

ЖАН-БАТИСТ МОЛЬЕР

SGANARELLE, OR, THE
SELF-DECEIVED
HUSBAND

Жан-Батист Мольер
**Sganarelle, or, the Self-
Deceived Husband**

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Molière

Sganarelle, or, the Self-Deceived Husband

INTRODUCTORY NOTICE

Six months after the brilliant success of the *Précieuses Ridicules*, Molière brought out at the Théâtre du Petit-Bourbon a new comedy, called *Sganarelle, ou le Cocu Imaginaire*, which I have translated by *Sganarelle, or the self-deceived Husband*. It has been said that Molière owed the first idea of this piece to an Italian farce, *Il Ritratto ovvero Arlichino cornuto per opinione*, but, as it has never been printed, it is difficult to decide at the present time whether or not this be true. The primary idea of the play is common to many *commedia dell' arte*, whilst Molière has also been inspired by such old authors as Noël Du Fail, Rabelais, those of the *Quinze joyes de Mariage*, of the *Cent nouvelles Nouvelles*, and perhaps others.

The plot of *Sganarelle* is ingenious and plausible; every trifle becomes circumstantial evidence, and is received as conclusive proof both by the husband and wife. The dialogue is sprightly throughout, and the anxious desire of Sganarelle to kill his supposed injurer, whilst his cowardice prevents him from

executing his valorous design, is extremely ludicrous. The chief aim of our author appears to have been to show how dangerous it is to judge with too much haste, especially in those circumstances where passion may either augment or diminish the view we take of certain objects. This truth, animated by a great deal of humour and wit, drew crowds of spectators for forty nights, though the play was brought out in summer and the marriage of the young king kept the court from Paris.

The style is totally different from that employed in the *Précieuses Ridicules*, and is a real and very good specimen of the *style gaulois* adapted to the age in which Molière lived. He has often been blamed for not having followed up his success of the *Précieuses Ridicules* by a comedy in the same style, but Molière did not want to make fresh enemies. It appears to have been a regular and set purpose with him always to produce something farcical after a creation which provoked either secret or open hostility, or even violent opposition.

Sganarelle appears in this piece for the first time, if we except the farce, or rather sketch, of the *Médecin volant*, where in reality nothing is developed, but everything is in mere outline. But in Sganarelle Molière has created a character that is his own just as much as Falstaff belongs to Shakespeare, Sancho Panza to Cervantes, or Panurge to Rabelais. Whether Sganarelle is a servant, a husband, the father of Lucinde, the brother of Ariste, a guardian, a faggot-maker, a doctor, he always represents the ugly side of human nature, an antiquated, grumpy, sullen, egotistical,

jealous, grovelling, frightened character, ever and anon raising a laugh on account of his boasting, mean, morose, odd qualities. Molière was, at the time he wrote *Sganarelle*, more than thirty years old, and could therefore no longer successfully represent Mascarille as the rollicking servant of the *Blunderer*.

This farce was published by a certain Mr. Neufvillain, who was so smitten by it that, after having seen it represented several times, he knew it by heart, wrote it out, and published it, accompanied by a running commentary, which is not worth much, and preceded by a letter to a friend in which he extols its beauties. Molière got, in 1663, his name inserted, instead of that of Neufvillain, in the *privilége du roi*.

Mr. Henry Baker, the translator of this play, in the "Select Comedies of M. de Molière, London, 1732," oddly dedicates it to Miss Wolstenholme [Footnote: I suppose the lady was a descendant of Sir John Wolstenholme, mentioned in one of the notes of Pepy's Diary, Sept. 5, 1662, as created a baronet, 1664, an intimate friend of Lord Clarendon's, and collector outward for the Port of London – ob. 1679.] in the following words: —

MADAM,

Be so good to accept this little Present as an Instance of my high Esteem. Whoever has any Knowledge of the French Language, or any Taste for COMEDY, must needs distinguish the Excellency of *Molière's* Plays: one of which is here translated. What the *English* may be, I leave others to determine; but the ORIGINAL, which you receive along with it, is, I am certain,

worthy your Perusal.

Tho' what You read, at present, is called a DEDICATION, it is, perhaps, the most unlike one of any thing You ever saw: for, You'll find not one Word, in Praise, either of Your blooming Youth, Your agreeable Person, Your genteel Behaviour, Your easy Temper, or Your good Sense... and, the Reason is, that I cannot for my Life bring myself to such a Degree of Impertinence, as to sit down with a solemn Countenance, and Take upon me to inform the World, that the Sun is bright, and that the Spring is lovely.

My Knowledge of You from Your Infancy, and the many Civilities I am obliged for to Your Family, will, I hope, be an Excuse for this Presumption in,

MADAM, *Your most obedient humble servant*

H. B.

Enfield,

Jan. 1st 1731-2.

This play seems to have induced several English playwrights to imitate it. First, we have Sir William D'Avenant's *The Playhouse to be Let*, of which the date of the first performance is uncertain. According to the Biographia Britannica, it was "a very singular entertainment, composed of five acts, each being a distinct performance. The first act is introductory, shows the distress of the players in the time of vacation, that obliges them to let their house, which several offer to take for different purposes; amongst the rest a Frenchman, who had brought over a troop of

his countrymen to act a farce. This is performed in the second act, which is a translation of Molière's *Sganarelle, or the Cuckold Conceit*; all in broken French to make the people laugh. The third act is a sort of comic opera, under the title of *The History of Sir Francis Drake*. The fourth act is a serious opera, representing the cruelties of the Spaniards in Peru. The fifth act is a burlesque in Heroicks on the Amours of Cæsar and Cleopatra, has a great deal of wit and humour, and was often acted afterwards by itself."

With the exception of the first act, all the others, which are separate and distinct, but short dramatic pieces, were written in the time of Oliver Cromwell, and two of them at least were performed at the Cockpit, when Sir William D'Avenant had obtained permission to present his entertainments of music and perspective in scenes.

The second imitation of *Sganarelle* is "*Tom Essence, or the Modish Wife*, a Comedy as it is acted at the Duke's Theatre, 1677. London, printed by T. M. for W. Cademan, at the *Pope's Head*, in the Lower Walk of the *New Exchange* in the *Strand*, 1677." This play is written by a Mr. Thomas Rawlins, printer and engraver to the Mint, under Charles the First and Second, and is founded on two French comedies – viz., Molière's *Sganarelle*, and Thomas Corneille's *Don César d' Avalos*. The prologue is too bad to be quoted, and I doubt if it can ever have been spoken on any stage. This play is written partly in blank verse, partly in prose; though very coarse, it is, on the whole, clever and witty. Old Moneylove, a credulous fool, who has a young wife (Act

ii., Scene I), reminds one at times of the senator Antonio in Otway's *Venice Preserved*, and is, of course, deceived by the gallant Stanley; the sayings and doings of Mrs. Moneylove, who is "what she ought not to be," and the way she tricks her husband, are very racy, perhaps too much so for the taste of the present times. I do not think any dramatist would now bring upon the stage a young lady like Theodocia, daughter of old Moneylove, reading the list about Squire Careless. Tom Essence is a seller of perfumes, a "jealous coxcomb of his wife;" and Courtly is "a sober gentleman, servant to Theodocia;" these are imitations of Sganarelle and Lelio. Loveall, "a wilde debauched blade," and Mrs. Luce, "a widdow disguis'd, and passes for Theodocia's maid," are taken from Corneille.

In the epilogue, the whole of which cannot be given, Mrs. Essence speaks the following lines:

"But now methinks a Cloak-Cabal I see,
Whose Prick-ears glow, whilst they their Jealousie
In *Essence* find; but City-Sirs, I fear,
Most of you have more cause to be severe.
We yield you are the truest Character."

Nearly all the scenes imitated in this play from Molière's *Sganarelle* contain nothing which merits to be reproduced.

The Perplexed Couple, or Mistake upon Mistake, as it is acted at the New Theatre in Lincolns-Inn-Fields, by the Company of Comedians, acting under Letters Patent granted by King Charles

the Second. London, Printed for *W. Meares* at the *Lamb*, and *F. Brown*, at the *Black Swan* without *Temple Bar*, 1715, is the third imitation of Molière's *Sganarelle*. This comedy, printed for two gentlemen, with zoological signs, was written by a Mr. Charles Molloy, who for a long time was the editor of a well-known paper, *Common Sense*, in defence of Tory principles. This play had little success, and deserved to have had none, for it has no merit whatever. Our author states in the prologue: —

"The injur'd Muses, who with savage Rage,
Of late have often been expell'd a Tyrant Stage,
Here fly for Refuge; where, secure from Harms,
By you protected, shall display their Charms...
No Jest profane the guilty scene deforms,
That impious way of being dull he scorns;
No Party Cant shall here inflame the Mind,
And poison what for Pleasure was designed."

Mr. Molloy admits in the preface that "the Incident of the Picture in the Third act, something in the Fourth, and one Hint in the last Act, are taken from the *Cocu Imaginaire*; the rest I'm forced to subscribe to myself, for I can lay it to no Body else." I shall only remark on this, that nearly the whole play is a mere paraphrasing of Molière's *Cocu Imaginaire*, and several other of his plays. The scene between Leonora, the heroine, and Sterling, the old usurer and lover (Act I.), is imitated from Madelon's description in the art of making love in the *Pretentious*

Young Ladies, and so are many others. The servant Crispin is a medley of Mascarille from *The Blunderer*, of Gros-René from *The Love-Tiff*, and of the servant of the same name in the *Cocu Imaginaire*; the interfering uncle of Lady Thinwit, is taken from *George Dandin*, whilst Sir Anthony Tainwit becomes Sganarelle. The only thing new I have been able to discover in *The Perplexed Couple* is the lover Octavio disguising himself as a pedlar to gain admittance to the object of his love; and old Sterling, the usurer, marrying the maid instead of the mistress. Molière's farce has been lengthened by those means into a five-act comedy, and though "no jest profane" may be found in it it is more full than usual of coarse and lewd sayings, which can hardly be called inuendoes. The play is a mistake altogether; perhaps that is the reason, its second name is called *Mistake upon Mistake*.

The Picture, or the Cuckold in Conceit, a Comedy in one act, by Js. Miller, is founded on Molière, and is the fourth imitation of *Sganarelle*. London, MDCCXLV. This play is, on the whole, a free translation of Molière's, interspersed with some songs set to music by Dr. Arne. Sganarelle is called Mr. Timothy Dotterel, grocer and common councilman; Gorgibus, Mr. Percent; Lelio, Mr. Heartly; Gros-René, John Broad, whilst Celia's maid is called Phillis. The Prologue, spoken by Mr. Havard, ends thus:

"...To-night we serve

A Cuckold, that the Laugh does well deserve;

A Cuckold in Conceit, by Fancy made
As mad, as by the common Course of Trade:
And more to please ye, and his Worth enhance,
He's carbonado'd a la mode de France;
Cook'd by Molière, great Master of his Trade,
From whose Receipt this Harrico was made.
But if that poignant Taste we fail to take,
That something, that a mere Receipt can't make;
Forgive the Failure – we're but Copies all,
And want the Spirit of th' Original."

The fifth and best imitation is Arthur Murphy's *All in the Wrong*, a comedy in five acts, first performed during the summer season of 1761, at the Theatre Royal, in Drury Lane. Though the chief idea and several of the scenes are taken from *Sganarelle*, yet the characters are well drawn, and the play, as a whole, very entertaining. The Prologue, written and spoken by Samuel Foote, is as follows:

"To-night, be it known to Box, Gall'ry, and Pit,
Will be open'd the best Summer-Warehouse for Wit;

[Footnote: Mr. Garrick, at this time, had let his playhouse for the summer months.]

The New Manufacture, Foote and Co., Undertakers;
Play, Pantomime, Opera, Farce, – by the Makers!
We scorn, like our brethren, our fortunes to owe

To Shakespeare and Southern, to Otway and Rowe.
Though our judgment may err, yet our justice is shewn,
For we promise to mangle no works but our own.
And moreover on this you may firmly rely,
If we can't make you laugh, that we won't make you cry.
For Roscius, who knew we were mirth-loving souls,
Has lock'd up his lightning, his daggers, and bowls.
Resolv'd that in buskins no hero shall stalk,
He has shut us quite out of the Tragedy walk.
No blood, no blank verse! – and in short we're undone,
Unless you're contented with Frolic and Fun.
If tired of her round in the Ranelagh-mill,
There should be but one female inclined to sit still;
If blind to the beauties, or sick of the squall,
A party should shun to catch cold at Vauxhall;
If at Sadler's sweet Wells the made wine should be thick,
The cheese-cakes turn sour, or Miss Wilkinson sick;
If the fume of the pipes should oppress you in June,
Or the tumblers be lame, or the bells out of tune;
I hope you will call at our warehouse in Drury;
We've a curious assortment of goods, I assure you;

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