elaborate set of illnesses, so that his problems may be discussed with regularity.

Act 3, Scene 8

Act 3, Scene 8 Summary

Toinette arrives to announce that another doctor has come and wishes to see Argan. Argan does not know anything about another doctor. She explains that the doctor looks so much like herself that she almost believes he could be her brother.

Act 3, Scene 8 Analysis

At first it seems that another doctor has arrived coincidentally. However, the previous foreshadowing element concerning Toinette's announcement to Beralde that she had something secret planned, makes this coincidence seem more mysterious. It is also odd that Toinette would make a point of telling Argan and his brother that the visiting doctor looks eerily like her.

Act 3, Scene 9

Act 3, Scene 9 Summary

Beralde tells Argan what luck he has that one doctor leaves him and immediately is replaced by another. Argan replies by once again voicing his fear that his brother's actions will bring misfortune.

Act 3, Scene 9 Analysis

Beralde seems to have caught on to Toinette's plan, or at least thinks he has an inkling of the truth, and so he mentions that his brother is lucky to have come across a new doctor so soon.

Act 3, Scene 10

Act 3, Scene 10 Summary

Toinette returns dressed in disguise as a doctor. The doctor offers his services to Argan, and his services are readily accepted. To Beralde, he remarks at the uncanny resemblance the doctor has to Toinette. The doctor excuses himself to check on his servant.

Act 3, Scene 10 Analysis

The plot element of dramatic irony is used as Toinette appears dressed as a doctor. Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows more than one or more of the characters. In this case, Argan definitely sees the uncanny resemblance the doctor has to his servant; however, he does not believe that he is being deceived. In his illness he thinks that it is only right that a doctor arrives, moments after his previous doctor quits. This just reaffirms his belief that he needs a doctor and that he is a very important man.

Act 3, Scene 11

Act 3, Scene 11 Summary

While the doctor is out of the room Beralde and Argan discuss the close resemblance he bears to Toinette.

Act 3, Scene 11 Analysis

When Argan mentions the close resemblance of his maid to the doctor, Beralde assures him that it is a mere coincidence.

Act 3, Scene 12

Act 3, Scene 12 Summary

Toinette returns, this time dressed as herself. She thought that she heard Argan calling for her. Argan tries to persuade Toinette to stay until the doctor comes back so that they may see the resemblance of the two side by side; however Toinette explains that she has far too much to do to waste time.

Act 3, Scene 12 Analysis

Toinette returns, dressed as herself, to complete her deception. By seeing both people so closely apart in time Argan is firm in his belief that it is not a ruse.

Act 3, Scene 13

Act 3, Scene 13 Summary

Once again alone, Argan remarks at the resemblance. He mentions that had he not seen the two only moments from one another then he would believe he was being deceived.

Act 3, Scene 13 Analysis

Act 3, Scene 13 serves merely as a transitional scene.

Act 3, Scene 14

Act 3, Scene 14 Summary

Toinette returns, this time dressed as the doctor. The doctor exclaims that he is very fortunate to have the opportunity to take care of such a famous patient. Argan replies that it is he who is fortunate to be cared for by the doctor. The doctor notices that Argan is looking at him strangely and asks how old he presumes him to be, to which Argan replies that he thinks he is either 27 or 28 years old. Toinette, as the doctor, replies that he is 90 years old. Argan cannot believe it! The doctor explains that it is his work as a doctor that has allowed him the gift of youth.

The doctor tells them that he is so successful that he travels the country looking for interesting cases because he does not concern himself with common diseases. It is lucky for him that Argan has all of the complex diseases that he looks to treat. He begins by feeling Argan's pulse. After doing so, he exclaims that his heart does not beat as it should, but not to worry, he will soon remedy that. He asks who has been treating him thus far. Argan replies that his doctor was a Mr. Purgon. To this Toilette, as the doctor, looks confused, for Mr. Purgon is not in his book of great doctors. Mr. Purgon's diagnosis of a problem with the liver was a huge mistake because obviously Argan suffers from the lungs. He has Argan list his symptoms, and after each one tells him it is caused by the lungs. After this, he has Argan list all of the remedies that Mr. Purgon has prescribed. He exclaims after each remedy that it was an ignorant choice.

The doctor tells Argan that he will send one of his own students to care for him to rectify the mistakes Mr. Purgon has made. The doctor then tells Argan that he would like to cut off his arm and pluck out his right eye. Both procedures will greatly improve his health. With that the doctor takes his leave since he has an appointment to keep.

Act 3, Scene 14 Analysis

Toinette, as the doctor, shows high respect to Argan, and more important, his disease. He markets himself as a great doctor and flatters Argan by telling him that it would be a great honor to treat someone with such a complex combination of illnesses. After building up his credentials, the good doctor then recommends a course of treatment. However, this course of treatment is much more severe than useless prescriptions. He recommends that Argan have his arm amputated and his eye removed. Upon hearing this announcement, Argan becomes unsure of the doctor, and moreover unsure of his disease. Even at the cost of giving up his imaginary illness, he does not wish to become a true invalid by purposely becoming disabled.

Act 3, Scene 15

Act 3, Scene 15 Summary

Beralde tells Argan that the doctor seems like a very smart man. Argan, however, is apprehensive expressing his fear that perhaps the doctor works a little too quickly. Argan says that he would rather be unwell than have only one arm and one eye.

Act 3, Scene 15 Analysis

Beralde plays into Toinette's charade by agreeing with the doctor's course of treatment. Both he and Toinette believe that this may scare Argan into abandoning his fake illness; however, his disease is stronger than that, and he announces that he will just stay unwell and not seek a cure.

Act 3, Scene 16

Act 3, Scene 16 Summary

Beralde changes the subject and asks his brother whether he may tell him of the match he has for Angelique, now that Mr. Purgon is out of the picture. Argan wants no part of this discussion because his mind is already made up that she will be sent to a convent for disobeying her father. Beralde accuses Argan of sending Angelique to a convent to appease his wife. Beralde does not believe Argan's attempts at convincing him that Beline loves him. Toinette interjects and tells them there is one way to prove Beline's love of her husband. She suggests that Argan lay in the armchair and pretend he is dead. Beline will soon arrive and be struck with grief. Argan agrees to the scheme to convince his brother of his wife's good intentions.

Act 3, Scene 16 Analysis

Once the doctor has departed Beralde continues his battle for Angelique's future happiness. However, Argan is still refusing to hear him. The subject of Argan's wife comes up along with Beralde's feelings that she is using his brother for his money. It is then that Toinette has the brilliant idea of finding the true feelings of Beline toward her husband so that Beralde may no longer use that argument as ammunition. Toinette accomplishes this by using verbal irony, by agreeing with Argan, even though she believes the opposite in regards to Beline's motives.

Act 3, Scene 17

Act 3, Scene 17 Summary

Argan asks Toinette if he will be endangering himself by merely pretending death. Toinette insures him there is no risk and helps to lay him out in the chair.

Act 3, Scene 17 Analysis

The degree of Argan's hypochondria is revealed when he asks if he will be harmed by simply faking death. The irony is that he is faking being ill everyday and it never occurs to him that he may be harming himself and others around him.

Act 3, Scene 18

Act 3, Scene 18 Summary

Beralde is hidden and Argan is stretched out when Beline arrives back at home. Toinette greets her mistress and tells her a tragedy has occurred. Argan has suddenly died. Beline asks if she is quite sure that her husband has passed. Upon hearing that Argan is indeed dead. Beline is relived as she tells Toinette that her husband was a huge burden. She then admonishes her servant for acting so emotional. Beline goes on to list her deceased husband's faults. She then asks Toinette to help her conceal her Argan's death until she gets all of the necessary paperwork in order.

Just then Argan rises from his feigned death pose. He shouts at Beline, who is hastily leaving, that he is glad to have learned her true feelings toward him.

Act 3, Scene 18 Analysis

Beline's reaction to her husband's death is no surprise to anyone but Argan. He is shocked to learn that he has been duped by the only person that he has so ardently claimed is after his own interests. It is also revealed in this scene that Argan is not the only one that believes that he has an illness. Beline had thought him very ill for that is the reason why she had agreed to marry him. Argan's "illness" has caused him to be blind to such an intimate deception.

Act 3, Scene 19

Act 3, Scene 19 Summary

Beralde comes out from his hiding place to join Toinette and Argan. Toinette voices her disbelief at what she has just heard come from Beline's own mouth. She hears Angelique coming and tells Argan to play the same ruse with her.

Act 3, Scene 19 Analysis

Toinette, having realized that her current handling of the situation placates Argan nicely, continues to use verbal irony by remarking how surprised she is at Beline's recent revelations.

Act 3, Scene 20

Act 3, Scene 20 Summary

Toinette sees Angelique and tells her that there has been a terrible accident and her father is dead. Angelique cries out with her grief. She can not be consoled in her feelings of unhappiness.

Act 3, Scene 20 Analysis

Angelique's reaction is much like Beline's in that it is expected by everyone but Argan. Even though Angelique had been angry with her father for now allowing her to marry the man whom she loved, she is still deeply hurt by the news of his death.

Act 3, Scene 21

Act 3, Scene 21 Summary

Cleante enters the room and asks Angelique what has made her so sad. She tells him that she is crying over the loss of her father. Upon hearing this news Cleante, too cries out in grief. Cleante explains that he had just come over in order to try to talk Argan into letting him marry her. Angelique tells him that they must now forget about getting married, as she will never be happy again without her father. Upon hearing this Argan rises from his pose. He acknowledges that Angelique is his true daughter in every way, and he is glad to hear of her feelings.

Act 3, Scene 21 Analysis

Cleante, too, is saddened by the news of Argan's death, even though the older man had not shown him much respect and had tried to keep him from his love. The fact that these two lovers can grieve so hard for a man that has tried so hard to make them unhappy shows that their true characters are pure and full of love. It is Argan's illness that causes him to only see this through an elaborate scheme such as this.

Act 3, Scene 22

Act 3, Scene 22 Summary

Angelique is shocked, but joyous, to see her father alive. She pleads for him to grant her one favor, that if he not let her marry Cleante, then he also not force her to marry anyone else. Cleante also throws himself at Argan's feet and begs him to consider allowing him to become his son-in-law. Beralde and Toinette advise Argan that he cannot turn down their request after hearing of Angelique's total devotion to her father. Argan tells them that he will agree to the match if Cleante agrees to become a doctor. Cleante readily agrees to this demand.

Beralde steps in and asks his brother why he does not just become a doctor himself, for surely that will be even more convenient. Argan sees the logic in this strategy however he is unsure of his ability to study at his advanced age. Beralde and Toinette assure him that it is a simple matter of ceremony and dress. Once he becomes a doctor he will inherit all of the knowledge of one. With that, Beralde arranges for the ceremony to be held that day in Argan's house.

Act 3, Scene 22 Analysis

Even after hearing Angelique and Cleante's true feelings for him, Argan only agrees to allow them to marry if Cleante agrees to become a doctor. Cleante shows his devotion to Angelique by readily agreeing. Once again Beralde comes to the couple's rescue by suggesting that his brother omit the middleman and just become a doctor himself. He convinces Argan that it is quite easy to become a doctor and the ceremony can occur this very afternoon. Argan is readily convinced, for he believes himself to be both extremely intelligent and the one true expert of his illness. His imaginary illness has become so important to him that it has rendered him unable to ascertain certain simple truths from lies, such that a ceremony cannot be readied in a matter of hours, to an uncertified doctor.

Act 3, Scene 23

Act 3, Scene 23 Summary

Cleante asks Beralde what he means by assembling a ceremony that day. How will he attempt to do that without Argan having completed any classes? Beralde explains that the company of actors has recently created a little skit with dancing and singing of which a doctor's admission ceremony is the main subject. He suggests that they get the company together and put on the little play themselves, and make Argan the star.

The play ends with a song and dance that is untranslatable since it is a mixture of dog-Latin and French, along with other unknown languages.

Act 3, Scene 23 Analysis

The very fact that the group decides to deceive Argan by putting on this little farce of a doctor's ceremony reveals Argan's true illness, and the theme of the play. Argan has believed himself to be ill for so long that he has actually become sick, however his disease has affected his mental capacity. While he is not truly an invalid, physically, mentally they are all forced to treat him as a child.

Characters

Angélique

Argan's daughter Angélique is a kind young woman whose main goal in the play is to marry for love. She hopes to marry Cléante, with whom she fell in love when he came to her defense at the theater. Angélique always acts with deference to her father, although she protests against a marriage to Thomas and does not get along with her stepmother. When Argan pretends to be dead, it is likely that Angélique actually feels as devoted to him as she claims (although Toinette may have informed her of the plot beforehand) because she consistently defends her father and is genuinely affectionate towards him.

Argan

The play's main character, Argan, is a selfish hypochondriac and a fool, with two daughters. He is obsessed with his own imagined illnesses to the point where he seems to think of nothing else, to the consternation of his brother and his daughter Angélique. He is also extremely gullible, allowing his doctors to overcharge him, his maid to trick and confuse him, and his wife (who calls him a "nuisance to everybody") to nearly manipulate him out of his fortune. Appearing to be almost a stock character, he is temperamental and explodes into a burst of comical anger when he is frustrated, and he is satirical of silly and selfish bourgeois gentlemen. Molière pokes fun at this class of people chiefly through his characterization of Argan.

Argan has a tender side as well, however, and the subtlety of his characterization is one of the chief accomplishments of the play. Eventually, he even endears himself to the audience by allowing them to sympathize with him as he is manipulated by everyone around him, and he reveals that he is basically kind by agreeing to allow his daughter Angélique to marry Cléante. He is very affectionate to his wife until he discovers that she is only interested in his money, and he does love Angélique in his own way, despite the fact that his overwhelming priority in arranging her marriage is the satisfaction of his own petty interests. By the end of the play, he appears harmless and benevolent, however much he is a shallow and ridiculous father, which is why he is an appropriate main character for a comedy. Molière himself played the role of Argan during the first four performances of the play, until Molière died of a lung disorder.

Béline

Béline is Argan's second wife. She is a manipulative woman interested only in Argan's wealth, and she wants to send both of her stepdaughters to a convent so they will not receive their inheritance. Although she showers Argan with affection and pretends to indulge him in his imaginary illnesses, her true character is revealed when Argan pretends to be dead and he listens to her happy reaction.

Béralde

Concerned about his brother Argan's foolishness, Béralde is involved in the scheme to help Angélique marry Cléante, and he presents Cléante's suit to his brother. Béralde continually calls Argan naive and attempts to bring him to his senses about doctors, his daughter, and his wife, but Argan tends not to listen. One of Béralde's most passionate beliefs is that the medical profession is a sham, and he has a long scene in which he argues with his brother about doctors, belittling them and stressing their ridiculous failures. At the end of the play, he uses his influence to bring about the joke of Argan's graduation from medical school.

Monsieur Bonnefoi

Monsieur Bonnefoi is the notary who informs Argan of the Parisian law regarding inheritance. His name means "good faith" in French, which is an ironic touch because he is shady in his dealings, scheming to transfer Argan's funds completely to Béline.

Cléante

Angélique's lover Cléante is a young gallant with whom Angélique falls in love at the theater. After he hears that Argan is arranging for his daughter's marriage to another suitor, Cléante shows his resourcefulness by pretending to be Angélique's music teacher and singing a love song with her. Angélique describes him as gentlemanly, chivalrous, and handsome, and he is equally devoted to her, willing to go to medical school if Argan requires it as a condition for their marriage.

Monsieur Diafoirus

Monsieur Diafoirus is the doctor who, with Argan, arranges his son and Angélique's marriage. The brother-in-law of Monsieur Purgon, he is very proud of his son Thomas and coaches him along in his speeches without recognizing that Thomas is making a fool of himself. He is also an incompetent doctor, since he makes a ridiculous and arbitrary diagnosis of Argan.

Thomas Diafoirus

Angélique's betrothed, Thomas is a "great booby." As his father points out, he is dim-witted, persists in ridiculous arguments, and has a "blind attachment to the opinions of ancient authorities." Argan likes him despite his foolish speeches and his indifference to Angélique's feelings towards him, and despite the fact that Thomas is a poor doctor and a stubborn bore.

Monsieur Fleurant

Monsieur Fleurant is an "apothecary," an archaic word for a pharmacist, and an assistant to Monsieur Purgon. He is offended when Béralde convinces Argan to postpone an injection, and he complains to his superior.

Flora

The Roman goddess of blossoming spring flowers, Flora is also associated with fertility. She appears in the first prologue to the play, inviting the shepherds to frolic and praising Louis XIV.

Louison

Louison is Angélique's younger sister, who appears, according to Béralde, not to be in line to inherit any of Argan's fortune. She loves her sister and attempts to disguise her knowledge of Cléante's visit to Angélique from her father, but she admits what she has seen when her father threatens to beat her.

Pan

Pan is the Greek god of shepherds and rural life, often represented as having the features of a goat. He appears in the prologue, urging the shepherds to amuse Louis XIV.

Punchinello

Punchinello is the "old money-lender" who tells Cléante the news of the arranged marriage, and he sings and dances in the comical first interlude. Toinette tells Angélique that this favor will cost her "a few buttery words," presumably because Punchinello is a rich old man who likes to chase after young women.

Monsieur Purgon

Argan's chief doctor and Thomas Diafoirus's uncle, Monsieur Purgon is a prime example of the incompetent and greedy doctors whom Molière mocks. His name means "cleanse" or "purge" in Latin, a joke relating to his preparation of enemas to clear Argan's bowels. His only appearance in the play is to threaten and dismiss Argan after Monsieur Fleurant informs him that Argan has postponed an injection.

Toinette

Toinette is the clever family servant and the chief schemer in the plot to arrange Angélique and Cléante's marriage. Cunning and resourceful, she tricks and outsmarts Argan, pretends to take Béline's side, disguises herself as a doctor, and organizes the ruse that Argan has died in order to reveal Béline's and Angélique's true feelings about him. Toinette is also the most astute of the characters, in part because she is not a member of the silly bourgeoisie Molière satirizes, and in part because her occasional snide comments and observations provide witty comedy. She is also quite selfless; she is devoted to Angélique and says she would "rather die" than desert her, which seems to be her entire motivation for plotting against Béline.

Themes

The Medical Profession

It is immediately clear that Molière is interested in a pointed satire of the entire medical profession in *The Imaginary Invalid*, an agenda that is common to many of the dramatist's works. In a manner that would have been familiar to contemporary audiences, the play constantly ridicules the pompous behavior, misuse and overuse of Latin, incompetence, ignorance, and selfishness of doctors. Monsieur Purgon and Monsieur Fleurant are mocked by their very names, which suggest "purging" and "flowery," respectively, and Monsieur Diafoirus and Thomas are shown to be incompetent doctors with intolerable personalities.

Molière attacks doctors with satire that is not simply farcical, however; at the beginning of act 3, Béralde's discussion with Argan about the medical profession is an eloquent and even philosophical argument against the medical profession. Béralde questions the basic reasons for living, pointing out that nature should be left to itself. Although the claim that doctors are useless may seem doubtful today, it was not an extreme view during the seventeenth century, and the idea that nature is too complex for humans to understand and that life should be embraced as a phenomenon outside the realm of science is a philosophical notion to which modern readers can relate.

Since Molière's presentation of medicine is such a central theme in the play, it also relates to many of the dramatist's other thematic ideas. For example, critics have connected Argan's imaginary illnesses to the imaginative endeavor of a play, since these are both obsessions associated with the creator's pleasure; they are both spectacles that affect the subject psychologically, and they both must be reconciled with bourgeois demand for moneymaking and reasonable prices, which is why Argan is so interested in having a doctor in the family. Also, Molière's ideas about the medical profession can be related to the "solipsistic" philosophy sometimes associated with him□the theory that one's own existence is the only certainty.

Love and Arranged Marriage

Love and marriage in seventeenth-century Paris are important themes both in the play itself and in its pastoral musical interludes, which involve shepherds, mythological figures, and gypsies dancing and singing. All the musical interludes, with the exception of the finale, dwell on the wonder and greatness of youthful love, which underlies the play's main conflict of Angélique's struggle to marry her true love, Cléante. The struggle exists between the force of young love and Argan's bourgeois desire to save money and continue his absurd obsession, since Argan has complete control over his daughter's wealth and love life. The villain in this struggle is Béline and the false love and greedy manipulation she represents.

Molière portrays the young lovers as completely under the power of Argan's wishes, although they do have the ability, like Béline, to manipulate him onto their side. It is possible that the play criticizes the father's power over arranged marriages, since Argan is so selfish and petty, although it is unclear that Molière would actually advocate any serious institutional change. Also, it is not necessarily clear that pleasure-seeking young love is actually the solution to the play's problems of selfishness, greed, and incompetence.

Class and Politics

The prologue establishes that the play was written chiefly for the pleasure of King Louis XIV, and seventeenth-century audiences would have realized that Molière was trying to secure further patronage and regain the favor he was in danger of losing to his previous collaborator, Jean-Baptiste Lully. Although the prologue is ambiguous and mildly ironic in its praise of Louis, arguing that the best way to praise the king's military accomplishments is by performing for his idle pleasure, its flattery is mostly in earnest, since Louis's patronage was so vital to the playwright. And Molière indulges in something both he and the king thoroughly enjoyed: ridiculing the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie class, which comprised the majority of Molière's audience, is one of the main objects of Molière's satire. While ridiculing their silliness and greed, *The Imaginary Invalid* also attacks middle-class incompetence, immorality, shallowness, and the unsuitability of the bourgeoisie to hold so much power over their children. An important element of this satire is Toinette's plot to manipulate Argan into supporting his daughter's love, since she is a lower-class maid exerting power and influence over the middle-class father figure. Nevertheless, the bourgeois Béralde is vital to the success of this plan, and there is ultimately no real shift in the household's balance of power. Molière, who is from a bourgeois background himself, pokes fun at the middle class to please the king and other noble patrons, but it is unclear that his representation of them goes beyond mild ridicule.

Style

Comedy-Ballet

Once his theater troupe was established in Paris, Molière knew he had to please both Louis XIV, his most important patron, and the bulk of the theater-going bourgeois audience. Perhaps his greatest innovation in this regard was the invention of the "comedy-ballet," a form that combines song and dance with farce and "comedy of manners" (witty comedy that is satirical of a particular social class). Comedy-ballets were Molière's most popular genre, and often, especially in *The Imaginary Invalid*, their musical intervals provide an important and insightful commentary on the main action. A good example of this is Cléante and Angélique's pastoral song, which directly mimics their own situation.

Comedies of manners originated in ancient Rome and, particularly in Molière's work, are known for combining careful attention to character development with the use of characters of a certain "type," meant to be representative of their social position. Molière's comedies often contain an obsessive father, a reasonable brother, a manipulative second wife, and a plotting servant, although these characters are not merely stock types, but full and unique personalities. With over-elaborate plots that are often simply an unimportant backdrop to the characters and the social scene, comedies of manners provided an opportunity for theater audiences to laugh at themselves. Combining this convention with ballet was instrumental to Molière's success, and it resulted in a very popular form that laid the foundations for later developments in theater and music, such as French opera.

Farce

The Imaginary Invalid also contains elements of "farce," or exaggerated and even bawdy comedy that often involves stereotypical characters and improbable situations. Farce originated in Greek and Roman drama, and the style gradually developed a reputation for crudeness and low comedy, but farce had been popular in the French theater since the fifteenth century. Molière's audiences continued to enjoy a certain amount of buffoonery, although Molière's use of farce was one of the areas in which he encountered opposition in the church and among French moral conservatives. *The Imaginary Invalid* is most clearly farcical during its episodes of physical comedy, such as when Argan chases Toinette with a stick, although scenes such as act 2, scene 5, in which Argan and Monsieur Diafoirus continually attempt to speak at the same time, are also farcical.

Historical Context

The Bourgeoisie

During the mid-seventeenth century, a class of wealthy tradesmen and entrepreneurs who were not a part of the peasantry nor of the nobility began to increase in size in France. Known as the bourgeoisie, this increasingly powerful group lived in large towns, especially Paris, and largely worked as merchants, tradesmen, master-craftsmen, and professionals. Because of their financial power, the bourgeoisie were able to influence local politics and enjoy a distinguished legal status; they were able to extend these privileges to their peers and divide themselves from the laboring masses.

The bourgeoisie grew increasingly stable through the seventeenth century, and inspired a sense of belonging among its members. Business associations became personal and religious associations as bourgeois families met in church and attended the same social functions. Also, bourgeois father figures had complete control over their wives and daughters, who had almost no financial rights under the law, and these fathers tended to marry their daughters into other bourgeois families. These connections strengthened the sense of identity in the middle class, and tended to inspire economic growth in cities.

Outside the established traditions of the French court, however, the bourgeoisie met with a large amount of resentment and dislike as they became established. Although members of the bourgeois class were comparatively well educated, the gentry tended to stereotype them as ignorant and petty. Associated with vanity, miserliness (or financial greed), and decaying morality, the bourgeois type was a favorite target of playwrights as well as conservative moralists. Many of Molière's plays, including *The Imaginary Invalid*, include caricatures and broad satires of bourgeois types, and this seemed to please both the nobility that attended his plays and the bulk of the bourgeois theatergoing crowd that may have enjoyed laughing at themselves.

Louis XIV and the Nobility

The most powerful and privileged persons in seventeenth-century France, whom Molière desired to please in order to survive as a dramatist, were the French nobility and particularly King Louis XIV. The well-established French nobility was an extremely exclusive group that married within its ranks; status came largely from birth and race, although the king could confer coats of arms, and certain offices earned their holders noble titles. Exempt form direct taxation, the nobility, together with the king, formed the power base of the government. They were also the key patrons of the arts; nobles such as Bernard de Nogaret de La Valette and Armand de Bourbon had been the chief means by which Molière's troupe had funded its extended tour of the provinces.

Louis himself was by far the dramatist's most important patron during Molière's time in Paris, however. The king not only funded Molière's troupe; he provided them with a performance space and even interceded on the dramatist's behalf when his play *Tartuffe* was condemned by moral conservatives, including Louis's mother. Louis's favor for Molière waned in the 1670s, however, and in 1672, the musician Jean-Baptiste Lully, who was Molière's former collaborator, gained from the king the right to oversee all theater performed with music. Because of Lully's influence at court, *The Imaginary Invalid* premiered not in court for Louis but in Molière's regular theater. The play is clearly designed to curry favor with the king; it contains precisely the mix of music and comedy that Louis enjoyed, and Molière knew Louis would laugh at its flamboyant ridicule of the bourgeoisie.

The late 1660s and early 1670s were periods of prosperity and expansion for the French monarch; he had spent large sums on his own grandiose lifestyle in order to impress on the nation his authority and power since his assumption of the role of first minister, after the death of the powerful Italian minister Cardinal Jules Mazarin in 1661. Provoking a series of wars against his neighbors, expanding the French colonial influence, and building an enormous palace in Versailles, the king became known as Louis the Great and established France as the dominant European power. Louis had already begun to run out of funds by the time *The Imaginary Invalid* was performed, however, because of the expense of the palace at Versailles as well as military spending and lavish excesses. These spending sprees would contribute greatly to the decline in France's power around the turn of the seventeenth century, as well as to the end of a golden age in French literature.

Commedia Dell'Arte

In addition to the tradition of "comedy of manners," described above, Molière was influenced by the Italian comic form, commedia dell'arte, which was flourishing in Paris and throughout continental Europe. Known for its framework of stock characters present with only minor variations in all performances, commedia dell'arte would often consist of a situation such as a young couple's love coming into conflict with their parents' opposition. Actors typically used masks to portray the common ensemble of stock characters. When Molière's troupe established themselves in Paris, they performed on the off days of a theater occupied by Italian players of commedia dell'arte.

Critical Overview

Molière had developed numerous enemies among devout conservatives and jealous rivals by the time *The Imaginary Invalid* appeared. *Tartuffe* was banned for a period of five years because of its commentary on religion, before Louis XIV's pious and conservative mother died and the king interceded to allow the play to be performed. But the personal, aesthetic, and moral criticism that peaked in the mid-1660s had leveled off well before the performance of Molière's final play. His main concern at this point was not the view of the critical majority or his bourgeois audience; it was the favor of his long-standing and most important patron, Louis XIV, because the king had recently transferred his favor to Molière's longtime collaborator, Jean-Baptiste Lully.

One of the dramatist's main concerns in *The Imaginary Invalid*, therefore, was to please the king, and the play was received very well during its first performances, until all of the reactions to it were dominated by Molière's death. Since then, critics have frequently dwelled on the irony of this death due to a lung condition; Molière performed as the imaginary invalid Argan, and lung trouble is the condition that Toinette ascribes to all of Argan's problems while she is disguised as a doctor. In his essay "The Doctor's Curse," J. D. Hubert writes, "Contemporaries of the author dwelled at length on this morbid paradox," and he cites one of the epitaphs concerning Molière's death by an anonymous author: "here lies Molière; since he was a great Actor, if he acts the part of an imaginary corpse, he does it very well."

Molière's collected works were published in 1682, and since then, he has been widely recognized as an extremely important writer and actor. His acting style influenced the comic style for generations afterwards, his plays have been continually produced throughout the world, and many critics (including the Enlightenment-era philosopher Voltaire) have discovered profound philosophical ideas and systems in his plays. Twentieth-century critics have been particularly interested in the relationship between Molière's theatricality and the content of the plays themselves, and *The Imaginary Invalid* has taken a prominent role in this discussion because of its irony related to Molière's acting and his personal life.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Trudell is a freelance writer with a bachelor's degree in English literature. In the following essay, Trudell discusses Molière's self-consciousness about performance, reality, and the role of the theater in The Imaginary Invalid*.*

Critics and scholars have long been fascinated by the self-conscious irony of Molière's last play. The dramatist's death only hours after the finale of its fourth performance, during which Molière, in the role of Argan, coughed up blood onstage, was long considered his final, greatest joke, and countless commentators noted that actual life seemed to be merging with the theatrical world in a sort of triumph of illusion by the famous actor. Molière's theatricality and showmanship continue to be common topics of discussion in criticism of the playwright and actor, including his ability to combine the arts of writing and acting, and his interest in incorporating the role of the artist and creator into the world of drama.

One aspect of this self-conscious theatricality that is particularly important to *The Imaginary Invalid* is the idea of imagination and falsification as it relates to art and performance. Elaborately theatrical, flamboyantly dramatic, and specifically designed to please King Louis XIV, on the surface the play might seem to be a simple farce or an unsubstantial joke. Far from reinforcing the idea that the purpose of the theater is simply to divert and amuse its audience, however, Molière was interested in highlighting drama's power to influence and attack society. This essay will argue that *The Imaginary Invalid* is a sophisticated and self-conscious critique of the function and purpose of the theater, the value of which, Molière suggests, lies in its intimate connection to reality.

Aside from the prologue's ironic insistence that the purpose of the play will be "to charm [King Louis's] leisure. / And contribute to his pleasure," the clearest hint that the play is a self-conscious analysis of theater is the insistent theatricality of its characters. Toinette, Béralde, and even Béline are all capable of theatrical creativity in the form of arranging and directing other people according to their own motives. Cléante and Angélique manage to subvert their real feelings into an improvisational musical performance, while Punchinello and the pastoral figures of the interludes comment on the themes of the play in the form of a ballet. Even the incompetent doctors are able to make a performance of their craft□in fact, since it has no substance and is something of an imaginary craft, medicine is shown to be nothing but a performance.

Indeed, it soon becomes clear that every character in the play is a master of the art of performance, amusement, and trickery, with the important exception of Argan himself. Incompetent and gullible, Argan is unable to manage his own affairs or judge the true character of his loved ones. He is a stock character similar to Homer Simpson in the popular television show *The Simpsons*, for whom audiences feel a certain affection because of his childlike tenderness, despite the fact that he is an ignorant and dim-witted father figure. It is this tender aspect of Argan's personality that leads Toinette to call him "kind-hearted." Because of his innocence and his inability to decipher all of the

theatrical manipulations at his expense, Argan inspires sympathy among the audience and endears himself to them.

But it is fascinating and ironic that Molière would choose to render his main character, and the role he played, unable to participate in the games and performances of the other characters. Argan must be coached along in his every action, even in his bowel movements, whence comes a great deal of the play's farcical humor. Argan continually alludes to his "bile" throughout the play, and a bowel movement serves as the excuse for Argan to leave the room two out of the three times he does so during the course of the plot. As Monsieur Purgon (whose name suggests cleansing or purging in Latin) notes while defending the injection that Argan has refused, it is Argan's enemas, "which would have produced a startling effect on the bowels," that cause him to rush to the toilet. Yet, in a typical and comical misidentification, Argon says of Toinette: "She's the cause of all the bile I make."

These references to bowel movements and enemas are important because they suggest that Molière uses Argan's "bile" as a metaphor for the performance and theatricality that he is unable to effect by himself. The constipated Argan is always a mere tool of the manipulations around him, whether as a means for Béline to access his fortune, a means by which Angélique can marry her lover, or a means by which the doctors can marry into the bourgeoisie and take their money. And, as he ironically recognizes, his chief manipulator is his maid, Toinette, even more so than the scheming doctors. It is she who is figuratively (or, through metaphor instead of literally) able to cause his bowel movements, because it is she who is most competent at manipulating Argan to effect what she desires.

Molière's choice to use bile as a metaphor for theatricality is partly a joke on the low reputation of the theater; biographers have speculated that the reason Molière took his stage name was to avoid the disgrace his father would endure to be associated with a dramatist. But, more importantly, the metaphor emphasizes the play's distaste for cheap tricks and petty manipulations. To Molière, doctors were petty liars and thieves who survived by taking advantage of the public with elaborate ruses; their manipulations were offensive and absurd because they failed to appreciate that the human body is a mystery mankind cannot understand. Similarly, Béline's trickery and the notary's shrewdness are offensive because their only object is money.

This is not to say that Molière views all theatricality in this light; Argan's complete lack of the talent for performance is also undesirable, which is why he needs to learn how to become a doctor, and therefore an actor, in the course of the play. Indeed, Béralde's and Toinette's manipulations are seen in a comparatively positive light because the object of their endeavors is not money or selfishness but Angélique and Cléante's marriage. Even these tricks are portrayed as inelegant and even vulgar, however; at its best, trickery is portrayed as a shrewd joke. Theatricality and performance remain associated with bile, and it is worth asking why Molière seems to be devaluing his own craft.

Since the answer to this question becomes clearer when taken in the context of Molière's other self-conscious devices in the play, it will help to examine a few of these devices before making a conclusion regarding the dramatist's apparent self-deprecation. Perhaps the most obvious of these devices are the many instances of performances within the performance, from the musical prologue and interludes to Cléante and Angélique's love song in act 2. Commenting on the action of the play more substantially than Molière's previous comedy-ballet interludes, these episodes often come closer to what is really at stake in the play than does the main plot. Cléante and Angélique's song is their only opportunity to express their true feelings to each other; Punchinello's dance brings out the connection between love and money more forcefully and clearly than in the rest of the play; and the shepherds and gypsies meditate on young love and directly attack doctors without the need to code their social commentary into metaphors or subtext. These interludes are not interludes at all, but real and direct commentaries on the themes of the play.

Another example of this refusal to treat theatricality as merely a diversion comes in the ironic first prologue, which, although it is earnest in its flattery of the king's recent military successes in the Dutch War, is nevertheless mainly a good-natured joke about the "reign of love and pleasure" that characterized Louis's home rule, referring to Louis's many mistresses and extravagant idleness. Pan's comment that "silence and sedateness / Serve best to sing his greatness" is entirely ironic, both because the prologue is nothing but a song of the king's greatness and because Louis was known (and is still known) more than any other French monarch to favor flamboyant and elaborate celebrations of his greatness. Instead of "silence and sedateness" on political themes, the goal of *The Imaginary Invalid* is to confuse reality with theater so that Molière's commentary on the real world can be as cutting and real as is possible.

Finally, Molière's crafty showmanship is perhaps at its most obvious when, in act 3, Béralde and Argan argue about the plays of Molière. This is more than a clever joke; it sets up a confusing problem of perception for the audience by inverting the real world and the theatrical world. In discussing Molière's plays about doctors, Argan and Béralde seem to be in the audience, while the audience naturally appears to be the play. Also, this is one of two scenes most strangely resonant with Molière's actual death, since Argan forecasts that Molière will die from ignoring the benefits of medicine. The other instance is Toinette's appearance as a disguised doctor, in which she attributes all of Argan's illnesses to the lungs, which is the condition from which Molière actually died.

With these examples of Molière's self-conscious adeptness at confusing theater with reality in order to make a more striking comment on the real world, it should be much clearer why the dramatist used bile as a metaphor for performance and seemed to devalue his own craft. It is the showperson's classic trick of modesty, pretending to be simple and shallow in order to extend and substantiate the illusion. By establishing Argan, the role he played, as an incompetent and foolhardy person with no ability to perform or manipulate, Molière accomplishes his greatest illusion in the play, to make his artistic creation real. This is how the great actor was able to reach out and grab his audience, challenging their assumptions and forcing them to acknowledge that his

satire, cloaked as a comedy-ballet and a pleasurable diversion, was incredibly real and urgent to their world.

Source: Scott Trudell, Critical Essay on *The Imaginary Invalid*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

The Imaginary Invalid was made into an audio recording in 1999 by L.A. Theatre Works.

Topics for Further Study

The Imaginary Invalid is a comedy both in the classical sense of the word (a story with a happy ending) and in the sense that it is meant to be humorous. Seventeenth-century audiences found the play quite humorous. Explore the differences in humor between seventeenth-century France and twenty-first-century America, and explain why certain parts of the play would have been humorous then, but are not as humorous now. What techniques and sources does Molière use to amuse his audience, and which comedic traditions are the most important to *The Imaginary Invalid*?

Molière was a masterful actor as well as a playwright, and he played the role of Argan for the first four performances of *The Imaginary Invalid*. Research Molière's life and discuss the reasons he might have chosen to write this role for himself. Consider how Argan's imaginary illnesses might have related to Molière's real illnesses, from which he died after the play's fourth performance. Also, discuss more broadly how you think Molière combined his acting and writing talents, and how each were affected by the other.

Read two or three other comedies by Molière, such as *Tartuffe*, *The Misanthrope*, and/or *Don Juan*. Compare the common themes and techniques of the plays you read. Which of the plays do you find most applicable to today's concerns? What makes *The Imaginary Invalid* unique? Many critics have found themes that are present throughout Molière's works; discuss some themes that you notice arising again and again, and compare how they are treated in each play.

Sometimes Molière's comedy is difficult to visualize on the page. Act out one of the more farcical scenes, such as act 2, scene 5, in which Argan and Monsieur Diafoirus keep attempting to speak at the same time. Then try performing or reading aloud your favorite scene in the play. Discuss how this reading/performance enhances your understanding of the scene.

Compare and Contrast

1670s: Under French law, a father has complete authority over his daughter's marriage, and a husband has complete authority over his wife and her wealth.

Today: In France, women are financially equal under the law and no one requires his/her parents' consent to marry, although males must be at least eighteen years old and females must be at least fifteen.

1670s: The Parisian theater is funded by a combination of the bourgeoisie, the nobility, and the king, but most theatergoers are bourgeois.

Today: Theaters are often subsidized by the French government and tickets are more accessible to lower-income groups, but the upper middle-class continues to be the primary audience group in many Parisian theaters.

1670s: Louis XIV is king of France, exerting increasing power over religious and state affairs, building an extravagant palace in Versailles, and pursuing an aggressive foreign policy agenda.

Today: France is a democratic republic and has not had a monarch since 1848. Its president is the center-right politician Jacques Chirac, who, along with the German president, opposed the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

What Do I Read Next?

Molière's *Don Juan* (1665) is one of the dramatist's most compelling and radical plays. It follows the adventures of the seductive and anti-religious Juan of Spain, and it was banned throughout Molière's lifetime by religious conservatives.

William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), a satirical play about the settling of a fortune and the arrangement of a marriage, is one of the most influential English comedies of manners from the Restoration period.

Phaedra (1677), by Jean Racine, is a tragedy based on the classical model. Although it is vastly different in style and content from any of Molière's works, it reveals another major prodigy from this period of French history.

The French philosopher Voltaire's famous work *Candide* (1759) is a provocative and ironic attack on optimism by a thinker who valued the philosophy he found in Molière's plays.

Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) is an example of a vibrant comedy of manners from a vastly different era, taking as its subject the vain and hypocritical English upper class of the late Victorian era.

Geoffrey Treasure's *Louis XIV* (2001) is a comprehensive and readable guide to the life of the famous French king and the atmosphere of seventeenth-century France.

Further Study

Calder, Andrew, *Molière: The Theory and Practice of Comedy*, Athlone Press, 1993.

Calder's clear and useful analysis of Molière's comedies discusses the dramatist's works in terms of overarching themes.

Fernandez, Ramon, *Molière: The Man Seen through the Plays*, translated by W. Follet, Hill and Wang, 1958.

This slightly dated biography nevertheless provides an interesting psychological approach to the dramatist.

Hall, H. Gaston, *Comedy in Context: Essays on Molière*, University Press of Mississippi, 1984.

This collection of essays explores Molière's comedies in terms of their literary context.

Hubert, Judd D., *Molière and the Comedy of Intellect*, University of California Press, 1962.

Hubert's book approaches each play from the standpoint of its intellectual themes.

Bibliography

Hubert, J. D., "The Doctor's Curse," in *Molière: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Jacques Guicharnaud, Prentice Hall, 1964, pp. 134, 160—69.

Molière, *The Hypochondriac*, in *The Miser and Other Plays: A New Selection*, Penguin Classics, 2000, pp. 217—99.

BOOKRAGS

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

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Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535