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*Fuller*

AN ANALYSIS OF MOLIÈRE'S MEDICAL SATIRES

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Commentators have also differed in their opinion of Molière's accuracy in satirizing medicine and medical men. Some declared that Molière's CHAPTER I hypochondriacs, whose jibes at the doctors were INTRODUCTION of his lively imagination, and gross exaggerations; while others maintained that in his portray Molière's principal plays dealing with the medical profession, namely, L'Amour Médecin, Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, and Le Malade Imaginaire, have been pronounced by commentators the most bitter satires ever written by the dramatist against any one class of men. Although Molière had not spared the précieux, the bourgeois, the miser, the marquises, and the hypocrite, toward none of these had he shown such a marked animosity as he had toward the physicians. of Molière's day, in order to show how accurate. The question, "Why did Molière choose doctors as the butt for his sharpest arrows?" has been answered in various ways. Commentators, whose opinions are discussed in detail in the body of this study, have attributed to Molière both private and impersonal reasons for his unremitting persecution of the Faculty. Some have declared that, among other personal motives, the author's ill health was the arsenal of his satiric fires, others maintained that in poking fun at the doctors Molière was merely treading in the footsteps of his Italian predecessors, and still others that his intense hatred of public abuses spurred him on to ridicule the doctors, in whom he found irregularities in greatest abundance.



Commentators have also differed in their opinion of Molière's accuracy in satirizing medicine and medical men. Some declared that Molière was a hypochondriac, whose jibes at the doctors were fabrications of his lively imagination, and gross exaggerations; while others maintained that in his portrayal of medical men and scenes he was minutely exact and precise.

It is the purpose of this study (1) to make a comparison of the comments made by critics in regard to Molière's ridicule of medical men and their art; (2) to show, by citing from the plays all direct references made to medicine, what Molière, himself, actually ridicules in physicians; and (3) to enumerate the actual practices of the medical men of Molière's day, in order to show how accurately Molière's ridicule of doctors, and critics' interpretation of his ridicule, measure up with the medical history of seventeenth century France.

Criticism that has been made of Molière's medical plays, since the seventeenth century, in regard to the author's motive in writing them, the identification of the doctors he introduced in his plays, and the accuracy of the accusations he launched at the doctors have been varied. Molière's critics can conveniently be grouped into two general classes - opponents and partisans.



1. Introduction - Among the comparatively few commentators who have interpreted Molière's plays as unjust attacks, works of vengeance, and

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Despite the fact that much has been written on Molière's medical plays, no work that has yet been published has presented anything like a complete analysis of the dramatist's references to medicine. The annotated citations that appear in the works of modern critics have been found to be, in many cases, mere repetitions, traceable to a few of Molière's contemporaries. Care has been taken to include in this study only those comments and interpretations dealing with Molière's medical satires that have been found to be original and that have been the result of careful study and investigation.

MOLIÈRE'S CRITICS.

Criticisms that have been made of Molière's medical plays, since the seventeenth century, in regard to the author's motives in writing them, the identifications of the doctors he introduced in his plays, and the accuracy of the accusations he launched at the doctors have been varied. Molière's critics can conveniently be grouped into two general classes - opponents and partisans.

John Palmer, Molière, "Impious in Medicine", p. 412.



1. Opponents - Among the comparatively few commentators who have interpreted Molière's plays as unjust attacks, works of vengeance, and gross exaggerations, Le Boulanger de Chalussay, a contemporary of Molière, was perhaps the most bitter. His "theatrical libel" upon the dramatist has been pronounced "the most malign that has ever been written."

What principle motivated Chalussay in writing Elomire<sup>1</sup> Hypochondre ou les médecins vengés (1670) is not known.

Palmer remarks that "it was the play either of a man with a private grudge or of one who believed that a possible opening to fame and distinction lay in thus conspicuously affronting a man with many enemies."<sup>2</sup>

Larroumet, like Chalussay, seems to have been of the opinion that Molière was a hypochondriac. In his critical work, La Comédie de Molière (1886) he attempts to depict Molière as the possessor of all the symptoms of hypochondria. "Among the causes of hypochondria," he says, "stomach troubles stand preeminent, then extreme sensitiveness, moral preoccupations, and a life of overwork. The hypochondriac professes either exaggerated confidence in medicine or absolute scepticism toward it, often commencing with the one only to finish with the other; but sceptical or confiding, he concerns himself greatly with medicine, reading medical works with

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<sup>1</sup>Anagram for Molière, Cf. pp. 55.

<sup>2</sup>John Palmer, Molière, "Impious in Medicine", p. 419.



avidity or seeking to draw doctors into conversation. After the general practitioner, he must have the specialist, then the advertiser and finally the charlatan. Are not all these united in Molière?" he asks.<sup>3</sup>

Larroumet asserts that Molière's wealth of knowledge regarding doctors and medical practices were due to his having passed through each of the above mentioned stages of disease. To make doctors speak and behave as Molière has done, Larroumet argues, he must have seen some of all classes, while to discourse about the medicine of his time so accurately as to call forth the admiration of Maurice Raynaud, he must have studied it at close range.<sup>4</sup>

Grimarest also had maintained that Molière was suffering from hypochondria. For the life of the dramatist that Grimarest published in 1705, he is said to have obtained much of his information from Baron, a young actor, who was for many years in the company of Molière.<sup>5</sup> Because of the second hand information, some critics maintain that Grimarest's Life of Molière is untrustworthy, and that his statements are not to be accepted without corroboration. Contrary to this statement, Brander Matthews asserts that Grimarest's account of Molière's

adverse criticism but also proved himself a great admirer

<sup>3</sup>Larroumet, La Comédie de Molière. Cited from Chatfield-Taylor, Molière, p. 304.

<sup>4</sup>Larroumet, op. cit., p. 304.

<sup>5</sup>John Palmer, Ibid., p. 493.

of the dramatist. To use his own words, Chatfield-Taylor has



life is much more accurate and trustworthy than critics are willing to admit.

20, too, Palmer states that he has endeavored to "present the facts in a way which

2. Partisans - Chief among Molière's supporters, as well as the most reliable source available on the doctors of Molière's day, is Maurice Raynaud. In his work, Les Médecins au temps de Molière, Raynaud, himself a doctor, has treated both the foibles and virtues of the seventeenth century physicians with an impartiality most praiseworthy in a writer. He has been quoted by students of Molière with regard to the latter's treatment of doctors more than any other critic.

In the biography by Brander Matthews, the author devotes several chapters to Molière's medical satires. He claims to have made a great effort to "set forth the facts of Molière's life stripped of all the legends which compass it about". He further asserts that in establishing his work "solidly on admitted facts" he resolutely refrained from borrowing hints or drawing inferences from such "notorious libels" as Elomire Hypocondre. It may be safely added that Matthews not only refrained from all adverse criticism but also proved himself a great admirer of the French dramatist.

Chatfield-Taylor and John Palmer, each have included a chapter on Molière's medical satires in their biographies of the dramatist. To use his own words, Chatfield-Taylor has



made an attempt "to interpret Molière's life by his plays and his plays by his life." So, too, Palmer states that he has endeavored to "present the facts in a way which will allow his readers to form an independent judgment."

Much valuable information for this study has been obtained from the collection of the Grands Ecrivains de la France edited by MM. Eugene Despois et Paul Mesnard and also from the Collection Molièresque of Paul Lacroix. In A. M. Brown's Molière and His Medical Associations, an entire book devoted to the subject under discussion, and in such shorter works as "Molière and the Medical Profession of His Time" by Everett Olmsted, an essay which serves as part of the introduction to the author's edition of Molière's Le Malade Imaginaire not only useful material was found but numerous helpful references were suggested.

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Critics have attributed to Molière other reasons besides that of complying with the King's request in writing his medical satires. Of the private reasons biographers have attributed to the dramatist for his

<sup>1</sup>Ch. M. Des Grozges, Histoire de la Littérature Française, p. 525.

<sup>2</sup>This statement of Des Grozges is a mere supposition based, no doubt, on the fact that there are in Le Médecin Volant some witticisms against doctors, such as Scaparelle's remark: "Je vous réponds que je ferai aussi bien mourir une personne qu'aucun médecin qui soit dans la ville..."



### CHAPTER III

#### L'AMOUR MEDECIN (1665)

Early in September, 1665, Louis XIV requested Molière to present a theatrical performance at court. The dramatist responded with L'Amour Médecin, a hastily improvised comedy-ballet, which in his own words, "a été proposé, fait, appris, et représenté en cinq jours." The play, according to Des Granges, was a remodeled version of Le Médecin Volant, (1659)<sup>1</sup> a farce which Molière had composed earlier in the days of his wanderings.<sup>2</sup>

#### PURPOSE

Critics have attributed to Molière other reasons besides that of complying with the king's request in writing his medical satires. Of the private reasons biographers have attributed to the dramatist for his

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unremitting persecution of the Faculty Grimarest's explanation is perhaps the most improbable. He relates that Armande took lodgings with a doctor's wife, who raised the rent and evicted Armande when she refused to pay the extra sum, taking as a lodger in her place Mademoiselle du Parc. The latter, desiring to remain in the good graces of her landlady, gave her a ticket for the theatre, whereupon Armande sent two stout fellows to throw the woman out. Molière, taking up his wife's quarrel, which ensued, wrote the comedy of L'Amour Médecin. Palmer in refuting this story remarks that it not only didn't have any basis but that its fallacy was supported by a document to the contrary.<sup>3</sup>

Palmer affirms that Molière had no personal grievance. His treatment of the Faculty, says the same critic, was a particular instance of his general procedure. When Molière, speaking through Dom Juan says: "Tout leur art est pure grimace" he is not exaggerating, as some people would have us believe; for, says Palmer, nine-tenths of the practice of medicine in the seventeenth century was truly "pure grimace". Medicine was perhaps never so dangerous to human life as then.<sup>4</sup> Even some doctors realized this and took a malicious pleasure in the misfortunes of their

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<sup>3</sup>Palmer, op. cit., p. 410.

<sup>4</sup>Palmer, op. cit., p. 412., pp. 294-295.

Matthews, Molière, p. 193.



rivals. Guy Patin is one example of the "witty malicious fellows" who wrote of court physicians in a way, says Palmer, that more than justified the satire of Molière.<sup>5</sup>

Chatfield-Taylor maintains that Molière's ill health was the chief reason for his attacks upon the doctors. He says that each of Molière's medical comedies represents a phase of his incurable malady. "L'Amour Médecin", he continues, "was written when the disease first manifested itself. After nature had won a temporary triumph, Le Médecin Malgré Lui was penned to paint in a vein of pleasantry the impotence of medicine; then continued suffering which the physicians were unable to alleviate inspired those more stinging satires, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac and Le Malade Imaginaire—each an expression of the author's bitterness toward medicine."<sup>6</sup>

Brander Matthews, among others, states that "in attacking the practitioners of medicine Molière was only doing again what the Italians had done before him".<sup>7</sup>

In reply to this supposition Everett Olmsted points out that while "it is true that the doctors have been objects of ridicule in the medieval farce and in the Italian

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>6</sup>Chatfield-Taylor, op. cit., pp. 294-295.

<sup>7</sup>Matthews, Molière, p. 193.



comedy, to which Molière was indebted for most of his conventional characters, such attacks had been in the main simple burlesques, while the medical comedies [of Molière] are scathing satires upon the profession, its spirit and its practices." In these plays, continues the same author, the satire assumes a frankness that is unmistakable. Among other reasons that Olmsted gives for Molière's bitterness toward doctors is the unexpected death of Gassendi, the dramatist's early teacher of philosophy, and later that of an old friend of his, Lamothe le Vayer by name, who was also said to have "paid with his life for the blunders of ignorant practitioners."<sup>8</sup>

That Molière's hatred of culpable ignorance, sham, and numerous other abuses, attributed to the doctors of his day, was one of the chief reasons for his vicious attacks upon practitioners is a supposition supported by the majority of critics. They attest that the countless abuses of which doctors were guilty called for even stronger ridicule than that which they received from the pen of Molière. In quoting examples of the doctors' irrational practices Maurice Raynaud has included the following anecdotes:

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<sup>8</sup> Everett Olmsted, Introduction to Le Malade Imaginaire, p. xx.



(1) The Faculty despised surgery and would not allow its students to dissect. Deeming it a mere manual art, all doctors who had practiced surgery before entering the profession had to promise to give it up, for it was fit only for an artisan.

(2) The doctors of the capital rejected the circulation of the blood because it came from England, the use of antimony because it came from Montpellier, and the use of quinine because it came from America.

It was just such abuses as these that Molière exposed to the public by ridiculing them in this and the following plays.

#### PLOT

The action of the play is simple. A rich and avaricious bourgeois, Sganarelle, unwilling to provide a dowry for his daughter, opposes her marriage to Clitandre, a young man of her choice. In desperation the daughter, Lucinde, feigns illness. Having vainly sought advice from neighbors and friends, the distraught father finally calls in four physicians to examine the patient. Each of the doctors diagnoses the case differently and proposes different remedies. They wrangle violently but come to no agreement. In the meantime Lisette, the clever maid of Lucinde, helps Clitandre to disguise himself as a doctor and brings him in. Clitandre immediately diagnoses



personal ideas about medicine, namely that nature allowed Lucinde's mysterious disease as love and prescribes immediate matrimony as the only effective cure. Made to believe that his signing the marriage contract will be an act done merely to humour his daughter, who is temporarily demented, Sganarelle willingly complies with the request. The play ends abruptly with Sganarelle's fit of anger upon learning that he has been duped.

### MOLIERE'S FIRST THRUST AT THE DOCTORS

L'Amour Médecin is distinguished by most critics as being Molière's declaration of war against medical empiricism. However, it is not the first play wherein the dramatist satirizes the medical profession. As has been pointed out above, signs of the "guerilla warfare", that he waged against doctors in his later years, appear in earlier plays.<sup>9</sup> He makes the following replies:

His first sharp thrust at the doctors is made in Dom Juan. In this play he attacks the ignorance of the medical men of his day. In connection with the exposure of doctors, he expresses for the first time his own

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. p. 8, note 2. This is evident also from titles of lost plays, as for example, Le docteur amoureux; Les trois docteurs rivaux; and Le docteur pédant.



personal ideas about medicine, namely that nature allowed to take its course will effect a cure. Sganarelle disguised as a doctor prescribes for a number of patients and then becoming half serious asks his master if he would not consider it strange should the sick people after using his prescriptions accidentally recover and come back to thank him. Dom Juan replies:

Par quelle raison n'aurois-tu pas les mêmes privilèges qu'ont tous les autres médecins? Ils n'ont pas plus de part que toi aux guérisons des malades, et tout leur art est pure grimace. Ils ne font rien que recevoir la gloire des heureux succès, et tu peux profiter comme eux du bonheur du malade, et voir attribuer à tes remèdes tout ce qui peut venir des faveurs du hasard et des forces de la nature.<sup>10</sup>

Again in the same play the craze for antimony received a telling thrust from Molière's satirical rapier. To Dom Juan's expressions of doubt regarding the efficacy of drugs Sganarelle makes the following replies:

Sganarelle: Vous avez l'âme bien mécréante. Cependant vous voyez, depuis un temp, que le vin émétique fait bruir ses fuseaux. Ses miracles ont converti les plus incrédules esprits, et il n'y a pas trois semaines que j'en ai vu, moi qui vous parle, un effet merveilleux.

Dom Juan: Et quel?

<sup>10</sup> Molière, Dom Juan, Act III, Scene I.

<sup>12</sup> A. N. Brown, Molière and his Medical Associations, p. 42.



Sganarelle: Il y avoit un homme qui, depuis six jours, étoit à l'agonie; on ne savoit plus que lui ordonner, et tous les remèdes ne faisoient rien; on s'avisa à la fin de lui donner de l'émétique.

Dom Juan: Il réchappa, n'est-ce pas?

Sganarelle: Non, il mourut.

Dom Juan: L'effet est admirable.

Sganarelle: Comment? il y avait six jours entiers qu'il ne pouvoit mourir, et cela le fit mourir tout d'un coup. Voulez-vous rien de plus efficace?<sup>11</sup>

This jibe at the doctors is the result of Molière's own observation. When he arrived in Paris in 1658, Louis XIV was ill of what is known today as typhoid fever. His condition becoming serious, a consultation of doctors was summoned, and the usual conflict of opinions was observed. The differences of the doctors attracted considerable public attention, and Molière, we are told, shared the hopes and fears which the malady and treatment of the royal patient excited. Finally, antimony was suggested and Cardinal Mazarin, who presided at the consultation, favoring it, the remedy was tried with the result that the king, whether because of it or inspite of it, recovered.<sup>12</sup> Immediately, antimony became the recognized remedy and began to be used quite as frequently and as indiscriminately as bleeding had

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Act III, Scene I.

<sup>12</sup> A. M. Brown, Molière and his Medical Associations, p. 42.



been before it. The dramatist, seeing in this too sudden adoption of an insufficiently tried remedy as great an evil as in the absolute refusal to accept progressive ideas, could not desist from ridicule. any critics, both contemporary and modern. Perhaps the first one is

### IDENTIFICATION OF MOLIÈRE'S DOCTORS

Molière's loss of faith in doctors, hinted at in early farces and definitely expressed in Dom Juan, is openly confessed in L'Amour Médecin. In the former plays the author ridicules medical practices; in the latter he attacks the practitioners themselves. And in so far as the caricatures he draws of doctors are real and life-like the satire is keen and stinging.

Although Molière modestly asserts in the preface that the play so hastily written at the king's request "n'est qu'un simple crayon, un petit impromptu dont le roi a voulu faire un divertissement", adding that it contains much that depends chiefly on the skill of the actors, the interest of the play from the time of its first presentation did not depend on its actions nor on its situations but rather on its satire.<sup>13</sup> To the seventeenth century theatre goes the physicians in

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<sup>13</sup> Palmer, op. cit., p. 412.



L'Amour Médecin were recognizable figures. They were somewhat exaggerated, perhaps, but none the less real.

The identification of the four doctors of L'Amour Médecin has occupied the attention of many critics, both contemporary and modern. Perhaps the first one to comment upon the identity of the members of the "consultation group" of L'Amour Médecin was Guy Patin. Writing to a friend of his, on September 22, 1665, six days after the first presentation of L'Amour Médecin, he said:

A comedy has recently been acted at Versailles upon the doctors of the court, in which they are most ridiculously entreated, before the <sup>14</sup> king, too, who was heartily amused.

And again a few days later he wrote his friend a still more enthusiastic comment regarding the play.

All Paris is crowding to see the doctors of the court upon the stage.<sup>15</sup>

Cicéron Rival, like Patin, maintained that the "quartet" of L'Amour Médecin were four of the most famous doctors of the court of Louis XIV, namely, Desfourgerais, Esprit, Guénaut, and Dacquin. Rival further states that Molière's doctors wore masks especially designed to make their identification easy, and bore names indicative of

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<sup>14</sup> Gui Patin, Lettres choisies de feu, Cited from Chatfield-Taylor, op. cit., p. 285.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 286.



the style of treatment peculiar to each.

Palmer and Matthews supply the information that Boileau, at the request of the dramatist, composed suitable Greek names for the doctors of L'Amour Médecin.<sup>16</sup> These pseudonyms reveal among other things the popular opinion in which the court doctors were held. Their reputation was not enviable. To Desfourgerais, physician to the king, was given the name of Desfonandrès, which signifies "killer of men."<sup>17</sup> His record as given by Patin more than justifies the harsh accusation of Molière. Palmer, too, states that not only was he execrated by Dr. Patin, but also, he was openly accused by Bussy Rabutin of illegal practices. Bahis, a Greek word meaning barking or snapping, was the name given to Esprit, because of the latter's defect of stammering. Guénaut, the third of the "famous" quartet, who was in the habit of giving his opinions slowly and sententiously, received the name of Macroton, which in Greek means "slow speaker". Guénaut, like Desfourgerais, had a "craze for antimony", said Palmer, and was charged with having "killed his wife, daughter, nephew, a brace of sons-in-law, and a host of patients with his panacea."<sup>18</sup>

That Patin was not always accurate is the opinion

<sup>16</sup> by other commentators besides Richard. Chatfield-Palmer, op. cit., p. 415.

<sup>17</sup> Brossette, Récréations littéraires, p. 765. letters which

<sup>18</sup> Palmer, op. cit., p. 415.

<sup>19</sup> ibid., p. 415.

<sup>20</sup> H. Richard, Ouvrages de Molière.



It was, likewise, Guénaut who was said to have attended Mazarin in his last illness and to have been given "credit" for killing him. Shortly after Mazarin's death, the doctor, finding himself held up in a traffic heard a voice shout to the crowd: "Way, there, for his honor! It's the good doctor who killed the cardinal."<sup>19</sup> Finally, the name of Tomès, denoting blood letting, was given to Dacquin who was said to have delighted in the practice of bleeding. He was described by Guy Patin as "a poisonous fellow.... a great charlatan..... poor in science but rich in chemical mystifications."

Not all critics accept the above identification of Molière's doctors as accurate data. Mesnard dismisses Guy Patin's and Cizeron Rival's statement, that the physicians in L'Amour Médecin were court physicians, appearing à l'Aristophane, as mere supposition lacking foundation. He explains that Patin's evidence coinciding so exactly with Cizeron Rival's assurance that "the court physicians were travestied with masks" was due to the fact that "Patin wrote from hearsay while Rival merely repeated Patin's statements."<sup>20</sup>

That Patin was not always accurate is the opinion held by other commentators besides Mesnard. Chatfield-Taylor quotes a statement from one of Patin's letters which

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 415.

<sup>20</sup> M. Mesnard, Oeuvres de Molière.



he definitely pronounces false. Three days after the first performance of L'Amour Médecin, at Versailles, August, 1665, Patin, according to Chatfield-Taylor, wrote to a friend of his:

L'Amour Médecin is now being played at the Hotel de Bourgogne, where all Paris is rushing to see the court physicians on the stage, especially Esprit and Guénaut with masks expressly made for the purpose.

This statement of Patin, Chatfield-Taylor staunchly denies.

"Needless to say", he declares, "Molière's comedy was not played at the Hotel de Bourgogne."<sup>21</sup> Records of Molière's performances affirm Chatfield-Taylor's pronouncement.

Furthermore, the mistatement of which the latter accused Patin might easily have been made, for the reason that Molière was not the only dramatist of that period to make the quack a comedy character. Raynaud relates that charlatanism with its selling of balms and opiates was so little removed in point of science from the licensed medical body, with its ludicrous practices, that no playwright with a sense of humor could possibly have resisted the "mirth-provoking possibilities of such medicine."

Raynaud further relates that "at the Hotel de Bourgogne, Guillot-Gorju, once a medical student, himself, acquired his reputation as a buffoon in the role of comic doctor."

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<sup>21</sup> Chatfield-Taylor, op. cit., p. 286.



It is very possible, then, that Patin, for the moment, had confused the two comedians.

Maurice Raynaud, who is considered by many critics the most reliable authority on the medical profession of Molière's day, maintains that the doctors of L'Amour Médecin were court physicians, but he substitutes the names of Valot and Brayer for Dacquin and Esprit. By so doing he brings together the very four men who were in attendance upon Cardinal Mazarin in his last illness. Raynaud bases his supposition, that the consultation of L'Amour Médecin represents the consultation held at the death bed of Cardinal Mazarin, on information derived from one of Guy Patin's letters, a part of which reads:

Quelques semaines après, dans le bois de Vincennes, où le Cardinal avait été transporté, Guénaut, Valot, Brayer et Desfourgerais alterquoient ensemble, et ne s'accordent pas de l'espèce de la maladie dont le malade mourait. Brayer dit que c'est le poulmon...; Desfourgerais dit que c'est un abcès du mésentère.... Ne voilà pas d'habiles gens! <sup>22</sup>

Raynaud believes that the patient of whom Patin wrote this was Mazarin.

Brander Matthews, on the other hand, does not think that in L'Amour Médecin Molière was poking fun at certain court doctors. He says:

Matthews, 22. 212., p. 199.

<sup>22</sup> Guy Patin, Lettre du 7 mars 1661.



Molière put into *L'Amour Médecin* four figures of fun which his contemporaries recognized as copied from certain of the more prominent physicians of Paris; but there was no bitterness of personality in this. It was the whole faculty he was attacking and the spirit that governed this trade-guild of those who trafficked in medicine.<sup>23</sup>

Palmer, unlike Matthews, and in agreement with Raynaud, whom he is doubtless quoting, says that Molière did have in mind very definite court physicians when he introduced the "quartet" into *L'Amour Médecin*. While he admits that the play cannot be read as a considered project for the reason that it was prepared at a very short notice, he says that the very "fact that Molière was in a hurry made his choice of theme in some ways the more significant." For, he continues, "The author in a hurry naturally takes the subject which comes uppermost."<sup>24</sup> And that the subject of medicine should have been uppermost in Molière's mind is very likely. Being an invalid upon a milk diet, and the patient of a friendly physician who was willing to satisfy the lively curiosity of his patient concerning members of the Faculty, including court physicians who were at the time the subject of much public gossip it was but natural that Molière, whose specialty was satire, should have ridiculed doctors.

<sup>23</sup> Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>24</sup> Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 415.

<sup>25</sup> *L'Amour Médecin*, Act II, Scene 1. It should be noted that this criticism is stereotyped and not new to French popular literature, having already appeared in such early farces as *Le Médecin Volant*.



### THE SATIRE OF L'AMOUR MEDECIN

Whether or not the consultation scene of L'Amour Médecin was a travesty upon four particular court physicians, does not matter; the important thing is that Molière's doctors were identified as such by his contemporaries and were subjects for social gossip and popular ballad.

The reason why contemporary critics and public displayed such a lively interest in Molière's medical characters lies in the actuality of his satire. An analysis of Molière's references to medicine reveals how close his imitations are to seventeenth century medical practices.

### MOLIERE'S RIDICULE OF DOCTORS

In his first jibe at the doctors in this play Molière shows that an easy prey of deceit man becomes in the face of sickness. When Sganarelle learns that his daughter is dangerously ill he summons four doctors to diagnose her case. The extravagance and futility of Sganarelle's act, as well as the skepticism of Molière is brought out by Lisette, the household maid, who, upon hearing what Sganarelle had done remarks:

Que voulez-vous donc faire, monsieur, de quatre médecins? N'est-ce pas assez d'un pour tuer une personne? <sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup>L'Amour Médecin, Act II, Scene 1. It should be noted that this witticism is stereotype and not new to French popular literature, having already appeared in such early farces as Le Médecin Volant.



Again shortly before the arrival of the four worthies

Lisette ironically gives Sganarelle the following advice:

Prenez garde, vous allez être bien édifié:  
ils vous diront en latin que votre fille  
est malade. <sup>26</sup>

1. The Latin Language. Taking into account Molière's deliberate exaggerations made for the purpose of heightening the humorous effect of the piece, his daunting the doctors with the futility of their medical ministrations and his accusing them of using the Latin language as a smoke screen behind which to hide their ignorance is not without foundation. According to Maurice Raynaud's survey of the medical profession in France during the seventeenth century the great attraction of doctors and students of medicine "lay in dialectic skill, academic tiltings and successful oratory." Thus, due to the training which was largely theoretical, the practice was to a great extent vague and useless. Latin words and phrases, of which liberal use was made, and which the patients could not understand, served the average physician as an easy escape from possible exposure.

2. Discourse. The doctors' love of oratory and dialectics, which Raynaud mentions, receives a special jibe from Molière in the scene that follows. As soon as the four physicians arrive at Sganarelle's house they enter

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<sup>26</sup> L'Amour Médecin, Act II Scene 1.



upon a long discussion of various nonessential matters, one topic leading to another quite as irrelevant as the first but each exposing in a lesser or greater degree some vanity or abuse of seventeenth century doctors.<sup>27</sup>

3. Importance Allotted to Trifles. One of the traditions to which doctors assigned great importance was the use of the donkey as a means of locomotion for physicians. Molière pokes fun at this ridiculous adherence to unimportant traditions when he has one of the physicians of the consultation group inform his confreres that he has just purchased a horse, whereupon ensues a long discussion of the merits and demerits of horses and mules as means of conveyance for doctors. The historical incident upon which this ridiculously irrelevant passage was based was explained by critics as an event that had actually occurred to Dr. Guénaud, a member of the Faculty, who had made himself conspicuous and the object of much adverse criticism because he had dared to replace his mule, the "sanctioned and more venerable means of locomotion for doctors", by a horse.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> A satire of this love of oratory and dialectics can also be found in La Jalousie de Barbouillé.

<sup>28</sup> Everett Olmsted, op. cit., p. xxxlx



4. Desire for Esteem. No sooner is the "horse versus mule" topic exhausted than Toms, another doctor, ventures upon a new subject as irrelevant as the first.

Tomès: Mais à propos, quel parti prenez-vous dans la querelle des deux médecins Théophraste et Artémus? Car c'est une affaire qui partage tout notre corps.<sup>29</sup>

When Desfonandrès answers him that he is for Artemus, Tomès replies:

Et moi aussi. Ce n'est pas que son avis, comme on a vu, n'ait tué le malade, et que celui de Théophraste ne fût beaucoup meilleur assurément; mais enfin il a tort dans les circonstances, et il ne devoit pas être d'un autre avis que son ancien.<sup>30</sup>

Great was the esteem which younger members of the Faculty were expected to show toward their seniors.<sup>31</sup> The importance given to honor is evident from the fact that not only one but three articles of the oath candidates had to take upon being received into the Faculty referred to it:

1. You swear to observe faithfully the secrets of honor ... of the Faculty and whatever happens, never to oppose them.
2. To pay homage and respect to the dean and to all the teachers of the Faculty.
3. To aid the Faculty against whoever shall under take anything..... derogatory to its honor....<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup>L'Amour Médecin, Act II, Scene 111.

<sup>30</sup>L'Amour Médecin, Act II, Scene 111.

<sup>31</sup>Typical of this attitude is the "diagnosis scene" in M. de Pourceaugnac.

<sup>32</sup>Maurice Raynaud, op. cit., pp. 40-41.



# 5. Hostile Attitude of the Faculty Toward Outsiders.

The above mentioned esteem which younger doctors were expected to show toward their seniors pertained to members of the Faculty only. The attitude taken toward outsiders was quite the contrary. In the course of the discussion which the four doctors hold in Sganarelle's house, Tomès relates his refusal to take part in a recent consultation to which he had been called together with two other members of the Paris Faculty and an outsider,<sup>33</sup> because of the latter's presence.

On nous assembla un jour, trois de nous autres, avec un médecin de dehors, pour une consultation, où j'arrêtai toute l'affaire, et ne voulus point endurer qu'on opinât, si les choses n'alloient dans l'ordre. Les gens de la maison faisoient ce qu'ils pouvoient et la maladie pressoit; mais je n'en voulus point démordre, et la malade mourut brièvement pendant cette contestation.

Des fonandres: C'est fort bien fait d'apprendre aux gens à vivre, et de leur montrer leur bec jaune.

Tomès: Un homme mort n'est qu'un homme mort, et ne fait point de conséquence; mais, une formalité négligée porte un notable préjudice à tout le corps des médecins.<sup>34</sup>

This marked animosity against all doctors not of the same faculty which Molière attributed to the physicians of his day actually made itself felt in seventeenth century France.

<sup>33</sup> Chatfield-Taylor presupposes that the "outsider" was a member of the Faculty of Montpellier.

<sup>34</sup> L'Amour Médecin, Act II, Scene 111.



Critics have attested that almost constant quarrels resulted from the rancor indulged in by physicians against all doctors not of their own faculty and who held theories different from their own.

6. Extreme Conservatism. Due to differences of opinion the Faculty of Paris and the Faculty of Montpellier were constantly at variance with each other. One of the contentions between these two institutions, having to do with antimony, lasted almost a hundred years. The Faculty of Montpellier, seeing in the new mineral remedy an excellent substitute for excessive bleeding, accepted it whole heartedly; the Faculty of Paris, fearing that it would undermine some of its old theories, not only regarded it with suspicion but aroused a great storm of protest against its use.<sup>35</sup> Doubtless the contention would have lasted longer had not the new remedy produced a desirable effect upon the king.<sup>36</sup>

Although, due to the king's recovery through its use, the future of antimony was assured, there still remained objectors. Such strenuous opponents of innovations

<sup>35</sup> Olmsted, op. cit., p. xxxii.

<sup>36</sup> M. Raynaud, op. cit. p. 147.

<sup>37</sup> A. M. Brown, Medicine and the Medical Associations, p. 77.



as Guy Patin felt that no new remedy was able to replace such a long tried curative as bleeding. So great was Patin's faith in the practice of bleeding that he applied it to all his patients, making exceptions for neither age nor disease. Maurice Raynaud relates that Patin was known to apply bleeding to children only three days old. A child, seven years of age, was bled by him thirteen times in two weeks; a Monsieur Baralis, at the age of eighty, eleven times in six days; his own son, twenty times for a persistent fever; and a Monsieur Cousinat, sixty-four times for rheumatism.<sup>37</sup> Thus when Patin heard of the king's recovery he skeptically remarked that what actually had saved the king was, not antimony, but his innocence, his age and robustness, and nine good bleedings.<sup>38</sup>

7. Bickerings Within the Faculty's Own Body. When the doctors finally begin the discussion of the girl's illness a veritable bedlam ensues. No two doctors agree on anything. One prescribes an emetic, another bleeding, a third herb tea, and a fourth injections. Each clings to his own opinions as doggedly and as unrelentlessly as he opposes those of the others.

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<sup>37</sup> Maurice Raynaud, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>38</sup> A. M. Brown, Molière and His Medical Associations, p. 77.



Tomès: Je soutiens que l'émétique la tuera.

Desfonandrès: Et moi, que la saignée la fera mourir.

Tomès: Si vous ne faites saigner, elle ne sera en vie dans un quart d'heure. <sup>39</sup>

The quarrel waxes hot until they finally conclude that it is not likely that the girl will die, but at any rate her father will have the consolation of knowing 'qu'elle sera morte dans les formes,' for they say:

il vaut mieux mourir selon les règles,  
que de réchapper contre les règles. <sup>40</sup>

8. Close Adherence to Ancient Doctrines, Formalities, and Rules. This staunch adherence to rules and formalities as shown by the last quotation - forms one of Molière's favorite criticisms against doctors, and, indeed, one of his most solid grounds for criticism. No matter what blunders seventeenth century doctors committed they were accustomed to justify their actions by referring to ancient doctrines. The reason for this was that with the large majority of practitioners, blunders which they committed were due, not to carelessness nor to culpable ignorance, but to slavish subserviency to authority, with its straight-laced observance of form and ceremony; also to the fact that any

<sup>39</sup> L'Amour Médecin, Act II, Scene iv.

<sup>40</sup> L'Amour Médecin, Act II, Scene v.



championing of progressive ideas was regarded as a direct breaking away from the authorities of Hippocrates and Galen. No book of medicine was regarded authentic unless it bore approving signatures of numerous doctors. The formula of approval read as follows:

We the undersigned, doctors of the very salutary Faculty of Medicine, certify that we have read the work and testify that it contains nothing that is not in accordance to the true and pure doctrine of Hippocrates. <sup>41</sup>

Now the doctrine of Hippocrates, which the doctors delighted in quoting, had to do with the nature and functioning of certain humors in man, which when perfectly intermixed resulted in health, and when one or the other of its principles was either wanting or in excess, or isolating itself in the body, was not combined with the rest, disease resulted. <sup>42</sup> However erroneous were the ideas regarding the nature and functions of these humors, pathology resolved itself into a simple question of the quantity and quality of the humors and the simple curatives of bleeding and purging were used to combat all abnormal combinations. <sup>43</sup>

Yet the profession, for which were required years of preparation, boasted of no such simple practices. Complicated and involved, indeed, were the theories medical candidates were trained to expound. But, like the

<sup>41</sup> Maurice Raynaud, op. cit., pp. 349-350.

<sup>42</sup> Maurice Raynaud, op. cit., p. 366, Note 1.

<sup>43</sup> A. M. Brown, op. cit., pp. 37-38.



philosophers, they did little more than theorize, and "as Aristotle was the infallible guide to the former so were Galen and Hippocrates the not-to-be-disputed authorities of the latter."<sup>44</sup>

Molière was sharp-witted enough to see through all this. On more than one occasion he takes pleasure in ridiculing the teachings of the faculty and their subservient respect for authority, but in *L'Amour Médecin* his burlesque in this respect is particularly amusing. When one of the doctors is told that Sganarelle's coachman is dead and buried, he persists that it is impossible, because Hippocrates says that the complaint of which he was sick terminates only on the fourteenth or twenty-first day, and he was ill but six.

Tomès: Comment se porte son cocher?

Lisette: Fort Bien: il est mort.

Tomès: Mort!

Lisette: Oui.

Tomès: Cela ne se peut.

Lisette: Je ne sais si cela se peut; mais je sais bien que cela est.

Tomès: Il ne peut pas être mort, vous dis-je.

Lisette: Et moi je vous dis qu'il est mort et enterré.

Tomès: Vous vous trompez.

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<sup>44</sup> Maurice Raynaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-350.



Lisette: Je l'ai vu.

Tomès: Cela est impossible. Hippocrate dit que ces sortes de maladies ne se terminent qu'au quatorze, ou au vingt-un; et il n'y a que six jours qu'il est tombé malade.

Lisette: Hippocrate dira<sup>45</sup> ce qu'il lui plaira; mais le cocher est mort.

Molière made a similar jibe at the doctors' persistent but futile application of curatives at the cost of the patients' discomfort and expense, when he had the nimble-tongued Toinette tell the story of the family cat that recovered after lying ill for three days without eating or drinking, and without moving a paw. "Luckily for the cat", she adds, "that there are no cat physicians for they certainly would have killed it with their bleedings and purgings."<sup>46</sup>

9. Sham. Perhaps the most stinging blow that Molière allowed himself to administer to the doctors in this play pertains to their practice of deceit under pretext of being subservient to authority. When Sganarelle, who cannot bring himself to such a whole-hearted resignation as the doctors to his daughter's dying, even though it be "selon les règles", is still in despair to know whose advice to follow, there arrives a fifth doctor, M. Filerin by name,

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<sup>45</sup> L'Amour Médecin, Act II, Scene 11.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Act II, Scene 1.



who upbraids the quartet for bringing harm on the profession by their internal disputes:

Ne voyez-vous pas bien quel tort ces sortes de querelles nous font parmi le monde? et n'est-ce pas assez que les savants voient les contrariétés et les dissensions qui sont entre nos anciens maîtres, sans découvrir encore au peuple, par nos débats et nos querelles, la forfanterie de notre art? Pour moi, je ne comprends rien du tout à cette méchante politique de quelques-uns de nos gens; et il faut confesser que toutes ces contestations nous ont décriés, depuis peu, d'une étrange manière, et que, si nous n'y prenons garde, nous allons nous ruiner nous-mêmes. Je n'en parle pas pour mon intérêt; car, Dieu merci, j'ai déjà établi mes petites affaires. ... mais puisque le Ciel nous fait la grâce que, depuis tant de siècles, on demeure infatué de nous, ne désabusons point les hommes avec nos cabales extravagantes, et profitons de leur sottise le plus doucement que nous pourrons. Nous ne sommes pas les seuls, comme vous savez, qui tâchons à nous prévaloir de la faiblesse humaine. C'est là que va l'étude de la plupart du monde, et chacun s'efforce de prendre les hommes par leur foible, pour en tirer quelque profit. Les flatteurs, par exemple, cherchent à profiter de l'amour que les hommes ont pour les louanges, en leur donnant tout le vain encens qu'ils souhaitent; et c'est un art où l'on fait, comme on voit, des fortunes considérables. Les alchimistes tâchent à profiter de la passion qu'on a pour les richesses, en promettant des montagnes d'or à ceux qui les écoutent; et les diseurs d'horoscope, par leurs prédictions trompeuses, profitent de la vanité et de l'ambition des crédules esprits. Mais le plus grand foible des hommes, c'est l'amour qu'ils ont pour la vie; et nous en profitons, nous autres, par notre pompeux galimatias, et savons prendre nos avantages de cette vénération que la peur de mourir leur donne pour notre métier.



By having one of the doctors, themselves, make this avowal of the deceit practiced by his kind, Molière gave more weight to his denunciation of the sham of medical art. The long speech of Filerin, is a very important document for the understanding of Molière's criticism of the medical profession. In it Molière points out:

(1) the doctors' lack of sincerity in the practice of their art ('la forfanterie de notre art').

(2) the doctors' allowing monetary interests to take precedence over professional integrity. ("si nous n'y prenons garde, nous allons nous ruiner nous-mêmes. Je n'en parle pas pour mon intérêt; car, Dieu merci, j'ai déjà établi mes petites affaires.") and

(3) He places the doctors in the same category with (a) flatterers, who "cherchent à profiter de l'amour que les hommes ont pour les louanges", (b) alchemists, who "tâchent à profiter de la passion qu'on a pour les richesses", and (c) fortune tellers, who "par leurs prédictions trompeuses, profitent de la vanité et de l'ambition des crédules esprits."

The end of the speech shows that the responsibility for the doctors' faults Molière attributed largely to the public, to man's "faiblesse", namely, his "peur de mourir" and his "l'amour de la vie".

Molière's last witticism against doctors in this play refers again to their determination to profit by the credulity of ignorant men; he puts into the mouth of Lisette this final



"boutade".

Quoi? Messieurs, vous voilà, et vous ne songez pas à réparer le tort qu'on vient de faire à la médecine? ... Un insolent qui a eu l'effronterie d'entreprendre sur votre métier, et qui, sans votre ordonnance, vient de tuer un homme d'un grand coup d'épée au travers du corps."<sup>48</sup>

This remark of Lisette is only a quip of which there are many in L'Amour Médecin. But it should be noted in conclusion that in this play Molière also makes jibes at the doctors that are more than mere quips such as are found in farces. The value of L'Amour Médecin, in so far as the subject at hand is concerned, lies in the fact that it is the first comedy wherein Molière goes definitely beyond popular common-place satire and expresses his own views regarding medical art, namely, that the practice of medicine in his day was not only inadequate but dangerously futile, and that he had the daring to do this through the mouth of a doctor.

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<sup>48</sup> L'Amour Médecin, Act III, Scene 11.



#### CHAPTER IV

#### LE MÉDECIN MALGRÉ LUI (1666)

Le Médecin Malgré Lui, or the second of Molière's assaults upon the doctors of his day, was written in 1666, immediately after the production of Le Misanthrope, and presented simultaneously with the above mentioned play. Voltaire believed that Le Médecin Malgré Lui was hurriedly prepared in order to be staged "as a decoy to attract a dwindling public to the later performances of Le Misanthrope."<sup>1</sup> John Palmer expresses the same opinion, adding that, while he agrees with other critics that Le Médecin Malgré Lui is perhaps "the most popular of Molière's farces, it is by no means the dramatist's best in that kind" for the reason that "almost more than any other farce of Molière, it depends on what is described as jeux de théâtre."<sup>2</sup> Brander Mathews also expresses the opinion that the play aims "at nothing more than a rapid succession of laughter-provoking episodes," and that "its immediate purpose" was to attract paying audiences to the Palais-Royal.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Voltaire, Vie de Molière, avec des jugements sur ses ouvrages.

<sup>2</sup>Palmer, op. cit., p. 421.

<sup>3</sup>Mathews, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>4</sup>Markins, Annals of the French Stage, Vol. II, p. 393.



SOURCE

Le Médecin Malgré Lui, according to some commentators, was an elaborate reworking of an earlier farce, entitled the Fagotier, which probably had been composed by Molière during his provincial strollings. Chatfield-Taylor saw in certain scenes of Le Médecin Malgré Lui a resemblance to a play by Lope de Vega,<sup>4</sup> while Hawkins and others expressed the opinion that the story of this piece Molière borrowed from a fableau of the twelfth century Le Vilain Mire.<sup>5</sup>

On comparing the above mentioned story with Molière's version of it, one discovers considerable originality in the latter. In Le Vilain Mire, as related by Hawkins, the hero, having been cudgelled into a leech of deep skill, is commanded by the king on pain of perishing under the bastinado to cure all the sick of the capital. The mock doctor dexterously extricates himself from his dilemma by assembling his patients into a great hall and announcing to them that since an indispensable ingredient in his panacea is the ashes of a man who has been burned alive, he has no doubt that the patient who feels himself most deplorably indisposed will sacrifice himself for the sake of the others. As he addresses each patient, in turn, telling him that he seems to be the greatest invalid

<sup>4</sup>Chatfield-Taylor, op. cit., p. 294.

<sup>5</sup>Hawkins, Annals of the French Stage, Vol. II, p. 333.



present, the latter pronounces himself in perfect health and leaves the hall. Thus the mock doctor escapes from his predicament without injury to his reputation.<sup>6</sup>

#### PLOT

In Molière's play a number of changes are apparent. Géronte's daughter, Lucinde, like the daughter of Sganarelle in L'Amour Médecin adopts the stratagem of a feigned illness, in order to obtain release from the obligation laid on her by her father of marrying Horace, whom she hates. Géronte, having failed to obtain aid from numerous physicians whom he had consulted, sends Valère and Lucas, two of his servants, in search of a doctor possessing the power of curing hopeless cases. The messengers arrive at the home of Sganarelle where the latter's wife is seriously contemplating vengeance on her husband for having given her a beating that very morning. Having heard the purpose of their mission, the outraged wife makes them believe that her husband possesses marvelous skill as a physician but will not admit his knowledge of medicine unless he is beaten into doing so. She then relates to them many unusual and, of course, imaginary, cures that have been forced from her husband in this manner.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 332.



The servants, glad to have found thus easily the object of their quest, search out the unfortunate Sganarelle, and beat him freely until he makes a promise to accompany them to the palace of their master, in the capacity of a physician.

Having arrived at G ronte's house, Sganarelle launches forth into unmeaning jargon, mingled with a few high-sounding 'medical' phrases in which the brain, liver, heart, lungs, and so forth are mixed up in an inextricable jumble. His dog latin, however, is to no avail. Lucinde remains dumb until her fianc , Leandre, bribes Sganarelle into allowing him to enter the household as his apothecary. No sooner does Lucinde see and hear Leandre than she becomes perfectly cured and begins to talk so volubly about her intention of marrying no one but the husband of her choice that G ronte asks Sganarelle to make her dumb again.

Sganarelle's skill as a doctor receives but momentary recognition. A servant having announced to G ronte that his daughter has eloped with the would-be-apothecary, the duped father is about to set the law after Sganarelle when the elopers return and inform G ronte that Leandre has just inherited a fortune from his uncle. This piece of news changes the father's attitude completely. He forgives the newly-weds and allows Sganarelle to return home. Having been pardoned by G ronte, Sganarelle in turn pardons his wife, but



warns her to treat him hence forth with respect, "et songe que la colère d'un médecin est plus à craindre qu'on ne peut croire.

### THE SATIRE OF LE MEDECIN MALGRE LUI

Critics seemed to agree that in this second attack upon the doctors of his day Molière was less severe, and one may add, less personal, in that he does not go beyond common-place satire. "Le Médecin Malgré Lui, says Palmer, "is distinguished above other plays, less by comic insight or satirical purpose than by its astonishing gaiety-frank, sane, vital- blowing through it like a spring wind."<sup>7</sup> Despite its lighter vein, however, it contains many witticisms at the expense of the doctors which, common-place though they are, present, according to commentators, a record of sober fact.<sup>8</sup>

### WITTICISMS AT THE EXPENSE OF THE DOCTORS

Doubtless, in order to make the play appear more real, and thus, the better to impress the audience with

<sup>7</sup>Palmer, op. cit., p. 421.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 421.

<sup>9</sup>Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act I, Scene I.

<sup>10</sup>Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act I, Scene vi.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., Act I, Scene vi.



the assaults he was about to launch at the doctors, Molière introduced Sganarelle his mouthpiece in this play- as one who has had the rudiments of an education, and who has been at one time in the employment of a physician.

Il [a] servi six ans un fameux médecin  
et [a] su dans son jeune âge son  
rudiments par coeur.<sup>9</sup>

1. Importance Attached to Dress Molière's first witicism at the expense of the profession in this play is his ridicule of the exaggerated importance the doctors attached to dress. When the king's messengers- Lucas and Valère - ask Martine how they may identify Sganarelle, she replies that he wears "un habit jaune et vert." Dismayed, Lucas remarks: "Un habit jaune et vert: C'est donc le médecin des perroquets?"<sup>10</sup> And Valère, astonished that a real doctor should thus be dressed, asks, "Mais, est-il bien vrai qu'il soit si habile que vous le dites?" Sganarelle, also, after having been subjugated into "acknowledging" himself a doctor and told to accompany the messengers to the palace, exclaims in dismay: "Sans une robe de médecin?"<sup>11</sup>

According to commentators, this repeated criticism in regard to dress, far from being an exaggeration of the

<sup>9</sup> Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>10</sup> Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act I, Scene vi.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Act I, Scene vi.



importance seventeenth century doctors attributed to professional attire, hardly stresses it enough. In describing the Faculty of Medicine, the youngest of the four faculties of the University of Paris, Chatfield-Taylor mentions "students in flowing gowns..... and doctors in crimson robes." Again in describing the Faculty assembled in conclave the same critic referred to "a hundred doctors in violet cassocks and ermine-trimmed robes of scarlet silk seated amid a throng of gowned students."<sup>12</sup> Palmer states that a doctor never ventured forth without his wig, his gown, and his conical hat. To see a physician attending a patient without a wig,

continues the same critic, would have been "as shocking as to see a priest officiating without his cassock".<sup>13</sup>

Maurice Raynaud, in describing the exercises of the day of election, also mentions that the display of costumes was most spectacular. He refers in particular to "the ermine-trimmed red gowns of the doctors, which, he says, predominated- the black gowns being worn only by the newly elected bachelors."

John Locke, the English philosopher, likewise, in his description of the ceremony he had witnessed at

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<sup>12</sup> Chatfield-Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 309. 60 (London, 1829)

<sup>13</sup> Palmer, *Molière*, "Impious in Medicine", pp. 416-417.



Montpellier, in March, 1676, at which a doctor was received into the Faculty, makes mention of "scarlet robes and black caps" - concluding his account of the ceremony thus:

The doctor then put on his head the cap that had marched in on the beadle's staff in sign of his doctorship, put a ring on his finger, girt himself about the loins with a gold chain, and made him sit down by him; that having<sup>14</sup> taken pains, he might now take ease.....

Finally, in the oath that the candidate had to take upon being admitted into the Faculty the matter of dress was included. In pronouncing the oath the candidate promised to be present, gowned, at all the ordinary exercises of the Faculty.

2. Exaggerated Dignity Molière's second witicism at the expense of the doctors in Le Médecin Malgré Lui is his exposure of the importance the Faculty attached to professional dignity. Sganarelle, who but a moment ago had been beaten by Gérontés messengers into accompanying them, in the capacity of a doctor, to their master's house, no sooner "admits" that he is a doctor than he assumes the domineering attitude of one. Giving his bottle of wine to Valère, he orders him to carry it saying, "Tenez cela, vous: Voilà ou je mets mes juleps."<sup>15</sup> Then turning to Lucas "en

<sup>14</sup> Lord King, The Life of John Locke, p. 60 (London, 1829)

<sup>15</sup> Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act I, Scene 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Act I, Scene 14.



crachant" he exclaims: "Vous, marchez là-dessus par ordonnance du médecin."<sup>16</sup> And Lucas, like all those outside the profession, who expected this superior attitude being shown them by doctors, far from being annoyed, says, "V'la un médecin qui me plait." Thus Molière shows that the docile public was willing to do anything and everything "par ordonnance du médecin."

### 3. Hostile Attitude of the Faculty Toward Outsiders

Another target at which Molière aimed in this play was the doctors' hostile attitude toward all those physicians outside their own Faculty. The arrow hits the mark when Sganarelle, upon arriving at Geronte's home, at once analyzes Lucinde's illness as dumbness. Being praised for his immediate recognition of her true malady, he complacently remarks:

Nous autres grands médecins, nous connaissons d'abord les choses. Un ignorant aurait été embarrassé, et vous eut été dire: C'est ceci, c'est cela; mais moi, je touche au but du premier coup, et je vous apprends que votre fille est muette."<sup>17</sup>

### 4. Empty Verbage

Molière ridicules the use of grandiloquent language no less than self complacency in the doctors of his day. When Geronte asks to be told definitely whence proceeds the malady from which his daughter is suffer-

<sup>16</sup> Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act I, Scene 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Act I, Scene iv.



ing, Sganarelle, in imitation of the doctors whom Molière is denouncing for their empty verbage says that dumbness is caused by the cessation of the action of the tongue, which in turn is caused by certain humeurs which he says "entre nous autres savants nous appelons humeurs peccants ....."<sup>18</sup> And then he proceeds to string off many would-be Latin- phrases in a long but empty analysis of the disease.

In referring to this diagnosis of Sganarelle, Hawkins terms it mere nonsense. Undoubtedly, such it is, and presumably such was Molière's intention that it should be. Yet upon comparing it with certain authentic speeches delivered by doctors of Molière's day one is forced to regard their verbose elucidations upon various cases and diseases as almost equally ridiculous. An apt illustration can be drawn from a comparison made between Molière's humorous analysis and a diagnosis made by a court physician on the condition of Louis XIV.<sup>19</sup> Molière had Sganarelle terminate his windy diagnosis thus:

Ces vapeurs, dont je vous parle, venant à passer du côté droit où est le coeur, il se trouve que le poumon, que nous appelons en latin arumyan, ayant communication avec le cerveau, que nous nommons en grec nasmus, par le moyen de la veine cave, que nous appelons en hébreu cubile, rencontre en son chemin les dites vapeurs qui remplissent les ventricules de l'omoplate; et parce que

<sup>18</sup> Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act I, Scene iv.

<sup>19</sup> Le Journal de la Santé de Louis XIV, cited from Olmsted, op. cit., p. xliiv.



les dites vapeurs ont une certaine malignité qui est causée par l'acidité des humeurs engendrées dans la concavité du diaphragme. .... Voilà justement ce qui fait que votre fille est muette." <sup>20</sup>

while the king's physician described the condition of Louis XIV in the following manner:

The king is subject to vapors- vapors which proceed from the spleen and the melancholic humor whose livery they wear, in the chagrin they engender. They permeate by the arteries to the heart and to the lungs, where they excite palpitations, disquietudes and dyspnoea; from thence proceeding upwards, they even reach the brain and there by disturbing the spirits of the optic nerve they set up vertigo and swimming of the head, and colliding elsewhere with the nervous principle cause weakness of the limbs." <sup>21</sup>

Studying the two passages, side by side, one is forced to acknowledge that with the exception of a few grossly ridiculous phrases Molière threw into his play for the purpose of heightening the humorous effect of the piece, the two analyses are if not identical at least very similar.

5. Shallowness of Medical Knowledge Possessed by Doctors. Having ridiculed the pomp and ostentation of seventeenth century doctors, Molière next attacks, in this play as in the previous one, their claim to a knowledge they did not possess. Géronte, who knows very little Latin

<sup>20</sup> Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act II, Scene VI.

<sup>21</sup> Le Journal de la Santé, Cited from A. M. Brown, op. cit., pp. 132-133.



and less about medicine, detects, in the precious little he has understood of Sganarelle's speech, a mistake.

Il n'y a qu'une seule chose qui m'a choque:  
C'est l'endroit du foie et du coeur. Il me  
semble que vous les placez autrement qu'ils  
ne sont; que le coeur est du côté gauche,  
et le foie du côté droit.<sup>22</sup>

The undaunted Sganarelle, however, like the loquacious doctors whom he represents is not nonplussed. Unhesitatingly he replies:

Oui, cela était autre fois ainsi; mais nous  
avons changé tout cela, et nous faisons  
maintenant la médecine d'une methode toute  
nouvelle.<sup>23</sup>

This explanation not only silences the "less educated" Geronste but also causes him humbly to acknowledge his ignorance. "C'est ce que je ne savois pas; je vous demande pardon de mon ignorance."<sup>24</sup> Molière here satirizes the gullible public perhaps, even more than the doctors.

Historians claim that at no time in the history of France was the practice of medicine at so low an ebb as during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Too numerous to mention were the absurdities peculiar to the practitioners of that period. Perhaps as good an example as can be obtained of the shallowness of medical practices on the one hand and of the attitude of defense stubbornly maintained by members of the Faculty on the other are the first and third articles of

<sup>22</sup> Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act II, Scene vi.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Act II, Scene vi.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Act II, Scene vi.



the oath each candidate was obliged to take before receiving the bachelor's degree.

1. You swear to observe faithfully the secrets of honor, the practices, the customs, and the statutes of the Faculty, as far as you are able, and whatever happens, never to oppose them.
3. You swear to aid the Faculty against whoever shall undertake anything contrary to its statutes or derogatory to its honor and especially against those who practice illegally, every-time that you shall be required to do so as well as also to submit to the punishments that it may inflict upon you in case of fault.<sup>25</sup>

These articles of the oath make it obvious what unconditional obedience to authority and respect for its statutes, a member of the Faculty pledged himself to give. It was not possible for him to deviate one iota from the common practices of the Faculty without incurring the displeasure of the entire medical body. Little wonder, then, that individual doctors seldom if ever dared to scrutinize any of the medical theories then prevalent, much less to support new ideas.

6. Medication and Robust Health. According to the medical theories of Molière's day, robust health was to be feared as disease. Molière ridiculed this erroneous

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<sup>25</sup> Maurice Raynaud, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Lenoir, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> Florio's translation of Molière, op. cit., p. 56.



idea of seventeenth century physicians through the character of Sganarelle. The latter, upon seeing the robust and healthy nurse, Jacqueline, says to G ronte:

Monsieur, voil  une nourrice   laquelle  
il faut que je fasse quelques petits  
rem des.

Hearing this remark, Jacqueline exclaims:

Qui? moi? Je me porte le mieux de monde.

To whom Sganarelle makes this answer:

Tant pis, nourrice, tant pis. Cette grande  
sant  est   craindre; et il ne sera pas  
mauvais de vous faire quelque petite  
saign e aimable. Comme on boit pour la  
soif   venir il faut se faire aussi soigner  
pour la maladie   venir."<sup>26</sup>

While Moli re, here, no doubt, likewise wished to ridicule the doctors' love of dalliance, Hawkins mentions that, in keeping with Moli re's satire, sixteenth and seventeenth century physicians were accustomed to pronounce robust health a danger that could be counteracted only by resorting to bleeding and purging.<sup>27</sup> The sixteenth century French essayist, Montaigne, also, made the following reference to this practice in one of his essays:

Physicians are not contented to have the  
government over sicknesses, but they make  
health to be sicke, lest a man should at  
any time escape their authority. Of a  
constant and perfect health doe they not  
frame an argument of some future danger-  
ous sickness. <sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Le M decin Malgr  Lui*, Act II, Scene v.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Hawkins, *op. cit.*, Notes, p. 56.

<sup>28</sup> Florio's translation of Montaigne, *op. cit.*, p. 56.



And in the Journal de la Santé there is found an account of the treatment the king received when in good health at the hands of doctors. Palmer, quoting from the Journal, says,

The doctors of Louis XIV physicked him soundly "pour la maladie à venir" at least once a month, while the "purgation ou saignée de précaution" was as much in favour as the preventive medicine of to-day.<sup>29</sup>

7. Craft. Another abuse that Molière points out in the doctors of his day is their solicitude for personal gain, irrespective of whether honestly or dishonestly attained. To Leandre's entreaties to be permitted to enter Géronte's house in the guise of an apothecary Sganarelle repeatedly makes answer:

Pour qui me prenez-vous? Comment! oser vous adresser à moi pour vous servir dans votre amour et vouloir ravalier la dignité de médecin à des emplois de cette nature?..... Vous êtes un impertinent ..... un malavisé.....<sup>30</sup>

and the abusive language continues until a purse is offered by Leandre when immediately Sganarelle changing his tune cries out:

Je ne parle pas pour vous; car vous êtes honnête homme, et je serais ravi de vous rendre service. Mais il y a de certains impertinents au monde, qui viennent

<sup>29</sup> Palmer, op. cit., p. 422.

<sup>30</sup> Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act III, Scene 1.



prendre les gens pour ce qu'ils ne sont  
pas; et je vous avoue que cela me met  
en colère.<sup>31</sup>

The jibe is even more stinging in the first scene of the third act. Leandre, having bribed Sganarelle into allowing him to enter the palace disguised as an assistant apothecary, asks the latter, whom he believes to be a real doctor, to teach him a few medical terms that will enable him to act his part without being found out. In the revelation that Sganarelle makes of himself, Molière could scarcely have spoken more disparagingly of the entire medical profession. This final thrust, like those that preceded it

Ils m'ont fait médecin malgré mes dents.  
Je ne m'étois jamais mêlé d'être si  
savant que cela; .... vous ne sauriez  
croire comment l'erreur s'est répandue,  
et de quelle façon chacun est endiablé  
à me croire habile homme. On me vient  
chercher de tous côtés; et si les choses  
vont toujours de même, je suis d'avis de  
m'en tenir toute ma vie à la médecine.  
Je trouve que c'est le métier le  
meilleur de tous; car, soit qu'on fasse  
bien, ou soit qu'on fasse mal, on est  
toujours payé de même sorte. La méchante  
besogne ne retombe jamais sur notre dos;  
et nous taillons, comme il nous plaît,  
sur l'étoffe où nous travaillons. Un  
cordonnier, en faisant des souliers, ne  
sauroit gâter un morceau de cuir, qu'il  
n'en paie les pots cassés; mais ici l'on  
peut gâter un homme, sans qu'il en coûte  
rien. Les bêtises ne sont point pour nous;  
et c'est toujours la faute de celui qui  
meurt. Enfin, le bon de cette profession,

<sup>31</sup> Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act II, Scene V. cf. also  
Act II, Scene iv and Act III, Scene ii.



est qu'il y a, parmi les morts, une honnêteté, une discrétion la plus grande du monde, jamais on n'en voit se plaindre du médecin qui l'a tué.<sup>32</sup>

8. Egregious Prescriptions. Having ridiculed medical men in devious ways, Molière concludes this play with a thrust at medicine itself. Perrin, who comes to consult Sganarelle about his bedridden wife, Parette, finally receives the following subscription for her:

Un morceau de fromage ... préparé, où il entre de l'or, du corail, et des perles<sup>33</sup> et quantité d'autres choses précieuses.

This final thrust, like those that preceded it Molière based on actual practice. Hawkins,<sup>34</sup> among other commentators, states that in the seventeenth century the precious things mentioned by Molière often entered into the composition of medicines. Molière's incredulity and, perhaps, the incredulity of the doctors, themselves, regarding the efficacy of medicines thus concocted, is apparent in the parting speech Sganarelle makes to Perrin:

Allez. Si elle meurt ne manquez pas<sup>de</sup> la faire enterrer du mieux que vous pourrez.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Act III, Scene 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Act III Scene 11.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Edited by Hawkins, Notes, p. 57.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Act III, Scene 11.



In Le Médecin Malgré Lui. Molière emphasizes two common follies of his day; first, the culpable ignorance of the doctors who attend, very seriously, "une feinte maladie,"<sup>36</sup> and secondly, the gullibility of the public, at large, which accepts unquestionably every mandate, no matter how ridiculous, that proceeds from the lips of a doctor. The play was later presented at the Palais Royal in Paris on the 15th November of the same year,<sup>2</sup> where it was said to have proved as attractive to the Parisians as it had been entertaining to the courtiers.

Pourpoint, the main character in the play, comes from Limoges to Paris to marry Julie, a young lady who has been promised to him by Eraste, the girl's father, but who, herself, has promised to marry Eraste. Julie and Eraste, with the help of Molière, "bons & intrigués" conceive a plan whereby to rid themselves of the unwelcome guest. Pourpoint is made the victim of many tricks, the most amusing of which is being delivered up as a lunatic into the hands of two doctors, who torment him in various ways.

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<sup>36</sup> Le Médecin malgré Lui, Act II Scene v.



## CHAPTER V

### MONSIEUR DE POURCEAUGNAC (1669)

Monsieur de Pourceaugnac was written at the request of Louis XIV to grace a royal fête held at Chambord on the 6th October, 1669.<sup>1</sup> The play was later presented at the Palais Royal in Paris on the 15th November of the same year,<sup>2</sup> where it was said to have proved as attractive to the Parisians as it had been entertaining to the courtiers.

#### PLOT

Pourceaugnac, the main character in the play, comes from Limoges to Paris to marry Julie, a young lady who has been promised to him by Oronte, the girl's father, but who, herself, has promised to marry Eraste. Julie and Eraste, with the help of Sbrigani, "homme d'intrigue" conceive a plan whereby to rid themselves of the unwelcome guest. Pourceaugnac is made the victim of many tricks, the most maddening of which is being delivered up as a lunatic into the hands of two doctors, who torment him in devious ways.

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick Hawkins, Annals of the French Stage, Vol. V, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 28.



These discomforts together with additional troubles not medical enable the intriguers to attain their end. The Limousin having been disposed of, Julie obtains her father's permission to marry Eraste.

### TWOFOLD SATIRE

The satire of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, according to critics, had a twofold purpose: (1) to humiliate a citizen of Limoges, and (2) to ridicule doctors.

The exact reason why Molière chose to poke fun at a Limoges layman is difficult to determine. Palmer states that the aspersions cast upon Limoges had been attributed to a cold reception Molière had received there when he was a strolling player, and also to the fact that his brother-in-law, Geneviève Béjart's husband, hailed from that city.<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Olypant, quoting several commentators whose names she does not include, likewise expresses the opinion that a certain M. Leonard de Lomenie, who married Genevieve Béjart, and who came from Limoges, was aimed at in this play.<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Hawkins, however, declares that Molière's choice of the Limousin as the topic of his play was due to an incident that had occurred at the Palais Royal just

<sup>3</sup> John Palmer, Molière, "Impious in Medicine", p. 296.

<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Olypant, Molière, p. 186.



a short time before his writing the play. A wealthy but ill-bred person from Limoges, who occupied a seat on the stage during one of the performances of the Comédiens du Roi insulted the actors in the presence of their audience. Molière who was ever on the look out for "originals" noted carefully the peculiarities of the individual and on the first occasion that presented itself incorporated him into a play.<sup>5</sup>

#### MOLIÈRE'S RIDICULE OF THE LIMOUSIN

Robinet remarks that the Limousin whom Molière's play took off "was half maddened by the hilarity the play excited." Hawkins and other commentators maintain, however, that although M. de Pourceaugnac was a very ludicrous personage, Molière not only infused no illnature into the ridicule he heaped upon him but made him better liked than anybody else in the play. Hence his ill will toward the Limousin could not have been very deep-seated.<sup>6</sup>

#### MOLIÈRE'S RIDICULE OF THE DOCTORS

If, as some commentators assert, the punishment

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<sup>5</sup>Hawkins, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>6</sup>Lawrence Hawkins, op. cit., p. 29.



Molière inflicted on the citizen of Limoges might have been much heavier his satire at the doctors was levelled with excruciating effect. The physicians into whose custody Pourceaugnac is committed are ridiculed in devious ways. Their too close adherence to the teachings of the ancients, their rejection of new discoveries, their medical limitations, both in regard to knowledge of medicine and practice, and their love of exhibition and vain eloquence are all exposed mercilessly.

#### 1. Strict Adherence to the Rules of the Ancients.

In this play as in the preceding ones Molière's doctors remind their patients that it is better to die observing the rules than to be cured violating them. In describing the character of one of the doctors in attendance upon Pourceaugnac his apothecary says:

C'est un homme qui sait la médecine à fond, comme je sais ma croix de par dieu, et qui, quand on devroit crever, ne déviroit pas d'un iota des règles des anciens. Qui, il suit toujours le grand chemin, le grand chemin, et ne va point chercher midi à quatorze heures, et pour tout l'or du monde, il ne voudroit pas avoir guéri une personne avec d'autres remèdes que ceux que la Faculté permet.... il n'est pas de ces médecins qui marchandent les maladies: c'est un homme expéditif, qui aime à dépêcher ses malades; et quand on a à mourir, cela se fait avec lui le plus vite du monde.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Molière, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Act I, Scene v.



Despite the seeming irony of the praise which the apothecary lavishes upon one of Pourceaugnac's attendants, students of Molière, familiar with the medical history of seventeenth century France, have pronounced the above and similar references of the dramatist to medical practices of his day as accurate statements. They maintain that members of the Faculty prided themselves on their ability to hold fast to the teachings and practices of the ancients. All new discoveries they rejected with scorn. Believing themselves the fortunate possessors of all the mysteries of medicine, they regarded new ideas as so many false exhibitions of knowledge. Hence in all good faith many doctors preferred "to die and to let their patients die rather than to depart one iota from the practices of their fore fathers."<sup>8</sup>

The ridiculousness of the Faculty's unconditional reliance upon the teachings of the ancients is amply stressed by Molière when he has one of the doctors in the play give the following answer to a peasant woman who comes to inform him that her father "sent dans la tête les plus grandes douleurs du monde:"

Le malade est un sot, d'autant plus que,  
dans la maladie dont il est attaqué, ce

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<sup>8</sup> Brender Matthews, op. cit., p. 112.



n'est pas la tête, selon Galien, mais la rate, qui lui doit faire mal.<sup>9</sup>

2. Medical Limitations. That medicine was in its experimental stage, with but a very limited number of curatives, which the doctors used indiscriminately, trying each in turn, in the hope that possibly one or the other would bring about the desired effect, Molière points out through the conversation between the peasant woman and the doctor.

La Paysanne: Mon père, Monsieur, est toujours malade de plus en plus.

Médecin: Ce n'est pas ma faute: je lui donne des remèdes; que ne guérit-il? Combien a-t-il été saigné de fois?

La Paysanne: Quinze, Monsieur, depuis vingt jours.

Médecin: Quinze fois saigné?

La Paysanne: Oui.

Médecin: Et il ne guérit point?

La Paysanne: Non, Monsieur.

Médecin: C'est signe que la maladie n'est pas dans le sang. Nous le ferons purger autant de fois, pour voir si elle n'est pas dans les humeurs; et si rien ne nous réussit, nous l'envoyerons aux bains.

L'Apothicaire: Voilà le fin cela, voilà le fin de la médecine.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Molière, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Act I, Scene vi.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., Act I, Scene vi.



Yet despite this startling limitation in knowledge and skill the doctors enjoyed a confidence that was truly amazing. This blind submission to physicians is satirised by Molière through the apothecary, who continuing the praise of his doctor to Eraste says:

Voilà déjà trois de mes enfants dont il  
m'a fait l'honneur de conduire la maladie,  
qui sont morts en moins de quatre jours,  
et qui, entre les mains d'un autre,  
auroient languì plus de trois mois. ...  
Il ne me reste plus que deux enfants,  
dont il prend soin comme des siens; il  
les traite et gouverne à sa fantaisie,  
sans que je me mêle de rien; et le plus  
souvent, quand je reviens de la ville,  
je suis tout étonné que je les trouve  
saignés ou purgés par son ordre.<sup>11</sup>

3. Principal Remedies. The reference which Molière made in the above mentioned scene with regard to bleeding and purging is further developed in the scene that follows, when the worthy, whose praise has just been sung by his apothecary prescribes for Pourceaugnac in the following manner:

Premièrement, pour remédier à cette pléthore  
obdurante, et à cette cacochymie luxuriante  
par tout le corps, je suis d'avis qu'il soit  
phlébothomisé libéralement, c'est-à-dire que  
les saignées soient fréquentes et plantureuses:  
en premier lieu de la basilique, puis de la  
céphalique; et même, si le mal est opiniâtre,  
de lui ouvrir la veine du front, et que  
l'ouverture soit large, afin que le gros sang

<sup>11</sup> Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Act I, Scene v.



puisse sortir; et en même temps, de le purger, désopiler, et évacuer par purgatifs propres et convenables, c'est-à-dire par cholagogues, mélanogogues, et caetera; et comme la véritable source de tout le mal est ou une humeur crasse et féculente ou une vapeur noire et grossière qui obscurcit, infecte et salit les esprits animaux, il est à propos ensuite qu'il prenne un bain d'eau pure et nette, avec force petit-lait clair, pour purifier par l'eau la féculence de l'humeur crasse, et éclaircir par le lait clair la noirceur de cette vapeur.<sup>12</sup>

According to Dr. Raynaud, this humorous and seemingly farfetched prescription is in complete accordance with the practices of seventeenth century doctors. Bleeding and purging, says Raynaud, were the most frequently used remedies of the Faculty in Molière's day. The popularity of bleeding, he says, was the result of a cure achieved through its use on the king. When in 1647, Dr. Raynaud continues, the king contracted small pox the physicians attending him being at a loss what remedy to use, one of the doctors suggested bleeding. At first a strong protest ensued with objections raised to the effect that the measure was contrary to the rules of practice, but finally the remedy was applied and the king recovered. Ever after bleeding not only received the endorsement of practically the whole profession but was

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<sup>12</sup> Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Act I, Scene viii.



used so much, says Raynaud, that blood flowed in torrents from almost all patients, no matter what their age or disease.<sup>13</sup>

The second remedy prescribed by Pourceaugnac's doctor is purgation. This curative, according to Raynaud, was quite as popular as bleeding. Having received the sanction of the Faculty it was henceforth regarded as the pillar of its strength. In order to see to what extent the practice of purging was carried on in the seventeenth century one has only to consult a medical journal of the period. It is astonishing to find in the Journal de la Santé de Louis xlv, for example, with what frequency even the king, and often in spite of himself, was bled, purged, and drugged. Fever, small pox, and any other disease he was unfortunate enough to contract received the same treatment.<sup>14</sup>

4. Vain Eloquence. Undue stress laid upon theoretical knowledge and vain complacency taken in flowery utterances also receive in this play a telling thrust from the dramatist's sharp rapier. When the first physician seeks in a long speech to prove that Monsieur de Pourceaugnac is both mad and hypochondriacal, the second doctor praises the former profusely for his learned and beautiful reasonings. In fact, so en-

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<sup>13</sup>Raynaud, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 145.



enchanted does he become over his colleague's eloquent recital of theory that he exclaims:

le raisonnement que vous en avez fait est si docte et si beau, qu'il est impossible qu'il (M. de Pourceaugnac) ne soit pas fou, et mélancolique hypocondriaque; et quand il ne le seroit pas, il faudroit qu'il le devînt, pour la beauté des choses que vous avez dites, et la justesse du raisonnement que vous avez fait. Oui, Monsieur, vous avez dépeint, fort graphiquement, tout ce qui appartient à cette maladie: il ne se peut rien de plus doctement, sagement, ingénieusement conçu, pensé, imaginé, que ce que vous avez prononcé au sujet de ce mal...<sup>15</sup>

Molière, here, very obviously, ridicules not only the exuberance of the first doctor's elucidations on medicine but also the extravagance with which the second doctor praises his colleague. A little further in the same speech the second doctor says:

- il ne me reste rien ici, que de féliciter Monsieur d'être tombé entre vos mains, et de lui dire qu'il est trop heureux d'être fou, pour éprouver l'efficace et, la douceur des remèdes que vous avez si judicieusement proposés. Je les approuve tous, manibus et pedibus descendo in tuam sententiam. (Je descends des mains et des pieds à ton avis, c'est -à-dire je me range et j'applaudis à ton avis)

This ridicule, of reverence and mutual flattery manifested among members of the same faculty, has its prototype in the

<sup>15</sup> Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Act I, Scene viii.



medical history of France, in the candidate's speech delivered upon his receiving the doctor's degree. "With all the rights, privileges, and honors, here or elsewhere thereunto appertaining" the candidate proceeded to compliment the Faculty, of which he had just been made a member, with an extravagance of utterance that is truly laughable. They were in turn compared to the stars, the sun, the waves of the sea, and the flowers of spring.

5. Professional Ignorance. Molière's contempt for the knowledge of doctors is perhaps no where better illustrated than in the famous diagnosis of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac's condition. In comparing it with the diagnosis of L'Amour Médecin critics have noted that it is decidedly less exaggerated than the latter. So closely has Molière approached actuality in Monsieur de Pourceaugnac that commentators have unhesitatingly pronounced the diagnosis of this play a photographic recording of seventeenth century medical procedure. The truth of this pronouncement is readily perceived when one compares the diagnosis of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac with a passage taken from the Journal de la Santé de Louis XIV.

Pourceaugnac's doctor speaking to Eraste: Je dis donc, Monsieur, avec votre permission, que notre malade ici présent est malheureusement attaqué, possédé, travaillé de cette sorte de folie que nous nommons fort bien mélancolie hypocondriaque ..... laquelle procède du vice de quelque partie



du bas-ventre et de la région inférieure, mais particulièrement de la rate, dont la chaleur et l'inflammation porte au cerveau de notre malade beaucoup de fuligines épaissies et crassés, dont la vapeur noire et maligne cause dépravation aux fonctions de la faculté princesse, et fait la maladie dont, par notre raisonnement, il est manifestement atteint et convaincu.<sup>16</sup>

Report of the king's health: The king is subject to vapors-vapors which proceed from the spleen and the melancholic humor whose livery they wear, in the chagrin they impart and the desire for solitude which they engender. They permeate by the arteries to the heart and the lungs, where they excite palpitations, disquietudes, and dyspnoea; from thence proceeding upwards, they even reach the brain, and there by disturbing the spirits of the optic nerve they set up vertigo and swimming of the head, and colliding elsewhere with the nervous principle, cause weakness of the limbs to such a degree that support is necessary in walking, .....<sup>17</sup>

6. Power Exercised by Doctors. The last but not least stab Molière makes at the doctors in this play is the indignation of the physician when Pourceaugnac escapes him. Like an echo of many a seventeenth century healer he exclaims:

Il est lié et engagé à mes remèdes et je veux le faire saisir où je le trouverai, comme déserteur de la médecine et infraacteur à mes ordonnances..... Sa maladie, qu'on m'a donnée à guérir, est

<sup>16</sup> Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Act I, Scene viii.

<sup>17</sup> Journal de la Santé, cited from A. M. Brown, op. cit., pp. 132-133.



un meuble qui m'appartient et que je  
compte entre mes effets.<sup>18</sup>

Molière points out in this passage not only the limitless power doctors of his day were accustomed to assume, but also the unworthy use they made of that power, namely, to replenish their purses at the expense of their victims, thus adding greed to their numerous other faults.

The foibles that Molière particularly stresses in this play are two; (1) the doctors' attachment to the rules and theories of the ancients, and (2) the blind trust reposed in doctors by the ignorant public.

The plot of this play is simple. Argan is an Imaginary Invalid, who occupies himself exclusively with his health. He wishes to marry off his daughter Angélique, to the son of a doctor, Monsieur Diafoirus, in order that a physician may always be available to him. He, himself, has unwittingly married a second wife, Béline, who cunningly inveigles him into making his will in her favor, to the exclusion of his children. Disillusioned, partly by Valerette, the maid, and partly by his brother, Béralde, he finally consents to the marriage of Angélique and Cléante, and

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<sup>18</sup> Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, Act II, Scene 1.



#### CHAPTER IV

#### LE MALADE IMAGINAIRE (1673)

In Le Malade Imaginaire Molière reaches the climax of his satire upon the medical profession. This play according to critics is the highest of all Molière's pictures of man in relation to medicine. In his other plays dealing with the subject of medicine Molière drew vivid caricatures of members of the Faculty and held up to ridicule various abuses of the doctors, but in none of them did he protest so bitterly against the impotence of medical art as he does in the present play.

#### PLOT

The plot of this play is simple. Argan is an imaginary invalid, who occupies himself exclusively with his health. He wishes to marry off his daughter Angélique, to the son of a doctor, Monsieur Diafoirus, in order that a physician may always be available to him. He, himself, has unwittingly married a second wife, Béline, who cunningly inveigles him into making his will in her favor, to the exclusion of his children. Disillusioned, partly by Toinette, the maid, and partly by his brother, Béralde, he finally consents to the marriage of Angélique and Cléante, and



decides that he, himself, will become a doctor.

The final "intermède" is a parody upon the reception of a doctor into the Faculty.

#### PURPOSE

Critics attribute various reasons to Molière in writing Le Malade Imaginaire. Some maintain that he was acting upon the challenging suggestion made him by his enemy, Le Boulanger de Chalussay; others, that he wrote in retaliation to the doctors who had failed to cure him; still others, that his hatred of the sham and hypocrisy of doctors in general spurred him on to ridicule them.

The first of these suppositions receives a substantial support from the close connection there appears to exist between Chalussay's attack and Molière's satire - the latter being as it were a rebuttal to the former. In his comedy, Elomire Hypocondre ou les Médecins Vengés, 1670 Chalussay shows us Elomire, the chief character in his play, whose name is an anagram of Molière, sick in imagination, patronizing the charlatans of Pont Neuf and secretly consulting the doctors whose profession he publicly ridicules. He finally falls into the hands of three doctors whose prescriptions are so terrifying to him that he believes he is actually dying. His servant tells him to think of getting well and then some day to make a comedy of his experiences.



Elomire is no sooner released from the immediate fear of death, says Chalussay, than he resumes his former attitude toward doctors. He watches them at work, notes their amusing episodes and on returning to the theatre incorporates them into his play.

Whether or not Molière had in mind Chalussay's words - "some day you can make a comedy of your experiences" - two years after Elomire was published Molière wrote a comedy about an imaginary invalid. That the play was a travesty upon Molière, himself, a supposition maintained by some critics, is discredited by others. The majority of critics believe that Molière was too sick at the time he wrote Le Malade Imaginaire to paint himself as an imaginary invalid. They maintain that Molière's objective was not to laugh at himself but to aim a final shaft at the physicians who had proved so incapable of curing him.

No less a reliable source than Maurice Raynaud maintains that Molière's hatred of sham and hypocrisy inspired his final attack. "Molière had," says Raynaud, "a sincere and ever eloquent horror for all that is procédé d'école, useless classification, ready-made formulas; a contempt for erudition that usurps the place of knowledge, subtleties that only entangle questions under pretext of solving them, and, above all, a profound aversion to all pendants, to all discoverers who talk without saying any-



thing, to the hypocrites of science, who pretend to teach what they do not know."<sup>19</sup> This pronouncement of Raynaud is repeatedly substantiated by Molière in this play. In the third scene of act one, for example, Molière makes one feel that he speaks with conviction when he says that physicians have no "secrets pour étendre la vie à de longues années", that all such claims are nothing more than "le roman de la médecine", and are like "ces beaux songes qui ne vous laissent au réveil que le déplaisir de les avoir crus."<sup>20</sup>

Molière, himself, declared that his sole objective in writing Le Malade Imaginaire was to please the king. In the prologue he states his purpose thus:

Après les glorieuses fatigues et les exploits victorieux de notre auguste monarque, il est bien juste que tous ceux qui se mêlent d'écrire travaillent ou à ses louanges, ou à son divertissement. C'est ce qu'ici l'on a voulu faire, et ce prologue est un essai des louanges de ce grand prince, qui donne entrée à la comédie du Malade Imaginaire, dont le projet a été fait pour le délasser de ses nobles travaux."<sup>21</sup>

Incidents in the play seem to indicate that each of the above mentioned reasons entered into the writing of this comedy, but particularly that Molière had recognized the force

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<sup>19</sup>Maurice Raynaud, op. cit., p. 399.

<sup>20</sup>Molière, Le Malade Imaginaire, Act III, Scene III.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., Prologue.



of Chalussay's insinuations and had resolved to answer them in public. When Beralde wants to take his brother to see one of Molière's plays Argan bursts forth into the following revealing conversation:

Argan: C'est un bon impertinent que votre Molière avec ses comédies, et je le trouve bien plaisant d'aller jouer d'honnêtes gens comme les médecins.

Beralde: Ce ne sont point les médecins qu'il joue, mais le ridicule de la médecine.

Argan: C'est bien à lui à faire de se mêler de contrôler la médecine; voilà un bon nigaud, un bon impertinent, de se moquer des consultations et des ordonnances, de s'attaquer au corps des médecins, et d'aller mettre sur son théâtre des personnes vénérables comme ces messieurs-là.

Beralde: Que voulez-vous qu'il y mette que les diverses professions des hommes?...

Argan: Si j'étais que des médecins, je me vengerais de son impertinence; et quand il sera malade, je le laisserais mourir sans secours...

Beralde: Vous voilà bien en colère contre lui.

Argan: Oui, c'est un malavisé, et si les médecins sont sages, ils feront ce que je dis.

Beralde: Il sera encore plus sage que vos médecins, car il ne leur demandera point de secours.

Argan: Tant pis pour lui s'il n'a point recours aux remèdes.

Beralde: Il a ses raisons pour n'en point vouloir, et il soutient que cela n'est permis qu'aux gens vigoureux et robustes, et qui ont des forces de reste pour porter les remèdes avec la maladie; mais que, pour lui, il n'a



justement de la force que pour porter  
son mal."<sup>22</sup>

This conversation indicates that, far from being intimidated by Chalussay's vicious attack, which the latter claimed to have made in defense of doctors, Molière not only appeared more certain than ever of his convictions regarding the art of medicine but also wished to make his denunciation of doctors even more pronounced than before.

#### ABUSES UNCOVERED BY MOLIERE

In this play, Molière takes up again all of the criticisms launched at the doctors in his previous comedies. Excessive medication, ridiculous prescriptions, practices of deceit with a view of personal profit, undue power enjoyed by the Faculty, ludicrous pomp, vain learning, strict adherence to ancient theories, and opposition to progressive ideas--each of these abuses Molière again uncovers in turn, and for each of them the doctors take their stand at the whipping post.

1. Excessive Medication and Craft. Molière's first reference to doctors is made in the opening scene. Argan, the hypochondriac, is checking his apothecary's accounts. After having listened to his prolonged enumeration of the

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<sup>22</sup>Molière, Le Malade Imaginaire, Act III, Scene 111.



medicines consumed by him in one month, one wonders that he should still be alive. Argan's chief concern, however, is not the large amount of curatives he has used up but the outrageous prices of the apothecary and the oversight of his physician, Monsieur Purgon, whose prescriptions do not equal those of the previous month. Feeling himself in worse health than formerly, he attributes his relapse to neglect on the part of his doctor to prescribe sufficiently and properly for him. The impotency of the dearly purchased medicine and the thought of the attempt made at chiseling on the part of the apothecary consumes him with rage. Determined that no apothecary is going to take advantage of him, he decides to give Monsieur Fleurant what he thinks just, and no more: "Vingt sous en language d'apothicaire c'est à dire dix sous," he says, as he cuts the price of each item in half.<sup>23</sup>

Argan's recital of the ridiculous prescriptions of the doctors, far from being pure fiction invented by Molière, actually has its counterpart, as has already been pointed out above, in the medical history of the seventeenth century.

"Un petit clystère, insinuatif, préparatif, et remollient, pour amollir, humecter, et rafraîchir les entrailles de

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<sup>23</sup> Molière, Le Malade Imaginaire Act I, Scene I.



monsieur"<sup>24</sup> is in the main an accurate illustration of the manner and kind of prescribing done by the members of the Faculty in Molière's day. In the formula of induction, for example, as each candidate came up for examination, insistence was made on his employing almost exclusively the recognized remedies of bleeding and purgation.<sup>25</sup> The reason for this was, says Raynaud, that the whole superstructure of the profession revolved around the theory of humors. The practice of medicine consisted in keeping the humors - blood, mucus, and bile - in good working condition by having frequent recourse to bleeding and purging.<sup>26</sup> "Plethora" and "Cacoehymia", the first, excess humors and the second, corrupted humors, being considered dangerous conditions, were of primary concern to physicians. For the first of these, blood letting was invariably prescribed and for the second, purgation.<sup>27</sup> Since "Plethora" and "Cacoehymia" frequently appeared simultaneously, Molière's comic formula

"Chysterium donare  
Postea seignare"<sup>28</sup>  
Ensuita purgare"<sup>29</sup>

gives the actual order followed in the curing process.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Le Malade Imaginaire, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>25</sup>Raynaud, op. cit., p. 366.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 366.

<sup>27</sup>A. M. Brown, Molière and His Medical Associations, p. 38.

<sup>28</sup>Le Malade Imaginaire, Troisième Interède".

<sup>29</sup>Cf. p. 51.



2. "Les Malade Imaginaires" Treating sick people excessively appears to us an abuse serious enough, but the doctors whose practices Molière repeatedly ridicules were guilty of a still greater fault. Seventeenth century physicians prescribed medical remedies not only for patients who actually were sick but also for those who obviously were not.<sup>30</sup> Molière speaks in no uncertain terms when he ridicules this abuse in Le Malade Imaginaire. He has Toinette address the gullible Argan thus:

"Ce monsieur Fleurant-là et ce monsieur Purgon s'égayent bien sur votre corps; ils ont en vous une bonne vache à lait; et je voudrais bien leur demander quel mal vous avez, pour vous faire tant de remèdes."<sup>31</sup>

This blunt remark of the keen-witted Toinette, which may be said to represent the unspoken opinion of many a seventeenth century observer is in complete accordance with accounts of actual practice handed down in the history of medicine.<sup>32</sup>

3. Power of the Faculty. Why verbal protests were with-held in the face of so much pretense and error, Molière hastens to show us through the answer Argan gives to the maid:

"Taisez-vous, ignorante, ce n'est pas à vous à contrôler les ordonnances de la médecine."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Brown, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>31</sup>Le Malade Imaginaire, Act I, Scene 111.

<sup>32</sup>Raynaud, op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>33</sup>Le Malade Imaginaire, Act I, Scene 111.



To appreciate fully the import of this reproof one needs to know something about the organization and usages of the French medical schools of the seventeenth century. The prestige and power enjoyed by doctors and emphasized by Molière more vigorously in Le Malade Imaginaire than in any one of his previous plays, was well nigh limitless. The reason for this was that "there were only about a hundred physicians in the capital and not more than four were admitted in any one year. The cost of medical education was onerous and therefore the physicians were recruited from the well-to-do. At the examinations, special privileges were granted to the sons of physicians; and the profession tended to be hereditary with all the obvious disadvantages of persistent inbreeding."<sup>34</sup> Besides bonds of blood, loyal traditions of a trade-gild bound the Faculty together, giving it "a solidarity more substantial than that of any modern trades-union."<sup>35</sup> This being the case, to disobey the mandates of a single member was to refuse to accept the ruling of the entire Faculty. One can readily see then why individuals preferred to submit unreservedly to the dictates of doctors than to call down upon themselves the displeasure and the condemnation of so strong a corporation as the Faculty.

#### 4. Vain Learning. Molière's next allusion to

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<sup>34</sup> Raynaud, op. cit., p. 223.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 223.



medicine in this play has to do with the superficialities of medical training in the seventeenth century. Dr. Diafoirus, in his recital of the numerous good qualities his son possesses, stresses particularly the boy's skill at debate. Since the ability to discourse learnedly of the

"Je puis dire sans vanité que depuis deux ans qu'il est sur les bancs, il n'y a point de candidat qui ait fait plus de bruit que lui dans toutes les disputes de notre école. Il est ferme dans la dispute, fort comme un Turc sur ses principes, ne démord jamais de son opinion, et poursuit un raisonnement jusque dans les derniers recoins de la logique."<sup>36</sup>

To the twentieth century reader the connection between ability to excel in debate and practical skill in medicine is vague. Not so to the average seventeenth century medical candidate. The training of the youthful aspirant to the doctorate was theoretical rather than practical. Medicine was considered a science lending itself abundantly to scholarly disputations.<sup>37</sup> And in these scientific discussions all candidates who wished to be received into the Faculty were obliged to take part. The course in argumentation was a long and difficult one. After having received the bachelor's

<sup>36</sup> Le Malade Imaginaire, Act II, Scene vi.

<sup>37</sup> Brown, op. cit., p. 184.



degree in medicine<sup>38</sup> the candidate for the licentiate had to spend two years in accompanying some practicing physician in his visits, and "sur les bancs" taking part in discussions over the theses that candidates were obliged to present.

Since the ability to discourse learnedly of the nature and cure of diseases and the power of oratory were considered much more important than practical experience, the student who attended to a high degree of excellence in these had without having done any practical work already assured himself of the reward of a brilliant future. Realizing what stress was placed on theory and how much time the average candidate had to devote to a preparation that was almost divorced from practice, one is not surprised to hear Maurice Raynaud commenting that it was not an uncommon thing for a student of medicine to receive his degree without having so much as seen a single case.<sup>39</sup>

5. Ignorance and Arrogance. The above mentioned superficialities of medical training resulted in profound

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<sup>38</sup> The examination for this degree lasted from five in the morning until noon. The first two or three hours were spent by the bachelor in answering questions and explaining points regarding his thesis, which his fellow candidates brought up. From eight to eleven he was exposed to an avalanche of questions fired at him by nine doctors chosen for the purpose, and from eleven to twelve he was again delivered over to the tender mercies of all present.

<sup>39</sup> Raynaud, op. cit., p. 40.



ignorance, while the formalities and length of training explain the proverbial arrogance of doctors.

Dr. Purgon is the chief exponent in this play of the irregularities that proceeded from ignorance. When Argan remarks that M. Purgon has an income of eight thousand good livres<sup>40</sup> Toinette retorts that he must have killed a great many men to be as rich as that.<sup>41</sup> These words coming from the sensible Toinette show that Molière believed that medicine as it was practiced by some doctors of his day was primarily an easy way to wealth. The dramatist, however, does not place all physicians in this category. He shows that ignorance even more frequently than craft was responsible for the blunders committed by the members of the Faculty. Apropos, when Béralde persuades Argan to reject one of M. Purgon's prescriptions the doctor flies into a fury not because he sees in Argan's action a possible monetary loss but because he feels that a sacred trust has been violated.

Purgon's fanaticism springs not from craft but from angered pride. Argan is his best patient, an inexhaustible source of revenue, and his nephew, Thomas Diafoirus, is to marry the daughter of Argan with a handsome dowry. But the good doctor does not hesitate to forego all these advantages

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<sup>40</sup> Le Malade Imaginaire, Act II Scene vi.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Act II, Scene vi.



when his professional advice is questioned. The patient's refusal to accept his prescription is without doubt an affront to the profession, a treason to the Faculty. Consequently, he breaks the marriage, tears up the marriage settlement, and "excommunicates his patient."<sup>42</sup>

"Je vous abandonne à votre mauvaise constitution, à l'intempérie de vos entrailles, à la corruption de votre sang, à l'acreté de votre bile, à la féculence de vos humeurs."<sup>43</sup>

Records of seventeenth century medical cases are replete with similar demonstrations of professional pride. The invective of Purgon bears a close resemblance, for example, to an actual malediction pronounced by Guy Patin against Guy Labrosse who refused to be bled.

"It was proposed to him, but he refused; it was a remedy, said he, of sanguinary pedants, and he preferred to die without it. May the devil bleed him in the other world, the impostor - the atheist."<sup>44</sup>

6. Opposition to Progressive Ideas. Through Thomas Diafoirus Molière lays bare the opposition of the Faculty toward progressive ideas. Dr. Diafoirus includes in the

<sup>42</sup> Chatfield-Taylor, Molière, "Molière and the Physicians", p. 425.

<sup>43</sup> Le Malade Imaginaire, Act III, Scene vi.

<sup>44</sup> Guy Patin, (Cited from Brown, op. cit., p. 222).



song of praise he sings in honor of his son, the latter's staunch refusal to listen to - much less to accept - any of the new ideas proffered by "les circulateurs".

"Jamais il n'a voulu comprendre ni écouter les raisons et les expériences des prétendues découvertes de notre siècle, touchant la circulation du sang, et autres opinions de même farine."<sup>45</sup>

Later in the same scene Thomas offers to Angélique a profusely decorated thesis entitled Contre les Circulateurs. This ridicule of the ultra conservatism of the Faculty is, according to critics, well merited. The Faculty's deeply rooted opposition to scientific ideas is clearly shown, for example, by their attitude toward "circulation". When in 1628 Harvey published his discovery of the circulation of the blood the Faculty as usual staunchly opposed it.<sup>46</sup> Even the more liberal Guy Patin looked at it askance. To him as to the other members of the Faculty "all circulateurs were charlatans."

7. Sham and Hypocrisy. To hide their ignorance, points out Molière, doctors frequently had recourse to sham and hypocrisy. The dramatist's hatred of these abuses is perhaps nowhere better revealed than through the words of Béralde, Molière's mouthpiece when he tries to convince his

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<sup>45</sup>Le Malade Imaginaire, Act II Scene vi.

<sup>46</sup>Raynaud, op. cit., p. 169.



brother that his illness is imagined. Béralde's doubt in the efficacy of medical treatment is definitely set forth when he says to Argan:

"Une grande marque que vous vous portez bien, et que vous avez un corps parfaitement bien composé, c'est qu'avec tous les soins que vous avez pris, vous n'avez pu parvenir encore à gâter la bonté de votre tempérament, et que vous n'êtes point crevé de toutes les médecines qu'on vous a fait prendre."<sup>47</sup>

And when Argan speaking in defense of doctors asks Béralde how it is that so many other people who are as wise and clever as he, Béralde, have recourse to doctors in times of illness, the latter replies:

"C'est une marque de la faiblesse humaine, et non pas de la vérité de leur art."<sup>48</sup>

Thus Molière boldly attacks the whole medical profession irrespective of person or practice. When Argan, astonished that his brother should put so little credence in medicine, asks:

"Quoi? vous ne tenez pas véritable une chose établie par tout le monde, et que tous les siècles ont révé-  
ré?"

Béralde emphatically replies:

"Bien loin de la tenir véritable, je la trouve, entre nous, une des plus grandes folies qui soit parmi les hommes; et à

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<sup>47</sup> Le Malade Imaginaire, Act III, Scene iii.

<sup>48</sup> Le Malade Imaginaire, Act III, Scene iii.



regarder les choses en philosophe, je ne vois point de plus plaisante momerie, je ne vois rien de plus ridicule qu'un homme qui se veut mêler d'en guérir un autre."

Argan still credulous asks Béralde to give his reason for his so great incredulity. The latter promptly replies:

"Par la raison, mon frère, que les ressorts de notre machine sont des mystères, jusqu'ici, où les hommes ne voient goutte, et que la nature nous a mis au-devant des yeux des voiles trop épais pour y connaître quelque chose."

Not certain that he has grasped the full significance of Béralde's statement, Argan questions him once more:

"Les médecins ne savent donc rien, à votre compte?"

To this question he receives the unmistakable answer:

"Si fait, mon frère. Ils savent la plupart de fort belles humanités, savent parler en beau latin, savent nommer en grec toutes les maladies, les définir, et les diviser; mais, pour ce qui est de les guérir, c'est<sup>49</sup> ce qu'ils ne savent point du tout."

Molière is here very obviously justifying his scepticism. In imitation of Gassendi, the epicurean philosopher, whom he greatly admires, he put aside what little belief there remains in his mind concerning medicine and places his trust exclusively in nature.<sup>50</sup> Like Gassendi, he declares

<sup>49</sup> Le Malade Imaginaire, Act III, Scene iii.

<sup>50</sup> Raynaud, op. cit., p. 399. Molière's trust in nature as a healing power, which has already been referred to in Chapter III is possibly due to influence of Montaigne Cf. Essais de Montaigne Tome III, p. 75, cited from Mesnard's edition of Molière.



that it is impossible to grasp anything but the mere shadow of the truth, for the truth itself lies outside the limits of human intelligence.<sup>51</sup>

This exclusive faith in the healing powers of nature is in the light of modern science unquestionably unreasonable. But, in 1669, when the sick, generally speaking, were safer to allow a disease to run its course than to seek help from a doctor, it was more than justified.

**8. Ostentation.** The undue importance given to dress by the Faculty is next satirized by Molière. When Argan hesitates giving his consent to become a doctor because "his advanced age will make the learning of the Latin language and the nature of maladies and their remedies too difficult a task" Béralde exclaims:

"En recevant la robe et le bonnet de médecin, vous apprendrez tout cela, et vous serez après plus habile que vous ne voudrez."

Needless to say Molière is here exaggerating deliberately for effect. Yet in so doing he does not lessen in the least the import of his satire, nor is he less justified in holding out to ridicule the doctor's absurdity in the matter of dress as he is in respect to other abuses.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Everett Olmsted, *op. cit.*, p. xx.

<sup>52</sup> *Le Malade Imaginaire*, Act III, Scene xxii.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Le Médecin Malgré lui*, p. 35.



9. Formalities. The final and perhaps the most forceful stab made at the doctors by Molière appears in the last interlude of the play, where the dramatist presents a parody upon the formalities of the medical schools. Having persuaded Argan to enter the medical profession Beralde tells him that a group of Faculty members, friends of his, have consented to perform the ceremony of induction in Argan's own house. The assembly, consisting of eight medical students, six apothecaries, twenty-two doctors, the candidate who is about to be admitted to the Faculty, and eight surgeons, having entered the hall and taken their places, each according to his rank, the president gives the opening speech. It consists of pompous eulogy of medicine and bombastic tribute given to the members of the Faculty. Upon the conclusion of the president's talk the examination begins. The examiners enter in turn upon "questions of physiology, pathology, and practice." The repeated insistence of the candidate upon the employment of the favorite remedies:

"Clysterium donare,  
Postea seignare,  
Ensuita purgare."

is followed by the repeated refrain in chorus of the company of doctors:

"Bene, bene, bene, bene respondere  
Dignus, dignus, dignus est, entrare  
In nostro docto corpore"<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Le Malade Imaginaire, Troisième Intermède.



Next the president administers the oath and the candidate swears to defend the rights of the Faculty, and always to conform to the mandates of the ancients, thereby promising never to have recourse to a new remedy even should this strict observance of the rule cost the life of a patient. All the privileges of the profession, namely, "seigner et tuer" throughout the world <sup>55</sup> are then conferred upon the colleague. Following this, reverence is paid to the new doctor by the apothecaries and the surgeons, and finally all present surround the recipient wishing him a long life in which to eat and to drink, to bleed and to kill.

"Vivat, vivat, vivat, vivat, cent fois vivat  
Novus Doctor, qui tan bien parlat!  
Mille, mille annes et manget et bibat,  
Et seignet et tuat!"

Investigators into the history of medicine in the reign of Louis XIV have reported that there is found in Molière's burlesque ceremony an adroit condensation of the long series of examinations, dissertations, and admissions which a candidate for the doctorate in medicine had to undergo.<sup>56</sup> Maurice Raynaud, in his excellent study of seventeenth century medicine says that Molière's burlesque "is an abridgement, not only of the ceremonies of the doctorate, but also

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<sup>55</sup> Le Malade Imaginaire, "Troisième Intermède".

<sup>56</sup> Matthews, "Molière and the Doctors", Scribner, 1910, Vol. 47, p. 112.



of all those through which a candidate was obliged to pass from the beginning of his studies to the day when he received the doctor's cap."<sup>57</sup>

A comparison drawn by Raynaud between the articles of oath appearing in Molière's parody and those in the actual oath taken by candidates reveals Molière's accurate knowledge of the useless formalities of the medical schools of his day.

#### Molière's first article

"Juras gardare status  
Per Facultatem praescripta,  
Cum sensu et jugeament"

is almost identical, points out Raynaud, to the original article:

"Quod observabis jura,  
Statuta, leges et laudabiles  
Consuetudines hujus ordinis  
Per Facultatem praescripta  
Cum sensu et jugeaments."

For the second article which deals with religion Molière substitutes an oath to have a blind respect for the ordre des anciens. Hence the similarity appears only in form. But in the third article one again perceives a striking resemblance to the real oath. Molière's presiding dignitary says:

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<sup>57</sup>Raynaud, op. cit., p. 42.



"De non jamais te servir  
De remedis aucunis  
Quam de ceux seulement  
Doctae Facultatis,  
Maladus dut-il crevare,<sup>58</sup>  
Et mori de suo malo."

while the actual medical candidate recited,

"Quod totis viribus contendes adversus  
Medicos illicite practicantes, nulli  
parcendo, cujus cunque ordinis  
aut conditiones fuerit."<sup>59</sup>

This comparison of the oaths is but one of many proofs available of the accuracy of Molière's mimicry. Thomas Locke, who visited Montpellier in 1776, just three years after the death of Molière relates that he was present at a ceremony such as Molière ridiculed. He describes a procession of doctors with red robes and black caps, marching to the music of ten violins, which played airs from Lulli. When all had assembled the president rose, bid the music cease, made a long speech on praise of his colleagues and in denunciation of impious innovations such as the circulation of the blood and other similar "absurdities." Finally, the candidate, to the sound of more music, was received into the profession, the president investing him with the cap of office, a ring, and a chain of gold. In his

<sup>58</sup> Le Malade Imaginaire, "Troisième Intermède"

<sup>59</sup> Raynaud, op. cit., 60-62.

<sup>60</sup> Falmer, Molière, "Epique in Médecine", p. 485.



biography of Molière, Palmer, likewise, asserts that all the details of the ceremony including the oath of office, imitated by Molière are to be found in the statutes of the faculty.<sup>60</sup>

Although many of the abuses of doctors which Molière uncovers in this play are analogous to those he had already pointed out in previous plays one notes here a more serious turn in his satire. He ridicules in Le Malade Imaginaire not so much the specific absurdities of the doctors as the entire educational system and the gullibility of the public that made them possible. One also notes in the play a bitterness and an earnestness not apparent before. This augmented hostility shown toward the doctors on the part of the dramatist is not difficult to explain. Physically at death's door and mentally disturbed Molière seemed no longer able to withhold the wave of pessimism that so savagely beat against him.

Not the least of his disturbances proceeded from the king's changed attitude toward him. Le Malade Imaginaire was written to celebrate the return of Louis XIV from his first campaign in Holland, but was not presented at court. A quarrel with Lully over the musical features upset Molière's



plans. Lully, having obtained an operatic monopoly from the king, grew arrogant and dictatorial; so Molière called in Charpentier, another composer to write the ballet interludes, with the result that Louis XIV took Lully's part. Molière's original plan of amusing the king defeated, the play was staged at the Palais-Royal, where it ran through four performances. Before the fourth performance Molière, who had a forboding of his approaching death, spoke of his morbidity to his friends. But when the latter tried to dissuade him from taking part in the play he replied:

"Comment voulez-vous que je fasse? Il y a cinquante pauvres ouvriers qui n'ont que leur journée pour vivre: Que feront'ils si l'on ne joue pas? Je ne reprocherais d'avoir négligé de leur donner du pain un seul jour le pouvant faire absolument."<sup>61</sup>

Thus with a thought for others Molière ventured upon the performance that proved fatal to him. The account of his death is very simply related by La Grange:

"Molière mourut dans sa maison, ayant joué le rôle du dit Malade imaginaire, fort incommodé d'un rhume et fluxion sur la poitrine qui lui causait une grande toux, de sorte que dans les grands efforts qu'il fit pour cracher, il se rompit une veine dans le corps, et ne vécut pas demiheure ou trois quarts d'heure depuis la dite veine rompue."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Ed. des G. E. Vol. 10. p. 429.

<sup>62</sup>Registre de La Grange, p. 140.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

While a few of Molière's contemporaries have spoken disparagingly of his medical satires, accusing him of gross exaggerations and ridiculous fabrications, the larger number of his commentators, both contemporary and modern, have expressed their admiration for the fidelity with which Molière had dealt with the doctrines he was denouncing. They have praised him for the certainty with which he seized the spirit that animated the doctors of seventeenth century France, and have pronounced his criticism of doctors as being solidly rooted in knowledge and his satire, despite its grotesqueness, its occasional coarseness, and its abundant humor, as having philosophic truth to sustain it.

The conclusion arrived at with regard to Molière's motives in writing his medical satires is threefold:

(1) Like his predecessors and some of his contemporaries, who made the quack the object of their ridicule, Molière wrote his medical plays for the purpose of entertainment, and to celebrate certain special events.

(2) He wrote them in order to satisfy a personal grievance



he<sup>1</sup> entertained, not so much toward any particular doctor or doctors, as toward the entire medical profession, that had failed so completely to discover a remedy possessing the power to cure or relieve him of his ailments, and

(3) He wished to expose to the public, for the purpose of ridicule, the numerous abuses of which seventeenth century doctors were guilty, and for which he entertained an intense hatred.

In depicting the doctors of his day, Molière has been found to be accurate. His medical satires, despite their ridiculous frivolity, are in accordance with the medical history of the time, in that each of his references to medicine resembles closely an actual practice of seventeenth century doctors.

It has been found, likewise, that Molière's attitude towards medicine is in keeping with his general philosophy of life. In matters of education, in social relations, even in his own field of acting, Molière wanted "le naturel;" he wanted nature to be allowed to take its course.

Also, due to his sense of justice and his knowledge

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<sup>1</sup>And probably the king's also.



of man, he put the responsibility for many of the doctors' abuses on the public, that was gullible enough to accept anything and everything from the doctors - the dominant reason for their gullibility being "la peur de la mort."

But it cannot be said that Molière did not believe in science and progress. A significant little word in Le Malade Imaginaire shows that he did. Speaking through the mouth of Béralde, Molière says, "les ressorts de notre machine sont des mystères jusqu'ici, où les hommes ne voient goutte."<sup>2</sup> By the inclusion of the word jusqu'ici (so far) Molière obviously shows that he had a certain amount of faith in the future of science.

<sup>2</sup>Act III, Scene iii.



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