



# KC Molière

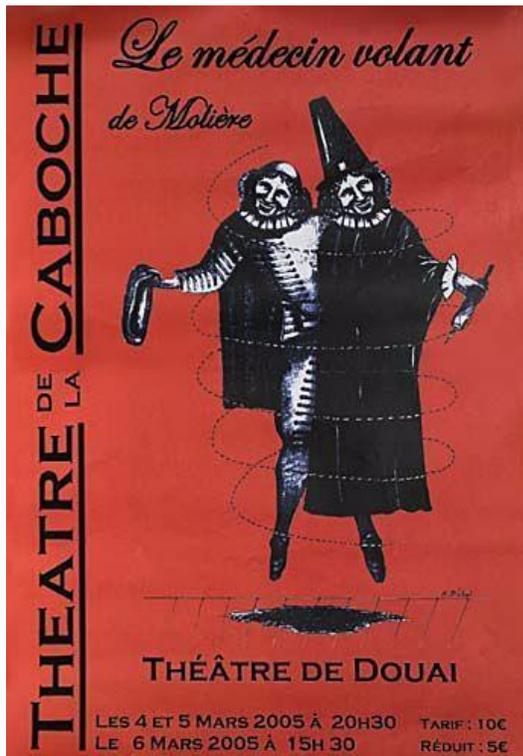
## 400 in 2022

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PRESENTS

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

### *The Flying Doctor* (*Le Médecin volant*, 1645) by Molière



- \*a very short one-act farce
- \*perfect for younger students
- \*plenty of physical comedy

# *The Flying Doctor*

## Characters in order of appearance

**Valère** (pronounced Vah-LEHR): in love with Lucile

**Sabine** (pronounced Sah-BEAN): Lucile's cousin; Gorgibus's niece

**Sganarelle** (pronounced Sss-gahn-ah-RELL): Valère's valet (a personal servant)

**Gorgibus** (pronounced Gor-zhee-BOOSS): Lucile's father; Sabine's uncle

**Gros-René** (pronounced Grow-ruh-NAY): Gorgibus's valet

**Lucile** (pronounced Lyu-SEEL): Gorgibus's daughter, in love with Valère

▫ **Lawyer**



## Plot Summary

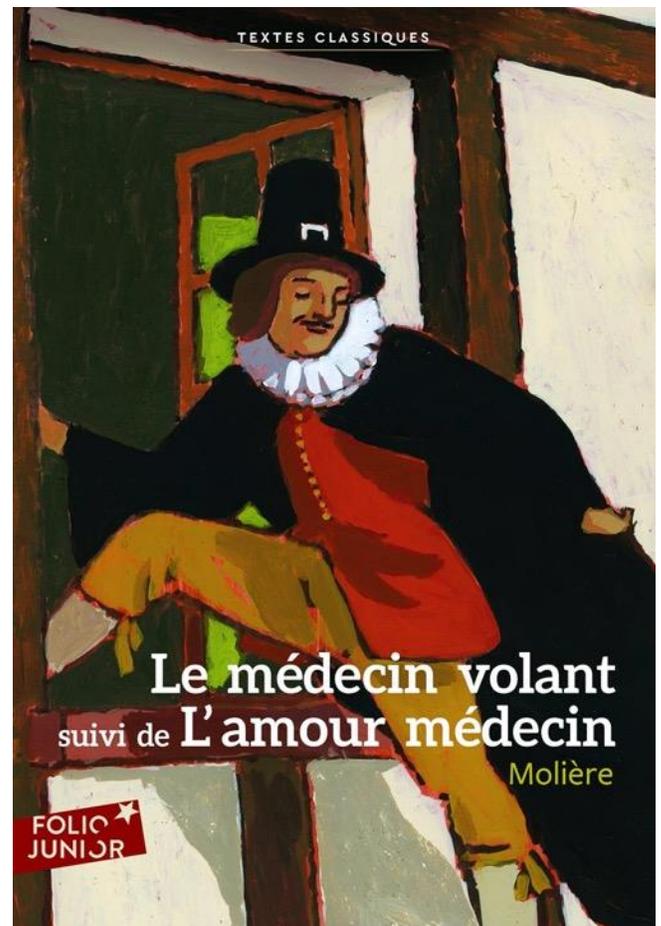
Sabine tells Valère that Lucile's father wants her to marry Villebrequin (pronounced Veel-bruh-CAN) and Lucile is pretending to be ill in hopes that a doctor will prescribe fresh air, which would give her an opportunity to elope with Valère.

Valère asks his valet Sganarelle to impersonate a doctor. Sganarelle goes to find a black cloak and tall hat like the ones doctors wore in the 1600s. Meanwhile Gorgibus orders his valet Gros-René to find a doctor.

Sabine introduces Sganarelle as a doctor to Gorgibus. Sganarelle makes several mistakes, but Gorgibus is fooled. Gorgibus's friend, a pretentious lawyer, visits -- another source of comedy.

Later Gorgibus sees Sganarelle without the doctor costume.

Sganarelle covers by saying that he is the alienated twin of the great doctor Sganarelle and seeks reconciliation. Gorgibus offers to mediate between the twins. This leads to the play's funniest sequence: Sganarelle changes back and forth between the two identities as Gorgibus tries to bring the two together at the same time. Sganarelle looks like a "flying doctor" when he jumps out the window wearing the black cloak.



This funny business allowed time for Valère and Lucile to marry. Gorgibus accepts the situation and everyone is reconciled.

## English Translations of *The Flying Doctor*

*The Flying Doctor* can be read free of charge on Project Gutenberg in a sanitized 1919 translation by Charles Heron Wall:

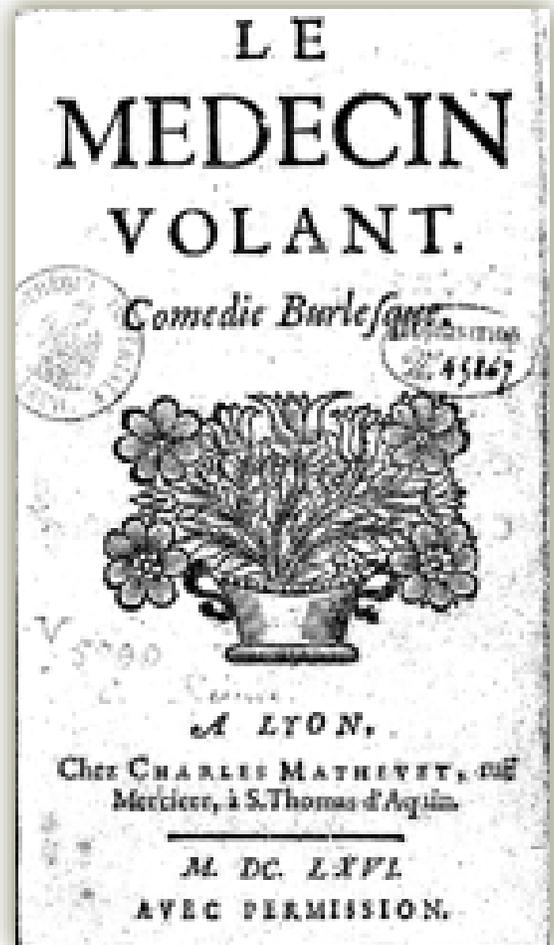
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/27072/27072-h/27072-h.htm>

A better translation is the one by Albert Bermel in *One-Act Comedies of Molière*. Applause Theatre Books, 2000. Republished in paperback many times. There are dozens of used copies available in the \$5.00 range on Bookfinder.

Dario Fo's 1990 staging of the play at the Comédie Française (padded out to 43 minutes) in French on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tganp-cUgco>

Christian Blanc as Sganarelle below:



## The Influence of *Commedia dell'arte*

*The Flying Doctor* (1645) is one of Molière's earliest surviving plays, written while his theatre company was touring France and perfecting their skills for nearly 14 years before they finally settled in Paris in 1658.

Although the plot is simple, the Paris theatregoing public enjoyed *The Flying Doctor* as a comic afterpiece to longer plays. Molière later used some of the gags from this play in his longer comedy *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*.

Molière wrote the part of **Sganarelle** for himself. A character named Sganarelle (not always a servant) appears in six of Molière's comedies, and he often played that role.

**Comic servant** characters may be found in two theatrical traditions that influenced Molière. One is the tradition of the **medieval French farce**, which often included ribald or vulgar humor. The predominant tradition is that of *commedia dell'arte* or **Italian improvised comedy** that used **stock characters** and incorporated a lot of boisterous stage action.

A company of **Italian *commedia*** players had already settled in Paris before Molière's troupe returned there, and for a time Molière's troupe shared a theatre with them.

Some **stock characters** from *commedia dell'arte* align with the characters in *The Flying Doctor*.



Valère and Lucile are the young couple in love. Like the Italian innamorato & innamorata, they rely on their servants to help them get together.

Gorgibus is a miser. The quintessential miser of Italian *commedia dell'arte* is Pantalone. His friend, Dottore, parallels the pedantic Lawyer of *The Flying Doctor*.



Sganarelle is typical of comic servants, called *zanni* (zanys) in Italian. Among the many variations in *commedia dell'arte* were Arlecchino (Harlequin), Scapino, Truffaldino, Brighella, and Pedrolino. Sabine functions like the ladies' maids of *commedia*; they are soubrettes, sometimes called Columbina.



## Questions for Discussion

Discuss the character of Gorgibus in terms of his authority over his daughter Lucile and his treatment of Sgnarelle's supposed twin. What are some examples of his gullability?

Today we think of medicine and the law as very respectable professions. What can you tell from the play about Molière's view of 17th-century doctors and lawyers? Why is the lawyer scene in the play?

We don't get to see much of Lucile and Sabine. Can you detect differences in their characters and personalities?

What parts of the play surprised you? Why? When did you laugh the most?



## Exercises

The only scenic elements needed to stage this play are a door and a window on different sides of the outside of a house. Design a scenic unit that could work for a simple staging of the play.

Find a place in the room where you can't be seen by others. Then try to sound like two different people having an argument. You may use Sganarelle's lines from the play when he is at in the house and alternates his two identities.

If you enjoyed *The Flying Doctor*, you might want to read Molière's later and longer comedy *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* (*Le Médecin malgré lui*), which uses some of the same plot devices and comic shticks.



The photo on page 7 is from a production by the Théâtre et Cinéma Fontenay-le-Fleury.

Co-chairs of **KC Molière: 400 in 2022**'s Education: K-12 Committee are Martin English and Danielle Trebus.

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